

# **THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC MODEL - A FACTOR OF STABILITY IN THE BALKANS<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to analyse the development of the multiethnic policy in the context of the Bulgarian society transformation to democracy and to reveal its positive effects on creating favourable conditions for preserving stability in the Balkans. In addition, it aims at analysing public attitudes towards different ethnic and religious communities in Bulgaria and evaluating current **interethnic** relations in society. Finally, the paper should summarise the main problem areas and some potential internal and external risks in the context of the current situation in South Eastern Europe (SEE).

## **Research Methods and Empirical Data**

The analysis in this paper is based on empirical data obtained in the framework of a research project entitled: "Attitudes towards Ethnic Tolerance and Co-operation in the Bulgarian Armed Forces". The Institute for Advanced Defence Research (**IADR**) has been carried it out

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<sup>1</sup> This view expressed in this paper are solely those of the **author** and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Bulgarian MoD or the Institute for Advanced Defence Research at the "G.S. Rakovski" National Defence & Staff College.

(during the period of July 2000 to July 2001)<sup>2</sup> in co-operation with the Institute for Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

We have used both quantitative (questionnaire surveys) and qualitative methodology (focus groups and consultations with experts) in our study. The project comprises the following empirical surveys:

- A representative sociological survey conducted by the IADR among 1905 Commissioned Officers (COs), Non- Commissioned Officers (NCOs), cadets in the Defence Academies, professional soldiers and conscripts from July to November 2000 period;
- A survey of experts (high ranking officers and civilians from the Ministry of Defence - MoD - , General Staff –GS - and the Services of the Bulgarian Armed Forces — BAF -) on the same topic using in-depth interviews and focus groups, conducted by the IADR in the period of July 2000 to February 2001.
- A representative sociological survey on the topic "Attitudes towards Ethnic Tolerance and Co-operation", conducted by the IADR among 1145 high school students (16-19 years of age) in October 2000.

In addition, we have made secondary analysis of data from nation-wide representative sociological surveys on the topic of the project conducted in Bulgaria between 1997 and 2000.

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<sup>2</sup> This project has been made possible by the financial support of the *Open Society Foundation* (local office in Sofia) and the *International Centre for Minorities Studies and Intercultural Relations* (Sofia).

## **Background: Ethnic and Religious Communities in the Bulgarian Society**

According to the census of December 1992, 85.7% of the country's population are Bulgarians. Two major ethnic groups - Turks and the Roma, represent 9.4% and 3.7% of the whole population, correspondingly 800 052 and 313 396 people. The remaining of 1.2% are distributed in the following way: Tatars- 0.1%, Armenians - 0.2%, and others, which did not declare their ethnicity - 1.0%.<sup>3</sup>

The Turkish ethnic minority is basically concentrated in two regions - South Eastern and North Eastern **Bulgaria**. In the South-Eastern part of the country, or Rodopa mountain region, the biggest Turkish minority population is located in the **Kardzali** district (64.7% of the people living there). In North Eastern Bulgaria the Turkish minority population is concentrated around **Razgrad** (47.5% of the population in the district), **Targovishte** (33.6%), **Silistra** (32.8%) and **Shoumen** (29.4%). The Turks are rural for the most part: 68 out of 100 people live in villages, and 32 the towns. Concerning ethnic Bulgarians this correlation is 28:72, while for the Roma community the proportion is 52:48.<sup>4</sup>

As far as the religious communities in Bulgaria are concerned, 86.2% of the population identify themselves as Eastern Orthodox Christians,

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<sup>3</sup> Results of the Population Census, Vol. 1, Demographic Characteristics, National Statistical Institute, Sofia, 1994, pp. 106.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106-109.

0.6% as Catholics, 12.7% as Muslims, 0.2% as Protestants and 0.2% as others.<sup>5</sup>

If the distinction between Bulgarians, Turks and Roma is made on ethnic basis, on a religious basis we should distinguish two more groups: **Pomaks**<sup>6</sup> (Bulgarian speaking Muslims, descendants of Christian Bulgarians forcefully converted to Islam during the Turkish yoke) and Gagagouz (Turkish-speaking Christians). The Muslim Bulgarians are not listed in the census. Their number is estimated to be about 200 000 to 280 000. They are concentrated in the Rodopa mountain region in Southern Bulgaria as well as in the **South-Western** part, or the **Pirin mountain region**.<sup>7</sup>

### **Interethnic Relations in Bulgaria: a brief Retrospection**

Regarding the main ethnic minority group in Bulgaria, the Turkish one, the Bulgarian State has not had a well-grounded and consistent policy during the last century. The periods of recognising the rights for lingual, religious and cultural self-identification and the development of the Turkish community have altered with periods of highly restrictive measures, breaching freedoms and rights. The first tendency found

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<sup>5</sup> Results of the Population Census, 2% sample, National Statistical Institute, Sofia, **1993** (in Bulgarian).

