

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

**MINORITIES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

**Muslims of Bulgaria**

**Acknowledgements**

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## MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS

### State

Bulgaria

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

Muslim

### Is there any form of recognition of the minority?

The Muslim community is officially registered in Bulgaria.

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

Religious

### Territory they inhabit

Almost 80 per cent of the Turks live in two compact zones in Northeastern and Southeastern Bulgaria, 90 per cent of the Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) live in the Rhodope Mountains on the Bulgarian-Greek border. A small number of Pomaks live in several villages around the town of Lovech in Northern Bulgaria (Eminov, 1997:101). Muslim Roma live in Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Peshtera (Southern Bulgaria) and Shoumen, Silistra and Dobrich (Northern Bulgaria) (Russinov, 1998). The Muslim Tatars live in Northeastern Bulgaria around the town of Shoumen (Poulton, 1993:117).\*

### Population

According to the last population census, there are some 1,110,295 Muslims in Bulgaria, out of a total population of 8,487,317 people (Cohen, Kanev, 1998:3). 12.1 per cent of all Muslims are Sunnis and 1.0 per cent are Shiites (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996:23).

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

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\* For the sake of clarity it is necessary to point out that the terms “Pomaks” and “Bulgarian Muslims” are used interchangeably; adherents to Islam in Bulgaria are referred to as “Muslims of Bulgaria”; all adherents to Islam around the world are referred to as simply “Muslims.”

Bulgarian, Turkish, Romanes. Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) speak different Bulgarian dialects

**Is there any form of recognition of the minority's language?**

Yes.

**Dominant language of the territory they inhabit**

Bulgarian

**Occasional or daily use of the minority language.**

Daily use of Bulgarian, Turkish and Romanes.

**Access to education corresponding to the needs of the minority.**

Islam is taught only on a private basis - in the three high schools in Shoumen, Rouse (both in Northeastern Bulgaria) and Momchilgrad (Southeastern Bulgaria) and at the Islamic Faculty in Sofia.

**Religion(s) practiced.**

Islam

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

The Islamic religion is officially recognized in Bulgaria.

**Communities having the same characteristics in other territories/countries.**

Muslims predominate in some 30 to 40 countries from the Atlantic to the Pacific and along the belt that stretches across northern Africa to the southern borders of the former Soviet Union and the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Arabs account for less than one fifth of all Muslims (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1992:102). Muslims in the Balkans make up the majority of the population in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina (the post-Dayton Federation) and Turkey. They are minorities in the predominantly Orthodox countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia and Yugoslavia, as well as in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries Croatia and Slovenia.

**Population of these communities in other territories/countries.**

There were around 400 million Muslims at the time of the Second World War. In 1985 they were around 1 billion (*Atlas on Religions of Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 1990:14). 70 per cent of the 3.4 million population of Albania are Muslims (Human Rights Without

Frontiers, 1996:9). There are 581,203 Muslims in Macedonia, out of a total population of 1,935,034 (Ilievski, 1998:11).

## PRESENTATION

### 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 1.1. *Important historical developments*

*Muslim communities before the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878):* It is disputable whether Islam existed on Bulgarian territory before the Ottoman conquest in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. Eminov claims that some of the Turkic tribes -Cumans and Pecenegs- entered the Bulgarian lands during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. While the Pecenegs were assimilated into the local population, some of the Cumans kept their scattered communities in the Rhodope and the Pirin Mountains. It was exactly there that they came into contact with some Muslim missionaries from North Africa and the Middle East and converted to Islam (Eminov, 1992:25).

Mutafchieva is among the scholars who do not accept the hypothesis that Muslims of various denominations of Islam lived in the Bulgarian lands before the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the insufficient information on the issue, Mutafchieva doubts that if there is one true answer. She supports the thesis that there were no Muslims before the Ottoman invasion. She argues that no Byzantine sources -which were among the major sources on Bulgarian history at the time- mention Islam as a religion coexisting with Christianity. She suggests that it is possible that the Ottoman invaders found Turkic-speaking people in some Bulgarian regions, but these people were not Muslims (Mutafchieva, 1994:8).

The Ottoman conquest of the remnants of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in 1396 brought transformation in the administrative system, in economic relations, and in religion. The Ottoman Empire was based on the *millet* system, which divided the subjects not in ethnic, but in religious terms. There were four millets - the Umma (the Muslims), the Rum (Eastern Orthodox) millet, the Armenian and the Jewish ones. Millets were given relative freedom in managing their internal affairs. Thus, at the time when the religious wars during the Reformation in Europe were taking hundreds of thousands of lives, the Ottoman Empire was quite tolerant towards the different religions on its soil.

There is again no scholarly consensus on the ways Islamization took place. There are three prevailing theses. The first suggests that the Ottoman conquest was followed by genocide over the indigenous populations and, thereafter, by an intensive colonization by Turks from Anatolia. This thesis also states that the surviving indigenous populations were subjected to campaigns of forceful Islamization (Zhelyazkova, 1997:14).

The second thesis on Islamization denies the existence of any colonization from Anatolia and argues that the indigenous population was subjected to forceful assimilation. This position was defended with extra zeal by scholars during the so-called "Revivalist Process" - the forceful assimilation campaign launched by the Bulgarian Communist

government in 1984-1989 (Zhelyazkova, 1997:14). The third thesis supports the idea that Islamization was voluntary.

Concerning the “Colonization” thesis, there are again debates on why and how colonization took place. Zhelyazkova says that the early migration of Turkic nomad tribes from Anatolia was spontaneous. According to her, migration was provoked by the difficult political and social situation in Anatolia. Turkish historiography has shown that colonization was a result of special demographic policy of the Ottoman State (Zhelyazkova, 1997:16).

According to Eminov, the colonizers came from all walks of life - soldiers, nomads, farmers, artisans, administrative personnel, as well as religious functionaries such as dervishes and preachers. Densely populated Turkish colonies were established in the frontier regions of Thrace, the Maritsa and Toundzha valleys and along the key transportation and communication routes in Thrace, Macedonia and Thessaly. The urban centers were affected the most. They became the focal points of the Turkish administration while the Christians moved gradually to the mountains (Eminov, 1997:27-28).

Concerning the “Forceful Islamization” thesis, Bulgarian scholars agree that it took place in different ways. In the earliest period of the Ottoman conquest, when the Ottoman invaders fought on the land that was subjected to conquest (*dar-ul harb*), conversion took place through the institution of slavery and through the so-called “natural Islamization.” On the one hand, the Ottomans kidnapped people from the indigenous population and turned them into slaves. They were either forced to convert, or were “attracted” to the new faith when their masters promoted them to the status of “free people” (*atik, muatik*). Former slaves were given land and relative freedom under the condition that they convert to Islam. On the other hand, the invaders, living far from their homes, needed women. These invaders therefore took women from the local population and converted them to Islam (Mutafchieva, 1994:9-10).

Another way of forceful assimilation was the military recruitment of Christian boys (*devshirme*) to the Ottoman *janissary* institution (14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century). According to Mutafchieva, during the rule of Sultan Murat I the new recruits were taken merely as slaves. Later on, a special practice was established to recruit only Christian boys among the subjected peoples. This kind of assimilation has a very prominent place in Bulgarian folklore and has been the subject of quite emotional nationalist interpretations by generations of Bulgarian historians (Mutafchieva, 1992:10).

Eminov states that the interpretation of the *devshirme* system as an “unmitigated” demographic disaster is “a gross exaggeration.” He goes on saying that large segments of the population were exempted from that levy. Ottoman provisions of recruitment forbade taking the only son of a widow, married men or more than one percent of the village’s young boys. He also argues that since the *devshirme* system was one of the few ways non-

Muslim men could reach high administrative posts, some Christian parents volunteered their sons for that kind of military service (Eminov, 1997:43-44).

Concerning the “Voluntary Assimilation” thesis, most of Bulgarian and other historians reach a relative consensus. They agree that poverty and the interest for higher social status were the usual reasons for the adoption of Islam. Muslims had quite a few financial advantages in comparison to the rest of the population. Muslims did not pay the *cizie* tax, which was levied on the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. This tax was high; it provided a third to a half of the state budget (Eminov, 1997:37). Moreover, Muslims were allowed to join the military and to take high and financially profitable positions, while the “the infidels” were prohibited from doing so (Mutafchieva, 1994:12).

The Islamization of the population living in the Rhodope Mountains has a special position within the larger subject of Islamization. Today these people are called Bulgarian Muslims, Bulgaro-Mohammedans or Pomaks. The last term is perceived as offensive by a part of that same population (Ivanov, et al., 1994:23). The situation is even more complicated due to the fact that Bulgarian Muslims do not have a clear ethnic identity and declare themselves Bulgarians, Turks or Muslims at different times. Since they live on the two sides of the present-day Bulgarian-Greek border and are Muslims -something, which makes them “spiritually” close to Muslim Turkey- the discussion on their origin is often the subject of gross speculations. In this vein, historians, often encouraged by the politicians of the day, try to find the “real” roots of the Bulgarian Muslims.

On the one hand, some Bulgarian nationalistic and old-generation historians suggest that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Islam was imposed on all the communities in Bulgaria. This claim is based mainly on the emotionally loaded Bulgarian folklore and on three Bulgarian sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These are the chronicle of the Christian priest Metodii Draginov and two other chronicles (Zhelyazkova, 1997:50). The Song of Balkandzhi Yovo offers the most hyperbolic rendition of this motif in folklore (The song’s hero preferred to die instead of withstanding his sister’s dishonor, because of her conversion to Islam) (Mutafchieva, 1992:19).

On the other hand, recent research has shown that the three sources mentioned above are rather contradictory, especially in the way they were interpreted in the Bulgarian nationalist historiography and literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Zhelyazkova, 1997:50-51). The conversion to Islam in the Rhodopes was not carried out through direct coercion and mass Islamization campaigns. The population there converted voluntarily, because of the expected economic gains (Eminov, quoting from Zhelyazkova, 1997:38).

Turkish historians provide yet another explanation to the process of conversion to Islam. They claim that the Bulgarian Muslims are of Turko-Cuman origin and that they were settled in Western Thrace, the Rhodope and the Pirin Mountains after the collapse of a “Turkic Cuman-Peceneg Union” in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Zhelyazkova, 1997:37). Consequently, the Pomaks are perceived as the oldest Turkish population in Europe, as “pure-blooded” Turks (GHM Report on the Pomaks, [www.greekhelsinki.gr](http://www.greekhelsinki.gr)).

Greek historians have their own version too. They argue that the Bulgarian Muslims are descendants of the Thracians and the Ancient Greeks (Zhelyazkova, 1997:37). Thus the claim goes that they were first Hellenized, then Latinized, Slavicized, Christianized and finally Islamized. Those of them who stayed in the mountains are “pure” descendants of these ancient tribes (GHM Report, [www.greekhelsinki.gr](http://www.greekhelsinki.gr)).

Very little information is available on the Muslim Roma in the Ottoman Empire. This is due to the fact that the administration of the Empire was not organized according to the ethno-linguistic principle, but according to the religious principle (*millet*s), and thus registration took place according to the subjects’ religion. However, the religious principle was very often violated for the needs of the local administration, management and military. As part of that violation, Muslim Roma were discriminated against and were levied the *cizie* tax along with the “infidel” subjects (Zhelyazkova, 1997:45).

*Muslim communities between the Russo-Turkish war and the end of the Second World War:* During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and immediately after the 1878 San Stefano and Berlin Treaties defined the terms of Bulgaria’s liberation from Ottoman rule, large parts of the Muslim population emigrated from the Bulgarian lands. Especially intensive was the migration from Southeastern Bulgaria and from the areas south of the Balkan Mountain range where the military operations took place. The Muslim population had been discredited by their active support for the Turkish actions against the Bulgarian rebellions (Zhelyazkova, 1997:21). Muslims thus feared that in the new political reality Bulgarians would strike back. Indeed, in the course of the Russo-Turkish war, Bulgarian soldiers, militias and civilians were engaged in indiscriminate killing of Muslim civilians, wholesale destruction of mosques, *medreses* (religious schools) and other religious buildings, burning of Muslim villages and seizure of Muslim lands (Eminov 1997:48).

