

**Center for Documentation and Information
on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE)**

MINORITIES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Macedonians of Bulgaria

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MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS

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State

Bulgaria

Name (in English, in the dominant language and -if different- in the minority's language)

Macedonians, Makedontsi (In Bulgarian and in Macedonian).

Is there any form of recognition of the minority?

No explicit recognition. However, through the recent registrations of the Traditional Macedonian Organization – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (TMO-VMRO), and of the United Macedonian Organization – Ilinden (OMO-Ilinden), the state gave an implicit recognition to that minority (See 1.3. on Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria for details).

Category(ies) (national, ethnic, linguistic or religious) ascribed by the minority and, if different, by the state.

National identity (self-ascription of the most radical Macedonian activists). Ethnic and/or regional identity (most people in the Pirin region). The Bulgarian state accepts the regional identity of the Pirin Macedonians, and treats them as belonging to the Bulgarian ethno-national group (Kanev, 1999b).

Territory they inhabit.

Pirin Macedonia borders on Greece and Macedonia (Southwestern Bulgaria). Émigrés from Aegean Macedonia (today in Greece) and Vardar Macedonia (today in the Republic of Macedonia) live in major Bulgarian cities and towns such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Bourgas, Varna, Rouse, Pernik, Kyustendil.

Population

10,803 (1992 Bulgarian census). 200,000 (Macedonian sources) (Popov, et al., 1989:17). 15,000-25,000 (Kanev, 1998a).

Name of the language spoken by the minority (in English, in the minority and -if different- in the dominant language)

Bulgarian or Macedonian, Bulgarski or Makedonski (in Bulgarian), Bugarski or Makedonski (in Macedonian). In the 1992 census, 3,500, out of the 10,803 registered Macedonians defined Macedonian as their mother tongue (Kanev, 1999b).

Is there any form of recognition of the language(s)?

Even though the Macedonians of Bulgaria define themselves as non-Bulgarians, most of them use the standard Bulgarian language. As far as Macedonian, the official language of the Republic of Macedonia is concerned, Bulgaria recognized it on February 22, 1999 (MILS News, 22/2/99, "Declaration for Solving the Language Dispute in Sofia Today").

Dominant language of the territory they inhabit

Bulgarian

Occasional or daily use of the minority language.

A Macedonian dialect, if at all, is used at home and in private communication (Kanev, 1999b).

Access to education corresponding to the needs of the minority.

No education is available in Macedonian.

Religion(s) practiced.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Is there any form of recognition of the religion(s)?

Yes.

Communities having the same characteristics in other territories/countries.

Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia (Vardar Macedonia), Greece (Aegean Macedonia), Albania, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, émigrés communities in Central and Western Europe, North America, Australia.

Population of these communities in the other territories/countries.

- ***The Republic of Macedonia*** – 1,281,195 (1981 census) (Poulton, 1995:121)
1,295,964 (1994 census) (Friedman, 1998).
- ***Albania*** -- 4,697 (1989 Albanian census); 140,000 (Macedonian sources); 10,000-20,000 (Poulton, 1995:144-145).
- ***Greece*** -- 47,000 “Slavophones” (1951 Greek census) (Poulton, 1995:162); 350,000 (Yugoslav sources); 150,000-200,000 Macedonian speakers (Poulton, 1995:167).
- ***The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)*** -- 150,000 (Macedonian sources); 40-50,000 (Yugoslav sources) (Poulton, 1995).

PRESENTATION

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. *Important historical developments*

In comparison to the other Balkan states, Macedonian nationalism is the last one to develop around the very end of the 19th century. “The measure of state-historical tradition separates old South Slavic nations . . . especially from the Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Bosnian-Herzegovian Muslims, who are the products of twentieth century mutations in South Slavic national affinities and are, indeed, still in the process of formation. Since the ideological underpinnings of these new South Slavic nations were seemingly incomplete without a state tradition . . . , theorists of Montenegrin and Macedonian national uniqueness augmented their claims with references to eleventh-century Doclea (Duklja) and the Western Bulgarian empire of Samuil” (Banac, 1992:23).

The first, and perhaps the most powerful, claim to the existence of a separate Macedonian identity was put forward with the founding of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Vutreshna makedonska revolyutsionna organizatsiya - VMRO) in Thessaloniki (Salonica, Solun) on October 23, 1893. Dame Gruev, the director of the Bulgarian school in Shtip who opposed any partition of Macedonia, was elected the leader of the organization (Danforth, 1995:51).

The development of this movement was sometimes so mysterious that even nowadays some non-historians present it in an almost fairytale-like fashion. “At the heart of the Macedonian enigma lies the story of . . . VMRO. Rarely has a national awakening had the misfortune of being led by a movement of such mumbling brutality, vindictive cruelty, divided loyalty and absolute, burning dedication; a movement which concentrated the best and the worst of pan-Slavism, Bulgarian expansionism, anti-Hellenism, proto-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, Balkan unitarism and post-Romantic pseudo-European nationalism into a wild, unpredictable, incendiary cocktail” (Reed, 1996:198).

From the beginning of VMRO’s existence, the organization was irreconcilably divided into two self-exclusive groups: the “Centralists/Autonomists” (the Internal Organization) and the “Vurhovists/Supremists” (the External Organization, the Supreme Macedonian Committee, founded in March 1895). The Vurhovists planned to destabilize Macedonia with the help of terrorist methods and then liberate it after a Russian-backed intervention from Bulgaria. They believed that Macedonia belonged historically to the “mother-nation” of Bulgaria and aimed at the creation of a Greater Bulgaria. The borders of such Bulgaria were the ones delineated in the San Stefano Peace Treaty (March 3, 1878). They included the three historical regions of the then Ottoman Macedonia – the Pirin Mountains, the Vardar River region and the Aegean Coast (Poulton, 1995:53-54).

Bulgaria’s ambitions in this respect were strengthened by the existence of a separate Bulgarian Orthodox Church, created after a *firman* issued by Sultan Abdulhamid in 1870. Before the time of the Bulgarian Exarchate, all Christians in the Ottoman

Empire were members of the Greek-dominated Rum millet. Most of the Slav-speakers in Macedonia chose to become members of the new Bulgarian Exarchate shortly after its foundation. The Autonomists, on the other hand, fought for Macedonian autonomy within the Turkish state. They saw such autonomy as equivalent to independence which would lead to the incorporation of Macedonia into a future Balkan federation (Reed, 1996:198-199).

Whatever the differences between the two groups, it seems that neither of them doubted “the predominantly Bulgarian character of the population of Macedonia” (MacDermott, 1978:85, quoted in Danforth, 1995:64). Even the famous leader of the Macedonian revolutionaries, Gotse Delchev, openly said that “We are Bulgarians” (Mac Dermott, 1978:192, 273, quoted in Danforth, 1995:64) and addressed “the Slavs of Macedonia as ‘Bulgarians’ in an offhanded manner without seeming to indicate that such a designation was a point of contention” (Perry, 1988:23, quoted in Danforth, 1995:64).

In 1896 VMRO changed its name to VMORK (Vutreshen makedono-odrinski revoluytsionen komitet; Internal Macedonian Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Committee). It aimed at the full political autonomy of both Macedonia and Thrace. In 1902, Delchev changed the statute and rules of the Internal Organization which was further renamed and became TMORO (Taina makedono-odrinska revoluytsionna organizatsiya; Secret Macedonian Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organization). The insurgent organization was to open itself to non-Slavs as well. Special guerilla units, *chetas*, were to lead the movement towards autonomy. “While Greek historians point to the Adrianople connection as evidence that VMRO was a mere tool of Bulgarian expansionism, the active recruitment of Vlachs into the cause in the mountains of Western Macedonia indicated a rather independent policy” (Reed, 1996:207).

In late April 1903, a group of graduates from the Bulgarian Lycee in Thessaloniki -- the so-called “Boatmen”-- launched a campaign of terror bombing with the aim to attract the attention of the Great Powers to Ottoman oppression in Macedonia. The Boatmen were not very successful in accomplishing their goals (Reed, 1996:206).

The premature Ilinden Uprising of 1903, which came as a result of the deep-seated rivalry between the two factions within VMRO, was not a success either. It started on July 20/August 2, 1903 (old and new calendar respectively) which was St. Elias’ Day. On August 6/19, 1903 (the Lord’s Transfiguration Day; Preobrazhenie), the Adrianople Vilayet also joined in the revolt and started up an independent administration in Strandzha. The biggest accomplishment of the uprising was the foundation of the so-called “Krushevo Republic” which lasted only for ten days. VMRO mobilized the Macedonian peasants in the Bitola-Monastir Vilayet (district), whose population was predominantly Exarchist (Danforth, 1995:51-52). “Provisional governments were established in four localities, all Vlach mountain villages in the Southwestern quadrant of Monastir Vilayet” (Reed, 1996:208).

The Krushevo Manifesto, issued by the leaders of the uprising, is a very interesting document calling for solidarity towards the Macedonian Muslims. “We have not risen to slaughter and plunder, to burn and steal . . . We call upon you to join us in this struggle for freedom and human life. Join us, brother Moslems, so that we can attack

both your and our enemies. Join us under the flag of ‘Autonomous Macedonia!’” (The Manifesto of Krushevo, 1983:25-26, quoted in Reed, 1996:215).

Two thousand Turkish troops and artillery soon crushed the uprising. The exact numbers of the victims are not known. Still, some non-historical accounts put them at as many as “4,694 civilians and 994 VMRO guerillas. Estimates put the total number of women and girls raped by the Turks at over 3,000” (Kaplan, 1993:61). This severe defeat weakened the positions of the Autonomists to the benefit of the Vurhovists, so the fight for an independent Macedonia came to a temporary standstill (Banac, 1992:316-317).

The “Macedonian Question,” which came into being in the second half of the 19th century with the beginning of the Macedonian struggle for liberation from the Ottomans, became especially prominent after the Balkan wars in 1912-1913 and the subsequent division of Macedonia between the three neighboring states: Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. This partitioning of the territory had a tremendous influence on the development of the Macedonian national identity. After the Balkan wars, Bulgaria, being the loser over Macedonia, became rather irredentist and revisionist. The large number of refugees from “the lost territories” aggravated the situation even more, especially after the population exchanges with Greece. By 1934, more than 10 per cent of the Bulgarian capital’s (Sofia) population was made up of Macedonian and Thracian refugees. Macedonian activists caused much instability by continuing their feuds and violence within Bulgaria (Poulton, 1995:79-80).

