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NATO, EU Lose Some Luster in the Eyes of Bulgarian Public, But Many Still Want To Join

Probably reflecting uneasiness over Kosovo, Bulgarian public attitudes toward the international community have worsened modestly since last year. Nonetheless, this USIA poll in Bulgaria shows that recent events have not dampened public sentiment for joining western organizations such as NATO and the EU.

KEY FINDINGS

- Confidence in international institutions has dropped somewhat since last year, though support for joining NATO and the EU has held steady.
- The U.S. is seen somewhat less positively now than a year ago, and slightly more view the U.S. as having too much influence.
- Bulgarians tend to believe that strong world leadership by the EU suits their interests better than American leadership does.
- More now than a year ago are concerned that Bulgaria might be attacked sometime in the next few years, with Serbia seen as the greatest threat.

Confidence In International Institutions Sags

Bulgarians' degree of confidence in a number of international institutions -- including the UN, OSCE, and WEU -- has dropped from a year ago (Table 1).

The decline in confidence has been particularly sharp for both NATO and the EU. Reflecting public opposition to the NATO military

Table 1: How much confidence you have in the following institutions to deal effectively with European problems?

		<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>
EU	Have confidence	69%	54%
	Lack confidence	18	27
UN	Have confidence	56%	50%
	Lack confidence	25	30
NATO	Have confidence	44%	31%
	Lack confidence	39	54
OSCE	Have confidence	49%	44%
	Lack confidence	21	25
WEU	Have confidence	47%	40%
	Lack confidence	26	34

This report is based on face-to-face interviews with a nationally-representative sample of 1,081 adults (age 18 and older) living in Bulgaria conducted May 15-25, 1999. The research firm Center for the Study of Democracy in Sofia conducted the interviews for USIA.

intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a majority lacked confidence in NATO “to deal effectively with European problems” while just a third expressed such confidence. A year ago, a small plurality had confidence in NATO. Those who approved of the NATO action in the FRY expressed much more confidence in each international institution named than did those who opposed the Kosovo campaign. The decline in confidence in the EU is also striking because it more than reverses an upward trend noted last year. More than two-thirds expressed confidence in the EU in 1998, up from 60 percent in the fall of 1997. In May, a bare majority expressed confidence in the EU.

Despite this drop in confidence in both NATO and the EU, support for Bulgaria joining each organization if given the opportunity has essentially held steady over the last year. Three-quarters continue to support EU membership (1999: 76% support, 8% oppose; 1998: 82%-6%), and half continue to support NATO membership (1999: 52% support, 34% oppose; 1998: 57%-27%).

Bulgarians’ View of U.S. Becomes More Negative

The events in Kosovo over the last year appear to have had no effect on Bulgarians’ overall views of Serbia, but fewer view the United States favorably now than did so one year ago (Table 2). Nonetheless, it is clear that Bulgarians’ opinions of these two countries are based on many factors besides the NATO airstrikes. The U.S. and Serbia are each seen favorably by two-thirds of Bulgarians; in fact, about half overall hold favorable views of *both* countries. Nearly all (93%) of those who approve of the NATO airstrikes have a favorable opinion of the United States, as do a majority (57%) of those who disapprove. There is a somewhat similar pattern in reverse with views of Serbia: more than two-thirds (71%) of those who disapprove of the NATO airstrikes have a favorable view of Serbia, as do half (51%) of those who endorse the air campaign against the FRY.

Views of Many Other Countries Hold Steady

About three-quarters or more of Bulgarians continue to have an overall favorable opinion of a number of major and neighboring countries, including Germany, Russia, Greece, Macedonia and Romania (Table 2). The Bulgarian public has become somewhat more favorable toward both Macedonia and Turkey over the last year.