When Bulgaria gained independence from the Ottoman rule in 1878, it was obliged to adhere to the clauses of the international treaties guaranteeing the rights of the minorities remaining on its territory (Eminov, 1997:49). The Berlin Treaty divided Bulgaria into the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia (the latter having autonomous status, but remaining in vassalage to the Ottoman Empire). Consequently, the traditional theocratic principle of ruling the state was replaced by the modern principle of separation between religious and state institutions. There were a few exceptions, such as the institution of marriage, for example (Cohen, Kanev, 1998). The treaty’s clauses concerning the respect of minority rights viewed minorities mainly according to the religious principle, although there were also some clauses concerning the “ethnicity” of the minorities (Kanev, 1998a:70).

The two basic laws -the Turnovo Constitution and the Organic Law- stated that all Bulgarian citizens had equal political and citizens’ rights and equal access to the state administration regardless of their religion. The spiritual heads of the different religions were free to have direct relationship with their dioceses regardless of where they were based. Hence, the Greeks were subordinated to their Patriarch in Istanbul, the Bulgarians

to their Exarch, the Muslims to their Khalif, the Catholics to the Pope (Nazarska, 1997:153). Furthermore, the Muslim spiritual courts were preserved, the twelve Muslim muftis in the Principality of Bulgaria were paid by the state and the theological schools provided students with education (Mutafchieva, quoting from V. Stoyanov, 1994:26).

From the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Roumelia in 1885 until the Communist takeover in 1944, the Bulgarian state's attitude towards the Muslim minorities was very inconsistent. It pursued a policy of assimilation and discrimination with different vigor at different times. Furthermore, it had different attitude towards the different ethnic groups within the Muslim community - Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and Roma. Nevertheless, the treatment of the Muslims during this period could be described as benevolent when one compares it to that during Communism. Muslims were allowed to have their religious institutions, relative religious autonomy and religious education.

The policy of religious assimilation was directed mainly towards the Bulgarian Muslims. During the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) a mass violent campaign for the changing of the names and faith of the Bulgarian Muslims took place (Georgiev, et al., 1995). Another serious assimilation attempt took place in the late 1930s. Some voluntary patriotic organizations -among them the Rodina Fraternity working with the Bulgarian Muslims in the Rhodopes- promoted the Christian faith and encouraged the Muslims to change their names (Tafradiiski, et al., 1992:212). The Rodina Fraternity became quite active especially during the war years (1942-1943) (Konstantinov, et al., 1995:26), but its campaign was doomed to failure, because of the new 1944 regulations, which restored the names of the Bulgarian Muslims (Kanev, 1998a:84).

Between 1878 and the 1920s the state-minority relations were based on a compromise between the religious elite and the government. The spiritual leaders tried to retain the religious unity among the Muslims and to prevent them from secular mobilization. In return, the state rewarded them with non-interference in their religious affairs (Hoepken, 1997:60-61).

Thus, in spite of Bulgaria's independence, the Muslim communities were still under the authority of the *Seyhuelislam*, an Ottoman official, who was responsible for all matters connected to Islamic law and religious schools, and who delegated authority to the muftis (Eminov, 1997:49-51). However, the fact that the state did not interfere in the Muslim religious affairs, except when paying the salaries of the muftis, resulted in the poor financial situation of the Islamic communities (Hoepken, 1997:56; Stoyanov, 1998:73).

Following the 1919 Peace Treaty of Neully, *the Statute on the Spiritual Arrangement and Government of Muslims* was adopted in Bulgaria. It is considered a repressive document, since a lot of power is concentrated into the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations (more details in 5.1.). This law was not changed during the Agrarian Government of Alexander Stamboliiski (1920-1923). Despite that, during the rule of the Agrarians, the Muslims faced favorable treatment in their minority education (Kanev, 1999).

The Kemalist reforms in neighboring Turkey and the 1923 accession to power of a junta regime in Bulgaria resulted in the strong governmental support for the preservation of the Muslim identity of the Bulgarian Muslims. Since the regime had little political interest in helping the spread of Turkish nationalist identity, it supported the conservative anti-Kemalist forces within the Muslim communities in Bulgaria (Hoepken, 1997:62; Kanev, quoting from Simsir, 1988:80). The influential religious leadership welcomed that move, since it was interested in keeping its own autonomy. The Kemalist forces in Bulgaria became quite active under the banner of the pro-Turkish union Turan, established in 1926 (Stoyanov, 1998:83). Turan's counter-force was the Association of the Defenders of Islam in Bulgaria, established in 1931, supported by the Bulgarian government. The Association had a wide structure with a central ruling body and subdivisions in many regions (Tatarli, *Prava i Svobodi*, 1996).

Another junta regime that came to power in 1934 was, however, with an anti-Islamic orientation. During its rule, many religious schools were closed down, while the remaining ones had problems because of the efforts of the authorities to limit the influence of Islam (Eminov, 1997, quoting from Simsir 1986:51).

Throughout the whole period under consideration, changes in the Muslim community affected mainly the Turks and the Bulgarian Muslims. Roma faced an especially discriminatory treatment in both ethnic and religious terms. They were not allowed to take part in the leadership of the Muslim religious communities. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were deprived of their right to vote. In the early 1940s intermarriages between Roma and Bulgarians were banned. In 1942 the Roma were subjected to a violent campaign for the changing of their names and faith (Kanev, 1998a:85).

*Muslim communities between the Second World War and the end of the Cold War:* The late 1940s and early 1950s were characterized by the brief period of "non-national experiment" policy of the newly established Communist regime (1944) (Eminov, 1997:5). In the early years of Communism the Bulgarian state recognized constitutionally the existence of ethnic minorities and tried to foster their cultural identity in accordance with the Stalinist theory of respect for ethnic identities within the socialist system (Hoepken, 1997:64).

This policy was pursued in line with the Communist ideology of developing a socialist identity based on the cleavage of classes and not on the cleavage of ethnicity or religion. Communists believed that, over time, the parochial ethnic and religious identities would fade away and would be replaced by the new socialist identity. The latter was to be the identity of the worker, the atheist and, in essence, the internationalist.

While the Bulgarian State significantly helped in the development of ethnic identities especially for the Turks and Macedonians, it made a concerted effort to undermine religious identities. The *Denominations Act* was adopted in 1949. Its main goal was to give legal rights to the authorities to exert total control on religion (Kanev, 1998a:97).

Special efforts were made to undermine Muslim identity. A few specific reasons were invoked to support that. First, Islam was an alien religion imposed on the Bulgarians during the Ottoman rule. Second, it had played an ostensibly reactionary role prior to Bulgaria's independence and reportedly stopped the cultural development of the Bulgarian people for centuries. Third, Islam was used as a force by "reactionary" elements from abroad, mainly Turkey, who wanted to introduce religious fanaticism to Bulgaria. Fourth, it was an obstacle to the integration of the Muslims into the socialist nation (Eminov, 1997:52-53). Fifth, Islam was attacked because the authorities viewed it as the main element of the traditional culture that was an obstacle to modernization (Hoepken, 1987:276).

Despite the fact that the 1947 Constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience, there were some practical restrictions on Islam. *Vakif* property (pious foundations' property) was nationalized, the number of *hodzhas* (religious teachers) was reduced and the theological high school in Shoumen was secularized (Hoepken, 1997:65). All Koranic schools were closed down in 1949. Many mosques were closed down and others fell into ruin or were converted into museums, warehouses, shops or restaurants. After 1952 the teaching of religion in public schools was banned and measures were taken to discourage the teaching of religion at home (Eminov, 1997:52).

After the 1956 April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and in accordance with the gradual shift from "Communist internationalism" to "Communist nationalism" further restrictions on Islam were introduced. It also became clear to the Communist leadership, led by Todor Zhivkov, that Islam was rooted very deeply in the Muslim communities in Bulgaria, so stronger measures were needed for its eradication. In 1958 the Central Committee of the BCP approved a thesis for work with the Turkish population, which included the waging of a decisive fight against Islam (*ibid.*:54).

Assimilation in both ethnic and religious terms gradually worsened in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Concerning Islam, the anti-religious propaganda was intensified, the number of *hodzhas* was further reduced; serious efforts were made to change the everyday rituals of the Turks, which were based on the Islamic religious and cultural traditions; festivities and rites of passage were "restructured" as to remove some religious elements from them (Hoepken, 1997:67-68).

After 1971, the assimilation policy tried to penetrate much further into the cultural and private lives of the Muslims. A new party program proclaimed that a "one-nation Bulgarian socialist state" should be created (*Nova Makedonia*, 25/2/1982). Its nationalist content was incorporated into the new 1971 Constitution. It did not have any references to national minorities, but stated that there are only "Bulgarian citizens," "normal ones, on the one hand, and those of non-Bulgarian ancestry, on the other" (Eminov, 1997:9). Article 53 included two controversial points concerning religion - that freedom of

conscience and creed is guaranteed, but also that religious rites and anti-religious propaganda may not be conducted (Eminov, 1997:52).

In line with the new party directives, Muslim identity became a target of serious public pressure. Articles in the local press criticized the *Ramadan* fast, describing it as “anti-scientific,” “unhealthy,” “reactionary” and “anti-social” (*The Economist*, 17/8/1977). *Ramadan* was publicly discouraged on scientific grounds, alleged to be detrimental to one’s immune system. The Festival of Sacrifice, *Kurban Bayram*, was attacked on similar grounds (i.e. the eating of too much fatty lamb meat over a short period of time led to serious gastro-intestinal disorders). Afterwards these major religious festivals were banned. In May 1978, the Communist government announced an obligatory system of socialist rituals and holidays to replace the traditional ones. The traditional attire of the Muslim women also fell under attack. These traditional clothes were referred to as “religious clothes,” reaffirming women’s subservience to men. The Muslim burial rituals were also banned as contrary to socialism and were replaced with socialist ones. Since 1971 these new practices had been left to the voluntary choice of the people and thus were not observed.

Bulgarian nationalism gathered momentum in the 1970s. Bulgarian Muslims and Roma (Muslims and Christians alike) were the first to have their traditional names changed into Bulgarian ones. Thus, they became a testing ground for similar measures to be taken against the Turkish minority (Hoepken, 1997:69). The latter minority was the one that resisted the new socialist identity the most. In addition to that, restrictive measures against Bulgarian Muslims and Roma could be pursued easier than against ethnic Turks, because they did not have a kin state -Turkey- to raise the issue internationally.

By the mid-1980s Bulgarian Communist nationalism had reached its final phase. At the end of 1984 the Zhivkov government launched a swift name-changing campaign targeting the ethnic Turkish minority. This campaign is widely known as the “Revivalist Process.” The extreme violence applied during the process was coupled by scientific “justifications” of Bulgarian nationalism. The thesis that Turks are Bulgarians by blood, rather than descendants of Turkic colonizers was launched. They were said to have been “Turkicized” and converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule. Therefore, they were “flesh from the flesh and blood from the blood of the Bulgarian people” as the member of the Central Committee Milko Balev put it in a speech in 1985 (Troebst, 1987:233).

Violence was applied to those who resisted the Revivalist Process. This made Western observers and politicians call that policy “genocide.” People opposing to the governmental actions were arrested, beaten in detention and imprisoned. Police with dogs surrounded some villages with tanks and troops. This was done in order to force the population to accept their new identity cards with their new Slavic names (Index of Censorship, 1986). Different reports say that between 100 and 5,000 people were killed because of participation in demonstrations or as a result of personal resistance. Some dissenters were sent to the Communist hard labor camp of Belene.

