

**Ethno-Nationalism during Democratic Transition in Bulgaria: Political
Pluralism as an Effective Remedy for Ethnic Conflict**

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Following the collapse of communism in the 1990s in Central and South- Eastern Europe, the region has not only undergone a difficult period of economic and political transition, but also has witnessed the rise of ethno-nationalism in several states, along with problems of national identity, state formation and the exclusion (or extermination as in the Yugoslav case) of minorities. Nationalism may adopt a variety of forms simultaneously - ethnic, cultural or civic, where either one of these forms or a mixture of elements from the three, may predominate in a state over time, influenced by politico-economic realities, elite behavior, party coalitions, international interests and ideological influences, as well as societal attitudes. Nationalism in its ethnic variant has led to the alienation and violation of minorities' rights, and its supporters have advocated the creation of ethnically homogenous states. Proponents of cultural nationalism have attempted the assimilation of national minority 'low cultures' into the dominant national 'high culture.' On the other hand, civic nationalism has mobilized people in Eastern European states towards the common goals of democratization and protection of human rights (individual or group/minority rights). The concern over the spread of ethno-nationalism in various countries of the region has not been, as it is commonly argued, a result of the unleashing of historical primordial forces previously 'frozen' by communism, but rather has been invoked by political elites to fill an ideological vacuum or to mobilize public support in times of political, economic or national identity crises in a quest for the conquest or preservation of political power (Anagnostou, 2005:90; Rupnik, 1996:10-16; Gagnon, 1994/95:131-132). These manipulative tendencies by elites have been less pronounced among the populace, especially in the case of Bulgaria, where anxieties over political democratization, the speed and consequences of economic market reforms, and guarantees of the protection of human rights, have all proved to be more pressing national concerns. As a Bulgarian scholar observes, ethnic animosities in Bulgaria in the beginning of the twenty first century "[have] diminished to such an extent that minority questions no longer represent a direct challenge to the new regime" (Vasilev, 2002:123). Ethno-religious animosities during democratic transition were managed due to the existence of an already existing unified state, by the application of democratic ethno-pluralism, the positive evolution of societal attitudes towards the ethnic 'other,' along with a revision of historical 'truths' and mutual reconciliation. These were some of the factors that played a vital role in impeding a violent mobilization against the ethnic or religious 'other.'

Contrary to mainstream liberal accounts placing Eastern European countries under the common denominator of being exclusively ethnically divisive societies plagued by historically entrenched primordial divisions, the eruption of violent ethno-religious conflict in the former Yugoslavia was an exception rather than the rule in the region. This paper will argue that ethnic nationalism although present in some form, is not an eternally prevailing, historically and geographically fixed feature of all Eastern European countries, and the processes of remedying ethnic animosities during transition vary from country to country determined by diverse factors such as history, culture, national identity and domestic politics. This variation in unique ethnic conflict

management will be illustrated with the case of Bulgaria, which witnessed during its initial transition period (1989 -1991) the escalation of animosities between the country's largest Muslim minority population and the national Bulgarian majority. Nevertheless, ethnic differences were channeled for mediation in the political and social space, without resorting to violent means. Ethnic politics do not always represent a 'ticking time bomb waiting to explode' if they involve cooperation and compromise. Democratic ethno- pluralism was constructive in the Bulgarian case to fostering civic unity, while guaranteeing safeguards for ethnic identity and self- expression in various spheres (education, party politics and the media). During the country's unstable transition period, democratic ethno-pluralism fostered the conditions for managing the initial escalation of ethnic tensions.

This observation will be explored through the application of a detailed analysis of ethnic politics during democratic transition, with a focus on the largest minority in Bulgaria – the Muslims (consisting of Roma, Pomaks, Turks, Tatars and Circassians) - in the transition period of 1989-1997. Bulgaria remains one of the exemplar cases in the region with the remedying of the country's ethnic animosities through political party re-configurations, elite decisions, external influences, and the positive transformation of societal attitudes, proving that ethnic hatred is not fixed as a matter of historical continuity, but is susceptible to change and amelioration through democratic pluralist methods. The lack of escalation of violent ethnic conflict in Bulgaria can be also attributed to the absence of a "stateness" problem, which Linz and Stepan (1996) identify as a restraining factor during democratic transition. Bulgaria's problem was a national-based one, requiring the search for and reformulation of national identity and the securing of minority rights. Second, the analysis will examine the successful management of ethnic animosities in Bulgaria in 1989 - 1997, through an analysis of ethnic politics from liberation from Ottoman rule (1878) until 1989, as well as of key events that led to the weakening of ethnic cleavages after 1989. Among the themes explored are the weakness of nationalist parties, the creation and evolution of the Turkish/Muslim minority party - the Movement for Rights and Freedoms - as a third major political force and mediator, internal liberal and external European support for minority rights, and the positive evolution of societal perceptions towards the ethnic 'other'.

1. Nationalism, National Identity and Democratic Ethno-pluralism: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The roots and evolution of nationalism in Central and South-Eastern Europe can be traced to the early nineteenth century. Nationalism, a modern political ideology imported from the West, which first emerged among English Tudor aristocrats and later received major impulses from the French and American revolutions, as a form of challenging monarchical privilege and establishing democratic governance representative of citizens' interests. Nationalism became influential and made its way into the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with advances in social mobility - the efforts of traveling East European intellectuals or émigrés to European

countries influenced by the ideology on nationalism – and increased communication (Greenfeld, 1995:19; Hroch, 1996:85-86). National consciousness and nationalism emerged prior to the formation of nation-states in the region, subjugated under imperial rule. Miroslav Hroch (1996) argues that an “exogenous ruling class dominated ethnic groups which occupied a compact territory but lacked their own nobility, political unity or continuous literary tradition” (p.80). Following the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires under the impetus of national revolutionary movements, the revival of language and culture of subjugated nationalities, and favorable external influences, nationalism became the driving force behind the overthrowing of the “exogenous ruling class” and the crafting of the new nation-states in the region (Hroch, 1996:80-83; Berend, 1996:173).

Nationalism is a contested concept and it continues to reappear in different forms. It has been analyzed as a plural “chameleon-like phenomenon, capable of assuming a variety of ideological forms” (Ozkirimli, 2000:61), as “diverse,” “fluid” and “protean” (Cockburn, 2000:613). Meanings of nationhood and ethnicity situated in such a fluid context may also vary. Nationalism cannot be defined separately, without understanding what nation, state and ethnicity are, which are not separate categories but mutually intersect in the constitution of nationalism, and account for its diverse forms of expression. There are various theories on nationalism and definitions on nationalism, nation and ethnicity.

Nationalism emerges with the idea of a nation. ‘Objective’ and ‘subjective’ approaches have produced diverging understandings of what a nation is. The ‘objective’ (or cultural) approach emphasizes the presence of common territory, language, historic fate, traditions or religion as constituent elements of nationhood. On the other hand, ‘subjective’ approaches identify a nation based on the presence of a common will, sentiment, imagination or belonging. Although useful, the two approaches have several limitations: ‘objective’ definitions tend to use broad national signifiers such as language or religion, which can apply to more than one nation (e.g. Germans and Austrians speak the same language, but are two separate nations); ‘subjective’ definitions are also broad and may encompass many cases such as regions, tribes or empires. (Smith, 2001:12) In reality, it is elements of both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ approaches that define a nation. The nation is neither a state characterized by Gellner (1983) as “an agency possessing the monopoly of legitimate violence” (3), with autonomous institutions and legal power over a particular territory, nor an ethnic community- defined as people sharing similar beliefs, language and customs. The nation is “a felt and lived human community...occupying a homeland, and having common myths and shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members” (Smith, 2001:13). The people constituting a nation possess a will for autonomy, national identity and express desire for self-determination (Ibid: pp.13-20). The feeling of identifying yourself with a nation and belonging to a nation (national

consciousness) is necessary, to have the emergence of nationalism as a unifying ideological movement.

It is important to recognize, that there is a difference of opinion among scholars on nationalism in regards to the historical periodization and sequence of the rise of nations and nationalism. Smith (1991) for instance, argues that nations are founded on pre-modern ethnic cores. Thus, he perceives modern nations to have ancient roots (38-42). On the other hand, Gellner (1983), a functionalist, asserts that nations and nationalism emerge with the coming of modernity and the rise of industrialization. His analysis relates the standardization of education, language and culture, the division of labor in industry, and the development of administrative and commercial structures to the rise of nationalism, and formation of nations (pp. 19-38; 50-52; 110-122; 137-143). Gellner (1983) argues, that “it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around” (p.55). In sum, the rise of nations is either viewed to have occurred prior to modernity where nations formed around ethnic cores, or is perceived as a modern phenomenon that came about under the influence of nationalism and industrialization.

In fact, both perspectives deserve merit. Relating these to the case of Bulgaria, it will be elaborated below, that in spite of the country’s political -economic domination by the Ottoman Empire and Greek cultural and linguistic influence, a Bulgarian nationality (rather than a nation in the modern sense) did exist prior to the rise of nationalism and the formation of an independent nation-state. Memories of former statehood (Bulgarian medieval state) stimulated the preservation of historical consciousness and national solidarity. For instance, monks in monasteries in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria were able to preserve through their works memories of statehood and signifiers of Bulgarian nationhood, such as language, history and culture. The rise of nationalism in the late 18th early 19th centuries, the founding of an independent Bulgarian Exarchy (1870), along with the revival of Bulgarian language and education by intellectual awakeners and the Church, were the crucial factors that strengthened national consciousness and stimulated a national revolutionary struggle that led to the creation of an independent Bulgarian nation-state (Andreeva, 1998:84). Although the country industrialized at a much later stage, the spread of education and the popularization of the Bulgarian language and history by Church figures (i.e. monk Paisii Hilendarski) and intellectuals in all spheres of life, strengthened people’s sense of belonging to a nation (Ibid:84-86). Nationalism in the 19th century became the driving force in the national revolutionary struggles for liberation from imperial domination and the formation of independent nation-states.

Nationalism is the process of devoting one’s interests to that of the political community (Kemp, 1999:8). Nationalism is an ideology that is solely focused on the nation and promotes its well-being. The meaning of nationalism has several dimensions. Nationalism is a socio-political movement characterized by an emphasis on the revival of history, national folklore, literature, and

as Miroslav Hroch (1996) asserts, it is the first phase in the development of East European nationalism (p.81). Language and national symbols are also inseparable elements from nationalism, such as for instance the national anthem, the flag or names of national heroes. National symbols “serve to express, represent and reinforce the boundary definition of the nation and to unite the members inside through a common imagery and shared memories, myths and values” (Smith, 2001:8). Nationalism is “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation” (Ibid: 10). In addition, according to Gellner (1983), nationalism is also a “political principle,” with an emphasis on the unity of the political and national elements (p.1). In sum, nationalism is a “political principle” defined by aspirations for autonomy (the willingness to ground the national will through a state), common identity and unity, concerned with the national well-being. It is also an embodiment of common memories, expressed in national symbols and an attachment to traditions, language, culture and folklore. Nationalism is a mobilizing force and a “political principle” bringing together the “political unity and the national unity” (Rupnik, 1996:17).

Nationalism may adopt various forms (has different faces), among the more prominent three variations being civic, ethnic and cultural. Civic nationalism is rooted in the civic conception of nationhood and is deemed to be the most inclusive of all types. Civic nationalism mobilizes members from diverse ethnic backgrounds that accept the prevailing national institutional and political framework of the state they occupy and enjoy equal access to political rights and all the ‘cultural goods’ of the nation (Nielsen, 1999:121-122). Although theoretically civic nationalism constitutes an attachment to common political principles, in practice it may also necessitate the adoption of some cultural components by those who wish to become part of the civic nation. Such components may involve the ability to speak the official language, mandatory education in the official language, knowledge of the country’s history and some traditions. Nevertheless, in a civic nation, space is provided for the preservation of minorities’ languages and culture. When cultural nationalism prevails in a state, a privilege is placed on its culture, language, customs and heritage. Participation in this cultural project is required by all citizens, and at times the cultural (or religious) freedoms of national minorities might be curtailed if it is believed that they clash with the dominant culture (Ibid: 125-126). On the other hand, ethnic nationalism is exclusive, divisive, and defines membership in terms of common ancestry or a blood link. No matter how well one knows the language or adopts the cultural practices of the dominant group, they cannot become part of the group due to lack of common origin (Ibid: 121).

As was the case in Bulgaria, nationalism in its civic form (capable of uniting diverse groups around common civic values) along with the introduction of ethno-pluralist methods for accommodating minority concerns, were constructive components for remedying ethnic tensions during democratic transition. Civic nationalism has provided the conditions - a stable political

unit, with a defined territory - for democracy to establish itself. The constructive role of civic nationalism in transition cannot be ignored or denounced. As Ghia Nodia (1992) rightfully asserts that it "...is the historical force that has provided the political units for democratic government" (p.7), and as Linz and Stepan (1996) argue, democracy is a system designed to govern a state, and without a stable and well-defined state structure consolidation of democracy is a challenging endeavour (p.7). Nationalism in its civic form may prove to be a useful for crafting a strong state structure and identity formation necessary for the successful transition to democracy and consolidation of civic nationhood (Nodia, 1992:3 – 6).

A well-defined state structure (Linz & Stepan, 1996), consolidated civic national identity, along with ethnic or religious minorities toleration and rights via ethno-pluralist structures and guarantees, are essential ingredients to remedying ethno-religious tensions during democratic transition. On the other hand, the existence of nationality problems, minority oppression and assimilatory policies, as well as conflicting national identities can frustrate a democratic transition process. First, a "stateness" problem occurs when disagreements occur over the territory of a state and rights of citizenship (Linz & Stepan, 1996:16). In such a situation, a small ethnic or religious minority group within a state seeking some rights or self-determination might question the legitimacy of an oppressive state and express separatist demands. Consolidating democracy under such a condition is difficult (Ibid: 26). On the other hand, if the state is territorially well defined, tolerant and its legitimate boundaries are not challenged by the people comprising the state, then problems of "stateness" are unlikely to pose a threat to democratic transition. Even if "stateness" problems occur, they are likely to be resolved through legislation and decrees over a shorter period of time; whereas problems of national identity take longer time to resolve, as this involves peoples' hearts and minds (Kuzio, 2001:175).

Often, "stateness" is assumed to include nationality and state territoriality. As Taras Kuzio (2001) rightfully argues, a necessary distinction must be made between nationality (national identity) and "stateness". He notes that despite the existence of a territorially unified state, cultural, linguistic and religious differences may complicate a democratic transition process (p.169). A common recognition of borders, the reconciliation of ethnic divisions, along with the creation of a strong civic national identity uniting diverse groups, is necessary for a successful democratization process.

National identity can adopt three different forms, from which one can judge the complexities around transition. National identity contains civic, ethnic and cultural components. Civic identity includes "attachment to a common territory, citizenship, belief in the same political principles or ideology, respect for political institutions and enjoyment of equal political rights, and will to be a part of the nation"(Shulman, 2002: 558-559). Cultural identity is defined by language, religion and traditions, and ethnic identity is based on common ancestry and race. Civic identity proves to

be the most inclusive among the three types. Civic nationalism is non-assimilatory, does not require cultural uniformity, and is able to bind citizens into a larger community. On the other hand, the cultural conception of nationhood requires the adoption of the majority culture and the pursuit of assimilatory policies; whereas the ethnic concept of nationhood presupposes the favouring of a particular ethnic group's culture and does not allow assimilation, which is deemed impossible (Shulman, 2002: 560-561). Thus, it is best for a democratic state to implement and promote civic values, around which groups with diverse cultural or ethnic identities can share and reconcile differences through ethno-pluralist means, while uniting around a common civic identity, as will be exemplified below was possible in the case of Bulgaria.

Uniting diverse, historically rooted ethno-religious minorities around a common civic identity can be accomplished through the application of an ethno-pluralist democratic model. Ethno-pluralism is "a coherent policy model that goes beyond *ad hoc* arrangements and notions of minority rights. Its essence is to focus on all groups involved and to foster civic unity while safeguarding ethnic identities" (Karklins, 2000:219). State policies of ethnic homogenization, repression or neglect can become problematic and may lead to the escalation of tensions. As Arend Lijphart (1977) notes "because of the tenacity of primordial loyalties, any effort to eradicate them not only is quite unlikely to succeed, especially in the short run, but may well be counter-productive and may stimulate segmental cohesion and intersegmental violence rather than national cohesion" (p.24). On the other hand, the provision of a framework, which enables the preservation and fostering of minority rights and identities, can promote integration and national unity in the long run.

In a pluralist democracy, state authority devolves to a plurality of groups. Contrary to proponents of liberal democratic theory, who recognize only the individual as the sole political actor in a liberal state, pluralists perceive associations to be the locus of guarantee of individual rights and an outlet for expression of diverse interests. Groups are more powerful than individuals in expressing demands towards the state, because they have more bargaining power to ensure the protection of individual or group rights and limit the possibilities for their abuse by the state (Karklins, 1994: 13-14). In a pluralist democracy, minority rights and identification no longer constitute individual private concerns, but become part of the public sphere. It is important for the state to take into consideration minority concerns, as the alternative may lead to the formation of reactionary forces challenging the authority of the state and expressing demands for territorial autonomy. The interests of a historically rooted ethno-religious minority, as was the case with Bulgaria's Muslim minorities, should be acknowledged, which are: 1.) political - concerned with participation in the political decision-making process; 2.) cultural – in regards to language policy or cultural associations; or 3.) economic – dealing with inequitable distribution of resources affecting minority populated areas (Ibid:7). Minority groups may have separate schools, organizations and identities, while also sharing civic values, institutions and identity along with everyone else.

Ethno-pluralism perceives identities to be flexible rather than fixed, interacting with one another in a constructive manner towards civic unity (Karklins, 2000:220-222). “Rather than trying to melt ethno-cultural groups into a new cultural and political whole, a policy of ethno-pluralism affirms the distinctiveness of ethnic groups in order to bind them into a political whole” (Ibid:222). In a political system of power-sharing, multiple identities and interests are best accommodated through pluralist structures such as political coalitions, parties or interest groups, and by adherence to pluralist values of cooperation and compromise. Difference is seen to be inspiring rather than frightening, a bridge to a common civic unity (Karklins, 1994: 8-16). In sum, ethnic particularities are best addressed via an ethno-pluralist democratic model, which operates in a country with a lack of “stateness” problem, with the predominance of civic nationalism uniting everyone around a common civic identity, while at the same time ethno-pluralist structures ensure the representation of minority group interests and protection of rights.

The existence of a unified state and the application of democratic ethno-pluralist politics were beneficial in remedying Bulgaria’s escalating ethnic tensions during democratic transition. As it will be explored below, in spite of instances in Bulgarian history of assimilation and violence directed against the country’s Muslim minorities - during the interwar years and communist rule - the application of ethno-pluralism in the post-communist period was productive in establishing to a certain extent a break with this uneasy past. Democratic ethno-pluralist methods such as political negotiation and compromise between various political and social groups were instrumental in managing escalating ethnic tensions during transition and facilitated the consolidation of national civic identities, while providing space for the preservation of ethnic and cultural identities. To be able to understand ethnic politics during democratic transition in Bulgaria, it is essential to consider the historical background of the problem, which can be divided into four major periods: 1.) Ottoman occupation and administration (1393-1878); 2.) national independence until the establishment of a communist regime (1878 – 1947); 3.) communist rule (1947-1989); and 4.) post-communist period (1989- present). During each of these broad historical stages, it is important to examine ethnic relations and the evolution of Bulgarian nationalism, in order to be able to understand post-communist ethnic relations and political continuities or discontinuities. Various developments in ethnic relations and forms of nationalism were influenced internally by government policies and externally by Great Power interests, and after 1947 – by Cold War politics.

