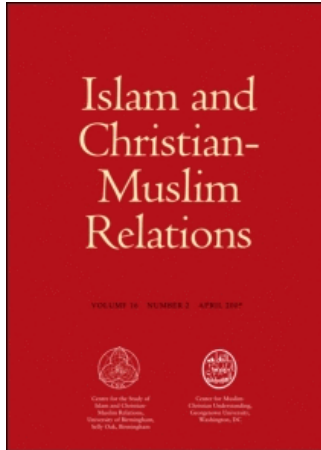


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## Bulgaria in Transition: the Muslim minorities

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ANTONINA ZHELYAZKOVA

**ABSTRACT** *Relations between the religious minorities in Bulgaria and the Orthodox Christian majority, between the minorities themselves and between the various Muslim minorities have a long and complex history. Various state policies have attempted to alleviate or eliminate either the problems or the distinctions. Conflicting definitions of 'nationalism' and whether and how to encourage it increase the complexity, but much could be learned from traditional approaches to co-existence and conflict resolution.*

### Islam in Bulgaria and the Religion of Bulgarian Turks: historical notes

Bulgaria is home to almost 1.2 million Muslims (Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and Muslim Romanies). At the last census in December 1992, Turks numbered around 800,000. They are mainly Hanafite Sunnī Muslims, with some 84,000 Shī'a Muslims—the so-called Kızılbaş—among them.

Before arriving in the Bulgarian lands with the Ottoman conquerors, Islam had travelled a long road, developing and changing as it spread. Seventh-century Arab raiders brought the faith to Anatolia, where it began radiating from the south-east, eventually covering all of Asia Minor. The period between the ninth and fourteenth centuries was especially important in the supplanting of Christianity by Islam.

The Islamization of indigenous Anatolian rustics was encouraged by Selcuk tax policies which favoured Muslims. Heretics and pagans who had endured decades of Byzantine Orthodox Christian religious bondage were in any case inclined to embrace Islam. Thus many Paulicians adopted Islam, not just attracted by economic stimuli, but also as a badge of political opposition to Byzantium.

The Islam Anatolians adopted was that practised by Turkic tribes. This 'Baba Islam' was much later to be systematized and disseminated by the various dervish orders. The latter went on to play a decisive role in spreading and rooting Islam in the Balkans. Various Muslim doctrines and prejudices which were gradually 'mainstreamed' into the dogmas of individual orders often contradicted official religious tenets and represented a kind of popular protest, becoming dominant in a number of areas around Asia Minor. It was precisely this Islam that influenced and impacted the majority of erstwhile Christian subjects.

In their turn, the Oguz and Turkoman nomads had been subject to numerous non-Islamic influences from neighbouring Christians, often of heretic persuasion. Thus at first Anatolia saw a Christian-Muslim bireligion grow on the foundations of earlier cultures. Boundaries between Christianity and Islam are liable to imprecision. Thus Muslims calmly borrowed Christian notions from indigenous peoples. The latter in turn saw no dramatic spiritual leap in adopting the new faith. During the period more and more dervishes, shaykhs and *babay* came from Maverannahr, helping the fusion of otherwise disparate ethnic groups by way of a mutual convergence between mass Islam

and folk Christianity. One may fairly assert that medieval Asia Minor was a bridge between Islam and Christianity.

Heretical Anatolian strands of Islam were widespread during the *beylik* period, which followed the collapse of the Selcuk Sultanate between the late thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Unorthodox Islam in the independent Turkic principalities retained a tendency to inherit concepts and cults from Christianity. The Muslim populace of the *beyliks* co-opted the cults of some Christian saints, nominating Muslim equivalents for them. Thus, for instance, St George became Hızır Eliyas, and St Nicholas became Sarı Saltık.

There is thus no doubt that heretical strands were intertwined in the spread of Islam and Muslim culture in Anatolia, and later the Balkans. Both types of Eastern emissary (those from Persia, such as Bahaeddin Veled, father of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Turkic *babayn* from Central Asia) arrived in significant numbers, especially in the thirteenth century under Mongol pressure. Ibn al-‘Arabī was lavishly welcomed to the Selcuk court and lived for some years at Malatya, the major tenets of his mystic teaching leaving a lasting influence on later Islamic philosophy. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī spent most of his life in Konya, where he founded the Mevliya Order and helped multiply its adherents throughout Anatolia. Later, his disciples were to reach the Balkans, and Bosnia in particular.

During the various eras of the Ottoman state, Islam and its ideological manifestations evolved, undergoing significant change. Sources from the early Ottoman period in the Balkans (the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) testify that they enjoyed relative religious tolerance. The empire was still being built and enlarged. Temporal and religious institutions were still emerging. The *ulema*, that hierarchy of learned theologians, rose gradually and its influence on Ottoman society had not attained anything approaching the ubiquitousness it was to enjoy later. It was only in the second half of the sixteenth century that *ulema* and their heads, the *şeyhülislâms*, began acting more independently. Secular legislation played an important role in fifteenth-century jurisprudence, as dictated by the exigencies of the time. As distinct from the unchangeable dogma of the Sharī‘a, *kanun-namets* and Sultanic *fermans* were in force only during the relevant reign, often departing from Sharī‘a formulae for the sake of empire.

Relationships between secular and spiritual principles in supreme power changed significantly during the seventeenth century. Rapidly eroding military might, growing economic problems and sharpened social disparity undermined the authority of the centre and increased centrifugal inclinations in imperial provinces. Faced with this, the Sultans began employing religion more broadly and frequently as a major means of preserving imperial unity. The Sublime Porte resorted to restoring the traditional Islamic principle of religious primacy in all spheres of life.

This trend continued during the eighteenth century, Turkish policy and culture continuing to develop along Islamic lines. However, this was also the period that witnessed the first timorous attempts at modernization (sometimes termed ‘Europeanization’ by researchers), initially in military matters and the economy. This process encountered fierce opposition, not only from senior clerics, but also from lay Muslims. Despite this, Europeanization featured throughout the gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire, undermining Islam in various arenas of life. Islamic decline accelerated significantly during the national liberation struggle between 1919 and 1923.

It is important to be aware of the syncretistic character of Islam in the Balkans and Bulgaria in particular—a characteristic that rendered it distinct from purist forms. During Islam’s adaptation to Bulgaria, specific religious forms emerged gradually,

rendering it less inimical and alien to local Christians. This was helped by the incorporation of layers of pagan belief into Christian dogma, worship and cults as practised by the local populace and as encountered by the conquerors in Bulgaria.

Orthodox Sunnī Islam was introduced into Bulgaria by Ottoman administrators and clerics. Thus its first local centres were Bulgarian towns. Muslim orders, whose ritual was closer to local beliefs, played a more active role in proselytising among rural people. Şūfī dervish orders were among the staunchest supporters of cults of saints—a point of contact with local Christians. Instead of a clash of civilizations, the encounter between Islam and Christianity in the Bulgarian lands, and the Balkans as a whole, turned into a meeting of minds between representatives of the two faiths at shared holy sites where they got to know and influence each other. Rituals of slaughtered sacrificial offerings to saints, which had penetrated both religions, led to grass-roots convergence rather than to confrontations between the purist forms of the two orthodox doctrines.