<sup>6</sup> The term "**Pomak**" has a predominantly negative meaning. Therefore, we shall use the term "Muslim Bulgarians", which is in common use in the scientific literature in Bulgaria.

<sup>7</sup> Anna **Krasteva**, Ethnic Minorities, In: Bulgaria 1960-1995, Nikolai Genov & Anna **Krasteva** (Eds.), National and Global Development, Sofia 1999, p. 452.

expression in a powerful educational campaign and reserved quotas for the representatives of the minorities in the governing bodies of a number of state institutions.

A positive result of the integration was the liquidation of illiteracy in the Turkish community. Even after the nationalisation of education in 1946, the special status of Turkish schools was preserved and their number increased to 1199 in 1950.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the fifties, a series of restrictive measures against the Turkish minority group were launched. In 1964, the Turkish language teaching was suspended in schools. In 1974, the Turkish Philology Department at the Sofia University was closed down.

The most extreme expression of the discrimination policy towards Turks was the forcible change of Turkish and Arabic names in the winter of 1984-1985. The official explanation was that the descendants of Bulgarians forcibly converted to Islam during the Turkish yoke must regain their Bulgarian identity. Therefore these measures were officially called "Revival process". In the summer of 1989, more than 300 000 ethnic Turks left **Bulgaria**, trying to attract international support for their minority rights. This was the most serious and deepest conflict in the **interethnic** relations in recent Bulgarian history.

Following the democratic changes in Bulgaria in November 1989, one of the first political acts was to condemn the "Revival process". On 15 January, 1990, the National Assembly adopted a declaration on national issues, assessing the forcible change of names as one of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451.

greatest crimes of **Todor Zhivkov's** regime. The ethnic cleansing during the period of 1984-1989 is being perceived by society as a remnant from the old totalitarian regime. The new elite publicly denounced the policy of repression by restoring all human rights to the Turkish minority. Legal arrangements were made for each Bulgarian citizen to be able to restore **his/her** former names if desired.

Regarding the second ethnic minority group in Bulgaria in number, the Roma, one could say that predominantly negative tendencies exist. These tendencies have been accelerated during the last decade, and could be summarised in the following way:

- Poor living conditions;
- Grave economic situation, higher degree of unemployment in comparison with other ethnic groups, coupled with a lower degree of education, which makes the Roma people less competitive on the labour market;
- Strong prejudices and stereotypes against the Roma community, shared both by the Bulgarian majority and the other minorities.

### **An Attempt to Define the Bulgarian Ethnic Model in the Context of the Bulgarian Society Transition to Democracy**

The Bulgarian Ethnic Model (BEM) has been developed during the last decade as an alternative to the "Revival process" of 1984-1989. Most authors describe the BEM as a successful development of multiethnic policy in Bulgaria resulting in more than ten years of

tolerant, peaceful co-existence and co-operation of different ethnic and religious communities. This model is a "social and political construction, which is characterized by stability, equality and common responsibility [...], a small part of the global process of the dialog of the civilizations."<sup>9</sup> In addition, some authors describe the essence of the BEM, saying that "there are no separatist claims and the level of ethnic tolerance is rather satisfactory [...] in the everyday life, different ethnic groups respect habits and beliefs of other groups [...]. In the current Bulgarian political system, ethnically heterogeneous or homogeneous, multiethnic and **monoethnic** parties coexist and compete [...] distinctive from the more coercive and non democratic authoritarian models, to settle ethnic **tensions**."<sup>10</sup>

When describing the BEM, most of the authors put the main stress on the peaceful co-existence of Bulgarians and Turks.

In the following rows we are going to summarise the main factors contributing to the successful development of the Bulgarian ethnic model in the past ten years. These factors have a multi-faceted genesis. They could be summarised in two groups: internal and external.

One of the most important internal contributing factors is the constitutional one. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, adopted by the Great National Assembly in **1991**, postulates that "There shall be

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<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Chukov, Bulgarian ethnic model - National Version of the dialog of the civilizations.

<sup>10</sup> *Early warning report*, The Roma Ethnic Group In Bulgaria: Identification And Political Representation, March 2000.

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." In addition, Article 36 postulates that "The study and use of the Bulgarian language is a right and obligation of every Bulgarian citizen. Citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language."

According to Article 54, "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, which shall be recognized and guaranteed by the law."<sup>11</sup>

In accordance with the constitutional provisions and the Eurointegration policy of the country, Bulgaria strictly follows the main principles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and fully recognises political, lingual, cultural and religious rights of the ethnic minorities in the country.

