

SCHISM IN THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS ON RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS AND THE NEW LAW OF CONFESSIONS.

By Janice Broun

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In 1992 the reformist United Democratic Forces (UDF) government used a hangover from communism, the Board of Religious Affairs (BRA), and made a disastrous foray into the affairs of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, to which 85 percent of Bulgarians, six and a half million, nominally belong. The schism this action provoked still rumbles on eleven years later. Under the pretext that the election of Patriarch Maksim back in 1971 was rigged, and therefore invalid, the government declared the Church's ruling body, the Holy Synod, illegitimate. They chose to ignore the obvious fact that under communism no elections of officials were free. The Holy Synod--somewhat of a misnomer since several of its members were police agents--was replaced by a Provisional Synod headed by Maksim's close colleague, the maverick Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop. The opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which was the communist party recycled, backed Maksim and the Holy Synod.

Since Pimen and the defecting metropolitans like Pankrati of Stara Zagora and Kalinik of Vratsa had been even more compromised by their assiduity in executing communist policies than Maksim, the *raskolniks* (schismatics) lacked credibility. The main protagonist of the schism, the monk Khristofer Subev, had in 1989 earned a considerable reputation with democratic Bulgarians and observers abroad as a champion of religious rights. After the overthrow of the communists, under the banner of the UDF, Subev challenged the complacent Holy Synod to push ahead with urgently needed church reform. I met him in 1990 and again in 1992, the second time in the Holy Synod palace, barricaded against a possible assault from the canonical synod's supporters. Although eager to explain the situation, he completely lacked charisma. By 1993 he had parted from the other *raskolniks* and declared himself a bishop. He proved to be unbalanced and was unmasked as a former security officer. He was just one of the many infiltrated into Sofia Theological Academy during the later years of communism in order to obtain key posts in the higher echelons of the clergy and eventually to destroy the church from within. Alexander Gospodinov, a teacher there, estimated that by 1990 probably half of his students were police agents or had been turned into informers. He had long had good reasons to suspect Subev.

Apart from the UDF, the *raskolniks* drew support from a minority of reformist priests and church members disillusioned by the Holy Synod. The majority, whatever their justifiable reservations about the integrity of their bishops, stood by the canonical church. It is conceivable that that genuine

UDF reformists, who were also theologically ignorant and knew nothing of canon law, were misled by forces intent on dividing the church, seizing or retaining its assets and staunching any prospects of Orthodox renewal.

If so, these forces have achieved their aim. Throughout the schism, it has been obvious that the dispute is not over theology or dogma, but about power and the possession of church property. Despite the indifference to religion which was prevalent even before the communist onslaught some Bulgarians kept their Orthodox faith in their hearts and homes and were open to religion. Many were open and prepared to look to their traditional church for moral and spiritual leadership to guide them through the appalling problems of post-communist economic collapse. There was widespread expectation that the entire Holy Synod would formally admit its guilt in collaborating with the communists. When this did not happen the UDF government tried to capitalize on the subsequent disillusion by creating a rival synod. Although the Holy Synod promised to convene a National *Subor* (Church Council), it was seven years before it materialized. There, no apologies were forthcoming, expectations of urgently needed reforms in church administration were not fully realized and discussions on sensitive issues such as the new private church bank, widely believed to be a cover for laundering dirty money, were quashed. The major cause for discontent within the church, the yawning gulf between the bishops and the parish clergy was not addressed. One problem, raised by Gospodinov as a lay member of the second *Subor*, held in 2001, was the size of the metropolitanates, which preclude close contact between bishops and their clergy. Greece has 70 metropolitans; Bulgaria, with only a slightly smaller population, has only 13. The church's limited resources were mismanaged, and the only priests with enough to live on are those in flourishing city churches. In one diocese priests' stipends were six months in arrears.