Turks in Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent other representatives of the Bulgarian Muslim community, are bearers of a centuries-old tradition which incorporates distant and more recent chronological and geographical layers. Today they see themselves as European Muslims, alien to religious fanaticism. They respect their traditional culture, and their distinct heritage of ritual and worship. Regrettably, national policy towards them over the last 120 years has been subject to extreme swings. These have led to moments of tension and to ruptures in Bulgarian inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations.

For centuries on end Bulgarians, Turks, Gypsies, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Wallachians and dozens of other less numerous ethnic groups have co-existed in the Bulgarian lands, sometimes in conflict but more often in peace. There are few countries in the world with a population that is homogeneous in terms of its ethnic structure and religious beliefs. There are even fewer countries with such a population in the Balkans—this crossroads of peoples and civilizations, where different customs, religious beliefs, political systems and stereotypes of behaviour have co-existed and continue to exist together. One of the most profound effects of the Ottoman domination (fourteenth to nineteenth centuries) on the past and present of the Balkan nations arises not so much from the centuries-long subjugation as from the changes in the structure of Balkan civilization. After the Ottoman conquest, Islam penetrated into the Balkan states, adapted itself to the local beliefs and furthered the formation of Muslim communities. Complex cultural genetic and ethnic genetic formation processes took place. These processes should be studied and understood correctly in the name of Balkan security.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim communities were formed in Bulgaria and in all the Balkan states through the ages, in most cases quite naturally, without violence, and under the influence of various factors. There are therefore solid grounds to claim that these communities should be considered as the native population of the regions they have been living in for many generations. The formation of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria and in the other Balkan states was a process which involved not only colonists from Asia Minor (on different scales) and migrant Muslims from near and far away provinces of the Ottoman empire, but also the local Islamized population. Islam in the Balkans is syncretistic, which makes it different from the pure forms of that religion. While adapting itself to the Balkans, Islam gradually built up diffuse religious forms, which made it less hostile to the local Christian population. The pagan layers of proto-orthodox beliefs professed by the Balkan population, as well as the pagan remnants (shamanism) in the ritual system of the Turks hidden under the thin layer of

Islam, contributed to this effect. The Muslim communities existed as part of the nation in Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia (Kosovo), which historically have belonged and continue to belong to the Christian European civilization; this fact is frequently dramatized and the representatives of these communities are considered as aliens,<sup>2</sup> but this is not part of the psychology of the Balkan peoples; it is rather the academics' prejudice and the politicians' weapon.

Balkan scholars are not in a position to accept calmly and analyse objectively the spread of Islam in the Balkans, or the Turkish colonization and Islamization of the local population. Scholars and the intellectual elite have perpetuated a negative stereotype of the Muslim communities in each of the Balkan states, which is passed on from generation to generation in textbooks, history books and literature, and through the mass media. They are not in a position to research in depth Balkan Islam and its specific features, which make it quite different from Islam in the Arab countries or in Asia Minor.

The politicians, in their turn, are familiar with, or feel intuitively, this sensitive and easily excitable zone in the Balkan communities and resort deliberately to speculations. Quite frequently the historical facts connected with the colonization, Islamization and the Muslim population in the Balkan countries are used as a deliberate exercise in mystification for political purposes, both outside and inside each of these countries. Sometimes the resulting events undermine or destroy the Balkan countries' national security.

### **Bulgarian Turks**

In 1877–8 (after the liberation from Ottoman rule) Bulgaria became an independent state for the third time in its long history; according to the Treaty of Berlin, Bulgaria was given a territory on which, besides Bulgarians, larger or smaller groups of all the remaining ethnicities in the Balkans were also living and are living to this day.

The first Bulgarian constitution (1879–1947) guaranteed freedom of religion to the 'infidels', though Eastern Orthodox Christianity was declared 'the dominant religion'. The minority ethnic and religious groups were recognized as Bulgarian citizens with rights equal to those granted to the Bulgarians.<sup>3</sup>

A large part of the Turkish population emigrated to Turkey during the Russo-Turkish War and immediately after the liberation of Bulgaria (1877–8). Later, this process continued on and off during the whole period of modern and contemporary Bulgarian history. In 1887 the Turks comprised about 20% of Bulgaria's population; in 1905 they were 12%, in 1934 below 10% and in 1956 8.6%.<sup>4</sup> The Turks who remained in the country did not create particular problems for the Bulgarian state. They repeatedly demonstrated their loyalty and joined the Bulgarian army during all the wars fought by Bulgaria. In the entire history of Bulgaria, from the Liberation till 1944, there were no serious conflicts between Bulgarians and Turks or, in general, between Christians and Muslims.

The position of the Turks and of the whole Muslim community was regulated by a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties to which Bulgaria was a signatory. According to some of these treaties (the Treaty of Berlin, 1878; the Treaty of Istanbul, 1909, and the Convention to it; the Peace Accords of 1913 and 1919; and the Treaty of Ankara, 1925) the Muslim community in Bulgaria was granted considerable autonomy.<sup>5</sup> In spiritual, administrative and judicial matters, the Muslims in Bulgaria were governed by the Chief Mufti's Office, the Mufti Vicarage and the

Spiritual Courts. Ownership issues were even settled by the Shari'a and special courts applied this law. The state allocated funds to maintain the mosques, and the Muslim spiritual leaders received salaries as civil servants. The schools were private—set up at the mosques, but financially supported by the state. Unfortunately, this educational system did not stimulate the integration of the Turks into the nation's society. The majority of the Turks did not know the Bulgarian language and for this reason they could not compete in the labour market. Thus they were not in a position to integrate themselves normally into Bulgarian society. In the 1930s a movement for modern secular Turkish schools was launched by the Turkish intellectuals. Bulgarian teachers were also invited to these schools to teach Bulgarian language, geography and history—subjects which thus far had not been taught to Turkish children. In 1944 there were 738 Turkish schools in the country and at the beginning of the 1950s 1150. Turkish high schools were also opened.

From the Liberation of Bulgaria till 1944 the representatives of the Turkish ethnic community could freely enjoy the right to disseminate information in their mother tongue. Tens of newspapers were published in Turkish. Most of them were short-lived—around 1–2 years. Many political parties (the Communist Party included) published newspapers in Turkish in different periods and newspapers and magazines were imported freely from Turkey.

Until the mid-1930s, when all parties were banned and freedom of association was restricted, the Turks had several cultural, educational and sports associations: Turan, Altun Ordu and Alparlan, etc. Attempts had been made to form ethnic parties but they failed. Despite this failure, Turkish and Muslim deputies have always been present in the Bulgarian Parliament. They numbered 25 in 1891, fifteen in 1908, nine in 1920, ten in 1923, five in 1925 and four in 1934. They were elected on the lists of some national parties.

