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[redacted]

6.2(d)

BULGARIA: Protests Accelerating Reform

Delay in the National Assembly is intensifying public pressure to accelerate the reform process. [redacted]

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In postponing the vote on the article guaranteeing the Communist Party's leading role, the legislature cited a constitutional requirement to submit such measures a month in advance. The decision brought more than 20,000 people to the parliament building, shouting, "We are here, come on out." General Secretary Mladenov and several legislators did and were booed and hissed when they encouraged the crowd to go home. The Assembly then condemned the protest and vowed not to bow to protesters demands, warning that they would be held responsible if attempts at destabilization continue. The legislature yesterday actually rejected decrees submitted by the State Council for the first time ever and continued its session late into the night because of lengthy debates. [redacted]

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Mladenov is also under pressure from more radical members of the party leadership to increase the pace of reform. Western press reports say he threatened to resign at the Central Committee plenum that ended Wednesday in response to increasing radical criticism. Purges of hardliners have begun in the provinces, and Mladenov indicated this week that the municipal and regional party organizations are to be purged before the party congress begins in March. [redacted]

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Comment: Public anger augurs massive protests if the regime ignores popular demands for reform. Protests tomorrow probably will be large even if the Assembly reverses its decision on the constitution. [redacted]

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Fissures in the regime between reformers and more moderate and orthodox figures are likely to widen. The reformers, apparently led by Politburo and Secretariat members Aleksander Lilov and Andrey Lukanov, seem to be gaining strength and will use public pressure to push Mladenov aside if he is seen as undermining party efforts to stay ahead of the reform process. [redacted]

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