

Bulgaria

72. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 8, 1969, 4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

US-Bulgarian Relations

PARTICIPANTS

Bulgaria

Dr. Luben Guerassimov, Ambassador

Mr. Vesselin Vassilev, Attaché

US

The Secretary

Martin A. Wenick, EUR/EE

Ambassador Guerassimov said that he was calling upon the Secretary on instructions from his Minister of Foreign Affairs with whom he had spoken during his recent consultations in Sofia. He told the Secretary that he carried a personal message of good wishes from the Minister and that he wished to inform us that Bulgaria stands ready to improve relations with the US in all areas.

The Ambassador said that there has been in recent years success in the development of US-Bulgarian commercial and cultural relations, and the Bulgarians wished to strengthen and to expand relations in these areas as well as in other fields. For example, he said that presently the Bulgarian Government is engaged in negotiations with American firms for the sale of two industrial complexes, the total cost of which would be approximately \$50 million. Of course, he said, one of the obstacles is the fact that Bulgaria does not enjoy MFN which inhibits the expansion of Bulgarian trade with the US. This is an area where the Bulgarians would particularly like to see progress in the future.

With this introduction, the Ambassador asked the Secretary whether he would provide an assessment of bilateral relations and whether he would comment on the Budapest Appeal of the Warsaw Pact countries² with which the Bulgarian Government was associated.

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL BUL-US. Limited Official Use. Drafted by Wenick and approved in S on May 15.

² Dated March 17; the significant portions of the statement are printed in *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1969-1970*, p. 23261.

The Secretary first requested the Ambassador to convey to Foreign Minister Bashev his appreciation for the Minister's message which the Ambassador had brought. He then told the Ambassador that it is US policy to seek to improve relations with all countries regardless of the obstacles which stand in the way. The advent of a new Administration, the Secretary observed, is a particularly good time to reexamine the course to be followed in seeking to improve relations.

The Secretary remarked that there is a tendency to be non-specific in conducting international relations. He wanted to tell the Ambassador very frankly and specifically, however, that he feels the process in improving our bilateral relations would be a slow one. Bulgaria's willingness to participate in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, an action which aroused public opinion in the US, would be an obstacle in the path of efforts to improve relations. Additionally, the so-called Brezhnev doctrine³ has the US concerned because of its implications. The Secretary added that this concern goes beyond the US, since every leader with whom the President and he had spoken during the President's recent European trip⁴ had expressed concern over the implications of the Soviet pronouncements about a socialist commonwealth.

The Ambassador interjected that a misunderstanding exists about Soviet policy. He feels, he said, that there is no so-called Brezhnev doctrine; however, there is the obligation of each socialist country to provide mutual assistance to other socialist countries in defense of the socialist order.

The Secretary then continued that despite the difficult hurdles that he foresees in improving relations, we would be seeking, within these limits, to have better relations with Bulgaria. He indicated there are areas, such as cultural exchanges and tourism, where progress would appear to be easier than in other areas.

The Secretary then asked the Ambassador whether he really considers the Budapest Appeal a practical solution to the question of European security. The Secretary observed that an effort to solve all the outstanding problems affecting European security at one time appears to be unrealistic from our point of view. He asked whether a conference such as that envisaged in the Appeal could really solve the

³ Originally propounded by Soviet Communist Party spokesman Sergei Kovalev in an article entitled "Sovereignty and International Responsibility in Socialist Countries," it asserted the right of the Soviet Union to interfere in the internal affairs of other Bloc states. (*Pravda*, September 26, 1968) A translation of the Kovalev essay is in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, October 16, 1968.

⁴ The President visited Western Europe February 23–March 2.

major problems facing Europe when we have been unable in the past to eliminate a number of the minor problems which are outstanding.

The Ambassador expressed his Government's belief that a European Security Conference would contribute to the consolidation of peace and security in Europe.

73. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Sofia, November 30, 1970.