After the end of World War II the Communists came to power in Bulgaria and the opposition was eliminated. And after 1946 totalitarian rule was rapidly introduced and democratic freedoms were severely curtailed. Soviet political, economic and social models were imported and imposed on Bulgarian society entirely mechanically, without taking into consideration the national mentality or the specific historical, cultural and geographical characteristics of the country. The new geopolitics was closely related to the Soviet Union. The new policy of the Communist government inevitably affected the minorities and inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria. During the decades of rule of this government raising the issues of confessionalism and religious communities was completely out of the question. Religion was declared to be the 'opium of the people' and was banned throughout the country. Strong atheistic propaganda was spread among the Bulgarian Christians, Muslims, Jews and Armenian–Gregorians. To compensate for the abolition of religion, the government made use of ideological clichés, such as 'internationalism', and allowed greater freedom of cultural expression to the various ethnic groups. The unexpected acts of tolerance of the Turks' ethnic identity are connected with the idea of the 'export of revolution' on a world-wide scale. In practice, under Soviet pressure the Bulgarian rulers were given the task of winning the confidence of the Turkish population and preparing cadres for the transfer of communist ideology to Turkey.

Among the first steps in this direction were the amendments to the Public Education Law which regulated the establishment of state minority schools for the Turks, Jews and Armenians. The education of Bulgarian Turks in private schools was terminated and they went under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Education. The newly

founded schools continued to teach part of the curriculum in Turkish, but new subjects were introduced to foster the integration of the Turks into the rest of the nation. In the field of culture, events were encouraged which aimed to preserve the traditions of the Turkish minority, which in practice meant that the Turks were given cultural autonomy. Besides the main Turkish schools (over 1000), there were seven Turkish high schools and teachers from Soviet Azerbaijan were invited to Bulgaria to teach Turkish and some other subjects at a professional level. A Turkish high school for girls was opened, as well as three pedagogical institutes to train teachers for the Turkish schools. Three newspapers and a monthly magazine were published in Turkish. Local newspapers in regions with mixed populations were published with a supplement in Turkish. In the large towns in these regions, the state theatres staged plays in Turkish. Regular programmes were broadcast in Turkish by the National Radio. Thus, the situation could be assessed as follows: in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, a fairly free expression of the ethnic awareness of the Bulgarian Turks was granted by command, typical of the Communist regime.

The objective pursued by the state machinery was, however, quite different. Education and culture had to further the process of re-educating the Turkish minority in the Communist Party spirit. This was a difficult job, especially in the schools. Turkish children, together with the Pomak, Bulgarian and all the other children in the country, received an atheistic education with intense indoctrination, leading to total moral and cultural standardization of the children. The Turkish press, published in Bulgaria, was completely based on ideological clichés; it either reprinted in full, or followed the pattern of, the Bulgarian Communist Party's (BCP's) printed news media. A Party nomenclature was created from among the Turkish minority and the Pomaks who, having been granted special privileges and career opportunities, carried out the BCP policy, directed against their fellow-countrymen, no matter whether it was good or bad, repressive or semi-repressive. During this period over 4000 Turks had already joined the BCP and the Fatherland Front (a popular satellite Communist organization); 18,000 held state and economic posts.

The beginning of the 1950s marked a shift in the policy of the Communist government towards the minorities—a shift towards restricting their rights and imposing a new conception of ethnic structure and inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria. The BCP declared war on 'the manifestations of nationalism and religious fanaticism among the local Turks'. The campaign was nation-wide because this was the period of total and forcible collectivization of agricultural lands. The process of collectivization had reached the mountainous and hilly regions, which were predominantly inhabited by Muslims. The nationalization of the land caused panic among the Turks and the Pomaks, the majority of whom were farmers and hired labourers. This opened the floodgates to one of the greatest mass exoduses of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey—over 150,000 emigrants in 1950–51.<sup>6</sup>

The first overtly discriminatory acts were committed against the Gypsies. Their newspapers (bilingual till then) began to be published only in Bulgarian; their theatre was closed down, and mass campaigns to change the names of Muslim Gypsies were undertaken throughout the country. In 1958 the less numerous nomad Gypsies living in Bulgaria (several tens of thousands) were obliged to settle in towns or villages where the special decree of the Council of Ministers had caught them at the time of its promulgation. Their horses and carts were confiscated by the state.

The beginning of the 1960s marked a turning point in the ideological policy towards the Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, which aimed at their total assimilation. On an

international plane this change in policy was related to the stagnation of the cold war. The BCP took the decision to repress and forcibly integrate the Muslims, both Turks and Pomaks, into Bulgarian society. The long-term strategic aim was to declare Bulgaria a single-nation state, and the nation homogeneous. Turkish secondary and high schools were gradually closed, the programmes of the state Turkish primary schools were either suspended or changed, the number of newspapers decreased, some of them being published in Bulgarian, and theatres were closed, etc.

The policy of forcible assimilation of the Muslim minorities culminated in the change of the names of the Pomaks (1972–74), and especially the names of the Bulgarian Turks in the winter of 1984–85.<sup>7</sup> The only purpose was to eradicate the cultural and religious specificity of the Pomaks, as well as the religious and ethnic identity of the largest ethnic minority community in Bulgaria—the Turkish community.

The state resorted to various forms of coercion—threats by the local administrative authorities, economic blackmail and overt acts of violence. The act of filling in a declaration for having one's name changed was routinely accompanied by beating, even of women and children. On several occasions of organized resistance in villages or in small provincial towns, the authorities used firearms and there were casualties. Frequently, the mountain villages met the dawn blockaded by the army and the police and the blockade continued until the last inhabitant of the village had accepted a new Bulgarian name. Thousands of people of the Turkish community were detained and frequently sent to prison or labour camps without trial or after a rapid court procedure *in camera*.<sup>8</sup>

The renaming campaign lasted for several months, followed up by harsh measures to consolidate the assimilation and convince the public at large of its correctness and justification. Turkish was banned as a means of communication in public places and in interpersonal relations; traditional Muslim clothing, festive rituals, even Turkish music, were banned. Paradoxically, an entire university department, the Department of Turkish Philology, was closed down. Muslim graveyards were destroyed; even the names of deceased parents and ancestors were changed in the municipality records. All remnants of religious symbols were subjected to annihilation and new, artificially created rituals were forcibly introduced. The government committed an extremely perfidious act—it included Bulgarians from the regions with mixed populations in the patrols who controlled and imposed fines for the use of the Turkish language or for wearing ritual hats. The whole propaganda machine of the army was mobilized in a smear campaign against the Turks ('terrorists', 'fifth column of a hostile country'). It aimed at inspiring distrust and fear of neighbouring Turkey and 'its aggressive plans'. The impact of this campaign on public consciousness was powerful and perverting.