In Bulgaria, VMRO effectively controlled the southwestern region of the country (i.e. Pirin Macedonia). From there, it launched numerous armed raids into the territory of the New Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) and into Greece (Poulton, 1995:80). In 1921, the then Bulgarian Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliiski started a campaign against VMRO. The campaign was formally established in March 1923 with the signing of the Treaty of Nish between Bulgaria and Serbia, which denounced VMRO and undertook obligations to dismember the organization. VMRO considered this act a fatal treachery, and responded with violence that culminated in the assassination of the Prime Minister (Poulton, 1995:82-85).

VMRO’s terrorist activities in Bulgaria were stopped only after the pro-Zveno coup of May 19, 1934. The Zveno group was sympathetic to the “Macedonian question” but they also realized that support for the irredentist VMRO was too costly for Bulgaria. The death toll resulting from VMRO violence only for the ten years until 1934 was believed to be about 884 lives (Poulton, 1995:85).

At its 1932 congress VMRO “voted to change its objectives from Macedonian autonomy to independence” (Poulton, 1995:84). In the inter-war period, many of the VMRO members still considered this as an alternative way for the creation of a second Bulgarian state. This is in stark contrast to the attitude of the partisans of the Second World War, who wanted to get rid of the Bulgarian occupation and to return as a constituent republic within a restored federalized Yugoslavia, including Vardar and Aegean Macedonia (Troebst, 1999a).

Between the two world wars, “Macedonians in all three regions of Macedonia were subject to violent campaigns of assimilation and denationalization whose goals were to deprive them of their true Macedonian identity and convince them that they were actually Serbs, Bulgarians, or Greeks” (Danforth, 1995:51). There were more and more contacts between the Communists and the Macedonians. The Comintern, unhappy with the fact that the Pirin Macedonia population was a firm supporter of VMRO, started infiltrating and splitting the organization. It set up VMRO-ob (VMRO-obedinena; Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-united) under Dimitar Vlahov. More importantly, at its January 1934 meeting, the Comintern reached the solution to the Macedonian Question (Poulton, 1995:97-98). “It was concluded that the Macedonian nation exists” (Vlahov, 1970:357, quoted in Poulton, 1995:98).

During the Second World War, the Bulgarians chose to enter the Axis camp, a step probably caused by their frustrated irredentism. While getting the greater part of “Vardar Macedonia, Eastern Aegean Macedonia and Thrace, and a small part of Western Aegean Macedonia, [Bulgaria] was not however allowed to have any of the Macedonian coast: the Germans controlled Salonica and the Italians the rest. . . . At first Bulgaria pursued policies, especially in education, which the population welcomed. More than 800 new schools were built and a university was established in Skopje.” However, “the new provinces were quickly staffed with officials from Bulgaria proper who behaved with typical official arrogance towards the local inhabitants” (Poulton, 1995:101).

Meanwhile, at the second congress of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in Jajce on November 29, 1943, the existence of a Macedonian nation was affirmed. Macedonia was given an equal status to that of the other future federal units: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Poulton, 1995:103).

After the Second World War, the part of Macedonia that in the inter-war years was under Serbian control (i.e. Vardar Macedonia) became a constituent republic in Tito’s Yugoslavia. There are a number of different views related to the post-Second World War history of the Vardar region. While pro-Yugoslav sources praise Tito for the creation of a Macedonian state within the Yugoslav federation, revisionist Macedonian historians call the federation “Serboslavia” where all nations but the Serbs were oppressed (Danforth, 1995:53). A third position is from the pro-Bulgarian sources. They claim that “in view of the Serbianization of the Bulgarian people in Macedonia -- which reacted strongly against the direct foreign influence -- it was necessary that its conversion to Serbianism passed through an intermediary ‘Macedonistic’ stage. During that period, the Bulgarian national consciousness and awareness were to be destroyed” (Macedonian Scientific Institute-Sofia, 1997:4).

The Macedonian nation was recognized and the literary Macedonian language was established. Even though “most of the population [in Pirin Macedonia] had probably always considered themselves Bulgarians” (Palmer and King, 1971:197, quoted in Danforth, 1995:68). In the years after the war, between 1944-1948, the Bulgarian Communist Party recognized the Macedonian nation and promoted cultural autonomy for the Pirin Macedonians (Poulton, 1995:107-108).

It is not certain whether a Macedonian nation really existed at that time or not. However, “it is perfectly clear that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had important political reasons for declaring that one did exist and for fostering its development through a concerted process of nation building, employing all means at the disposal of the Yugoslav state” (Danforth, 1995:66). In this way Yugoslavia was able to preserve its control over the Vardar part of Macedonia and to counteract any Bulgarian subversion in this direction. At various points, other factors came into play in the shaping of the Macedonian identity as a whole. Among these were also industrialization, urbanization, migration and one party rule (Troebst, 1999b).

In August 1947, the leader of the Bulgarian Communists, Georgi Dimitrov, signed the Bled agreement between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In practice, this agreement gave the green light to a union between Pirin and Vardar Macedonia. It abolished entry visas and envisaged a customs union. “However, Dimitrov opposed immediate formal union until after the proposed Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation had been realized. This proved [to be] something of a stumbling block as Tito wanted Bulgaria to join on a basis of equality with the other constituent republics of Yugoslavia (e.g. Serbia) while Bulgarians wanted equal status with Yugoslavia” (Poulton, 1995:107).

The Macedonian official language was adopted as the official language of Pirin. Ninety-three teachers from Yugoslav Macedonia arrived in Pirin, together with numerous books (See 6. for details on the educational system at the time). A Macedonian newspaper *Pirinski Vestnik* (*Pirin Paper*) and a “Macedonian Book” publishing company were set up (Poulton, 1995:107-108). The Bulgarian government presented the remains of Gotse Delchev to the government of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1946. Shortly after that, it sent Macedonia about 3,500 volumes of ethnological books from the Sofia-based Scientific Institute of Macedonia (Danforth, 1995:68).

The Yugoslav actions on Bulgarian territory were met with great disapproval by many Bulgarians. Thus, after the Stalin-Tito split in June 1948, the Bulgarian authorities reversed the policies vis-a-vis the Macedonians in Bulgaria. It started to repress the Macedonian consciousness, which was distinct from the Bulgarian one (Danforth, 1995:68-69; Poulton, 1995:107-108). Things were even more complicated by the fact that “the Macedonians considered their entity as only the ‘Piedmont’ of an eventual Great Macedonia, which was to include the ‘unredeemed’ territories under Bulgarian and Greek rule, regardless of the fact that massive population movements had altered the ethnological composition of these areas, turning the Macedonians still living there into minorities, with a large number of them, perhaps as a result of past repression, having been assimilated” (MRG Greece, 1994:11).

Under the Communist regime of Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria progressively moved towards the expounding of the ideology that the population of the country was a “unified Bulgarian socialist nation” where there were no minorities, with the exception of the small Jewish and Armenian communities (Poulton, 1995:150). “A powerful effect of the party’s April line was the thwarting of a plot against the Bulgarian national consciousness among the population of the Pirin area. This brought trust and peace to the people, who had been the object of scandalous [Yugoslav]

claims on their national self-consciousness. Anyone who travels in the Pirin region of our fatherland today is impressed by not only its great progress but also the people's high level of patriotic Bulgarian consciousness in the Blagoevgrad region" (Todorov, 1985:232).

1.2. Economic and demographic data

Demographic data: Yugoslav sources claim that 252,908 people declared themselves as Macedonians in the 1946 census, while the Bulgarian side puts the figure at 169,544. In 1956, there were 187,789 Macedonians, over 95 per cent of whom lived in the Pirin region (63.8 per cent of the population). Census data for 1965 are the last ones under the Communist regime. It registered about 9,636 Macedonians. In the district of Blagoevgrad, which used to have the highest percentage of Macedonians, the Macedonian population made up less than one per cent of its total (Poulton, 1993:107-108; Poulton, 1995:148).

In December 1992, a new census was conducted in Bulgaria. It included the partly open question about one's ethnic group. Before and during the census, both central and local authorities led a campaign for the denunciation of the existence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Nevertheless about 10,000 people, mainly from the Pirin region, registered as Macedonians. The Bulgarian National Institute of Statistics never published officially the exact figures (Kanev, 1995:45-46). "The media of the Republic of Macedonia, however, reported in early 1993, that in the 1992 census approximately one third of the population in Bulgarian Pirin Macedonia, i.e., some 120,000 out of 345,000, declared themselves to be ethnic Macedonians" (Troebst, 1994:42).

Economic data: The district of Blagoevgrad in the Pirin Macedonian region is one of the most well developed parts of Bulgaria. In comparison to other parts of the country, people there are relatively well-off, mainly due to the proximity of the Greek border and the business opportunities flowing from that (Kanev, 1999b).

1.3. Defense of identity and/or of language, and/or of religion

The short-lived period of recognition and even encouragement of the Macedonian identity in the Pirin Macedonian region was soon substituted with exactly the opposite attitude on the part of the state. While in the Dimitrov period people were reportedly forced to declare their Macedonian identity, now there was suppression and punishment of any exhibition of minority identity. This applied to most minority groups in Bulgaria, with the exception of Armenians and Jews. When it comes to Macedonians, however, it should be stressed that not all people in the Pirin region identified themselves as such.

"Since the introduction of the Criminal Code in 1968, most of those accused of propagating such 'anti-democratic and nationalist ideology' in the Communist period were charged under Articles 108 and 109 which deal respectively with 'anti-state agitation and propaganda' and with forming, leading or membership of an illegal group. Article 39(1) of the People's Militia Law of 1976 (amended on August 12, 1983) also allowed administrative punishment [*sic* banishment] (i.e. without trial),

which has reportedly been used to resettle members of the Macedonian ethnic minority forcibly in other areas of the country” (Poulton, 1993:108; Poulton, 1995:149).

In Blagoevgrad in 1949 and 1950, twelve people were put on trial accused of being “foreign intelligence agents.” Five of these people were sentenced to death and the others received long sentences. It is believed that the main reason for this severe punishment was the Macedonian orientation of the suspects. In 1958, three youths from the villages of Nikodim and Sandanski went on trial. They were found guilty of having “established an organization whose aim was to overthrow the People’s democratic government in the District of Blagoevgrad by riots, disturbances, etc.” A group of people from Blagoevgrad was tried in 1962 by the local District Court on charges of creating an organization aiming at the secession of Pirin Macedonia. In 1964 four other people were tried for reportedly having written, “We are Macedonians” and “Long live the Macedonian nation” on the wall of a restaurant (Poulton, 1993:108; Poulton, 1995:149-150).