Along with the above-mentioned rights, an important achievement of democracy in Bulgaria is the opportunity for representatives of the minorities to join the **BAF** as COs and NCOs. This point is very important because during the totalitarian regime the representatives of the minorities used to carry out their military service in the construction troops and transportation troops which did not belong to the Armed

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<sup>11</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria , Adopted: 12 July 1991, *International Constitutional Law*, [http://www.uni-wuerzburgs.de/law/bu\\_idx.html](http://www.uni-wuerzburgs.de/law/bu_idx.html)

Forces. This was a kind of discrimination, which no longer exists. According to the Law of the Armed Forces adopted in 1995, young men belonging to minorities have equal rights as the Bulgarian majority to carry out their military service in the regular army. The law states that "All men, citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria, fit for military service, without difference of race, nationality, religion, social descent and family position, who have 18 years of age, shall be liable to military service."<sup>12</sup> Another important internal factor for the development of the BEM is the political one.

The democratic legislation adopted in Bulgaria after 1989 has established political representation for the minorities and a working model of representative democracy accepted and upheld by society. One example of this fact is the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (**MRF**) as a unique attempt to integrate the Turkish minority group in the political power structure of society. This movement is a political party of national relevance and has proved its a and a social liberal party, with a general left-wing trend stemming from the ability to control ethnic extremism during the last decade. It is a left-centre social characteristics of its electorate. The actual members of the MRF do not exceed 50 000. In elections, about 350 000 to 400 000 or about 5% to 6% of the electorate vote for the **Movement**.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Law of Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria , *Promulgated - State Gazette (SG) No. 112 from 27 December 1995 with many amendments the last one from SG No.64/2000.*

<sup>13</sup> Vassil Penev, Political Parties, In: Bulgaria 1960-1995, Nikolai Genov & Anna Krasteva (Eds.), National and Global Development, Sofia 1999, p. 304.

There are positive tendencies also in the efforts to internally mobilise the Roma community for participation in the political power. These tendencies found expression in the establishment of numerous Roma organisations and organisations for human rights in **Bulgaria**.<sup>14</sup> In addition, there have been Roma Members of the Parliament in all National Assemblies since 1989 in both the parliamentary groups of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).

There is a positive trend of change of radical nationalistic attitudes on part of the Bulgarian majority towards the Turkish minority during the last decade. The best example in this regard is the constantly diminishing role and influence of some nationalistic formations in the Bulgarian political life like the Bulgarian National Radical Party, the National Patriotic Union, and the Christian Radical party. The bases of their politics were the values of the nation state. Their demands included the following: Unification of all Bulgarians into one state (including those living outside the borders of Bulgaria); eviction of ethnic minorities; adoption of an obligatory, unified name system for all Bulgarian citizens; "national unification". The same process could be observed among the sympathisers of the **MRF**.<sup>15</sup> As a result, one could observe a process of gradual reduction on the of level of ethnic tensions, which

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<sup>14</sup> Anna **Krasteva**, Ethnic Minorities, In: Bulgaria 1960-1995, Nikolai Genov & Anna **Krasteva** (Eds.), National and Global Development, Sofia 1999, p. 450.

<sup>15</sup> **Krassimisr Kanev**, Ideologies and Beliefs, In: Bulgaria 1960-1995, Nikolai Genov & Anna **Krasteva** (Eds.), National and Global Development, Sofia 1999, p. 336.

used to be relatively high when the democratisation process in Bulgaria began.

Another important factor for the successful development of the Bulgarian ethnic model is the cultural one. It finds expression in the inherent Bulgarian tolerance to "the others", which is a good basis for the elaboration of the non-violent approach towards resolving ethnic conflicts.

Last but not least, when describing the BEM, we should underline the growing role and influence of the civil society in guaranteeing democratic rights and freedom of the minorities in Bulgaria.

From the viewpoint of the Bulgarian foreign policy, an important factor for the successful development of the Bulgarian ethnic model has to do with the new good relations with Turkey and the influx of Turkish business interests in Bulgaria.

## Public perceptions of interethnic relations in Bulgaria

### General perceptions of interethnic relations

The results of recent sociological surveys show that Bulgarians are more predisposed to perceive interethnic relations as problematic than the minority groups are. Three fourths of the Christian Bulgarian students assess the relations between Bulgarian and Roma communities in negative terms as "poor" and "very poor". In addition, about one third evaluate the relations between Bulgarians and Turks in these categories. The assessments of the elder people are close to those of the students.

At the same time, the representatives of the ethnic minorities perceive the interethnic relations with more tranquillity. Just 6.5% of the ethnic Turks consider the relations between Turks and Bulgarians "poor" and "very poor", while about half of the Roma students evaluate their relations with Bulgarians in negative terms.