2. Setting Bulgaria’s Ethnic problem: Overview of the History of Bulgarian Nationalism and Treatment of Bulgaria’s Muslim Minorities

i. Bulgarian History and the Rise of Bulgarian Nationalism

Efforts for the consolidation of the modern nation-states in the Balkan Peninsula began under the conditions of imperial domination. For about five centuries, Balkan nations were conquered and

ruled by the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires (Mancev, 1992:9). The Bulgarian nation fell under Ottoman domination in 1393, and the Bulgarian state ceased to exist. Prior to the Ottoman conquest, Bulgaria was a medieval state whose foundations were laid in 681 (the first Bulgarian state). The ethnic groups that comprised the medieval Bulgarian state were the proto-Bulgarians (coming from Asia Minor), Thracians and Slavs, which subsequently mingled over time to form the Bulgarian nation. The process of formation of a Bulgarian nation from ethnically diverse groups was solidified not only by conquest, intermarriage and combination of diverse cultural practices, but also with the establishment in 864 by Prince Boris I of Orthodox Christianity as the state's religion. The Bulgarian medieval state was at its apogee in the 9th and early 10th centuries (See Appendix, Figure 1). Its vast territory stretched from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, marked by flourishing trade relations, culture, art, literature (the works of the monk Chernorizec Hrabr i.e. “*Za Bukvite*” – “About the Letters”) and legal codes written in the Cyrillic alphabet, founded by the monks Cyril and Methodius (Filipov, 2000:28-31; Crampton, 1997:10-24; Fowkes, 2002:21). In the 10 century, the first Bulgarian state fell under Byzantine rule well until 1185. The second Bulgarian state was established in 1185 and lasted until 1393 (Crampton, 1997:24-26). With the Ottoman conquest of Bulgaria and the Balkans in the 14th century, the Bulgarian state ceased to exist until the 19th century, but the statist tradition was preserved (Mancev, 1999:20).

The Balkan Peninsula, at the crossroads of civilizations, “a gateway between Europe, Asia, and Africa and the existence of a well-developed road system for carrying military, administrative, commercial, and cultural traffic since ancient times” was of vital interest to the Ottomans (Eminov, 2000:130). The Ottoman conquest of the region secured access to these key arteries. In closest proximity to the centre of Ottoman imperial rule and strategic trade routes (Bosporus and Dardanelles), Bulgaria was placed under direct Ottoman political and economic administration, subjected to the absolute authority of the Sultan and his administrators, while a relative degree of autonomy was provided to imperial subjects only in religious and cultural matters through the *millet* (religious nation) system. The Empire was divided across religious and class lines. The “People of the Book” – Jews and Christians, were given the right to self-governance, pertaining only to religious and educational matters, and did not have to adhere to the *Sharia* (the body of Islamic legislation) (Bieber, 2000:14-15; Mancev, 1999:11).

Although Christians and Jews were governed by separate religious authorities (Patriarchate in Constantinople for Orthodox Christians) and not the *Sharia*, their status was inferior to that of Muslims. This stratification based on the profession of faith determined the economic status of subjects and the applicability of particular laws. For example, only Muslims were allowed to serve in the army, and non-Muslims were subject to numerous taxes (i.e. *cizye* – poll tax), the most severe of which was considered to be the *devshirme* (child levy or also referred to by Bulgarian historians as “the blood tax”) - a separation of young boys from their families, who

became Muslim and were recruited in the Ottoman army (Janissary corps). Society was also divided into classes. On the top of the hierarchy was the Sultan, followed by the state service (court scribes, soldiers etc.) recruited from members of the three recognized religions, traders (Ottoman and Bulgarian *chorbadji*), and the rest of society was considered as *raya* – the servants of the Sultan and his administrators (Bieber, 2000:14-15; Warhola & Boteva, 2003:257). Thus, the stratification of society in the Ottoman Empire according to religious affiliation, determining economic status and legal privileges (or lack thereof), led to the intertwining of religious and ethnic identification in the 19th century and consolidation of separate ethno-religious identities.

This process was facilitated with the establishment of national Exarchates in the 19th century, independent from the Greek Patriarchate in Constantinople. This contributed to the strengthening of national consciousness and facilitated the penetration of religious institutions by nationalist ideologies from the West. Prior to the establishment of national Churches, non-Greek Orthodox people were subject to the Phanariot Greeks and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople. Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire were not only subject to the political and economic domination of the Ottomans, but also to Greek authority in religious, educational and cultural matters. Religious services and education were held in the Greek language. There was restriction on liturgies in Church Slavonic or education in the Bulgarian language (Poulton, 2000:47; Sugar, 1996:19). As the Czech historian Konstantin Irechek (1978) notes, the Hellenicisation process was so deep, that when asked, many Bulgarians identified themselves as Greek and were ashamed to call themselves Bulgarian (p.547). The beginning of the reversal of this process was set in motion in March 1870. Based on continuous pressure from Russia, and resistance from the patriarch in Constantinople, Sultan Abdulaziz (1861-1876) issued a *ferman* (decree) on this date, granting the creation of an independent Bulgarian Exarchate, with assigned dioceses from the Danube to the Balkan range (Sugar, 1996:25-26). The role of the Bulgarian Church and the works of intellectual awakeners such as monk Paisii Hilendarski with his “History of the Slavo-Bulgarians”(1762) (aiming to revive Bulgarian national consciousness and self-esteem through emphasis on culture, language and the greatness of the medieval states and Bulgarian Church) and priest Stojko Vladislavov (Sofronii Vrachanski) considered as the founder of Bulgarian literary language (published *Nedelnik* – a volume of sermons and an autobiography – *Zhitije i Stradanija Greshnovo Sofronija*) were some of the major sources contributing to the revival of national identity in the 18th and 19th centuries (Fowkes,1998:48; Mancev, 1999:25). According to the Bulgarian philosopher and sociologist Kiril Neshev (1997), the tradition of the inseparability of the Bulgarian Church from the process of national enlightenment and desire for independence begins with Paisii (p.76). Father Paisii, the first articulator of Bulgarian nationalism and revivalist of Bulgarian national consciousness urged the following in his *History* (See Appendix, Figure 2):

“So I wrote down for you what was known about your race and language. Read and know so that you would not be ridiculed and reproached by other tribes and peoples...I wrote it for you who love your people and Bulgarian homeland, and who like to know about your people and language...But there are those who do not care to know about their own Bulgarian people and turn to foreign ways and foreign tongue; and they do not care for their own Bulgarian language but learn to read and speak Greek and are ashamed to call themselves Bulgarians. O, you senseless fool! Why are you ashamed to call yourself Bulgarian and do not read and speak your language? Or had the Bulgarians no kingdom and state?...In the entire Slavic race the Bulgarians have had the greatest glory, they first called themselves tsars, they first had a patriarch, they first became Christians, and they ruled over the largest territory...But why, you fool, should you be ashamed of your people and linger after a foreign tongue. ...You, Bulgarian, so do not be deceived, but know your people and language, and learn your language!” (41-44).

Paisii's *History* was an encouragement directed towards Bulgarians to be proud of their national origins and struggle against their inferiority complex (which Paisii transforms into pride). The book was also written for the purpose of the revival of language, culture, national and religious values (Todorova, 1995:75). The Bulgarian Church became the “bridge to the political independence of Bulgarians” (Sugar, 1996:25) and the rise of nationalism. As Poulton (2000) observes:

“The millet became established as the prime focus of identity outside of family and locality, bequeathing a legacy of confusion in modern times between concepts of citizenship, religion, and ethnicity. Furthermore, as the millet system placed control of education and much of the millet's internal affairs in the hands of the millet hierarchy, and hence beyond official state control, it proved ideally suited to the transmission of the new ideology of nationalism intruding from the West” (p.47)

Orthodox Christianity became the identifier of Bulgarian ethnic and national identity, and the Turk was identified with Islam. The religious and national elements intertwined in the struggle for national independence and affirmation of Bulgarian national consciousness (Tafradjiiski, Radoeva & Minev, 1992: 209-210). This lack of separation of the religious and national elements from the Ottoman period, carried over to the post-independence (1878) years, when the “faithful” and “*giaur*” (unfaithful) switched places. Memories of the experiences of Bulgarians under Ottoman rule were mixed. While relations in the Ottoman Empire between Bulgarian Christians and Muslims might have been to a certain extent considered friendly and neighborly – “*komshuluk*,” there were also dark moments in the history of relations between the two groups,

contributing to mutual animosity and suspicion (Mancev, 1992:35) .Some examples provided by Mancev (1992),

“...with a lasting place in the national psychology of the Bulgarian, was the participation of Muslims in the quenching of the Bulgarian uprisings against the Ottoman rule. Best remembered along these lines were the bashi-bozuk carnages during the 1876 April Uprising: these atrocities deepened the gap between the Bulgarians and the Turks, found their place in the folklore literature, poetry and art, left a scar in the memory of the people, a scar of danger, animosity and historical guilt” (p.35).

These mixed memories and experiences were to affect the Muslim minority in various ways after independence, depending on the form of nationalism that was predominant at particular point in time, which was influenced by external and internal political factors.

Bulgarian nationalism adopted a variety of forms in the 18th and 19th centuries. Great Power interests in the region (especially Britain), as well as Bulgaria's relations with neighboring Balkan states (in regards to territorial concessions from the collapsing Ottoman Empire) and internal political developments, were the configurations that determined the predominance of some forms of nationalism over others, and in turn affected internal government policies of assimilation or passive toleration of the country's Muslim population. The key events, which determined the direction on the Bulgarian national question (the economic, political, territorial and cultural relations between nations; struggle for national emancipation and consolidation of an autonomous nation-state) were the establishment of an independent Exarchate (1870) and liberation from Ottoman rule; the treaty of San Stefano followed by the Berlin Congress dividing up Bulgarian territory (1878); the unification of the Kingdom of Bulgaria and East Rumelia (1885); proclamation of national independence (1908); the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the two World Wars (1914-1918;1939-1944) (Andreeva; 1998:46). During these historical stages, Bulgarian nationalism adopted several forms: 1.) anti-imperial, romantic and ethnic 2.) irredentist – aiming to unite lost territories (especially Macedonia and Southern Dobrudja) leading to the Balkan Wars and stimulating involvement in WWI 3.) revanchist and cultural nationalism (from WWI until the collapse of communism) and 4.) post-totalitarian nationalism – mixture of civic, ethnic and cultural forms (Daskalov, 1998:217- 223). A detailed exploration of these forms throughout Bulgarian history is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is essential to mention major occurrences, in order to understand how these influenced ethnic relations from 1878 to 1997.

Prior to independence in 1878, the Bulgarian national struggle was centered on liberation from Ottoman political and economic rule and Greek ecclesiastical domination (Andreeva, 1998:46-47). During the years of national struggle and subsequent liberation with the intervention of the

Russian army in 1878, Bulgarian nationalism was romantic (aiming to revive a glorious past; emphasis on history, religion, language, folklore; origin and cultural cohesion was important rather than territory) and was an anti-imperial movement. Nationalism emerged in reaction to foreign domination, was romanticized, and thus solidified the Bulgarian national desire for an autonomous ethno-culturally cohesive nation-state. The national revival, the support of the Bulgarian Church, an educated middle class and secret national revolutionary committees formed in neighboring nations by émigré intellectuals influenced by the nationalist ideology (i.e. Belgrade - the legion of Georgi Rakovski; Bulgarian Central Committee in Bucharest – Karavelov and Levski) gave way to an organized armed revolutionary struggle for independence (Daskalov, 1998:200; 214; Sugar, 1996:25; Mancev, 1999:23). During this period ethno-cultural nationalist traits were present, such as an emphasis on language, folklore, tradition, dress (the donning of the Turkish *fez* for the traditional Bulgarian *kalpak*, and Turkish scarf for Bulgarian scarf), composition of revolutionary poetry and press, and revival of memories of a heroic past to defeat present enemies (See Appendix, Figure 3) (Daskalov, 1998: 214-217).

Following the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century and its transformation into the “sick man of Europe”, accompanied by a favorable international conjuncture (British-Russian cooperation), Bulgaria was liberated from Ottoman rule in 1878. Liberation was achieved with persistent and numerous national uprisings (although unsuccessful) and with the diplomatic and military intervention of Russia. At this point in time, with Russian aid, the San Stefano treaty was signed (March 3, 1878), which outlined the borders of the Bulgarian nation-state closely coinciding with the dioceses of the Exarchate and the ethno-linguistic boundaries of the Bulgarian nation – from the Black Sea to Lake Ohrid and from the Danube to the Aegean (See Appendix, Figure 4) (Todorova, 1995:76). This territorial acquisition was to become the nationalist “dream” (Greater Bulgaria or San Stefano Bulgaria) for Bulgarians in later years and was to have implications for ethnic minority relations. This “dream” was shattered with the arbitrary imposition of the Berlin treaty by the Great Powers in 1878, which divided San Stefano territories, in fears of an increasing Russian influence to the South and economic access to the Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles). Bulgaria was divided into the Kingdom of Bulgaria and East Rumelia, and Macedonia and Thrace remained under Ottoman rule; Nish was given to Serbia and Dobrudja to Romania (Mancev, 1992:10-22; Todorova, 1995:56).

The Berlin Congress (1878) was to set another stage in Bulgarian nationalism, adopting an irredentist form, with the aim to attain lost territories populated by fellow nationals. Neighboring newly formed nation-states were also not satisfied with their territorial boundaries, and each one of them developed “megali” ideas (i.e. Greater Serbia or Greater Croatia), aiming to acquire territories populated with co-nationals, which were also ‘historically justified’ by the existence of medieval states. Following the first Balkan coalition war of 1912 against the Ottoman Empire, the

Second Balkan War of 1913 turned into a mutual strife for the division of the Ottoman legacy, where each party in the conflict sought to acquire ‘historically justified’ territory and realize their national dream. These objectives carried over to the First World War. Although Bulgaria lost and acquired some territories throughout this period, and afterwards during the Second World War, the dream of Greater Bulgaria was never achieved (See Appendix, Figure 5) and the country was among the losers in all the wars that it engaged in (with the only exception of a victory in the Serb-Bulgarian war) (Daskalov, 1998:220-221).

Following the Balkan Wars and the First World War, in a state of national collapse, Bulgarian nationalism transformed to revanchist and cultural one, in efforts for retaliation to national humiliation and territorial losses. This period witnessed an emphasis on cultural homogenization, the strengthening of state and educational institutions, highlighting the greatness of Bulgarian cultural heritage and history. Furthermore, the inter-war period witnessed instances of forced assimilation and Christianization of the country’s Muslim population (1912- 1913 and 1930s), in attempts to rid the country of any Turkish or Islamic presence (i.e. replacing of the *fez* for men and headscarves for women with Bulgarian hats *kalpak* and scarves). These assimilatory attempts were preceded by changes in the ideological climate in the country (liberal, conservative, agrarian or fascist) or in the international conjuncture. During communism, nationalism was cultural, expressed in historical works, literature, through public events, sports etc. By adopting cultural nationalism, the government aimed to accomplish the cultural and ethnic homogenization of the population, necessary for reaching the goal of a desired socialist identity. Its culminating point was in the 1980s, with the forced “Bulgarization” and secularization attempts of all Muslims, in efforts to create a socialist society (Daskalov, 1998:221-223). Following the collapse of communism, various nationalist forms became influential in Bulgarian political and social space, ranging from ethnic, cultural and civic. Overall, these nationalisms had diverse impact on Bulgaria’s Muslim minorities.

ii. History of the Treatment of the Muslim Minorities (1878-1989)

The pre-communist and communist periods in Bulgarian history were characterized by instances of differential treatment or relative tolerance towards the country’s Muslim population, influenced by socio-political developments in the country, external relations, wars and political changes in neighboring Turkey. Bulgaria incorporates various ethnic and religious minorities, including Jews, Armenians, Russians, Walachians, Ukrainians, Macedonians, Greeks, and the largest minorities approximately accounting for more than 10% of the total population, Muslims (See Appendix, Figure 6) (Ivanov & Ilieva, 2005:1). The Muslim minorities include representatives of ethnic groups such as the Roma, Turks (with the exception of Christian Turks – Gagauz), Tatars, Circassians as well as Bulgarian Muslims – referred to as ‘Pomaks’ (this term may have a negative connotation meaning ‘traitor,’ but here it will not be used in this pejorative sense). It is important to note, that it is difficult to establish accurately the number of representatives from each group, as some Roma, Tatars, Circassians and Pomaks tend to identify

themselves as Turk. According to the last 2001 Census of the Bulgarian Statistical Institute, the Turks in Bulgaria account for 746,664 of the total Bulgarian population (6 655,210), the Roma number 370,908, and the Pomaks, Tatars and Circassians are included in the total of the Bulgarian population (http://www.nsi.bg/Census_e/Census_e.htm). The number of people practicing Islam account for 966,978 of the total population. (http://www.nsi.bg/Census_e/Census_e.htm)

Ethnic relations ranging from Bulgarian independence from Ottoman rule in 1878 until the consolidation of communist rule in 1944 are characterized by scholars as a mixture of closeness, neighborliness and toleration, or that of suspicion, hostility or even hatred (Zhelyaskova, 2001, 284-285; Mancev, 1992:35-36). This observation of variance in intra-ethnic coexistence can be accounted to several factors, such as cultural similarities, country specific socio-political developments, as well as relations with Turkey and other states. The coexistence of Turks and other Muslim minorities with Bulgarians and other Christians in the Ottoman Empire was made possible due to the gradual “cultural hybridization” of these groups, and in other instances as of the evolution of a syncretic form of Islam intertwined with Christian tradition and some pagan rituals inherited from proto-orthodox people in the Balkans and pre-Islamic Turkish shamanism. The spread and adoption of a non-purist form of Islam (or folk Islam), and its intermixing with pagan and Christian traditions, reduced the likelihood of societal alienation of some Muslims who practiced this form of Islam, and secured their incorporation into the larger community (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 283-285). In addition, years of co-existence of different nationalities in the Ottoman empire have to a certain extent blurred distinctions between cultures and “[f]or the most part, Muslims and non-Muslims coexisted or periodically came into conflict as intimate neighbors with shared local identities and knowledge” (Neuburger, 2004:28). On the other hand, periods of hostility, hatred and assimilation of Muslims during and after the collapse of Ottoman rule, instigated by various Bulgarian governments were influenced by the volatile international conditions at the time (Balkan Wars and two World Wars) and changing political ideologies and national goals. During periods of government policies of assimilation of the Muslim minorities, emphasis was placed on: a) the revival of memories of Ottoman political and economic domination b.) the violent suppression of Bulgarian uprisings c.) the argument of the violent conversions to Islam of Bulgarians, a policy that was to affect mostly the Pomak population. These outbursts against the minorities often followed variations in Bulgarian nationalism in the process of consolidation of an independent nation-state, relations with Turkey and changes in the international conjuncture.