PARTICIPANTS

Prime Minister Todor Zhivkov
Foreign Minister Ivan Bashev
Bulgarian Interpreter
Ambassador H.G. Torbert, Jr.
DCM Robert B. Houston, Jr.

SUBJECT

Protocol Call on Prime Minister Zhivkov

Prime Minister Zhivkov welcomed me as a new Ambassador and wished success for my mission. He said that Bulgaria wished to have normal relations with the United States and wished that these relations would develop. In answer to my question about his recent trip to Hungary, where I said I had served in 1961–62, Prime Minister Zhivkov said that he shared the assessment of the Hungarian Party Congress which had been made by the Western press, namely, that there were no sensational developments. He gave as his personal impressions of the Party Congress that the development of friendship and cooperation between Hungary and the Soviet Union had been a major theme and that the Hungarian formulations about developing a socialized society coincided with Bulgarian views. He also said that expectations in certain Western circles that the Hungarian liberalization would turn

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL BUL–US. Limited Official Use. Initialed by Torbert. Transmitted to the Department of State as an enclosure to airgram A–285, December 3. The meeting took place in the Council of Ministers. In telegram 1107 from Sofia, November 30, Torbert commented on the meeting: “Zhivkov revealed nothing new and engaged in good-natured verbal sparring about lack of progress in US-Bulgarian relations.” (Ibid.)

out to be of a Western type were shown by the Congress to be groundless. Zhivkov then went on to charge that my question about his attendance at the Hungarian Party Congress indicated a lack of interest in the development of US-Bulgarian relations.

I assured the Prime Minister that US-Bulgarian relations were my prime concern. I said that I felt it was necessary to become acquainted before one could attempt to do serious business, and noted that by asking him about Hungary I felt we had become better acquainted. I said that US-Bulgarian relations could not be changed overnight but would have to be improved gradually over a period of time. I said that our two countries, and the East and West generally, were moving away from the cold war and hopefully into a period of increased mutual communication and economic exchange. I noted that some countries in the East as well as in the West had made good progress in moving away from the period of confrontation but that regrettably US-Bulgarian relations seem to be the last to change.

I said this immobility was no doubt connected with the lack of acquaintance between our two countries. I noted that there had been some recent steps towards overcoming such poor acquaintance. Department of Commerce official Harold Scott had visited Bulgaria in early summer, and two US Senators had come to Bulgaria in September and October respectively.² First Deputy Foreign Minister Grozev had visited Washington shortly before I came to Bulgaria.³ Furthermore, agreement had just been reached for two groups of Bulgarian administrators to go to the United States to exchange views on economic management. Such contacts can only serve to improve our understanding.

Zhivkov took up this theme of lack of understanding and said that information about himself, both true and untrue, was well known in the United States. Picking up a paper which Foreign Minister Bashev had brought to the meeting, Zhivkov went on to say that he knew a lot about me, too. He said, for example, that he knew we were born in the same year and that I was only one month younger than he.

On a more serious note, Zhivkov said that his government felt that Bulgaria was developing successfully. He said that while this might not be true, his government nonetheless was satisfied that Bulgaria was

² Senator Henry Bellman (R-Oklahoma) represented the United States at the opening of the Plovdiv Trade Fair in late September. The second senator has not been identified.

³ An October 9 memorandum of conversation between Grozev and Johnson is in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL BUL-US.

on the right track. He noted that Bulgaria used to be the second poorest country in Europe, with only Albania being less well off. He complained that Bulgarians today do not remember how difficult life in Bulgaria used to be, but only wanted to have ever better living conditions. He noted that “Western centers” could perhaps take advantage of this desire of the Bulgarian people to live better.

I told Prime Minister Zhivkov that this revolution of rising expectations was known even in the United States. There, workers struck in the attempt to get ever higher living standards. I told him that I was impressed by Bulgaria’s evident progress in developing industry and by the relatively contented appearance of the people. I said that I had served in many countries in differing stages of economic development and considered myself a competent observer in such matters.

