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BULGARIA - WESTERN EUROPE: Diplomatic Strains

Bulgaria's alleged involvement in the shooting of the Pope and other questionable activities has set off negative diplomatic reactions in some West European capitals. Italy recalled its Ambassador to Bulgaria on Saturday for "consulations" following Bulgaria's recall last week of its Ambassador to Rome. According to Western press reports, Italian Foreign Minister Colombo said that, despite insufficient corroboration of Bulgaria's involvement, Rome remains concerned over possible other illegal activities by Bulgarians. Officials in Bonn also stressed that they are concerned about reports of Sofia's toleration of heroin trafficking between Bulgaria and West Germany and of possible links between Palestinian guerrillas in Bulgaria and West German terrorist groups.

Comment: Sofia is clearly embarrassed by the Italian accusations and concerned about the negative impact on its image abroad. Bulgarian officials probably hoped the arrest last week of Bekir Celenk--a smuggler--based in Sofia accused by Turkish media of involvement in the plot to kill the Pope--would help its tarnished reputation. With Western attention also focused on reported Bulgarian willingness to provide a safehaven for arms and narcotics traffickers and possible support for terrorism, it will be difficult for Sofia to limit additional damage to its reputation.

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