Following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, approximately 1 million Turks and other Muslims emigrated from Bulgaria. The population outflow continued during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the two World Wars (Hopken, 1997:55). The Turkish and other Muslim minorities (Tatars, Pomaks, Roma and Circassians) that

stayed in the country, consolidated their identities primarily around religion, and lived in closed and isolated rural communities (Ibid:56). This isolation of the Muslim minorities can be explained with the prevailing socio-political climate in the immediate post-independence period. Nationalism at the time was ethno-cultural, aiming to assert what is Bulgarian coupled by a pattern of modernization and “Westernization”, aiming to ‘wipe out’ any visible elements of the Ottoman past (i.e. by renaming towns bearing Turkish names, the transformation of mosques for non-religious purposes; transferring of Muslim cemeteries to the outskirts of towns etc.). As Wolfgang Hopken notes:

“While this policy was more a result of the Bulgarian elite’s understanding of ‘modernity’ and what a ‘European state’ should look like than a case of deliberate ethnic and religious discrimination, it nevertheless had an immediate impact on the living conditions of the Turkish and Muslim population, and on perceptions of their identity. It showed that they were now ‘aliens’ in the new state, which encouraged them either to emigrate or to ‘encapsulate’ themselves further within their religious group solidarity” (p.59)

The Bulgarian elite in the immediate post-independence period and subsequently interwar period, overall, did not facilitate the integration of Muslim minorities into the rest of society. While Bulgarian governments during this period had to conform to international minority treaties under the auspices of the League of Nations, and ensure the provision of rights for Bulgaria’s minorities, in practice their attitude towards the Muslim minorities was passive. This passivity and negligence (economic, social and educational) on the part of Bulgaria’s governments, along with efforts for modernization and ‘wiping out’ of the country’s signifiers of the Orient, gradually contributed to the “encapsulation” of Muslims within their own communities. This process strengthened the Muslims’ religious identities and directed their sympathies towards Turkey (Mancev, 1992:40). Bulgarian state policies towards its Muslim minorities during the interwar years were characterized by double standards. On the one hand, there was 1) an official recognition of the Muslim population as a minority and 2) government compliance with obligations under international treaties for the treatment of minority populations (moved primarily by concerns for Bulgaria’s international standing, revisionist goals and the treatment of its fellow nationals on foreign territories). On the other hand, 1) the Bulgarian state made attempts by various means to decrease the Muslim population and encourage its emigration to Turkey and 2) lacked concrete state policies addressing educational matters and economic development in the regions populated by Muslims (Rhopdoean, Kurdjali and North-Eastern Bulgaria) (Ibid, 1992:36). The position of the Muslim population in Bulgaria was also on unstable grounds: first, it was a group which was associated with former Ottoman imperial rule; second, during the uncertain war period, Muslims were affected by the governments’ efforts to strike a delicate balance between the provision of minority rights and the protection of national

sovereignty and security; third, the Turkish minority's close proximity to its country of origin was the reason for the difficulty of the Bulgarian state to strike a balance between minority toleration and concerns for national security and territorial integrity (especially during the 1920s split within the Muslim community between Kemalists and anti-Kemalists) (Stojanov, 1998:61-62).

In sum, Bulgaria complied by international treaties guaranteeing minority religious, cultural and educational autonomy, and incorporated provisions for safeguarding minority rights in the first Bulgarian constitution (1879-1947) and Bulgarian law. On the other hand, the elite's preoccupation with modernization and Bulgarian ethno-cultural revival, while neglecting to a certain extent the Muslim minorities' economic and educational needs, contributed to the latter group's isolation from the rest of society and sowed the seeds for the formation of a separate ethno-religious identity. This merging of ethnic and religious identification was a continuity inherited from the Ottoman millet system, which the new Bulgarian state failed to revise. Governments in the interwar period continued to associate Muslim with Turk and Bulgarian with Christian. This tendency, along with government negligence towards the Muslim minorities, was sufficient to create some problems in the interwar period.

The first Bulgarian Constitution (Turnovo Constitution) (1879-1947) guaranteed freedom of religion to adherents of other faiths, and declared Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the dominant state religion (articles 37-41). All ethno-religious minorities were granted Bulgarian citizenship rights, which were equal to these of ethnic Bulgarians (Articles 54 and 55; *Bulgarski Konstitucii I Konstitucionni Proekti*: 24-25). Muslims fought in the Bulgarian army for Bulgaria, as was in the case of the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885 and WWI. Several treaties between Bulgaria and Turkey subsequently granted autonomy to the Turks in Bulgaria. The Chief Mufti's office, Religious Courts and the Mufti Vicarage dealt with the spiritual, administrative and judicial (inheritance and family law) affairs of Bulgarian Muslims up to the mid-1930s (where such were already eliminated in neighboring Kemalist Turkey). Mosques were tolerated, spiritual leaders were paid civil servant salaries and private schools inside the mosques were formed, although receiving irregular and limited financial support by the state. In addition, the printing and circulation of Turkish press was also tolerated (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 286-287; Hopken, 1997:56). Overall, these arrangements were accommodating for the Muslims and allowed for autonomy in religious and cultural matters. On the other hand, the duality in Bulgaria's minority policy was evident in its neglect for the economic, educational and political integration of the Muslims.

During the interwar period, the community was in an underdeveloped educational, political and economic state. In regards to educational policy, many ethnic Turks did not know Bulgarian and thus could not compete equally on the labor market (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 287). The illiteracy rate among Muslims was high, by the 1930s reaching 80.6% among men and 90.6% percent among

women (*Statisticheski Godishnik na Tzarstvo Bulgarija*, 1938:36). Private community schools were mostly funded by their members and donors, and the curriculum was with a religious orientation (Stojanov, 1998:70). The financial situation of schools was strained, receiving irregular and limited support from the state. For instance, per capita expenditure in 1907-1908 for a student in a Bulgarian school was 31.8 leva, and for a student in an Islamic school – 5.4 leva (*Statistika na Obrazovanieto v Tzarstvo Bulgariya*, 1911:224,250). Furthermore, teachers in Muslim schools were under-qualified, underpaid and could not receive government pensions (Stojanov, 1998:71). It should be noted that the Agrarian Government of Alexander Stamboliiski (1923) contributed somewhat to the educational advancement of the Muslim population, by increasing funding for private schools, the founding of a teacher's college, and the introduction of a pension plan for private school teachers (Ibid:73). However, these efforts were short-lived and the general trend of limited education prevailed, thus contributing to a scarcity of intellectuals among Muslims. In terms of political participation, as previously mentioned, there were representatives of the Muslim and Turkish communities in Parliament as members of Bulgarian parties, numbering no more than 20 in 1883 and no less than 4 in 1933. Nevertheless, they had limited room for ethnic bargaining in Bulgarian politics (Ibid: 66-67).

In regards to economic development, economic stagnation was prevalent in areas with concentrated Muslim population, or in areas with mixed population. The state did not have a special program to address the economic underdevelopment of these regions, primarily Kurdjali (populated with Turks), Pomak populated areas in the Rhodopi Mountains and regions in North Eastern Bulgaria. As already mentioned, the Muslim population was primarily rural, dependent for its survival on agricultural production. Even this outlet for survival was blocked with the passing of a controversial Forestry Law in the Rhodopes, which gave the right to the state to lay a hand on all forests in the area. Administrators used this law to extract taxes and issue fines to members of the community attempting to use the land. Under conditions of permanent hunger and harassment by state administrators, many Muslims were driven to emigrate (Mancev, 1992:37-38). Thus, while there was an official recognition of minority rights based on obligations under international or bilateral treaties with Turkey, as well as guarantees in the Bulgarian constitution, the policies of the Bulgarian state at the time were flawed, neglecting matters of education, economic development and practical socio-political integration of its Muslim population.

The Bulgarian state was unable to strike a balance between efforts for integration of the Muslim minorities and the protection of national territorial integrity. Bulgarian governments' policies in the interwar period were driven by irredentist and ethno-cultural nationalism, with the aim to regain back lost territories populated by allegedly fellow nationals (i.e. Macedonia - nationality was determined based on linguistic and cultural commonalities) and rid Bulgaria of any remnants of the Ottoman past in efforts towards modernization and formation of a Bulgarian national identity.

Bulgaria's ruling circles and population focus was on the Bulgarian minorities' situation in Macedonia and Southern Dobrudja, and Bulgaria's relations with Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania. The Turkish factor was not an immediate state priority and the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria were left on their own devices, while at the same time ensuring their confessional and cultural autonomy (Mancev, 1992:47). Overall, the Muslim minorities' efforts were centered on the consolidation of a religious identity and they did not pursue any ethnic mobilization. In turn, the Bulgarian state respected these efforts and chose not to interfere in Muslim affairs, as long as they did not pose a threat in any way to national sovereignty and security (Hopken, 1997:61).

State policies of relative toleration and instances of repression varied in the interwar period, where the latter were influenced by the liberation war (1878), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1914-1918), the Kemalist revolution in Turkey (1919-1924) and the infiltration of Kemalist ideology among some of Bulgaria's Muslims. For the most part, changes in Bulgaria's domestic ideological orientation, as well as engagement in wars preceded occurrences of repression against Bulgaria's Muslim population. The first instances of repression occurred during Bulgaria's liberation war in 1878-1880. In this period, there were outward acts of violence engaging members of the two groups (Bulgarians and Muslims (mostly Turks) (Hopken, 1997:58). From 1880 until 1912 the ethnic situation improved and clashes between the two communities were an exception. One such exception occurred in 1910 around a private affair in the town of Rousse, where a Bulgarian Christian bank clerk had persuaded a Muslim girl to convert to Christianity so they could both enter into marriage. The affair was blown out of proportions, and resulted in the involvement of public officials, members of parliament and citizens. Clashes around this issue led to the injury and death of 70 people (Stojanov, 1998:74-75). Nevertheless, ethno-religious co-existence remained relatively peaceful until the First Balkan War.

During the Balkan Wars of 1912 - 1913 violence recurred. The Bulgarian conquest of Thrace was accompanied by severe repression against the Muslim population living there. The violence committed was in a way an expression of resentment and revenge for past Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans. Villages were burned; mosques were transformed into churches, soldiers raped women, and mutilated bodies prior to murdering them. In the mean time, about 220,000 Pomaks in Thrace, Macedonia and the Rhodope Mountains were forcefully Christianized, renamed and forbidden to wear religious clothing (See Appendix, Figure 7) (Stojanov, 1998:77; Neuburger, 2004:41). As Neuburger (2004) notes, "Islam (unlike Judaism for example) continued to be conceptualized as a false and illegitimate presence, brutally imposed by Ottoman overlords on essentially Bulgarian souls" (p.40). This perception was reinforced by Bulgarian ethnographers like Stoiou Shishkov (1914) who argued that Pomaks (or what he called Bulgaro-Mohammedans) in Bulgaria spoke the purest form of Bulgarian with old Slavic words, and thus they were the purest Bulgarians. On the other hand, he presents arguments, derived from observations of Pomak

Turco-Arabic features in clothing and customs that Pomaks were forcibly Islamized by the Ottomans, and were thus Turkified (p.3) (See Appendix, Figure 8). Here one can vividly see the continuation of the trend in post-Ottoman Bulgaria of merging religious and ethnic identities and the reminder of historic tragedies to justify ethno-nationalist goals. During the First Balkan War of 1912 “official actions reified academic notions (i.e. Stoiou Shishkov)” (Neuburger, 2004:41). While instances of forceful conversion during Ottoman rule were not unheard of, alternative possibilities of conversion to Islam were not considered, whether they were either a matter of personal choice, or motivated by economic and social status reasons, escape from religious persecution (i.e. Bogomils were considered by the Orthodox Church as heretics and were widely persecuted) or other factors (Eminov, 1997:32-45).

Following a military disaster for Bulgaria, the campaign of forced Christianization of Pomaks was reversed in 1913, by the liberal interim regime of Vasil Radoslavov. Pomaks were allowed to return to Islam, wear religious clothing, and to reclaim their old names. This policy reversal was a strategic move to gain Muslim votes in an upcoming election and to earn the favor of the Ottoman Empire and Austro-German Central Powers. The explosion of the First World War in 1914 necessitated the Bulgarian government’s rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire, as to be able to pursue an alliance with the Austro-German Central Powers in an effort to re-gain lost San Stefano territories (Neuburger, 2004:42). Following a defeat in WWI, the Agrarian government of Stamboliiski (1919-1923) pursued an isolationist, anti-irredentist, anti-war policy of rapprochement with Balkan neighbors and the Great Powers. In addition, Stamboliiski’s domestic policy involved the affirmation of national culture through the Bulgarian village. Stamboliiski incorporated both Muslims and Christians in his effort to transform Bulgaria to a peasant state and rid it from what he considered the foreign influence and corruption of the cities (Crampton, 1992:151; Neuberger, 2004:44). Ethnic relations in the immediate post - WWI period were calm, and the Bulgarian state pursued a policy of non-interference in the affairs of the Muslim minorities.

This situation changed in Bulgaria in the late 1920s, which was influenced by domestic politics and by the Kemalist Revolution and proclamation of a secular Turkish republic (29 November, 1923). The Kemalist revolution strengthened Turk national identity and removed all religious elements in the public sphere and life of citizens. Some of the changes included the elimination of the *Sharia* courts and religious education (1925); the adoption of the Swiss Public Codes (1926); the separation of religion from the state (1928); the introduction of the Gregorian calendar and substitution of the Persian-Arabic alphabet with the Latin one (1928); mandatory education (1931) and universal suffrage (1934) (Stojanov, 1998:81). In Bulgaria, following the assassination of Stamboliiski (1923), nationalist and centrist democratic parties formed subsequent new governments (Democratic Accord 1923-1926; Democratic Party 1926-1931; Popular Bloc 1931-1934; Military quasi-fascist authoritarian government – Zveno 1934-35; Boris

III authoritarian rule – 1935-1944). Bulgarian politicians during this period were preoccupied with containing the activities of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) and persecution of members of the Communist Party (Pantev, 1996:15-16). In 1923-1944, Kemalism was associated by the various Bulgarian governments with communism, and government elites viewed Kemalism as a potential threat to Bulgaria's territorial integrity (especially in Southern Bulgaria) (Neuburger, 2004:45).

Part of Kemalist Turkey's policy at the time was to attract fellow nationals living in foreign lands. Kemalism found grounds for expression in Bulgaria among urban Turkish teachers and intellectuals, particularly in the North-Eastern towns of Varna and Shumen. Kemalist supporters founded the youth sports and cultural organization Turan (1926), which was a union of Turkish cultural, educational and gymnastics sports societies, with centre in Sofia, aiming to spread the nationalist ideology among its members. Until its 1936 ban, the organization was actively functioning. The Muslim community was split between Kemalist modernizers with a Turkish national consciousness in the process of formation, and those who adhered to religious principles and held firm to their religious rather than ethnic identities (the majority of the population). In the late 1920s, the government launched active support for anti-Kemalist forces within the Turkish and Muslim communities, and organizations such as *Rodina* (Pomak organization). *Rodina* sought to strengthen the Bulgarian identity of Pomaks and emphasized the need of modernization in the community (See Appendix, Figure 9). Modernizing attempts initiated by Pomaks were tolerated by the state, but such were discouraged among the Turks. Anti-Kemalist refugees were also granted residence in Bulgaria. The aim of the Bulgarian state was to uproot disseminators of the Turkish nationalist ideology, to maintain the religious (rather than national) identification of Bulgarian Turks and encourage the strengthening of Bulgarian identity among the Pomaks (through the support of *Rodina*) (Hopken, 1997:61-62, Stojanov, 1998:82- 84).

Anti-Kemalist efforts intensified in 1934, with the coming to power of the authoritarian military government of Kimon Georgiev. Frustrated from numerous failed attempts of persuading the international community to revise the 1919 peace settlement and improve the situation of Bulgarian minorities in Macedonia, Dobrudja and Thrace, Bulgarian society and political circles were penetrated by defensive ethno-nationalism. A special directorate for 'social renewal' was created to stimulate the revival of culture the increase in art and publications. Nationalist organizations became involved in the political process and spread anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish prejudice. The state became actively involved in persecuting Kemalist supporters and in the banning of organizations associated with the spread of Turkish nationalism, such as Turan. In the meantime, the state encouraged the flourishing of religious publications, conferences and activities among Bulgaria's anti-Kemalist Muslims. The Bulgarian government also promoted the activities of the anti-Kemalist organization – the Society for the Defense of the Muslim Religion, established in 1934. Teachers/ government informants were placed in Muslim schools to monitor

the rest of the staff for Kemalist influences over students. Religious education and activities were encouraged only to curb the spread of Kemalist nationalist propaganda, and serve Bulgarian nationalist goals (Crampton, 1992:163; Stojanov, 1998:86-87; Hopken, 1997:62-63).

Overall, the Bulgarian governments in the 1930s and 1940s did not tolerate the rights of Muslim minorities, and did not pass any policies to improve their economic and educational situation. On the contrary, the Bulgarian state in this period pursued an active policy of discrimination, name changing campaigns (1930, 1942), encouraged mass emigrations to Turkey, reduced the number of Muslim schools and newspapers (except for the newspaper *Medeniyet* - the mouthpiece of the Society for the Defense of the Muslim Religion and *Hakikat sahidi* – a Christian outreach magazine), and the number of Muslim parliamentarians or public officials significantly decreased. A deliberate policy was launched to slow down the educational development of Muslims. Illiteracy was seen to sever ties with Turkey and Kemalism, and intellectual advancement was perceived to have the opposite effect – to strengthen Muslim ties with Turkey and threaten Bulgarian national integrity. Fascist groups constantly harassed members of the community. Economic opportunities were also limited. Many Muslims emigrated during this period to Turkey, through the active encouragement of the Turkish state, and glad tidings from the Bulgarian state (Stojanov, 1998: 88-90; Poulton, 2000:49).

Overall, the Bulgarian state in the interwar period pursued policies of assimilation and repression of Turkish and other Muslim minorities, encouraged their emigration, while providing grounds for religious autonomy (stipulated by international treaties). Bulgarian governments' policies towards the Muslim population during the post-liberation and interwar period varied between assimilation and repression or passive tolerance. Periods of discrimination were preceded by wars, internal political changes or influenced by relations with Turkey. The Bulgarian state did little to stimulate the cultural, economic and educational development of the Muslim minorities. The Muslim community was left on its own devices (except during the period of Agrarian rule), and its isolation from the rest of society was the result of state passivity. The Bulgarian elite did not pursue attempts for reconciliation to overcome the distance between Bulgarian Muslims, Turks and Bulgarian Christians. The Bulgarian governments' policies initially contributed to the strengthening of Muslim religious identity, and later on pursued assimilatory policies attempting to destroy it. Assimilation rather than integration was the preferred policy of the 1930s. This tendency carried over the Cold War period, with variation in policy and ideological orientation.

In 1944 communist rule was established, and in 1946 the regime became totalitarian. Soviet political, economic and social models were imported and implemented without taking into consideration national particularities. Religion, considered as the 'opium of the masses,' was banned and atheistic propaganda was spread to Christians, Muslims, Jews and Armenian-Gregorians. The Bulgarian Communist Party tried to eradicate religious identities in general and

Islamic identity in particular. Instead, the Party enhanced the development of a Turkish national identity and a secular identity among Muslims, by improving the material conditions of members of the community and restoring their Muslim names. The communist government believed that by improving the lifestyle and material conditions (base) of the Muslim population, they would stimulate the development of a socialist consciousness (superstructure). According to the BCP, Muslim consciousness and vestiges of the Ottoman past were obstacles on the way to socialist progress and formation of a socialist consciousness (Neuburger, 2004:56-58; Poulton, 2000:49). Thus, during the communist period, efforts were made by the Party to encourage the development of socialist consciousness by enhancing national identities, secularism and modernization among Turks and Muslims in a way that did not threaten Bulgarian national integrity and security. From the late 1950s the Party attempted to gradually weaken Turkish national identity, and by the 1980s pursued a policy of assimilation in efforts to eliminate it completely (Hopken, 1997:64; Eminov, 2000:140). A level of cultural expression among ethnic groups was allowed only within the framework of the communist ideology of proletarian internationalism. The communist policy of respecting Turkish culture and supporting cultural development was influenced ideologically based on the assumption that the communist revolution can be exported to Turkey and the rest of the Muslim world with the help of a new secularized Turkish intelligentsia (Ragaru, 2001: 295; Warhola & Boteva, 2003:261).