The encroachment upon the Muslims' names contains a dramatic element of desecration, of sacrilege, since, according to Islam, a person's name has a particular role in the Muslim's life and culture. Without his proper name, a Muslim cannot present himself upon his death before Allāh, who summons people by their names in order to judge whether they have lived well or badly, and to take them to Paradise. In short, the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks considered themselves as doomed to eternal damnation, both in their lifetime and after death. All these factors brought about the turning of the Turkish minority in on itself for the preservation of their own identity, a withdrawal caused by fear and deep insult. The situation continued to deteriorate and relations between the two ethnic communities, the Bulgarians and the Turks, who had been living together for centuries, were almost severed.

In the spring and summer of 1989, the Bulgarian Turks initiated massive protests in

north-eastern and southern Bulgaria, with the request that their names be restored. This brought about clashes with the army and the police, as a result of which people were killed and wounded. The Turks' protests in the summer of 1989 were supported by informal dissident groups in Sofia, which had already tried to discredit and sabotage the totalitarian regime. The BCP decided to solve the crisis by opening the frontiers with the Republic of Turkey. Subsequently, in order to create panic, several thousand activists involved in the protests were forcibly deported. This caused a huge flux of emigrants towards neighbouring Turkey. From June to August alone, when the frontier was closed at the insistence of Turkey, about 350,000 Bulgarian citizens—ethnic Turks—left the country, abandoning their homes and household belongings. International human rights organizations declared this exodus to be the largest movement of people since World War II. About 120,000 emigrants came back in the autumn, particularly after the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989, but the majority found a new home in the Republic of Turkey.

### **The Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims)**

After the Turks, the Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) are the largest Muslim community in Bulgaria. The Pomaks are of Bulgarian origin; they adopted Islam between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries when the Bulgarian lands were a province of the Ottoman Empire. Since the Liberation (in 1878) their number in Bulgaria has varied, depending on the changes of the state borders. Prior to World War I, they numbered about 20,000, and in the early 1930s there were well over 100,000. They differ from the Bulgarian Turks not only in terms of the language they speak, but also in some basic features in their customs and festive ritual system, which contains explicit syncretistic elements and is strongly influenced by Christianity. The Bulgarian Muslims are also organized in communities under the jurisdiction of the Mufti spiritual courts, but the majority of the Pomaks nevertheless attend Bulgarian schools, though they receive their religious education outside the schools—in the mosques.

The Pomak community is internally non-homogeneous. It represents a specific, colourful world situated between the Bulgarians and the Turks. And this creates problems for their self-identification. The Pomaks live predominantly in the Rodopi Mountains, usually in the higher-altitude regions, and the nature of the location predetermines, to a certain extent, the community's isolation and confinement. The Pomaks are linked to the Bulgarians by ethnic and linguistic kinship and to the Turks by their common religion—Islam. The Bulgarian Muslims' awareness of ethnic identity has always been marked by the split between these two communities, which is due both to their complex historical destiny and to the ever-changing state policy towards them—a state policy which, throughout the years, has been frequently accompanied by acts of violence and flagrant violation of their civil rights. Some of the Pomaks are inclined to identify themselves with the Turks; they have even sporadically emigrated to Turkey. Other members of the Pomak community insist that they are ethnic Bulgarians and for the last few years (1993–96) some of them have adopted Eastern Orthodox Christianity. There is a third group of Pomaks who have a feeling of discomfort with respect to their ethnic identification. Most often they stand up for their real identity, namely that of Bulgarian Muslims. This dual, or rather triple, consciousness is the cause of the Pomaks' distinctive attitude towards any attempts by the Bulgarian state to integrate them into the life of the wider nation. Many Bulgarian politicians and

governments have taken unfair advantage of the complexity of the Pomaks' identity, frequently trying to assimilate them into Bulgarian society by changing their names and religion.

Three such attempts are known in history. The first was in 1912–13: after the victorious offensive of the Bulgarian troops during the Balkan wars and in an atmosphere of patriotic euphoria, a conversion campaign was launched against the Rodopi people on the initiative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The Pomaks were forced to change their Muslim names into Christian names and to adopt Christianity. The fierce resistance of the Bulgarian Muslims, however, dampened the vehemence of the campaign; the next government put an end to this crusade and publicly denounced the errors committed by its predecessors. Similarly, in 1942, there was a new forcible conversion and renaming of the Pomaks, which also failed. After 1944 the consequences of this attempt were overcome by the Fatherland Front government. The Muslim names were restored once again. In 1972–74 the third attempt was made under the totalitarian Communist regime. Like the previous two attempts it also failed. The Bulgarian Muslims responded with passive resistance but the violent acts of the state's repressive apparatus are an undeniable fact. The police and the army took part in the forcible assimilation and the Pomaks suffered heavy losses. Later, in 1990–91, many of them restored their Muslim names.

### **The Roma (Bulgarian Gypsies)**

The Gypsies represent a considerable minority group in Bulgaria. They settled in the Bulgarian lands as early as the thirteenth century. The majority adopted Islam in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. After the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule, some of them returned to their Christian traditions. During the 1930s there were about 150,000 Gypsies in the country, and in 1956 over 200,000. Some of them gave up their nomadic way of living and became a sedentary community even during the period of the Ottoman Empire. The reason was that the Sublime Porte and the local authorities wanted to exercise effective taxation control over these people. As early as the fifteenth century the Gypsies living within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire were accepted by the Bulgarians both in the villages and in the towns. Thus, they were able, to a certain extent, to adapt themselves socially, economically and culturally to the environment without losing their traditions and specific characteristics. And yet, after the Liberation, the majority of the Gypsies were illiterate or semi-literate people occupying the lowest social strata. The Bulgarian Gypsies have suffered from poverty, from lack of competitiveness in the labour market and from prejudice against them throughout the modern history of Bulgaria, which is why they usually try to adapt themselves to the life and cultural stereotypes of the surrounding communities.

The Gypsy community is very unhomogeneous. There are Christian Gypsies and Muslim Gypsies, but most of them use syncretistic traditions and rituals and frequently observe the rituals of both religions. Within the two main groups there are a number of subgroups, identified by tribal or racial characteristics, or by their lifestyle, the nature of their trade and occupation; taken together, these criteria determine the specifics of the respective subgroup. This internal differentiation is frequently a more significant factor in determining their identity than their relations with the rest of the ethnic communities in Bulgaria. Sometimes conflicts between groups are more severe and more irreconcilable than conflicts between the Gypsies and the other ethnic groups.

Such conflicts create difficulties for their self-organization and hinder the government and the non-governmental organizations from working with the community members.

The discriminatory legislation in Bulgaria during World War II affected not only the Jews but also the Bulgarian Gypsies. The Gypsies were forbidden to marry Bulgarians, they were subjected to acts of violence by nationalistic groups, they were entitled to smaller quantities of rationed foodstuffs and their freedom of movement was restricted.

Though our main topic is the large Muslim minorities, we shall briefly mention the Jews and Armenians, since they occupy a special place in Bulgaria's social and cultural life.