Independent Macedonian Association – Ilinden

Macedonians who publicly declare their identity face repression from the state even nowadays. On November 14, 1989 the *Independent Macedonian Association-Ilinden (Nezavisima makedonska asotsiatsiya “Ilinden,” VMRO-independent)* was founded in Sofia. Its main objective was “to protect the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria,” i.e. to develop all elements of Macedonian culture and political representation for the Macedonians. The first President of “Ilinden” was Georgi Solunski from Sofia and the organization had members both from the capital and from the Pirin region. On November 18, 1989, members of the group took part in the first rally against the Communist regime organized by the rising opposition. The group participated also in the United Democratic Forces (UDF) rally from December 10, 1989 on under the slogan “Macedonia for the Macedonians.” During the first months of the next year, the center of the organization’s activities shifted to the Pirin region (Poulton, 1993:109; Poulton, 1995:151; Troebst, 1994:36-37).

In these first days of democracy, the organization submitted a declaration to the Bulgarian National Assembly, which spoke for human rights and the freedom for one to choose his/her ethnic identity. Soon after this, the Sofia City Prosecutor’s Office started investigating the activities of “Ilinden.” Its May 15, 1990 decision says that according to Art. 13 (4) of the Political Parties Act, the organization should either stop its activities, or register as a political party within a month, in accordance with the Political Parties Act. Less than a week after this decision --on May 23, 1990-- a second decision was issued. This time the organization was called upon to stop its activities immediately (BHC, 1999b:9).

Traditional Macedonian Organization - TMO

“Ilinden,” whose headquarters were in Sofia, renamed itself *Traditional Macedonian Organization – VMRO independent “Ilinden” (Traditsionna makedonska organizatsiya – VMRO nezavisima ‘Ilinden’)*. Georgi Solunski successfully registered it on June 29, 1992 at the Sofia City Court. Later on the Chief Prosecutor of Bulgaria, Ivan Tatarchev, challenged this registration on formal grounds (Kanev, 1999a:25). However, on June 3, 1998 Solunski managed to register the *Traditional Macedonian*

Organization-VMRO-Independent as a public NGO (168 Chassa, 2-8/10/1998). “The program of the Organization will be directed towards cultural activities, and will use democratic means to fight for the protection of the rights, freedoms and identity of the Macedonians in Bulgaria, as well as for the cultural and spiritual bonding of all Macedonians in the world” (“New Organization of Macedonians in Bulgaria” MILS NEWS, Skopje, August 11, 1998; Kanev, 1998a)

United Macedonian Organization – OMO-Ilinden

A little later, on April 14, 199 a decision was taken to create a new association – the *United Macedonian Organization-Ilinden (Obedinena Makedonska Organizatsiya “Ilinden,” OMO-Ilinden)*. Stoyan Georgiev from Petrich was elected to be its President, later to be replaced by Yordan Kostadinov from Sandanski (Poulton, 1993:109-110; Poulton, 1995:151-152; Troebst, 1994:36-37). Art. 1 of the Founding Statute of the organization states its aim: “to unite all Macedonians, who are citizens of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, on the basis of their regional and cultural affinity.” Art. 2 speaks for the “recognition of the Macedonian minority in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.” Art. 8 explicitly states that OMO is against secession and does not have any territorial claims. Art. 9 is against violence, while Art. 10 is against any form of separatism, nationalism, chauvinism, assimilation and genocide. Point 3 of OMO’s Program declares that the organization will fight for the provision of a forum for the expression of alternative opinions on Macedonia’s development. Point 8 of the Program states that the above would be done through hosting historical lectures, discussions, etc. (BHC, 1999b:10).

OMO radicalized and included some separatist demands in the period 1992-1994 (Poulton, 1993:107-111; Poulton, 1995:151-154; Troebst, 1994:36-37). On September 3, 1992, the then OMO leader, Yordan Kostadinov, gave an interview to the Skopje-based *Puls (Pulse)* newspaper in which he demanded the withdrawal of the Bulgarian “occupation troops” from the Pirin region; the transfer of the Orthodox Church in the region under the authority of the Orthodox Church in the Republic of Macedonia; the banning of all Bulgarian parties on the territory of the region. It is important to point out that such radical demands have not been made since 1994 (BHC, 1999b:10-11).

In 1990, the Blagoevgrad District Court refused to register OMO as a juridical person. The decision was based on the fact that, according to the Court, Arts. 1 and 2 of the Founding Statute of the organization, as well as Points 3 and 8 of its Program are against Art. 52 (4), and Arts. 3 and 8 of the then Constitution of Bulgaria. OMO then appealed to a three-member and later to a five-member chamber of the Supreme Court. Both decisions stipulate that the organization is anti-constitutional, because of its aims against the unity of the Bulgarian nation.

In 1998, the association OMO-Ilinden, which differed from the party OMO-Ilinden, started a new process of registration (BHC, 1999b:13). On November 2, 1998, this group, led by Yordan Kostadinov, was denied registration as an NGO by the Blagoevgrad District Court. A number of arguments were invoked. The basic one was that the registration documents (e.g. the decision on the foundation of the organization, the statute signed by the founders, etc.) were found incomplete. The

decision mentioned some other serious controversies between the statute of the organization and Bulgarian legislation (Decision No.319 from 2/11/1998).

The Decision points out that the statute is not clear as to what exactly is meant by the definition of the association as an “inheritor” of “fighters that have fallen victim.” Regardless of the organization’s stated intention to use peaceful means for the achievement of its goals, the court interpreted this wording as suggesting that the leaders would be potentially willing to lead a “national liberating war” on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria. Furthermore, the Decision states that OMO’s statute introduces the idea of the changing of borders “through negotiations.” The Organization’s self-proclaimed role is “to voice and defend the civil, political, national and socio-economic rights of the Macedonians living in the Macedonian land under Bulgarian occupation.” This is interpreted as implying the applicants’ firm belief that “Macedonian” lands are “forcefully occupied by Bulgaria” and their dedication to wage “a national liberation war.” This idea is reaffirmed in the statute, which says that the Organization will promote the cultural autonomy of Pirin Macedonia against Bulgarian “assimilation” of the region. The Decision interpreted this wording as implying that the population in the region is considered to be other than Bulgarian. The conclusion reached, therefore, was that *OMO-Ilinden* declares itself an organization aimed against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the nation (Decision No.319 from 2/11/1998).

Exactly how many members OMO has and how popular it is in Pirin Macedonia is hard to ascertain. The organization’s strength appears to reside mainly in the villages, especially in the Petrich, Sandanski and Strumiyanski districts. Bulgarian scholars estimate that all in all OMO has about 1,500 members (Tomova, 1994:189). Mr. Krassimir Iliev, who used to be OMO’s Secretary in its earlier years and then became its ardent enemy, claims it has no more than 160 members, while some Western non-historians (Poulton, 1995:154) put the number at around 1,000 people (BHC, 1999b:12).

In October 1994 the OMO-Ilinden citizens’ association split up again. Now there are three different factions which claim to be “the real” OMO. The first one, headed by Yordan Kostadinov, is based in the town of Sandanski. The second one is the Blagoevgrad branch of OMO led by Kiril Ivanov, and the last one --*OMO-Ilinden Democratic Action (OMO-Ilinden – demokratichno deistvie)*-- based in the small town of Gotse Delchev (Kanev, 1998a).

OMO “Ilinden” - PIRIN

July 13, 1997 saw the failed attempt in unifying the three wings of OMO-Ilinden. Soon afterwards, the two more moderate wings founded *OMO-Ilinden -- Party for Economic Development and Integration of the Population -- PIRIN (OMO “Ilinden” -- partiya za ikonomichesko razvitie i integratsiya na naselenieto -- PIRIN)*. In February 1998, they jointly submitted their documents for registration as a citizens’ association with the Blagoevgrad City Court. The aim of the organization, as stipulated in those documents, is to voice and defend the rights, freedoms and interests of the population in Pirin Macedonia and in the other parts of Bulgaria, regardless of their religion, gender, social status and origin. The Court refused to grant the registration (BHC, 1999b:15).

However, in September 1998, OMO-Ilinden-PIRIN submitted its documents for registration as a political party with the Sofia City Court. The Court granted the registration of the party with headquarters in Blagoevgrad and with Mr. Ivan Iliev Sungartiiski as the Chair of its National Executive Council (Decision No.12802/98, published in the *State Gazette* No.16/1999).

This decision provoked 61 members of the 38th Bulgarian Parliament --mostly representatives of the Bulgarian Socialist Party-- to submit a letter with the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria. In it, the 61 MPs claim that the activities of the newly registered political party are against the national unity of the state and are thus against Art. 11 (4) of the Constitution (the article prohibits political parties, founded on ethnic, racial or religious basis). "OMO-Ilinden is actually founded on ethnic basis, even though there is no such ethnic group in Bulgaria" (MPs' Letter, 1999:1-2).

On the basis of the MPs' letter, Constitutional Case No.3/99 was instituted on March 4, 1999. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, chaired by Mr. Zhivko Stalev, decided on March 9, 1999 to hear the case and to stipulate the Bulgarian National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of the Judiciary and the Legal Eurointegration, the Chief Prosecutor, the Bulgarian Center for Human Rights and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee as interested parties (Constitutional Court, 1999:1-2).

Other Macedonian organizations

There are several other Macedonian organizations founded on the basis of the structures of OMO-Ilinden: Slave Makedonski formed the *Macedonian Democratic Party* which was never registered. In the Pirin region, the more moderate *Union for the Prosperity of Pirin Macedonia* and the *Orthodox Priests' Brotherhood "St. Ilia"* were formed. There are also the cultural *Society "Jane Sandanski"* from the village of Mikrevo and the *Committee on the Repression of Macedonians in the Pirin part of Macedonia* (Poulton, 1995:152).

In March 1990, a new organization appeared and called itself the *Solidarity and Struggle Committee of Pirin Macedonia*. It claimed that it spoke for "the 250,000 Pirin Macedonians [and that it] has decided to fight on the side of the Macedonian Liberation Army" (Poulton, 1993:109; Poulton, 1995:151). Apart from this organization, some 15 other organizations were founded after 1989. Among them are: *The Committee for Defense of the Rights of the Pirin Macedonians*; *The People's Academy of Pirin Macedonia*; *The Union for the Prosperity of Pirin Macedonia*; *The Macedonian Democratic Party* and many others. Most of these have not sought registration as juridical persons. They are different in their ideological, political and cultural underpinnings (BHC, 1999b:10).

Pro-Bulgarian Macedonian organizations

There are a number of pro-Bulgarian Macedonian organizations. The best known one is the *Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization -- Union of Macedonian Societies (Vutreshna makedonska revolyutsionna organizatsiya -- suyuz na makedonskite druzhestva; VMRO-SMD)*. VMRO-SMD has MPs in the present

Bulgarian Parliament (within the coalition of the ruling United Democratic Forces). There are some fifty-six branches of the organization throughout the country. Its members are mainly descendants of Macedonian migrants from outside Bulgaria. There is a special Macedonian Scientific Institute, associated with VMRO-SMD. It propagates the Bulgarian version of the historical controversies over the “Macedonian Question.” There are some other smaller organization bearing the same name -- VMRO-- but with much less influence in society. In 1990, a more radical organization --the *All-Bulgarian Macedonian Union*, led by Hristofor Tzavela-- was founded as an alternative to VMRO-SMD, but it never reached the latter’s level of popularity (Poulton, 1995:160-162).