According to Archimandrite Pavel Stefanov, a Shumen University lecturer whose views on the Holy Synod generally reflect the popular consensus; "Maksim and his synod did almost nothing to improve the image of the church in this country and abroad and it has lost most of its prestige. Their activities are limited to liturgies and long dinners. Few books are published, church periodicals are at an all time low, no circular was ever issued to found Sunday schools or youth societies. The church is just left to drift or rather to rot. Many priests are trying desperately to feed their struggling families because they get hardly any salaries while bishops are driving around in limousines and donating millions to football clubs".¹

Sensing the vacuum, sects and cults abound. Constant altercation and demeaning antics including street fights and sieges of key church properties by both sides in the schism left people indifferent and disillusioned. A great opportunity was lost, not least among the enthusiastic youngsters who since 1990 had enrolled in expanded seminary and theological education. The young women who

¹He later qualified the latter claim - but Metropolitan Kiril of Varna's enthusiasm for Levski, and Galaktion of Stara Zagora's for Beroe is notorious!

looked forward to teaching religion in schools or finding employment in church institutions found themselves confronted by a conservative, hidebound, male dominated establishment. The graduates were appalled to find themselves competing with former communist teachers who had been given a crash course to qualify. Less than seven per cent of the properly qualified and trained theological teaching graduates were able to find employment although the second UDF government-- to its credit--re-introduced religious education as an optional school subject in 1997, though only for Orthodox, but later extended to the substantial Muslim Turkish community. Many of the graduates have sought a future elsewhere--often abroad. Since only one per cent of school children receive religious education, most Bulgarian children are as distant from the church as ever. It is thanks to grassroots initiative from theologians, educated priests and concerned layfolk that since 1999 seventy-nine parish Sunday schools have been set up to provide the basic spiritual and moral guidance they are convinced children need.²

Despite re-iterated pleas from several directions for Patriarch Maksim (now eighty nine) to resign and leave the field to a younger, more dynamic successor, he has stood his ground. In 1996 a *raskolnik* national *subor* elected its figurehead Pimen - who was even older - as a rival patriarch. In 1997 during the widespread pro-democracy demonstrations which caused the collapse of the compromised BSP government and brought the UDF back to power, it was Pimen who seized the initiative, reflecting popular feeling. Nevertheless, since Pimen's death three years later there has been no move to elect his successor, Innokenti, 'Metropolitan' of Sofia, as patriarch.

In 1998 the Pan-Orthodox Council with a flotilla of patriarchs under the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios descended on Sofia to read the riot act. They endorsed Maksim and the Holy Synod and after tortuous negotiations to persuade the reluctant *raskolniks* to proffer their repentance, they declared the schism at an end. They even generously re-instated *raskolnik* metropolitans as titular bishops.

The *raskolnik* promises were not worth the paper they were written on; they promptly called another council which, backed by hardliner UDF government members, 'deposed' Maksim. All attempts to reconcile the two sides, including those of the former (UDF) President Petur Stoyanov, have failed.

The root of the Church's problems stems not only from persecution and subjugation under communism but from Bulgaria's chequered past. It has never been able to make up for five centuries under Ottoman domination (which ended not much more than a century ago) when it was forced to keep a very low profile and was completely cut off from church life and theological developments in the rest of Europe. Even in freedom since 1870 the Church was still handicapped and marginalized because of its schismatic status with other Orthodox Churches, which was only lifted in 1945. Its

²Valentin Kozuharov, a leading religious educationalist, in a letter to the author. It is a significant comment on the lack of opportunities in this field that Kozuharov and his wife transferred to work in Russia.

resources and land endowments, with some exceptions like the extensive Rila monastery mountains, were very limited. Restrictions by the inter-war government prevented it from providing the people with an effective religious education. Even among apparently Orthodox educated Bulgarians tendencies towards theosophy and esoteric beliefs often lie not far below the surface.

The fact that only two patriarchs and no-one higher than a low-key bishop from the Moscow Patriarchate turned up at the Bulgarian Patriarchate's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 2003 could signal the growing impatience of other Orthodox churches with the Bulgarian church's failure to put its house in order.

In 1998 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was withdrawn by its Holy Synod from the World Council of Churches, mainly as a protest against what was seen as large scale proselytism within Bulgaria by foreign missionaries under the aegis of long-standing fellow WCC members. The bishops claimed that the gap between Orthodox and Protestants had widened, and that proselytism was confusing people's understanding of Orthodoxy. Was the Holy Synod trying to tap into public hostility to the WCC to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the *raskolniks*?

