



# ACCEPT PLURALISM

## **Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria: the Bulgarian Ethnic Model – Parallel Cohabitation or Multicultural Recognition?**

Antonina Zhelyazkova  
Maya Kosseva  
Marko Hajdinjak

International Center for Minority Studies  
and Intercultural Relations (IMIR)  
Sofia, Bulgaria

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### **1. Overview National Discourses Background Country Reports**





EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE  
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

# **TOLERANCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY DISCOURSES IN BULGARIA:**

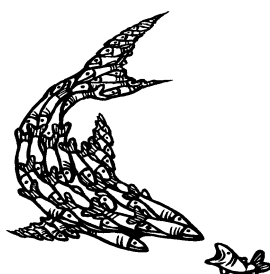
## **Bulgarian Ethnic Model – Parallel Cohabitation or Multicultural Recognition?**

**ANTONINA ZHELYAZKOVA**

**MAYA KOSSEVA**

**MARKO HAJDINJAK**

**INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MINORITY STUDIES  
AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS (IMIR)**



**Work Package 1 – Overview of National Discourses  
on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity**

**D1.1 Country Reports on Tolerance and Cultural  
Diversity Discourses**

Antonina Zhelyazkova, Maya Koseva, Marko Hajdinjak

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**Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)**

**ACCEPT PLURALISM** is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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**Antonina Zhelyazkova** is Chairperson of the Board of Directors at IMIR. She holds a PhD in History from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."

**Maya Kosseva** is a project coordinator and researcher at IMIR with PhD in History from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."

**Marko Hajdinjak** is a project coordinator and researcher at IMIR. He has an MA degree in Nationalism Studies from Central European University, Budapest.

Contact details:

International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR)  
Antim I St. 55, Sofia 1303, Bulgaria

Tel: (+359 2) 8323-112

Fax: (+359 2) 9310-583

E-mail: [zhelyazkova@inet.bg](mailto:zhelyazkova@inet.bg); [mkosseva@yahoo.com](mailto:mkosseva@yahoo.com); [marko@imir-bg.org](mailto:marko@imir-bg.org)

Web site: <http://www.imir-bg.org/>

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Antonina Zhelyazkova, Maya Koseva, Marko Hajdinjak

# Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria

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## Executive summary

The following report examines issues of tolerance, acceptance and diversity challenges in Bulgaria.

Bulgarians have been used to living in a multi-cultural environment since the times of the Ottoman Empire. When the modern Bulgarian state was formed in 1878, Bulgarian society and state institutions have had to face the problem of finding a balance between the accommodation of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in the country and the aspiration for building a mono-national Orthodox-Christian nation-state.

All Bulgarian Constitutions and principal laws noted the existence of various ethnic and religious communities in the country and upheld the principle of equal rights and obligations. However, at the same time they guaranteed that Bulgarian language and Bulgarian Orthodox Church enjoyed a privileged position. The perception of a mono-national state has resulted in corresponding policies towards the minorities. They were accepted as a part of the Bulgarian society, but at the same time were in practice highly marginalised.

The process of recognition of diversity and multiculturalism in Bulgarian society and of protection of minority rights truly started only after 1989 as an inseparable part of the democratisation of Bulgaria and its aspiration to join the EU. In addition to the political recognition of different ethnic and religious groups, minorities were also “discovered” by the researchers from various fields in social sciences and were quickly placed on the ethnographic map of Bulgaria. The avalanche of studies dedicated to the ethno-cultural situation in Bulgaria followed soon, including the first sociological studies about levels of tolerance and mechanisms for coexistence of different communities.

Despite that, the majority population and the minorities largely continued to live side by side. The otherness in Bulgaria is tolerated without being actually accepted. In other words, Bulgarians and the minority groups accept the otherness, and there are numerous areas of public life (politics, culture, economy, sports, media, etc) where members of different ethnic and religious communities interact. At the same time, the psychological division line is preserved and in private space, the boundaries of the formal parallel existence are seldom crossed.

In recent years, scholarly debates turned to the question whether tolerance in Bulgaria truly exists or whether the notion of tolerant Bulgarians is basically a well-entrenched myth. Numerous studies conducted between 1990 and 2010 show that Bulgarians perceive themselves as very tolerant. This stereotype has been actively promoted by the media and the leading Bulgarian politicians.

More recent studies argue that coexistence and cohabitation of Bulgarians with other communities were not a result of conscious tolerance towards diversity and otherness, but merely a manifestation of putting up with it. In other words, what can be observed in Bulgaria is above all liberal tolerance. While allowing for the free expression of ethnic, religious and cultural identity of minorities, the majority society is not really prepared to respect and accept them as equals.

A perception that people of Bulgarian ethnic origin should enjoy a privileged position in the country has been reflected also in the *Law on Bulgarian Citizenship* (1998, last amended in April 2010). The amendments of April 2010 eased and accelerated the procedure for citizenship acquisition for the ethnic Bulgarians from other countries. The “fresh blood” brought by ethnic Bulgarians from abroad is expected to overcome the demographic crisis and reverse the “percentage battle” – the increasing share of ethnic and religious minority communities among the population of Bulgaria.



## Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria

The data about people who have obtained Bulgarian citizenship between 1990 and 2010 show that even without the amendments, the overwhelming majority of new Bulgarian citizens were people who have claimed to be of Bulgarian descent and were previously citizens of Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro), or Albania. Between 2002 and 2010, 98.14% (59,677) of all those who obtained Bulgarian passports were (or claimed to be) of Bulgarian ethnic origin, while only a tiny minority (1,129) received citizenship through non-facilitated procedure and for other reasons.

Due to still relatively small levels of immigration to Bulgaria, immigrant communities are not perceived as a diversity challenge. The most important “significant others” for the Bulgarian majority population are the native minorities. There are over 15 ethnic communities in Bulgaria. Bulgarians represent 83.9% of the population. The three largest minorities are Turks, Roma and Pomaks (or Muslim Bulgarians). Pomaks have not been included as a special ethnic group in the census as they are considered a religious and not ethnic minority. These are also the three groups with the most significant tolerance-related problems – each in a different way and for different reasons.

Turks are well integrated, politically organised and with a very clear and well-expressed self-awareness, but are faced with the increasingly intolerant attitude of the majority population, which perceives that Turks control too much political power in the country. Education in the Turkish language is provided on all levels, Turks can freely practice their religion, they have newspapers and electronic media in their language and are actively involved in political life in Bulgaria.

Unfortunately, the full integration into the political and public space did not lead to genuine coexistence based on respect and acceptance on the side of the Bulgarian majority population and for the larger part of the last 20 years, their attitude towards the Turkish minority can best be described as a case of liberal tolerance. Furthermore, in recent years the anti-Turkish sentiments and intolerant attitude have been on the rise. The majority believes that the Turkish community has too much political and economic power and finds such situation to be intolerable. Turks are a minority and should therefore know their place – they are tolerated as long as they keep a low profile in public space. On the other hand, Turks do not want to be simply tolerated – they want to be included and actively participate in all spheres of social, political, cultural and economic life in the country.

Roma are almost completely excluded from the society. They are rejected not just by the majority population but other minorities as well. The widespread perception is that the state institutions “tolerate” Roma too much and that instead of tolerating, the state should control them. On the institutional level, the state policies towards Roma can be rated as tolerance but with a reservation that it is tolerance with the clear goal of social-economic integration. Despite these measures (many of which suffered from poor implementation, insufficient funding and lack of commitment), the situation of the Bulgarian Roma has not changed substantially yet. If anything, the situation changed for worse. The general public still perceives them in overwhelmingly negative terms and continues to reject and exclude them. This is visible in the education system, health care, housing, labour market and numerous other areas.

Acceptance and toleration of Roma are a precondition for their successful inclusion into the society, but at the same time, only their participation in all fields of social life can reduce the distances and rejection. For now, the Bulgarian Roma are entangled in a web of rejection, exclusion and intolerance and the prospects for this to change in the near future are not very bright.

Pomaks are tolerated as a religious minority, but any attempt to assert their different ethnic or national identity is met by a furiously intolerant rejection of such claims. Pomak self-identification is often presented as a threat to the national interests and an attack on the national unity. The state policy towards Pomaks is thus a combination of tolerance and exceptional

intolerance. While Pomaks are free to practice their religion and manifest their cultural identity without hindrance in the private and social sphere, the state and the majority population strictly refuse to acknowledge their right to genuine self-identification. All attempts from within the Pomak community to assert their identity as different from the Bulgarian majority usually lead to an overly negative and aggressive reaction from the state institutions, media and the public. The overall attitude towards Pomaks can thus be rated as intolerance. Without recognising its existence, there cannot be any discussion about tolerance and acceptance of a particular community.

Two smaller minority communities (Armenians and Jews) are perhaps the only indicator giving ground to the claim that the Bulgarian society is not a complete stranger to mechanisms of tolerant attitude and acceptance of otherness. Both minority groups have been treated with respect and recognition and have always enjoyed full freedom to express their ethnic, religious and cultural identity. One pragmatic explanation for this is the small number of members of both communities. For this reason, the majority has never perceived them even as a potential threat to the national unity. Both communities have been fully accepted and are respected both on the state level and by the society, as is manifested by numerous highly respected individuals from both communities who have left their mark in Bulgarian politics, culture, science and sports.

For the majority of Bulgarians, the mere fact of practical cohabitation in a multi-cultural environment is often enough to perceive themselves as being tolerant. However, the “tolerance” in the Bulgarian case can be understood only as “putting up with someone different,” without accepting and understanding them. The term “tolerance” is thus above all a synonym of bearable and parallel cohabitation. The situation could be classified as liberal tolerance – the right of the minorities to express their ethnic, religious and cultural characteristics is respected, but only as long as it is considered (by the state institutions, political actors and even the majority population) that this is not in contradiction with the national interests.

The situation is rather similar in the academic circles. The Bulgarian intellectuals have only recently (through import of the European discourse) begun to understand the tolerance in a broader way – as acceptance of the different groups. Such discourse for now exists predominantly in the projects and work of the non-governmental organisations. Studies show that the attitude of the majority of Bulgarians towards otherness is still based on deeply entrenched disregard, apprehension and prejudice.

### **Keywords**

Tolerance; acceptance; segregation and exclusion; unitary nation-state; multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence; ethnic and religious minorities; nationalism; hate speech; Bulgaria; Turks; Roma; Pomaks

### 1. Introduction

From the very moment of the formation of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, Bulgarian society and state institutions have had to face the problem of balancing between the accommodation of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in the country and the aspiration for building a unitary nation-state. For more than a century (until 1989), the state and the majority population struggled to accept the minorities as an inseparable part of the nation and respect their rights. Although the Bulgarian legislation and above all the Constitution(s) included provisions, which protected religious, cultural and linguistic rights of minority communities, in practice these rights were often violated. Tolerance on paper quite often lost the battle with intolerant practices in reality. The process of recognition of diversity and multiculturalism in Bulgarian society and of protection of minority rights truly started only after 1989 as an inseparable part of the democratisation of Bulgaria and its aspiration to join the EU.