2. ETHNIC OR NATIONAL IDENTITY

2.1. Describing identity

Macedonian identity in Bulgaria results from a combination of cultural and historical factors. Due to historical reasons, some people in Pirin Macedonia see themselves as Macedonians. Besides Macedonians who have strong regional Macedonian feelings and Bulgarian national identity, there are ethnic Macedonians who nationally identify themselves as Macedonians, i.e. having a language, culture and history that are distinct from those of the Bulgarians.

2.1.1. Cultural characteristic(s) differentiating it from the dominant group

Bulgarians and Macedonians share common cultural characteristics. There is no single cultural factor, which distinguishes the one group from the other. At different points in history, and due to the inconsistent policy of the state, there has been fluctuation in the identity of the people in the Pirin region. Thus, when one talks to a person who has a Macedonian regional and a Bulgarian national identity, s/he claims that the costumes, dances, and songs of the region are Bulgarian. Exactly the opposite happens when a person with a Macedonian national identity is approached. This is also true when it comes to specific historical figures and events, which are claimed by both Bulgarians and Macedonians (e.g. Samuil’s Kingdom, the Ilinden Uprising, Yane Sandanski, Gotse Delchev, etc.) (Kanev, 1998a).

2.1.2. Development of the minority’s awareness of being different

It is difficult to trace the development of the Macedonian minority’s awareness of “being different.” In 1913, the majority of Macedonians in all three regions of Macedonia were Bulgarophile, i.e. they had Bulgarian identity (MRG Greece, 1994:11). VMRO activists considered themselves Macedonians not by nationality but within a greater multinational region, whereas the nationality of the Macedonian Slavs was considered undoubtedly Bulgarian (See 1.1.). Since during that period VMRO practically ruled over the Pirin Macedonia region, there were campaigns to assimilate the whole population into the Bulgarian nation (Poulton, 1995:80-81).

With the creation of Tito’s Yugoslavia and with the subsequent Tito-Dimitrov Bled agreement on a union between Pirin and Vardar Macedonia, the process of Macedonian national identity formation gained momentum. The introduction of

Macedonian language teaching, Macedonian publishing and other cultural activities helped a lot in the building of such identity in some people in the Pirin region (See also 1.1. and 6.1.) (Poulton, 1995:106-108; Danforth, 1995:68).

2.1.3. Identifying this difference as ethnic or national

Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia (similarly to the ones in Greece) are divided into three groups. The majority has a Bulgarian national identity and a Macedonian ethnic and/or regional identity. The ones who have a Macedonian national identity are not more than 1,000 people and come mainly from the small villages. There are also people who refrain from speaking about their national identity in public, unless they are pressured (Kanev, 1998a).

The linguistic aspect of the issue is of particular interest. Even though some of the Pirin Macedonians define themselves as ethnic non-Bulgarians, they nevertheless use the Bulgarian standard language (and the Bulgarian variety of the Cyrillic script), rather than the Macedonian standard language (and the Macedonian variety of the Cyrillic script). This fact raises the question about the degree to which Pirin Macedonian identity in today's Bulgaria is in fact a national orientation, or is it a form of "ethno-regionalism," like in the case of the Aegean Macedonians in Greece (Troebst, 1999b).

2.2. *Historical development of an ethnic or a national identity*

2.2.1. The minority's resistance to or acceptance of assimilation

As was mentioned above, many of the VMRO activists, who were the first to start fighting for Macedonia, considered themselves Macedonians not by nationality but within a greater multinational region, whereas the nationality of the Macedonian Slavs was considered undoubtedly Bulgarian (See also 1.1.) (Banac, 1992:315). Since during that period VMRO practically ruled over the Pirin Macedonian region, there were campaigns of assimilation of the whole population into the Bulgarian nation. Sometimes these campaigns were accompanied by violent action, which intimidated the local people. Thus by the 1930s, VMRO had managed to estrange many of its former supporters and its name became a synonym of a terrorist organization (Poulton, 1995:80-81).

The pro-Zveno coup, after which VMRO was practically dismembered, brought about a new policy regarding the Macedonian question. The Zveno group was sympathetic to the Macedonian question but they also realized that support for the irredentist VMRO was too costly for Bulgaria. On top of that, ten years of VMRO violence (1924-1934) had claimed at least 884 lives and disrupted Bulgarian politics (Poulton, 1995:85).

However, the shift in policy was not in the direction of completely forgetting Bulgaria's claims on Macedonia. This was shown during the Second World War when the Bulgarians chose to enter the Axis camp, a step probably caused by their frustrated irredentism. They got in return the greater part of Vardar Macedonia, Eastern Aegean Macedonia and Thrace, and a small part of Western Aegean Macedonia (Poulton, 1995:101).

With the creation of Tito's Yugoslavia and with the subsequent agreement between the Communist parties of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia on a union between Pirin and Vardar Macedonia, the process of reverse assimilation was observed. Namely, people who had a Bulgarian national consciousness and who lived in the Pirin Macedonia region were pressed to identify themselves as Macedonians and to study the official language of Vardar Macedonia (Poulton, 1995:107; Danforth, 1995:68). This language, according to sources promoting Bulgarian nationalist ideas, was "fathered all too hastily -- in a matter of days -- through voting by a dozen of teachers and public workers of dubious scientific potential, [it] is alien to the Macedonian Bulgarians from Pirin and the Aegean area. The attempt to popularize it in the Blagoevgrad area in the space of two years was abortive as a result of its volatility, the poor training of semi-illiterate 'teachers'; and the resistance of the local residents" (Kochev, et al., 1994:23) (See 1.1. and 6.1.).

After this short-lived period of recognition and even encouragement of the Macedonian identity, the traditional attitude of denying the existence of such people revived. A gradual process of assimilating the Macedonian identity began in the 1950s. Numerous trials were staged during the Communist regime from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. There was political pressure, administrative pressure and a general cultural pressure upon the people who identified themselves as Macedonians (Kanev, 1998a; Kanev, 1999a:21) (See 1.3. for details).

2.2.2. The minority's resistance to or acceptance of integration

Due to the closeness of the languages, culture and historical backgrounds, Macedonians cannot be identified and pointed out from the rest of the Bulgarian population. Most of them are well-educated urban dwellers who have relatively good jobs, so they are equal to the other citizens in Bulgarian society. The small number of Macedonian activists, who usually come from the villages of the Pirin region, face discrimination only on some occasions when they declare Macedonian self-identity as different from the Bulgarian one (Kanev, 1998a).

2.2.3. Awareness of having an ethnic or a national identity

The construction of the Macedonian identity started sometime around the very end of the 19th century when the first attempts at expressing Macedonian national identity were made. During that time a very small, yet very active, number of intellectuals in Thessaloniki, Belgrade, Sofia and St. Petersburg laid the foundations "of the process of 'imagining' a Macedonian national community, the beginning of the construction of a Macedonian national identity and culture" (Danforth, 1995:56). Thus "French geographer Ernest Granger wrote in 1924: 'The Slavs of Prilep, Bitolija, Strumica, Lower-Vardar have not had to this date the consciousness of belonging to a clearly defined nation. To the question: are you Serbian? Are you Bulgarian? Are you Greek? Or Albanian? They were answering: I am Macedonian'" (Garde, 1992:243, quoted in MRG Greece, 1994:12).

In the first years of the 20th century, the feeling of a separate Macedonian identity was becoming stronger and stronger, especially among intellectuals. Around the end of the

first decade, the right to Macedonian self-determination was discussed for a while, but the question was never posed seriously. However, the Greek government of Venizelos pointed out the existence of a separate group of “Macedonian Slavs” in the official ethnological map of 1918. The same held true of the official Serb maps of Cvijic, as well as of an internal memorandum of the British (MRG Greece, 1994:12).

Regardless of all the above, it is important to point out that in these early years of Macedonian self-identification, the feeling of belonging to a separate group was not very strong. Thus due to the cultural and linguistic affinity with the Bulgarians, many Macedonians identified themselves as Bulgarians, rather than as Macedonians (MRG Greece, 1994:12).

Perhaps this has led some scholars and journalists to exclude the possibility of the existence of a separate Macedonian nation altogether. “Since the disappearance of the classical, semi-Hellenic Macedonian Kingdom of Philip, Alexander and Perseus in Roman times, the terms ‘Macedonian’ and ‘Macedonia’ have been used as geographic terms for the area in Southeastern Europe, which is still known under this name. Since the Middle Ages, it has been inhabited predominantly by Slavo-Bulgarians and by minorities of Albanians, Valachians, Turks, Greeks, Gypsies, Jews, and, as the statistics of the 19th and 20th centuries show, surprisingly few Serbs. For more than a thousand years the Slavs living in this area have been considered Bulgarians, or to be more precise, Western Bulgarians whose idiom is distinguished by certain dialectical peculiarities, without thereby losing its general Bulgarian character” (Stammler, 1991:4).

“The vast majority of the population of Macedonia are Bulgars . . . They were the first people, when Macedonia was a Turkish province, to found national schools there, and when the Bulgarian church revolted from the Greek Patriarch . . . the Turks allowed them to establish bishoprics, because it was evident that Macedonia was Bulgarian” (John Reed, *The War in Eastern Europe*, 1916, quoted in Kaplan, 1993:53)

However, with the creation of Tito’s Yugoslavia and the inclusion of a separate Macedonian republic within it, things changed enormously. Macedonian identity, which had already started developing before the Second World War, now got its state attire. “Bulgarians have accepted that, in the last 50 years, the Slav population of Yugoslav Macedonia developed a separate identity although they keep the hope that they can be reintegrated in the Bulgarian nation in the future” (MRG Greece, 1994:12).

2.2.4. Level of homogeneity in the minority’s identity

Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia (similarly to the ones in Greece) are divided into three groups: the ones who have a Bulgarian national identity; the ones who have a Macedonian national identity, and those who refrain from speaking about their national identity in public unless pressured (See 2.1.3. for details).

As with other minorities (e.g. Roma), there is a difference between the Pirin Macedonians’ self-identification and the identification they get from the macro-group in the Bulgarian society. In the 1992 Bulgarian census, about 10,803 people declared

themselves Macedonians. The macro-group, however, does not recognize these people as different from the titular Bulgarian nation. Even within this group, there are two subgroups with different identity perceptions. For the ones in the first group, the idea of nationality is not related to the idea of citizenship. They are loyal to the Macedonian nation and state as such. The other group has a Macedonian ethnic identity and wants to be treated as a national minority within Bulgaria. The loyalties of the latter group are with the Bulgarian state. The Macedonian organizations which have been registered as NGOs or political parties are comprised of people belonging to the second group (Kanev, 1999b) (See 1.3. on Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria).