After March 1985, when Communist leader Todor Zhivkov publicly announced that there are no more Turks in Bulgaria, the suppression of the remnant of the Turkish identity -the names were already Bulgarian- got into extreme dimensions. Islam was targeted directly on a much larger scale than before. While some mosques remained open -often only for Friday prayers- many others were closed. Many of the closed mosques were turned into museums, but their doors remained constantly closed. A few mosques were completely destroyed. Imams were told to use only Bulgarian in all religious services and in general conversation, otherwise they faced punishment (Poulton, 1991:132-135). The Koran was neither printed in the country, nor imported.

Muslim rituals -circumcisions, weddings and burials- were strictly forbidden. Parents were required to sign documents promising that they were not going to circumcise their children. Health officials visited Muslim families for check-ups. If they found out that the ban had been violated, both parents and the person who did the operation were punished (Eminov, 1997:61). The punishment was either serving time in prison or paying a fine of up to 1,000 leva (at the time, USD 1,000) (Poulton, 1991:133-135).

Party officials monitored Muslim funerals in order to make sure they were carried out in line with the new socialist ritual. Muslims were not allowed to bury their dead in their own cemeteries and were asked to cover the tombstones of their buried relatives with cement (Eminov, 1997:60). Many of the Muslim cemeteries were destroyed and tombstones were smashed (Poulton, 1991:136). Some refugees in Ankara claimed that Turks were sometimes buried in accordance with the Christian ceremony and a cross was put on their graves (RFE/RL, 1995).

Islam was suppressed in indirect ways as well. The Chief Mufti's Office, the regional Mufti offices and the Muslim communities received subsidies from the state. The clerics were socially secured and received state pensions. (BTA, 1988) Thus, Muslim clerics, just like the Orthodox Church clerics, were loyal to the Communist state. Islamic clerics who voluntarily changed their names were given a considerable pay rise (Poulton, 1991:132). After 1985, this loyalist attitude was visible in the declarations of some Muslim clerics that Muslims in Bulgaria enjoy enough religious freedom. The Resolution of an Imam Meeting in 1985 went even further by saying that the "Muslim Bulgarians have never belonged to the Turkish nation" (BTA, 1985). It even defended the replacement of Muslim names with Bulgarian ones (Poulton, 1991:61).

Besides the suppressive element of the assimilation campaign, it also had an element of "voluntary fostering" of a new identity, pursued by means of "patriotic education." Numerous genealogical, folklore and local history societies were formed, usually with the assistance of ethnic Bulgarian schoolteachers or party activists, in order to involve the Turkish population in hobbies with a strong patriotic bias. For example, the Koleduvane Folklore Society in the town of Razgrad (Northeastern Bulgaria) "revived" traditional Christmas celebrations among local Muslims (Ashley, RFE/RL, 1988).

There were numerous reasons behind the assimilation campaign. The Bulgarian government needed to divert attention from the intensified economic crisis and to legitimize itself in the eyes of the Bulgarian population. It also feared that the Turkish and other Muslim communities had a higher birth rate than the Bulgarians. Another important reason was the intensification of the Islamic movement on the world scene in the late 1970s. In 1985, the Islamic scholar Zaki Badawi claimed that Islamic revivalism is a response to the uncertainty of modern life and provides people with the old certainty of religious faith (RFE/RL, 1985). The Islamic religious revival rejected the rational and materialistic values of both the West and the Communist countries and was therefore seen as an alternative to both Capitalism and Communism. Given the fact that the Muslim population in Bulgaria was increasing in number, it was highly undesirable to leave its faith to proliferate unhampered. Therefore, in the mid-1980s, the Communist leadership took the religious issue quite seriously (Beast, 1986:112).

The assimilation campaign of 1984-1989 led to a strong resistance within the ethnic Turkish community (see 1.2.). The assimilation campaign was doomed to failure by the anti-Communist developments in Eastern Europe starting in the mid-1980s. That is why the Zhivkov regime decided to use the policy of expulsion to get rid of its ethnic adversaries. In a TV address on May 31, 1989 Todor Zhivkov announced that the Turks were free to go to Turkey. They were allowed to apply for international passports, only a couple of months before a new passport regime came into effect. Through the relaxed travel regulations the Communist regime wanted to make the “expulsion” campaign look like a voluntary “excursion.” However, many of the people who escaped to Turkey, said that in some cases they were forcibly deported. Many others had left on their own will because of the fear of ethnic discrimination (BBC, 1989).

The mass emigration of around 330,000 Turks to Turkey and the subsequent inter-ethnic tensions (See also 4.2.2.), as well as the general anti-Communist developments in Bulgaria provoked the ousting from power of the Zhivkov regime on November 10, 1989. Pressed by local and international human rights groups and by the December 11 protests in Sofia of ethnic Turks and Pomaks, on December 29 the government reversed its policy of forced assimilation and recommended that the Turks be given the right to choose their own names, practice their Islamic customs and use their language in public (*World Directory of Minorities*, 1997:112). Bulgarian Muslims and Muslim Roma were also allowed to reclaim their names. This was institutionalized through two governmental acts from March and November 1990.

## **1.2. Economic and demographic data**

### *Demographic data:*

*Emigration:* After Bulgaria’s liberation from the Ottoman rule, large numbers of the Muslim minority, and especially the ethnic Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, emigrated to the Ottoman Empire and respectively to Turkey after 1923. Emigration was either voluntary or as a result of the “encouraging” policy of the state. Right after the Berlin Treaty (1878)

some 730,000 Turks emigrated voluntarily (Tafradiiski, et al., 1992:207). Some Bulgarian Muslims joined them (Konstantinov, 1997:50). Other waves of large-scale emigration were observed after the Balkan wars, and especially after the First World War. In the inter-war period between 150,000 and 200,000 Turks left for Turkey mainly on the basis of a Turkish-Bulgarian agreement of 1925 (Hoepken, 1997:55). Bulgarian Muslims are included into the second figure (Poulton, 1998:8). Despite the fact that in 1932 Turkey revised its migration policy and restricted the admittance of new refugees, between the years 1935 and 1940 around 95,000 Turks left for Turkey (Tafradiiski, et al., 1992:207). In the period 1942-1949 Turkish emigration from Bulgaria was minimal.

Despite the short-lived “rapprochement” of the Bulgarian Communist authorities with the Turkish minority before 1956, in 1950-1951 about 150,000 Turks left for Turkey. Many Bulgarian Muslims emigrated too (Konstantinov, 1997:51). This was the first big emigration wave of Muslims after the Second World War. The collectivization process hastened emigration, because it was aimed at restructuring the property of the Bulgarian citizens. Many of the educated and formerly wealthy Turks left the country.

In the second half of the 1960s, when the Communist state made energetic efforts to “revive patriotism” and ban “national nihilism” in Bulgaria in general, a voluntary expulsion policy was pursued through a bilateral agreement between Bulgaria and Turkey signed in 1968. It allowed Turks from Bulgaria to go to Turkey, in order to reunite with their relatives who had gone there prior to 1951. By 1978 when this agreement expired, around 130,000 people had left Bulgaria (Hoepken, 1997:55). Afterwards the two countries decided not to renew negotiations on the refugee issue. Turkey, which was experiencing economic difficulties, was reluctant to receive new immigrants, while Bulgaria wanted to keep its manual labor workers in the tobacco growing industry, since it was not able to find any other labor force to replace them.

The largest emigration of Muslims took place in the spring and summer of 1989. It is popularly known as the “Big Excursion.” Around 330,000 Turks left the country in May-August 1989. Half of the Turks who emigrated in 1989 stayed in Turkey while about 150,000 returned later (Hoepken, 1997:55) (More on the inter-ethnic tensions in 4.2.2.).

*Demographic behavior:* The demographic behavior of the Muslim population in Bulgaria is quite different from that of the Bulgarian population or of the so-called “unproblematic minorities” - Jews, Armenians, Karakachani and others. This difference became quite clear during the modernization process connected with migration from the village to the town. The migration among the Bulgarians started in the mid-1950s and peaked in the 1970s. During that time, the Islamic communities remained in their compact settlements - villages or small provincial towns. The Pomaks lived mainly in the Rhodope Mountains, and the Turks - in northeastern and southeastern Bulgaria (Konstantinov, 1997:42). Thus these settlements became almost exclusively Muslim, attracting Muslims from other parts of the country as well. For example, when some Bulgarian Turks moved to Turkey during the big emigration wave of 1950-1951, they preferred to sell or to give away their property to Pomaks rather than to Bulgarians. As a result, many former villages around Veliko

Turnovo (in northcentral Bulgaria) became Pomak ones (Konstantinov, 1997:42). Some of these villages and others around the town of Kazanluk in central Bulgaria used to be populated by Pomaks who in 1948-1950 were resettled “to the interior of the country,” because earlier they had lived close to the Bulgarian-Greek border in the south (Konstantinov, 1997:42; Kosntantinov et al, 1995:27).

The birthrate of the Muslim population in Bulgaria is higher than that of the ethnic Bulgarians. There are no official statistics on this issue, so the data can only be inferred from statistics on the birthrate of the respective regions populated by Turks and Pomaks. It is a common practice that ethnic Bulgarians have one to two children, while ethnic Turks -most of whom live in the rural areas- have three to four children. Pomaks are placed in the middle, between Turks and Bulgarians (Kanev, 1999).

*Economic data:* The economic situation of the Muslims in Bulgaria changed dramatically during the years of collectivization in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Muslim community as a whole was affected by the expropriation of the *vakif* (pious foundations) property. Collectivization affected also the privately owned land of the individual people. Deprived of their own property, Turks and Pomaks had to earn their living working for the socialist-style cooperatives. They were employed mainly in tobacco growing, as well as in other types of agricultural work and in the mining industry. Nomadic Roma were forced to become sedentary. They usually had low-level jobs as grass mowers or street cleaners. The positive development from all this was that their income, although low, was at least secured by the state.

The three ethnic groups of Muslims in Bulgaria were badly affected by the economic transition after the collapse of Communism. The restitution of the land put them in an unequal position in regard to the Bulgarian majority. While Bulgarians used to own land and real estate before 1944, Turks possessed only small-scale property. Pomaks and especially Roma had almost nothing. A death blow on the Turks and the Bulgarian Muslims was caused by the collapse of the tobacco industry. The Roma community was the first one to be affected by the scarcity of jobs in the state organizations.

After 1989, the unemployment rate of these three ethnic groups became higher than that of the Bulgarians. In 1997 Bulgarian unemployment rate was 16 per cent, while in some areas inhabited by Turks and Bulgarian Muslims it reached 40 per cent, and even 60-80 per cent for the Roma (Hoepken, 1997:80).

As a way to face these economic challenges, between 1990 and 1994 around 120,000 Turks found economic refuge in Turkey (Hoepken, 1997:80). Turkey, however, countered the high level of emigration from Bulgaria by introducing a visa regime. Turkey is reluctant to lift this regime due to the different living standards in the two states. Thus, many Turks remain in Turkey as “tourists” for economic reasons (Hoepken, 1997:81).

Many Turks and Roma have been actively involved in “suitcase trade,” in order to compensate for the high unemployment rate. Traveling regularly to Turkey, they buy

goods and sell them in Bulgaria. This form of living is alien to the Pomaks, who depend exclusively on tobacco and potato growing and on goat and sheep herding (Konstantinov, 1997:45).

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

Before the Communist takeover in 1944, the Muslims were treated in a relatively benevolent way, despite some attempts of the state to change their names and faith and to restrict Islam after 1934 (See 1.1.). Muslim identity was preserved through the relative autonomy that the community was given under the leadership of the Muslim clerics. Identity was preserved in a very natural way. Living in closed communities in rural areas, far from the reach of the state, Muslims' traditional culture was not heavily exposed to the pressures of modernization. In the first decades of Communism, when modernization and industrialization were accompanied by anti-Islamic propaganda, the general reaction of the people who wanted to defend their Muslim identity was to immigrate to Turkey (1950-1951) rather than to create an organized opposition in Bulgaria.

