

# *Bulgarians Stage Demonstration against NATO*

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Sofia, March 9 (RHC)-- Bulgarians have held a protest rally to express their anger at military operations conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the East European country.

On Sunday, demonstrators took to the streets of the capital city of Sofia to call on NATO to leave Bulgaria, which joined the Western military alliance in March 2004. They were holding banners reading, "Barbaric American bases – out of Bulgaria! STOP the killing" and "Stop the occupation and colonial administration - NATO out of Bulgaria - the future is in sovereign countries."

In an address to the rally, Yane Ivanov, a protest leader, said: "Unfortunately, Bulgaria at the moment is being ruled by this criminal institution – NATO." The march came after five NATO patrol ships entered the eastern Bulgarian port of Varna as part of a joint training exercise with Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania. Bulgarians also marched in Sofia last month to condemn a government plan to install a NATO military command base inside the country.

Back in February, NATO defense ministers agreed to increase from 13,000 soldiers to 30,000 the size of the alliance's rapid reaction force. They also announced plans to set up six new command posts in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

The Western military bloc has over the past year increased its presence and conducted several drills in Eastern Europe amid the crisis in Ukraine. Moscow, however, has repeatedly condemned NATO's

exercises and military buildup near Russia's borders.

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