2.3. Actual political and social conditions

2.3.1. Relations with the state

After the break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Bulgaria felt uneasy at recognizing anything more than the fact that the process of creating a nationality for the Macedonians had begun in 1918. “Later the date was changed to 1944, and at the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) plenum in April 1956, when Todor Zhivkov cemented his power, it was apparently decided no longer to recognize a separate Macedonian nationality” (Poulton, 1995:148, quoting from Robert King, 1973) (See 1.1. for details).

Only after the fall of communism, Macedonian national identification became a topic of public discussion again. There is no problem for one to espouse Macedonian identity within a wider Bulgarian one. However, any form of national Macedonian self-identification continues to be prohibited, although the penalties for breaking this ban have been greatly reduced (Poulton, 1995:150-151).

The official policy of the Bulgarian state, ever since the first democratic elections of June 1990, has been to denounce the existence of a Macedonian minority. Thus, the police have been given a free hand in suppressing all public manifestations of the Macedonian identity. Moreover, the New Bulgarian Constitution of July 13, 1991, as well as the Political Parties Act provide for a discriminative ban against organizations and political parties on ethnic and/or religious basis (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee - BHC, March 1995; BHC, January 1996:6-7; BHC, January 1997:5-6; BHC, February 1998:10-11).

On July 12, 1990, the Blagoevgrad City Court refused to register OMO-Ilinden as a citizens' association, a decision which was upheld by a three-member chamber of the Supreme Court on November 9, 1990 and by a five-member chamber of the Supreme Court on March 11, 1991. Many acts of police brutality were documented during 1990-1994: arresting and beating of people participating in the OMO-organized celebrations of the anniversary of the deaths of Yane Sandanski and Gotse Delchev (revolutionaries who are claimed by both Bulgarians and Macedonians); confiscation of the third issue of the *Skornuvane* (*Awakening*) newspaper of OMO-Ilinden, etc. (Poulton, 1993:109-111; Poulton, 1995:152-154; BHC, March 1995)

In April 1995 OMO-Ilinden activists were allowed for the first time after 1991 to put flowers at Yane Sandanski's grave. Still, this attitude was not the norm in the state's relations with the minority. On July 26, 1995 four OMO activists were arrested while distributing materials about the Ilinden Uprising celebration at the Samuilova Krepost (Samuil's Fortress) locality in late July which had already been banned by the Mayor of Petrich. Even though the activists were released in a few hours, their leaflets were confiscated and the police blocked the roads to the Samuilova Krepost on July 30, 1995 (BHC, January 1996:6-7).

The repressive state policy with respect to OMO-Ilinden activists continued in 1996. On February 4, 1996, the police broke up a meeting of an OMO splinter group --the Democratic Movement of Ivan Sungartiiski-- which was held behind closed doors in the village of Musomishte, near Gotse Delchev. The assembly was disbanded on the order of the Blagoevgrad District Prosecutor issued in advance. Numerous materials were confiscated. On April 21 the police prevented OMO-Ilinden from marking the anniversary of Yane Sandanski's death at the Rozhen monastery, while on May 4, at the Blagoevgrad railway station, 12 OMO activists, who were about to break the ban on their celebration at Gotse Delchev's monument, were arrested. In the town of Sandanski, 25 OMO activists were detained for the whole day on June 8, 1996, with the aim of preventing them from organizing a congress in a hall of the American University in Blagoevgrad. The same day another six people were detained in Petrich and eleven people in Blagoevgrad. On June 10, five other members were arrested by the Blagoevgrad police and were subsequently forced to sign a warning protocol, which forbade them to hold the congress (BHC, January 1997:5-6).

On October 21, 1996, the European Commission of Human Rights in Strasbourg heard the related complaint of 23 OMO-Ilinden activists, represented by Yordan Kostadinov, Chair of the organization (Masruchka, *24 Chassa*, January 24, 1997). The Commission declared all complaints registered under application numbers 29222/95, 29223/95 and 29226/95 inadmissible, and adjourned the examination of the remainder of the complaints under application numbers 29221/95 and 29225/95 (Final Decision of the European Commission of Human Rights, 1998, www.dhcour.coe.fr/hudoc).

A very important step was taken in 1997 when, on October 9, President Stoyanov signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The Convention was ratified on February 18, 1999 in accordance with the Bulgarian Ministry of the Exterior's "interpretive declaration." This declaration makes it explicit that the Framework Convention is going to be applied only to seven "minority groups" (and not national minorities): Turks, Roma, Armenians, Vlachs, Sarakachans, Greeks, Jews. It is notable to point out that in the 1992 census, more than 30 ethnic groups were identified, many of them substantially outnumbered the above mentioned groups. One such group is the Russians (17,139), which is much larger than the group of Jews (3,461), Vlachs (5,159), Greeks (4,930) and Sarakachans (5,144) (BHC, February 1998:3; Kanev, 1998b:33).

Regardless of this step, however, the police still posed many obstacles in front of the activities of the Macedonian minority party OMO-Ilinden. On April 20, 1997 the Blagoevgrad District Prosecutor banned their celebrations at the Rozhen Monastery; on May 5, fifteen activists were detained in Blagoevgrad after attempting to celebrate

the 94th anniversary of Gotse Delchev's death; on October 29, nationalists threw out several Macedonians from the Home of Technology in Plovdiv who had gathered for the presentation of Georgi Radulov's book "The History of Macedonia -- an Apology of the Macedonian Spirit" (BHC, February 1998:10-11; "Bulgarian Police Violating Rights of OMO-Ilinden," MILS NEWS, Skopje, February 19, 1998).

In 1998, the Bulgarian authorities continued placing serious restrictions on the right of peaceful assembly for Bulgarian citizens identifying themselves as ethnic Macedonians. On April 14, 1998 OMO-Ilinden began the publication of a newspaper which was intended to serve as a voice for its members and their concerns and interests. Two days later sometime after 8p.m. --the latest hour until which searches of private property are legal-- seven policemen broke up a meeting of this organization without a search warrant. Police sergeant Krassimir Karamfilov claimed that he was "sent by the authorities to come and search your organization's headquarters and seize what is necessary." However, when asked for evidence of his legal right to conduct the search, he failed to provide any documents. Fearing violence, OMO-Ilinden members allowed the search to continue without any protest, hoping to look for redress within the court system. All equipment and supplies for the publication were seized and had not been given back after more than six months later (Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada, 1998).

On April 18, several hundred OMO members were prevented from laying flowers at the grave of Yane Sandanski. The group's gathering and commemoration activities were banned by the Blagoevgrad District Prosecutor. In the town of Petrich, some people arriving by bus were taken to the police station for short a period of time. Several people managed to reach Yane Sandanski's grave secretly. On their way back, they were stopped before entering the town of Sandanski. One of them, Vassil Gudjemov, was detained at the local police station because he did not have a passport. He claimed that he was beaten by the police during the short detention and that his front teeth were broken (BHC, 1999a:9; IHF, 1998b).

On July 29, 1998, the European Commission of Human Rights gave admissibility to two out of five complaints of Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia ("Strasbourg -- Macedonian Complaints of Bulgaria Justified," MILS NEWS, Skopje, July 30, 1998). The latter affirmed the complaints of Boris Stankov, et al. against Bulgaria where they protested against the Bulgarian authorities who refuse to register their association, and who ban their meetings. The complaints were under application numbers 29221/95 and 29225/95 (Final Decision of the European Commission of Human Rights, 1998, www.dhcour.coe.fr/hudoc). "Based on the submitted evidence, the European Human Rights Commission assessed that the complaints are founded, and the procedure on the two cases commenced on the grounds of Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights, an article regulating the freedom of citizens to organize meetings" ("The European Commission of Human Rights, 1996 and 1998", *168 Chassa*, October 2-8, 1998).

On August 2, 1998, the Mayor of Petrich banned a commemoration organized by members of OMO-Ilinden at the Samuilova Krepost locality. Yordan Toshev, a local activist of the organization, was arrested and taken to the detention facility in Petrich for having thrown flowers at the feet of the policemen. On the next day, the Sofia

Mayor, Mr. Stefan Sofiyanski, banned a peaceful protest organized by another group of the same political organization commemorating the 85th anniversary of the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty. On September 2, Mr. Sofiyanski banned a group of OMO-Ilinden activists from holding a peaceful protest commemorating September 12, the day of the genocide over the Macedonians (BHC, 1999a:9; IHF, 1998b).

2.3.2. Relations with the dominant ethnic/national group in society

On January 16, 1992, Bulgaria was the first state in the world to recognize the Republic of Macedonia. However, this sensational step was semi-officially accompanied by the clarification that the recognition of a Macedonian state does not imply recognition of a Macedonian nation. "Most of Bulgarian opinion remains convinced that the Macedonian issue is a sacred one" (Reed, 1996:239), so Bulgarians are openly against any exhibition of the Macedonian identity. "How dare you write [in a previous story about the Bulgarian mountain resort of Bansko] 'Macedonian women' when there is a state [called] Macedonia? When they read the magazine those from Skopje will say to themselves: so there are Macedonians in Bulgaria, i.e. they are our compatriots and we want them [back] on our territory. . . . I don't think there are such people – Macedonians, they are all Bulgarians, and that should be written and underscored" (*Sega (Now)*, August 28-September 3, 1997, quoted in *Balkan Neighbours* 6/1997:22).

Only radical Macedonian activists claim that Bulgarians are occupiers of their national territory. Otherwise, relations are characterized by the acknowledgement by Bulgarians of the fact that Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia are unique in the Bulgarian cultural milieu, regardless of whether they have or do not have a Macedonian national consciousness. Once this national consciousness is claimed, however, the result is a nationalistic backlash. For example, on March 11, 1990 about 100 people handed in a petition to the Bulgarian Parliament demanding the state to recognize the rights of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. A spontaneous nationalistic counter-demonstration was organized around this action but the police effectively protected the Macedonians from mob violence (Poulton, 1993:109; Poulton, 1995:151).

Occasionally, Bulgarian mainstream newspapers openly advocate discrimination against the activists of the Macedonian minority. "The Bulgarian Prosecutor's Office has to stop the activities of the illegal OMO-Ilinden Association which is committed to bring about the recognition of a non-existent minority and its language by threatening to murder people.' . . . The comment had been triggered by the gathering of OMO-Ilinden activists at Blagoevgrad where -- according to this Sofia paper -- more radical measures had been announced in order to achieve the recognition of the Macedonian minority and the Macedonian language in Bulgaria. This included the death threat against a Bulgarian MP" ("*Standart (Standard)* Requests Prohibition of OMO-Ilinden" MILS NEWS, Skopje, June 12, 1997).