I then noted that the Bulgarian press indicated that changes were coming up in the next few months concerning the Bulgarian economy and the Bulgarian government. I asked the Prime Minister what we should be expecting on this score.

At this point, Zhivkov looked a little puzzled and turned to Foreign Minister Bashev. The Foreign Minister explained to Zhivkov that my questions referred to the forthcoming economic changes. (See Sofia’s 1092).⁴

Zhivkov then said that nothing sensational should be expected. His government was always carrying out steps to improve the economy. He said that a Council of Ministers meeting had been going on prior to my call to discuss carrying out the technical revolution on a broad front pursuant to the decisions of the September (1969) and April (1970) plenums. These had provided for automated management and the concentration and specialization of agriculture. He confirmed that what Bulgaria was doing in the field of concentration and specialization of agriculture was novel, and laughingly said, “We do not recommend that anyone else adopt this path. This is something specific for Bulgarian conditions.”

I then asked him specifically whether the new constitution would go into effect only after the Party Congress.

Zhivkov confirmed that it would probably go into effect after approval by the Party Congress and certainly only after approval by the National Assembly. He did say, however, that both the draft constitution and a discussion of it would be published for national consideration.

In conclusion, I told the Prime Minister that I had no sensational proposals to make. I said that major changes in certain US-Bulgarian

⁴ Dated November 24; it reported Zhivkov’s comments on Vietnam and the proposed Bulgarian economic reforms. (Ibid., E 1 BUL)

relationships would require Congressional action. Such action needs careful preparation and creation of a favorable atmosphere in the Congress. Creation of such an atmosphere is difficult if our countries are at each other's throat. I hoped that these changes would come to pass. However, I noted that possibilities for small steps exist at present. I said I would do anything in my power to achieve such useful steps and expressed the hope that, with Prime Minister Zhivkov's help and with the help of his government, our relations would improve.

Zhivkov then said that no barriers exist on the Bulgarian side to the improvement of US-Bulgarian relations. He alleged that the barriers exist on the US side in the form of US discrimination against Bulgaria. How long such discrimination would continue, he said, was US business. He said that Bulgaria could wait and could be as patient as were the Chinese in this regard. He noted that some Western experts charge that conditions are desperate in Bulgaria; that all Bulgarian export goods are sold through the year 1975; that Bulgaria is suffering from serious labor shortages. He said these Western assessments were false and simultaneously added that Bulgaria could find goods to sell to the United States.

I said that when I read the Bulgarian press and listened to Bulgarian radio and TV, I found it difficult to believe that only the United States was making difficulties for US-Bulgarian relations.

Zhivkov was quick to point out that the discrimination of which he had been speaking was trade discrimination. He said that Bulgaria knew its place and that Bulgaria felt the US laws could be changed if US policy changed.

I said that one could argue whether the chicken or the egg comes first, but it was true that policy could be changed only in an appropriate climate. I wanted the US and Bulgaria to be better friends and I said I would work to this end.

In an apparent effort to show his personal interest and knowledge about Bulgaria's relations with the United States, he said that Ambassador Guerassimov was now in Sofia, although he had not yet seen him. He said that Ambassador Guerassimov was his personal friend. He implied that the latter had not been very industrious in Washington, but remarked, in a disarming fashion, that he would not say this to Ambassador Guerassimov's face.

74. Telegram From the Embassy in Bulgaria to the Department of State¹

Sofia, July 3, 1971, 1028Z.