When asked about the relations between Turks and Roma in Bulgaria, about half of the students from the Turkish ethnic group evaluate those as "poor" and "very poor", whereas just one fifth of the Roma students perceive their relations with Turks as "problematic".

These results clearly indicate that the assessment of the interethnic relations in Bulgaria correlates with the ethnic **self-identification** of the respondents. The Bulgarian majority perceives the relations with the Roma ethnic group as worsened because of the fact that the image of the Roma people is mainly associated with rising level of criminality during

the last decade, and, in this sense, with a threat to the personal security of the citizens.

Regarding the perception of the relations between Bulgarians and Turks, an important factor which influences the evaluations in a negative direction is the worry about possible religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims. These fears find expression in emotionally based expectations of a military invasion of Bulgaria by Turkish troops to protect the Turkish minority in case of **interethnic** conflicts in Bulgaria.

### **Assessment of Interethnic distances**

The **Bogardous** scale was applied to measure interethnic distances in Bulgaria.<sup>16</sup> It contains six items, which compose the social-psychological term "social distance" and measure the level of acceptance of a person from other ethnic groups as a member of the family, close friend, neighbour, colleague at the workplace, **fellow-townsmen/fellow-townswomen** and **fellow-countrymen/fellow-countrywomen**. The results of the measurement of interethnic distances between Christian Bulgarians, Muslim Bulgarians, Turks and Roma are presented in tables 1 to 6. These figures give an opportunity to compare the attitudes among five categories of Bulgarian citizens - the population aged between 18 and 85 years, the COs and NCOs from the **BAF**, the young people from

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<sup>16</sup> **Yanakiev Y.**, Georgieva, Molhov, The Bogardus scale, In: Measurement Scales and Scaling Procedures in Sociological Surveys, "Saint G. **Pobedonosets**" Publishing House, Sofia 1996, pp. 19-24 (In Bulgarian).

18 to 30 years of age, conscript soldiers and students from 16 to 19 years of age.

Table 1

Social Distance between the Christian Bulgarians and the ethnic Turks  
(Percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of the Turkish minority group for:	Population aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
Your <b>wife/husband</b>	15	27	13	26	19
Close friend	65	80	63	73	70
Neighbour	73	71	57	56	56
Colleague at the workplace	78	74	64	67	67
<b>Fellow-townsmen/</b> Fellow- <b>townswoman</b>	81	77	64	61	60
Fellow- <b>countryman/</b> Fellow-woman	84	85	72	65	66

Table 2

Social Distance between the Christian Bulgarians and the Muslim Bulgarians  
(Percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of Bulgarian Muslims for:	Population aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
Your wife/husband	23	31.5	16	21	14.5
Close friend	67	76	60	59.5	58
Neighbour	76	70.5	68	49	52
Colleague at the workplace	81	75	71	59	60
<b>Fellow-townsmen/ fellow-townswoman</b>	83	76	73	56	56
Fellow-countryman/ Fellow-woman	85	83	78	59	71

The analysis of the data presented in table 1 and 2 shows that the Christian Bulgarians demonstrate a comparatively high level of tolerance towards the Turkish minority and the Muslim Bulgarians. The only exception is when the hypothetical possibility to accept a person from these communities as a family member is concerned. The Christian Bulgarians perceive both the Turks and the Muslim Bulgarians in almost the same way. Obviously, the leading factor in the formation of these perceptions is religious rather than ethnic identification. It is important to underline that the Christian Bulgarians have more tolerant attitudes towards the Turks in comparison with the Muslim Bulgarians.

The other conclusion is that young people demonstrate more restrictive attitudes towards both communities than their parents.

Finally, one should emphasise a different, more tolerant attitude of people in uniform in comparison with their civilian counterparts. On the one hand, the higher educational level of the COs and NCOs could explain this result. On the other hand, the results from our surveys proved the hypothesis that the specifics of the military life influence the attitudes towards "the other" ethnic community in favourable manner.

The attitudes of the Christian Bulgarians towards the Roma community are presented in table 3.

Table 3  
Social Distance between the Christian Bulgarians and the Roma ethnic group  
(Percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of the Roma ethnic group for:	Population aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
<b>Your wife/husband</b>	6	11	5	8.7	5
Close friend	27	38	22	33	29
Neighbour	32	27	26	21	22
Colleague at the workplace	40	35	29	29	28
<b>Fellow-townsmen/fellow-townswoman</b>	50	41	43	30.5	32
Fellow-countryman/fellow-woman	60	53.5	50	40	41

It is obvious that the social distance between the Bulgarian majority and the Roma is very high and the attitudes of discrimination dominate among all surveyed groups of respondents. When analysing these figures

we have to keep in mind the fact that part of the Christian Roma population present themselves as Bulgarians and another part of Muslim Roma population present themselves as Turks. Probably for that reason the real degree of discrimination against of the Roma community in the Bulgarian society is even stronger.

