

AI Index: EUR 15/01/95  
EXTERNAL  
21 February 1995

## BULGARIA

### Ill-treatment of local protesters in Sapareva Banya

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN:** Amnesty International is concerned about reports that Bulgarian special police forces used excessive force in dispersing a crowd of about 150 protesters at Sapareva Banya. According to press reports, police forces in riot gear kicked and beat several protesters, resulting in some 15 people injured, two persons having to undergo medical treatment for broken limbs and one man having a heart attack after he was taken into a police car. AI is appealing to the Bulgarian authorities to make sure an investigation into this incident is carried out and that disciplinary measures will be taken against those responsible. AI also urges the Bulgarian authorities to ensure that police officers are informed of, and required to implement, international standards for law enforcement.

**BACKGROUND:** On 9 February 1995, units of the Bulgarian special police forces (reports indicate that some 120 policemen were involved) dispersed a crowd of about 150 protesters who were blocking the road leading to a water diversion project. The project joins two rivers - the Skakavica and the Dzherman - just outside the small town of Sapareva Banya which lies some 80 kilometres south of Sofia. It is meant to provide the capital with additional water supplies, in view of serious problems caused by water shortages in summer.

Most of the people in the crowd were local elderly inhabitants, joined by some ecologist groups and MPs. Uniformed regular policemen first asked the crowd barring the road to leave, which the demonstrators refused to do. Immediately afterwards two buses arrived, carrying special police forces in riot gear from Sofia. A further 30 police cars with regular policemen arrived on the spot. The protesters then blocked the road further using logs they took from a nearby forest business. The police again urged the people to clear the road and said they were entitled to use force if they wouldn't oblige. After the crowd once more refused, the police, kicking and beating people indiscriminately with truncheons, made their way through the crowd and finally succeeded in freeing the road.

The incident ended with 35 people being arrested and cautioned in writing at Dubnica police station and one person charged with petty hooliganism. Although there were no serious casualties reported, all together 15 people had to seek medical help in local clinics, and five of them had to be taken by ambulance to Dubnica hospital.

The daily *Otechestveny Front* of 9 February reported in more detail on the injuries people in the crowd suffered :

60-year-old Teodora Dimitrova was thrown by police into a heap of lumberwood and as a result had a swollen and bruised leg. 71-year-old Dafina Peychev suffered a broken arm when she was pushed back into the crowd. "They kicked me in the leg and beat me on the head with their truncheons" said Itso Krapchanski, who had blood all over his face. The local representative of the SDS (the Union

of Democratic Forces, a Bulgarian political party) Ventsi Tsuparski lost a tooth in a confrontation with the police. Edvin Sugarev (another SDS deputy) was injured from a kick in the upper right leg. According to a medical laboratory examination another protestor had blood in his urine as a result of kicking and beating.

Amnesty International is concerned about the continuing reports of police ill-treatment in Bulgaria. Frequently, victims of ill-treatment have been ethnic minority groups like the Roma and ethnic Macedonians. Amnesty International is particularly concerned that cases which it brought to the attention of the Bulgarian authorities have not been fully and impartially investigated and no one responsible for ill-treatment has been brought to justice. This latest incident in Sapareva Banya is also an indication of the repeated failure of Bulgarian police forces to abide by the relevant international human rights standards, including the UN Basis Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.