Members of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance regarded the withdrawal as a retrograde step, accusing the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of exploiting ecumenism under communism solely to further its own interests. Their repeated attempts to establish good relations with it had been rebuffed. They touched a raw nerve when they implied that behind the decision lurked political elements seeking to exploit Orthodoxy for their own ends and to impede Bulgaria's integration into Europe. Replying, Orthodox spokesman Peter Grammatikov denied that his church was under pressure. He argued that the very opposite was the case; it was the main victim of persecution with a government which refused to recognize the synod under Patriarch Maksim.³ In fact, the church did continue to send representatives to various conferences, mainly those concerned with Orthodoxy and with rebuilding inter-church cooperation in the Balkans in the wake of the wars, but could not always afford to do so. In comparison with neighboring Romania theological education has never been adequately developed and there is a dire shortage of outstanding teachers. So far the Holy Synod has remained unresponsive to re-iterated pleas from the WCC to return. This summer the Greek Archbishop Christodoulos along with leading Orthodox theologians added their entreaties.⁴ Former WCC official Todor Subev pointed out how his church had distanced itself from ecclesiastical Europe and lost out on substantial cash grants for development.⁵

In one respect inter-faith relations are cordial. Because of the Orthodox Church's leading role in protecting 48,000 Bulgarian Jews from deportation during the war, Bulgaria has been regarded very favorably by Jewish organizations and a number of ceremonies commemorating 'the righteous among

³"Intoleranz oder Toleranz?" GLAUBE IN DER 2 WELT No 1 1999 p. 4 and "Bulgarie", SERVICE ORTHODOXE DE PRESSE No 232 November 1998, p 13.

⁴"Bulgarian Church asked to return to Ecumenical fold," WCC Press 6 June 2003.

⁵"Bulgarian Church expected to rejoin ecumenism," Bulgarian national radio, 5 September 2003. RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIV, 2 (April 2004) page 22.

nations' take place. Despite impassioned defense of the Jews by leading Orthodox, anti-Semitism remained rampant among ordinary people. After the war 30,000 Bulgarian Jews voted with their feet. Now only 3000 remain and they have not been spared a resurgence of anti-semitism, which has been courageously denounced by Evangelical leaders, but not by the Holy Synod.⁶

The alternative synod, particularly under Pimen, tended to look to other schismatic Orthodox churches for support, in particular, to Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko), head of the Kievan Patriarchate of Ukraine, who sought to create a sort of schismatic 'Internationale', and also to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The latter had become the 'de facto' Orthodox Church in Macedonia since Tito's creation of a Macedonian republic in 1945 but its relations with the church it had left, the Serbian Orthodox Church, have remained very tense. With the Bulgarian government's recognition of Macedonia in 1999 there have also been occasional exchanges with the canonical synod. Maksim was the only Orthodox patriarch to intercede with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios for recognition of the Macedonian church.⁷ Last summer Metropolitan Kalinik served a liturgy in Macedonia with Metropolitan Peter and predicted that his church would be the first local Orthodox Church to endorse the Macedonian Church.⁸

The Catholic Church, about 44,000 strong, is deeply rooted in Bulgaria's history. It has emerged from a constricted ghetto existence and still has to depend largely on expatriate clergy but is active and its personnel are well respected. The Vatican had cleared Bulgaria of complicity in the attempt on the Pope's life and beatified Bishop Eugene Bosilkov, martyred in 1952, in 1998. However Maksim and the Holy Synod showed little enthusiasm for John Paul II's visit last year; the initiative for the invitation came from the current government, the Simeon II National Movement (SND) under Prime Minister Simeon Saksoburggotsky (the former tsar), who had spent most of his life in exile in Spain and whose wife is a Catholic.

At an official level and in Sofia, Orthodox response was reserved, some Holy Synod metropolitans refusing to kiss the Pope's hand; but in Plovdiv, the main Catholic center, in front of maybe 25,000 enthusiastic believers, Metropolitan Arseniy of Plovdiv even spoke warmly of convergence between Orthodox and Catholic churches. The Pope beatified other Catholic martyrs and his appeal to young people there to become the salt and life of society, was exactly the challenge young Bulgarians needed, but rarely heard from their own bishops.⁹ It had been left to an independent committee to collect individual donations and in 2001 to erect a Wall of Memory commemorating victims of communism and listing martyrs of all faiths and it was the *raskolnik* Innokenti, who has close links with Sofia's mayor Stefan Sofiansky, who dedicated it.¹⁰ As for the Holy Synod, it delayed

⁶Emil Cohen, "Leaders of Evangelical Churches condemn the wave of anti-Semitism in the country," BULGARIAN TOLERANCE FOUNDATION, press release, 20 February 2002.