The Communist regime succeeded in making some of the younger and better-educated people less religious than the illiterate and older ones. This was observed in three ideologically motivated surveys on the impact of atheism among Muslims. They were carried out in 1962, 1967 and 1973 and showed a decline in religious attitudes (Eminov, 1997:55-56). Religious practices like the going to the mosque were not observed very much, especially by the young people. Furthermore, the regime succeeded in creating a new generation of Muslim clerics loyal to the Communist state.

However, atheist education and anti-Islamic propaganda had only limited effects. 88 per cent of the Turks claimed that they retained their internal beliefs in the 1960s (Eminov, 1997:55-56). Other surveys conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s confirmed that religious affiliation among the Turks was twice as high as that of the ethnic Bulgarians (Hoepken, 1997:69). Even right after the name-changing campaign in 1984-1985, 55 per cent of the Turks declared that they were religious in contrast to only 23 per cent of the ethnic Bulgarians (Hoepken, 1997:69).

The Turkish minority's resistance to the assimilation campaign of the 1970s and early 1980s was sporadic and not well organized. It is still quite unclear whether the bomb attacks at the Varna airport and at the Plovdiv railway station in 1984 and at other railway stations in 1986 were carried out by activists of a Turkish underground organization, or were insinuations on the part of the state security service, which wanted to use the incidents to justify its measures in the assimilation campaign. There is information that in the spring of 1985 the Turks were already organized in an underground resistance movement (Tafradiiski, et al., 1992:212). Attempts by the movement's leaders to organize others into active resistance in 1985 failed. The leaders were subsequently imprisoned (Eminov, 1997:127). Local imams were also unsuccessful in their opposition against the religious restrictions in 1985, because they were either replaced by loyalists, or were arrested, or simply disappeared. For example, the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* claimed that

an imam was killed by the Bulgarian security forces, while the Bulgarian Communist newspaper *Svetlina* denied such allegations (Poulton, 1993:134).

However, all this changed with the emergence of the new political currents of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union and around Eastern Europe in the second half of the 1980s. By the beginning of 1988, six Bulgarian dissidents had set up the Independent Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Bulgaria. From the very beginning, this organization took up the issue of the repression of the ethnic Turks (Poulton, 1991:153). In late 1988 and early 1989 two other human rights organizations were created. They also expressed their protest on behalf of the Turkish minority. These organizations were the Democratic League for the Defense of Human Rights and the Association for the Support of Vienna (1989). The last mentioned was set up with the aim to bring to the attention of the world the plight of the Turkish minority before the CSCE conference on Human Rights in June 1989 (Poulton, 1993:154). The Democratic League for the Defense of Human Rights was comprised of ethnic Turks, while the members of the other human rights organizations were ethnic Bulgarians, Turks and Pomaks (Kanev, 1998). In addition to that, in April 1989, a Muslim Committee was formed in the central Bulgarian town of Kazanluk (RFE/RL, 1989).

The new strategy for organized resistance was followed by actions. Some ethnic Turks launched hunger strikes in May 1989. Large-scale anti-assimilation demonstrations were carried out in late May and early June 1989 in Northern Bulgaria. The demonstrations were peaceful, but some of them finished with clashes with the *militsiya*, the Bulgarian police force at the time that was sent to suppress them. Reportedly up to 60 demonstrators were killed (Poulton, 1993:156). After the change of the regime in Bulgaria on November 10, 1989 (see 1.1. and 4.2.2.) in December of the same year, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims held rallies in Sofia, pressing the new government to restore their names. The December 29 Decision of the BCP's Central Committee restored the right of the Muslims to have their Muslim names and to profess Islam openly.

After 1989 the defense of Muslim identity was pursued mainly at two levels. At the political level, the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) was officially founded in 1990 with the aim to represent the interests of the Turkish minority and the other Muslims in Bulgaria. The MRF participated in the first multi-party general elections of 1990. There have been a few unsuccessful attempts on the side of the newly reformed Bulgarian Socialist Party -the former Communists- to challenge the party's registration before the Supreme Court in 1991 (Kanev, 1999).

Since 1990, the MRF has been constantly represented in the Bulgarian Parliament. The party has a secular ideology, which defends Islam as far as it concerns the human rights of the Muslim population in Bulgaria. In the period 1990-1997 it was the third-major party in Parliament. All this has happened despite the several split ups within the leadership of the MRF. The Party of Democratic Changes of Mehmed Hodzha and the Movement for Renewal of the former MRF's Gyuner Tahir have been marginalized in Bulgaria's political life. The Democratic Party of Justice of Nedim Gendzhev, established in 1995 independent

of the MRF, is also marginal. Hodzha's party got very few votes in the 1994 general and 1995 municipal elections and at present Hodzha is a teacher in Turkey. Gendzhev's party has just a few supporters. To a great extent this is due to the background of Mr. Gendzhev himself - he was a participant in the Revivalist Process and Head of the Muslim Supreme Council during the rule of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the 1990s. Tahir is an MP from the list of the currently ruling party, the United Democratic Forces (Kanev, 1999). MRF's core, led by Ahmed Dogan, still remains an important player in the Bulgarian National Assembly. Today it is represented in the opposition coalition Alliance for National Salvation.

On December 12, 1998, the Initiative Committee for the Renewal of the MRF held its first national conference and announced that it would set up a separate party, which would be called the National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (NDPS). Gyuner Tahir, who is currently an ODS deputy (ODS is the ruling coalition dominated by the Union of Democratic Forces) was elected leader of the new political formation (RFE/RL/Newsline, 14/12/98).

MRF's participation in all elections since 1990 has been as follows: in the elections for the 7<sup>th</sup> Grand National Assembly (June 10 and 17, 1990) the MRF received 6.02 per cent of the vote and 23 per cent of the seats in the Parliament. In the elections for the 36<sup>th</sup> National Assembly (October 13, 1991) the MRF received 7.55 per cent of the vote and had 24 seats in Parliament. In the elections for the 37<sup>th</sup> National Assembly (December 18, 1994) the MRF won 5.44 per cent of the vote and had 15 seats in Parliament. In the local elections (October 29 and November 1, 5 and 12, 1995) the MRF won 26 seats for mayors and one more seat in coalition with the Union of Democratic Forces and the People's Union. Finally, in the early general elections on April 19, 1997, the Alliance for National Salvation coalition, where the MRF is the political core, won 7.6 per cent of the votes and 19 seats in Parliament (15 seats for the MRF) (<http://www.online.bg/politics>).

The leadership and the institutions of the Muslim community in Bulgaria defend Muslim identity on the religious level. Religious affairs are within the authority of the Supreme Muslim Council, the Chief Mufti's office and the offices of the regional Muftis, the imams, and the local Muslim boards. Today, the highest body in the regulation of the Muslim affairs is the National Conference, which elects the Chief Mufti and the Chief of the Supreme Muslim Council. Throughout 1995 -during the time when Nedim Gendzhev was the head of the Supreme Religious Council- the Chief Mufti was elected by the Supreme Religious Council, and not directly by a National Conference (Kanev, 1999) (See more on the last elections in 4.2.3.).

The Supreme Muslim Council is the administrative body of the Muslim community. It consists of the Chief Mufti and the ten regional Muftis, as well as of the Head of the Supreme Muslim Council and 10 regional Muslim clerics (Karamolla, 1998). The regional Muftis are subordinated to the Chief Mufti's office (See the list of all current Muslim leaders in the Section on Addresses). The Chief Mufti's office is focused not so much on

the administration, but on the spiritual affairs of the Muslims. The Chief Mufti is considered to be the spiritual leader of the Muslim religious community in Bulgaria.

## **2. ETHNIC OR NATIONAL IDENTITY**

### *2.1. Describing identity*

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

**2.1.2. Development of the minority's awareness of being different**

**2.1.3. Identifying this difference as ethnic or national**

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

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

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

**2.2.3. Awareness of having an ethnic or a national identity**

**2.2.4. Level of homogeneity in the minority's identity**

### *2.3. Actual political and social conditions*

**2.3.1. Relations with the state**

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

**2.3.3. Relations with other minorities if any**

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

Muslims in Bulgaria come from various backgrounds. According to the last population census of 1992, ethnic Turks are the largest minority. There are some 800,055 Turks, out of the total population of 8,487,317 Bulgarian citizens. The Roma follow with about 313,386 people, although according to some human rights activists their real number reaches 700-800,000. The third-biggest Muslim minority in Bulgaria are the Bulgarian Muslims. Unofficial estimates put them at 250,000 people. The Bulgarian state does not treat Pomaks as a separate ethnic group, but as Muslim Bulgarians, different from the majority of Bulgarians who are Orthodox Christians. That is why the 1992 census did not count the Pomaks separately.

A small ethnic minority numbering around 5,000 people are the Tatars, who still manage to maintain their ethnic identity separate from that of the ethnic Turks (Poulton, 1993:117). On the other hand their language has more or less been assimilated into Turkish. The Crimean-Tatar language is a means of communication only among the elderly at home. The children in the families understand this language, but do not speak it. Nevertheless, the Tatar language plays an important role in the ethnic identification of the Tatars (Antonov, et al., 1998:363). This is not the case with the Cherkez, another Islamic

group remnant from the Ottoman time, which is already assimilated into the ethnic Turks (Poulton, 1993:117).

The Roma and the Bulgarian Muslims often describe themselves as either Turks or Bulgarians. The Roma who live among ethnic Turks in Eastern Bulgaria are especially prone to declaring themselves as Turks (Popov, 1994:152). There are several reasons behind this new identification. Some Roma have the same religion (Islam), and speak Turkish, instead of Romanes. Furthermore, the social status of the ethnic Turkish minority in Bulgaria is higher than that of the Roma (Popov, 1994:152-153). Thus, by declaring themselves Turks, Roma try to avoid the social stigma.

The same reason is valid also for the identification of the Roma as Bulgarians and Romanians. However, whereas the identification as Turks appears on a group basis, the one as Bulgarians is mostly perceived on an individual basis and/or among the sedentary Roma. Those who prefer to call themselves Bulgarians often break the relations with their traditional Roma communities (Popov, 1994:153-154). There are two Roma groups in Bulgaria, which they identify themselves as Romanians or Vlachs (Popov, 1994:155-156).

The Bulgarian Muslim minority is far from homogeneous in ethnic terms. From the overall number of Muslims, in the 1992 census there were 70,251 Bulgarians, 65,546 “Bulgaro-Mohammedans,” “Pomaks,” “Muslims,” and finally, 25,540 Turks with Bulgarian as their mother tongue (Ivanov, et al., 1994:23).

### **3. LANGUAGE**

#### ***3.1. Describing the language***

##### **3.1.1. Linguistic family**

##### **3.1.2. Dialects and unity; linguistic awareness**

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

#### ***3.2. The history of the language***

##### **3.2.1. Origins**

##### **3.2.2. Evolution**

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

#### ***3.3. Actual sociolinguistic data***

##### **3.3.1. Territory in which the language is used**

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

#### ***3.4. Freedom of expression in the minority language***

##### **3.4.1. Level of acceptance or resistance to the minority’s language**

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

Since most Muslims of Bulgaria are ethnic Turks, their mother tongue is Turkish. The mother tongue of the Roma Muslims is Romanes. The language of the Pomaks in the Rhodope Mountains is clearly a Slavic language (Fraenkel, 1999). Bulgarian scholars argue that it is a Rhodope dialect of modern Bulgarian that had preserved aspects of Old Bulgarian that by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century had disappeared in the rest of the country. A typical feature demonstrating the conservative character of the Rhodope dialect is the tripartite demonstrative and definite article system used at present mainly by the older generation of Bulgarian Muslims. The phonetic and lexical peculiarities of the Rhodope dialect make it different from the norm that is standard for the other parts of the country.