Almost all of the Bulgarian media try to discredit the legitimacy of OMO-Ilinden. The latter is portrayed either as a marginalized organization of mentally unstable people or as a terrorist organization responsible for a whole range of criminal activity.

Following are specific examples of comments made in a number of the mainstream newspapers (Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada, 1998):

- “OMO-Ilinden Members Are Lunatics and Psychopaths” (Anatoly Velichkov, Member of Parliament, *168 Chassa*, 4/10/1993)
- “OMO-Ilinden Threatens Local Journalist with Death” (*Strouma*, 24/4/1994).
- “OMO-Ilinden Prepares to Kill Journalist” (*Strouma*, 6/6/1994).
- “OMO-Ilinden Steals TV Equipment of German News Crew” (*Pirinsko Delo*, 2/8/1994).
- “Bomb Threats Attributed to OMO-Ilinden” (*Strouma*, 24/6/1994).
- “Bulgarian Prosecutor No1: OMO-Ilinden Are Lunatics and Traitors” (*Troud*, 23/3/1998).
- “OMO-Ilinden Needs Psychotherapy” (Krassimir Karakachanov, President of the Bulgarian VMRO and Member of Parliament, *24 Chassa*, 4/9/1998).
- “Psychopaths from the Macedonian Disease” (Mariana Svetoslavova, *168 Chassa*, 4/10/1998).

While most Bulgarians exclude the possibility of the existence of a separate Macedonian identity, there are some organizations, which defend the rights of the minority. The most outspoken of them is the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC). In an interview for the Skopje-based *Nova Makedonija* (*New Macedonia*) newspaper, Krassimir Kanev, Chair of the BHC, stated that “they [OMO-Ilinden] want the Bulgarian priests out of Pirin Macedonia and treat this part of Bulgaria as an occupied territory. However, this does not mean that their activities should be banned, as long as they are peaceful and do not incite to violence. Their program states explicitly that they are against the use of and incitement to violence. This is the only thing, which the court should take into consideration when it deals with the organization’s registration. I think that it should be registered, regardless of the fact whether a part of its program is anti-constitutional or not. In Bulgaria there are other organizations which have anti-constitutional views, like, for example, the monarchist parties, which have all been registered by the court” (“Vo Bugarija Postoi Makedonsko Malcinstvo/There Is a Macedonian Minority in Bulgaria” MILS NEWS in Macedonian, Skopje, July 9, 1997).

2.3.3. Relations with other minorities if any

It is difficult to establish whether there are any relations between Macedonians and other minorities. One of the rare examples of that is the statement by Stoyan Denchev, Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and MP of the Bulgarian ethnic Turks’ Movement for Rights and Freedoms. “No one in Bulgaria believes in the existence of a Macedonian nation and Macedonian language -- and this is well-known to our friends from the Great Powers too” (*Sega (Now)*, November 3-9, 1996, quoted in *Balkan Neighbours* 5/1997:13).

2.3.4. Relations between the regions inhabited by the minority and the central authorities

According to some data, before the changes in 1989-1990, the central authorities used to concentrate investments and resources in some areas of the Pirin Macedonia region

(e.g. Sandanski, Petrich), as well as in other “nationally sensitive” regions like Kurdzhali (with a majority of ethnic Turks) and Smoliyan (with Bulgarian Muslims/Pomaks). This became particularly true after the famous 1975 speech given by the then President of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, in which he stated explicitly for the first time that Bulgaria did not recognize the existence of a Macedonian nation. Even though some radical Macedonian activists in the Pirin region claim that their area is kept underdeveloped, there is enough evidence even in the post-Communist years that this is one of the most affluent parts of Bulgaria (e.g. Petrich is called “the town of the millionaires”). This is mainly due to its proximity to the Greek border, a fact that helps business and trade. Macedonians are not worse off than the majority of the country’s population. Most of them are city dwellers with good education (Kanev, 1998a; Troebst, 1994:36-37).

In regard to local government, the system is not very different from the rest of the country. Bulgaria is traditionally a highly centralized state, giving very limited freedom to local authorities. Moreover, the latter are dependent on the state budget, so they have very little room for autonomy in making political decisions (Kanev, 1998a).

3. LANGUAGE

3. 1. Describing the language

3.1.1. Linguistic family

Macedonian belongs to the Slavic linguistic group, Eastern South Slavic subgroup, of languages and is related to Bulgarian. Some authors (e.g. Vyacheslav Ivanov, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. Macropaedia. Knowledge in Depth*, 1990) see Macedonian as a “link” between the Eastern subgroup (Bulgarian) and the Western subgroup (Serbo-Croatian) of South Slavic languages.

3.1.2. Dialects and unity; linguistic awareness

Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia speak many Bulgaro-Macedonian dialects: the *Maleshevski* dialect (spoken also in the Republic of Macedonia); the *Seres-Nevrokop* dialect; the *Shtip* dialect (Kanev, 1998a).

3.1.3. Instruments of knowledge: description of the language and norms (history of the written form and of its standardization)

Modern Macedonian was the last Slavic language to attain a standard form. It was in the second half of the 19th century that the first attempts of its standardization were made. It was done by a small group of intellectuals who asserted the existence of a unique Macedonian nation. The first dictionaries, grammars and textbooks in Macedonian were published regardless of the strong opposition on the part of the Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians. The most renowned intellectuals from this period were: Gorgi Pulevski, Grigor Prlichev, Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov and Krste Misirkov. In 1861, the Miladinov brothers published a collection of Macedonian folksongs. Pulevski published a *Dictionary of Three Languages* [Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish] (1875) and founded a Macedonian literary society in Sofia which

was quickly suppressed by the official Bulgarian authorities. Krste Misirkov, whom Nurigiani (1972) calls “the founder of the modern Macedonian literary language” published *On Macedonian Matters* (Sofia, 1903) (Danforth, 1995:50). There he stated that the Macedonians are “a separate and independent Slav people” (Misirkov, 1974:28, 34, 73, 182, quoted in Danforth, 1995:50).

After the Second World War, the new authorities in Yugoslav Macedonia set about to consolidate their position. “The new nation needed a written language, and initially the spoken dialect of Northern Macedonia was chosen as the basis for the Macedonian language. However, this was deemed too close to Serbian and the dialects of Bitola-Veles became the norm. These dialects were closer to the literary language of Bulgaria” (Poulton, 1995:116). However, due to the fact that the latter was based on the Eastern Bulgarian dialects, it allowed for enough differentiation between the two languages.

The Macedonian alphabet and orthography was accepted on May 3, 1945 and June 7, 1945 respectively. In 1946, the first primer in the new language appeared and the Macedonian Department in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Skopje was founded. Six years after, a grammar of the Macedonian literary language appeared and in 1953 the Institute for the Macedonian Language “Krste P. Misirkov” was founded. Old people in Macedonia still speak dialects containing obvious Serbianisms and Bulgarianisms, while younger ones, who have gone through the whole system of education, speak “purer” literary Macedonian (Poulton, 1995:116-117).

3.2. The history of the language

3.2.1. Origins

Macedonian is a Slavic language, closely related to Bulgarian and Serbian. “Although the Macedonian language was ‘formally created and recognized in 1944 . . . it has a history and lineage dating back more than a millennium’” (Popov, et al., 1989:21). Macedonian nationalists like Popov make such claims, because according to them “Old Church Slavonic, the literary language developed by ‘the Macedonian educators’ Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century, was based on the local Macedonian dialects of Solun (Thessaloniki). Old Church Slavonic was, therefore, an ancient form of the Macedonian language” (Danforth, 1995:45).

Thus, the origins of the language are traced back to the 6th and 7th centuries when the region of Macedonia was affected by a mass influx of Slavic peoples. Although at the time all Slavic tribes spoke a common or closely related language, throughout history Macedonian, in fact all other Slavic languages, developed specific characteristics separating it from the other Slavic languages (Shashko, 1991:177).

Church Slavonic was the first Slavic language that was codified and given some form. “From the multitude of linguistically similar Southern Slav dialects and the archaic Church Slavonic emerged the common Serbo-Croat literary language, based on the Neostokavian Ijekavian or Ekavian dialects; the Slovenian, based on the Ljubljana dialect; the Bulgarian based on the Northern Bulgarian dialect; and the Macedonian, based on the Bitola dialect. It should be mentioned that the differences between the

various Southern Slav languages are smaller than those of the various Italian dialects or between the French and Occitan dialects” (MRG Greece, 1994:7)

The fact that “Macedonian shares nearly all the same distinct characteristics which separate Bulgarian from other Slavic languages -- lack of cases, the post-positive definite article, replacement of the infinitive form, and preservation of the simple verbal forms for the past and imperfect tenses” (Poulton, 1995:116) made the codifiers of the Macedonian literary language particularly cautious. In their desire to make the new language as distant from Bulgarian as possible, they chose the Western Macedonian dialect as the basis of literary Macedonian. This dialect had the largest number of speakers and was also the one, which was most different from literary Bulgarian (based on the Northeastern Bulgarian dialects). Apart from that, the phonetic orthography characteristic of Serbian was introduced (Danforth, 1995:67; MRG Greece, 1994:11).

Some rather biased pro-Bulgarian accounts go even further than that. “Similarly to the case with Moldovian, when the Cyrillic script was introduced to distance it from Romanian, the Macedonian glossotomists decided to adopt the Serbian alphabet (respectively, orthography) . . . Hence the joke: Macedonian is Bulgarian typed on a Serbian typewriter” (Kochev, et al., 1994:53).

3.2.2. Evolution

No texts approximating spoken Macedonian are known before about 1790. The first dictionaries, grammars and textbooks in Macedonian were published, despite the strong opposition on the part of Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians.

3.2.3. Cultural production in the language (literature, oral tradition)

It is notable to point out that the first ever Macedonian book by the founder of the modern Macedonian literary language Krste Misirkov, called *On Macedonian Matters*, was published in Sofia in 1903 (Danforth, 1995:50).

Throughout the years, there have been sporadic appearances of books by and about Macedonians from the Pirin region. All of them are written in literary Bulgarian (e.g. Georgi Radulov’s book “Istoriyata na Makedoniya - apologiya na makedonskiya duh” [“The History of Macedonia - an Apology of the Macedonian Spirit”] and Kosta Georgiev’s book “Kritika na shovinizma” [“Criticism on Chauvinism”] (Kanev, 1998a).