### **The Bulgarian Jews**

The majority of the Jews settled in the Bulgarian lands at the end of the fourteenth century and at the beginning of the fifteenth century after they were banished from Spain. They were predominantly Sephardi Jews and spoke the Ladino language. The Jews were well received in the Ottoman Empire and lived in their own independent communities. They brought a new culture and knowledge and skills, which were welcomed pragmatically by the autochthonous people. The 1910 census of the population gave the number of Jews as being about 40,000; at the beginning of World War II there were already over 45,000. Organized in synagogue Boards of Trustees, the Jewish community traditionally enjoyed extensive autonomy. Their mother tongue was taught in schools founded by the community itself and, after the spread of Zionist ideas at the beginning of the century, they could study Hebrew. Many Jews attended Bulgarian state schools and they had no problems adapting themselves freely to Bulgarian social, economic and cultural life.

During World War II, when Bulgaria entered into an alliance with Germany, the Bulgarian government enacted, mostly under German pressure, the discriminatory Law on the Protection of the Nation, by virtue of which Jews were obliged to declare their origin in their respective municipalities and at police headquarters. The Bulgarian endings of -ov, -ev and -ich were removed from their family names; Bulgarians were no longer allowed to adopt Jewish children or marry people of Jewish origin. The Jews were disenfranchised and were deprived of the right to work for the government. Anti-Semitic quotas were introduced in some colleges and universities. Some later regulations obliged the Jews to wear a Star of David and they were forbidden to own motor cars or wirelesses.

These discriminatory measures met with complete lack of sympathy on the part of the Bulgarian public, who had for centuries co-existed peacefully with the Jewish community. The passive disapproval of the Bulgarians soon turned into mass protests against the attempts to deport Jews from Bulgaria to the death camps (on Polish territory) during the spring and summer of 1943. High-ranking Orthodox clergy, members of the Bulgarian Parliament, unions of intellectuals and ordinary citizens all interceded for the Bulgarian Jews. Thus about 50,000 Bulgarian Jews survived the Holocaust, which, even to this day, fills the Bulgarian people with pride. Unfortunately, 13,363 Jews from the new lands (the occupied territories) in Macedonia and Aegean Thrace, which were under temporary Bulgarian rule, were deported with the participation of the Bulgarian government and perished in concentration camps.

In 1948 the majority of the Bulgarian Jews left for Israel to take part in the development of their newly founded state.

## The Bulgarian Armenians

The Bulgarian Armenians (in the 1930s they numbered about 25,000 people) settled in Bulgaria at the beginning of the century, escaping from the mass repressions and bloodshed in Turkey. They were also welcomed and Bulgarians take pride in the fact that they gave refuge to the Armenians at this dramatic moment of their history. A benevolent atmosphere was created for their adaptation to and integration into Bulgaria's economic and cultural life. The co-existence of Armenians with the Bulgarian population has never caused any problems for the government, nor have there been any signs of strain in the relations between the Armenians and the larger minority groups in the country.

## Contemporary Demographic Characteristics

The latest census of the population in Bulgaria was conducted between 4 December and 14 December 1992. For several dozens of years the data about the ethnic and religious structure of the population were under control and were practically inaccessible to the public at large and to specialists in this field. For this reason in 1992 the demographic changes in the country necessitated a new approach to the collection of statistical information. Each Bulgarian citizen could declare his or her ethnic and religious identity freely, in accordance with their own wish.

The census results have outlined the following ethnic and religious picture of the country. The population of Bulgaria is 8,487,317, made up as follows:

- Bulgarians 7,271,185;
- Turks 800,052;
- Gypsies 313,396;
- Armenians 13,677;
- Jews 3461;
- Tartars 4515;
- Russians 17,139;
- Wallachians 5159;
- Karakachans 5144;
- Greeks 4930;
- and about 20 other ethnic groups not exceeding 0–0.02%.

As regards religious beliefs, the population consists of the following communities:

- Eastern Orthodox 7,247,592;
- Catholic 53,074;
- Protestant 21,878;
- Muslim (Sunnite) 1,026,758;
- Muslim (Shī'ite) 83,537;
- Jewish 2580;
- Armenian–Gregorian 9672;
- others 6430.

It might be a paradox, but the possibilities offered for free self-identification have seriously distorted the real data about the number of ethnic groups in the country. This

is the reason why specialists prefer to work with expert data about the ethnic and religious groups in Bulgaria.

According to unofficial data, the Gypsies are estimated to number between 560,000 and 600,000. When the census was conducted a considerable number of those who were Muslims by religion—about half of the Gypsies—identified themselves as Turks, while Rumanian-speaking Gypsies identified themselves as Bulgarians or Wallachians, though from their traditional culture, lifestyle and educational background they would be considered as Gypsies. The act of self-identification was not a magic wand that could make their problems disappear. Nor could it remove the lower social and cultural status and the negative stereotypes attached to them.

According to experts' estimates, the Turks number between 600,000 and 700,000. On the one hand, during the census, their number was increased at the expense of the Gypsies and the Bulgarian Muslims who identified themselves as Turks; on the other hand, migration to neighbouring Turkey is still in progress and the number of people on the move varies between 5000 and 50,000 annually. These migrants use tourist visas; their residence in Turkey is unregulated and illegal and the frontier posts of the two countries are unable to control the process, let alone collect significant statistics. This high annual rate of migration is the result of economic and social factors, provoked by the severe economic depression in Bulgaria, and also by the fact that almost all Turks in Bulgaria are members of divided families.

Bulgarian politicians and Bulgarian society as a whole are most sensitive and sentimental about the Pomaks (the Bulgarian Muslims). This is the reason why the data about the Pomaks from the official census triggered a sharp negative response among some members of Parliament. Politicians are unwilling to accept the fact that some of the Pomaks in the Western Rodopis have declared Turkish to be their mother tongue, though they neither speak nor use it. They were trying to find a new Turkish self-identification through the language. In January 1993 a parliamentary inquiry investigated the results of the census; it submitted a proposal 'to cancel the results of the December 1992 census in columns No. 11, 12, and 13 of the census lists (ethnic identity, mother tongue, and religious belief)' and proposed 'that representatives of the parliamentary groups should express their opinion in Parliament concerning the identity of the Bulgarian Muslims, namely Bulgarians forcibly Islamized after 1628, or Turks, who have forgotten their language as a result of the Bulgarian outrages after 1912'.<sup>9</sup> This preposterous idea demonstrated that Bulgarian legislators and politicians tend to politicize an inherent human right—the right to self-identification; at the same time, using rough and incompetent methods, they read history in terms of contemporary politics.

In September 1993 the National Assembly (the Bulgarian Parliament) adopted a decision to the effect that the results of the census in terms of columns 11, 12 and 13 do not correspond to the ethnodemographic map of the population in the regions of Yakoruda and Gotse Delchev. The vote of the members of Parliament was surprisingly unanimous: out of 186 present, 165 were in favour and nineteen against, with two abstentions.<sup>10</sup> The debates soon ceased, though the decision of Parliament was a violation of human rights. Thus the Muslim people of the Western Rodopis (where the regions of Yakoruda and Gotse Delchev are located) were not included in the census as regards their identification. That is why researchers are working with the expert estimates, namely that the Bulgarian Muslims (the Pomaks) number between 220,000 and 250,000 people; naturally, the Pomaks' internal unhomogeneity, the specifics of their individuality and group identification are taken into account in such studies.