After the Liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878, political, academic and cultural elites directed their resources and capabilities to develop and strengthen the Bulgarian national identity. The long tradition of Bulgarian statehood,<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian role in the development of Slavic literature and Cyrillic script, and its belonging to the Christian world were the most common themes in their efforts. In the entire period before the WWII, the existence of various minority groups in the country was perceived as a colourful fact, yet little attention was paid to their specific features or their position in Bulgarian society. During the Socialist period, the minorities were almost completely marginalised in scientific studies and were mentioned only as a folkloric and ethnographic addition to the wealth of the Bulgarian culture. The Socialist regime strived towards building an ethno-national state and the majority of intellectuals and artists have directed their efforts towards justifying such policy.

The debates about diversity in Bulgarian society and about tolerance and coexistence were introduced into the public space after the changes in 1989. The first step was the official recognition of different ethnic and religious groups. They were “discovered” also by the researchers from various fields in social sciences and quickly placed on the ethnographic map of Bulgaria. The avalanche of studies dedicated to the ethno-cultural situation in Bulgaria followed soon.

The first sociological studies about levels of tolerance and mechanisms for coexistence of different communities were also made. The long-lasting interdisciplinary research “Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria” (1993-2000), conducted by historians, ethnologists, sociologists, political scientists, has brought forward the thesis that during the centuries of coexistence, the Bulgarian society has set up a sustainable mechanism for accepting otherness along the line contact – conflict.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Bulgarians and the minority groups accept the otherness, and there are numerous areas of social life (politics, culture, economy, sports, media, etc) where members of different ethnic and religious communities interact.

At the same time, the psychological division line is preserved and in private space the boundaries of the formal parallel existence are seldom crossed (hence the exceptionally low number of mixed marriages in the country). It was also noted that Bulgarians often have negative stereotypes about the “others” on the group level, but disregard them on the personal

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<sup>1</sup> The First Bulgarian Empire lasted from 681 to 1018, when it was conquered by the Byzantines, and the Second Bulgarian Empire from 1185 to 1396, when it fell under Ottoman rule.

<sup>2</sup> The first published result of the research was the book *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims*. (Zhelyazkova, Nielsen, Kepel, 1995).

level and have no problem in accepting their neighbour, colleague or friend from a different ethnic or religious community.

Gradually the debates have centred on the question whether tolerance in Bulgaria truly exists or whether the notion of tolerant Bulgarians is basically a well-entrenched myth. Numerous studies conducted between 1990 and 2010 show that Bulgarians perceive themselves as very tolerant.<sup>3</sup> This stereotype has been actively promoted by the media and the leading Bulgarian politicians.<sup>4</sup>

However, to justify this self-perception one needs to look back into the past – the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first example of Bulgarian tolerance usually brought forward is the shelter provided to the Armenian refugees, fleeing the genocide in 1910s. Preserving their cultural and religious specific features, Armenians quickly integrated into the society and have never been victims of intolerance (Miceva, 2001). Another group of refugees, who settled in Bulgaria after 1917, were Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. They were also accepted in an organised manner by the state, quickly integrated into Bulgarian society, and were often actively involved in academic and cultural life in the country (Kyoseva, 2002).

The crucial moment demonstrating the genuineness of Bulgarian tolerance was the saving of Bulgarian Jews during the WWII. In reaction to the German demand for the deportation of Jews, a massive public protest was organised, headed by the members of the parliament and the leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. As a result, the government defied the German demands and did not deport the Jewish population (Cohen, 1995; Eskenazi, Krispin, 2002, pp. 546-585).

An interesting case, in which discourses of tolerance, acceptance or indeed intolerance and rejection developed in Bulgaria, concerns the repressive assimilation campaigns undertaken by the Communist government against Pomaks and Turks in the 1980s and the reaction of ethnic Bulgarians to them. In the 1980s, the Bulgarian Muslim communities were forced to change their names and to accept “Bulgarian” ones. In addition, all other distinctive signs defining them as a group like wearing of traditional clothes, customs and religion were also prohibited. A small but active group of Bulgarian intellectuals has condemned this act, but under the strict control of the Communist regime and bombardment of the media propaganda, there was no popular reaction on the larger scale.

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<sup>3</sup> The survey of the Open Society Institute Sofia conducted in June 2008 gave the following answers to the question “Are Bulgarians tolerant towards those who are different”: fully tolerant - 15.1%, rather tolerant - 37.7%, rather intolerant – 23.6%, not tolerant at all – 10.1%, cannot say – 13.4%. *Социални дистанции Юни 2008* (Social Distances June 2008). <http://www.opendata.bg/opendata.php?q=44&s=4&c=20&t=1&sel=1>  
See also Georgiev, 1992 and Fotev, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the President Georgi Parvanov praised the high levels of ethnic tolerance in Bulgaria at the Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Istanbul in April 2009 (“President Parvanov Praises Bulgaria Ethnic Tolerance,” 2009). He described Bulgaria as “a model of religious and ethnic tolerance” at the 15th Summit Meeting of Heads of State of Central Europe (“Address by President Georgi Parvanov,” 2008) and explained that Bulgaria was “joining the European Union with its best traditions of ethnic and religious tolerance established in the course of decades” in his address to the European Parliament (“Address by President Georgi Parvanov,” 2007). In his lecture at the Sofia University, President Parvanov again underlined that Bulgaria offered “a model of dealing with ethnic differences, it set an example of tolerance and understanding at a time when many European states are experiencing ethnic tensions and conflicts (Parvanov, 2002). The former Prime Minister Stanishev also praised “the long history of tolerance based on the common understanding that cultural diversity is a great asset in our society” (“Statement by Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev,” 2008) and described the tolerance and mutual respect between the different religions in Bulgaria as “a value that is an indispensable part of our democracy” (“Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev Congratulated Muslims,” 2006). The politicians from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (political party representing mostly interests of minorities) have also often praised the “Bulgarian ethnic model” and their own merits for the levels of tolerance in country – “one of the biggest MRF’s successes is its main role and contribution to establishing the successful Bulgarian ethnic model” (“History of the MRF”).

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Debate continues as to how much society actually knew about these events, how important was the fear of Communist repression and how widespread was the genuine disinterest in the fate of their Muslim co-citizens. In the end, the mass protests of the Turkish community and especially their exodus in the summer of 1989 (sarcastically dubbed by the media “the great excursion”) have been recognized as being among the most important events leading to the fall of the Communist regime. The protests, initiated by the Turkish community, soon acquired a national character and among the demands put forward to the authorities were the protection of minority rights and the re-instatement of original names to Turks and Pomaks (Stoyanov, 1998; Yalamov, 2002)

Although these protests and especially the restoration of the names are often considered as additional examples of Bulgarian tolerance, it is very difficult to evaluate how involved Bulgarian society really was in trying to protect the rights of Bulgarian Muslims. On one side, the society at the time was sharply divided over the issue and there were also counter protests, where demands that the Muslims should remain with the Bulgarian names were voiced. On the other, it is an indisputable fact that Bulgaria has avoided the ethnic conflicts of the Yugoslav type and that the political class and the media intentionally imposed the notion of the Bulgarian ethnic model, which was widely accepted by the society (Erdoğan, 2002; Zhelyazkova, 2001a, pp. 295-300).

In recent years, debates on ethnic diversity and tolerance have become more focused. A newly surfaced thesis argues that coexistence with others over the centuries was not a result of conscious tolerance towards diversity and otherness, but merely a manifestation of putting up with it. In other words, what can be observed in Bulgaria is above all liberal tolerance. While allowing for the free expression of ethnic, religious and cultural identity of minorities, the majority society is not really prepared to respect and accept the minorities as equals.

Largely, this is a consequence of the fact that for decades, minorities have been strongly marginalised in public spaces, which were strictly controlled by the state. This is especially the case with the Roma, who were practically invisible for the wider society under the Communism. They lived in clusters in segregated settlements and worked only in certain professions. In the democratic period, they have become visible to the society, while at the same time their social problems have become ever more intense. As a consequence, the level of dissatisfaction and rejection of the Roma among Bulgarians has been on the constant increase (Tomova, 1995; Mizov, 2003; Pamporov, 2006; Grekova, 2008).

At the same time, there is an increasing anti-Turkish sentiment in the country, fuelled above all by several nationalistic and extreme right political parties, which gained popularity in the last 5-6 years. The increased intolerance towards the Turkish community has also come as a consequence of the widespread dissatisfaction over the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the main political party representing the Bulgarian Turks. The influence and importance of the MRF has been steadily increasing over the years and the party has been a virtual king-maker from 2001 to 2009. The MRF is widely perceived as the most closely linked to the grey economy and corrupt practices among the Bulgarian political parties.<sup>5</sup> The distrust

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<sup>5</sup> These perceptions have been fuelled by numerous corruption scandals, which were brought to the public attention in the recent years – the most important being the allegations made by the Parliamentary Anti-corruption Committee that the MRF leader Ahmed Dogan (philosopher by education) breached the conflict of interests provisions and has served private interests when receiving 750,000 EUR fee as a consultant of four large-scale hydroelectricity projects, funded by the state – “Tsankov Kamak,” “Dospat,” “Gorna Arda” and “Tundzha Dam” (“Bulgaria Begins Trial,” 2010). Anti-MRF sentiments were also intensified by two scandalous Dogan’s public statements. Just before the parliamentary elections in 2005, he used the term “circle of firms” to describe the fact that each political party had a network of economic groups and companies that support it financially – quite often through illegal payments (Gounev, Bezlov, 2010, p. 210). While talking to MRF supporters in Kochan village ahead of July 2009 elections, Dogan said: “I am the instrument of power, who distributes the bits of financing in the state. The power is concentrated in me, not in your MPs” (“The power is in my hands,” 2009).

and dissatisfaction of the majority population over what is perceived as “Turkish” party has quickly transformed into the ever strengthening perception that Turks in Bulgaria yield too much political and economic power.<sup>6</sup>

The first part of this report will provide a brief historic overview of the development of Bulgarian state and the process of national identity formation. The issue of Bulgarian citizenship will be discussed, especially in its relation to the question of inclusion into / exclusion from the Bulgarian national body. Finally, the first part will also discuss the ambiguous and somewhat troublesome relation of Bulgarian state with Europe / EU.

In the second part of the report, the main cultural diversity challenges Bulgaria faced in the course of the past 30 years will be discussed. The most important minority groups, which have posed a challenge to national homogeneity, will be presented. The report will trace how concepts of intolerance, tolerance, acceptance and respect translated into practice over different periods of time. Three main periods will be covered: 1980-1989 (the period of most repressive assimilation policies of the Communist regime); 1990-2005 (the period of “the Bulgarian ethnic model”); and from 2005 to today (the rise of nationalism and interethnic tensions).

The third part of the report will analyse the concepts and definitions of tolerance in Bulgaria. Comparing the political, public and media discourse about the notions of tolerance and acceptance, the report will try to establish where Bulgaria stands today in its periodic oscillation between two poles – intolerance and multicultural respect.

## **2. Bulgaria and Europe**

### **2.1. National identity and state formation**

The modern Bulgarian national identity was constructed around the following identity markers: the Bulgarian language, Orthodox Christianity, historic and cultural traditions, common national awareness and the geographic boundaries of the medieval Bulgarian state. The Bulgarian struggle for national self-awareness and independence from the Ottoman Empire had two main forms. One was based on the efforts to establish and spread the Bulgarian national identity through education and culture, while the goal of the other was the establishment of the independent Bulgarian church emancipated from the Greek Patriarchate in Constantinople. A network of secular schools where education was conducted in Bulgarian language led to the formation of the Bulgarian intellectual elite, the core of which represented the teachers.