The attitudes of the Turkish minority towards the Roma community are less restrictive compared to the attitudes of the Bulgarian majority. However, they remain discriminative. (Table 4)

Table 4

Social Distance between the ethnic Turks and the Roma ethnic group  
(Conscript soldiers, Percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of the <b>Turkish/Roma</b> ethnic group for:	Turks - Roma	Roma - Turks
Your <b>wife/husband</b>	17	65
Close friend	42	84.5
Neighbour	26	79
Colleague at the workplace	39	83
<b>Fellow-townsmen/ fellow-townswoman</b>	34	77
<b>Fellow-countryman/ fellow-woman</b>	50	77

The Roma community represents itself as the most open for integration both with the Bulgarian majority (table 5) and the Turkish minority (table 4).

Table 5

Social Distance between, the ethnic Turks, the Roma  
and the Christian Bulgarians  
(Conscript soldiers, Percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of Bulgarian Christians for:	Turks	Roma
Your <b>wife/husband</b>	63	79
Close friend	94.5	90
Neighbour	94.5	86
Colleague at the workplace	97	90
<b>Fellow-townsmen/ fellow-townswoman</b>	93	91
<b>Fellow-countryman/ fellow-woman</b>	92	91.5

Young people from both the Turkish and the Roma communities demonstrate high level of openness towards the Christian Bulgarians. A comparison with the attitudes towards the Muslim Bulgarians (table 6) shows of comparatively low level of acceptance of the later community, both by the ethnic Turks and the Roma group.

Table 6

Social Distance between the Muslim Bulgarians,  
the ethnic Turks and the Roma ethnic group  
(Conscript soldiers, percentage of answers "Yes")

Would you accept a representative of Bulgarian Muslims for:	Turks	Roma
Your <b>wife/husband</b>	40	55
Close friend	69	74
Neighbour	69	74
Colleague at the workplace	74	74
<b>Fellow-townsmen/ fellow-townswoman</b>	70	73
<b>Fellow-countryman/ fellow-woman</b>	70	73

These results proved the hypothesis that the Muslim Bulgarians tend to become an isolated and underestimated community in society. They feel neither Bulgarian nor Turkish, and are disregarded by both communities. Probably for that reason their self-esteem is very low. The Muslim Bulgarians have problems with their ethnic and religious self-identification because they feel different from the Christian Bulgarians for their religious affiliation as well as from the Turkish minority because of their ethnic affiliation: Therefore, they look for their own ethnic identity. This situation generates a conflict potential because of the attempts to establish the so called "Pomak ethnic community" in Bulgaria.

### **Assessment of Interethnic prejudices and stereotypes**

A variant of the Katz & Braly test has been applied to measure interethnic prejudices and stereotypes. It contains a series of negative statements concerning the different ethnic groups in Bulgaria. These statements are formulated on the basis of a previous qualitative study among small groups of representatives of these communities.<sup>17</sup>

We think of prejudice as "an attitude of aversion and hostility toward the members of a group simply because they belong to it and are therefore presumed to have objectionable qualities ascribed to the

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<sup>17</sup> Ilona Tomova, Measurement of stereotypes and prejudices in Bulgarians, In: Aspects of Ethnocultural Situation in Bulgaria, Friedrich Namann Stiftung, ACCESS Association, Sofia 1994, pp. 293-310, (in Bulgarian).

group”<sup>18</sup>. Stereotyping is an aspect of the cognitive component of the attitude. Stereotypes are "unscientific and hence unreliable generalisations that one makes about individuals by virtue of their membership in a group”<sup>19</sup>.

The analysis of the data from the surveys proved the hypothesis that there are comparatively stable and invariable prejudices and negative stereotypes among different generations of Christian Bulgarians.

The prejudices and stereotypes against ethnic Turks are associated with their participation in the political power, which generates fears and mistrust regarding their loyalty to the Bulgarian State and the possible influence of Islamic fundamentalism in the country (Table 7).