## The Muslim Minorities in the 1990–97 Transition Period

### *Political Transition*

Today, the relationships between the various ethnic, cultural and religious groups in Bulgaria have undergone radical changes related to the vicissitudes of history and politics. The outrages committed against the Muslims (Pomaks and Turks) during the 1970s and the 1980s were a test of the traditional model of tolerant and unstrained co-existence which fortunately proved stable, especially in the contact regions, and the links between the ethnic groups, which had worn thin because of political brinkmanship, were intensively restored after 1990. Common sense and the wisdom of the people in the contact regions, as well as the support found in the traditional values of Bulgarian society, were instrumental in preserving the equilibrium of inter-ethnic relations during this difficult period of transition, which was marked by a deep economic and social depression.

Clearly, the general political and psychological atmosphere in which the democratic changes began in Bulgaria should not be underestimated. It created the motivation to protect the rights of minorities—the main differentiating criterion when Bulgarian society started to identify itself and polarize between democrats and communists (socialists). After the fall of the Communist regime, the attempts to restore the violated rights of the Turks and the Pomaks were the first manifestations of democracy in Bulgaria. Parallel to the foundation of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), a Committee for National Reconciliation was founded in 1989. (It dissolved itself in 1991.) It united mainly intellectuals and representatives of all ethnic and religious groups in the country. Its declared programme was one of tolerance, reconciliation and peace in inter-ethnic relations and the Committee began actively to support the restoration of the Bulgarian Muslims' rights.

At the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks organized a series of public actions in the capital and in the country. They requested that their names be restored, that prisoners arrested for resisting the so-called 'Revival Process' be released and that their religious, cultural and social rights be protected. The Committee for National Reconciliation announced these first steps for the protection of minority rights to international organizations and the European media, and the Committee members led and participated in the Muslims' rallies and protests.

The absence of extreme nationalism should be emphasized as a striking feature of the Bulgarian transition. The small parties, which appeared in 1990 and 1991 and had nationalistic and anti-minority platforms, did not find favour with Bulgarian society. Though founded in regions with mixed populations in order to create tension between Bulgarians and Turks, and to sustain constant fear and mistrust of the Muslims, some of them did not gain support even among the local people. They were quickly marginalized and at the present time they carry no political weight.

The countries of central Europe took the first steps in the process of democratization and reform in political and economic life by mobilizing civil society in the name of anti-sovietism, national pride, determination to rupture relations with the Eastern bloc and immediate liberation from Soviet military occupation. In Bulgaria the mobilization of civil society at the beginning of the transition took place under the slogans of 'democracy', 'human rights' and 'equality for the minorities'. At first, attempts to give a human face to the existing social system were quite visible in Bulgaria and the moral values of democracy were those that carried weight. There was a popular, large-scale effort to undo immediately the consequences of the acts of violence that had been

committed against Muslim compatriots. A large part of Bulgarian society was united in a feeling of collective shame that no attempts had been made to save the Pomaks and Turks from the outrages—like those made to protect the Jews during World War II. There was a sense of fear that the moral capital accumulated in saving the Jews had been lost. Or, to put it more generally, open demonstrations of solidarity with the minorities and the struggle for their rights were an attempt to compensate for the lack of resistance to the Communist regime during the previous 45 years, a resistance that had existed in other former Communist countries: Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, etc. Solidarity with the minorities and civic activism also arose because of the negative response in Europe and the world and the state of deep international isolation into which Bulgaria had fallen as a consequence of its dealings with the Turks.

The decision to restore the names of Bulgarian Muslims affected by the campaigns of the 'Revival Process' was taken by the State Council on 29 December 1989 and the restoration began with the adoption of two laws: the March 1990 Law and the November 1990 amendments. By the summer of 1991, 600,000 requests for the restoration of Muslim names had been granted. It was a difficult process and met with resistance from a powerful nationalistic campaign organized by the structures of the Communist Party in the regions with mixed populations and in the capital.

With the Amnesty Bill of December 1989, some of the Bulgarian Turks, imprisoned for having resisted the forcible change of names, were released. Presidential decrees issued in 1990 pardoned those who were still imprisoned for the same cause and the June 1991 Bill declared the political and civic rehabilitation of those sentenced in connection with the change of names. The heirs of those who had been executed, or killed in clashes with the army and police, and of those who had committed suicide and those declared missing, were compensated and received hereditary pensions. Under pressure from the Committee for National Reconciliation and the public at large, the property problems of Bulgarian Turks who had returned from the Republic of Turkey but had lost their homes and property were given consideration under a special decree issued by the Council of Ministers.

Religious freedoms were restored almost immediately. Mosques began to operate freely. The construction of new mosques and the repair of old buildings got under way. The Islamic school in the town of Shumen was restored and an Islamic Religious Institute was founded in the capital. The clericalization of public life, both Muslim and Christian, went to excess—obviously a reaction against the prohibitions of the past—and religious literature of all confessions was published and disseminated freely.

The unrestricted publication and restoration of the newspapers of Armenians, Jews, Turks and Muslims began soon afterwards, impeded only by lack of funds. A non-governmental organization (the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), which has been functioning since 1992) provided some financial support for minority newspapers, and with this help the only newspaper of the Romas in Bulgaria, *Romano ilo* (*Roma's Heart*), began to appear monthly. The IMIR also supports some publications of the Turkish, Jewish and Armenian communities.

After lengthy consultations, and vigorous resistance from nationalistic groups and parties, the teaching of minority languages was introduced in state schools at the beginning of 1991. In September 1994, the Council of Ministers issued decree no. 183, which introduced 4 hours of mother tongue studies in the comprehensive school curriculum (from first to seventh grade). The departments of Turkish philology at Sofia University and the University of Shumen were restored and required to train teachers of Turkish for the schools.

An undoubtedly positive fact in Bulgaria's democratic development was the foundation of the Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF) in 1990 and its consolidation, though its existence was contested by various strata of Bulgarian society. During the 1990–96 period, the socialists, and the nationalist organizations which supported them, challenged the legality of the MRF in the Constitutional Court on three occasions. Their appeals were clearly not connected with any anti-constitutional MRF activities; rather they appealed against the very existence of a political party for the Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria. Most frequently, the attacks against the MRF took place when the economic and political situation in the country was critical and when the socialists were losing ground and wanted to divert public attention at crucial moments of their campaign.