The Bulgarian language education and the establishment of the autonomous Bulgarian church (both achieved while Bulgaria was still under the Ottoman rule) were the necessary catalysts, through which the Bulgarian national liberation movement acquired a revolutionary character in the period after the Crimean Wars (1853-1856). In the two decades preceding the national independence (1878), Bulgarians formed numerous revolutionary committees and insurgent brigades, ultimately resulting in the Stara Zagora uprising (September 1875), April uprising (April 1876) and all-national participation in the Russian-Turkish Liberation War (1877-1878), which brought about the re-establishment of the Bulgarian state (Zhelyazkova, 2008, pp. 570-582).

The result of the Ottoman defeat in the Russian-Turkish War was the formation of the so-called “San Stefano Bulgaria” – a territorial ideal that the Bulgarian state continued to strive for at least until 1944. Although the San Stefano Treaty (signed on March 3, 1878) was revised

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<sup>6</sup> A very popular expression, especially among certain politicians and often quoted by media, is that the “MRF has overeaten with power.” (“Karakachanov: Make a Distinction between the MRF and Turkish Community,” 2009).

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after few months at the Congress of Berlin (June 13 – July 13 1878) and the newly established Bulgarian state was significantly cut down in size (with regions of Thrace and Macedonia remaining Ottoman territories and considerable lands becoming a part of Serbia), it became a decisive landmark shaping both the internal and external policies of the Bulgarian state.

By contrast, the Treaty of Berlin, signed on July 13, 1878, has entered the national mythology as the second “black day” for the Bulgarian nation (the first was the fall under the Ottoman rule in the 14<sup>th</sup> century) (Daskalov, 2004; Genchev, 1977). The Congress of Berlin gave birth to the so-called Bulgarian national question – the issue of the national unification of all territories populated by the Bulgarian diaspora, which remained outside the borders of the mother-state. Especially important was the “Macedonian question.” Macedonia (above all Ohrid and its monasteries) was perceived as a spiritual centre of medieval Bulgarian religion, art and education. From 1878 to 1914, Macedonian-born refugees and emigrants to Bulgaria (around 100,000 by 1912) played an exceptionally important role in the political life of the country. Their number and influence increased significantly after the failure of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising in 1903. Following this event, there was a general consensus in Bulgaria that war with Ottoman Empire was unavoidable if all-Bulgarian national unification was to be achieved (Lalkov, 1998, pp. 172-178).

The Congress of Berlin also marked the beginning of the long ambiguous relation of Bulgaria with “Europe” and the constant shifts between pro-Russian and pro-Western European foreign policy orientation of the young state. While some prominent Bulgarian intellectuals stressed the Europeanness of Bulgarians, others viewed Europe as something different from and quite often antagonistic to both Slavdom and Orthodox Christianity, which were among the most important Bulgarian identity markers (Mishkova, 2005).

Bulgarian nationalism has been largely a hybrid, containing elements of both German cultural and ethnic nationalism and French civic nationalism. On one side, the Bulgarian nation-building process was driven by a clear goal of establishing a Bulgarian state for the Bulgarian nation and its ultimate goal was the unification of all territories perceived as Bulgarian ethnic and cultural space. On the other hand, the presence of a large number of people belonging to various religious and ethnic communities different from the Orthodox Christian, Bulgarian-speaking majority, also necessitated a different approach. This led to the inclusion of elements of civic nationalism and periodic attempts of the Bulgarian state to come to terms with the ethnic and religious diversity in the country.

Despite certain hesitations and distrust, the period between national independence and the end of the First World War (1878-1918) was generally marked by a strong pro-European orientation of the Bulgarian state (Daskalov, 1994, p. 46). This has drastically changed in 1918. As the losing side in the WWI, Bulgaria had to conclude humiliating peace treaties, which were perceived in the country as a national catastrophe.<sup>7</sup> Henceforth, Europe was no longer an attractive and desired role model for the Bulgarian nation-building and the political and intellectual elites turned their attention to the search for “the uniquely Bulgarian” features of the national identity and character. In the inter-war period, the discussions on the Bulgarian identity and its place in Europe thus focused on the opposition between “ours” and “foreign” (Mutafchiev, 1987).

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<sup>7</sup> The most important was the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, signed on November 27, 1919 at Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. As a result, Bulgaria had to cede Western Thrace to Greece (thereby losing its direct outlet to the Aegean Sea), substantial areas on its western border to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the region of Southern Dobrudzha to Romania. Bulgaria was also required to reduce its army to 20,000 men and pay reparations exceeding \$400 million. See *Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Bulgaria, and Protocol and Declaration signed at Neuilly-sur-Seine, 27 November 1919.* [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty\\_of\\_Neuilly](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Neuilly)

Disillusioned and disappointed by the treatment and attitude of the democratic and liberal European countries (mostly France and UK), Bulgaria in the 1930s endorsed the German totalitarian economic doctrine, which placed the state above the needs of the society. The political developments in the country followed a similar direction. Extreme right wing forces and authoritarian ideas gained popularity as a result of the gradual orientation of Bulgaria towards Germany (another country, which suffered a failure in the WWI and was seeking a retribution for the European punitive measures). At the same time, the leftist ideas spread among that part of the society, which turned again to Russia (Soviet Union) and Slavdom as a counterweight to Europe.

In the second half of the 1930s, the political parties were banned and under Tsar Boris' authoritarian rule, Bulgaria began to gravitate towards the alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The promise of territorial expansion (especially the annexation of Macedonia) was again an exceptionally strong factor, which pulled Bulgaria into the German camp during World War II (Lalkov, 1998, pp. 220-223).

After the war, Bulgaria became a Communist country and a loyal member of the Soviet bloc. In a sharp contrast with the post-independence period (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), when Bulgaria was struggling to "return to Europe" and when its European identity and heritage was strongly emphasised, the political discourse, literature and social sciences of the post-WWII Bulgaria completely lacked any reference to European identity and European orientation. Instead, the Bulgarian "Slavic identity" was emphasised, demonstrating the closeness in origin and culture of Bulgarians with the Soviet/Russian nation (Lory, 2005, p. 57).

Radical changes swept through the education system. Communist ideology and Marxist theory became the backbone of the educational process, aimed at raising the children in the spirit of supra-national Socialist identity. Textbooks were rewritten and purged of any reference to Bulgarian ties with the Western European and other capitalist states (Jelavich, 2003, pp. 351-352; Manchev, 2003, pp. 176-177).

Religious communities were the first to suffer the consequences of the new policies of the Communist regime, aimed at changing the identities of Bulgarian people. As religion was an exceptionally important segment of the national identity on the Balkans, many churches, mosques and other places of worship were closed and through various forms of repression, people were diverted away from the religion. The repressive measures were most severe in the case of the Bulgarian Muslim communities (Turks, Pomaks, Muslim Roma) and their intensity only increased in time, reaching its peak in the 1980s.

The aim of the exceptionally repressive assimilation campaign against the Bulgarian Turks was the complete annihilation of a separate Turkish ethnic and religious identity in the country. As a result, the Turkish community reacted by withdrawal and self-isolation (Zhelyazkova, 1998, pp. 381-382). The opposition to the new rules and deliberate efforts to preserve identity were manifested through many everyday practices. For example, most of the rituals connected with the life cycle like births, weddings and funerals were conducted in secrecy. Despite the obligatory change of the names and their use in the public space, Turks continued to use their original, Muslim names within their families and communities. The newborn children also received a traditional name, alongside the official Bulgarian-sounding name under which they were listed in the documents.

This widespread resistance on numerous levels made it possible to quickly return to the traditional public manifestation of ethnic, religious and cultural identity after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. Furthermore, the return to tradition in some cases exceeded the restoration of practices banned by the Communists. Various religious and cultural practices, which have naturally withered away because of modernisation, were brought back to life. The post-1989 democratisation has brought about religious freedom and toleration of Islamic



religious practices, but this did not extend to genuine acceptance – the Muslim minorities continued to be viewed with distrust by a significant part of the Bulgarian majority population.

## 2. 2. Citizenship in Bulgaria

The *Law on Bulgarian Citizenship* (1998, last amended in April 2010) is the principal Bulgarian law regulating the procedures for the acquisition of Bulgarian citizenship through naturalization. The amendments of April 2010 eased and accelerated the procedure for citizenship acquisition for the ethnic Bulgarians from other countries. According to Bozhidar Dimitrov (Minister without Portfolio, in charge for Bulgarians living abroad, from July 2009 to December 2010), these amendments were especially important for the historic Bulgarian communities in diaspora, which were under the threat of assimilation and consequent loss of their national identity. He believed that Bulgarian citizenship would offer them a significant protection against this danger (“Interview with Bozhidar Dimitrov,” 2010). Dimitrov predicted that up to 30,000 people per year (mostly ethnic Bulgarians from other countries) would be able to obtain Bulgarian passports. In his opinion, this would solve the demographic crisis as the annual difference between the natality and mortality is around 32,000 (“Bozhidar Dimitrov: Changes to the Law,” 2010).

One of the main problems regarding the amendments is the reasoning provided to justify them, as the discourse shows that the current Bulgarian government sees the nation in predominantly ethnic terms, rather than as a civic and multicultural community of citizens. The “fresh blood” brought by ethnic Bulgarians from abroad is expected to overcome the demographic crisis and reverse the “percentage battle” – the increasing share of ethnic and religious minority communities among the population of Bulgaria.

The number of foreign citizens interested in acquiring Bulgarian citizenship began to increase after 1999, when Bulgaria was removed from the “black list” of the Schengen agreement. Number of applications reached its peak in 2004-2005, after which it decreased significantly.

**Table 1: Applications for Bulgarian citizenship (1990 - 2010)**

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
<b>Applications</b>	<b>1039</b>	<b>2600</b>	<b>3259</b>	<b>2386</b>	<b>2785</b>	<b>3310</b>	<b>3233</b>	<b>2930</b>	<b>3729</b>	<b>2474</b>	<b>3334</b>
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Total
<b>Applications</b>	<b>5495</b>	<b>7438</b>	<b>14306</b>	<b>29493</b>	<b>23200</b>	<b>14468</b>	<b>12870</b>	<b>7184</b>	<b>5549</b>	<b>3435</b>	<b>154517</b>

\* Until September 30, 2010

Source: [http://www.president.bg/v\\_pravo\\_txt.php?id=4043&st=0](http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?id=4043&st=0)

**Table 2: Number of people who received Bulgarian citizenship**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Total
<b>Citizenships</b>	<b>3371</b>	<b>4266</b>	<b>5660</b>	<b>5847</b>	<b>6628</b>	<b>5938</b>	<b>7113</b>	<b>9068</b>	<b>12915</b>	<b>60806</b>

\* Until September 30, 2010

Source: [http://www.president.bg/v\\_pravo\\_txt.php?id=4043&st=0](http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?id=4043&st=0)

When comparing Tables 1 and 2, two interesting tendencies can be observed. Firstly, the number of citizenships granted to foreign nationals has been steadily increasing since 2002. Secondly, in the 2002-2007 period, the number of applications was much higher than the number of citizenships, while in 2008 this trend was completely reversed (3435 applications and 12915 citizenships in first 9 months of 2010). The main reasons for the latter trend is that the current Bulgarian government (in power since July 2009) significantly improved the efficiency of state institutions, involved in the citizenship acquisition procedures, which were extremely cumbersome and slow in the past. In this way, the enormous backlog of applications, which has piled up over the years, has started to decrease.