Table 7  
Prejudices and stereotypes of Christian Bulgarians  
against ethnic Turks  
(Percentage of answers "Completely agree" & "Rather agree")

Statements	Population aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
The ethnic Turks in Bulgaria are privileged <b>compared</b> with the other ethnic groups	28	30	38	29	28.5

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<sup>18</sup> James W. Vander **Zanden**, Social Psychology, Ohio State University, **McGRAW-HILL, Inc.**, 1987, p. 465.  
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The ethnic Turks in Bulgaria have occupied too many posts in the governing bodies of the country	50	50	57	57	53
The ethnic Turks in Bulgaria are religious fanatics	63	59	53	45.5	37
One could not believe and rely on the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria	46	36	40	36	33
The ethnic Turks in Bulgaria have hostile attitudes towards the Christian Bulgarians	37	31	38	35	36
The ethnic Turks in Bulgaria have hostile attitudes towards the Roma community	31	27	22	18.5	17
It is necessary to undertake everything possible to make more Ethnic Turks migrate to Turkey	29	31	41	43	53.5
All Turks resemble each other	52	52	57	53	53

More than half of the respondents from all generations support the statement that "Ethnic Turks have **occupied** too many posts in the governing bodies of the country". In addition, their image is associated with Islamic fundamentalism. Finally, more than half of the Christian Bulgarians thinks that "all ethnic Turks resemble each other", which indicates that the level of identification of the individual with the group

is comparatively high. Again we should underline that, on the whole, young people are more likely to have prejudices against and negative stereotypes concerning the Turkish and the Roma minorities than elder generations.

It is not surprising that the prejudices and negative stereotypes of Christian Bulgarians towards the Roma community are very strong (Table 8).

Table 8

Prejudices and stereotypes of Bulgarian Christians against  
the Roma community  
(Percentage of answers "Completely agree" & "Rather agree")

Statements	Population Aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
The Roma in Bulgaria are privileged compared with other ethnic groups	27	30	31	25	24
The Roma are irresponsible and lazy	84	73	82	65	63
The Roma are inclined to criminal activities	89	81	88	74	77
The Roma do not value education	-	74	-	67	67
One could not believe and rely on the Roma	84	72	85	64	66
The Roma community has to live separated from us	67	62	68	58	63
All Roma resemble each other	80	73	80	67.5	66.5

The sociological surveys during the last 5 to 6 years reveal a tendency of growing negative attitudes towards the Roma. Their image is predominantly one of "irresponsible and lazy people", people who are "inclined to criminal activities", "people that could not be believed and

relied on", "people who do not value education". All these prejudices against the Roma community have added up to the attitude that “they have to live separated from us”, which is upheld by about two-thirds of Christian Bulgarians.

It is important to stress the fact that according to the data from our surveys, Christian Bulgarians are afraid of possible common activities of the Roma community and the Turkish ethnic group in case of social conflict in Bulgaria. They think that in such a situation the ethnic Turks will support the Roma and that this could lead to a deepening of the **interethnic** counterpoising and a threat to social peace in Bulgaria.

When comparing this to reverse views, i.e. the prejudices and the negative stereotypes of the Turkish and the Roma minorities against the Bulgarian majority, one can find differences between the two groups (Table 9). On the whole, the negative image of the Christian Bulgarians predominates among the Roma community. The prejudices and stereotypes against Bulgarians are comparatively widespread.

Table 9

Prejudices and stereotypes of ethnic Turks and the Roma  
towards Christian Bulgarians  
(Soldiers, percentage of answers "Completely agree" & "Rather agree")

Statements	Ethnic Turks, 2000	Roma, 2000
Bulgarians are privileged compared with other ethnic groups	43	61
Bulgarians do not like hard work and want to be the superiors	46	67
Bulgarians are religious fanatics	29	34
One could not believe and rely on Bulgarians	24	50
Bulgarians have hostile attitudes towards Turks	28	42
Bulgarians have hostile attitudes towards the Roma community	37	56
All Bulgarians resemble each other	36	67

Speaking about the ethnic Turks, obviously the positive image predominates, despite the fact that about half of the young ethnic Turks view Bulgarians as people who "are privileged in comparison with other ethnic groups" and as people who "do not like hard work and want to be the superiors".

### **Public attitudes towards some basic minority rights**

The analysis of data on the attitudes of the Christian Bulgarians towards some basic minority rights, presented in table 10, leads to the following conclusions:

First, most of the Bulgarian majority is apt to accept some lingual and cultural rights of the minorities connected with preserving their culture

and traditions that are officially recognised and that are realised in Bulgaria at the present moment. The scope of these rights includes the establishing of organisations for preserving minority cultures and traditions as well as the publication of books and literature in their mother tongue.

Second, regarding the participation of the representatives of the minorities in the political power structures, the Bulgarian majority is almost equally split into acceptance and rejection. The representation of minorities is an officially recognised right of the minorities in Bulgaria and its **rejection** by half of the Christian Bulgarians should be analysed very carefully because it could generate conflict potential.