In contrast to the interwar governments' deliberate educational stagnation and enhancement of religious identity among the Muslim minorities, in 1946 - 1956 the Bulgarian Communist Party sought to strengthen secular identities among Turks and Muslims, and invested efforts and finances to educate the members of the community. The government implemented a sort of affirmative action policy, granting Muslims privileged entry in university without entrance exams, and provided them with opportunities for professional advancement. The Party stimulated the cultural development of Turks and other Muslims, established secondary schools for Turks and Pomaks, theatres, libraries and pedagogical institutes, which improved the qualifications of teachers in Turkish and other Muslim schools. All these efforts contributed to the development of a secular Turkish and Muslim intelligentsia, loyal to the Party and regime, and led to the consolidation of separate ethnic identities (Eminov, 2000:140-141).

The BCP encouraged the secularization of Turks and Muslims, at the expense of curtailing religious rights. The Dimitrov Constitution of 1947, and the 1971 Constitution, provided legal guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion, but in practice these were violated. For example article 53 of the 1971 Constitution stipulates that "citizens have freedom of conscience and religion, and rights to perform religious rituals or to engage in anti-religious propaganda"; article 35 (2) states that "no privileges or limitation of rights based on nationality, origin, creed, sex, race education and social and material status is allowed" and forbids the (4) "the propagation of hate or humiliation of the person because of race, national or religious affiliation" (*Bulgarski*

Konstitucii i Konstitucionni Proekti , 1990:65, 63). In practice, the opposite occurred, and religious freedoms were curtailed not only of Muslims, but also all of other religious communities. Quranic classes were banned. Religious schools (*Medresse*) were closed down, minority private schools were eliminated, and the educational activities were transferred to public schools where part of the curriculum still contained the teaching of the Turkish language, but subjects were introduced that would facilitate the assimilation of Turks into Bulgarian society. (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 287-288). In addition, the observance of religious holidays and rituals was prohibited, as well as the wearing of religious attire or symbols (i.e. *shalvari* and *feredje* for women and *fez* or prayer hats for men). The justification behind such actions was based on the following:

- 1) Islam had an alien presence in Bulgaria, which was imposed on Bulgarians by force, who were as a result Turkified and have lost their Bulgarian consciousness
- 2) Foreign reactionaries from abroad (i.e. Turkey) have been using Islam to spread ‘bourgeois nationalism and religious fanaticism’ (considering Cold War tensions, Turkey’s membership in NATO, shared border with Bulgaria and close territorial proximity of the Turkish minority to Turkey)
- 3) Islam impeded the assimilation of Turks and Muslims into the Bulgarian socialist nation and Muslim *bit* (life style) was an obstacle on the way to socialist progress and modernization (Eminov, 1997: 52-53; Neuburger, 2004:58).

To certain extent, the BCP succeeded in their efforts to secularize a fraction of the Muslim population, especially the Pomaks. However, attempts for the complete eradication of religious identity were not successful. The Party inadvertently contributed to the strengthening of Turkish national consciousness, and members of the Muslim community managed to preserve their customs and steadfastness in religious observance. By the 1950s, the BCP arrived at the realization that by strengthening ethnic identities they undermined the main socialist goal – the amalgamation of various ethnic groups into a single socialist nation, sharing a universal language, culture etc. The BCP was in need to reverse its policy and began to gradually eradicate ethnic identities or encourage emigration to Turkey. In 1950, during massive government land collectivization campaigns, about 150,000 Turks emigrated to Turkey. This population outflow continued until the 1970s. As Warhola and Boteva (2003) note, despite the friction that this emigration caused between the Turkish and Bulgarian governments, in a way “it served as a social and political “safety valve” that kept potential ethnic-based conflict inside Bulgaria within manageable proportions” (p.262). The communist government gradual process of minority assimilation intensified after the 1958 Party Plenum. The government realized that it could not

destroy gradually and completely minority religious and cultural identity and thus had to intensify this effort (Eminov, 2000:141).

Following the 1958 Plenum, the Bulgarian Communist Party declared “war on all manifestations of nationalism and religious fanaticism among the local Turks” and the so-called “Rebirth Process” was implemented in full force aiming to eradicate not only Muslim religious but also Turkish ethnic identity. Ethnic and national differences had to be eliminated, on the road to the consolidation of a universal socialist identity (Zhelyaskova: 288). The BCP, adopting cultural nationalism, pursued a Bulgarization campaign, aiming to assimilate Turkish and other Muslim minorities into the Bulgarian nation. The peak years of assimilation were in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Bulgarian communist regime experienced a legitimacy crisis (Vasilev, 2002: 105; Ragaru, 2001: 295).

There were several foreign policy and country-specific motivations behind the BCP’s pursuit of assimilation and repression against Muslims. On the international front, the strain in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and persistent Cold War tensions heightened the BCP’s sensitivity to Bulgarian national security issues. In addition US support for Turkey and Greece, the Kosovar riots of 1981 and Muslim/non-Muslim tensions in Yugoslavia, the Turkish participation in the Korean War and joining of NATO forces in 1951, as well as the partition of Cyprus in 1975, all led to the BCP’s increasing prioritization on national territorial integrity (containing Turkish irredentist nationalism directed towards Bulgaria’s Turkish minority in Southern Bulgaria) and security (Neuburger, 2004:66-67, 71). Some of the major factors that pressed the BCP to pursue assimilation were: 1) demographics – allegedly declining number of Bulgarian population and increasing number of Turks and other Muslims; 2) diverting national attention from a persisting economic crisis; 3) increasing affinities of Pomaks and Roma towards Turkey and Bulgarian government fears of minorities’ demands for territorial autonomy; 4) rising devotion to the fundamentals of Islam among Muslims; and 5) destabilizing factors such as the bombings of the Varna and Plovdiv train stations in 1984 (Neuburger, 2004: 79; Eminov, 1997:92).

The first Communist Party attacks were launched against the Muslim Roma in the 1950s. Their theatres and press were shut down and their names were forcibly changed (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 288). In the 1960s, a total assimilation campaign was launched against Bulgarian and Turkish Muslims, who, according to official party rhetoric (echoing such during the interwar years based on ethnographic studies), were Bulgarians who were forcibly “Islamized” and “Turkified” during the Ottoman period and were now willing to restore their true Bulgarian identity (Ragaru, 2001: 295; Eminov, 2000:141). Turkish schools, media and theatres were closed down; the use of Turkish was banned in public communication along with religious clothing, festivals, rituals and music. The field of Turkish Philology in Sofia University was eliminated; Muslim graveyards

were destroyed and even the names of the deceased were changed; burial ceremonies had to be conducted in a new socialist way; and the circumcision of boys was prohibited. Those who dared to speak Turkish in public or parents who circumcised their sons, were fined by the state police (see Appendix, Figure 10) (Helsinki Watch, 1986:10-15) Only the Muslim Muftiship was allowed to exist, with Chief and regional Muftis appointed based on their loyalty to the regime. The assimilatory policy culminated with the forced name change of Pomaks in 1972-1974, and of Turks in 1984 -1985. The campaign was conducted by the government through propaganda and violence, and those who resisted adopting Christian Bulgarian names were sent to labor camps or imprisoned (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 288-289; Eminov, 1997:61).

The so called “Rebirth Process” further eroded relations between Muslims and Christians, and was countered with the eruption of massive protests in 1989 against the government’s campaign. These protests started in Northeastern and Southern Bulgaria, where the Turks and other Muslims began to demand the restoration of their names, respect for their human rights and called for the establishment of a multi-party system (RFE/RL 27 June, 1989:5). They were joined in support by dissident and human rights groups (union *Podkrepa* and the Discussion Group for Glasnost and Perestroika) in the capital Sofia, which were also opposed to the regime. Clashes with the army and the police resulted in several casualties. Consequently, the same year, Todor Zhivkov, the country’s top communist leader, announced on radio and public television the opening of the border with Turkey and granted the right to “those who did not feel Bulgarian” to leave Bulgaria . Zhivkov maintained that “there are no Turks in Bulgaria” and that “the Islamized Bulgarian population has not come from outside.” He accused “foreign forces” and “certain Western circles and radio stations of conducting a slanderous campaign against Bulgaria”, as well as Turkish “circles [that] harbored the hope that they could turn the wheel of history back, to the times of the Ottoman Empire” (RFE/RL, January, 1990:9-10; RFE/RL 27 June, 1989:7-8). This period, what was euphemistically called by the government as “the Grand Excursion,” witnessed “the largest movement of people since the Second World War” – 350,000 ethnic Turks left the country, leaving behind their homes and possessions (Helsinki Watch Report, 1989:1).

The BCP’s initial secularization attempts until the 1950s, and the launching of the so called “Rebirth Process” after the 1958 Plenum, failed to destroy Muslim religious and Turkish ethnic identities. The assimilatory policies strengthened, rather than weakened, minority religious and ethnic identification and further undermined the government’s legitimacy and ability to bind all Muslims around a socialist identity. Facing such a crisis, in order to alleviate ethnic tensions, the only way out for the BCP was to actively encourage emigration to Turkey or pursue assimilation. The mass emigration of Turks and other Muslims from Bulgaria to Turkey caused economic dislocations. The country lost a much needed labor hand in the tobacco industry in the Southeast, construction, transportation, livestock breeding, and wheat agriculture in the Northeast of the country. Factories in ethnically mixed areas were facing closure and crops were not harvested due

to the lack of labor. Economic stagnation and other factors, led to the ouster of Zhivkov from power on 10 November, 1989. The new reform Communist leaders came to power by the means of a parliamentary coup, and removed the former dictator from government (RFE/RL, 5 January, 1990:7-10). The new reform communist government of the former Foreign Affairs Minister Petar Mladenov reversed the policy of assimilation on 29 December, 1989, and promised the protection of the rights of the Turkish and other Muslim minorities in the country (RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:5). Nevertheless, the collapse of the regime was already set in motion.

In sum, Bulgaria's historical record (1878-1989) of treatment towards its Muslim population varied between that of passive tolerance or assimilation, hostility and hatred. The treatment of Muslim minorities differed, influenced by several factors such as country- specific political regime changes and ideological orientations determining prevailing forms of nationalism, foreign policy and international influences, as well as the Balkan Wars and two World Wars. Following the disintegration of the communist system in 1989 and the increase in socio-economic and political uncertainties during regime change, Bulgaria witnessed a brief period of escalating ethnic tensions (1989-1992). One may have expected the historical inevitability of an ethnic conflict, but on the contrary such was remedied through skillful ethnopluralist democratic politics, such as the formation of political coalitions, the integration of the Muslim minorities in the political process with the formation of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, and the application of pluralist values throughout transition, such as negotiation and compromise. In addition, the political mobilization of people around a civic conception of nationhood, and citizens' respect for civil rights and faith in a democratic system and institutions were essential to overcoming ethnic divisions.

3. The collapse of communism, the national identity crisis and the initial handling of the ethno-nationalist backlash (1989-1992)

Bulgaria's elite-pacted transition from communism did not face a "stateness" problem, as the country had an already existing unified state. Rather, it experienced a Bulgarian national identity crisis and a "nationness" problem, which may have prolonged the transition to democracy. Bulgaria and what it meant to be a Bulgarian, as well as Bulgarian history were in need of re-examination and re-constitution. Eager Bulgarian Western-oriented elites began a process of disassociation from their "Oriental" and communist past, and strove to establish a close relationship with the West. Most Bulgarians were in a process of re-examining their identities, drifting between Western and Bulgarian cultural influences. The presence of the Turkish minority and followers of Islam in the country, a religion and country which Bulgarians for centuries past have associated with economic backwardness and historical occupation, strengthened this disassociation from the "other", especially through the continuous dwelling on "national tragedies". This process, which has proved to be politically detrimental at times in the Balkans, has been referred to as "transferred manners in historical perception." It is a process of

construction of enemies and allies through the presentation of a historic “pain list,” through which a nation aims to bring out its quality and uniqueness in comparison to other nations, and to shape in this way a nation’s identity (Ozge, 2002:52). ‘Bulgarianness’ was, and to a certain extent still is, emphasized through the searching for and demeaning of the foreign “other,” while not necessarily being clear on what it means to be a Bulgarian. As Ozge (2002) notes, “the negative perception of national consciousness has paved the way for an appreciation of one’s own history, origin, culture and people while, at the same time, rendering the other as valueless” (p.54).

Inter-ethnic animosities in the country escalated in the initial transition period (1989-1992) to democracy, with society and politicians being divided on Bulgaria’s national question. Bulgarian national identity was in crisis and the only way to assert its uniqueness was through the continuous reminder of historical pains and the existence of the foreign “other” within the nation. This ‘othering’ process occurred, because previous governments and intellectuals failed to separate ethnic and religious identification. Belonging to a particular ethnic group meant that one belonged to a particular religion, and visa versa (i.e. Pomaks were ethnic Bulgarians and therefore could not possibly be Muslim or a Muslim was a Turk and nothing else). State repressive and assimilatory policies stimulated the consolidation of separate Turkish and Muslim identities, as well as Bulgarian/Christian identities, and thus led to the formation of distinct group solidarities (Hopken, 1997:71). However, the fear from the imposition of another authoritarian regime necessitated the unification of representatives from diverse ethnic and religious groups around a common civic identity. Everyone sought the common goals of democratization, respect for human rights for all Bulgarian citizens, socio-economic and political reform, and European integration (Warhola & Boteva, 2003:268). This primary concern of overcoming any authoritarian pledges to political rule strengthened the necessity for resolving the country’s Muslim minorities’ problem and national identity question, through ethnopluralist democratic means.

As the analysis above shows, Bulgaria had a historical record of ethnic tensions and government policy of repression, assimilation and expulsion of its Muslim population. Instances of ethnic tensions were also accompanied by the predominance of various forms of nationalism – anti-imperial, irredentist, revanchist, ethnic or cultural. Following the disintegration of the communist regime, one would have predicted the inevitability of violent ethnic conflict. In spite of such common expectations for conflict, based on observations of escalating tensions in the beginning of the transition period, the opposite occurred. Ethnic cleavages were ameliorated by channeling differences in the democratic pluralist political process. Priority was placed on the greater ‘evil’ – the elimination of the threat of another tyrannical regime (keeping in mind that Communist Party representatives still had powerful influence in Bulgarian politics during transition), rather than the lesser ‘evil’ (to become more pronounced after the establishment of a Parliamentary democracy) – the participation of representatives from the Muslim community in Parliament in an organized

political movement. The remedying of ethnic conflict took place on two related levels: 1) political/foreign relations - based on official political policies and practices and external influences 2) social level – based on relations among groups (Warhola & Boteva, 2003: 265). On the first level, the factors that determined the improvement of ethnic relations were political party re-configurations; the possibility for Muslim minority political mobilization and Parliamentary representation; the absence of violent retribution attempts by the Turkish and other Muslim minorities for past injustices; and external EU pressures for respect of minorities' rights. On the second level, the positive gradual evolution of societal attitudes towards the ethnic 'other' (Bulgarian, Turk, Roma, Pomak etc.) were key to ameliorating ethnic cleavages.

Following the gradual collapse of the Bulgarian communist regime (1989), political elites became preoccupied not only with resolving problems around political-economic reform, but also with the painful national question, especially in the face of an ethno-nationalist backlash in 1989-1992. Many Bulgarians, especially urban intellectuals perceived the so-called "Rebirth Process" to be a dark and shameful period in the country's history, brought about by the former regime's chauvinism. In the face of a collapsing communist regime, along with a level of support by ethnic Bulgarian human rights groups and other organizations (i.e. *Podkrepa*, Human Rights Committee in Bulgaria, Society for the Protection of Human Rights), the Turkish and Muslim minorities staged mass protests and hunger strikes in May, 1989 demanding the restoration of their Turkish or Muslim names and the release of prisoners convicted for their opposition to the assimilation campaign (Helsinki Watch Report, 1989:39-45). The Muslim community's protests were planned to coincide with the opening of the Paris CSCE Human Rights Meeting, and attract the attention of the international community. In a matter of days, they spread across Turkish and other Muslim populated areas, and the demonstrators carried banners which demanded the following: "We want our real names," "We want to speak our language," and "We want to practice our religion freely." The authorities suppressed the protests by sending the police and the army. The army and the police surrounded villages with tanks and used force against the protestors (Ibid: 7-8). Facing domestic unrest, protests by newly organized groups, and international pressures (Turkey, the West and even countries in the Soviet bloc), as previously mentioned, on December 29, 1989 the new reform communist government passed a policy that reversed the assimilation campaign and allowed for the restoration of Turkish/Arabic names (RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:5).

This sudden policy reversal witnessed the eruption of nationalist counter-protests in January 1990 that began in Kurdzhali (a region concentrated with Turkish and other Muslim population), and spread to other ethnically mixed areas and major cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Ruse, Shoumen, Turgovishte etc (RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:7). Nationalist groups and parties were formed, such as the Bulgarian National Radical Party and the Fatherland Party of Labor, which raised slogans calling "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians," "No to Turkish Separatism," "Bulgaria is not Cyprus" and "Turks go to Turkey." They set up a Committee for the Defense of National Interests (CDNI) in

the district of Kurdzhali. The Committee accused the minority Turkish population of pursuing territorial separatism, denounced the new policy decision of the Communist Party as undemocratic without due regard for the opinion of the Bulgarian population, and called for a national referendum on the national question. The political climate in the country was further destabilized by the nationalists, who played with public fears by claiming that Turkey, a NATO member, was aspiring to invade Bulgaria and was to attempt the “Cyprusization” (territorial partition of Turkish populated from Bulgarian populated areas) of the country. These nationalist protests evoked the counter-mobilization of Bulgarian human rights groups and organizations (Stamatov, 2000:555-556; Vasilev, 106-107; RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:7-8).

The ethno-nationalist protests were contained as a result of the formation of social and political alliances and the introduction of new legislation aimed at resolving the country’s national question. This initial political compromise became possible due to lack of a “stateness” problem and the pursuit of negotiations by various groups. The reform communist government still in power in the period of transition, along with the newly emerged major democratic opposition - the United Democratic Forces (UDF), the human and cultural rights national movement - the Movement for Rights and Freedoms representing the Turkish/Muslim minorities, labor unions and 65 other organizations, allied in opposition to the CDNI’s demands for a referendum. In addition, the Grand Mufti Nedim Genchev presented a declaration issued on January 11 by the Supreme Muslim Theological Council, which denounced nationalist provocations and accusations that Muslims were aspiring to obtain regional autonomy or sought the territorial partition of the country, and expressed a firm recognition of the unity of the Bulgarian state and support for retaining Bulgarian as the sole official language of the country (RFE/RL 9 February, 1990: 4; 7-10).