Overwhelming majority of people who obtained the Bulgarian citizenship between 1990 and 2010 have claimed to be of Bulgarian descent and were previously citizens of Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro), or Albania.

**Table 3: Number of people who received Bulgarian citizenship because they are of Bulgarian descent or born to a parent with Bulgarian citizenship**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Total
<b>Citizenships</b>	<b>3210</b>	<b>4179</b>	<b>5559</b>	<b>5722</b>	<b>6511</b>	<b>5837</b>	<b>6945</b>	<b>8911</b>	<b>12803</b>	<b>59677</b>

\* Until September 30, 2010

Source: [http://www.president.bg/v\\_pravo\\_txt.php?id=4043&st=0](http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?id=4043&st=0)

Between 2002 and 2010, 98.14% (59,677) of all those who obtained Bulgarian passports were (or claimed to be) of Bulgarian ethnic origin, while only a tiny minority (1,129) received citizenship through non-facilitated procedure and for other reasons. In the same period, 12,717 citizenship applications were rejected, citizenship was restored to 780 people, and 4,930 people were released from Bulgarian citizenship (Changes in Bulgarian Citizenship in the period 22.01.2002 - 30.09.2010, 2010).

Overall, approximately 75,000 people have been granted Bulgarian citizenship over the last 20 years. More than half of them have previously been Macedonian nationals. Most other applicants were from Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine and Israel ("Bulgarian Citizenship," 2010).

**Table 4: People who received Bulgarian citizenship by countries of origin (22.01.2002 - 30.09.2010)**

Country	Macedonia	Moldova	Russia	Serbia**	Ukraine	Israel	Albania	Without citizenship
<b>Total</b>	31438	17306	2578	2468	2167	1594	907	218
<b>2010*</b>	9491	1553	234	402	265	314	306	16
<b>2009</b>	4398	2676	279	538	274	471	193	40
<b>2008</b>	3624	2464	234	253	185	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2007</b>	3727	2019	492	306	389	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2006</b>	2394	2317	189	213	185	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2005</b>	2435	2465	174	127	251	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2004</b>	2173	2204	260	160	151	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2003</b>	1599	1063	337	250	202	95	59	N/A
<b>2002</b>	1597	545	379	219	265	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* Until September 30, 2010

\*\* Serbia and Montenegro until 2006

Source: [http://www.president.bg/v\\_pravo\\_txt.php?id=4043&st=0](http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?id=4043&st=0)

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In addition to the *Law on Bulgarian Citizenship*, another important legal document dealing with the issues of citizenship and Bulgarian communities living abroad is the *National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006-2020* (MLSP, 2006). The document devoted special attention to the diaspora communities. In addition to scholarships, work permits and other incentives envisaged for attracting them to come to live in Bulgaria, the Strategy recommends that the procedures for acquisition of citizenship for Bulgarians from other countries need to be simplified and made easier. This has been largely accomplished with the April 2010 amendments to the *Law on Bulgarian Citizenship*.

### 2. 3. Bulgaria and the European Union

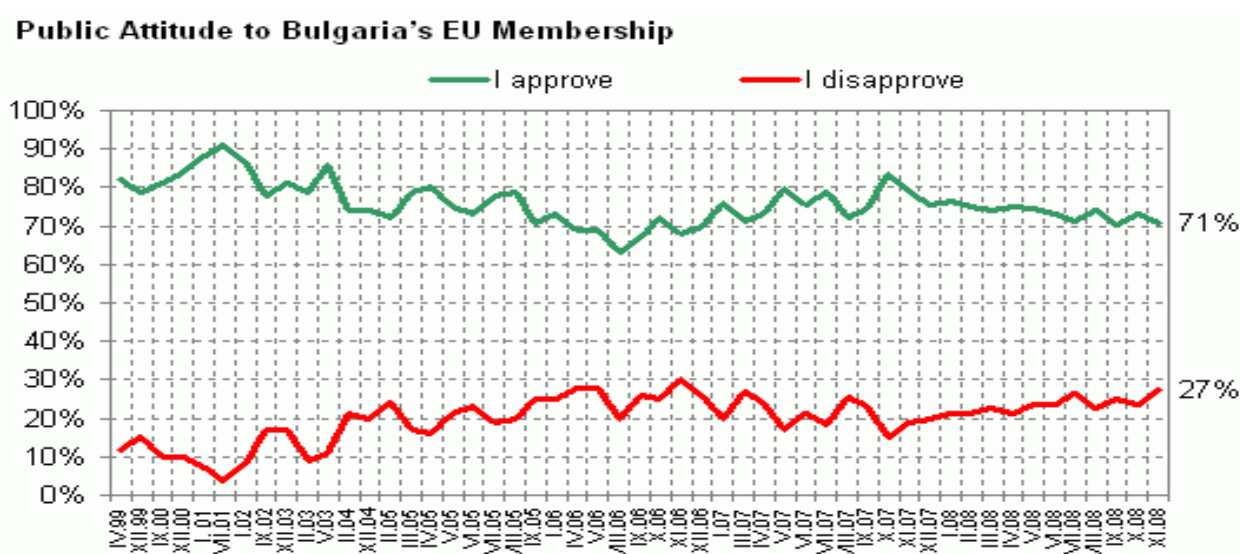
After 1989, Bulgarian society again turned towards Europe (somewhat similarly to the post-independence period). The dominating public-political slogan again became “back to Europe” from which Bulgaria was forcibly separated (before 1878 by the Ottoman Empire, between 1945 and 1989 by the Communist regime). All post-1989 Bulgarian governments placed the relations with the EU and full integration into all its structures at the very top of the country’s foreign policy priorities (Dinkov, 1999, pp. 993-995).

The Bulgarian EU accession process has been a long and troublesome one. The Bulgarian state declared its desire to become an EU member soon after the democratic changes of 1989. On December 22, 1990, the Bulgarian Grand National Assembly passed a resolution expressing the desire of the Republic of Bulgaria to become a full member of the European Community. On April 14, 1994, the Government of Bulgaria adopted a declaration confirming the willingness of the country to become a member of the European Union. The response on the part of the EU institutions was cautious. The Agenda 2000 (July 1997) described Bulgaria as a candidate country, which was not sufficiently prepared to start accession negotiations. Recognising Bulgaria as a “functioning market economy,” the European Commission in October 2002 stated in its regular report that it supported Bulgaria’s desire to join the EU in 2007. On June 15, 2004, Bulgaria provisionally closed the negotiations with the EU on all 31 chapters of the *acquis communautaire* and on April 13, 2005, the European Parliament approved the signing of the Treaty of Accession.

From the Bulgarian perspective, the EU accession was often seen as a set of directives that had to be fulfilled, chapters that needed to be closed, values that were expected to be adopted. The highly critical tone of the EU reports on the Bulgarian progress towards the EU accession, the predominantly negative image of the country in many old EU member-states and the additional burden of unfavourable and difficult social-economic conditions in the country have spread significant fears and discomfort among Bulgarians that they were not “European enough” (Kostova-Panayotova, 2004).

At the same time, the support for the EU membership remained high through the entire post-1989 period. Much hope and optimism were expressed in a number of surveys that Bulgaria would benefit from the membership in various ways (this has substantially changed after the 2007 accession).

**Table 5: Public Attitude to Bulgaria’s EU Membership**



Source: Alpha Research, 2009

**Table 6: Taking everything into account, would you say that Bulgaria has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?**

	Has benefited / Would benefit	Has not benefited / Would not benefit	Don't know
Fall 2009	50 %	28 %	22 %
Spring 2009	48 %	28 %	24 %
Winter 2009	31 %	44 %	25 %
Fall 2008	43 %	27 %	30 %
Spring 2008	47 %	23 %	30 %
Fall 2007	52 %	14 %	34 %
Spring 2007	50 %	18 %	32 %
Fall 2006	58 %	16 %	26 %
Spring 2006	54 %	19 %	27 %
Fall 2005	51 %	23 %	26 %
Spring 2005	62 %	16 %	21 %
Fall 2004	66 %	14 %	21 %

Source: Eurobarometer 72, Fall 2009

Kabakchieva (2009) made an interesting observation regarding the sharp division between identity and citizenship in Bulgaria, based on her study of the data from the 2008-2009 European Values Survey. Over three quarters of (ethnic) Bulgarians were very proud of their origin and their belonging to the Bulgarian nation, but were largely disinterested or even dissatisfied with the state of Bulgaria and did not trust its institutions. On the other hand, trust in the EU and its institutions, and the pride for being a part of the EU, were strongly expressed, while European identity and European civic awareness were almost completely absent (Kabakchieva, 2009, pp. 257-278).

Despite being an EU member since January 1, 2007, Bulgaria’s position in the Union is still not equal to those of older member states. Bulgaria (along with Romania) is subject to a strict monitoring and control from the European Commission over issues of corruption and organised crime. In addition, 10 out of 25 member states have opted for a period of derogation from the free movement principle for all EU citizens, imposing partial or full restrictions on

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Bulgarian (and Romanian) citizens' access to their labour markets. Some of the older member states (especially France and Germany) are also highly reserved regarding Bulgarian readiness to enter the Eurozone and Schengen area (both among the priorities of the current Bulgarian government).

The Bulgarian authorities (especially the triple coalition government, 2005-2009) and various state institutions on their part only worsened the situation and deepened the mistrust of the EU and member states – especially through non-transparent and fraudulent management of EU funds. The European Commission's 2008 *Report on the Management of EU-funds in Bulgaria* for example noted that the country lacked sound financial management, had weak administrative capacity and that "there have been serious allegations of irregularities as well as suspicions of fraud and conflicts of interest in the award of contracts" (Commission of the European Communities, 2008).

As a result, Bulgarian access to various financial instruments was temporary suspended. In July 2008, the Commission withdrew the accreditation of two main agencies implementing the EU funds in Bulgaria, and suspended payments under the three pre-accession programmes (PHARE / Transition Facility, ISPA and SAPARD) (Budgetary Control Committee of the EP, 2009). The access to the funds was restored after the new government of GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (decisive winner of July 2009 elections) initiated the necessary reforms and improved its management of the EU funds.

### 3. Cultural diversity challenges during the last 30 years

Since the liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, the population of Bulgaria has always been ethnically and religiously diverse. The first Bulgarian constitution (Tarnovo Constitution, 1879) included articles safeguarding the rights of the Bulgarian citizens belonging to religious minorities, although deliberate effort was made to avoid terms like "minority" or "Muslims." For example, Article 40 guaranteed the right to free practice of religion to those subjects of the Bulgarian Principality who were "Christians of non-Orthodox denomination or other believers." The Constitution guaranteed the autonomy of minority religious communities and wide cultural rights for minority groups (the right to have their places of worship, schools, newspapers and journals). In Turkish schools, which were financially supported by the state, the language of instruction was Turkish. Turks also had their political representatives in the Bulgarian National Assembly, but had no right to form a political party on ethnic grounds (Tarnovo Constitution, 1879; Nazarska, 1999).

Despite that, Bulgarians have not been able to accept the minorities (especially the Turkish one) as an equal and inseparable part of the nation before 1989. The national minorities have thus felt insecure and marginalised, although at the same time, they viewed themselves as part of the Bulgarian nation, shared the common national goals and participated in all the wars Bulgarian state fought for their implementation (Zhelyazkova, 2008).