Third, non-acceptance prevails regarding a group of minority rights that are officially recognised by the Constitution such as the following: Each minority group is allowed to learn their mother tongue in public schools; to have their programmes on National television; to establish their television; to have their newspapers. In addition, the Christian Bulgarians tend to reject some rights that are officially recognised but only partially realised in Bulgaria. These are the right of each Bulgarian citizen to be able to join the **BAF**, the Secret Services or the Police as CO or NCO. Finally, the right of the minorities to put road signs, advertisements, etc. in their mother tongue in public places in the regions where compact minority groups live, which is not prohibited by the Constitution and the laws in the country. This also rejected by most of the Christian Bulgarians.

Fourth, the Christian Bulgarians do not definitely accept rights of the minorities that are prohibited by the constitution such as: territorial autonomy; to establish their political parties; to carry out education in public schools in their mother tongue.

Table 10  
Public Attitudes Towards Some Basic Minority Rights  
(Christian Bulgarians, Percentage of answers "Yes")

Some Basic Minority Rights	Population aged (18-85 years), 1997	BAF (COs & NCOs), 2000	Young people (18-30 years), 1999	Conscript soldiers (18-20 years), 2000	Students (16-19 years), 2000
To establish organisations for preserving their culture and traditions	67	73	67	58.5	60
To publish books and other literature in their mother tongue	52	54	43	46.5	47
To learn their mother tongue in public schools	29	31	24	31.5	27
To carry out education in public schools in their mother tongue	9	10	9	19	19
To have their representatives in the National Assembly	50	63	44	45	40
To have their <b>representatives</b> in the local parliaments	47	60	40	39	40
To put road signs, advertisements, etc. in their mother tongue in public places in the regions where compact minority groups live	12	13	14	21	24.5

To establish their political parties.	25	36.5	32	30	28
To have the right of territorial autonomy	3	4	3	13	12
To have their television	18	31	23	40	35
To join the Bulgarian Armed Forces as Cos or NCOs	21	33	-	26	35
To join the Secret Services or Police as COs or NCOs	27	27	-	22	29
To have their broadcast on the National Television	20	26	14	21	22
To have <b>their</b> newspapers	45	51.5	37	38	32

The analysis of the attitudes of different generations of Christian Bulgarians shows that young people are much more restrictive in comparison with their parents when asked about the acceptance of some basic minority rights. At the same time, the analysis of the data presented in Table 11 shows that young people from different minority communities demonstrate radical attitudes in their pursuit of these rights and freedom.

The gap between the unwillingness of the majority to accept some basic minority rights and the pretensions of the minorities regarding their rights is an important precondition for ethnic tensions, which could generate ethnic conflicts. Therefore, constant monitoring of **interethnic** perceptions, distance and prejudices, especially among young people, is of great social importance.

Table 11

Public attitudes of students towards the minority rights  
(Comparison among the answers from the three main ethnic groups in  
Bulgaria, Percentage of answers "Yes")

Some Basic Minority Rights	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma
To establish organisations for preserving their culture and traditions	60	79	82
To publish books and other literature in their mother tongue	47	76	76
To <b>learn</b> their mother tongue in public schools	27	68	65
To carry out education in public schools in their mother tongue	19	30	55
To have their representatives in the National Assembly	40	66	81
To have their representatives in the local parliaments	40	64	73
To put road signs, advertisements, etc. in their mother tongue in public places in the regions where compact minority groups live	24.5	44	55
To establish their political parties	28	53	61
To have the right of territorial autonomy	12	29	35
To have their television	35	69	63
To join the Bulgarian Armed Forces as COs or NCOs	35	61.5	75
To join the Secret Services or Police as COs or NCOs	29	63	76
To have their broadcast on the National Television	22	66	69
To have their newspapers	32	68	68

## **Conclusions: Some potential internal and external risks for the interethnic relations in Bulgaria**

The analysis of the current interethnic relations in Bulgaria we made so far leads to the conclusion that despite development of tolerant interethnic relations in Bulgaria during the last decade, one could hardly speak of an absence of ethnic tensions and counterpoising among the main ethnic communities. The present stage of interethnic relations could be defined as a latent conflict which could escalate under specific circumstances. From the viewpoint of the internal situation in Bulgaria, these could be summarized in three main dimensions: The social-economic, the political and the social-psychological dimension.

### **The social-economic dimension**

One of the most important factors that has generated ethnic tensions in Bulgaria during the last decade is the unequal burden sharing between the majority and the minority groups during the time of painful economic reforms. This is obviously one of the main problems in interethnic relations in the context of the social-economic transition in Bulgaria.

These problems are most profound in the regions with mixed ethnic population, which may be defined as risky. In some cases social counterpoising may be generated in them, due to **unclarified** ownership of farm lands, ethnic differences in employment, living standards,

housing, education, health care, etc. In most of these regions there is a very high unemployment rate, which restricts the job opportunities.

