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Sergei Supinsky/Agence France-Presse

## United in Kiev

Demonstrators allied to various political parties and trade unions gathered in Kiev on Thursday to demand the cancellation of proposed increases in communal service payments set by the Ukrainian capital's mayor, Leonid Chernovetskiy.

## Britain deports Dutch 'provocateur'

### Home Office cites the public safety

By John F. Burns

**LONDON:** A member of the Dutch Parliament who has compared the Koran to Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and blamed Islamic texts for inciting the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and other terrorist atrocities was detained by immigration officials at London Heathrow Airport on Thursday and forced within hours to board a return flight to Holland.

His deportation had been ordered by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith on the grounds that his presence in Britain would be a danger to public safety.

The lawmaker, Geert Wilders, 45, had been invited to a showing at the House of Lords later Thursday of his 17-minute film, "Fitna," which caused outrage in wide areas of the Muslim world last year after it appeared on the Internet.

The film juxtaposes images of the Koran with footage of the 2001 attacks in the United States, as well as gruesome images of the Madrid rail bombings in 2004, the London transit attacks in 2005 and other atrocities, including a beheading in Iraq.

It also suggests that parts of the Koran have contributed to provoking violence by Muslim extremists.

As he had planned, Wilders's deportation — an action that British officials said had taken place only three times previously in the case of a citizen from another European Union country who was not wanted in a criminal case — attracted widespread publicity.

Although informed of the Home Office ban by the British Embassy in The

Hague this week, Wilders boarded a flight at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam in the company of a posse of reporters and cameramen. He arrived at Heathrow to the accompaniment of live television coverage by Britain's main news channels.

Wilders, whose Freedom Party holds nine seats in the 120-seat Parliament, had framed the affair as a test of freedom of speech and, he said, as a demonstration of Muslim intolerance of criticism of Islam and of what he has called the "Islamicization" of Europe.

In Britain, at least, Wilders and his British host — Malcolm Pearson, a member of the United Kingdom Independence Party, which campaigns for the preservation of Britain's traditional culture — succeeded in stirring a strident debate that has exposed underlying tensions over Muslim issues.

The tensions showed up in an ill-tempered debate on Sky Broadcasting's main news channel as Wilders arrived at Heathrow. Intercut with shots of his plane landing and of him walking through a terminal surrounded by reporters, the debate featured Pearson and Nazir Ahmed, a Pakistan-born property developer who, as a member of the governing Labour Party, is one of a handful of Muslim lawmakers at Westminster. Ahmed led the lawmakers who lobbied intensively for the ban on Wilders.

Pearson, a businessman who made his fortune in insurance, suggested that Muslims are less tolerant of dissent and criticism than Christians.

"Why, if you are a Muslim and convert to Christianity, do you become an apostate, and why, if you are a Christian and convert to Islam, do you suffer no problem at all?" he asked. And he compared what he said was an unwilling-

ness among Muslims to forswear the more warlike verses of the Koran to Christians taking parts of the Old Testament that speak of "Jehovah smiting the Malachites" as a justification for violence. "Why do you take the Koran so seriously?" he said.

Ahmed said that by inviting Wilders, who has been indicted in the Netherlands on charges of inciting hatred against Muslims, Pearson's group was providing the Dutch lawmaker with a platform to provoke "violence and hatred" against Muslims in Britain, the vast majority of whom disavow acts of terrorism by Islamic extremists.

He said that behind his claims of freedom of speech, Wilders was "a provocateur and publicity seeker" with no regard for what he described as "the great majority of Muslims who want to have the freedom to practice their religion without being insulted and threatened by people like Wilders."

Wilders's right to enter Britain won broad support from editorial writers and columnists in Britain's major newspapers, which mostly took the view that his film, while provocative, did not justify the government's action in abrogating his freedom of speech. Wilders's "political posturing," The Times of London said in an editorial Thursday, "is so self-evidently preposterous that, if he is permitted to speak, he will be arraigned before the best court in the land — the court of public opinion."

A similar stand was taken by the Dutch government of Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende. He said when the Wilders film was first shown last year that "it serves no cause other than to cause offense." But the government stood strongly behind Wilders's right to travel to Britain.

## Officials in Bulgaria accused of corruption

### Kickbacks rampant, businessman claims

By Stephen Castle and Doreen Carvajal

**BRUSSELS:** As the European authorities prod Bulgaria once more to root out corruption, the wealthy chairman of a pharmaceutical distribution company has accused the health officials of demanding monthly cash kickbacks totaling up to €2.8 million.