3.3. Actual sociolinguistic data

3.3.1. Territory in which the language is used

Different Macedonian (or Bulgaro-Macedonian) dialects are used in the whole geographic region of Macedonia (the Republic of Macedonia, as well as parts of Bulgaria and Greece), émigrés communities in Central and Western Europe, North America, Australia (Kanev, 1998a).

3.3.2. Number of persons using this language (in territory and among emigrants)

Approximately 2 million people.

3.4. Freedom of expression in the minority language

In their everyday life, people from the Pirin Macedonia region in Bulgaria use their dialects in communication with one another. When dealing with the official administration, however, they use literary Bulgarian. The recent recognition of the official Macedonian language by the Bulgarian government is of little importance to the Macedonians in Bulgaria. Their dialect is very close to official Bulgarian, so there is hardly any objective practical need for the introduction of literary Macedonian in the villages and towns of Pirin Macedonia (Kanev, 1998a).

3.4.1. Level of acceptance or resistance to the minority's language

The Macedonian language is one of the most controversial issues in the relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia, which, in turn, is reflected in Bulgaria's relation to the Macedonian minority within its territory. Even nowadays Bulgarians and some outside scholars consider Macedonian a mere dialect which has artificially been turned into a language by the Yugoslav Communists (e.g. Kochev, Krosteyner, Alexandrov, 1994). "One can pose the question whether, perhaps, the Macedonian Slavs haven't their own language, something in between Serbian and Bulgarian. Such an assumption, however, would be absolutely unjustified, for, as we have seen, in phonology, morphology and syntax Macedonian Bulgarian and Bulgarian proper harmonize in every respect. . . . Macedonian can only be considered a Bulgarian dialect" (Weigand, 1924, quoted in Stammer 1991:13-14).

On June 22, 1971 the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party passed Decision No.333 on the signing of agreements between Bulgaria and the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. This Decision allowed for the signing of agreements in the official languages of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, Macedonian included. In this way, until 1989 the "language problem" was kept in a *status quo*, which was soon to be shattered to pieces (Fileva, *Kapital*, November 10-16, 1997).

Actually there was no "language problem" until 1994. At least two bilateral agreements had been signed in the period 1992-1994. The event, which flared up the problem, was the visit of the then Bulgarian Minister of Education Marco Todorov to Macedonia. During that visit, the Macedonian side tried, in a rather provocative way, to make the Bulgarian Minister acknowledge the existence of a Macedonian language. Such an explicit acknowledgement would have been "suicidal" for a Bulgarian politician at the time, so the Minister cut his visit short and returned to Bulgaria (Kanev, 1999b).

Bulgaria's refusal to recognize the Macedonian language has posed many problems. Until recently, there were more than 20 bilateral agreements between the two countries which were waiting for the "language issue" to be solved, so that these

agreements can be signed and applied in practice (Fileva, *Kapital*, November 10-16, 1997).

“By recognizing the Macedonian language, Sofia would have to come to terms with the fact that there are people in Macedonia speaking the Macedonian language. This would then entail the raising of the issue on the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.” [an interview given by BBC’s Steven Ashley for *Makedonski Glas (The Macedonian Voice)*, a Macedonian-language broadcast of Radio Perth, MILS NEWS, Skopje, November 18, 1997].

Surprisingly enough, the Bulgarian authorities finally recognized the Macedonian literary language. This happened on February 22, 1999 when Macedonian Prime Minister Georgievski and his Bulgarian counterpart Ivan Kostov signed a joint declaration, as well as eight cooperation agreements. The declaration only stated explicitly that the two sides recognize the respective constitutional languages of the two countries. The terms of the declaration were weak but it was suitable for domestic consumption (MILS News, 2/22/99, “Declaration for Solving the Language Dispute in Sofia Today”).

3.4.2. Ways in which the state protects or impedes the use of the minority language

In their everyday life, people from the Pirin Macedonian region in Bulgaria use their dialects to communicate with one another. When dealing with the official administration, however, they use literary Bulgarian. Even before February 1999, when the Bulgarian authorities used to deny the existence of the Macedonian literary language, there was no suppression of the Macedonian language in Bulgaria. For example, in Blagoevgrad one was free to buy an issue of the *Narodna Volja*, a newspaper with articles both in Bulgarian and Macedonian (Kanev, 1998a).

The dialect, spoken by the Macedonian minority is very close to the official Bulgarian language. Moreover, the orthography used is a Bulgarian variant of the Cyrillic script and not of the Macedonian one. Macedonian is not taught in Bulgaria. There have hardly been any demands for that, apart from the demands of some radical OMO-Ilinden activists in the period 1992-1994.

4. RELIGION

4.1. Identifying a religious minority

4.2. Religious freedom enjoyed

Most Macedonians in Bulgaria are Christian Orthodox. During the Ottoman domination on the Balkan Peninsula, most of the people living in the geographic region of Macedonia were under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (created after a *firman* issued by Sultan Abdulhamid in 1870). Before the time of the Bulgarian Exarchate, all Christians in the Ottoman Empire were members of the Greek dominated Rum millet. Most of the Slav-speakers in Macedonia chose to become members of the new Bulgarian Exarchate shortly after its foundation (Reed, 1996:198-199).

Religious affiliation, as well as language, have always been important tools of identity formation. This is well illustrated in the attitude of the atheistic Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, which helped to free the Orthodox Church in Yugoslav Macedonia from Serb control. In 1958, the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church was established and the ancient archdiocese of Ohrid was revived (Poulton, 1995:118).

After the changes in 1989, religious life in Pirin Macedonia, just like in all other parts of Bulgaria, has been determined by the schism within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. After the October 1991 elections, the new Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) government relied on the Denominations Act (1949) to remove priests from the authority. The clergy dismissed as a result from that Act were people suspected of having had connections with the Communist Secret Services. Religious officials loyal to the new government were needed, so the Director of Religious Affairs used Art. 12 of the Denominations Act to remove several of these people from office. With two orders (from April 3, 1992 and April 13, 1992) he removed the New York Mitropolit Yosif and the Mitropolit of Plovdiv Arseniy. In a letter to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (March 9, 1992), the election of the Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim was announced invalid; and in another letter (May 25, 1992), the whole Synod was declared illegitimate. A new Holy Synod and the new Patriarch Pimen were then appointed. This marked the beginning of a deep crisis within the Orthodox Church that is present even today (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996:23-25).

The two Synods exist side by side and constantly argue about each other's legitimacy. The stakes involved are rather big because they include the issue of the restitution of church property. With the change of Bulgarian governments, one of the Synods gains the upper hand over the other. On March 18, 1996, when priests from Patriarch Maxim's Synod took over a candle workshop by force, a workshop which had been run by the competing Synod of Pimen since 1992, the socialist government refused to put an end to this property dispute (BHC, January 1997:6-8).

Macedonians in Bulgaria attend services of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Theologically and doctrinally there is no difference between the Bulgarian and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, so the issue is purely political. The Macedonian Orthodox Church is recognized neither by the Bulgarian, nor by the Greek and Serbian churches. In the early days of OMO-Ilinden, one of the basic demands of the organization was related to the establishment of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the Pirin region. Nowadays, none of the OMO splinter groups supports such demands, while the ordinary believers --regardless of their ethnic or national identity as Bulgarians or Macedonians-- attend the services of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Kanev, 1998a).

4.3. Relations with the dominant religious community and the other communities

Since there are no clear-cut distinctions between Bulgarians and Macedonians regarding their religious practices, Macedonians actually form one of the dominant religious communities in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Kanev, 1998a).

4.4. Ways in which the state protects or impedes minority religious activities

After the Second World War, religion and language were the important tools for the new Yugoslav authorities, which were willing to promote a separate Macedonian identity. The first step undertaken was to free the Orthodox Church in Yugoslav Macedonia from Serbian control, with the establishment of the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church and the revival of the ancient archdiocese of Ohrid in 1958. The Serbian Orthodox Church opposed to this move in its final declaration of the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Church on July 18, 1967. The other Orthodox Churches followed suit. Nowadays, they are still firmly against the recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Poulton, 1995:118).

Since both Macedonians and Bulgarians are predominantly Orthodox Christians, there is not much difference in their respective religious practices. There are no Macedonian churches in Bulgaria and no visible religious practice among the Pirin Macedonians. Most of the Pirin Macedonian believers attend services of the Bulgarian Orthodox Churches. OMO-Ilinden, however, used to mention in its statute that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is alien to the Pirin Macedonians, so it demanded the presence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the area.

5. GENERAL LEGAL STATUS

5.1. Past

In the first years of existence of the modern Bulgarian state, legislation related to minorities dealt mainly with religious minorities. However, with the coming to power of the Bulgarian Communist Party on September 9, 1944, an abrupt change came into being. Marxist ideology with its stress on internationalism became the rule for more than four decades. When dealing with this period of Bulgarian history, one has to keep in mind that even though legislation may look very progressive, practice was not unproblematic and benevolent. The Dimitrov Constitution (1947) guarantees equality before the law (Art. 71), speaks against discrimination (Art. 72) and defends the ethno-cultural, religious and linguistic identity of the minorities (Art. 78). Article 79 is very explicit in its giving the right to “national minorities” to study their mother tongue and to develop their national culture. The other constitution from the period, the Zhivkov Constitution (1971), also defends the rights of minorities, even though not as unequivocally as the earlier one. Article 45 provides for the right of “citizens of non-Bulgarian origin” to study their language, while obliging those citizens to study Bulgarian as well (Kanev, 1998b:33; Kanev, 1999a:13-14).

5.2. Present

After the fall of Communism, Bulgaria got a new Constitution (adopted on July 13, 1991), which was a result of ethnocentric agitation. This document defines Bulgaria as the “nationally and politically unified” state of the “Bulgarian people” and grants only very limited rights to what is now called not ethnic minorities but “citizens, for whom the Bulgarian language is not their mother tongue” (Troebst, 1994:33). These citizens are given the right to study and use their language, while the study of Bulgarian is obligatory (Art. 36 (2)). They may develop their own ethnic culture (Art.

54 (1)). Article 13 (1), (2), (4) established the state's role in regard to religious communities. Article 37 (1) obliges the state to tolerate differences and respect believers from different religions (Kanev, 1999a:25).

The Constitution and the Political Parties Act provide for a discriminative ban against organizations and political parties founded on ethnic and/or religious basis. For example, Art. 11 (4) of the Constitution prohibits political parties form on ethnic or religious basis, as they threaten the country's territorial integrity or unity or they incite racial, ethnic, or religious hatred (Kanev, 1999a:33). This article has been criticized both domestically and internationally, due to its discriminatory and restrictive character (BHC, 1992; BHC, March 1995; BHC, January 1996:6-7; BHC, January 1997:5-6; BHC, February 1998:10-11; US Department of State, 1993; Parliamentary Assembly, 1992; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1992).