The poor economic standard and economic hardships, especially of the people living in mixed ethnic regions of Bulgaria could be reasons for some radical political claims on part of the minorities as well as nationalistic attitudes among the Bulgarian majority.

### **The political dimension**

An important risk factor for the **interethnic** relations in Bulgaria that generates ethnic tensions and division in the Bulgarian society is the so-called "ethnic voting". This phenomenon has its definition in the Bulgarian political life as "**ethnomobilisation**" and finds expression especially during the pre-election campaigns. Both the Bulgarian majority and the Turkish minority have used the **ethnomobilization** tactics in parliamentary as well as in local elections after the democratic changes in 1989. Despite the efforts of the **MRF** to break its ethnic stereotypes and the image of the Party of the Turkish minority, the Bulgarian majority continues to perceive it as an "ethnic party".

Another risk factor that could lead to serious tensions in the interethnic relations in the future is the new intensification of the activities of some Bulgarian citizens and organisations for the formation of the so-called "**Pomak** ethnic community". The community of the Muslim Bulgarians has been subjected to unsuccessful efforts for integration both by the Bulgarian and the Turkish ethnic group. At the

same time, both the Christian Bulgarians and the Turkish minority underestimate this community. Most of them look at the Bulgarian Muslims as second class people due to their different ethnic and religious self-identification. As a result, along with the Roma, the Bulgarian Muslims are the second marginal and disintegrated community in the Bulgarian society. Under these circumstances the formation of the so-called "Pomak ethnic community" has taken place.

### **Social-psychological dimension**

Along with the economic and the political factors, there are many social-psychological factors which could generate problems in the **interethnic** relations in Bulgaria. They are both **cognitively** and emotionally based. First of all, one should point out the maintenance of certain stereotypes and prejudices among the Bulgarian majority towards the minorities (Turkish, and especially Roma) as well as among the minorities towards the ethnic Bulgarians. In addition, there are conflicting perceptions and attitudes with an emotional dimension which find expression in a feeling of fear, mistrust, scorn, in some cases in hatred, etc.

Finally, the gap between the restrictive attitudes of the Bulgarian majority towards the rights of the ethnic minorities and especially among young people, and the radical pretensions of the minorities regarding their rights is an important precondition for ethnic tensions, which could generate ethnic conflict. The main external factor which could pose

potential risk to the **interethnic** relations in Bulgaria and hence to the security and stability in SEE, is the crisis-like development of the situation in some parts of the Western Balkans. A possible further deepening of **ethno-religious** contradictions in the region and a spreading of Islamic fundamentalism in SEE could provoke radical nationalistic attitudes in Bulgaria. The crisis situation in SEE could have an additional negative effect on the development of interethnic relations and ethnic peace in Bulgaria, namely possible mass refugee streams. Such a situation could lead to changes in the ethnic composition of the Bulgarian society, infiltration of some radical, nationalistic groups, illegal traffic of armament, etc., which is a predisposition for ethnic tensions.

A restraining factor for the development of the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations continued to be the ideologies inherited from former Yugoslavia, and the attempts by circles connected with the former regime of Milosevic to use them for attaining their political and economic interests. In this regard, some tensions could produce the artificial problem of the so-called "Macedonian minority" in Bulgaria and problems with the illegal United Macedonian Organization (OMO - Ilinden "**Pirin**") with its separatist claims.

Ethnic conflicts in the Balkans in the post-Cold War period have proved the particular significance of the problems of ethnic minorities and the impact of ethnic and religious contradictions on the internal stability and foreign policy of the countries.

The Bulgarian ethnic model, which is a synonym of stability, respect of habits and beliefs of other ethnic groups, common responsibility, absence of separatist claims, mutual co-existence of **monoethnic** and multiethnic political parties, has proved to be a successful multiethnic policy. Thus, it has created favourable conditions for preserving stability and security in the SEE. At the same time, there are many internal as well as external risks which could generate ethnic tensions and conflicts. The best way to prevent these risks is further development of the democratisation process in Bulgaria and the building of a civil society. This will secure equal and full right of political representation of all ethnic minorities on the national as well as the local level, and an opportunity to accommodate the interests of the different ethnic group's under a common denominator, to discuss and to achieve political goals by peaceful means. It is very important for all political parties to recognize the **interethnic** relations as vital for the development of the democracy, economic stabilisation and prosperity of Bulgaria. The overcoming of ethnic voting is of prime importance in this regard.

Further economic stabilisation and prosperity of Bulgaria is necessary in order to solve one of the most serious problems, namely the problem of social justice in the social-economic transition of Bulgaria.

Further development of the culture of conflict behaviour, both among the majority and the minorities, culture for **non-violent** elimination of conflicts and control of affects and emotions is more than necessary. Overcoming prejudices and negative stereotypes should be the first step in this direction.

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