621. Subject: Review of bilateral relations with Foreign Minister—Policy. Ref: Sofia 542 (Notal).²

Summary: In lengthy discussion of US-Bulgarian relations arranged at my request, FonMin Bashev strongly established cessation of our broadcasting in Bulgarian from non-American territory as well as end to discriminatory trade legislation as precondition for any real improvement in our bilateral relations. *End summary.*

1. I had an hour and a half free-swinging conversation with Bulgarian FonMin Bashev late afternoon July 2. After preliminary perfunctory discussion of visit of Greek DepFonMin Palamas, I expressed my interest in having first comprehensive bilateral discussion since Amb McSweeney's meeting with First Deputy FonMin Grozev in November 1969, partly precipitated by report Bashev had told German Trade Commissioner improvement in US-Bulgarian relations inhibited because the U.S. had no Bulgarian policy. I too had the feeling our relations not improving as they should, but disagreed as to the cause. Noted that this was a personal initiative, approved but not directed by my government.³ Presented him translation of sections on Eastern Europe and Bulgaria in Secretary's March 26 foreign policy message to Congress⁴ and invited him to compare conciliatory wording thereof with his own remarks about the United States in his foreign policy speech to the Party Congress⁵ which was the only comparable document I could find. I then reviewed and left with him informal list of 21 U.S. actions to improve bilateral relations during past years, some of which successful and some frustrated by Bulgarian side.⁶

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL BUL–US. Confidential. Repeated to USIA, Belgrade, Athens, Bonn, Bucharest, Budapest, Moscow, Prague, Warsaw, and Munich. A memorandum of this conversation was transmitted as an attachment to airgram A-166 from Sofia, July 8. (Ibid.)

² Dated June 12; it reported on the Foreign Minister's comments to German trade representatives. (Ibid., POL BUL–W GERM)

³ Approval was given in telegram 106819 to Sofia, June 16. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL BUL–US)

⁴ "United States Foreign Policy, 1969–1970: A Report by the Secretary of State," released March 26; for text, see Department of State *Bulletin*, April 5, 1971, pp. 465–477.

⁵ This speech is summarized and extracts are printed in *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 1971–1972, pp. 24747–24748.

⁶ Not found.

2. With skillful histrionic display he launched into long statement that two countries would not have good relations until U.S. made up its mind to take a different attitude on some of the fundamental problems facing us. He was not talking now about world problems on which we had disagreements and could argue at great length, but primarily about the matter of broadcasting. The U.S. is building a powerful transmitting station less than 100 miles from Bulgaria's border which cannot be considered as necessary to our proper concerns, as friendly or as a serious indication of our intention to improve relations. It is impossible to convince Bulgarian "ruling circles" that they should make any moves themselves as long as we were doing this sort of thing. It was as though they put an anti-American station in Canada or Cuba or helped to finance the Black Panther movement which, of course, they would not do because they did not sympathize with Black Panther tactics. He recognized difference between RFE and VOA but said it was only one of technique and sophistication; both were motivated by attitude antagonistic to Bulgaria.

3. After ten minutes of this, he turned for shorter attack to MFN question, saying that they could well understand lack of trade with America if it were based on unprofitability or mere disinclination, but when we have legislatively singled out Communist countries as enemies and, in effect, designated Bulgaria as a dangerous country, this set the tone for the attitudes of all U.S. businessmen and was totally incompatible with improved relations. Therefore, unless we made up our minds to take these fundamental steps as indicating our desire for improved relations, the latter would never occur no matter how much we did in the way of "small steps." He had been working for a decade in the hopes that results would be obtained from the latter technique, but was now convinced it wouldn't. He had twice had meetings with Secretary Rush designed to improve relations in which he had not raised these basic matters so strongly, but now realized they were fundamental.

4. I rebutted at some length noting we were not alone in foreign broadcasting field, including foreign broadcasting from other territory not one's own. While I appreciated his view, I thought it important he visualize view from other side of fence where we too were concerned with world peace and saw it frustrated by complete control of access to the full facts of any situation and a steady flow of one-sided, vicious propaganda against the United States and its allies. It was this all pervasive propaganda which was the basic cause of most of the difficulties. The U.S. could not get to a fundamental change in its laws which required domestic political consensus unless both countries succeeded in lowering our voices a bit. The U.S. had accomplished this in great measure, but it seemed to me the Bulgarians had not. It might be somewhat of a chicken and egg proposition, but we were trying to break

the circle and improve the climate. I noted that if he could actually listen to a VOA broadcast, I thought he would have difficulty in telling me precisely what they objected to. International broadcasting is a general international practice, the right to which no country would wish to give up. Furthermore, if he had been following recent Pentagon Paper disclosure case in the United States, he might be aware of how fundamental freedom of information is in our outlook. Therefore, if he was saying that the only possibility for improved bilateral relations was the abolition of international broadcasting, I was afraid that I and my successors would have rather futile tours. On trade legislation, I thought there was more hope in the long run, but it would require patient effort to eliminate polemics.