There are over 15 ethnic communities in Bulgaria. The largest group are Bulgarians (83.9% according to 2001 census), followed by Turks and Roma.

The religious division of the population is the following (according to the 2001 census – see NSI, 2001): 82.6% are Eastern Orthodox Christians, 12.2% are Muslims (majority are Sunni, while about 5.5% of them are Shia), 0.6% are Catholics and 0.5% are Protestants. There are also small communities of believers of Armenian-Gregorian (6,500 people) and Jewish (650 people) faiths.

**Table 7: Division of the population according to ethnic group**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>%</b>
Total	8 487 317	100	7 928 901	100
Bulgarians	7 271 185	85.67	6 655 210	83.94
Turks	800 052	9.43	746 664	9.42
Roma*	313 396	3.69	370 908	4.68
Russians	17 139	0.20	15 595	0.20
Armenians	13 677	0.16	10 832	0.14
Vlachs	5 159	0.06	10 566	0.13
Macedonians	10 803	0.13	5 071	0.06
Karakachans	5 144	0.06	4 107	0.05
Greeks	4 930	0.06	3 408	0.04
Ukrainians	1 864	0.02	2 489	0.03
Tatars	4 515	0.05	1 803	0.02
Jews	3 461	0.04	1 363	0.02
Romanians	N/A		1 088	0.01
Gagauz	1 478	0.02	540	<0.01
Circassians	573	<0.01	367	<0.01
Arabs	N/A		328	<0.01
Albanians	N/A		278	<0.01
Others	N/A		11 369	0.14
Undeclared	N/A		62 108	0.78
No answer	N/A		24 807	0.31

Source: <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Ethnos.htm>

\* Most experts consider that the real number of Roma in Bulgaria is almost double the official number – between 600,000 and 700,000.

The three largest minorities in the country are Turks, Roma and Pomaks (or Muslim Bulgarians). Pomaks have not been included as a special ethnic group in the census as they are considered a religious and not an ethnic minority. These are also the three groups with the most significant tolerance-related problems – each in a different way and for different reasons. Turks are well integrated, politically organised and with a very clear and well-expressed self-awareness, but are faced with the increasingly intolerant attitude of the majority population, which perceives that Turks control too much political power in the country. Roma are almost completely excluded from the society. They are rejected not just by the majority population but other minorities as well. The widespread perception is that the state institutions “tolerate” Roma too much and that instead of tolerating, the state should control them. Pomaks are tolerated as a religious minority, but any attempt to assert their different ethnic or national identity is met by a furiously intolerant rejection of such claims. Pomak self-identification is often presented as a threat to the national interests and an attack on the national unity.

**Table 8: Main minority groups in Bulgaria and their dimension of difference from the majority population**

Dimension of difference	Citizenship	Racial	Ethnic	Religious	Cultural	Linguistic
<b>Native minorities</b>						
Turks			x	x	x	x
Roma			x	partial x	x	x
Pomaks			x	x	x	
Jews			x	x		
Armenians			x			
<b>Immigrants</b>						
Bulgarian descent	partial x				partial x	
Non- Bulgarian descent	x	x	x	x	x	x

### *Turks*

Turks are the largest minority in the country and are among the most homogeneous ethnic groups. They started to settle in the Bulgarian lands after Bulgaria was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. During the five centuries of the Ottoman rule, Turks became the majority population in urban centres, while Bulgarians remained the majority in rural areas. After Bulgarian independence, numerous Turks retreated from northern and central Bulgaria towards the eastern parts of the country. In the following century, huge numbers of Turks left the country in several emigration waves, although their share of the Bulgarian population always remained close to 10% (Eminov, 1997, pp. 76-78; Zhelyazkova, 1990).

The minority rights of the Bulgarian Turks have been defined in several international and bilateral agreements (the Berlin Treaty of 1878, the Istanbul Protocol of 1909, the Peace Treaty of 1913, the Bulgarian-Turkish Government Treaty of 1925 and others). These agreements offered the Turkish community the judicial guarantees for establishing their cultural and religious institutions in Bulgaria. On the other hand, very often Bulgarian state failed to live up to the obligations it had signed up to in the agreements. Quite the contrary, the state periodically tried to limit the rights of the Turkish minority. The situation worsened after the coup of 1934. Under Tsar Boris' authoritarian rule, Turks suffered social, political and cultural discrimination (Yalamov, 2002, pp. 142-164).

The Communist regime, which took power in Bulgaria after the WWII, initially endorsed a liberal and tolerant policy towards the Turkish community. The authorities permitted the existence of Turkish elementary schools and print media in Turkish language, and introduced preferential quotas for acceptance of Turkish students in the universities. The main goal of these policies was the integration of the Turkish minority into the society and their active involvement in the processes of modernisation and construction of a Socialist state.

At the same time, significant emigration to Turkey was also permitted, as this was a way for the state to "get rid off" those Turks, who did not accept the Communist regime and its

anti-religious policies<sup>8</sup> (Stoyanov, 1998; Büchschütz, 2000; Gruev, 2003; Gruev, Kaljonski, 2008). It can be said that the actions of the state in this period were an example of policies, which seemed liberal and appeared to be designed to stimulate the identity of the minorities, but were in fact used for the purpose of assimilation. Above all, the education and cultural policy of the state towards Turks aimed at weakening one exceptionally important segment of their identity, as significant efforts were devoted to limiting the influence of Islam within the community (Troebst, 1987, p. 240; Büchschütz, 2000, p. 131).

Yet, the seemingly liberal attitude did not last long and in the early 1960s, a drastic change occurred. Under the pretext of “integration” all specific features of Turkish identity (language, religions, customs and ultimately even their names) were first restricted and later prohibited. The process of complete assimilation of the Turkish minority reached its peak in the mid-1980s, when the names of the Bulgarian Turks were administratively substituted with Bulgarian-sounding names. The so-called “regeneration process” has caused an immense rift between the Bulgarian majority and Turkish minority, which has still not been completely overcome (Yalamov, 2002, pp. 365-388).

After 1989, the minority and human rights of the Turkish and other minority communities were restored. This however did not occur smoothly. A significant opposition to the reversal of the assimilation policies has appeared, especially among the Bulgarians living in the ethnically mixed areas and among the members of the security sector (the Ministry of Interior, secret services, army), who were directly involved in the implementation of “the regeneration process.” In their opinion, the process has achieved certain results and brought Bulgaria into a position from which there should be no retreat – otherwise the national interests of the country could be threatened. On the other hand, the Turkish community, encouraged by the restoration of their names, raised other demands: study of Turkish language and Islamic religion in schools in regions with predominantly Turkish population, proclamation of Islamic holidays Kurban Bayram and Sheker Bayram as official state holidays, and recognition of the Turkish community as a “national minority” (Baeva, Kalinova, 2009, pp. 36-39).

The first democratic Constitution, adopted in 1991, included no reference to the term “minority.” The Constitution only mentioned the “citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian” (Article 36) and added that everyone had the right to “develop their own culture in accordance with their ethnic affiliation, which is endorsed and guaranteed by the law” (Article 54).

Although the post-1989 period saw numerous positive developments regarding the change of legislation and the general consensus among the main political parties regarding the protection of minority rights, there was also a notable opposition to these trends and above all to the political participation of minorities (especially Turks) in central and local government. Article 11 (4) of the Bulgarian Constitution states: “There shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines, nor parties which seek the violent seizure of state power.”

Despite this, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the first political party representing Turks and other Muslim communities in Bulgaria, was formed in 1990. Since then, the MRF has always been represented in Parliament, and has been a member of three government coalitions. The reaction of the majority population to the appearance of the MRF on the political scene was predominantly negative. Public disapproval was followed by the negative response of the main political parties – both from the right and from the left.

Despite continuous efforts by the MRF leaders to present the party as a national civic party and not as a representative of a single ethnic group, its political opponents time and again insisted on using “ethnic” terminology in the political debate, persistently referring to the MRF

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<sup>8</sup> In the period summer – fall 1951, around 155,000 people left Bulgaria. Majority were Turks, but Pomaks and Roma were also among them. Büchschütz, 2000, p. 130.



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as “the Turkish party.” On several occasions, most notably prior to the 1992 elections, efforts were made to ban the MRF on the grounds that it was unconstitutional (Article 11). In 1992, the Constitutional Court declared that the MRF was not unconstitutional and could operate as any other political party as its statute made no restrictions to membership in the party on ethnic grounds, nor did it include any other provisions defining it as an “ethnic party” (Judge Aleksander Arabadzhiev – Decision No. 4, 1992).

Political attacks on the MRF continue today. While most of the criticism towards the party deals with its alleged high level of corruption, black funds and links with the grey economy, some accuse the MRF’s leaders of trying to isolate the Turkish minority in order to preserve full control over its votes, thus obstructing its integration into the Bulgarian society.

The anti-MRF rhetoric (which often spilled over into anti-Turkish hate speech) characterised the 2009 parliamentary election campaign, bringing substantial gains to the GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) party (the winner of the elections) and the extreme nationalistic Ataka (Attack) party.<sup>9</sup> President Parvanov’s comment on the election campaign was that “this was not anti-MRF talk, it was openly anti-Turkish and anti-Roma talk” (“Will the Ethnic Peace in the Country be Shaken?,” 2009). The widespread dissatisfaction over the political party generally considered to be Turkish has in recent years thus grown into a widespread intolerant attitude towards the Turkish minority.

*Diversity challenges:* Since 1989, the Bulgarian Turks have succeeded to fully integrate into all spheres of social life. As far as the official state policy is concerned, the Turkish minority has been recognised and accepted by the Bulgarian state. Education in the Turkish language is provided on all levels of education, they can freely practice their religion, they have newspapers and electronic media in their language and are actively involved in political life in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, the full integration into the political and public space did not lead to genuine coexistence based on respect and acceptance on the side of the Bulgarian majority population and for the larger part of the last 20 years, their attitude towards the Turkish minority can best be described as a case of liberal tolerance. Furthermore, in recent years the anti-Turkish sentiments and intolerant attitude have been on the rise. The majority believes that the Turkish community has too much political and economic power and finds such situation to be intolerable. Turks are a minority and should therefore know their place – they are tolerated as long as they keep a low profile in public space. On the other hand, Turks do not want to be simply tolerated – they want to be included and actively participate in all spheres of public, political, cultural and economic life in the country.

### *Roma*

Roma are the third largest ethnic community in the country. The real number of Roma in Bulgaria is highly disputed and ranges from the official 370,908 (Census 2001) to 700,000 (expert estimates). The reason for the difference is that a large number of Roma self-identifies as Bulgarians or Turks, while some also choose Vlach identity. An additional reason for inaccurate numbers is the high mobility – many Roma do not have addresses where they are officially registered, but have migrated to other towns or villages in search of temporary or seasonal employment and are therefore hard to track during the census.