The Pomaks like to refer to their language as a language which is “foreign to the others”, a language which sets them apart from the others (Konstantinov, 1995:42). With respect to the linguistic borrowings from other languages, it would have been strange if the language of the Bulgarian Muslims did not have any Greek and Turkish linguistic borrowings, given the fact that they live in the border region close to Turkey and Greece (Konstantinov, 1998). Furthermore, the modern Bulgarian language also contains Greek and Turkish words. Moreover, it is argued that the language of the Bulgarian Muslims living in Bulgaria is clearly a dialect of Bulgarian, while the language of the Pomaks living in other countries in the Balkans may differ from it (Kanev, 1999).

However, the Balkan-wide disputes on the origins of the Pomaks are endless. They often include linguistic “arguments.” The view of the Bulgarian scholars has been mentioned above. Greek scholars find “evidence” supporting the theory of the Greek origin of the Pomaks in the remainder of Greek words in the Pomak language, which are lost in Modern Greek. The claim is that the Pomaks are a Hellenized population, who had forgotten that the language spoken by them contains some Turkish words. Turkish scholars stress on the religious affiliation of the Pomaks, as a “proof” of their Turkish origin (Eminov, 1997:101-103).

The American historian Fraenkel claims that the language of the Pomaks in the Rhodope Mountains is very similar to the Macedonian language in its tripartite articles. Apart from that, the language is close to Old Bulgarian. However, the Rhodope and many other regional dialects vary from standard modern Bulgarian. The Rhodope region is a geographically isolated one. That is why it is not surprising that this dialect would be considerably different from that in the rest of Bulgaria, especially from the standardized literary language (Fraenkel, 1999).

## **4. RELIGION**

#### 4.1. Identifying a religious minority

According to the last population census of 1992, there are around 1,110,295 Muslims in Bulgaria, 13.08 per cent of the total population of 8,487,317. The majority of the population is Christian Orthodox - 7,274,592 or 85.71 per cent of all Bulgarian citizens (Cohen, Kanev, 1998). Muslims are 98 per cent of the Turks, 39.2 per cent of the Roma and 2 per cent of the Bulgarians (Georgieva, 1994:151).

The Muslims in Bulgaria are not homogeneous in religious terms. Most of them belong to Sunni Islam, while a small part of them are Shiites. Sunnis are most of the Turks and the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, as well as part of the Muslim Roma. Shiites are mainly the Alevis, called also Alians or Kizilbashi (Gramatikova, 1998:5). When offered three options in a 1994 sociological survey –“Sunnis”, “Shiites” and “Islamic culture as a whole”- 52 per cent of the Muslims chose the one saying that they belong to the “Islamic culture as a whole.” By contrast, only 17 per cent of the Turks and 13 per cent of the Bulgarian Muslims define themselves as Sunnis, and respectively 2 per cent of the first and 1 per cent of the second - as Shiites (Mitev, 1994:187). This points to the fact that the contrast between the two streams of Islam plays a rather insignificant role in the beliefs and practices of the Muslims in Bulgaria (Mitev, 1992:172).

The data on the distribution of the people by mother tongue and religious affiliation show the following: 171,000 Muslims or 15.4 per cent of all Muslims speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, whereas 814,000 or 98 per cent of the Muslims speak Turkish (Cohen, Kanev, 1998). The Alevis are also Turkish speaking (Gramatikova, 1988:5).

The Bulgarian researcher Georgieva claims that the Islamic believers in Bulgaria hardly fit into the classical notion of a true believer. The big religious revival euphoria immediately after the collapse of Communism in 1989, when Muslims and Christians alike started visiting their respective houses of worship, is gone. Religious manifestations are focused mainly on the *Ramadan* and *Bayram*, as well as on the strict following of the Muslim burial ritual. The Muslims who strictly observe *Ramadan* are still a minority in Bulgaria. The other requirements of the Muslim religion -veiling, no drinking of alcohol, no eating of pork, etc.- are optional (Georgieva, 1992:157). However, just like the Muslims in Macedonia, the Muslims who eat pork or drink alcohol do not necessarily feel “less Muslim” than the rest (Fraenkel, 1999).

The Alevis (Alians or Kizilbashi) are Shiite Muslims. Shiism is the smaller branch of the two streams of Islam - Sunnism and Shiism. The designation “Alians” comes from the name of Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. Ali is the holy figure followed by the “Alians” (Gramatikova, 1998:5). As a rule, Shiites do not worship Ali, but follow a different line of authority over the interpretation of the Koran (Fraenkel, 1999). The Alians are called also “Kizilbashi” (red heads) after their traditional headgear with twelve red stripes representing the twelve *imams* (Eminov, 1997:72). They belong to the Bektashi and Baba-i brotherhoods (Gramatikova, 1998:5). These are two orders of

popular Islam. There are minor differences in belief and practice between them (Eminov, 1997:72). For the sake of clarity, this group will be referred to as “Alevi,” which is the better known term internationally.

Nowadays, the Alevi inhabit in a number of villages in northeastern and southern Bulgaria, and few of them live in Central Bulgaria (Gramatikova, 1998:6). The origins of the Alevi are found with a group of people, sent in exile to the Bulgarian lands by the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Gramatikova, 1998:6). However, this theory is highly disputed due to the lack of sufficient information. The Alevi themselves claim that they are a synthetic population containing Iranian, Kurdish, Turkish and Bulgarian elements. Irrespectively of what their origins are, today they are linguistically assimilated into the Turkish community (Eminov, 1998:72).

A strategy of religious concealment is typical of the Alevi, unlike the Sunnis who are more open. This is because throughout history Shiite Islam challenged the political authority of the Sunni rulers and claimed that the true leaders were only to be revealed after the return of the Imam. This rivalry has been at the heart of Middle East politics for centuries from the Ottoman times to present day Iran (Fraenkel, 1999). The Alevi were subjected to persecution and even today they are quite suspicious of the Sunni Muslims (Gramatikova, 1998:8). The Sunni Muslims in Bulgaria seem to be friendly towards the Alevi in that country, but the two communities remain divided.

After the establishment of the independent Bulgarian state in 1878, the activities of most of the Sufi brotherhoods -popular Islamic religious organizations, such as that of the Alevi in Bulgaria- were curtailed. Some of them survived into the 1930s (Eminov, quoting from Kovalski, 1997:74). Under Communism, both Shiite and Sunni Islam in Bulgaria were targets of anti-religious propaganda. The convents of the Alevi (*tekke*) were closed down and fell into ruin along with the hundreds of Sunni Muslim mosques. In 1982, the meetings of the last remaining Sufi order in northeastern Bulgaria were prohibited. After the collapse of Communism in 1989, along with the general revival of Islam in Bulgaria, some convents, and especially the Demir Baba *tekke* (of the Alevi) near Razgrad in northeastern Bulgaria, became a focal point of Muslim solidarity (Eminov, 1998:74-75).

#### **4.2. Religious freedom enjoyed**

The religious practices of the Muslims of Bulgaria are recognized by the state. They include the right to: build and visit mosques; hold everyday and Friday prayers; officiate religious marriages with the presence of an imam or a mufti; officiate the religious rituals of *Ramadan* and *Kurban Bayram*; bury the dead in the traditional Muslim way (in a shroud and often in a simple wooden coffin). Interviewed religious leaders -Chief Mufti Haci and Head of the Supreme Muslim Council Karamolla- do not think that after 1989 the state has impeded the general religious practices of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. However, it is pointed out that the state impeded the development of Islam in Bulgaria by interfering in the religious affairs of the leadership of the Muslim denomination between

1992 and 1997, in the restitution of the *vakif* property (see 4.2.3.) and in issues of education (see 4.4.3.).

Since the collapse of Communism there has been a revival of Islam in Bulgaria. This is visible in the building of many new mosques. Between 1989 and 1997 around 100 new mosques were built and many of the older ones were restored (Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, 28/11/97). Some mosques, however, are still to be restored. According to two high-rank officials from the Directorate of Religious Affairs -Hristo Matanov (1996) and Georgi Krustev (1998)- there are between 900 and 1,000 actively functioning mosques and houses of worship in Bulgaria (24 *Chassa* 9/1/96; Krustev, 1998). According to the Synod of Patriarch Maxim, in 1995 the number of Christian Orthodox churches and other houses of worship were around 3,500 (Krustev, 1998). Now they are about 3,800 (Matanov, 24 *Chassa* 9/1/96). The number of mosques is between 900-1,000 and Orthodox churches 3,500-3,800. When one keeps in mind that Muslims are 13 per cent and Orthodox Christians are 85 per cent of the total population in Bulgaria, it turns out that the number of religious temples which the Muslims have per capita, almost doubles the number available to Orthodox Christians. However, when interpreting these numbers, one should not forget that the Muslims of Bulgaria are usually villagers who need houses of worship in their neighborhoods. By contrast, Christians are town-dwellers who usually go to the services in the bigger churches in their towns (Kanev, 1999).

Concerning religious marriage, there are a few post-1989 cases when people married in the presence of an imam or mufti before they had their civil marriage (Hadzhi, 1998). According to Bulgarian law, civil marriage is compulsory and has to be performed prior to the religious marriage. This regulation affects also the majority of Orthodox Christians and other religious minorities in Bulgaria. Recently, the public has demanded that priests and imams, officiating such ceremonies before the civil marriage, should not be prosecuted. After 1989 there are no data about such prosecution.

Traditional clothing for Muslim women in Bulgaria does not include the veil. In present-day Bulgaria, factory-made kerchiefs are worn instead of the veil. Traditional clothing for women today includes *shalvari* (baggy trousers), as well as factory-made aprons. According to a 1994 ethnological survey, the *shalvari* proved to be the most resistant item of traditional Muslim clothing. The variants of *shalvari* differ from region to region and from generation to generation. In many rural areas all Muslim women wear *shalvari*, while in others, only women over 40 years of age wear them. In the western Rhodopes imitations of traditional clothing, imported from Turkey, are widespread, while in the central Rhodopes and around the town of Gotse Delchev, women and girls dress in a local modification including brightly colored clothes (Georgieva, 1994:154-155).

Traditional clothing for men includes the black beret. This type of hat is used in all regions, particularly in the towns of Kurdzhali, Razgrad, Velingrad and the villages around Madan and Assenovgrad where Turks live. It is less common in the Pomak-populated central Rhodopes and in the towns (Georgieva, 1994:154).

Muslims in Bulgaria have changed their attitude towards other religious practices significantly. A 1994 ethnological survey reported that some Muslims accept the consumption of pork. Some Turkish families from the town of Ardino breed pigs. They do not consider this a sin of the present generations, but an inherited practice (Georgieva, 1994:164). In this vein, Pomaks consider themselves “better Muslims” than the Turks, since they never eat pork.

The prohibition on alcohol consumption is another traditional practice for Islam. Paradoxically, in Bulgaria there is high alcohol consumption among Christians and Muslims alike, especially in the mixed population regions (Georgieva, 1994:164). Today there are even instances of alcoholism, due to the extremely difficult economic situation.

Another Islamic tradition -the polygamous marriage- is not practiced by the Muslims in Bulgaria. This has been the case among Muslims in Bulgaria for some 120 years from the formation of the Bulgarian state after the “liberation from Ottoman rule” (Yalimov, 1998). Even in earlier times it was not a common practice in the Bulgarian lands (Kanev, 1999).

Deviations from such practices, as well as the influences of Christianity on Islam in Bulgaria allow some researchers to claim that Islam in Bulgaria is of a special Balkan type (Gradeva, et al., 1998:11). The theory goes on to say that this type of Islam was the predominant school of Islam in the Ottoman Empire and not only within its Balkan region (Fraenkel, 1999). This kind of Islam, defined as Hanefi-Islam, is more open towards the other religions than some versions of Islam professed in the majority of Islamic countries (Yalimov, 1998).