5. Bashev concentrated thereafter on question of broadcasting from foreign territory. I rebutted that this was a matter of relations between allies and fact that we were among largest broadcasters was historical carry-over of our resource position at end of war. If we reduced our efforts, I felt sure others would carry them on. His climactic point was that stationing of transmitter in Greece was a poisoning element in Greek-Bulgarian bilateral relations in which we were thus interfering. Germany not specifically mentioned and RFE only incidentally.

6. Discussion got quite blunt and heated at times, but in end Bashev crawled off diplomatic limb to extent of saying that while he saw no prospects for improved relations, it should not follow that they would deteriorate further. Bulgaria was sincerely interested in maintaining present level and improving it once we took fundamental steps. He also assured me of his availability at any time for further discussions and I emphasized my reciprocal availability.

7. *Comment:* This was a forceful, histrionic performance delivered with all the fervor of a religious fanatic. It is notable that for the moment, foreign broadcasting has replaced MFN as a number one problem in Bulgarian eyes. It seems highly likely this is part of the orchestrated attack and that Bulgaria selected to emphasize point of extraterritorial transmitting stations since they neither have any, or as far as we know, host any. This probably means a continued period of chilly political weather here. It also well illustrates depth of Bulgarian concern to maintain ideological and cultural purity.

Torbert

75. Telegram From Secretary of State Rogers to the Department of State¹

New York, September 29, 1972, 2055Z.

Secto 31/3579. Memorandum of Conversation: FonMin Mladenov (Bulgaria) September 27, 1972; 10:15 a.m. 30A Waldorf.

1. Participants: Bulgaria—FM Mladenov, Deputy FM and UN Perm Rep Grozev, Mr. Garvalov (Interpreter); US—The Secretary, Mr. McCloskey, Mr. Combs (Notetaker).

2. *Summary*: Mladenov proposed broad program for improving US-Bulgarian relations beginning with visit to US of official delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Ivan Popov. Delegation would study possibilities, primarily in economic field, and make specific proposals for further bilateral measures. Secretary Rogers responded favorably, but noted that as practical matter improved bilateral relations in specific fields such as trade and tourism required improvement in overall climate between two countries. Secretary mentioned consular convention and harassment of US Embassy employees in this regard. *Action requested*: Specific reply to Mladenov's proposal be prepared for transmittal to Mladenov prior to his departure from US October 5.²

3. FM Mladenov led off by proposing major improvement in US-Bulgarian relations in all fields. In commercial area, Bulgaria has many exports to offer including cigarettes, wine and electric trucks. Mladenov suggested that all limitations on trade be lifted by each side and that trade agreement providing MFN be signed. He also suggested maritime agreement and arbitration agreement, to be following by discussion of mutual credit arrangements and joint economic ventures. Steps should also be taken to increase scientific and technical cooperation, tourism, exchanges of expert delegations and athletic teams.

4. As first step, Mladenov proposed that US receive official Bulgarian delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Machine Building Professor Ivan Popov. Delegation would study possibilities at first hand and then make further concrete proposals.

5. Secretary Rogers said US welcomed improved relations with Bulgaria, in line with President Nixon's worldwide policy of building structure of peace and mutual understanding. Our experience showed that for meaningful improvement in specific fields, particularly in

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 7 BUL. Confidential. Repeated to Sofia. Rogers and Mladenov were in New York attending the UN General Assembly meeting.