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<sup>9</sup> The official slogan under which the 2009 elections were conducted was “Buying and selling of votes is a crime” to which Ataka added: “So is the Turkisation and plunder of Bulgaria.” Ataka’s election platform included the following points: Bulgaria must not be governed by the Turkish party MRF; a Turkish common worker in Bulgaria cannot receive a salary of 2400 BGN while a Bulgarian teacher is struggling to receive 600 BGN; Turkish language cannot be used in state and municipal institutions; Gypsy, Turkish, homosexual and other minorities cannot have any privileges while the impoverished Bulgarian pensioners are paying their electricity bills. See Ataka election brochure: [http://www.ataka.bg/images/documents/broshura\\_09.zip](http://www.ataka.bg/images/documents/broshura_09.zip)

According to the 2011 census data, 37% of Roma are Orthodox Christians, 18% are Muslims, while 10% are Protestants (it has to be noted that out of 64,476 Protestants in Bulgaria, more than a third – 23,289 – are Roma). 24.6% of Roma did not declare their religion (NSI, 2011). The census data should be viewed with certain caution. A comparison with the significantly different 2001 census data gives ground to suspicion that there might be a fault in the way results were either obtained or analysed. In 2001, 48.6% of Roma were counted as Orthodox Christians, 27.9% as Muslims, 6.6% as Protestants, and 17% did not declare their religion (NSI, 2001).

Roma are the most heterogeneous community in the country. In addition to professing different religions, Roma also identified themselves as belonging to different ethnic groups. They speak a number of languages – Bulgarian, Turkish, and Romany (numerous forms and dialects). Some differ according to their lifestyle – they can be either “settled” or “nomads.” Roma are further divided into numerous sub-groups. For example, the Bulgarian speaking Roma are divided into 21 subgroups. For all these reasons, Roma are perceived as a “community” above all by the non-Roma population. They rarely perceive themselves as a united and unified “Roma community” and the differences, distances and conflicts among various Roma sub-groups are often larger than between Roma and other ethnic groups (Tomova, 1995; Pamporov, 2006; Grekova, 2008).

An expected consequence of this situation is that the Roma community never managed to unify behind one Roma political party and elect its representatives into the National Assembly, despite potentially having more than enough voters to do so. There are over 20 registered Roma parties in the country (although only few of them contain word “Roma” in their name), which fragments the Roma votes, keeping their electoral results well below the 4% parliamentary threshold. Only a few Roma parties (especially the Party “Roma” and Euroroma) had some modest success on the local level (Hajdinjak, 2008, pp. 119-120).

To say that Roma in Bulgaria are not integrated into the society and that they are not tolerated by the other communities (not just the Bulgarian majority but by other minorities as well) is an understatement. The majority of Roma live in segregated city ghettos or village settlements, separated from the rest of the population. In the 1945-1989 period, the Communist regime employed various measures (often repressive) to force the Roma minority to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle. After being made to settle, Roma were included (if not really integrated) into the country’s social-economic system. They received access to health care and education, and were included into the labour market.

However, the situation has dramatically changed during the transition period. Today Roma are largely excluded from the legal labour market and work predominantly in grey and black sectors. Their access to proper health care is very limited, while the child drop-out rate from schools has dramatically increased. The prejudices and stereotypes about Roma are exceptionally negative – they are described as “dirty,” “lazy,” “thieves,” “liars,” “cheaters,” “irresponsible” and “hopeless.” As a consequence, Roma are rejected and according to recent sociological studies, only a third of Bulgarians are content with living in the same town with Roma (Tomova, 1995 pp. 58-61; Pamporov, 2006, pp. 37-38; Grekova, 2008, pp. 20-28).

The studies on ethnic discrimination in Bulgaria show that Roma are victims of institutional discrimination on daily bases. In most cases, however, this discrimination remains largely hidden and is not officially registered because Roma rarely use legal and institutional resources available for protection of their rights. This is not a result only of the lack of information, but above all of their isolation from the Bulgarian society and the lasting distrust and fear of the Bulgarian institutions (Grekova et al, 2010).

The first genuine and purposeful attempt to deal with the problem of Roma exclusion was the *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, which the Bulgarian government passed in 1999. The Framework Programme was an attempt to set

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up a comprehensive state strategy for accomplishment of real equality of the Roma people in Bulgaria. It served as a base for various strategies, plans and programmes prepared and implemented by consecutive governments and individual ministries.

The *National Action Plan – Decade of Roma Inclusion*, passed in 2005, was the most ambitious attempt to address the multifaceted problem of Roma exclusion. Despite much optimism and hope that accompanied its launch, the Plan has not achieved much in terms of tangible results over the following years.

*Diversity challenges:* The programmes, action plans and other measures implemented by the government and various state institutions demonstrate that on the institutional level, the state policies towards Roma can be rated as tolerance but with a reservation that it is tolerance with the clear goal of social-economic integration. Despite these measures (many of which suffered from poor implementation, insufficient funding and lack of commitment), the situation of the Bulgarian Roma has not changed substantially yet. If anything, the situation changed for worse. The general public still perceives them in overwhelmingly negative terms and continues to reject and exclude them (Grekova et al., 2010, p. 16). This is perhaps most visible in the institutional efforts to integrate Roma children into the education system as quite regularly, attempts to desegregate Roma schools and transfer the Roma children to normal, or “integrated,” schools result in the resistance of Bulgarian parents (and quite often also teachers) against such moves. On numerous occasions, Bulgarian parents have withdrawn their children from integrated schools and transferred them to other schools with little or no Roma children. Acceptance and toleration of Roma are a precondition for their successful inclusion into the society, but at the same time only their participation in all spheres of social life can reduce the distances and rejection. For now, the Bulgarian Roma are entangled in a web of rejection, exclusion and intolerance and the prospects for this to change in the near future are not very bright.

### *Pomaks*

The fourth significantly large ethno-religious group are the Muslim Bulgarians or Pomaks. The issue of Pomak identity has been a controversial one ever since the establishment of independent Bulgaria in 1878 and has yet to be resolved. The widespread belief is that Pomaks are not a separate ethnic group as the only difference between Pomaks and other Bulgarians is religion. Very often, Pomaks are seen as “lesser” Bulgarians – inseparable part of the Bulgarian family-nation, but blemished by the “wrong,” Muslim religion.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of Pomaks live in the area of the Rhodopa mountain. According to Census data, there were around 160,000 Muslim Bulgarians in 1992, and 131,500 in 2001 (NSI, 2001). According to various expert data, their number could be between 220,000 and 250,000 (Kostova, 2001, p. 26.). The main reason for this conflicting and inaccurate data is the lack of internal homogeneity. Many Pomaks have problems with self-identification. Some identify themselves as Turks, some consider themselves as Bulgarians<sup>11</sup> (there has been a strong tendency towards converting to Christianity among some of them), while others believe their origin is entirely different from both dominant groups (some believe they have Arabic origin). Many describe themselves simply as Muslims, equating the religious identity with the ethnic one.

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<sup>10</sup> One of the best such examples is the book “On the Past of the Bulgarian Mohammedans in the Rhodopes,” published in 1958 by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that those Pomaks who live among Christian Bulgarians, more often identify themselves as Turks, while those who live in the regions with a compact Turkish population prefer to identify as Bulgarians.

Many times in history, the academic discourse about Pomaks as “brothers who have lost their way” transformed into violent campaigns of forced assimilation, during which Pomaks were forced to abandon their religion, customs and even their names. As a result, even today, the Pomak community is still very divided and uncertain regarding its identity. There is a very strong sense of isolation among them, especially those residing in the geographically remote Rhodopa mountain villages. A growing distrust towards the Bulgarian population and the state of Bulgaria, which has virtually abandoned them during the painful years of transition, has also been observed among Pomaks (Tomova, 2000, p.131).

All attempts to assert a separate and unique Pomak identity (especially if they came from within the community) have provoked a very strong negative reaction among the majority population, including political and intellectual circles. The most recent example was the pilot internet census, which started in September 2010. The questionnaire prepared by the National Statistics Institute offered as possible answers for respondent’s ethnic group also ethnicities such as Bulgarian-Muslim and Macedonian. This triggered a wave of criticism. The NSI Head stated that NSI has no authority or goal to determine which ethnic groups live in Bulgaria, but just wanted to give every Bulgarian citizen the opportunity to self-determine his or her ethnic background. The nationalist political parties demanded the categories to be removed from the questionnaire over fears they would divide the nation. In response, two Deputy Directors of the NSI resigned, while the resignation of the Head of the NSI was rejected by the Prime Minister (“Bulgarian Stats Head Resigns over Ethnic Controversy,” 2010).

*Diversity challenges:* The state policy towards Pomaks is a combination of tolerance and exceptional intolerance. On the one side, Pomaks are free to practice their religion and manifest their cultural identity without hindrance both in the private and public sphere. On the other side, the state and the majority population strictly refuse to acknowledge their right to genuine self-identification and the attempts from within the Pomak community to assert their identity as different from the Bulgarian majority usually lead to an overly negative and aggressive reaction from the state institutions, media and the public. The overall attitude towards Pomaks can thus be rated as intolerance. Without recognising its existence, there can be no discussion about tolerance and acceptance of a particular community.

All other minority communities in the country are relatively small. Only Russians, Armenians and Vlachs number more than 10,000 people, while all other are smaller than 5,000. Most (with the exception of Macedonians, who have problems similar to those faced by the Pomaks) are well integrated into Bulgarian society and have no acceptance-tolerance related difficulties. Two of these communities (Armenians and Jews) deserve to be mentioned here because of their special place in Bulgarian social and cultural life. Their presence and complete integration into the society is perhaps the only indicator giving ground to the claim that the Bulgarian society is not a complete stranger to mechanisms of acceptance of otherness.

### *Jews*

Jews settled in Bulgaria in 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, when they were expelled from Spain. The community integrated exceptionally well into Bulgarian society and played an important role in the development of the Bulgarian state. Their level of integration was such that Bulgaria was the only country in Europe, where the number of Jews increased during the WWII. Despite being an ally of the Nazi Germany, in 1943 the entire Bulgarian society rose up in defence of the Bulgarian Jews, when the order came from Berlin that they should be sent to the concentration camps. As a result, none of the 50,000 Bulgarian Jews ended up in death camps.

Despite that, in 1948-1949 over 30,000 Jews emigrated from Bulgaria to Israel to avoid living under the Communist regime and today, only a fraction of the once large Jewish

## Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria

community still resides in the country. The census data give the following numbers: 1,162 in 2011, 1,363 in 2001 and 3,461 in 1992. The representatives of the Jewish community believe there are around 10,000 Jews in Bulgaria, who are difficult to trace because they are so well integrated into the Bulgarian society, have intermarried with ethnic Bulgarians, and have in numerous cases abandoned their mother tongue for Bulgarian language (Barouh, 2001). It is interesting to note that in the 2002-2010 period, 1,594 Israeli citizens received Bulgarian citizenship by claiming the Bulgarian origin. Presumably, many of them are descendants of Bulgarian Jews who emigrated from the country after the WWII.

### *Armenians*

The majority came to Bulgaria during the period of the Armenian Genocide in the 1910s. They were well received and acquired refuge in Bulgaria, which provided them with good conditions for adaptation and integration. Their numbers were significantly reduced as a result of two large emigration waves to the Soviet Armenia (in 1935 and 1946).<sup>12</sup> The majority of Armenians live in the city of Plovdiv. The community is well organised and there are numerous Armenian organisations all over the country involved with educational and cultural activities. Armenians have been disproportionately active and prominent in the cultural life of the country (Miceva, 2001).