⁷STANDART, 8 June 2000.

⁸"Bishop welcomes recognition," *Dnevnik*, 4 June 2003.

⁹ZENIT-ORG, Rome, May 21-27, 2002.

¹⁰"Commemoration of Neo-Martyrs," www.focus-news net, 11 March 2003.

official commemoration services for its martyrs until July 2003, and then on a weekday, not a Sunday, when few people would attend. Perhaps this reflected guilty consciences on the part of some former collaborationist figures? Following the papal visit the Vatican generously gifted a church in Rome for the use of the Bulgarian community.¹¹

Over the years the alternative synod has lost support, with some members like Metropolitan Kalinik of Vratsa, a very obvious communist appointee, deciding their future lay with the canonical synod. 'Of those of us who attend church every Sunday,' Gospodinov told me, 'over 90 per cent back the patriarch. The *raskol* supporters are often folk who go once a year - mainly people who do it for political considerations.' Some UDF members, like Gospodinov, have grave reservations about their party's continued support of an uncanonical church. Yet in some localities the situation is still very strained. Ownership of key church estates is, according to many observers, what keeps the schism going. In 2000, trustees and priests of Blagoevgrad Cathedral in Pimen's former see decided to rejoin the canonical church but the supporters of his schismatic successor Gavril remained in occupation for five days, backed by a police cordon; when Patriarch Maksim arrived he was not allowed inside. He and his supporters in the canonical church had to demonstrate in Sofia in front of the offices of the president and premier before the public prosecutor rescinded the local police order. Such was the antagonism unleashed among some participants that in 2002 a hot-tempered *raskolnik* priest, Stefan Kamberov, was murdered by a 'canonical' one during a scuffle over a profitable monastic property in Nevrokop diocese in south west Bulgaria.¹² This dispute was by no means the last in an unedifying saga of occupations, barricades and attacks on contested churches, but this was the first time life had been lost. People all over Bulgaria were stunned. The people taken into custody for the act were later released. Though in Sandanski people demonstrated for an end to violence, some *raskolniks* launched an ill-informed and vicious hate campaign against Patriarch Maksim and Metropolitan Natanail of Nevrokop. One of those who made accusations was Associate Professor Kalin Yanakiev, a church member. In 2003 he turned against both hierarchies, accusing them of being far more closely connected with the big bosses of the criminal world and the 'mafia', than with believers and clergy. Some of his allegations may not be wide of the mark. There is no doubt that the Holy Synod is still contaminated by people with discreditable life styles who are patently former security plants. In fairness, the synod also contains good people, but lacks any obvious, towering personality to challenge or succeed the not very bright or inspiring Maksim. Inevitably, it is deeply divided--as it is in orientation with Orthodox churches outside. The majority still look to the Moscow Patriarch, whose party-line they followed for years.

Two metropolitans look to Greece, while Metropolitans Dometian of Vidin and Neofit of Dorostol-Cherven, Makism's most likely successor, are more open to the west. The latest election, to

¹¹"Bulgarian Orthodox Church given use of Roman parish church," CWNews.com, 21 May 2003.

¹²Pavel Stefanov, "Priests kill priest; killing - the aftermath," BGNews and information supplied by Gospodinov.

Silistra, aroused a bitter dispute and was only resolved with the appointment of a 92-year-old, Ilarion. However odd this seems, the election was popular, as Ilarion, a prolific writer on theology, author of eight books over the last decade, is hale and hearty and determined to do all he can for his church. He is well respected by both sides in the schism.

To its credit, during the NATO attack on Yugoslavia in 1999, the Holy Synod, in sharp contrast to the Moscow Patriarchate, unequivocally condemned Slobodan Milosevič's and the Serbian government's policies particularly against its own Albanian citizens as "an insult to Orthodoxy; it is not possible for such a war and such slaughter to be fomented in the name of Christianity." Inter-Orthodox solidarity, it stated, could not condone Milosevič's vicious crimes which only served to increase tensions between Balkan states.