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

Present day relations between Muslims and Christians are the result of more than six-hundred years of coexistence. Throughout history, regardless of the politics of the day, of the different historical interpretations, and of the influence of the media, the two confessional communities have developed their own system of living together in peace and in conflict. A 1994 ethnological and sociological study called “Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria” outlined the main characteristics of that relationship. In sum, these are the relations between Muslims and Christians in everyday life, in the festive system and in conflict situations. In conflict situations, one observes some negative attitudes and stereotypes.

The Christian-Muslim opposition should not be viewed only in religious terms. Religion, as a division marker, is more important for differentiation within the ethnic communities. Bulgarians are divided into Christians and Muslims, Turks into Sunni and Shiite Muslims (the Alevi are also included under Shiites) and Roma into Christians and Muslims. In the relations between Christians and Muslims, it is the ethnic and not the religious division that plays a more important role. This has been quite visible in the tendency among Pomaks and Muslim Roma to adopt new ethnic identities. For example, in the Central and Eastern Rhodopes where Bulgarian Muslims live, separate individuals and groups have recently

adopted Christianity. They claim that Islam prevented them from integrating into the Bulgarian community. An opposite process gained momentum in the Western Rhodopes, where Bulgarian Muslims declared themselves Turks although they speak Bulgarian. Some of the Muslim Roma also prefer to adopt Turkish identity (Georgieva, 1994:153).

Pomaks projected different anthroponymic (name) behavior after they were allowed to regain their Islamic names in 1990. A 1990 field study showed that 45 per cent of the men and 44 per cent of the women preferred their Turkish name, 6.5 per cent of the men and 24 per cent of the women preferred their Bulgarian name. A large number -nearly 40 per cent of the people- projected varying degrees of compromise between the two extremes. In different situations they projected a Bulgarian or a Turkish identity within and outside the group. Sometimes they used various types of hybrids between their Bulgarian and their Islamic names. Thus, compromise proved to be a strong and stable feature for the community. Later studies -in 1991 and 1992- have confirmed that there is a strong correlation between anthroponymic and political behavior. When it comes to political behavior, it seems that compromise is directed towards the influence of local power factors like local businessmen and politicians (Konstantinov, 1995:76-109).

*Examples of cooperation:* During religious festivities one could observe peaceful life in ethnically mixed villages and towns. Sacral gifts are exchanged. The side which is given the present *has to* accept it. On Easter Day Christians bring red eggs and Easter cakes to their neighbors. During Bayram, Muslims give their Christian neighbors sweets or boiled mutton from the sacrificial offering, the *Kurban*. During the “assimilation campaign” all this disappeared, but after 1989 a mutual desire to normalize the system of coexistence reemerged (Georgieva, 1994:159-160).

A second component of peaceful coexistence could be seen in the reciprocal visits paid during family holidays. Christians and Muslims invite each other to their respective wedding ceremonies. After a child is born, mothers are often visited individually by female representatives of the other community. Apart from that, children of the same age are raised together, regardless of their religious background (Georgieva, 1994:160-161).

A third component of the system of coexistence in everyday life is the participation in the burial rituals of the community. Christian males participate in the procession taking the deceased Muslim to the grave. Christian women abstain from that activity, since they obey the Muslim ritual. Muslims also attend the Christian ritual. Sometimes they even take part in the prayers for the peace of the soul. Since Muslims are not allowed to enter the Christian cemetery, Muslim women take part in the vigils practiced by the Christians. During the Revivalist Process the two communities had to follow a “socialist ritual.” This ritual provided for Muslims and Christians to be buried in a common cemetery, something seen as a sin by both confessional groups (Georgieva, 1992:162).

Another link between Christians and Muslims concerns their common economic activities in the mixed population regions. Both Muslims and Christians cultivated crops brought by the Muslims from Asia (e.g. rice, sesame, the oleaginous rose, and poppies) (Georgieva,

1992:163). A similar arrangement occurred in the production of cereals, flax, hemp, legumes, grapes and honey, as well as in stockbreeding. There are some cases in the Deliorman area (northeastern Bulgaria), in which Bulgarian businessmen with Turkish capital have created new private firms. This is so because Turks prefer a majority representative to operate their investment (Mitev, 1994:193).

The sociological part of the same study claims that there is a relatively high level of religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria. The attitude of Christians who perceived Muslims as “religious fanatics” has declined over the years since 1989. The popular perceptions of the Muslims towards the Christians, seen as “infidels” around the end of the last century, has changed to the present day perception of the Christian as “a believer” or a “Bulgarian” (Mitev, 1994:189).

*Examples of confrontation:* It is certain that everyday coexistence between Christians and Muslims does not contain only cooperation. There are many negative signs that still plague mutual trust between the two communities. This came as a result from the mass exodus of 1989, the remaining social gaps and ethnic prejudices that have been strengthened by the negative attitudes spread by the mass media.

*The 1989 “Big Excurison”:* Signs of the conflict between the two communities, even before the exodus, were the officially sponsored demonstrations aimed at countering the protests of the Turks in northeastern Bulgaria and the mass meetings launched after Zhivkov’s May 31, 1989 televised address (Nikolaev, RFE/RL, 1989). Another source of tension was the policy of “mass civil mobilization” of the ethnic Bulgarian population. The Turkish population was involved in agriculture, tobacco growing, mining and building. Once the Big Excursion started, highly skilled ethnic Bulgarians had to substitute for the emigrating Turks. Further tensions occurred because of alleged Turkish sabotages prior to their leaving for Turkey, as well as because of Bulgarians’ speculative trading in Turkish property (Dimitrova, 1995:395).

There were many Bulgarian intellectuals who participated in dissident organizations and others who supported the restoration of the Turkish names. However, even after 1989 there was another group of Bulgarians that was not content with the situation. Two days after the December 29 governmental announcement allowing Turks and other Muslims to restore their names, a wave of nationalist protests swept ethnically mixed Bulgarian towns. Bulgarians staged rallies and strikes, cars with protesting people set out for the capital, and a live chain surrounded the building of the Bulgarian Parliament (Tafradiiski, et al., 1992:217). Bulgarians in these areas viewed the Big Excursion as an act of treason to the country. Some of these demonstrators had their personal stakes, because they had been the ones working overtime during the Big Excursion. Reportedly, many of the organizers of the protests were people who were involved in the assimilation campaign and who had taken economic advantage of the Turkish property.

The fact that some 120,000 (out of the 330,000) ethnic Turkish immigrants had returned to Bulgaria by March 1990 due to discontent with their treatment in Turkey, was a matter

of serious concern not only for Bulgarian nationalists, but also for the ethnic Turks themselves. The returning Turks had great difficulties to adapt to the new circumstances. They often found themselves at their old jobs, this time on a lower pay; they had troubles with the local governments on the return of their real estate and personal property and they also had strained relations with their ethnic Bulgarian neighbors (Dimitrova, 1995:400).

The 1984-1989 name-changing campaign and the following mass exodus inflicted painful wounds on the relations between Christians and Muslims. The majority of Bulgarians viewed the campaign as a crime. Ethnic Turks do not blame the Revivalist Process on all ethnic Bulgarians. Moreover, they do not blame even socialism as a system, but rather the Communist clique around Zhivkov (Mitev, 1994:191).

*Present-day social gaps and prejudices:* The social gap between ethnic Bulgarians and Turks is bigger than the one between Bulgarian Muslims and Roma, or Pomaks and Turks. The Turks are the group, which is most tolerant towards the Pomaks, while Roma and Bulgarians show the opposite trend - of distancing themselves from the Pomaks. Social distance between the Roma and other ethnic groups has been increasing constantly in the period 1992-1997. When it comes to Bulgarians, this is especially true of the period 1994-1997. For all ethnic groups social distance is much bigger as far as friendship, marriage and common work are concerned. All ethnic groups are much more tolerant of each other when they have to coexist on the same territory (Kanev, 1998b:1-6).

Ethnic Bulgarians are widely accepted in all social relationships (e.g. having them as friends; having them as neighbors, working with them in the same place, and living with them in the same country). Only the wish to have an ethnic Bulgarian spouse remains quite low on the scale among minority groups. Since 1994 the distance between the Roma and all other groups has grown bigger, while the other minorities have remained closer to the ethnic Bulgarians (Kanev, 1998b:6).

The existing social gaps are further widened by many prejudices that Christians and Muslims have for each other. Ethnic Bulgarians show some contradictions in their attitude towards Turks. On the one hand, Bulgarians maintain good neighborly relations with them. On the other hand, however, they view Turks as people who cannot be trusted and who are hostile to them, because of the name-changing campaign, even though this is not substantiated by the Turks themselves. Furthermore, a big number of Bulgarians views Turks as being "all the same," thus treating them as a depersonalized mass of people, and not as separate individuals with whom they maintain daily contacts (Mitev, 1994:197).

Orthodox Christian Bulgarians trust neither the Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), nor the Roma (Mitev, 1994:197). Their opinion of Bulgarian Muslims is that they are "religious fanatics," while Roma are lazy, irresponsible, prone to crimes and Godless people (Kanev, 1998b:4).

*Print media:* The print media pay uneven attention to the different ethnic groups within the Muslim community. The Roma are the ones, who make the headlines, usually with negative connotations (Balkan Neighbors, 1997/5 and 1997/6). These articles usually depict Roma as people who steal or commit other crimes. Neutral and positive articles are rare.

Although attention is paid also to the ethnic Turks, it has decreased since 1997. In 1994, articles published on the Turks were almost as many as those dedicated to the Roma. (Sociological Survey, Mitev, 1994; Balkan Neighbors, 1997/6). Most of the articles dedicated to the Turks were neutral. Of the rest, the number of the negative ones exceeds considerably the number of the positive ones. Turks are mostly referred to with regard to the developments around the policies of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Balkan Neighbors, 1997/6).

Compared to the two other Muslim groups, the attention dedicated to the Pomaks is insignificant. However, they have the most stable positive image in the mainstream press (Balkan Neighbors, 1997/5).

The Bulgarian media, traditionally very hostile to Christian “sects,” did not forget to pay attention to Islamic ones. Foundations reported to have spread “non-traditional Islam” in Bulgaria, i.e. not the Islam typical for the Muslims in that country, have been branded as “sects.” These foundations were even alleged to have connections with the Movement of the Muslim Brotherhoods, which is prohibited even in some Arab countries due to its allegedly subversive activities. Thus, some media hinted that these foundations are setting up the basis for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria. Furthermore, the media claimed that “sects” are most active among the Pomaks not only because it was easier to impose a new Islamic identity on people who do not have any clear identity, but also because “sects” needed to strengthen the Islamic chain in the Balkans, connecting Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The following examples are typical of the hostile attitude of the media: *Noshten Troud* wrote in January 1997: “Islamic fundamentalism and sects crucify the traditional Bulgarian values.” *168 Chassa* wrote in September 1997: “Foreign missionaries spread among Bulgarian Muslims the most dangerous Islamic branch, which calls for ‘sacred war’ against all other religions.” (Lenkova, 1998:57).

In the media Islam is usually treated in a political context. Followers of Allah are represented as underdeveloped people and the discrimination against women is emphasized. Moreover, the media try to project a socio-pathological character of the Muslims, especially of those from Algeria and Afghanistan, and to show them as the threat which the theocratic state poses on the secular one (Metodieva:1996:6).

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

The Bulgarian state does not recognize the notion “religious minorities,” but “religious denominations.” First and foremost this is due to the fact that the state claims to treat all denominations on an equal basis. Second, one cannot refer to the religious denominations in Bulgaria as “religious minorities,” since the respective denominations might be majorities in other countries. Third, if one speaks of “minorities,” then all denominations in Bulgaria should be considered as such, because atheists are still the majority (Krustev, 1998).

The Bulgarian state nowadays tries to protect the Muslim denomination and “traditional” Islam in Bulgaria. Recently this was done through the signing of a protocol between the directorates of religious affairs of Bulgaria and Turkey in July 1998. This move was initiated by the Muslim leaders in Bulgaria (Krustev, 1998). It was qualified as a “relief” by the rector of the Islamic Institute in Bulgaria Ibrahim Yalimov, since it would protect the Muslims of Bulgaria from the influence of non-traditional, i.e. non-Hanefit, Islam in Bulgaria. According to that protocol, the lecturers in Islamic Theology would be qualified to teach at Bulgarian schools and seminars only if registered through the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Dianet*). The protocol also envisages the importation of religious books from Turkey.