The Public Council on the National Question was formed in January 1990, with representatives from the government, political parties, and independent groups and associations. As a result of the political compromise and resolution that the Council produced, the first wave of nationalist strikes and protests nation-wide subsided. The Council publicly condemned the “Rebirth Process” pursued by the former regime as being a dark period plagued by minority human rights violations, and at the same time strongly expressed their opposition to minority separatism and separatist organizations threatening the territorial unity of the country and affirmed Bulgarian to be the sole official language of the country. In fact, when a number of moderate nationalist representatives were interviewed such as Mincho Minchev and Rosa Simeonova, they stressed their support for democratic pluralism and the rule of law, and stated that their main criticism was that the BCP’s December 29 decision was taken behind closed doors without any public consultation. They also stated that they were in support of granting basic human rights to Turkish and other Muslim minorities (RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:9) A declaration of compromise was adopted by Parliament (Declaration on the National Question) on January 15, 1990 promising the

restoration of Turkish and Muslim names, rights and religious freedoms, while at the same time prohibiting any Turkish or Muslim minorities' demands for territorial autonomy, outlawing autonomist groups, the public display of the Turkish flag, and providing security guarantees for Bulgarians living in ethnically mixed areas. In addition, amnesty was granted to all ethnic Turks jailed since 1984 during the "Rebirth Process." Furthermore, a Parliamentary commission on the national question was set up with representatives from ethno-political movements and the United Democratic Forces. The commission drafted a Law on the names of Bulgarian citizens, which was later adopted by Parliament on 5 May, 1990, allowing for the restoration of names and rights to homes and property of Bulgarian citizens who wished to return from Turkey (Tafradjiski, Radoeva & Minev, 1992:217; Karasimeonov: 3; RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:9-10).

Thus, during the first wave of nationalist protests, a political compromise was reached on the national question between representatives from the Muslim community, various political parties and nationalist organizations. This compromise was possible due to the preoccupation of the reform communist with building for themselves a good international political image, especially in the eyes of the European Community, as well as their realization of the destabilizing effect of an ethnic conflict on their regime. Nationalist groups were disturbed by the BCP's unilateral 29 December policy decision, without consulting Bulgarian citizens or giving them a chance to voice their concerns. In addition, the Turkish and other Muslim ethno-religious minorities did not have any separatist goals, but rather demanded respect for their human rights and cultural autonomy, recognized the territorial unity of the Bulgarian state, and did not insist on the adoption of Turkish as a second official language of the country. All parties in the deliberation process were in support of democratic pluralism and the rule of law. The political institutionalization of the Turkish and other Muslim minorities' agenda into the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the MRF's moderate nationalism (going as far as demanding the restoration of Turkish cultural, language and education rights, freedom of Muslim religious practice, and restoration of names) as well as the formation of the Council on the National Question in opposition to the CDNI, were two initial decisive socio-political moves that determined the absence of a violent ethno-religious conflict in the country during the initial transition period (RFE/RL, May 31, 1991:5-7). Thus, the channeling of differences to the political process, the absence of instigation of violent clashes by either side involved in the verbal conflict, and their ability to reach compromise on the national question, were among the key factors that alleviated ethnic tensions.

Despite the success of these preliminary ethnopluralist political endeavors in fostering a compromise, coupled with granting of political representation space for the Muslim/Turkish minorities through the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) with 24 deputies being elected in the first general elections in 1990 to sit in the Grand National Assembly, the nationalist turmoil in the country did not recede. On 12 July 1991, the new post-communist Bulgarian Constitution was adopted, guaranteeing some rights to minority groups, with certain limits, which nationalist

groupings used to their advantage to stir up national debates (AL/BGR/93.001:8-9). The Bulgarian Constitution affirms the territorial integrity of the Bulgarian state and states that “no autonomous territorial formations shall exist” (article 2.1). Article 5 (4) stipulates that any international instruments, in this case related to minority rights, are “considered part of the domestic legislation of the country” and “shall supersede any domestic legislation of the country” (i.e. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); European Convention on Human Rights (1950); Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities).

The Constitution guarantees cultural rights and freedom from discrimination for ethnic and religious groups, but does not explicitly recognize collective minority rights, and prohibits collective political rights. The Constitution’s focus is on individual rights. Article 6 recognizes that all individuals are “born free and equal in dignity and rights”, and that “there shall be no privileges, or restriction of rights on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic self-identity, sex, origin, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status.” Articles 13 (1) and 37 (1) guarantee the freedom of conscience and practice of any religion, as long as such do not pose threat to public order, the rights and freedoms of others, or to national security. Article 29 (1) states that “[n]o one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, or to forcible assimilation.” Furthermore, article 36 (2) of the Constitution also guarantees citizens whose “mother tongue is not Bulgarian,” “the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language.” In terms of cultural rights, article 54 (1) states that “everyone shall have the right to avail himself of the national and universal human cultural values and to develop his own culture in accordance with his ethnic self-identification.” On the other hand, the Constitution limits collective political rights with article 11 (4), stating that “there shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious basis, nor parties that seek the violent seizure of state power,” and “no organization shall act to the detriment of the country’s sovereignty and national integrity, or the unity of the nation, nor shall it incite racial, national, ethnic or religious enmity or an encroachment on the rights and freedoms of citizens.”

In October, 1991, article 11 (4) of the Constitution provided the nationalists, with legal grounds to continue their further attacks on the MRF and the Turkish and other Muslim minorities in the country. Nationalist organizations and deputies in the Grand National Assembly argued that the MRF was an ethnic-based party, with a chairman (Ahmed Dogan) and constituency of Turkish and Muslim descent. They argued that the MRF constituted a threat to the territorial integrity and security of the Bulgarian state guaranteed by the Constitution. Ninety three members of the National Assembly - most affiliated with the former Communist Party – requested from the Constitutional Court, which by law is required to “rule on challenges to the constitutionality of

political parties” (article 149.5), to declare the unconstitutionality of the MRF (Ganev, 2004:69-72).

During the decision process, the justices were divided between those who gave greater priority to national territorial integrity, and others who placed emphasis on the need for democratic pluralism. The final decision was based on numerous factors, some of which were: the interpretation of article 11 in its broader constitutional context (referring to democratic pluralism); the inability of the justices to agree on a precise definition of the broad phrase “ethnic, racial or religious basis;” and the conclusion that although the MRF program included reference to Muslim membership, it did not explicitly set barriers to ethnic Bulgarians willing to join the party. Thus, the MRF was allowed to register as an official party, the nationalists’ petition was rejected by the Constitutional Court in 21 April, 1992, and the constitutionality of the MRF was affirmed. It should be noted, that during this conflict, the nationalists sought legal rather than violent means to resolve what they understood to be their national problem, and based their grievances on Constitutional provisions. On the other hand, the decision by the Constitutional Court not to ban the MRF was a turning point in the history of ethnic politics, where the contrary might have led to tragic consequences for ethnic relations in the country (Ganev, 2004: 72-84).

In response to the Court’s decision, nationalist parties, among the most vocal ones being the Bulgarian Nationalist Radical Party and the Fatherland Party of Labor, threatened to form a “civil parliament” and pledged to wage a “life or death” struggle against the introduction of Turkish language classes in the Bulgarian curriculum, and vigorously resisted the participation of MRF deputies in the Bulgarian Parliament and the existence of the party (Vasilev, 2002: 110-111). They even went as far as to form an “independent republic” in the city of Razgrad, which threatened to declare autonomy from Bulgaria and possibly join Greece (Ibid: 109)! Nevertheless, politically the nationalists did not enjoy mass support in the country, where for instance the BNRP in the 1990 general elections obtained 1.5% of the votes, the FPL obtained only one seat in Parliament and 2 seats in the elections of 1993 due to their alliance with the BSP, and the Bulgarian National Democratic Party remained invisible in the political spectrum up until 1997, when it acquired 0.16% of the votes (Ragaru, 2001: 300).

Regardless of this weak political standing of nationalist parties in Bulgaria, public attitudes remained negative towards Turks and other Muslims. According to a sociological statistical inquiry conducted in 1991, about 51.1% of Bulgarians viewed the Turks as “an actual threat to national security” (versus 21.5% for Pomaks and 36.2% for Roma) and 83.8% of Christians replied that the Turks were “religious fanatics.” In regards to attitudes towards the “Revival Process,” 35.5% thought that it was “necessary for the achievement of the unity of the Bulgarian nation,” and 56.2% claimed that “descendents of Turkified Bulgarians should be helped to rediscover their Bulgarian conscience;” 60% rejected the way that the assimilatory policies were

applied, but approved of the goals they aimed to achieve (Ragaru, 2001: 300). According to a different sociological study conducted during the same year (consisting of interviews of 160 high school and university students (138 Bulgarians, 12 Turks, 4 Pomaks and 4 unidentified), 85% of the interviewed Bulgarians thought that Turks were religious fanatics, 52% replied that they were cruel, 47% saw that they were isolated in their own community, 33% thought that they were rich and also hard working. More negative stereotypes were expressed towards the Roma: 89% of respondents considered this group as robbers, 87% thought of them as being dirty and ignorant, 83% - careless, 80%- having bad manners, 76% - being trouble makers, 70% - having lice, 68% - lazy, 64% - with musical talents etc. In terms of what each group (Turkish and Bulgarian) thought of themselves and the other, resulted in the overvaluation of one's own group in comparison to the other (Note: the author of the survey recognizes the limited number of Turkish respondents, and that the results from this survey question are tentative) (Tomova, 1991:77-88).

In the face of such popular distrust towards the Turkish and other Muslim minorities and a national identity crisis instigating a nationalist backlash, the eruption of a violent ethnic conflict might have appeared inevitable in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the initial conflict was remedied through democratic ethnopluralist political management, with emphasis on negotiation, compromise and the provision of political space for representation of Turkish and other Muslim minorities' interests (MRF). These developments, brought to the fore the need to resolve the country's 'nationness' problem and to gradually reformulate Bulgarian identity in a more tolerant direction. The ethno-nationalist rapprochement was achieved due to: 1) elite electoral interests and the weakness of nationalist parties and their inability to institutionalize their agenda; 2) the evolution of the MRF from an ethno-religious based party to a centrists and more broad based party; 3) external European human rights influences; and 4) gradual reconciliation of group differences and attitudes towards the 'other' (Ragaru, 2001:300-301; Anagnostou, 2005:98-101).

4. An aborted ethnic conflict

The ethno-nationalist protests that erupted in the period of transition and the rise of extreme right parties in Bulgaria, such as the BNRP and the FPL, threatened the political stability in the country. The fact that this threat did not materialize was due to four important occurrences. First, it was the weakness of nationalist parties and their inability to institutionalize politically their demands (Ragaru, 2001: 301-302). Second, it was also the creation of a party integrating the interests of the Turkish and other Muslim minorities – the MRF, and its evolution into a centrist and broad-based party. In addition, the almost tied electoral competition for government between the United Democratic Forces (UDF) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) required the support of the MRF for the formation of a coalition government. The MRF became a balancing actor and a third political force in Bulgarian politics (Vasilev, 2002:113-121). The third facilitating factor was the internal liberal support for minority rights, along with external human rights influences from the Council of Europe (Anagnostou, 2005:98-101). Fourth, the gradual

positive evolution of societal attitudes towards Turkish and other Muslim minorities also played a constructive role in remedying ethnic tensions.

4.1 The weakness of nationalist parties and their inability to institutionalize their agenda

Regardless of the low voter turnout in support of nationalist parties in the early 1990s, popular attitudes towards the Muslim ethno-religious minorities were such that they threatened to frustrate the democratization process. One of the reasons for the initial inability of the nationalists to make a stronger case and to institutionalize their agenda was the lack of financial resources available to nationalist parties, the appropriation of their argument by the two largest political parties – the BSP and the UDF, and the fact that the majority of Bulgarians were mostly concerned about their economic interests (Neuburger, 1997:12-13). The nationalist parties that emerged in the political spectrum were inexperienced and lacked financial resources. The only party capable of asserting itself on the political scene was the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party – composed of reform communists), which possessed enough funds and political experience. Nationalist parties were financially unstable and politically inexperienced, and the nationalist protests that they often mobilized in the early 1990s became not only outlets for the expression of anti-Turkish sentiments, but also for the expression of general public dissatisfaction with the political and economic situation in the country. Among the people that took part in these demonstrations, and comprised the nationalist public were Communist Party elites, former participants in the ‘Rebirth Process,’ illegally occupying property of Turks who fled the country during communist rule, and “non-elite” ethnic Bulgarians in regions with mixed populations (blaming Turks who left the country in 1989 for their region’s economic crisis). Former supporters of the so called “Rebirth Process,” feared persecution for their past actions, and faced eviction as of property restitution to former Turkish owners. These elements adopted an ethno- nationalist stance and took part in the nationalist protests. They “had economic and symbolic interests vested in preserving the status quo created by the assimilatory policies of the previous regime” (Stamatov, 2000:559; RFE/RL 9 February, 1990:9). As soon as it became evident that there would be no trial and persecution of former participants in the ‘Rebirth Process’, this group of protesters withdrew from nationalist organizations and demonstrations (Stamatov, 2000:557-560; Creed,1990: 4-5).

The adoption of nationalist rhetoric by other broad-based parties such as the two major competing forces – the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the United Democratic Forces – also weakened the support for nationalist parties. In the beginning of the transition period, the political spectrum in Bulgaria became increasingly polarized between the BSP and the UDF, each struggling to monopolize power. Despite the former communist’s public denunciation of the “Rebirth Process”, the Bulgarian Socialist Party and its supporters still remained divided on the country’s national question. Depending on the political climate around elections, the Bulgarian Socialists used from time to time nationalist rhetoric. In the first general elections held in 1990, the Socialist government at the time refrained from using nationalist rhetoric in its campaigns and did not

oppose the registration of the MRF (with a platform based on the assurance of human rights to all minorities), despite the Constitutional ban on formation of ethnic-based and religious parties. The participation of the MRF in the elections was beneficial for the Socialist government, based on the expectation that the MRF would divert votes away from the UDF (democratic opposition). This strategy brought about the Socialists' electoral victory. The absence of xenophobic rhetoric in their campaign was a tactic to secure their positive international standing (which was needed due to a past record of human rights abuses) and to avoid a politically destabilizing domestic atmosphere (Ragaru, 2001:302-303). In addition, the 1990 elections gave rise to the MRF as a third political force in Bulgarian politics, obtaining 23 seats in Parliament (3 seats occupied by ethnic Bulgarian MRF MPs) (<http://www.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=33>; Eminov, 1999:36).

However, following a sudden political turmoil against the government due to a deteriorating social and economic situation in the country, resulting in a call for new elections in 1991, led to a shift in the usage of anti-Turkish rhetoric in the BSP's political campaigns. As the climate was more conducive to victory for the more democratic and reform oriented UDF, the BSP appropriated the nationalist parties' xenophobic rhetoric. This move was instrumental in weakening the nationalist parties and destroying their platform. In 1991, anti-Turkish rhetoric was widely used, and the consequences of this proved to be damaging for the BSP. The BSP lost the elections due to their unpopular anti-Turk and anti-reform program. The UDF's positive democratic, inclusive and reform-oriented platform proved more appealing to voters. The UDF won the elections with a narrow victory of 110 seats to 106 BSP seats in Parliament, and the MRF obtained 10% of the vote and 24 seats in Parliament (Eminov, 1999:37; Neuburger, 1997:10; Ragaru, 2000:303-304). Although nationalist parties did not garner enough votes to obtain seats in Parliament, they remained vocal opponents to the new MRF-UDF coalition government. The nationalist parties' media outlets, such as the Bulgarian Liberal Democratic Party's journal *Zora* (Dawn) and the Bulgarian National Radical Party's newspaper *Bulgarski Glas* (Bulgarian Voice), were full of articles and illustrations that pledged to defend everything Bulgarian, and protested against 'historical injustices.' In addition, the government's 'foreignness' was emphasized, by 'selling out' the Bulgarian nation to Western and Turkish interests. The President Zhelyu Zhelev (UDF) was called "a Marxist with a turban on his head" who was:

“...yesterday's red tulip proletariat-internationalist who quickly transferred to the [political camp] of the cosmopolitan Euro-American political butterflies, who flit from capital to capital in Western Europe and America...waiting for belittling praise from their powerful masters” (Dimitrov, 1993:36)

In sync with attacks on the UDF, were also such against the MRF. The MRF was represented in the nationalist media as an illegal political party, violating the constitutional and territorial

principles of the country, and pressing for much resented education in the Turkish language. An article in the journal *Zora* went as far as to accuse Ahmed 'Doganov' of trying to Turkify Bulgaria, and mocked Bulgarians of:

“...vot[ing] for their own Turkification...[where] ...the flying carpet of Ahmed Doganov will take [everyone] to the Anatolian Mosques and Minarets...[and concluded that]...Yesterday's terrorist doesn't learn democracy” (Ibid:39)

After losing the elections, the BSP also continued to spread anti-Turkish rhetoric. In their newspaper *Misul* (Thought) they argued that Turks in Bulgaria were not national, but a religious minority, who were forcibly Turkified during Ottoman rule. The Socialists argued that the MRF was a reminder of the Turkish yoke (Ibid: 47). Following year in power, the UDF government collapsed in 1992, and two years of BSP- MRF coalition government followed.

The early 1990s witnessed a period of continuous political party re-configurations with frequent change in governments. Between 1991 and 1994, the MRF played a balancing role in Bulgarian politics, allying either with the UDF or the BSP in government (See Appendix, Figure: 11). Anti-Turkish rhetoric was used selectively by both the BSP and the UDF, depending on the MRF's alliance preferences. Resorting to xenophobic rhetoric became a standard act in Bulgarian politics, shifting with the political wind through the years as a part in the electoral platforms of broad-based parties. This factor weakened nationalist parties and their influence in Bulgarian politics during the transition period. Ethnic exclusive nationalism was not historically entrenched in Bulgarian politics and social space, and it was less pronounced in comparison to civic and cultural nationalism. Ethno-national rhetoric did not materialize, but was utilized by political elites as a defensive mechanism in times of political uncertainties, power struggles and economic crises (Creed, 1990:3). The formation of the MRF, and the broadening of its agenda to support not only minority human rights, but also the rights of all Bulgarian citizens, its moderate stance rejecting extremism, separatism and Turkish nationalism, as well as its balancing partisan role, have all proved to be constructive elements in Bulgaria's transition to democracy. The moderate platform of the party and its reform-oriented democratic program, proved to be beneficial for the elevation of nationalist tensions, facilitating tolerance in Bulgarian society and a relatively smooth democratic transition (Vasilev, 2002: 114-116).

4.2 The evolution of the MRF as a broad-based 'third political force'.

The evolution of the MRF from an exclusively minority to a centrist and broad-based party, resulted in the moderation of extreme nationalist sentiments and rhetoric targeting the Turkish and other Muslim minorities. The MRF's adoption of a moderate platform has led to the party's acceptance in Bulgarian social and political space. The predecessor to the MRF was the underground Turkish National Liberation Organization in Bulgaria (TNLOB) with leader Ahmed

Dogan, which was founded in 1985, in opposition to the communist assimilation campaign. The main function of the organization was non-violent political dissent, in opposition to the Communist Party's curtailment of Muslim and Turkish minorities' rights and freedoms. In 1986, the organization was dismantled by the government's secret services, and its members and leadership were imprisoned or sent to forced labor camps. Ahmed Dogan was jailed based on allegations of attempted murder of the son of Todor Zhivkov and the daughter of Pencho Kubadinski. During Ahmed Dogan's imprisonment, he maintained the work of his organization, and continued to oppose the repressive policies of the regime. In 1989, he held several hunger strikes in prison in protest to the regime's policies, and demanded the following from the Bulgarian government:

“ 1)Amnesty for political prisoners opposed to the “Rebirth Process” 2) restoration of Turkish names 3) the passing of a law in Parliament guaranteeing people the right to speak freely in public their national minority language, including Turkish 4) freedom of creed 5) freedom to emigrate to Turkey” (TNLOB: <http://ww.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=32>).

