

THE PRESIDENT OF BULGARIA – THE INAPPROPRIATE PERSON AT THE FORUM OF BULGARIAN MEDIA IN MADRID

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Following the initiative of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA), in May 2005 in Sofia was held the First meeting of Bulgarian language media from all over the world. The goal of this meeting was to organize a presentation of the media coming out in Bulgarian abroad and to establish collaboration between them and their colleagues from Bulgaria.

This first meeting was followed up by other similar events in Chicago in 2006, Rome – in 2007 and the Fourth world meeting of Bulgarian language media planned for May 19th 2008 in Madrid. With the exception of the first meeting, organized by the BTA, the other remind us much more of a flirt with the official Bulgarian authorities. Already twice after the Chicago meeting in 2006, the meetings of the Bulgarian language media have been held “under the auspices” of the President of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov. We think that for many reasons Georgi Parvanov is not the appropriate person to open a forum of Bulgarian media. Indeed, the President of Bulgaria shall answer a number of uncomfortable questions instead. Documents discovered by the Commission for the Disclosure of Documents and for Identification of Affiliation to the Former State Security show that Georgi Parvanov worked for the First General Department of the State Security under the operational name “Gotze”. The Former State Security was the organization which simultaneously played the role of the political police and controlled the organized crime (illegal trade, arms and drugs smuggling, terrorism).

It was subordinate to the former KGB, as element of the full control which the former Soviet Union exercised over Bulgaria. The Former State Security considered Bulgarian emigration as their main enemy and committed a number of crimes against them including discrediting, splitting their ranks, kidnapping and murder. In the beginning, President Parvanov blankly denied any connection to the State Security. Later he said he was not aware of his collaboration with the Security Service. When the found documents proved that his affiliation to the communist secret services was true and voluntary, the President declared that he was proud of his “patriotic” duty carried out in an organization working in the interests of a foreign country and charged of criminal offenses like the murder of the writer Georgi Markov (the famous Bulgarian umbrella case) in London or kidnapping and murder of the political emigrant Boris Arsov from Denmark. According to the Freedom House and Reporters without borders,

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Bulgaria is among the countries with only partially free media. The recent report of Reporters without borders for 2007 ranks Bulgaria 51st in the list of the countries with free media, after countries like Mauritania, Togo and Mauritius. In Bulgaria, a member of the EU, people are still being murdered for what they think or say : only a couple of weeks ago “the reporter of the mafia” Georgi Stoev was shot dead in the center of Sofia after he declared that he would bring evidence against the mafia bosses in court. Instead of representing Bulgarian state and authorities, President Parvanov should rather give an explanation why the Prosecutor General Boris Velchev (who is the President’s former advisor) did not initiate criminal cases after the appalling disclosures following journalist investigations in some Bulgarian ministries. On the contrary, criminal cases have been opened against the investigators. Lack of adequate judiciary reaction makes the work of investigating journalists absolutely pointless and raises the already high job-related risk.

The presence of President Parvanov will be inappropriate for several other reasons. He was directly involved in a scandal with the journalist Ivo Indzhev who was forced to resign from the TV channel BTV after having asked a question about a penthouse apartment of Parvanov who would allegedly receive it as an anonymous gift. During the huge scandal related to the leak of information to the organized crime and corruption in the Ministry of Interior, Parvanov remained silent, declared himself “ill-informed” and avoided any official comment on this hottest corruption issue in the Bulgarian political life for the past 15 years. One of the topics to be discussed in Madrid is Bulgarian tourism. Disclosures of embezzlement and construction works in protected natural reserves and areas were followed by open menaces against Bulgarian journalists in 2007 and 2008 by unknown persons. So far these persons have not been identified. According to the press, businessmen like Krassimir Guergov, president of the national board for tourism and chairman of Bulgarian golf association, as well as Georgi Velchev, representative of the chain “Sol Media” in the Balkans will be attending the meeting. Krassimir Guergov is a media boss controlling almost the entire TV commercial sector and investigated for corruptive payments of 200 000 euros to the former director of Bulgarian State National television. Georgi Velchev is the brother of the ex-finance-minister Milen Velchev. According to information published in the media, Georgi Velchev owns 14 hotels, the major part of which were built illegally but later made legitimate. He has invested in a scandalous construction project in a landscape protection area in the national park “Rila”. We also consider the presence of these persons at the meeting very inappropriate and unjustified.

We therefore protest against the proposed format of the meeting and suggest to replace the friendly cocktails and shoulder tapping by a real working forum. At this forum, the President of Bulgaria shall answer questions about the freedom of speech and supremacy of law in Bulgaria, about nonfeasance of authorities when Bulgarian nature is being destroyed, about legislative attempts to deny or limit the electoral rights of Bulgarian emigrants, etc.

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