Between 1992 and 1997 the state interfered a great deal in the affairs of both the Muslims and the Orthodox Christians in Bulgaria. The Union of Democratic Forces government attacked the Orthodox Patriarch and the top Muslim leaders in 1992. This move was due to the new government’s desire to replace the religious leaders, who had been loyal to the Communist regime, with new people with pro-democratic orientation. This policy resulted in making a rift in the respective leaderships of the two denominations. The Muslims managed to get over their problems in 1997, but the problems still persist within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

In February 1992, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, backed by the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms, issued two letters pronouncing the election of Chief Mufti Nedim Gendzhev and of all other seven regional muftis illegitimate. The Directorate did that due to some improprieties in the election procedure of the Chief Mufti and his subordinates, as well as due to Gendzhev’s insufficient term in office at the time of his election. Thus, on the basis of customary law, an Interim Council was appointed to act until a new Chief Mufti and regional muftis were elected. Fikri Sali was appointed as the new Muslim leader in Bulgaria (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996).

The ousted Muslim leadership under Nedim Gendzhev filed a case against these acts of the administration. The case was rejected on the grounds that the Directorate had acted “according to its competence under the law” (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996). Later on, the split in the Muslim leadership mirrored that in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The same violent occupation of religious property was observed. In March 1992 a pro-governmental group, assisted by the police, occupied the building of the Chief Mufti’s Office and put Sali, the newly appointed Chief Mufti, in office (Cohen, Kanev, 1998a:11).

The 1992 *Decision No. 5 of the Constitutional Court*, interpreting the 1949 Denominations Act in light of the new democratic changes, limited the right of the state to interfere in the religious denominations' affairs (Cohen, Kanev, 1998a:11). However, after the downfall of the UDF government at the end of 1992, every subsequent government has tried to interfere in the Muslim affairs and to use one of the two leaderships as its own political tool. The rift was used not only by the top leadership but also on the local level among the regional muftis and imams (Eminov, 1997:65).

The government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which came to power in early 1995, started a pro-nationalist policy towards the Muslim minority. BSP's daily *Douma* (*Word*) constantly referred to the Turkish minority as "Turkey's fifth column" and as the channel of the "Islamic threat" in Bulgaria. But BSP's policies did not remain only on the level of the media. Through different acts and on its own initiative, the BSP government started replacing leading Muslim figures with its own loyalists (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996; IHF Report on Bulgaria, 1996:59). Nedim Gendzhev, known for his loyalty to the former Communists during the Revivalist Process, was restored to office.

In September 1995 many Muslims protested in Sofia against these acts. They viewed Gendzhev as a person who had shown his negative attitude to Islam by collaborating with the Communists. In addition to that, the Cabinet's act was appealed before the Supreme Court. The latter rejected the protest by following its practice not to judge the content of the act, but only the procedure. The Court concluded that the executive branch had the "right to its own discretion" in the registration of religious denominations (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996). Thus, it implicitly confirmed Gendzhev's legal right to stay in office (Cohen, Kanev, 1998b:11).

The rival Chief Mufti, Fikri Sali, organized an extraordinary conference among his followers in March 1996, which elected him the Chief Mufti in accordance with the 1992 statute. However, throughout the rest of 1996 and in 1997 he was refused official recognition by the state. As late as October 14, 1997, the Supreme Court decided that the 1992 statute was in force at the time of the election of Sali as the Chief Mufti at the above mentioned extraordinary conference, and that he had been duly elected (Cohen, Kanev, 1998b:12).

With the new political currents of 1997 -a new UDF government replaced the BSP- the Bulgarian state started trying to overcome Bulgaria's isolation from both the West and the Muslim world. This policy concerned Bulgaria's removal from the negative list compiled by the Islamic Conference countries. Bulgaria was put there on the motion of Turkey due to the Revivalist Process (*Troud*, 24/6/97). It was highly desirable that the state help overcome the rift between the two leaderships of the Muslim community.

In the presence of state officials, an agreement was signed on September 9, 1997. In it representatives of the High Muslim Council of Fikri Sali and of the Supreme Spiritual Council of Nedim Gendzhev agreed to convene a unification conference (BTA, 9/9/97). The agreement envisaged an organizational council chaired jointly by two representatives

of the rival Muslim councils that would organize the unification conference. Gendzhev supported that agreement, but Sali did not (*24 Chassa*, 10/9/97). In the end, Sali also signed it (BTA, 22/9/97).

On October 17, 1997, meetings were held throughout the country to elect the delegates for the unification conference. An imam and one more delegate had to be elected from each mosque (BTA, 17/10/97).

The unification conference was held on October 23, 1997, and was opened by the Deputy Prime Minister Veselin Metodiev. The conference was attended by 1,362 delegates who voted for a new statute stating that members of the former Bulgarian Communist Party, State Security agents and participants in the Revivalist Process would not be elected as imams or muftis. Apart from that, all people who are elected have to be Bulgarian citizens. Late in the evening, the delegates unanimously elected Mustafa Hadzhi, the single candidate for the post, as Chief Mufti of the Muslims in Bulgaria (*Sega*, 24/10/97). The Bulgarian state officially registered him and the new Muslim statute. The statute explicitly points out that Islam in Bulgaria is Sunni from the Hanefi school (*Kontinent*, 29/10/97).

Right after the unification conference, the Bulgarian print media suggested that it was highly disputable whether that conference was the ultimate solution to the problem, because a third Chief Mufti's office had emerged in the meantime (*24 Chassa*, 30/10/97). The argument was that both Gendzhev and Sali had different objections to the legitimacy of relations between the state and the Muslim leadership. Sali had filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights in 1996. He objected to the fact that his election as a Chief Mufti was not registered by the state despite a decision of the Bulgarian Constitutional Court. This case is still pending, but the European Commission on Human Rights has given it admissibility. Sali did not challenge the particular unification elections of October 1997, rather the decision of the Bulgarian state to not register him as a Chief Mufti. Thus, the ultimate decision of the European Court, even if it says that the Bulgarian state did not have the right to do so, would have no legal impact on the October 1997 elections (Grozev, 1998).

Unlike Sali, Gendzhev held a press conference on October 21, 1997. He accused the state of interfering in the election of the unification conference's delegates. He said that in some cases the delegates were not the imams who had to deal with religious affairs but mayors, coordinators, and activists of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (BTA, 27/10/97). Furthermore, it was alleged that the Director of the Directorate of Religious Affairs had created his own rules for the convening of the conference and, thus, he did not respect the Constitution, the Denominations Act, and the statute of the Muslim community in Bulgaria (BTA, 3/11/97). Gendzhev filed a case with the Bulgarian Supreme Administrative Court. The case was rejected on the grounds that Gendzhev's registration as a Chief Mufti was nominal and thus, he did not have the legal right to make objections (Grozev, 1998).

At present, one year after the unification elections, the election of Mustafa Hadzhi is no longer contested. He has been accepted as the legitimate leader of the Muslim community in Bulgaria.

Another way in which the state interferes in the affairs of the Muslim community in Bulgaria is through delaying the restitution of the *vakif* property. This is land and real estate, owned by the Muslim community, which were confiscated during the Communist "Nationalization Process" in the late 1940s. Between 1990 and 1992 acts on restitution of both land and real estate were passed (Cohen, Kanev, 1998:9). They allowed the Muslim community to restore part of its *vakif* property, but not all of it. The reasons for that were mainly the existence of the two conflicting leaderships, as well as the lack of sufficient archival documentation and initiative on behalf of the Muslim community. According to Deputy Director of the Directorate of Religious Affairs Krustev, the real problem now is only in the lack of archival documentation (Krustev, 1998).

The restitution of the *vakif* property is very important for the ability of the Muslim community to finance itself and not to rely on subsidies from the state. Part of the *vakif* property already restored provides financial aid to some of the regional muftis' offices as well as to the Sofia-based Chief Mufti's office. However, the finances coming from that property and from the state are insufficient. According to the *Denominations Act* the state can allocate funds if demanded by the denominations in Bulgaria. The Muslim denomination has received 20 million leva (around \$11,000) since the beginning of 1998, an amount, which Muslim leaders find highly insufficient (Hadzhi, 1998; Yalimov, 1998).

Regardless of all this, the 1997 US State Department Report on Human Rights stated that along with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a number of major religious bodies, including those of the Muslim and the Jewish communities, receive governmental support. The Report also claimed that there is no evidence that the government discriminated against the members of any religious group in restituting the property nationalized under Communism to its previous owners ([www.state.gov/human\\_rights/](http://www.state.gov/human_rights/)).

However, the report pointed out two other problems - discrimination in the military service and at the workplace. During compulsory military service, Muslims are placed in construction units where they often perform commercial or maintenance work rather than serve in normal military units. Discrimination at the workplace is especially strong towards the Roma due to their low training and education. Supervisory jobs are usually given to ethnic Bulgarian employees. Ethnic Turks, Pomaks and Roma are the first to be laid off ([www.state.gov/human\\_rights/](http://www.state.gov/human_rights/)).

In 1995, the Directorate of Religious Affairs prohibited students from the Islamic High School in Shoumen from visiting villages during religious festivities and from helping at Muslim funerals and marriages (Eminov, 1997:65). In January 1996, the district governor of Haskovo -a town in southern Bulgaria- banned the building of a mosque in a village near Stambolovo; and in June, a Muslim school near Rouse -a town in northeastern Bulgaria- was closed down by the authorities (IHF Report on Bulgaria, 1997:60).

In August 1997 a seminar on Islamic religion, held for Pomaks by lecturers from Yemen, Israel, and Saudi Arabia close to the resort village of Narechenski Bani in southern Bulgaria, was cut short by local police and internal security forces. Two of the lecturers were expelled from the country (*Demokratiya*, 29/8/97; *Kontinent*, 1/9/97). This action of the state can be interpreted as “helping” traditional Hanefi Islam in Bulgaria, since the lecturers were Shiite Muslims of the so-called “non-traditional” Islam (Cohen, 1998). The media often treat the latter as the major force behind the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria.

## 5. GENERAL LEGAL STATUS

### 5.1. Past

Two international treaties -the San Stefano Treaty and the Berlin Treaty of 1878- determined the establishment of the modern Bulgarian state and provided for the protection of minorities in Bulgaria. These treaties protected mainly religious minorities, since religion and not ethnicity was the major factor of differentiation. However, special clauses concerning the defense of ethnicity and race had already entered international legislation as early as during the Vienna Congress of 1915 (Thornberry, 1991 quoted by Kanev, 1998:69).

The first Bulgarian constitution -the “Turnovo Constitution” of 1879- that was operative until the adoption of the Communist one of 1947, mirrored the international treaties’ principle of the protection of religious minorities. On the one hand, it gave rights to religious communities for self-government, while, on the other, it put them under the supervision of the executive branch. Local legislation was regulated by the 1880 *Temporary Rules for Spiritual Government of Christians, Muslims and Jews*. As far as the Muslim community was concerned, this legislation curtailed the rights of the Muslim judges (*kadii*) and transferred these rights to the Muftis. The regulations also stipulated that the Chief Mufti and the regional muftis should be paid by the government (Kanev, 1998a:70).

Another legislative act was the 1895 *Temporary Rules for the Government of Muslims*, which was in power until 1909. This document provided for the appointment of the Chief Mufti by the Prince, and not by election in the Muslim community. The local representatives of the mufti were appointed by the muftis at the suggestion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations. Muslim community leaders continued to receive governmental salaries, determined by the above-mentioned ministry. Muslim Roma were not allowed to participate in the election process of the regional muftis (Kanev, 1998a:72).