In sum, the aim of the TNLOB, by means of peaceful demonstration, demanded the restoration of rights and freedoms to Bulgaria's Muslim population, and did not seek the territorial partition of the country. The absence of support for territorial partition is reflected in a police statement from January 21, 1989, where the leader Ahmed Dogan declared that “...he denies claims for territorial autonomy, and he is opposed to the territorial partition of Bulgaria” (<http://ww.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=32>). The fate of the TNLOB and the May 1989 demonstrations of the Muslim population against the regime's violation of human rights attracted international attention (<http://ww.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=32>). Following the disintegration of the communist regime, in December, 1989 Ahmed Dogan was granted amnesty and released from prison.

In December, 1990, the MRF was launched as an organization, with policy of continuity from the TNLOB, defending the rights and freedoms of Turkish and other Muslim minorities. In April 26, 1990 the party was officially registered in the Sofia district court, with a leader Ahmed Dogan (<http://www.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=33>). Prior to the party's constitutional status challenge by the nationalists, the MRF demanded “the legal protection of the Muslim community in conformity with international standards, political and civil rights, and guarantees for its ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity” (Vasilev, 2002: 113). The leader of the MRF, Ahmed Dogan was vocal in insisting for the protection of collective minority rights and cultural autonomy, but never expressed any demands for political or territorial autonomy, or advocated the use of violence. For instance, the MRF maintains in its platform the importance of “a united and democratic Bulgaria” and “denounces all forms of separatism, fundamentalism and fanaticism”. The MRF is opposed to “totalitarianism and extremism on the political left or right” (<http://www.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=33>).

Ahmed Dogan is also against the use of violence as a means to achieving political ends. This objective is reflected in one of his statements:

“I am against any forms of violence. None of my strategies that I built for myself and others involve violence. In my opinion, a person who utilizes the ‘spillage of blood’ as a means to achieving a particular end, has to distance himself/herself from the social, political or business processes. I am not a person who insists on achieving a goal by utilizing all possible means. The notion of utilizing ‘all possible means’ to achieving a desired end, suggests that the end justifies the means. I do not accept such a formula, which for me is a principle of nationalism, whether it is expressed by Hitler or Lenin, it doesn’t matter. From such a formula, one can draw monstrous principles” (<http://www.dps.bg/?pit=8&it=33>)

The MRF distanced itself (and still maintains such a distance) from the separatist nationalist Turkish Democratic Party of Adem Kenan (established in 1990, but banned from registration), which advocates the creation of a federal state in Bulgaria with equal status for Bulgarians and Turks (Vasilev, 2002: 114-115). In addition, Kenan does not recognize the Bulgarian Constitution. For example, when interviewed by several Bulgarian newspapers such as *24 chasa* (24 hours) and *Douma* in 1999, Kenan stated that “the entire Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria must be rewritten”. He argued that Bulgarians are a minority in Bulgaria, citing dubious statistics claiming that Muslims constitute 40% of Bulgaria’s population, and Christians 60%, of whom only 20% are Bulgarian. Based on these figures Kenan stated that the Turkish language should become official and that “autonomy should be sought for all municipalities with compact Turkish population” (i.e. Southern and Northeastern Bulgaria) (May 10, 1999: <http://www.b-info.com/tools/miva/newsview.mv?url=places/Bulgaria/news/99-05/may10d.bta>).

In contrast to such positions, the MRF maintains a moderate and inclusive agenda. The MRF’s policies transformed from a narrow focus on collective minority rights to addressing broader issues such as economic development and human rights for all Bulgarians. In 1991-1994, MRF’s political platform evolved from a somewhat isolationist and confrontational one emphasizing a “wounded collective memory” from the “Rebirth Process,” to a more universal one claiming to be representative of the nation’s values. (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 297-298). For example, article 1 of the MRF’s Statute, stipulates that “the Movement for Rights and Freedoms is an independent socio-political organization, founded to contribute to the unity of all Bulgarian citizens, by respecting the rights and freedoms of Bulgaria’s minorities – in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the country, the International Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and other international treaties” (<http://www.dps.bg/?it=24&pit=7>). The party maintains that its platform is “...founded on liberal principles, aiming for the protection of the

rights and freedoms of the person and the protection of minorities” (<http://www.dps.bg/?it=25&pit=7>). Membership and political representation positions are open to all Bulgarians, regardless of their ethnic origin. In fact, over the course of the years, the party has had several ethnic Bulgarian regional political representatives. Overall, the MRF’s program aims to establish guarantees against any forms of discrimination, advocates political cooperation with all parties and participation in coalitions, equal regional economic development and so on. In sum, the MRF transformed from a party representative exclusively of Turkish and Muslim minorities’ interests, to a more broad-based, centrist actor, supportive of the interests of all Bulgarian citizens, including minorities. This transformation was instrumental in permitting the legal existence of the party (refer to conflict over article 11.4 of the Constitution), and in becoming a balancing actor in Bulgarian politics gaining concessions for the country’s minorities (1990-1994).

The electoral system adopted in 1990 was a mix of proportional representation and a majoritarian system, isolating small parties (especially nationalist parties) that could not pass the 4% threshold and stimulated the formation of electoral coalitions. The two major competitors for complete political control that emerged in Bulgaria’s political space in 1990 were the BSP and the UDF (Tanev, 2001:238). The MRF emerged as the third political force in Bulgarian politics, creating a balance between the UDF and BSP. The MRF found itself in a decisive position in Bulgarian politics as a centrist party, possessing a considerable amount of bargaining power, especially between 1991 and 1994. The two opposing political forces had to tone down their anti-Turkish rhetoric, in order to gain the MRF on their side. An alliance with the MRF was important for both the UDF and the BSP, from the point of view of winning elections and staying in government. Being in the position of a third major political force, the MRF had stronger bargaining power in terms of demanding the protection of Turkish/Muslim minorities’ rights (Ragaru, 2001:305).

In 1991, although not having opportunity to participate in government due to the uncertainty and turmoil over the Turkish question, the MRF sided with the UDF in an informal alliance with the motivation to remove the Socialists from power and to punish those responsible for human rights crimes during the assimilation campaign. This informal alliance, based on a common anti-communist stance, helped the UDF to stay in power for one year, and on the other hand caused the Socialists to side with nationalist parties and adopt anti-Turkish rhetoric. The UDF-MRF alliance broke down in October 1992 as the UDF refused to acknowledge MRF’s social and economic policy concerns. The reason for the split was the UDF’s adoption of a neo-liberal economic policy of crash marketization, privatization and liberalization, the effects of which impoverished the Bulgarian people in general and Muslims in particular. This policy could not address effectively the problem of unequal regional economic development. Ahmed Dogan was in support of a more socially oriented economic reform program that would address the development of economically stagnant regions, where as the UDF was in opposition to such

program (Todorova, 1993:177-178; Andreev, 1996:35-36). Some of these economically underdeveloped regions included Muslim populated areas in Northeastern and Southern Bulgaria. The impact of the economic crisis was more severe in these regions than in any other in the country. Many Muslims in the Rhodopes were dependent on the tobacco production industry, which since the implementation of economic reforms suffered due to loss of former Soviet and East European markets and fall in commodity prices. Others in the North, mainly agricultural producers, suffered from the dissolution of cooperatives. Unemployment in the Muslim populated areas was 3 to 4 times higher than the national average rate of 16%. The unemployment rate among Turks and Pomaks approximated to about 40% and among Roma to 80% (Kostova, 2000:23). In fact, the results from a sociological study conducted in 1991 show that in comparison to other issues, most of the respondents were concerned with the country's deteriorating economic situation. Among the interviewed, 56% were distressed with the country's economic crisis, and saw this to be their major problem. Political problems stood second, with 14% of the respondents expressing concern, followed by problems of loyalty, religion and ethnicity (Galabov, 1993:49).

In sum, the split between the UDF and the MRF was based on differences over economic policy and its negative effects on society rather than ethnicity. Bulgarian citizens were more concerned with the country's economic crisis and its negative effect on their lives, rather than the ethnic situation in the country. The MRF broadened its platform to include issues not only related to human rights, religion and culture, but also to the social and economic well-being of its constituency and of Bulgarian society as a whole.

In 1992, with the withdrawal of the MRF from its alliance with the UDF, and the passing of an MRF-BSP vote of non-confidence, led to the collapse of the UDF government. The same year, the MRF allied with the BSP and some elements from the UDF to form a new government, and helped the BSP to sustain itself in power until 1994. During this change in government, the MRF played an important role in proposing a candidate to become the new Prime Minister and head the new government – the politically unaffiliated academician Prof. Lyuben Berov (AL/BGR/93.001:V). In addition, the MRF's pursuit of an alliance with the BSP was a positive move, resulting in the moderation of the BSP's anti-Turkish stance. As Vasilev (2002) observes, in this period “strictly partisan considerations - primarily in the form of an intense political conflict between the UDF and the BSP, which led the reins of government to be entrusted to a neutral third party – appear to have been more salient than ethnic divisions and enmities” (p.122). The constant competition for power between the BSP (the reds) and the UDF (the blues) was more intense than ethnic hatred. The MRF played an important balancing role by preventing either party of monopolizing power, and contributed to policy moderation in this bi-partisan environment leaning either to the left or to the right. The MRF accomplished its incorporation into democratic politics, adopted a moderate and broad-based platform and improved its

interaction with other parties. Other parties officially recognized the MRF as an equal partner on the political scene, and even the nationalists arrived to the realization that the MRF was not a disloyal political player. During the 1997 Parliamentary elections the nationalist anti-Turkish rhetoric was moderated, and the MRF formed a coalition incorporating left, left-centrist, centrist and monarchist parties under the name Union of National Salvation, supported by the former King Simeon II, against the BSP and the UDF. During the June 2001 elections, the MRF received 7.5% of the votes and 21 seats in Parliament, and the National Movement of Simeon II won an unexpected victory. The MRF and the National Movement of Simeon II created a government coalition, which proved to be constructive for Bulgaria's ethnic relations (See Appendix, Figure 12) (Ibid: 122-123).

In sum, the party alliances that emerged in the initial period of transition and the important balancing role that the MRF played at this time, along with the evolution of the party's concerns from more isolationist and minority-oriented politics to broad-based and inclusive politics proved to be beneficial for Bulgaria's ethnic relations. The incorporation of the MRF in parliamentary institutions and local government was instrumental in channeling minority concerns to the political process. The compromise on Bulgaria's national question was reached through democratic ethnopluralist means in the political space. Thus, ethnopluralist politics such as political party re-configurations, negotiation and compromise, along with the role, evolution and integration of the MRF, played a decisive part in alleviating ethnic animosities. Other important factors working in this direction were internal liberal elite support and external influences, as well as the evolution of societal attitudes towards the foreign 'other.'

4.3 Influence of the European Integration Process:

The roles of European institutions along with internal liberal support from the UDF were instrumental in stimulating the recognition of minority rights in Bulgarian politics. In 1991 Bulgaria submitted an application for membership to Council of Europe. During the evaluation process, the Council expressed their disapproval over the Constitutional ban on the formation of ethnic parties, which limited minorities' opportunities for representation and expression of their concerns over issues such as cultural, religious and educational rights. In addition, Bulgarian liberals in the UDF equally sought the opportunity to join European institutions and confirmed the necessity of the practical application of guarantees of minority political, cultural and religious rights. Liberal-oriented elites, some of which were the former Presidents Zhelyu Zhelev and Petar Stojanov, publicly denounced the 'Rebirth Process' and other past violations on Muslim minorities' rights, initiated respect for human rights, and worked in the direction of meeting EU reform requirements to facilitate the country's future integration (Anagnostou, 2005: 100-102).

In March 1993, Bulgaria signed an Association Agreement with the European Union that came into effect in January 1995. In December 2002, at the Copenhagen European Council, the EU announced the membership acceptance date for Bulgaria in the European Union – 2007 (Giatzidis, 2004:434-441). In the 1990s, the Bulgarian government debated on and signed several European Conventions. The goal of EU integration pressed politicians to revise and condemn former human rights violations against minority groups. The EU accession process has called for the adoption of legal provisions by the Bulgarian government for the protection of minority rights. Bulgaria ratified the European Convention on Human Rights on May 7, 1992. A National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues was also set up in 1997, to address minorities' concerns (Maeva: 3-4). While raising considerable public and Parliamentary debates on the definition of “minority” and its legal consistency with the Bulgarian Constitution, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified in 1999. Based on further EU requirements, Parliament voted in 2003 to implement the Protection from Discrimination Act (2003) (Kostova: 18-19; Maeva: 4).

Although the ratification of EU Conventions and their incorporation into Bulgaria's domestic legal framework was a positive step in terms of providing legal guarantees for minority rights and non-discrimination, their practical implementation to present remains ambiguous. On the one hand, following intense Parliamentary debates and social discontent, considerable government efforts were made to advance education and media broadcasting in the Turkish language. In 1991-1994, the Bulgarian government issued and implemented a decree permitting voluntary education in Turkish from grades 1-8. An Islamic College and four secondary Islamic schools were founded in the country. Media publications in Turkish, and as of 2001 news broadcasting in Turkish began on the Bulgarian National Television and Bulgarian National Radio “Hristo Botev” (Maeva:2-3). On the other hand, a level of discrimination persists against ethnic minority groups, especially the Roma. For example, an Amnesty International news report, lists some incidents of violence against Roma, one of them conducted by police officials:

- *“On 30 April, Georgi Angelov was reportedly brutally beaten by two men who cut off his ear with a razor blade. This and similar incidents were reportedly not effectively investigated. Local human rights organizations have called for better policing in Romani neighbourhoods and known meeting-places of skinheads.*
- *On 16 January Assen Zarev from the Fakulteta neighbourhood in the capital was reportedly beaten by police officers near his house who threatened to shoot him if he did not give information about the whereabouts of some men suspected of cutting down a tree in the near-by woods. Assen Zarev later obtained a forensic medical certificate, describing injuries consistent with the allegations of ill-treatment.*
<http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGEUR010012005>)

A 1999 Report on Bulgaria from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance/ Council of Europe, recognizes that the most vulnerable minority group in Bulgaria is the Roma. In regards to the Turkish minority, the Report stipulates that their situation has considerably improved, although discrimination remains in terms of employment opportunities and military recruitment placements, restricted to the construction corps (note: Turks, Pomaks and Roma soldiers have traditionally been isolated by the military in the construction corps). In terms of religion, the Report states that tolerance exists towards individuals belonging to the three traditional confessional groups – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but discrimination persists towards non-traditional religious denominations such as for instance Jehova’s Witnesses (http://www.coe.int/T/e/human_rights/ecri/5-Archives/1-ECRI's_work/5-CBC_Second_reports/Bulgaria_CBC_2.asp).

Most international laws and conventions can only provide legal guidelines for the desirable treatment of minorities, but lack an enforcement mechanism to ensure their practical application. Many states with human rights violation problems hide behind the principle of national sovereignty, and the only method to ensure compliance with international UN and EU conventions for the protection of minorities is by blaming and shaming perpetrators or imposing economic sanctions. Legal provisions may set the groundwork for group rapprochement, but real change in terms of treatment and toleration of national minorities can only come from within society. Education, intra-cultural dialogue and exchange can facilitate the gradual eradication of prejudice towards the ‘other’.

4.4 Gradual evolution of societal attitudes towards the ethnic ‘other’:

Although prejudice against the Turkish and other Muslim minorities (especially Roma) minorities still exists among ethnic Bulgarians, and some acts of violence committed by the public or police based on ethnicity still take place, there has been an important trend towards the weakening of these prejudices and recognition that human beings are equal regardless race, creed, gender or social status. Considerable efforts have been pursued by society, intellectuals and non-governmental organizations with a focus on human rights such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (*Bulgarski helzinski komitet*, BHK), the Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights (*Bulgarski advokati za pravata na choveka*), the Human Rights Project (*Proekt Prava na choveka*) and Tolerance Foundation (*Fondacija Tolerantnost*) to counter these trends. Attitudes towards minorities have been evolving in a positive direction, although at a considerably slow pace. The roles of non-governmental organizations in addressing the issue have varied from focus on human rights, to the stimulation of intra-ethnic dialogue through cultural events or symposia. Efforts of human-rights based non-governmental organizations have focused on naming and shaming perpetrators, and submitting reports documenting police brutality against minorities to the European Court on Human Rights (Ivanov&Ilieva, 2005:22). Other non-governmental organizations, the most prominent being Guven and the International Centre for Minority Studies,

are inter-ethnic mission based, committed to resolving disputes and improving relations among various ethnic groups. Rapprochement is pursued via educational and cultural projects, such as the provision of education grants, organization of language classes and seminars, conduction of research, or staging exhibitions and cultural performances to preserve and popularize a particular culture (Snavely & Chakarova, 1997:317-324).

As previously mentioned, in Bulgaria, there is more religious-based rather than ethnic based tolerance. Mutual religious tolerance is evident among Christians and Muslims, and intolerance persists more so against new religious denominations such as Evangelics or Protestants. Insults tend not to be religious-based such as “As bad as a Muslim”, but rather ethnic-based, such as “As bad as a Turk”, “As dirty and dishonest as a Gypsy”, and “as wild as a Bulgarian” (Zhelyaskova, 2001: 298). According to opinion polls, negative attitudes towards the Turks and other Muslims in Bulgarian society have been decreasing. For example, 84% of ethnic Bulgarians in 1992 compared to 72% in 1994 and 63% in 1997 claimed that “Bulgarian Turks are religious fanatics”, and 84% in 1992, 72% in 1994, and 46% in 1997 believed that “ethnic Turks can not be trusted or relied upon”; 84% in 1992, 55% in 1994, and 37% in 1997 agreed that “ethnic Turks are hostile towards Bulgarians” and 37% in 1992, 6% in 1994, and 29% in 1997 responded to the claim that “Everything possible should be done to make more Turks emigrate to Turkey” (Ivanov&Ilieva,2005:23). The issues on which ethnic Bulgarians have expressed the greatest discontent are public school education and news broadcasting in the Turkish language. Nevertheless, reflecting on the results from these polls, it seems that Bulgarians’ ethnic-based prejudices are gradually disappearing over the years.

Furthermore, the fear and distrust towards the Muslim or Turkish ‘other’, has been gradually eroding. As Zhelyaskova (2001) observes “otherness is perceived calmly as ‘a familiar strangeness and not as something completely unknown and therefore threatening” (p.300). Ethnic and religious co-existence in Bulgaria and mutual processes of interaction and communication gradually eliminate rigid boundaries of ‘us versus them’. Ethno-religious perceptions towards the ‘other’ evolve into “familiar strangeness” followed by the subsequent realization of the value of the human being regardless of ethnic origin or religious affiliation. A sociological study – “Changes in Ethnic Perceptions among Students” (*Promjana na Etnicheskite Obrazi i Uchenicheskoto Vuzprijatie*) conducted in 1992 with 212 students (124 Turks, 84 Bulgarians, 1 Roma, 1 ‘Turkish Roma’, 2 unidentified women) in an ethnically mixed region (Isperih), confirms these reconciliatory trends. Although the results are limited to one region, they still contain valuable information on ethnic relations. In terms of knowledge about religious holidays and their significance, 1 out of 6 of the Christian respondents were familiar with Muslim holidays and their importance. Among the Muslim students, every second participant had knowledge about various Christian holidays. Overall, the respondents articulated through their responses a tolerant attitude towards the other’s religious group (Germanova, 1992:138-139).

