

ANGER AT BULGARIAN PREMIER'S REMARKS ON A SOCIALIST PARTY BAN

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The Bulgarian Prime Minister's comments on banning the country's main opposition Socialist Party sparked outrage at the European Parliament in Strasbourg today.

The S&D Group called on Bulgaria to respect difference of opinion and defend political pluralism.

Bulgarian Socialist MEPs sent an open letter to leaders of the EP's main political groups, quoting the Bulgarian Premier as saying that the Socialist Party was holding the country back and that it was a mistake that it had not been banned.

In a statement today, the S&D leadership said: "We express our support for the Bulgarian Socialist Party, not only as the major opposition party in Bulgaria but also as a member of the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists.

"The S&D Group strongly opposes such threats, insults and pressure on members and supporters of a political party, regardless of its political orientation, simply because they voice different opinions from those of the Prime minister and his party.

"The S&D Group expects the Bulgarian government -- despite its reliance on the parliamentary support of the far right xenophobic party Ataka -- to act as all EU governments do in observing the principles of democracy, freedom of speech and the rule of law.

"The S&D Group urges all major European political families to make it clear to the government of Bulgaria that it must stick to and to promote European values. This includes respecting the right to difference of opinion and defending political pluralism.

"Failure to show such respect would be a major step back from 20 years of efforts by the people of Bulgaria to build and preserve a democratic society."

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