*Diversity challenges:* Both Jews and Armenians can be seen as examples of minority groups that have been treated with respect and recognition. They have always enjoyed full freedom to express their ethnic, religious and cultural identity. One pragmatic explanation for this is the small number of members of both communities. For this reason, the majority has never perceived them even as a potential threat to the national unity. Most Jews and Armenians also live dispersed in the larger cities and towns of Bulgaria, and are integrated into the majority population to the extent that the only visible marker distinguishing them from the rest of the population are their names. Both communities have been fully accepted and are respected both on the state level and by the society, as is manifested by numerous highly respected individuals from both communities who have left their mark in Bulgarian politics, culture, science and sports.

### *Immigrants*

Bulgaria has only recently become a country attracting a more significant flow of immigrants. Neither society nor state institutions are truly prepared for this process. The state structures respond slowly and chaotically to the increasing numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers and economic immigrants, and the state has no clear policy on how to accommodate them and integrate them into the country. The society is only partially aware of the issue, as the immigrant communities are still small in number and relatively invisible for the average citizen. Bearing in mind the problematic attitude towards the traditional minorities, it can hardly be concluded that the increase in immigration will be met with understanding and benevolence.

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<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that around 5000 people left on both occasions.

**Table 9: Permanently resident foreigners in Bulgaria by citizenship as of 31.12.2009:**

Citizenship	Permanently resident foreigners					
	31.12.2004	31.12.2005	31.12.2006	31.12.2007	31.12.2008	31.12.2009
<b>Total</b>	<b>50756</b>	<b>53197</b>	<b>55653</b>	<b>63615</b>	<b>66806</b>	<b>69423</b>
<b>Europe</b>	<b>35437</b>	<b>37051</b>	<b>38988</b>	<b>44261</b>	<b>47106</b>	<b>49379</b>
<b>EU - 27</b>	<b>5690</b>	<b>5949</b>	<b>6245</b>	<b>6861</b>	<b>6904</b>	<b>6948</b>
<b>Other European</b>	<b>29747</b>	<b>31102</b>	<b>32743</b>	<b>37400</b>	<b>40202</b>	<b>42431</b>
including:						
Albania	99	113	142	198	229	265
Belarus	283	306	326	351	362	377
Bosnia and Herzegovina	46	47	48	50	58	63
Macedonia	821	918	1115	2188	4375	5507
Moldova	1643	1626	1703	2071	2203	2403
Russian Federation	18639	18947	19216	21171	21309	21483
Serbia	1068	1116	1121	1326	355	593
Turkey	1880	2583	3361	3778	3828	4092
Ukraine	4500	4659	4861	5263	5350	5514
<b>Asia</b>	<b>7060</b>	<b>7700</b>	<b>8162</b>	<b>9308</b>	<b>9623</b>	<b>9888</b>
Armenia	873	1018	1142	1268	1322	1380
Viet Nam	796	832	867	1033	1043	1040
Iraq	359	366	369	430	437	443
China	1081	1421	1581	1785	1934	2011
Lebanon	794	817	832	913	932	953
Syria	1617	1648	1690	1929	1945	1987
<b>Other Asia</b>	<b>1540</b>	<b>1598</b>	<b>1681</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2074</b>
<b>Africa</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>651</b>
Algeria	80	79	85	89	90	91
Egypt	75	86	89	94	102	106
Libya	39	42	37	36	34	38
Morocco	50	49	50	51	56	57
Nigeria	87	86	91	92	92	96
Tunisia	43	45	50	46	46	47
<b>Other Africa</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>America</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>890</b>
Canada	38	41	40	43	45	49
Cuba	157	158	160	200	203	204
Nicaragua	55	55	54	58	57	58
Peru	20	19	22	24	23	25
USA	221	273	332	360	374	412
Chile	27	28	27	27	27	27
<b>Other America</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Australia and New Zealand</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Stateless</b>	<b>1749</b>	<b>1896</b>	<b>1903</b>	<b>2157</b>	<b>2167</b>	<b>2171</b>
<b>ex-USSR</b>	<b>5316</b>	<b>5285</b>	<b>5238</b>	<b>6404</b>	<b>6386</b>	<b>6372</b>
<b>Unknown citizenship</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>

Source: [http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Pop\\_5.8\\_Migration\\_DR\\_EN.xls](http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Pop_5.8_Migration_DR_EN.xls)

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*Diversity challenges:* Europeans represent 71.1% of permanently residing foreigners in Bulgaria, followed by immigrants from Asia (14.2%), North and South America (1.3%) and Africa (1%) (see Table 9). The vast majority of foreign permanent residents came from the former Soviet Union (30.9% are from the Russian Federation alone). Immigrants from the countries neighbouring Bulgaria (especially Macedonia and Turkey) represent 14.7% of all foreign permanent residents. Most of the immigrants in Bulgaria thus originate from countries, which are culturally, linguistically and religiously close to the Bulgarian majority population. Even immigrants from Asia and Middle East, which form the second largest group, are not perceived as a challenge. Two most important reasons are their relatively small number, and the fact that they rarely compete with the native population on the employment market, but rather come to Bulgaria as investors, opening small business and more often than not providing employment to Bulgarian citizens.

### 4. Definitions of tolerance in Bulgaria

Traditionally the debates about how tolerant the Bulgarian society was were based on the entrenched auto-stereotype among the Bulgarians as an exceptionally tolerant nation. This belief has its roots in the period of the National Revival, when the spiritual leaders of the nation advocated the equality of all ethnic and religious communities in the country. The belief was further strengthened at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Bulgaria accepted and accommodated thousands of Jews fleeing from anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia (1895) and Romania (1904). A decade later Bulgaria welcomed Armenians who had escaped from the genocide in Turkey. Finally, Bulgarians stood up and saved their Jewish co-citizens in 1943, when they prevented their deportation to the Nazi concentration camps. Even the fall of the Communist regime and the transition to democracy occurred under the sign of protection of minority rights and equality of all religions. All this made it possible for the Bulgarian political elites to talk about the existence of a unique “Bulgarian ethnic model,” based on tolerance and respect for the others (Zhelyazkova, 1998, pp. 11-25; Zhelyazkova, 2001b, pp. 62-66).

Yet, when the general self-perception is juxtaposed to a concrete manifestation of tolerance, the results are less encouraging. Thus for example a survey from 2000 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents believe that Bulgarian Christian majority is tolerant (the belief shared by 89% of respondents who defined themselves as Christians and by 87% of those who said they were not religious). However, only 25% of Christian and 17% of non-religious respondents support the construction of temples of other (non-Christian) religions (Fotev, 2000, pp. 34-35).

Several sociological and anthropological studies conducted in recent years have shown that the ethnic Bulgarian majority is in general very distrustful and distant from the various minorities in the country. Bulgarians have incomparably more stereotypes and prejudices regarding the minorities than it is the other way around (Pamporov, 2009; Kanev, Cohen, Simeonova, 2005, Fotev, 2009).<sup>13</sup> Minorities are in general much better disposed towards the majority, and more open to various kinds of contacts and cohabitation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example, one study which compared results from 4 surveys, conducted in years 1992, 1994, 1997 and 2005, showed that between 87% (in 2005) and 91% (in 1994) of Bulgarians believe that Roma are predisposed towards crime; between 84% (in 1997) and 86% (in 1994) believed that Roma cannot be trusted; between 63% (in 2005) and 69% (in 1997) did not want to live in the same neighbourhood with Roma, while between 27% (in 2005) and 38% (in 1997) did not want even to live in the same country with them. The results show that there has been no decrease in the negative attitudes and prejudices against Roma over the years. The situation is somewhat different regarding the Turks. While the perception that Turks are religious fanatics (84% in 1992 and 59% in 2005) and

One of the more recent studies on social distances and ethnic stereotypes in Bulgaria has shown that even after 130 years, the majority of ethnic Bulgarians still associate the Turkish minority with the Ottoman rule and the term “Turkish yoke” (Pamporov, 2009, p. 113). This is a clear sign that the education and integration policies in Bulgaria are still very far away from becoming multi-cultural.

Before 1989, in the regions where ethnic Bulgarians were a minority population, while Turks were a local majority, almost all prestigious political, intellectual and business positions were occupied by ethnic Bulgarians. The logic behind this was that Bulgaria is a country of Bulgarians, while the others were “intruders” and a heritage of unfavourable historic circumstances (Zhelyazkova, 2010, pp. 9-11).

Post-1989 democratic transition has reversed this trend and now Turks are well represented in regional and municipal administration, local economy and other spheres of social life in regions where they represent majority population. This reversal has caused many Bulgarians residing in the mixed regions to believe that Turks pushed them out of the public space and are (again) dominating them. A research conducted in 2006 in one such municipality (Ardino; population: 68.2% Turks, 16.9% Bulgarians and 14.9% others – mostly Pomaks) showed that many Bulgarians do not regard the local administration as theirs. They feel marginalized and believe it is not in their power to influence the social processes in the municipality. Frustrated by the lack of perspectives, the young Bulgarians “are escaping” to bigger towns in search of professional realization and very few are still living in Ardino (Troeva-Grigorova, Grigorov, 2006).

Politicians from the nationalistic political parties and some media periodically claim that Bulgarians in mixed regions are victims of discrimination and Turkish oppression. According to their statements, Bulgarians cannot receive employment in municipal administration if local government is dominated by the MRF. Another often voiced grievance is that only Turkish language is used in such municipalities and Bulgarians, who are allegedly referred to as *giaours*<sup>15</sup> by Turks, are made to feel like second class citizens in their own country (Deliyska, 2006; Siderov, 2009; BHC, 2006).

A 2008 sociological research highlighted new tendencies in the development of the Bulgarian nationalism. Bulgaria’s EU accession, open borders and greater mobility of people did not make the majority of the Bulgarian population more secure, open and tolerant, but – it seems – quite the contrary. The opening to the world has intensified the fear from the others, and in many cases, the perceived disappearance of the national borders has been substituted with the construction of the borders around the family and the family home. The situation in which the focus of a significant share of the wider society is on the foreigners, coming to “take our land away,” and the Roma, preying at the gates of our home to rob us, is potentially very dangerous. The desire to “protect the family” can easily expand into the need to “protect the fatherland” and thus give rise to strongly xenophobic and nationalistic political ideology (Kabakchieva, 2008, pp. 87-88).

Keeping in mind the exceptionally low trust in the state institutions and the political class, as well as the large regional differentiations in the country (especially in terms of

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that they cannot be trusted (62% in 1994 and 35% in 2005) have decreased considerably, the belief that Turks are occupying too much space in the political life of the country remained high (62% in 1992 and 69% in 2005). 18% of Bulgarians stated that they do not want Turks to live in Bulgaria. See Kanev, Cohen, Simeonova, 2005, pp. 41-47.

<sup>14</sup> 53% of Roma respondents in a survey said that Bulgarians can be counted on; 40% believe that Bulgarians are not ill disposed towards Roma, 59% would marry a Bulgarian, while 89% would make friends with them. Rejection of Bulgarians as colleagues and neighbours is between 2 and 6%. See Kanev, Cohen, Simeonova, 2005, pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> *Giaour* is an offensive Turkish term for an infidel.



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economy and standard of life), it can be concluded that for majority of Bulgarians the notions of nation and state are no longer part of the indivisible whole. Kabakchieva writes that the nation-state has split into an (ethnically defined) nation and a (disrespected and distrusted) state. This process is the strongest among Bulgarians, who are a dominant group, but similar tendencies can also be observed among Turks and to a smaller extent among Roma (Kabakchieva, 2009, pp. 257-278).

