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6.2(d)

BULGARIA: Crowds Demand Free Elections

More than 50,000 people demonstrated in Sofia on Saturday, calling for democracy, free elections, and punishment of former leader Zhivkov. [redacted] rallies also were held in at least four other cities. Part of the crowd, however, booed a speaker who criticized the regime's mistreatment of the Turkish minority. A smaller, officially sponsored demonstration on Friday also went beyond the official program in calling for a multiparty system and immediate elections. New party leader Mladenov told reporters on Friday that elections are "possible"—elections for the National Assembly are scheduled for early 1991. [redacted]

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Comment: The demonstrators' strong showing probably presages greater popular activism that could eventually force the leadership to implement more radical changes. Judging by the demands raised by demonstrators, dissident groups will have to scramble to remain in front of popular desires. Despite Mladenov's comment that free elections are possible, he and other Communist leaders probably will continue to resist the idea of a multiparty system. Nonetheless, the long-docile puppet Agrarian Party announced it will meet today; it could take up the cry of pluralism. [redacted]

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