None of the religious groups existing in pre-war Bulgaria have achieved satisfaction in the restitution of all their property. As long as Orthodox, and nearly a million Muslims too, were kept waiting for their property they remained financially dependent on the state and open to manipulation by it. Until the SND government took the matter in hand with their new Law of Confessions in 2002, the schism's continuance provided successive governments with a convenient excuse for delaying restitution, on the pretext that they did not know which side should be given it. Certainly, the prolonged economic crisis, allied to probable misappropriation here and there by the church's mafia element, accentuated the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's financial problems. The Orthodox Church has been at a disadvantage when compared with flourishing evangelical churches and sects, some of which are heavily subsidized from abroad. Stefanov's comment is apposite; "Evangelization is proselytism when one side has a lot of money and the other is poor and apathetic." For instance, the Holy Synod made no attempt at systematic provision of new churches in the extensive churchless city suburbs; the first new one in Sofia was not dedicated until 1999.

If, in comparison, the Evangelical churches have made such headway, with, currently, a member growth rate of 17 percent a year, with the Pentecostalist Church of God alone expanding from a few thousand in 1989 to 45,000, the Orthodox--in both synods-- have mainly themselves to blame. Though there are Orthodox projects to help the needy, including some concerned parishes and the only recently founded Pokrom, a nationwide lay charity, the minority churches have far more initiative and their contribution in outreach to the disadvantaged, orphans, the homeless and the Roma in particular, is out of all proportion to their size. Evangelism of the unchurched is not on the Orthodox program. Gospodinov deplors the continued use of Church Slavonic and, as a lay representative, reminded the 2001 *Subor* that 35 years ago the independent minded Metropolitan Iosif of Varna and Preslav had introduced modern Bulgarian into the liturgy in his diocese. He believes that it will be impossible to reclaim the 'lost' Orthodox until the church is prepared to meet them where they are and provide services they can understand. Even many priests hardly understand what they chant.

"Among certain circles there is a lot of effort to keep Church Slavonic" he told me. "It is basically political; the idea is to keep our church and laity in closer contact with the Russian and

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Serbian churches which use Church Slavonic. The Romanians on the other hand have made successful use of their vernacular.” Sliven is one of the few cities where worship is mostly in the vernacular, thanks to the initiative of local choirmaster Metod Grigorov, son of a priest, and the support of Metropolitan Ioanniki.¹³

The most recent major confrontation has been in the port of Varna. Its most flourishing congregation, St. Athanasius, with its best priest, a lecturer in theology and former diocesan secretary, Liubomir Popov, last year left the diocese and switched to the alternative synod following months of occupation and counter-occupation of the church after its metropolitan Kiril sacked Fr. Liubomir. Kiril was installed in 1989 thanks to his uncle Hristo Marinchev, who happened to be head of the BRA and a top-ranking security officer. Stefanov rates his sermons as poor and ill-prepared. The press reflects popular sentiments. *Dnevik's* editorial pleaded for “Kiril's brothers in the Synod to bring him to his senses. People are sick and tired of this drunkard and mafia stooge and are ready to elect new leaders.” *Standart* commented, “It raises a question of growing poignancy within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church whether laypeople have any voice in church matters or whether decisions are taken by a hierarchy which is not accountable to anyone.” The diocesan secretary for the last 19 years, Boris Iordanov, along with Popov and two other priests who have joined the rival synod, produced a document proving that their metropolitan drew the equivalent of \$12,000 from the bank of the metropolia, in cash, for his nephew Milen Petrov to travel abroad. The dissentient clergy claim that priest loyal to Kiril carry firearms and frequent striptease shows.¹⁴

Despite its often precarious legal status during the schism, the canonical Bulgarian Orthodox Church can still count on and exploit the support of the majority of Bulgarians and of the new SNM government which replaced the second and duly discredited UDF government in 2001. The Law of Confessions which was finally passed in December 2002 after years of debate and deferment came down unequivocally on the side of the canonical church. It is in some respects, in its continuing tight supervision of religious life, from the same stable as its 1948 predecessors, which gave the communists a stranglehold over church life. It recognizes only one Orthodox Church, that of Patriarch Maksim and the Holy Synod.