Another important criteria for tolerance in the society are the political parties. One of the first political parties founded in 1989 was the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), a party widely considered as a political party of the Muslim communities (especially the Turkish one). Its appearance and activities were met with very mixed reception. On one side, its representatives have been promoting themselves as the protectors of the ethnic model in the country and have on numerous occasions (especially in the beginning of the transition) contributed to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence and tolerance in the country. On the other side, the MRF has caused also a considerable negative backlash among the Bulgarians. The long years of its participation in the political games in the country and above all the increasingly authoritarian structure of its political apparatus have significantly contributed to the predominantly negative attitude towards the party in Bulgaria today.

The increasing popularity of nationalistic and xenophobic political parties says much about the levels of tolerance in the country. The two most popular such parties are VMRO – Bulgarian National Movement, and Ataka (Attack). VMRO (which stands for Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) focuses on the national dignity and integrity and is less radical in its public statements and activities. It was established in 1989, but never gained significant popularity and usually participated in the Bulgarian parliamentary life as a member of various coalitions. Ataka relies on extremely aggressive nationalistic, racist and xenophobic rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> It appeared on the political stage shortly before the 2005 elections and achieved an unexpectedly high result with 8.14% of the votes. Contrary to the predictions that this would remain its best achievement, Ataka performed even better on the 2009 elections (9.36%). On the 2006 Presidential elections, Ataka leader Volen Siderov received 21.49% in the first and 24.05% in the second round of voting.

A very good test of how tolerant is the society are its reactions to various political initiatives regarding the Turkish minority. On numerous occasions and especially during the election campaigns, Ataka has raised the issue of the Turkish language news programme on the national TV channel “Kanal 1.”<sup>17</sup> After the parliamentary elections in 2009, the party demanded the referendum on the issue, provoking a heated public discussion for and against the news. After a significant number of aggressive and intolerant statements were made in the media and public space, in the end the position prevailed that the Turkish language news should be preserved (“GERB and Ataka Want Referendum,” 2009; “Borisov Backs Down,” 2009).

Another test for Bulgarians are the increasing anti-Islamic sentiments in the world. On the one hand, there is the opinion that “our” Muslims are well integrated and are “not like the others” (Zhelyazkova, 1998a; Zhelyazkova, 2010; Roev, 2009; Iliev, 2007). On the other hand, the suspicions and allegations about the spread of radical Islam in the Turkish and Pomak villages have become quite common in the recent years. Even the traditional and well established customs from everyday life (like headscarves) are used by certain political circles

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<sup>16</sup> This was especially the case from its establishment in 2005 to 2009. After the change of the government in 2009, the party made a visible effort to soften its rhetoric and move closer to the mainstream. Although officially not a coalition member, Ataka has been the most loyal and unquestionable supporter of the government, formed by GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) party in 2009.

<sup>17</sup> A 15-minute long summary of the main news in Turkish language (with Bulgarian subtitles) has been broadcast on the national TV channel since 2004.

as evidence that “radicalism” has entered Bulgaria. On several occasions, the special police investigators were called in to investigate the “manifestations of radical Islam” in various Bulgarian villages, but so far they have only confirmed that there was no such phenomenon in the country. The only result was the increasing feeling of discomfort and rejection among the Muslim communities.

Media are a very important factor forming the public opinion and an indicator of the existing tendencies. Unfortunately, some media have in the recent years contributed to the spread of intolerance instead of trying to achieve the opposite. One of the TV channels, quite popular on the national scale, is SKAT. Its programme orientation is openly nationalistic, and anti-Islamic and racist messages are a common feature in many of its shows.<sup>18</sup> The Council for Electronic Media, the state regulatory institution, rarely intervenes against the hate speech featured on SKAT and in other media, which regularly use negative and offensive terms for various minorities.

The situation has somewhat improved in the recent years with the passing of the new Law on Protection against Discrimination (in force since January 1, 2004) and the establishment of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. The increasing number of NGOs has been engaged with the protection of human and minority rights and protection against discrimination. They have sent a number of signals to the Commission and started procedures with the goal of creating legal precedence and bring public attention to the issues of anti-discrimination and tolerance.

NGOs are also the most active actors in the research of tolerance in Bulgaria and in efforts to build a truly tolerant society. A number of projects and initiatives in the recent years aimed at:

- studying the tolerance and acceptance of otherness
- promoting peaceful coexistence
- reforming the education through introduction of programmes for learning about otherness and setting up models of tolerance
- protection against discrimination

The issues of tolerance, equality of citizens and fight against discrimination have been included in the relevant Bulgarian legislation: the Constitution, Law on Religion (or Confessions Act) of 2002, Law on Political Parties (1990), Law on Protection against Discrimination (2004), and Penal Code (from 1968 and amended many times since then). Special state institutions in charge of these issues have also been formed: the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (1997), Ombudsman (2003), and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (2005; it is the only one with the authority to issue sanctions).

Monitoring of tolerance and anti-discrimination practices in Bulgaria has been conducted since 1998 by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The ECRI has issued four reports on Bulgaria to date.<sup>19</sup> Despite certain remarks, the ECRI believes that the Bulgarian Constitution safeguards the equality of all Bulgarian citizens. Regarding the Confessions Act, the ECRI recommends that the Bulgarian authorities continue the process of

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<sup>18</sup> Some of SKAT’s regular programmes are: For Bulgarian Faith (hosted by an Orthodox priest and dedicated to various topics, covered from the viewpoint of Orthodox religion); Class on Bulgaria (different themes from Bulgarian history, archaeology, ethnology, literature and arts); Banished from Their Fatherland (dedicated to Bulgarians, banished from historic Bulgarian lands, which are now part of Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania); The Other History (a nationalistic take on Bulgarian history) and similar. <http://www.skat.bg/preda.php?action=3>

<sup>19</sup> The latest report is from 2009. See *ECRI Report on Bulgaria*, 2009.

amending the law in order to ensure the full freedom of religion in accordance with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The ECRI's most categorical recommendations deal with the prevention and punishment of racist crimes and offences based on discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and other indicators. The ECRI recommends that the Bulgarian authorities ensure that such offences are duly punished in accordance with the law and that the authorities continue to foster awareness among the judiciary in this regard to ensure that the law is applied when necessary. Despite the reports of various NGOs and findings of the ECRI, the Bulgarian state institutions still do not recognize the existence of racism, xenophobia and manifestations of intolerance and hate crimes, and consequently they do not act accordingly to prevent and punish them. For this reason, the ECRI again recommends that the Bulgarian authorities insert a provision in the Criminal Code expressly stating that racist motivation for any ordinary offence constitutes an aggravating circumstance (*ECRI Report on Bulgaria*, 2009, p. 15).

Regarding the relevant state institutions, the ECRI recommends that the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues is reinforced and that its responsibilities are clarified in order to make a greater impact, especially on issues affecting Roma. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination has been positively evaluated, but the ECRI recommends that its human and financial resources be increased – especially through establishment of its local offices (*ECRI Report on Bulgaria*, 2009, pp. 17-18).

### 5. Concluding remarks

Bulgarians have been used to living in a multi-cultural environment since the times of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, this experience of cohabitation has led to the construction of models of parallel existence – the otherness is tolerated without being actually accepted. From the very formation of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, the Bulgarian society and the governing circles viewed Bulgaria as a mono-national Orthodox-Christian state. All Bulgarian Constitutions and principal laws noted the existence of various ethnic and religious communities and upheld the principle of equal rights and obligations, but at the same time, all these legal documents (all Constitutions and the Law on Religion) placed the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in a privileged position compared to other religions.<sup>20</sup>

The perception of a mono-national state has resulted in corresponding policies towards the minorities. They were accepted as a part of the Bulgarian society, but at the same time were in practice highly marginalised – Roma live mostly in segregated settlements at the edges of cities and towns, while majority of Turks and Pomaks reside in peripheral rural regions. In this way, they remain largely “invisible” in the everyday life of the majority population. The public attitudes towards them is directed and regulated mostly by the media and certain political parties with nationalistic orientation. Most often, the minorities fall into the media and political spotlight in election periods, or in times of political, economic or other crises, when they are most often presented as being responsible for a given problem, or as a problem itself.

At the same time, the mere fact of practical cohabitation in a multi-cultural environment is often enough for Bulgarians to perceive themselves as tolerant. However, the “tolerance” in this case can be understood only as “putting up with someone different,” without accepting and understanding them. A similar attitude can be observed even in the academic circles.

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<sup>20</sup> Article 13 (3) of the current Constitution states: “Eastern Orthodox Christianity shall be considered the traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria.” *Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*, <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=const&lng=en>

Humanities in Bulgaria have failed to conceptualise the issue of tolerance. The thesis that the Bulgarian society is tolerant because of the traditional coexistence of various ethnoses and religions is accepted as an axiom. An Orthodox and a Catholic church, a mosque and a synagogue, which stand almost side by side in the centre of the capital Sofia, are frequently pointed out as a symbol of tolerance in the country.

And yet, the term “tolerance” remains above all a synonym of bearable and parallel cohabitation. The situation could be classified as liberal tolerance – the right of the minorities to express their ethnic, religious and cultural characteristics is respected, but only as long as it is considered (by the state institutions, political actors and even the majority population) that this is not in contradiction with the national interests. The Bulgarian intellectuals have only recently (through import of the European discourse) begun to understand the tolerance in a broader way – as acceptance and respect of the different groups. Such discourse for now exists predominantly in the projects and work of the non-governmental organisations. The particular studies actually show that the attitude of the majority of Bulgarians towards otherness is still based on deeply entrenched disregard, apprehension and prejudice.

Legislation and state policies follow the European norms and are largely in line with the EU legal practices, but this is above all a result of the EU accession process, as the Bulgarian legislation had to be changed so that the accession criteria could be fulfilled. The practical implementation of these legal texts often leaves much to hope for, and the comprehensive policy on equal treatment of all citizens belonging to various minority groups has yet to be developed. The traditional distrust towards the state institutions is another reason why many representatives of the minority communities remain very reserved regarding the possibility to turn to the state for protection of their rights.

Many minority communities feel that they are not equally treated and that the majority and state institutions are neglecting them. They have set up various NGOs and political parties in an effort to protect their interests.

Roma are most active in the NGO sector. They have not succeeded in uniting around a single political party, but have their representatives in many municipal councils. Turks and Pomaks have a political representation on the central level, and are the political majority in many municipalities where they live. The Chief Mufti office is also actively involved in the protection of religious freedoms on the national and local level.

In conclusion, several recommendations can be made on how to increase the sensitivity and ability to accept the otherness in the Bulgarian society. In the first place, the state should more actively support the work of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, which has until now shown the best concrete results in the fight against discriminative treatment. The Commission itself should intensify and widen its media campaigns and its activities aimed at encouraging citizens to protect their rights through legal means. The institutions overseeing the media should be much stricter towards the cases of hate-speech and intolerance in the media.

The state needs to develop a comprehensive and purposeful policy on acceptance of otherness in the Bulgarian society. To make this possible, a centralised system for collecting information on actual existence / lack of tolerance in the society, media and institutions is needed. The cases of discriminative practices, registered by various NGOs, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, courts and other institutions should be structured in a common database.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bulgaria is still searching for the proper balance in accommodating its diversity. To a large extent, the Bulgarian political circles and the society have declared their support for the process of recognition and acceptance of “otherness” in the country. However, only a few concrete measures have produced effective and genuine results to date.

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