Tihomir Kamenov, a Bulgarian businessman, has written to the European Commission charging that his country's health system is rife with conflicts and greed.

"Corruption is everywhere, including the United States and Europe, but the fundamental difference in Bulgaria is that it's much more brutal," Kamenov said in an interview, explaining that he sought a European review because he had reached "legal exhaustion" in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria and Romania are the newest members of the 27-nation European Union and Bulgaria already has forfeited €220 million, or \$280 million, in funds because of what EU officials see as crime and corruption and insufficient efforts to root them out. On Thursday, the European Commission issued a new report urging Bulgaria to press forward with indictments of organized crime figures and to introduce legislation on political party financing and conflicts of interest.

"No major court decisions on high profile cases of organized crime have been taken in recent months," the report said, concluding "no significant change."

Kamenov, a lawyer who founded the wholesale pharmaceutical distributor, Commercial League, in 1991, first raised his allegations about kickbacks in an unorthodox way while mingling in January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. There he hand-delivered a six-page complaint to Jacques Barrot, the European commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs.

Michele Cercone, a spokesman for the commission, said that Barrot had received the letter and was examining the complaint. It accuses Emil Raynov, the deputy minister of health care in Bulgaria and an adviser to Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev, of demanding monthly cash kickbacks totaling about €2.8 million.

The Bulgarian authorities have denied the claims and say that Kamenov is using dramatic corruption charges as a political tool to battle the Socialist-led government because he failed to win authorization from health officials to claim public reimbursement for treating people at newly opened cardiac care hospitals owned by his company.

"This firm does not fulfill the necessary requirements to obtain the accreditation needed to claim reimbursement for three of its hospitals," the Bulgarian Permanent Representation to the EU said in a statement.

The statement added: "If the firm has proof of its serious allegations, why is it not handed over to the public prosecutor? If the firm does not submit immediately the proof to the public prosecu-

tor's office it might leave the impression of trying to exert unlawful pressure for its own benefit."

Commercial League, with offices in Switzerland and Bulgaria, once distributed pharmaceutical products to more than 3,000 pharmacies and had a 20 percent share of the local Bulgarian market until it balked at giving kickbacks in 2006, Kamenov said.

As a result, he said company sales started tumbling, dropping to less than 4 percent of the market, or 1,000 pharmacies, after government officials pushed drug manufacturers to move to other distributors.

In an unusually direct accusation of government corruption, Toni Vekov, executive director of Commercial League National Pharma Center, a subsidiary of the company, said in an interview that he met with Raynov and his representative who both explicitly raised the issue of a cash "commission."

"They didn't want a bank transfer because they didn't want an invoice," Vekov said, adding, "The deal was as following: If you want to have business with the National Health Insurance Fund, you have to pay."

Raynov was one of the first appointments by Stanishev after he took leadership of a coalition government in 2005. Raynov remains an adviser to Stanishev and in addition to his ministry position he is also the chairman of the National Health Insurance Fund, an agency that presides over the distribution and reimbursement of drugs in the public health care system.

After the new hospitals run by Kamenov's company failed to receive authorizations for reimbursement, giant billboards started proliferating in Sofia of Raynov dressed in the classic finger-pointing position of Uncle Sam and the words, "I took your health money, Now I want your life."

Jeny Bumarova, a financial director for the National Health Insurance Fund, said Raynov denied outright the allegations of demands for kickbacks. "We know the Commercial League very well," she said. "At any time their interests head in a bad direction they start complaining to the media. They have done this before with the ex-minister of health and they're picking on Raynov."

Since Kamenov established Commercial League after the fall of Communism, he has tangled with the authorities, falling afoul of local prosecutors in the capital, Sofia, who accused him of manipulating the cost of customs duties on medicines so that his company reaped higher reimbursements from the state. Ultimately, he was acquitted of the charges; he blamed former secret service officials for pressuring them.

In its progress report Thursday, the European Commission said Bulgaria "needs to show that it has put in place an autonomously functioning, stable judiciary which is able to detect and sanction conflicts of interests, corruption and organized crime."

The Bulgarian Representation in Brussels said the government was committed "at the highest political level" to fulfilling all its requirements.

Doreen Carvajal reported from Paris.