In terms of lifestyle, 50% of the Turkish respondents did not see a difference between the Turkish and Bulgarian housing arrangements, and Bulgarian respondents saw only some differences, most noticeable being (87%) the wearing of *shalvari* by older Muslim women. House visitations between the two groups were quite common, where 71.4% of the Bulgarian and 71.8% of the Turkish students visited one another during holidays or without any reason, because they were neighbors and friends. One interesting response provided by a Bulgarian girl was that “Turks and Bulgarians do not hate one another that much, and after all we are all human beings. Therefore, if you are friends with a Turkish family you can go and visit them whenever you want”. In terms of general perceptions about the other ethnic group, both Bulgarians and Turks overestimated their own group in comparison to the other. The Turks saw themselves as good, patient, hard working, understanding, but yet poor and confused. The Bulgarians self-evaluated themselves as good, hospitable and persistent people, but also as “*Bai-Ganiovci*”, lazy and anti-social. The most negative attitude was expressed against the Roma, among 62% of the Bulgarian and 52% of the Turkish respondents (Roma were seen as liars, robbers, always ‘seeking to pull a deal’) (Ibid: 139-141).

While the Bulgarian students had some positive evaluation about themselves, interestingly enough, they also had the negative self-Orientalizing perception of resembling the literary figure Bai-Ganio (uncle Ganio), the main character of a popular classic 19th century novel *Bai-Ganio: Incredible Tales about a Contemporary Bulgarian*, by the Bulgarian writer and political pamphleteer Aleko Konstantinov. In Konstantinov’s novel, Bai-Ganio Balkanski is an itinerant trader of rose oil and rugs, who travels across Western Europe. Due to his inadequate actions (i.e. shouting, pinching a waitress, talking out loud and blowing his nose in the Vienna Opera during a performance; spitting on the carpet in the house of his host; acting foolish so others would pay his bills), the character gets involved in absurd situations, which clash with what are considered to be civilized manners and values, and are even resented by his compatriots (students or intellectuals) that he encounters during his trips (Daskalov, 2001:530-531). Bai-Ganjo is a character that reveals the problems within Bulgarian society, a humorous image of the ‘unscrupulous and vulgar self’ clashing with the lifestyle and mannerisms of the civilized European figure. Although certainly not meant to be a signifier of every Bulgarian, the figure of Bai Ganjo “serves as a test to tease out and reveal some of the basic configurations and fundamental problems of modern Bulgarian society” (Ibid: 548). As Neuburger (1997) notes “...in Bulgaria’s own struggle with democracy and economic transition the self-Orientalizing, self-depreciating figure of Bai Ganjo has also re-emerged...as the internal foe to national development” (p.15) (See Appendix, Figure 13). The average Bulgarian’s encounters with problems of the ‘self’ distract the focus on the ethnic ‘other.’ All Bulgarian citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation struggle through the same daily problems of economic underdevelopment, political instability, crime and corruption.

In sum, although ethnic-based violence and discrimination still take place in Bulgarian society, there is evidence that efforts are being made in the direction to gradually eradicate intolerant behavior through the activities of the non-governmental sector, with a focus on human rights and intra-ethnic rapprochement. The necessity of the average Bulgarian to deal with the “*Bai Ganiovshchina*” from within, have re-directed the focus from the ethnic ‘other.’ Most Bulgarians have gradually raised civic values of nationhood, maintained a level of cultural nationalism, and have to a certain extent set aside divisive ethno-nationalist tendencies.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to deconstruct simplistic accounts placing Eastern European countries under the common denominator of being ethnically divisive societies plagued by historically entrenched primordial divisions, which were supposedly ‘frozen’ by communism and rose to the surface following the fall of the Iron Curtain. It has been established that nationalism may adopt various forms. The most pronounced form of nationalism in a state is often influenced by political, economic and social realities. The prevalence of ethnic nationalism in a state as was in the case of Bulgaria varied throughout history, and was not a historically or geographically fixed feature. There were various forms of nationalism throughout the history of Bulgaria. Nationalism was an anti-imperial and romantic prior to liberation from Ottoman rule (1878), and then transformed to irredentist, aiming to united territories populated by fellow nationals to the Bulgarian state, followed by revanchist/defensive ethno-cultural forms after defeat in the Second Balkan War (1913) and two World Wars, cultural during communism (1944-1989), and civic, ethnic and cultural during the transition period (1989-present). The prevalence of some forms of nationalism over others were influenced by changes in the international conjuncture, wars, domestic politics and ideological currents, relations with Turkey, economics and social realities. These nationalist variants and influences had an impact on the treatment of the Bulgarian state towards its Muslim population, ranging from passive tolerance or neglect to the implementation of assimilatory campaigns (1912-1913; 1930-1940; 1956-1989).

Following the disintegration of the Bulgarian communist regime in 1989, Bulgaria witnessed the escalation of ethnic tensions between its Muslim minority population and ethnic Bulgarian majority (1989-1991). Despite expectations on the contrary, the ‘ticking time bomb of ethnic conflict’ did not explode after the collapse of the communist regime, and ethnic differences were channeled for mediation in the political and social space without resorting to violence. This was achieved through democratic ethno-pluralism, which was constructive to fostering civic unity while providing safeguards for ethnic minorities’ rights and freedoms for expression in education, politics (MRF) and the media. Most people were concerned with eliminating the possibility of the coming to power of another authoritarian government, rather than with the issue of the MRF’s existence and participation in the political process. Anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim rhetoric was

used by various political actors in times of economic instability and political competition for government office. Representatives from different ethnic, political, social and religious groups were able to unite around a common civic identity, and pulled together to negotiate and reach a compromise on Bulgaria's national question. Various factors were constructive to fostering ethnic peace in the country such as: 1.) the weakness of nationalist parties and their inability to institutionalize their platform 2.) the evolution of the MRF from a minority party to a centrist broad-based actor , which was able to maintain the balance of power between the BSP and the UDF 3.) influences of the EU integration process on Bulgaria's minority rights legislation and compliance and 4.) the gradual evolution of societal attitudes towards the ethnic 'other', and respect for civic values. The absence of retribution attempts by members of the Turkish and other Muslim communities for past injustices, and the ability of the Bulgarian government to integrate minority and nationalist concerns, were instrumental to the preservation of peace in the country. The unity of the Bulgarian state was not challenged by the Muslim population, and the minorities' economic, cultural and political interests were secured. Democratic ethno-pluralist methods of political power-sharing, negotiation and compromise were constructive to accommodating diverse group concerns, including those of the nationalists, and resulted in remedying of ethnic tensions. Democratic ethno-pluralism also facilitated the process of gradual consolidation of national civic identities, while it provided space for the preservation of ethnic and cultural particularities.

Appendix

Figure 1:

Bulgarian Medieval State



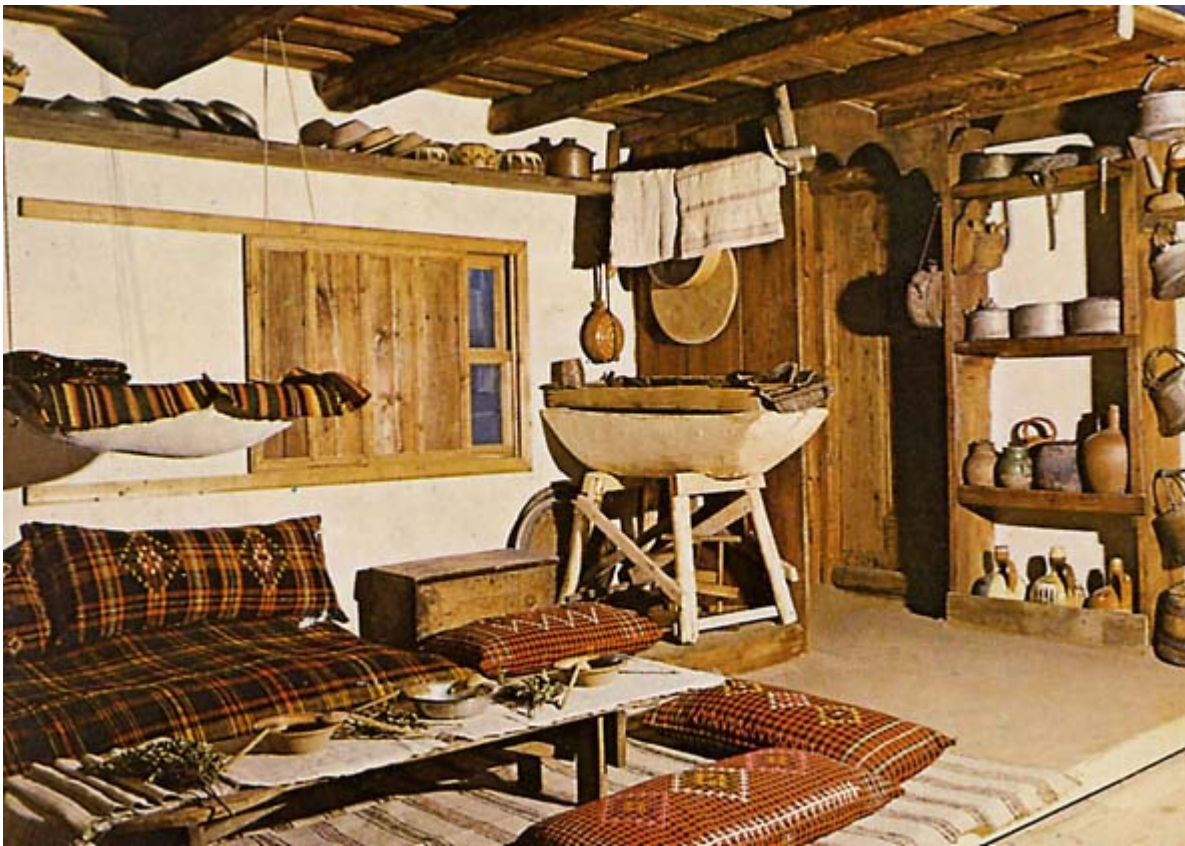
Source: http://www.purebulgaria.com/en_version/history.php

Figure 2

Paisii Hilendarski



Figure 3 Bulgarian household (1830-70)



Bulgarian men wearing hats (kalpak) and a woman wearing traditional scarf



Sources: <http://www.tenoresdibitti.com/bittiexp05/snimka.jpg>

<http://rumen123.hit.bg/rumen1.jpg>

Figure 4

San Stefano Bulgaria (1878)



Source: http://www.purebulgaria.com/en_version/history.php

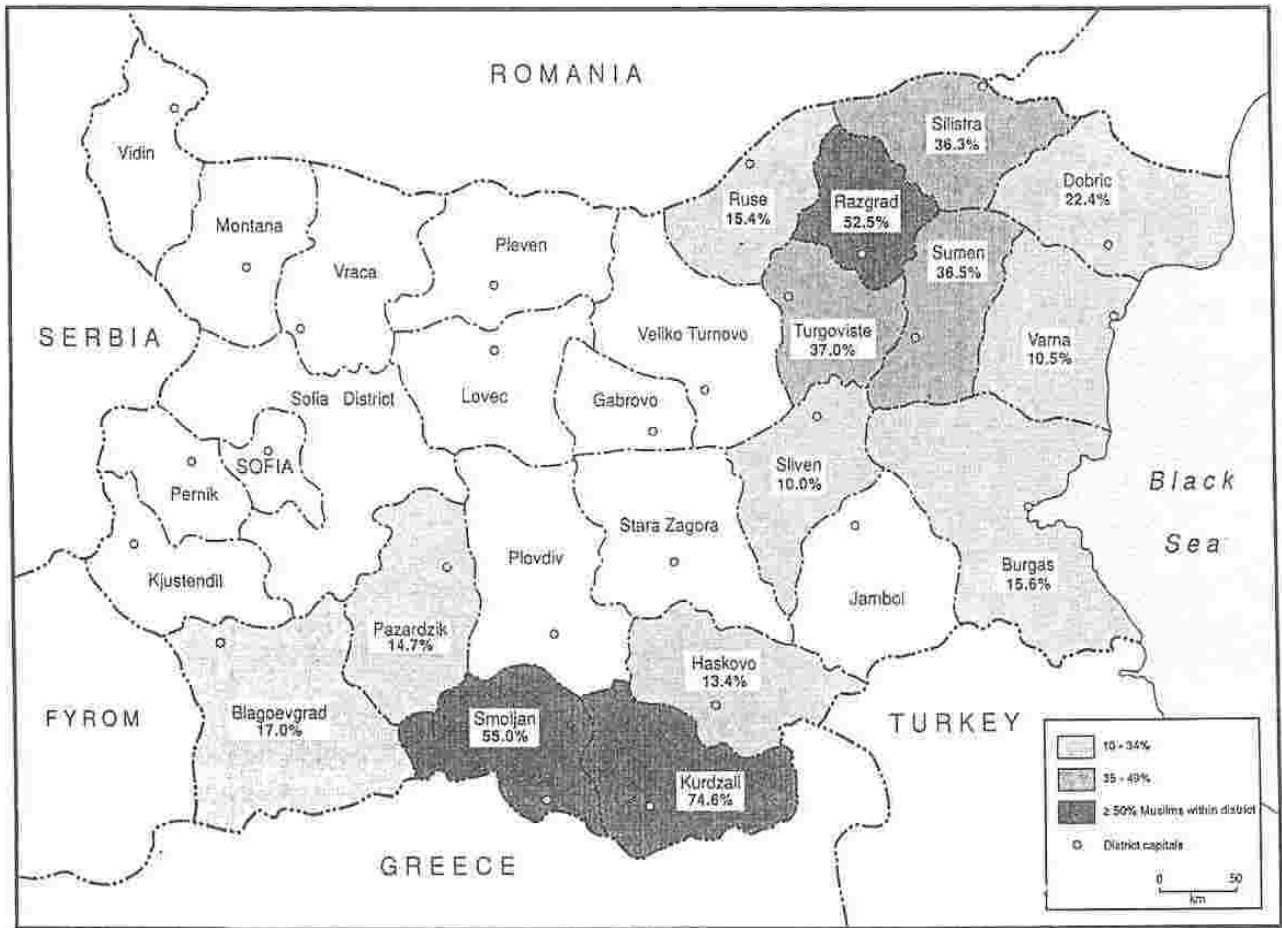
Figure 5

Bulgaria after WWII



Source: http://www.purebulgaria.com/en_version/history.php

Figure 6



Muslims in Bulgaria

Source: Eminov, 1997: 80

Figure 7



Fig. 3. Scene from the First Balkan War (1912). The Pomak who is bent over bares his head for baptism by an Orthodox Christian priest. Pomak men in the background, presumably all baptized, appear bareheaded while the still “veiled” Pomak women wait their turn. PODA, 959k—photo collection.

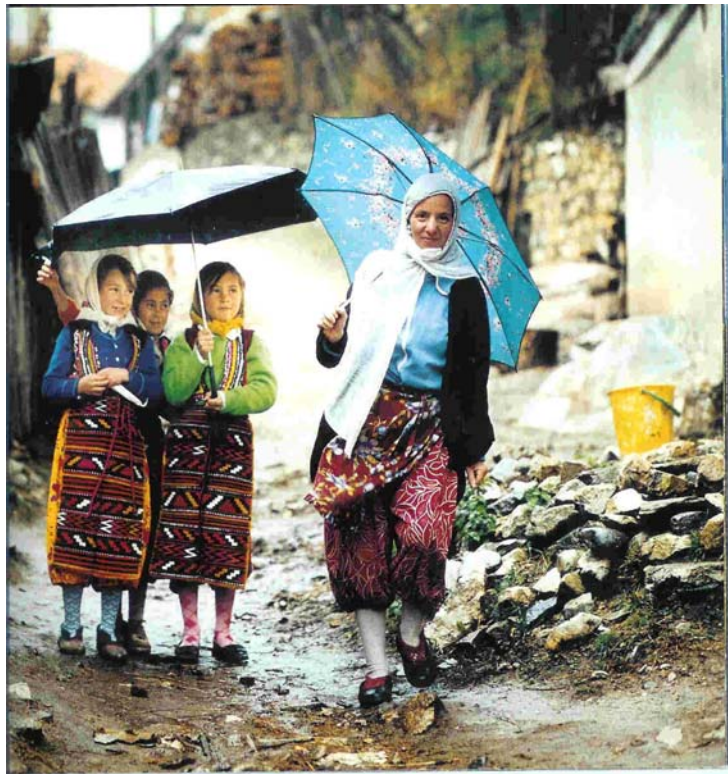


Fig. 2. Prior to the forced conversion of Pomaks during the First Balkan War (1912), Pomak men appear in turbans while Pomak women still wear the so-called veil. PODA, 959k—photo collection.

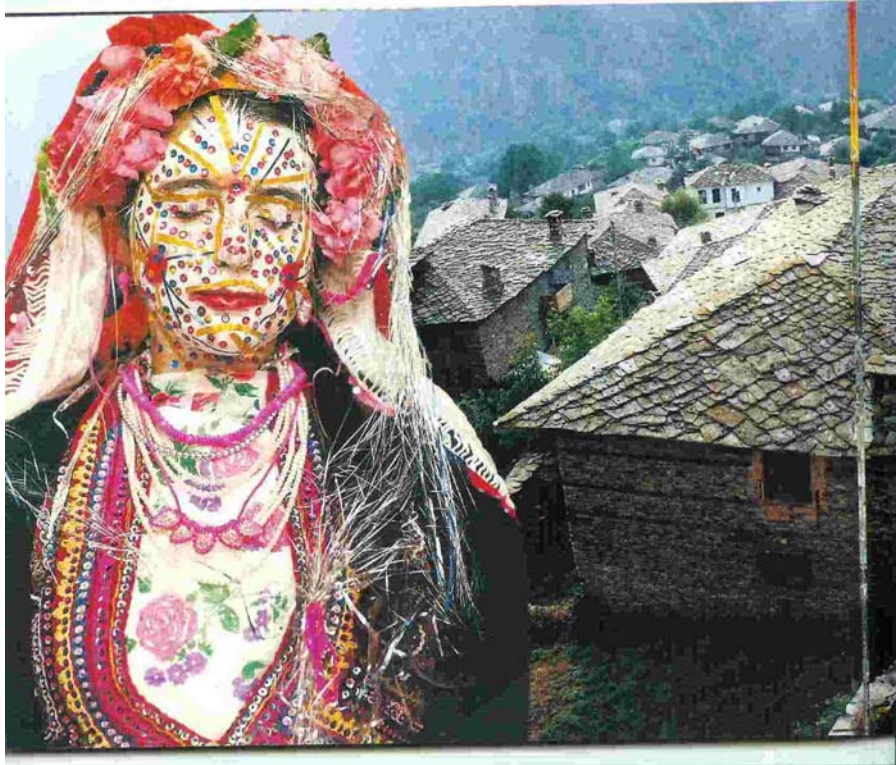
Source : Neuburger, 2004 :93,94

Figure 8

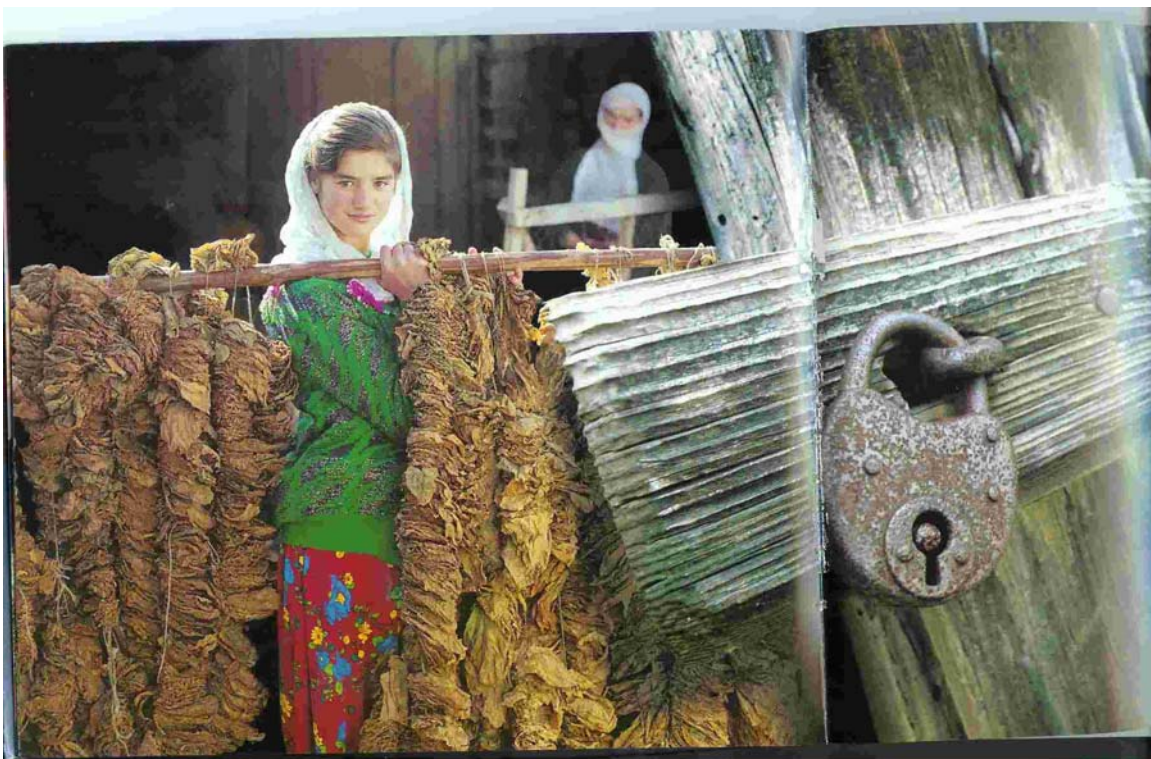
Pomak women in rural areas in traditional dress



