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Bulgarian MP Resigns Amid Row With Journalist

The lawmaker and a deputy prime minister accused of veiled threats against a TV host say they are victims of defamation campaign.

9 October 2017

A Bulgarian lawmaker has announced his resignation to limit damage to the ruling party after he and a deputy prime minister hinted that a TV host **risks being sacked** for pressing them on controversial topics.

During an interview last Friday with Victor Nikolaev, Nova TV's morning show anchor, lawmaker Anton Todorov (pictured) from Bulgaria's ruling GERB party apparently threatened the journalist that his provocative questions might cost him his job.



Following Todorov, the next guest on the show, Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov, responded to questions from Nikolaev in a similarly aggressive tone.

The scandal began when, during his 6 October show, Nikolaev asked Todorov to comment on the delayed **purchase of new fighter jets**. Todorov warned the host that he might follow the fate of his former colleague Anna Tsolova.

Last month, Tsolova's decision to resign as co-anchor of the program led to speculations that she was forced to leave for asking uncomfortable questions.

"You are using very strong words. They might cost you your bread [livelihood]," **Todorov told**

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Nikolaev.

“They already cost the bread of your colleague – she had taken a certain direction, and as far as I can see, her chair is missing.” and as far as I can see, her cha

Discussing a different matter later in the interview, Todorov gave another irritated response: “For such a question, if I was the boss of Nova TV, I would fire you.”

Questions about alleged corruption and nepotism in the Bulgarian government angered Nikolaev’s next guest – Valeri Simeonov from the nationalist alliance United Patriots, a junior government partner.

Simeonov also made reference to Tsoleva’s absence, and suggested that Nikolaev’s relatives benefitted from his position at NOVA when looking for jobs.

While Todorov said that his comments were misunderstood and [issued an apology to Nikolaev](#) on Facebook, Simeonov took a contrasting approach. [In an official position](#) published on the government website on 7 October, the deputy prime minister described himself as a subject of an “organized defamation campaign by the leading Bulgarian media” provoked by “a crime, which I did not commit.”

[Todorov announced his resignation today](#), also claiming he continues to be targeted by “an unprecedented attack,” which also damages “the reputation of GERB, our leader [Prime Minister Boyko Borissov], and the entire leadership.”

Before today’s developments, Bulgarian journalists and academics announced that they would protest against alleged political pressure in front of the Council of Ministers building on Wednesday.

After the show, Bulgarian outlets and independent experts severely criticized both politicians for apparently intimidating a journalist and disrespecting his freedom to question authority.

- Simeonov later announced his plans to sue the three largest television networks and the national radio if they do not apologize to him. Journalists interpreted these actions as a declaration of war on the media.
- “Such an act is unprecedented in Bulgarian history,” read a statement from the [Bulgarian section of the Association of European Journalists](#), announcing the Wednesday protest. “At no previous time has the government dared to give ultimatums to Bulgarian media.”

Compiled by **Peter Georgiev**

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