

Bulgaria

Response to Information Request Number:	BGR98001.ogc
Date:	15 July 1998
Subject:	Bulgaria: Information on the use of torture since the United Democratic Forces have come to power and the current treatment of dissidents under Zhivkov
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Bulgaria/torture/mistreatment/police/security forces/United Democratic Forces (UDF)/dissident/ espionage

Query:

What is the status of reforms in Bulgaria since the United Democratic Forces (UDF) came to power in May 1997? What is the likelihood that someone who had betrayed military secrets to the West and acted against the regime under the Communists would be jailed upon returning to Bulgaria? If jailed, what is the likelihood that he would be tortured?

Response:

Sources consulted by the RIC assert that positive trends in the consolidation of democracy have continued since the election of a UDF majority to the Parliament. The Government of Bulgaria generally respected the rights of its citizens before the elections and has continued to do so since the new government has come to power (CSCE 2 July 1998; Freedom House 13 July 1998).

However, monitoring groups report that police and security forces severely abuse the rights of Bulgarian citizens. The 1998 Amnesty International Annual Report states that instances of torture and mistreatment by police officers were reported daily (AI 1998). According to a researcher with Amnesty International, the situation in detention has deteriorated and the use of torture is widespread. By his judgment someone who is detained by the Bulgarian authorities is very likely to be tortured or mistreated (AI 7 July 1998). This statement is supported by the Prosecutor General of Bulgaria Ivan Tatarchev and National Investigative Service Director Boyko Rashkov who recently sent letters to the President, Prime Minister, and Parliament of Bulgaria alerting them to the regular use of violence by police officers (Sofia BTA 8 May 1998). The researcher from Amnesty International added that the change in authorities has permeated only the higher levels of government and that the government has little ability control the local police forces (AI 7 July 1998).

On the other hand, representatives from the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and from Freedom House doubt that a Bulgarian who had betrayed military secrets to the United States before the establishment of the democratic regime in Bulgaria would be targeted by authorities currently in power upon his return. The representative from the CSCE believed that the very pro-Western stance of the UDF would deter it from prosecuting anyone who had worked against the Communist regime (CSCE 2 July 1998). The representative from Freedom House stated that many of those currently in power were involved in similar activities and would be unlikely to prosecute someone who had been an active dissident under Zhivkov (Freedom House 13 July 1998).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

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Sofia BTA [Sofia, in English]. 8 May 1998. "Bulgaria: Top Prosecutor, Investigator Warn of Police Violence." (FBIS-EEU-98-128 8 May 1998). [Internet] <URL: <http://www.fedworld.gov>>.

Attachments:

Amnesty International (AI). 1998. *Amnesty International 1998*. New York: Amnesty International USA. [Internet] <URL:<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport/ar98/eur15.htm>>.

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