It is interesting to pinpoint the legal contradiction between the official non-recognition of the existence of a Macedonian minority and the implicit recognition given to the latter through the recent registration of its associations (Kanev, 1999b).

6. AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATION FOR THE MINORITY

6.1. Brief history of the education system in relation to the minority

Except for the 1944-1948 period when Pirin Macedonia *de facto* enjoyed cultural autonomy within Bulgaria, there have never been efforts on the part of the Bulgarian government to promote education in the Macedonian language. In the beginning of the Communist period, the state took the financial initiative to support the various minority schools within the country, while preserving the specific culture of the respective minority. Article 79 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (1947) stipulates that "national minorities have the right to study in their native tongue and to develop their national culture, while compulsory studying the Bulgarian language" (Chakurov, et al., 1976:100).

Another important legislative instrument at the time was the People's Education Act of 1948, which allowed the introduction of minority schools (Art. 4), where subjects would be taught in both the minority and the Bulgarian language (Art. 9). This Act laid the foundations for the further development of education in the spirit of "proletarian internationalism . . . and people's patriotism . . . To denounce the reactionary and traitor's character of nationalism and cosmopolitanism" (Chakurov, et al., 1976:113).

6.2. Availability of teaching material for the minority

None.

6.3. Official position

Since the Bulgarian state does not recognize the existence of a Macedonian minority as different from the titular Bulgarian nation, there are no provisions for education in the minority's language.

6.4. Activists' initiatives

The different factions within OMO-Ilinden have different demands in regard to education. While the more radical of them insist that the situation from 1944-1948 should be reintroduced, so that teachers from the Republic of Macedonia are allowed to teach literary Macedonian to the locals in Pirin Macedonia, the rest have more moderate demands (Kanev, 1998a).

6.5. Present situation at different levels:

6.5.1. Nursery school and primary education

6.5.2. Secondary education

6.5.3. Higher education and Research

There is no education in Macedonian.

7. COMMUNICATION AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

7.1. Legal situation

Since Bulgaria denies the existence of the Macedonian minority, it is natural that it does not have TV programs or printed media in the Macedonian language. Bulgarian law does not mention directly whether private Macedonian press, TV, or radio stations may operate on Bulgarian territory. This fact has allowed a group of Pirin Macedonians to publish a small size newspaper -- *Narodna Volja (People's Will)* -- in Bulgarian and in Macedonian. The publishers claim that the paper has a circulation of 2,500 copies (Kanev, 1998a). Chances that the Bulgarian authorities would let a Macedonian language TV or radio station operate in Bulgaria, despite the legislation on private media, are slim. The National Radio and Television Act was recently amended. It no longer prohibits independent broadcasting by political parties, trade unions, religious groups and non-profit organizations. Actually, it neither authorizes, nor bans these activities (Kanev, 1999b).

7.2. Press

A group of Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia publishes one newspaper *Narodna Volja (People's Will)* - 2,500 copies). The OMO-Ilinden newspapers *Skornuvane (Dawn)* and *Nezavisima Makedoniya (Independent Macedonia)* have stopped coming out, mainly due to lack of finances, even though there are claims that the Bulgarian authorities have confiscated issues of the newspapers and thus impeded the circulation (Kanev, 1998a).

7.3. Radio

Radio programs broadcast from the Republic of Macedonia could be listened to in Pirin Macedonia. Apart from these programs, there is no Macedonian radio station in Pirin Macedonia.

7.4. Television

Except for the programs of the Macedonian National TV broadcast from the Republic of Macedonia that can be watched in some parts of Pirin Macedonia, there are no Macedonian TV stations in Bulgaria.

7.5. Internet

There are no Pirin Macedonian web sites in Bulgaria. However, there are some Macedonian organizations in the Diaspora, which occasionally publish information on the Pirin Macedonians.

- *Macedonian Tribune*
124 West Wayne Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46802, USA
Telephone: (219) 422-5900
Fax: (219) 422-1348
E-Mail: mtfw@macedonian.org
<http://www.macedonian.org/>
- *Matica na iselenicite od Makedonja* (Mother of the Macedonian Refugees)
<http://lotus.mpt.com.mk/matica/>
- *Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee*
PO Box 364
Doncaster Victoria 3108
Australia
<http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/fcf/ucr/student/1996/v.stefanov/organs/mhrc1.htm>
- *BISER BALKANSI* - Egej (Aegean), Pirin, Prespa, Vardar. Formerly "The Makedonka." This is a Canadian site filled with comprehensive information on the Macedonian community in Canada, as well as general Macedonian information. Some pages are provided in both English and Macedonian.
<http://www.interlog.com/~macy/>
- *Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada*
P.O. Box 44532,
2376 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, CANADA
M1K 5K3
Tel: 416-202-8866
Fax: 416-412-3385
mail@mhrmc.on.ca
<http://www.mhrmc.on.ca/>

8. CONCLUSION

The number of people in Pirin Macedonia who identify themselves as Macedonians ranges from 10,000 to 25,000. The Bulgarian state and public opinion alike deny their right to self-identification. Any actions pertaining to public demonstration of the Macedonian identity in Bulgaria are subjected to a more or less direct suppression and denial. Macedonian activists face numerous problems in their activities. As a rule, they are not allowed to register as political parties; their celebrations are banned by either the municipal authorities or by the police; their propaganda materials are occasionally confiscated (See 2.2.1. and 2.3.1.).

In the years after the collapse of Communism in the late 1980s, the Macedonian question has significantly burdened the bilateral relations between the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. The main problem seems to be related to national identity: whether the people in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as those in Pirin Macedonia, are Macedonians, Bulgarians, or Macedono-Bulgarians.

Things are complicated even more due to the fact that at certain periods of history Macedonian national identity developed congruently with the Bulgarian one. As a result, some ethnic Macedonians or their descendants in Bulgaria, as well as in the Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Canada, Australia, and the USA, have developed a non-Macedonian, Bulgarian (or Macedonian-Bulgarian) national identity. The latter fit into the description of the “Slavic-speaking immigrants from Macedonia [who] came to the United States during the first decade of the twentieth century, at which time they identified themselves either as Bulgarians or as Macedonian-Bulgarians. . . . between 1903 and 1906, 50,000 people who identified themselves in this way entered the United States” (Danforth, 1995:87).

By the 1980s, approximately the same number of Bulgarians (Macedonian-Bulgarians) lived in the USA, mainly in the industrial centers of the Midwest. When it comes to Macedonian immigration to Canada and Australia, things become rather different. This difference is due to the fact that the number of immigrants in the early twentieth century was very small in comparison to the Macedonian immigrants (especially from Greek Aegean Macedonia) who went to Canada and, to a lesser extent, to Australia in the late 1940s. That is why in the latter two countries, the Slavic immigrants from the geographic region of Macedonia identify themselves as Macedonians and are sometimes very militant nationalists and irredentists (Danforth, 1995:87-88).

Bulgarian officials fear that the recognition of a Macedonian nation, which is separate from the Bulgarian one, may confuse many Bulgarian citizens who would then opt for a Macedonian national identity. All governments after the fall of communism have made more or less the same historical claim that those who call themselves Macedonians in an ethnic sense are in fact ethnopolitically disoriented Bulgarians.

“From a Bulgarian perspective, any recognition of a Macedonian minority inside the borders of Bulgaria would mean giving up the claim to some 1.5 million ‘co-nationals’ in Macedonia and Greece” (Troebst, 1994:37). These co-nationals claimed on the basis of the well-known Balkan tradition of adopting an irredentist attitude. Here, “the unredeemed territories targeted by each new nation-state conflicted with those targeted by other states, because of the mixed populations, and, usually, their lack of a clear national consciousness in these territories” (MRG Greece, 1994:8).

Regardless of all the above, it should be stressed that a very important step was taken in 1997 when, on October 9, President Stoyanov signed in Strasbourg the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. The Convention was ratified on February 18, 1999. This is a positive development for all minorities, even though the Convention will be applied to only seven “minority groups,” and the Macedonians are not included (See 2.3.1. for details) (BHC, February 1998:3; Kanev, 1998b:33).

Macedonians in Bulgaria live in one of the best-developed regions of the country. Although they are affected by the overall economic crisis in the country, their plight is made easier because of the proximity of Greece, which offers ways for trade and work. The people, who have Macedonian identity, are still impeded in their efforts to express their identity freely, even though things seem to be going towards a more positive development.

These people speak a dialect of Bulgarian. There is not even a remote possibility for the introduction of Macedonian language lessons, even after the recognition of that language by the Bulgarian authorities. The Pirin Macedonians attend the services of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and are on good terms with their neighbors with Bulgarian identity. The main problem is still in the fact that Bulgarians tend to look down upon their fellow-citizens with Macedonian identity. They are considered uneducated fanatics, who are influenced by the nationalistic policies of the new Macedonian state.

This connection to the Republic of Macedonia could be expected when people are discriminated against only because of their feelings for that country. However, such support does not come easily. The Republic of Macedonia seems to do much less commotion about its minorities abroad than other Balkan states. In this way groups like OMO-Ilinden and the like do not appear to have as many links with the authorities in the “mother-nation” as other minority groups do (e.g. Turks in Bulgaria and Greece, Greeks in Albania, etc.). This is so because “On the one hand, the large nationalistic opposition [now the ruling VMRO] there [in the Republic of Macedonia] is seeking political support in Sofia, and, on the other, isolated Macedonia is still dependent on Bulgaria’s diplomatic, moral and economic support -- not to mention Bulgaria’s transportation infrastructure. Therefore, at present the fate of the Pirin Macedonians is only of very limited importance to relations between Sofia and Skopje” (Troebst, 1994:40).

ADDRESSES

1. Cultural institutions and/or associations founded by the minority

2. Minority institutions and/or associations concerning education

3. Political parties and/or associations founded by the minority

- OMO-Ilinden
31, Georgi Skrizovski St.
Sandanski
BULGARIA
Attn: Yordan IVANOV
Tel. & Fax: 746-81-46

- OMO-Ilinden-PIRIN
4A Grigor Purlichev St.
Blagoevgrad
BULGARIA

4. Minority media

Radio Stations

Newspapers

- *Narodna Volja* newspaper
kv. "Zapad"
bl. 36, ap.17
2700 Blagoevgrad
tel. + 359-73-26336

Magazines

Television Stations

Internet Web Sites

- <http://www.macedonian.org/>
- <http://lotus.mpt.com.mk/matica/>
- <http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/fcf/ucr/student/1996/v.stefanov/organs/mhrc1.htm>
- <http://www.interlog.com/~macy/>
- <http://www.mhrmc.on.ca/>

Publishing Houses

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