² Not found.

commercial and tourism areas, it important to improve general political climate. In principle we favored Bulgarian proposal to send exploratory delegation although we would have to look into timing of delegation's visit. We will give thought to how visit should best be set up and will be back in touch with Bulgarian side.

6. We very much favored exchanges in scientific, cultural, athletic and other fields and were prepared to discuss this further with Bulgarians at any time, Secretary continued. We also favored increased tourism, although this of course depended largely on individual US tourists.

7. But in discussing improvement in political climate, specific problems should be mentioned, Secretary noted. For example, US had submitted proposal for US-Bulgarian consular convention and was awaiting Bulgarian response. Agreement on consular convention would in our view be important step toward enhanced commerce and tourism. We had reports of harassment of US Embassy employees in Sofia; this was unfortunate irritant in our relations that surely could be rectified. So let us begin today with agreement to work for better climate, to eliminate irritations, to take concrete steps to improve mutual relations.

8. Mladenov agreed fully. He undertook personally to look into status of consular convention. He agreed that political climate should be improved but noted that of course Bulgaria had its own view of matter. He did not want to dwell on VOA broadcasts to Bulgaria or on annual US campaign regarding enslaved nations. Main thing was to start to improve situation; Bulgarian side evaluated today's meeting in that light and felt meeting was extremely useful. Secretary Rogers agreed.

9. As meeting ended, Mladenov said this was his first visit to US and unfortunately he would have to spend entire stay in New York. He plans to leave October 5. Next year he hoped to visit Washington and, if US agrees, he would like to travel to other parts of US.

10. After meeting, Secretary told McCloskey and Combs he wished to give Mladenov specific answer regarding visit of Bulgarian delegation prior to Mladenov's October 5 departure. Public statement could then be made concerning this development.

Rogers

76. Telegram From the Embassy in Bulgaria to the Department of State¹

Sofia, December 7, 1972, 0815Z.

1336. Subj: Policy: U.S.-Bulgarian Relations. Ref: Sofia 1322 December 4.²

1. *Summary.* In first informal encounter with FonMin Mladenov since his meeting with Secretary³ he was effusively friendly and pushed for progress toward commercial agreement.

2. Was cornered at Finnish reception Dec 6 by FonMin Mladenov whom I had till then successfully evaded since my return (he was in Moscow and Ankara part of the time). He was effusively cordial, referred with great pleasure to UN meeting with Secretary and said that in view of Secretary's receptivity to his suggestions of various kinds of agreements we should not lose momentum but get along with preparation for visit by Ivan Popov. For example, now that we had U.S.-Soviet model we should be able to start drafting an economic and commercial agreement.

3. I replied that I was all for preparatory activity and had received a general verbal brief while at home to be receptive to any Bulgarian initiatives. As of the moment I had not received any detailed instructions. I had plenty of authority however to continue negotiating consular convention on which we were waiting their reply to our last proposal 18 months ago. On commercial matters there were so many technicalities involved that I suspected in the final analysis this might be better discussed in Washington perhaps by Deputy FonTrade Min Lukanov during January visit. Mladenov acknowledged such trip was a possibility. We were interrupted before I could pin him down further on consular agreement.

4. Just prior to above had somewhat similar conversation with First Deputy FonMin Grigorov. Latter inquiring as to Codel Symington reactions and expressing regret we had not accepted GOB offer for National Assembly to be official host which he had personally pushed for at policy level. I expressed appreciation for treatment of Codel and other indications of better working relations which I said we were noting carefully. Said (without firm commitment) Codel IPU in February

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL BUL-US. Confidential; Limdis.

² Telegram 1322 outlined likely Bulgarian scenarios for improving U.S.-Bulgarian relations. (Ibid.)

³ See Document 75.

might be more appropriate for at least partial hosting by National Assembly.

5. *Comment:* Atmosphere was clearly changed here at least temporarily but it appears that tactic is to push for early reward in form of commercial progress while giving as little as possible on other fronts. Would appreciate early receipt Department's scenario instructions after which I will seek appointment with Mladenov and try to sort out priorities.

Torbert