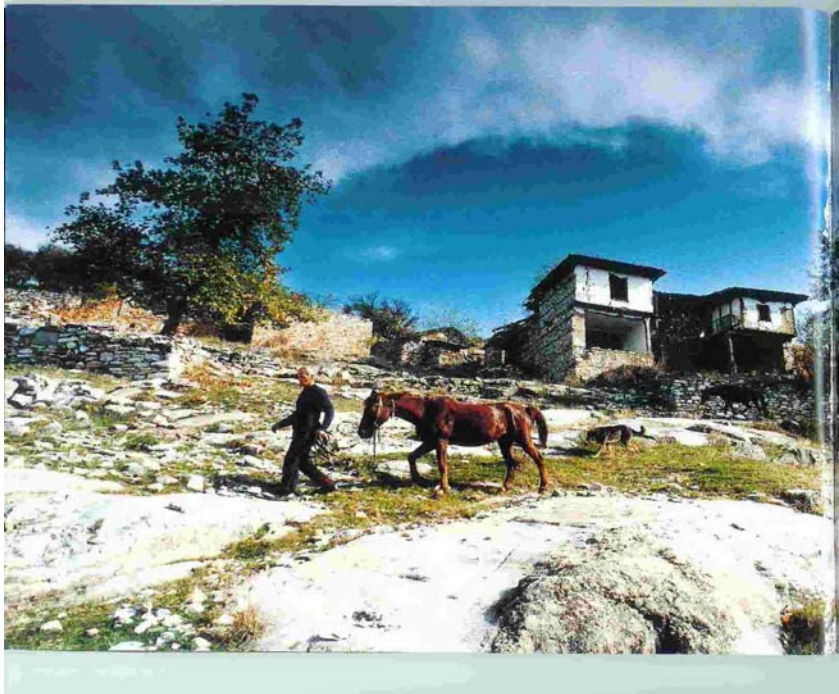
Pomak bride



A Pomak girl carrying dried tobacco leaves on her shoulders



A Pomak man



Source : Kanchev K. and Hristov B. *Ot Iznik Slonce do Zanih : Photolyric*, Faraon Design : 1997

Figure 9

Members of the *Rodina* Organization



Source : Neuburger, 2004 : 98

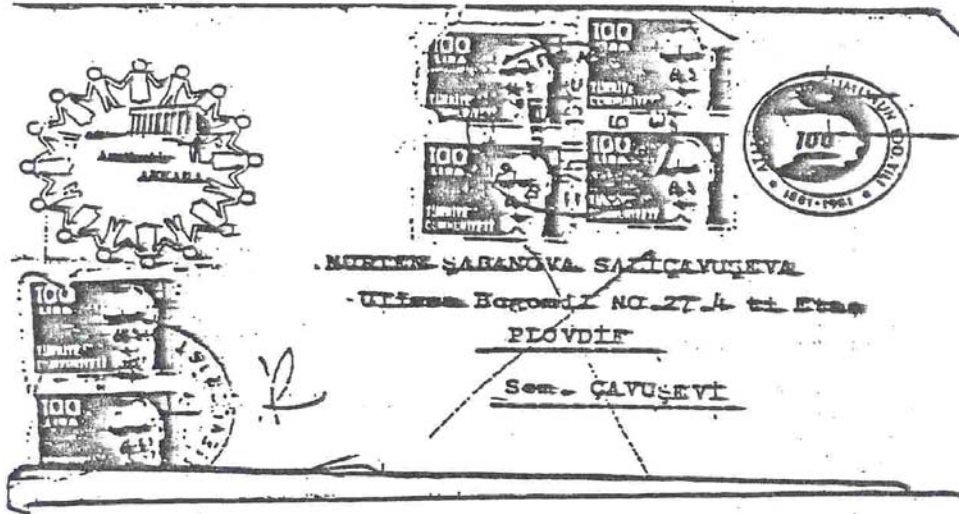
Figure 10

Documents from the “Re-birth Process”

Letters addressed to Turks in Bulgaria were returned to the sender and marked "unknown"

A/40/904
English
Page 19

APPENDIX II



Handwritten signature

RETOUR	Обратна
Refusé	Отказан
Non réclamé	Неотърсен
Érubi	Замислен
Démisage	Прикрепен на друг адрес
N° existe plus	Не съществува вече
Étranger	Неизвестен
Décédé	Починал
Adresse insuffisante	Адресът нееднотъчен
Non admis	Непрет

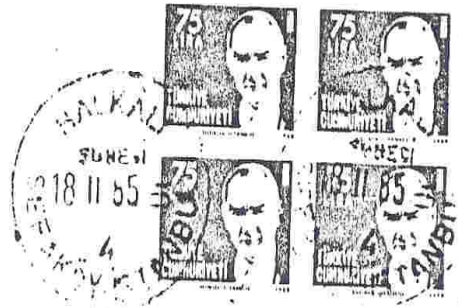
La cause est marquée par X

Причината се отбелязва с X

Восстановен: _____ Проверен: _____

LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THE TURKS IN BULGARIA
ARE RETURNED TO SENDERS MARKED "INCONNU"

Bulgaria



ок. Разградски
с. Беленци
Назмие Църлева
Мехмедова

R HALKALI
269

Обр. 250

RETOUR		Обратно
Refusé		Отказан
Non réclamé		Непотърсен
Parti		Заминал
Déménage		Преместен на друг адрес
N° existe plus		Не съществува вече
inconnu	X	Непознат
Décédé		Починал
Adresse insuffisante		Адресът недостатъчен
Non admis		Неприет

La cause est marquée par X Причината се отбелязва с X
Пощальон: Проверил:



A Turk of Bulgaria – “Georgi Dimitrov” from Kurdjali, charged with speaking Turkish

ОБЩНСКИ НАРОДЕН СЪВЕТ /КМЕТСТВО/ - гр./с/ _____
ОКРЪГ КЪРДЖАЛИЙСКИ

А К Т № _____

За установяване на административно нарушение

Днес: 18.11.1983 г. в гр./с/ Кърджали
подписаният Ангел Радев Христоф на длъжност
/собствено, бащино и фамилно име на актосъставителя/
старовоачел при ДНССС

в присъствието на свидетелите:
1. Стоян Георгиев Дожрев от гр./с/ СМУ-МВР
2. Димитър Иванов Топалов от гр./с/ Кърджали
Сашо Йорданов Стояков

съставих този акт против гр./с/ Кърджали, гр./с/ Кърджали
имена на нарушителя: Георги Димитров Бек 90 алз
от гр./с/ Кърджали ул. _____ пещиса дер побомест
на възраст 34 години и месторабота _____
за следното: говори турски в гр./с/ _____ окр. _____

7кратко, но конкретно описание на наруш. - действие или бездействие/
С извършеното е нарушен: чл 2 буква а от наредба

7посочва се нарушения законен текст от определен закон, указ, поста-
новление, разпореждане, правилник, наредба, инструкция, заповед и др.
поради което и съгласно чл.36, ал.1 от Закона за административните
нарушения и наказания съставих този акт за установяване на админи-
страивно нарушение.

Свидетели: 1. _____
2. _____
Актосъставител: _____

International Press Commentaries on the "Rebirth Process" and diaspora activism in Canada against the Bulgarian government's assimilation campaign

Canadian Association For Solidarity of Turks From Bulgaria
Kanada Bulgaristan Türkleri Dayanışma Derneği

P.O. BOX: 8, STATION "J"
TORONTO, ONT. CANADA
M4J 4X8

Monday, September 11, 1988 37

Protest decries 'killing of Turks'

By SAM PAZZANO
Toronto Sun

About 100 people marched on Yonge St. yesterday to protest what they say is the slaughter and brutal treatment of Turks in Bulgaria.

The protesters, mostly Turks and Macedonians with Bulgarian links, placed a black wreath at the Bulgarian consulate.

Protesters accused the Bulgarian government of killing up to 7,000 Turks since 1984 to force them to renounce their Turkish names and Moslem religion.

"We will not neglect or forget our Turkish brothers and sisters in Bulgaria," Ozer Aksoy, spokesman for Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations, told the crowd at Toronto City Hall.

"We want External Affairs Minister Joe Clark to bring up this issue with the Bulgarians at every appropriate meeting," Aksoy said later in an interview.

Spokesman Vesna Karapetrova said Bulgaria's half-million Macedonians have encountered similar treatment for the last 30 years.

Their schools have been closed and language rights also denied, she said.

DEAR FRIENDS AND FELLOW CANADIANS

TO DAY ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY THE KANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SOLIDARITY OF TURKS FROM BULGARIA PEACEFULLY PROTESTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST THE ETNIC TURKISH MINORITY IN BULGARIA.

IN ORDER TO STOP THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT FROM COMPLETING THIS GENOCIDE WE ARE CALLING UPON TO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC OPINION:

PLEASE HELP US TO END THIS TRAGEDY IN BULGARIA.

"JOIN US TO BOYCOT BULGARIAN PRODUCTS"

SINCERELY YOURS,

Canadian Association for
Solidarity of Turks
from Bulgaria (Toronto)

December 10, 1988

End killing, 150 chant at Bulgaria consulate

By John Duncanson
Toronto Star

About 150 Canadian Turks descended on the Bulgarian consulate yesterday to demand an end to the "brutal, forced assimilation" of millions of indigenous Turks living in Bulgaria.

Shouting "stop the killing, stop the torture," the crowd taunted embassy consulate officials watching from inside the Adelaide St. W. building to come out and address them.

Two Turkish children then left a black wreath and a letter calling upon the Communist regime to stop the practice of forcibly changing the names of Turkish citizens to Bulgarian as part of that government's assimilation policy.

The government began to change the names of more than 1 million Turks living in Bulgaria in 1985.

7,000 shot

The government said it was a voluntary program of assimilation, but protesters charged that those who didn't consent to having their names changed were thrown in jail, tortured, and even killed.

Organizers of yesterday's rally and march said more than 7,000 Turks have been shot for refusing to change their names.

Mustafa Ozturk escaped Bulgaria's repressive rule in 1975, but like thousands of other Turks, he can't return and has no way of getting in touch with his relatives still in Bulgaria.

"I don't even know what their names are now. The government won't allow me to talk to them. I don't know if my brothers and sisters are alive or dead," he said.

Earlier, at Nathan Phillips Square, organizers called on Canadians to boycott Bulgarian products to pressure the Communist government to clean up its act.

"Please help us to end this tragedy in Bulgaria," said Ismail Vataer, president of the Canadian Association for Solidarity of Turks from Bulgaria.

"We speak for justice, we speak for freedom for all minorities in Bulgaria," he told the crowd waving placards and flags from Turkey and Canada.

THE SUNDAY STAR, SEPTEMBER 11, 1988 / A3

'Hostility' to ethnic Turks grows in Bulgaria

By Edward Steen Special to The Star

SOFIA — "Something crazy is happening in this country," said Assen Agov, managing director of Bulgarian television news.

"In six months' time, some of the Turks will come back, and then they will be met by a wall of hostility."

Agov, a well-known personality in Bulgaria, appeared visibly shaken by his visit to the crowded camps of refugees on the southern border.

Many had no clear idea of where they were going — or why — except that they were Turkish.

'Fallen to pieces'

"Something has broken down," Agov said. "We lived together for some 500 years and it's fallen to pieces. It's a very serious ethical and political problem which cannot be solved in a totalitarian society."

The headlong exodus of — so far — 100,000 Bulgarian Turks, the largest population movement in Europe since the 1940s, has created an emergency in industry and agriculture just as the harvest approaches.

At least 300,000 ethnic Turks are expected to leave in the coming weeks, a Bulgarian foreign ministry spokesman said this week.

The effect on the rest of the population has been to stoke up patriotic fervor and harden the ever-present, if vague, resentment of the now-vanishing million-strong Turkish minority.

In a city like Ruse, far outside the Turkish enclaves in the south and northeast, up to 40 per cent of the workforce are reported to have left or stopped work while they wait for their papers.

Razgrad, 80 kilometres (50 miles) south, a centre of Turkish protest during the hunger strikes and demonstrations in May, risks becoming a ghost town: its population has dropped from 75,000 to 15,000.

But the school children, nurses and office workers now being drafted into factories and farms are happy to do their bit, Agov said.

Nor have there been many complaints about the whole workforce going on a six-day week.

If the object of the exercise has been to

drum up nationalist support for Todor Zhivkov, the 78-year-old party leader, and justify his hard line against dissidents and reformers, it has been effective.

Passport law

It is notable that the mobilization of the workforce has been even more radical than the grave-situation warrants.

"Why?" asked Agov.

His frankness is in sharp contrast to the official line that the descendants of Bulgarians Islamized during the 500 years of Turkish rule are tourists taking advantage of the new passport law (though this is not in fact coming into force for anyone else until Sept. 1).

Supposedly, there are no Turks here.

A quixotic attempt to make this true began in late 1984 and early 1985 with forcible name-changing.

It was the seed of the present crisis, and more resented even than the closure of mosques and Turkish schools, and finally a ban on speaking Turkish at all.

"This 'mass emigration' is a national

referendum against the changing of names," said one of Agov's Turkish colleagues.

Under attack from co-signatories of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) agreement signed in Vienna earlier this year, Sofia has tried to turn the tables on its critics.

According to the latest pronouncement, the whole affair has been provoked by Turkey, "speculating with the religious feelings of 'Bulgarian Muslims,' and therefore morally responsible for the seven deaths officially admitted in May.

Deputy Attorney-General Atanas Atanasov, told reporters last month of people being forced to leave by "extremist emissaries," and of military threats.

"We are being menaced with . . . being wiped off the map," he said.

Ankara has also been accused of intending to exploit the immigrants by sending them to northern Cyprus to reinforce Turkey's legitimate occupation, or to "Turkify" Kurdish areas of Anatolia.

THE INDEPENDENT NEWS SERVICE

Persecution of Turks reported in Bulgaria

Re Rumén Pironchev's letter of July 3, 1989:

Mr. Pironchev expresses "amazement and indignation" at a story about ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, then claims there are no ethnic Turks in Bulgaria.

He is wrong.

Amnesty International has documented several cases of ethnic Turks arrested for not accepting new, Bulgarian names. The latest is Ismail Mehmedov Hyuseynov, arrested in May 1985.

In addition to arrests, there are reports of name changes forced at gunpoint and executions. To deny the existence of ethnic Turks and persecution of them is to ignore the evidence.

PIERRE FRIOUR
Toronto

THE SUNDAY STAR

9, 1989

Sunday, July

Note: All the documents and press excerpts related to the “Rebirth Process” are from the archives of the Canadian Association for Solidarity of Turks from Bulgaria in Toronto, which were kindly provided by the President of the Association – Mr. Ismail Vataner.

Figure 11

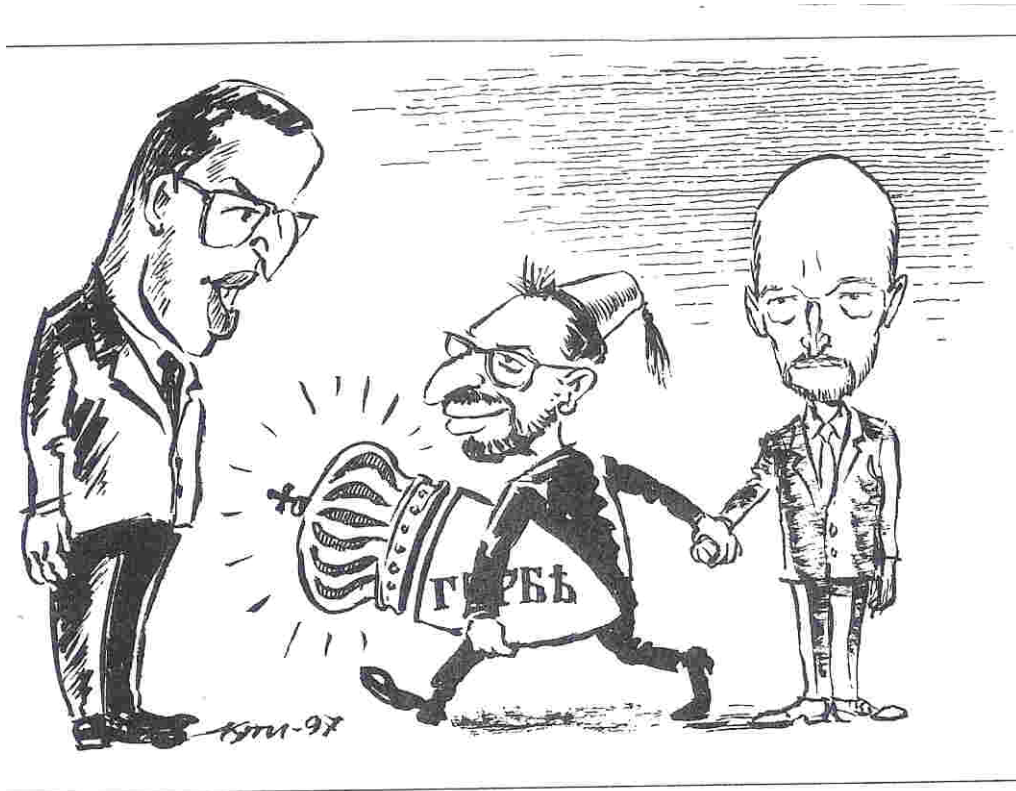
On this cartoon Ahmed Dogan is the man in the middle, between representatives from the BSP (right) and UDF (left); President Zhelev is bouncing a soccer ball on the side



Има ли шанс президентска партия у нас?

Figure 12

President Stoyanov (left), Dogan (middle) and king Simeon (right)



Source: Palchev, Ivan. *Ahmed Dogan: Opit za Politicheski Portret*, Sofia:RIK Slaviani, 2001

Figure 13

Bai Ganio's Desires



- Common young lady (democracy), let's get married on the altar of the Fatherland!...

Source: Neuburger, 1997:19

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