

Bulgaria Keeps a Wary Eye On Carter's Stop in Belgrade

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SOFIA, Bulgaria, June 21 — Bulgaria, the Soviet Union's most faithful ally, is keeping one eye cocked on President Carter's visit to next-door Yugoslavia, but its public posture is one of unconcern and even nonchalance.

"It's normal to have such state contacts," said Ivan Ganev, adjusting his dark glasses, which seemed appropriate apparel for a Foreign Ministry official who oversees the murky and sometimes conspiratorial world of Balkan affairs.

Mr. Ganev indicated that he would withhold judgment on Mr. Carter's visit until he had a better impression of what it was all about. "In Bulgaria," he said, "there is an old saying: 'We count the chickens in the autumn.'"

President Carter's visit to Belgrade, designed to dramatize his commitment to Yugoslavia's territorial integrity and recoup what is widely regarded as a loss of face for not attending President Tito's funeral in May, is of more than passing interest here because Yugoslavia and Bulgaria are traditional enemies.

Periodic Wars of Words

Ever since 1948, when Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet bloc, their relations have periodically flashed into saber-rattling and wars of words in the press over the issue of the Macedonian minority that straddles the border.

Yugoslavia appears convinced that Bulgaria, which invaded Macedonia in both world wars by attaching itself to a belligerent European power, harbors irredentist sentiments toward the region. Bulgaria denies this heatedly and resents Belgrade's insistence that it should treat its own Macedonians as a minority with special language and cultural rights.

It has been suggested that if the Soviet Union wanted to bring pressure on Yugoslavia now that President Tito is out of the picture, it could easily do so by "stoking the Macedonian fire." Such a view, of course, does not sit well with Bulgaria.

Foreign Ministry officials and others insisted in interviews that Bulgaria had no territorial designs on Macedonia. They pointed out that President Todor Zhivkov, who is also first secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, publicly and repeatedly offered President Tito a treaty to make the border inviolable. The offers were refused.

'Game' of the 'Intelligentsia'

"We take into consideration the realities of the Second World War," said Alexander Fol, the Minister of Education and

a rising political figure. He said Bulgaria felt that Yugoslavia's "Socialist Republic of Macedonia was rightfully created."

The dispute, he suggested, was a "game" perpetrated by "the intelligentsia of Macedonia who want to build their history on a false, anti-Bulgarian basis."

Other officials theorized privately that Yugoslavia had fueled the Macedonian issue in order to create an external threat and unify its diverse republics. This view does not stray far from that of many Western diplomats stationed here.

One ambassador observed that the Yugoslav press is adept at finding obscure Bulgarian publications that seem to revive the Macedonian claim. Whenever a press campaign starts up next door, he said, "we have to go searching the bookstalls."

"It's often said that Bulgaria will be the cutting force for the Soviet Union against Yugoslavia," he added. "Bulgarian claims on Yugoslavia were not supported by the Soviet Union. People forget that it was the Soviet Union that came in here after the war and gave that territory to Yugoslavia in the first place."

Primarily a Local Quarrel

A Soviet journalist who works here, noting that the Macedonian question had never appeared in the Soviet press, depicted it as a local quarrel of interest mainly to the two nations involved. "One side writes an inflammatory article," he said with a shrug, "and the other side feels it has to answer."

For the Yugoslavs, the dispute has a dark side because Bulgaria is so closely linked to Moscow economically, militarily and ideologically. There are no Soviet troops stationed here, for there is no need for them, but Soviet forces could be quickly transported by a ferry link established on the Black Sea in 1978 between Illichevsk, near the Soviet city of Odessa, and Varna, Bulgaria.

President Zhivkov, when he was in Belgrade for President Tito's funeral, met with Lazar Kolisevski, the temporary President of Yugoslavia, for 45 minutes. Their discussions did not take a substantive turn, officials here said, but they seemed to halt the polemics.

Although Bulgarian officials said they were not bothered by President Carter's trip to Belgrade, they decried United States military assistance to neighboring Turkey and said Washington was meddling in the Balkans and trying to exploit political instability in the region.

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Associated Press

President Carter reviewing the honor guard as he arrived yesterday at Surcin Airport in Belgrade, Yugoslavia

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