Although the law specifies that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has no greater rights than other faiths, the minority churches are uneasy because only it enjoys freedom from interference by the BRA. The law tries to resolve the property problem once and for all. The *raskolniks* are allowed to register as a church under any new name they choose but all property reverts to the canonical church. That is the theory; in practice the truculent *raskolnik* priest and spokesman Emil Barakov warned of more bloodshed when his church has to defend its property. More likely, as the Bulgarian Helsinki

¹³“Chants in the vernacular.” Bulgarian National Radio, 26 December 2003.

¹⁴“Metropolitan pillaried at conference,” CHERNOMORIE, 14 November 2003.

Committee pointed out, they may put their case to Strasburg and the Bulgarian taxpayer could have to bear the long-term cost of reparation to the synod for loss of property!¹⁵

For most Bulgarians and the canonical church the new law presents no problem as it seems to settle the schism and take firm measures to defend Bulgaria and Orthodoxy from what they regard as a sectarian invasion. But among minority faiths such was the dissatisfaction with the finished product that eighteen out of thirty-one registered religious organizations protested. *Raskolniks*, Catholics, Muslims and Evangelicals joined in an unprecedented public demonstration. Its basic premises, that religious bodies must be subject to restrictions which do not apply to any other non-government associations and that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church alone enjoys immunity from state interference, are completely unjust and contravene the constitution of the European Court of Human Rights which the government has already signed as a prior requisite to its joining the European Community in 2007 (now postponed until 2010). Two legal experts from the Council of Europe made this clear in May 2003 in what was only a limited overview. Its byzantine complexities and apparent ignorance or defiance of accepted international legal norms throw Bulgarian law as a whole into disrepute. The law has not dismantled the BRA but extended its powers, under a new director; theology lecturer Ivan Zhelev Dimitrov, Maksim's former secretary, whom the new government had appointed in place of the rabidly pro-schismatic Lyuben Mladenov when he reached retirement age. All denominations, the canonical church excepted, have to re-register with the Sofia municipal court.

On the other hand, the status of minorities and the extension of spheres in which they can work have improved over the last few years and created a favorable impression in many places. Positive features of the law include permitting registered churches to open their own educational, medical and social institutions, subject to inspection by the respective ministries. Nevertheless, some restrictive provisions add an element of uncertainty. There is no way of telling how certain local councils hostile to minorities-- Burgas for instance--will implement the law, clamping down on unwelcome groups who want to construct new buildings, hold open air services or hire halls for worship.

To the dismay of *raskolnik* supporters and the minority faiths, in an unprecedented and very dubious decision, the Constitutional court overturned an appeal from fifty UDF deputies against the official status of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on 15 July 2003. Zhelev Dimitrov maintained that he was merely an executive, that all 31 registered religions would be automatically re-registered, and commented that although it had created the schism even the UDF government had never registered their alternative synod.¹⁶ Though the canonical church is now firmly entrenched it has long lost its hold on the majority of Bulgarians and the schism seems set to continue.

¹⁵Felix Corley, "Religious minorities object to religion bill"; "Bulgaria : religion bill favours Orthodox Patriarchate," KESTON NEWS SERVICE, 17 December 2002.

¹⁶Corley, "Bulgaria; controversial Religion Law survives constitutional challenge," FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE, 21 July 2003.
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One specific measure in the new law, to allow the Board to prohibit the entry of foreign religious activists, though it could be employed to keep out 'sectarians' is primarily meant to bar radical fundamentalist Muslims who it is feared might threaten to destabilize the well-integrated, moderately religious, mainly Turkish, Muslim community. Strategically, in the aftermath of September 11, this is of key importance to the USA which played host to a visit from Chief Mufti Selim Mehmet. Simeon came to power with promises which could not be realized and his government has predictably lost support. The BSP could return to power; much depends on the Muslim party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which under Ahmed Dogan, the most astute politician in post-communist Bulgaria, has for a decade adroitly held the balance of power in Bulgarian politics. There is now a very justified fear that Bulgaria, which has amicable links with Turkey, could be subject to the same violence as Istanbul.¹⁷

¹⁷For those who want further detail of most aspects covered in this article, see the following articles of Janice Broun in RELIGION, STATE AND SOCIETY:

1. "The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church," RSS vol 21, no 2, 1993;
 2. "The Schism...Part 2; under the Socialist Government, 1993-97," RSS vol 28, no 3, 2000;
 3. "The Schism....Part 3; under the Second UDF Government, 1997-2001," RSS vol 30, no 4, 2002.
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