Table 2: Feelings toward different countries

		<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>
Bulgaria	Favorable	—	98%
	Unfavorable		1
Germany	Favorable	89%	86%
	Unfavorable	5	6
Russia	Favorable	87%	86%
	Unfavorable	9	8
Greece	Favorable	82%	82%
	Unfavorable	12	11
U.S.	Favorable	76%	66%
	Unfavorable	17	25
Macedonia	Favorable	72%	87%
	Unfavorable	21	7
Romania	Favorable	72%	73%
	Unfavorable	20	18
Serbia	Favorable	63%	65%
	Unfavorable	31	27
Turkey	Favorable	50%	61%
	Unfavorable	43	34

EU Leadership Preferred To American

Bulgarians tend to believe that strong world leadership by the EU suits their interests better than American leadership does. A majority (58%) consider it desirable that “the European Union exert strong leadership in world affairs” (23% do not), but just a quarter say the same about American leadership (25% desirable, 61% undesirable). Support for American leadership tends to overlap with support for European leadership, though many Bulgarians would prefer only the latter. Overall, one-third (33%) consider EU leadership desirable but American leadership undesirable, while one-quarter (24%) see both as desirable. One in five (22%) see both as undesirable.

Paralleling (and perhaps contributing to) the modest drop in the proportion holding a favorable opinion of the U.S. is the growing majority of Bulgarians who believe that “The United States has too much influence over our country's affairs” (Table 3). Fewer say that the European Union has too much influence over Bulgaria (42% agree, 32% disagree), although many are uncertain (27%).

Table 3. “The United States has too much influence over our country's affairs.”

	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>
Agree	43%	52%	56%	61%
Disagree	37	30	30	21
Don't know	20	18	15	18

Many Unfamiliar With Key Foreign Leaders

While majorities have positive opinions of Germany, Russia and the United States, Bulgarians have more tepid views of the leaders of each country, with many apparently unfamiliar with them. Pluralities of about four in ten have a positive opinion of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (45% positive, 14% negative), Russian President Boris Yeltsin (40%-36%), and U.S. President Bill Clinton (41%-37%), though in each case a sizable percentage opt not to give any opinion at all (42%, 25%, 21%, respectively). By contrast, Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov is viewed very positively (80%-13%), with only a relative handful having no opinion (7%).

With An Eye On Serbia, Concern About Attack on Bulgaria Increases Slightly

Compared to a year ago, slightly more in May were at least somewhat concerned that “another country might attack our country sometime in the next few years” (42%), although half had little or no such concern (52%) (1998: 31% concerned, 54% unconcerned). More women (47%) than men (35%) were concerned about an attack on Bulgaria. Among those fearful of an attack on Bulgaria, nearly half (48%) named Serbia as the country most likely to launch such an offensive. A quarter (25%) named Turkey, followed by the United States (5%); one in five (18%) of those concerned about an attack did not specify which country most concerns them.

Bulgarians See Problems Abroad, But Would Prefer Domestic Focus

Three-quarters either strongly (37%) or somewhat (36%) agree with the statement “Bulgaria should not worry about world affairs but just concentrate on taking care of problems at home.” A quarter either strongly (8%) or somewhat (15%) disagree with this sentiment. This desire to focus on domestic problems does not appear to reflect widespread complacency about the state of world affairs in the post-Cold War world. Consistent with 1998 findings, the Bulgarian public is closely divided between those who agree (35%) and disagree (40%) with the statement that “Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world has become much safer.” A quarter (25%) are unsure. Those who believe that Bulgaria should pull back from world affairs are somewhat more likely to believe that the world has become safer since the end of the Cold War than do those tending toward international engagement (51% vs. 32%, respectively).

Bulgarians' divided attention between international and domestic concerns is evident when they are asked to select from a list the two most important problems for world leaders to address (Table 4). Instability in the Balkans and unemployment top the list, with about half naming each problem as either the first or second most important. About a quarter cite the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and fewer select drugs, environmental pollution, global financial instability, terrorism or AIDS.

Table 4: From the following list of issues, please tell me which issue you think is most important for world leaders to address? And which is second most important?

*Percentage naming each issue as either the first or second most important priority**

Instability in the Balkans	55%
Unemployment	45
Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	25
Narcotics and drug trade	15
Environmental pollution	15
Instability of world financial markets	13
Terrorism	12
AIDS	5
Other (<i>volunteered</i>)	2

** Numbers do not sum to 100 percent because each respondent could give up to two responses.*

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Methodology

This report is based on face-to-face interviews conducted May 15-25, 1999 with a nationally-representative sample of 1,081 adults (age 18 and older) living in Bulgaria. The research firm The Center for the Study of Democracy in Sofia conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions were prepared by the USIA Office of Research and Media Reaction. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research and Media Reaction staff.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in Bulgaria. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the Bulgarian population. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.