The foundation of an independent party for the Turks and the Muslims in Bulgaria, which also attracted considerable numbers of Muslim Gypsies, was a historical inevitability; it inspired confidence in the minorities that, in an environment of radical change and insecurity in all spheres of life, they could defend their rights and participate fully and adequately in the political and economic life of Bulgaria. Their success in the parliamentary elections, as well as in the local government elections, entrusted them with new and heavy responsibilities and thus reduced the tension in the contact regions. Opinion polls conducted from 1992 till the present day have shown that the negative stereotypes of the Turks and Pomaks are fading away. Their existence in the public arena through their own political organization has ultimately legitimized them in Bulgarian society and they are already considered an integral part of the nation and citizens enjoying full rights in Bulgaria's political life.

In the course of time, the MRF central leadership and its members of Parliament became more and more preoccupied with political bickering and their personal ambitions and lost touch with their electorate, with a resulting inconsistency in their parliamentary activity and the tendency to vacillate between the two larger parliamentary groups (the socialists and the democrats). On the other hand, the mayors, the municipal councillors and the party committees in the provinces remained closely related to and engaged in the day-to-day social and economic problems of the population in their municipalities and established their authority as governors, which had a positive effect on the various ethnic and religious communities.

The MRF had developed between 1991 and the 1994 parliamentary elections. In 1991, the MRF pre-election platform and the appeals to the electorate were built upon a moderate degree of confrontation based on the wounded collective memory of the 'Revival Process'. The MRF party leaders sustained the fear that Muslim rights might again be violated if the Muslims did not unite to protect themselves.

The MRF platform and their 1994 pre-election video clips were expertly prepared and they carried conviction as voicing the nation's values in support of the universal orientation of this political organization. Their main slogan was 'Bulgaria for All!' Their election campaign was devoid of any elements of confrontation—the image of the enemy or the opponent, was completely lacking—and accentuated the role of the MRF in preserving peace in the country, its pragmatism and universalism. The only reference (in one of the video clips) to the forcible expulsion of the Turks from Bulgaria in the summer of 1989 was a deeply moving scene of two very old men—a Bulgarian and a Turk, who had lived all their lives together. They part at the border with tears in their eyes. They are helpless because there is nothing they can do about the insane policy of the totalitarian regime. In short, after approximately 10 years, the mere mention of the tragedy evoked not only the memory, but also the idea of 'All of us in Bulgaria'.

Frightened by the constant migration of Turks to the Republic of Turkey, which automatically eroded MRF support, the leaders coined another positive and constructive slogan for their election campaign: 'Choose Bulgaria!'

The 1995 opinion polls about the party press campaigns leading up to the 1994 election, conducted by sociologists, confirmed that the MRF had been the most positive: the positive points in the MRF party propaganda scored 63.8%, those of the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) 20.4% and those of the UDF 24.4%. As for the negative points, the figures were: MRF, 17.8%; BSP, 51.9%; and UDF, 7.1%.<sup>11</sup>

In general, on the basis of the opinion polls about the ethnic cultural situation in Bulgaria and the content analysis of the political platform and the party press releases, it may be claimed that in the 1994–95 period the propagation of overtly nationalistic doctrines was considered to be in poor taste by the general public. In fact, in terms of significance and quantity, the theme of inter-ethnic conflicts comes second after that of social and economic problems. The shift of focus towards the present economic depression and social stagnation shows that the complexities and trauma inflicted on Bulgarian society by the 'Revival Process', the attempt forcibly to assimilate the Pomaks and Turks in Bulgaria during the 1970s and 1980s, are gradually fading.

### **Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria**

Let us begin with the data from the most recent studies, made during the autumn of 1996, since they are connected with the above statements about the economy and inter-ethnic relations. To the question 'What is your attitude towards people from the Turkish minority?', Bulgarians answer: 65.2%—'I accept them with understanding'; 18.2%—'I have nothing against them'; 4.9%—'Negative, but I do not reject them'; and 11.7%—'Negative'. Even more encouraging is the fact that this high level of tolerance is expressed as a function of the age criterion, mostly by people in the active age range—70.7% of those aged 30–39, and 68.6% of those aged 40–49.<sup>12</sup>

Tolerance towards Pomaks is always higher than tolerance towards Turks—70% on average.

The data on tolerance with respect to the Gypsies (regardless of whether they are Muslims or Christians) show lower percentage values, though they are 1.5 times higher than in 1991–92: 42.6%—'I accept them with understanding'; 24.2%—'I have nothing against them'; 8.2%—'Negative, without rejection'; and 25%—'negative'.<sup>13</sup>

Studies by ethnologists and sociologists dated 1994 and 1995 point above all to a high level of religious tolerance. A belief in the exclusiveness of one's own religion is not held by the majority (of either Christians or Muslims). To the question 'How do you treat people of different religious beliefs?', the overwhelming majority of respondents reply: 'People like anybody else!' Intolerance is an exception; it appears among the Muslims (3–5%) and among a small proportion of Bulgarians (10%). The vast majority of adherents of both religions are convinced that 'Freedom of religion should exist in Bulgaria'. Appeals for the restriction and banning of freedom of religion exist only with respect to non-traditional religions (some Christian or Muslim sects).<sup>14</sup>

Respect for the festivals of other religions is unequivocal. Indeed, the number of Muslims who celebrate Christian holidays is not inconsiderable, particularly among the Pomaks and the Gypsies. In the contact regions, anthropologists underline the fact that the first steps towards improving inter-ethnic relations after 1989 consisted in the

observance of sacred rites and rituals, respect for sacred places and sharing the ritual food of people of different religions.

The results of a team of sociologists who, with semi-standardized interviews, collected the opinions of Christian and Muslim clerics about the ethnic-religious situation in Bulgaria in 1995 are very enlightening.

The conclusions reached about the practices and strategy of the spiritual leaders of the two main religions, Christianity and Islam, are of great importance. The Muslim clerics have a clearer strategy for imposing their religion on the Turks and the Bulgarian Muslims. They resort to a consistent step-by-step approach. Their strategy is based on material actions (the construction of mosques), and the formation of new religious individuals. The Eastern Orthodox priests rely on the general development of the processes in the country and a certain amount of help from the state, though they nevertheless consider the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church to be an independent autonomous institution.<sup>15</sup>

There is a basic difference between the opinions of Muslim and Christian clerics with regard to the religious orientation of Gypsies. Both take into account the fact that the Roma religion actually represents the absence of religious culture and the predominance of superstition. According to the Muslim clerics, the majority of the Roma population practise Islam; but to the Eastern Orthodox the Gypsies have atypical religious inclinations—they are superstitious rather than religious. There are therefore two approaches to the Roma population: co-operation and ostracism. An Imam from a provincial town said: 'The Romas, if Muslims, are our brethren. If they are not Muslims, they are members of the whole of humanity.' It is particularly important that the Muslim clerics insist on introducing the Gypsies to the civilizational norms of Islam; Eastern Orthodox priests, on the other hand, turn their back on them because they think that an unbridgeable civilizational gulf exists between Bulgarians and Gypsies.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from this, there is tolerance between the representatives of the various religious institutions, which is frequently declared to be friendship. Imams and priests consider preaching a vocation and they refer to each other as colleagues, even as adherents who share the same views and who are engaged in some joint sacral activities.

Religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims, although it is a fact, should not, however, be viewed as a guarantee of the existence of some 'ethnic idyll' in Bulgaria. Ethnic prejudices do exist despite the tolerant attitude, despite the careful adherence to the rules of mutual respect and to the 'taboos', implicitly but categorically defined and passed down through generations in the contact regions in the name of good neighbourly relations and peace. One would never hear in Bulgaria an insult like 'As bad as a Muslim', but the stereotypes 'As bad as a Turk', 'As dirty and dishonest as a Gypsy' and 'As wild (meaning 'introverted', 'uncommunicative') as a Bulgarian' do exist. In extreme situations extremists shout slogans such as 'Turks out of Bulgaria!' or 'Death to the Gypsies!', but never 'Muslims (Jews) out of Bulgaria!' The Bulgarians' tolerant attitude frequently conceals certain prejudices and negative stereotypes and, to use the categories of social psychology, there exists a deeply rooted (in high school or university graduates) or transparent (in people with primary education or uneducated people) *ethnic subconscious*. In all cases this is potentially dangerous if used unscrupulously or manipulated by politicians. But in all cases the *ethnic subconscious* is under control, governed by the traditional rules of the multicultural community. In an environment of co-existence it is compensated for by religious tolerance.

Unlike Bosnia and some other Balkan countries, where intermarriages are rather frequent, in Bulgaria they are an exception. In the contact regions there is a tacit but

almost insurmountable rule of resisting and even forbidding intermarriage. When young people of the Christian and the Muslim communities love each other, the whole village or town knows about it and follows the young people's relationship attentively, though without interfering. In principle, love is not a crime. However, when the couple want to marry, both sides say a firm 'no!' The centuries-long experience of people who have been living together in the contact regions is categorical—intermarriage may bring about ethnic tension in the village. This is a phenomenon which is still not well studied in Bulgaria and which is now arousing scholarly interest.

### General Conclusions and Forecasts

Each ethnic and religious community in Bulgaria organizes, realizes and supports its internal integrity, which is perceived by the others as alien. The positive element in the perception of 'the other' comes from the centuries-long experience of co-existence, and from the fact that otherness is perceived calmly as 'a familiar strangeness' and not as something completely unknown and therefore threatening. In Bulgaria there undoubtedly exists a clear organization of inter-relations and clear principles of action arising from an old tradition of co-existence between groups of people of different confessions, ethnic origins and cultural traditions. This organization links individuals and communities in a continuous process of communication and transforms their everyday life into a counterweight to frequently destructive politics. This is one of the greatest values of the Bulgarian historical and social experience, which abounds in examples of tolerance and, to a certain extent, integration of the various ethnicities, religions and cultures. Ultimately, this represents the human (the Balkan and, in the broad sense, the European) experience, which is indispensable to the Bulgarians; however, it can also be used by the rest of the world, if it is known and studied well.

On the basis of the past political and social experience, we may say with confidence that Bulgarian nationalism is not vital and not particularly popular, despite all the complexity of inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria and despite the frequent speculations of politicians and the authorities about this delicate area. Nationalistic tendencies gravitate mainly around apprehensions about Bulgarian national identity, national self-esteem and possible national and territorial fragmentation. These tendencies are 'closed', turned inwards to the historical complexities of the Bulgarian nation; they are mostly concerned with the nation's preservation and survival. In this sense, the nationalistic events of the last seven years have very few points of contact with the pan-Bulgarian chauvinism of the early part of the twentieth century.

### NOTES

1. For a description of these processes and further bibliography, see Antonina Zhelyazkova, *Razprostranenie na isliama v zapadnobalkanskite zemi pod osmanska vlast, XV–XVIII vek* (Sofia, Izdatelstvo na Bulgarska akademiia na naukite, 1990).
2. Antonina Zhelyazkova, 'Islimizatsiata na Balkanite kato istoriografski problem', in: *Sudbata na miusulmanskite obshtnosti na Balkanite*, Vol. 1 (Sofia, 1977).
3. Veselin Metodieff & Lûchezar Stoianov (Eds), *Bûlgarski konstitutsii i konstitutsionni—proekti* (Sofia, Dûrzhavno izdatelstvo 'D-r Petûr Beron, 1990), 24, articles 37 and 40.
4. Atanas Totev, *Naselenieto na Bûlgariia 1880–1960 g. Demografsko-istoricheski ocherk* (Sofia, 1968), 24.
5. These treaties and agreements included the Treaty of Berlin (1878), the Treaty of Istanbul (1909), with its added Convention, the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), the Treaty of Neuilly (1919) and the Treaty of Ankara (1925). For the texts, see *Diplomaticeski slovar'* (Moscow, Politizdat, 1950).

6. Ulrich Buechsenschuetz, 'Minderheitenpolitik in Bulgarien. Der Politik der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei gegenüber den Juden, Roma, Pomaken und Turken', unpublished master's thesis, Free University of Berlin, August 1996, 36–8; J. F. Brown, *Bulgaria under Communist Rule* (London, 1970), 293–5; Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (New York, 1967), 476–9.
7. Bell, 'The Revival Campaign', etc.; Orlin Zagorov, *Vúzroditelniat protses* (Sofia, Pandora, 1993).
8. The *Research Reports* of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty published during 1985 and 1986 include substantial material on the suppression of Turkish identity. See also Helsinki Watch Report, *Destroying Ethnic Identity: the Turks of Bulgaria* (New York, 1986). The Bulgarian branch of the Carnegie-sponsored Project on Ethnic Relations is currently gathering material for an oral history of the events.
9. *Stenogrami ot zasedanie na XXXVI Narodno súbranie*, 28 January 1993.
10. *Stenogrami ot zasedanie na XXXVI Narodno súbranie*, 17 September 1993.
11. 'Etnopoliticheskata situatsiia v Búlgariia i predsrochnite parlamentarni izbori—1994, Prilozhenie, tables 1–5', in: *Aspekti na etnopoliticheskata situatsiia* (Sofia, Asotsiatsiia AKSES, 1995). The ratios were: MRF, 63.8% positive/17.8% negative; UDF, 24.4% positive/7.1% negative; BSP, 20.4% positive/51.9% negative.
12. 'Predstavitelno izsledvane za nuzhdite na dúržavnite institutsii/NtslOM—Natsionalen tsentúr za izsledvane na obshtestvenoto mnenie', October 1996, published electronically. It was even more encouraging that the most tolerant age groups were those between 30 and 40 and between 40 and 50.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Vrúзки na súvmestimost i nesúvmestimost mezhdu khristiiani i miusiulmani v Búlgariia*, 173–4.
15. 'Mneniia i otsenki na khristiianski i miusiulmanski dukhovnitsi i prestaviteli na mestnata izpúlnitel-ska vlast za etnoreligioznata situatsiia v stranata', in: *Aspekti na etnoreligioznata situatsiia*, 11.
16. *Ibid.*, 7, 12.