After Bulgaria’s independence in 1908, the *Tsarigrad (Istanbul) Accords* reduced the involvement of the State in the Muslim community’s affairs, drafting new rules for the election of the Chief Mufti. These rules stipulated that the leader of the Muslims was only

to be announced but not appointed by the government. The election of the regional muftis and the control over their affairs were under the sole authority of the Chief Mufti. However, all muftis remained state employees. This spirit and clauses were preserved in the *Tsarigrad (Istanbul) Treaty* of 1913, which never came into effect due to the outbreak of the First World War (Kanev, 1998a:72).

The relationship between the State and the Muslim community was regulated once again after the 1919 Treaty of Neully. The *Statute on the Spiritual Arrangement and Government of Muslims* showed a new shift from non-involvement to strong state involvement in Muslim affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations was given wide authority in this regard. It had the right to cancel the election of the representatives of the local Muslim boards -a body of Muslim community representatives consisting of five to nine people elected every 3 years- and the Chief Mufti; to dismiss the Chief Mufti if he did not perform his duties in accordance with the laws, decrees and regulations of the country; to hire and dismiss all regional muftis and their local representatives; to control the denomination's communication with foreign public institutions, as well as the Muslim spiritual courts. The construction of new mosques, as well as the selling, mortgaging and exchange of *vakif* property were to be sanctioned by the Ministry. In regard to Muslim Roma this Act was a step ahead. It gave them the right to participate in the election of local Muslim boards, provided that they were sedentary. The new statute was a way for the central authorities to exert total control over the Muslims - ethnic Turks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, and Muslim Roma (Kanev, 1998a:72-75; Statute on the Spiritual Arrangement and Government of Muslims, *State Gazette*, June 26, 1919).

With the Communist takeover in 1944 and the introduction of a totalitarian political system, the state tried to introduce major changes in all spheres of public life. Concerning minorities, it was no longer important to protect their rights in terms of religion or ethnicity, but to merge them into the secular ideology of Communism. Although both Communist constitutions -of 1947 and 1971- provided for the respect of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, none of these freedoms were respected in practice (Kanev, 1998a:72-75) (See also 1.1.).

Between 1944 and 1989 Bulgaria ratified some UN documents which included clauses on the respect of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Among them were the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976)*, the *International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1948)*, the *Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)*. In the middle of the 1970s Bulgaria became a member of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (Kanev, 1998:72-86).

Religious affairs were regulated domestically by the 1949 *Denominations Act* that helped the authorities to exert total control over all denominations (See 5.2.).

## **5.2.Present**

The right to religious freedom is guaranteed on three levels, which on many points are in sharp contradiction with one another. These are the July 13, 1991 Constitution, the international treaties to which Bulgaria is a party, and local legislation. (Cohen, Kanev, 1998). The Constitution proclaims freedom of religion and the separation between Church and State. It defines the Christian Orthodox Church as “the traditional religion of the Republic of Bulgaria.” Initially, this provision was interpreted as not providing any legal preference for the church of the majority, but the 36<sup>th</sup> National Assembly made some attempts to do so (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996).

The Constitution introduces a number of prohibitions. First, there is a prohibition on the use of religious communities and institutions for political purposes and the formation of parties along ethnic and religious lines. Human rights organizations see this provision as unreasonably discriminatory. Second, freedom of conscience is restricted on five grounds - national security, public order, public health, good morals and the rights and freedoms of the others. The restriction based on the “national security” argument is in addition to the restrictions made by international treaties such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *European Convention on Human Rights* (Cohen, Kanev, 1998). The Deputy Director of the Directorate of Religious Affairs has stated that “national security” is understood in Bulgaria as a special case of “public order” (Krustev, 1998).

At present, the *Denominations Act*, enacted in 1949, requires the registration of all religious denominations with the Council of Ministers. The respective local branches of the religious groups are registered with the municipal councils (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996). The Chair of the Council of Ministers has the right to get involved in the communities’ religious affairs. S/he may do the following: 1) review the documentation and communications of the denominations and stop their publication and distribution; 2) grant preliminary permission to the religious denominations which want to maintain relationships with organizations abroad, as well as approve donations from abroad; 3) dismiss any religious officers who “break the laws, the public order and the good morals, or are working against the democratic structures of the state” (Krustev, 1998).

The *1992 Decision No. 5 of the Constitutional Court* reviewed the *Denominations Act* in view of the new 1991 Constitution. The democratic President and some MPs who were interested in declaring the *Denominations Act* unconstitutional provoked this action. However, nothing major was achieved, apart from the fact that some qualifications regarding religious freedom were made. The Constitutional Court ruled against any infringement upon the freedom of religion and included the right of association as a basic right of religious belief. The decision mentioned that the constitutional restrictions on the freedom of conscience should be interpreted within the limitations of the international treaties to which Bulgaria is a party, especially of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. The right of the state to interfere in the affairs of the religious communities was limited to monitoring their political activities and activities directed against national security, public order, and the rights and freedoms of the other citizens.

The right to discharge religious leaders from their office was declared unconstitutional (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 1996).

Interviewed Muslim leaders point out that the 1949 *Denominations Act* should be amended in order to further prevent the state from interference in the denominations' religious affairs. This is particularly important in respect to three articles of the Act (Yalimov, 1998). Article 6 (1) requires from every denomination to register its statute with the Council of Ministers. Article 16 requires the central bodies of the denomination to register with the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and the regional muftis with the regional municipalities. Article 14 allows religious denominations to establish their secondary and higher schools only after the approval of the Council of Ministers. The schools' statutes and curricula are to be approved by the Deputy Prime Minister. These articles still allow the state to get involved in the Muslims' religious affairs (Yalimov, 1998). The Deputy Director of the Directorate of Religious Affairs Krustev also said that the *Denominations Act* had to be changed because of the present vagueness in the wording of the different procedures of the law (Krustev, 1998). Such changes are not expected in the near future.

There are three articles in the *Penal Code* that envisage penalties for "crimes against religious denominations." The first concerns the instigation of religious hatred through speech, press, action, or in any other way. The second penalizes disturbing religious rituals and masses, and the third prohibits the establishment of religion-based political parties and the use of religion against the state. None of these articles has been used to punish people after 1989 although there were many instances of instigation of religious hatred by the media or through statements by public officials (Cohen, Kanev, 1998:7).

The *Law on the Person and the Family* is also related to religious affairs in Bulgaria. This law requires the registration of citizens' associations and foundations with the district courts. As far as the Muslim community in Bulgaria is concerned, the law does not affect its officially recognized structures - the Chief Mufti's Office, regional muftis' offices, etc. However, the so-called Islamic "sects," which profess non-traditional Islam and are publicly accused of being the basis for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria, are affected by the law. Starting in February 1994, these groups along with many others which fall under the restrictions of the *Law on the Person and the Family*, had to re-register within three months. Many of them were not allowed to re-register. Human rights activists qualify this move of the state as a serious infringement on religious freedom in Bulgaria (Cohen, Kanev, 1998:7). The International Islamic Relief Organization - Bulgaria and the Al-Vakif al-Islami foundations were refused re-registration (*Decision No. 296 of the Council of Ministers*, 19/7/94).

The *Radio and Television Act*, adopted in November 1998, suggests in Article 53 that the Bulgarian National Radio and Television should provide time for addresses to the believers, as well as for the coverage of important religious ceremonies at the request of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the other officially registered religious denominations. The statutes of the respective national media give a concrete framework for the coverage

of religious events. This allows the national electronic media's directors to make their own decisions on what could be broadcast. Thus, the concrete decisions are going to be made on a case by case basis.

## **6. AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATION FOR THE MINORITY**

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

The international treaties that regulated the terms of Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1878 and the ones after the First World War stated that minorities have the right to conduct their own education. Until 1944 this right was observed. Initially, linguistic and religious education was allowed mainly in private schools. Muslim schools were divided according to ethnicity. There were separate schools for Turks, Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), Tatars, and Roma. Private Muslim schools operated from the nursery school to the high school level (Kanev, 1998a:79).

In the beginning of the 1920s, there was decline in the number of private schools in contrast to state schools. This came as a result of the legislation of the Agrarian Government of Alexander Stamboliiski, which pursued this change in order to raise the education level of the minorities. This trend was particularly visible in the schools of the Pomaks. At the time this was not viewed as violation of minority rights, but rather as support from the state for minority education. Bulgarian language education was not compulsory (Kanev, 1998a:79). The Islamic school in Shoumen -one of the main schools in the history of the Muslims in Bulgaria- was established as a theological high school with a five-year course of education (Yalimov, 1998). Another school of higher theology was operated in Sofia (Eminov, 1997, quoting from Kostanick 1957:50).

The subsequent governments, especially the junta regime of 1934, abandoned this benevolent policy. They changed the status of the Pomak schools and made them state-owned in an attempt to assimilate that population. However, the junta regime had a different attitude towards the Turks. While between 1928 and 1934 many Turkish schools had adopted the new Turkish alphabet following the Kemalist reforms in Turkey, the regime, supported by the Muslim spiritual leadership in Bulgaria, re-introduced the Arabic script (Kanev, 1998a:80).

Soon after the Communist takeover in 1944, all private schools became state-owned following the changes introduced by the October 1946 the *People's Education Act*. From then on, schools were to be maintained by the state. This move created a twofold reaction. On the one hand, it was accepted as a relief from the economic hardships that many schools had been exposed to in earlier times. On the other hand, however, this was viewed as a way for the state to interfere in Muslim education (Kanev, 1998a:89).

In 1947 the higher education program at the Islamic school of Shoumen was closed down. The Islamic high school in Shoumen was transformed into a state high school. In the early years of Communism, Islam was still present in the curricula of some schools in Bulgaria.

Over the course of 1951-1954, however, four *medreses* (private Islamic high schools) were closed down. Only one such school was allowed to continue to operate in the area around the town of Aitos in Eastern Bulgaria. In the years of Communism almost no Muslims were sent to study at universities abroad. It was not until 1985-1986 that four Muslims were sent to study in Tashkent in the USSR (Yalimov, 1998).

## **6.2. Availability of teaching material for the minority**

Since the political changes of 1989, there have been two translations of the Koran into Bulgarian. The first one was published in 1993 at the initiative of Nedim Gendzhev. It was widely sold and distributed. Arabists in Bulgaria claim that the translation from Turkish was full of mistakes (Belev, 1998). A new translation of the Koran directly from Arabic was made in 1997. It is distributed free of charge, but the copies printed were not enough. There is also a CD ROM version of the Koran in Bulgarian. However, it cannot be used effectively within the country, since the Muslim minority has almost no technical facilities.

Besides the fact that a properly translated Koran is unavailable, teaching materials on Islam are quite insufficient for the needs of the minority. Very often, teaching involves only taking notes during lectures (Yalimov, 1998). Muslim leaders claim that there are no “proper” textbooks on Islam. Until recently, teaching materials distributed among the Muslim community came as donations and some of these donations were not of very good quality. Some of the textbooks held positions that were quite incompatible with the “traditional” Islam professed in Bulgaria. Chief Mufti Hadzhi claimed that recently people whom he referred to as representatives of “sects” had distributed 18 books translated into Bulgarian in the towns of Blagoevgrad and Sandanski in southwestern Bulgaria. He also claimed that the Jehovah’s Witnesses had translated their books into Turkish and distributed them among the Muslims in northern Bulgaria. In line with the July 1998 protocol between the Bulgarian and the Turkish directorates of religious affairs, textbooks were imported officially from Turkey for the 1998/1999 academic year. This move by the state is accepted very well by the Muslim community (Hadzhi, 1998).

Another form of education, which concerns high school age Muslims, but also younger and older ones, are the courses on the Koran. Such courses are offered regularly. In 1998 alone, there were around 100 courses organized in the 10 muftis’ districts (Karamolla, 1998). Many of those courses were held by students from the Muslim high schools, who had taken part in a course given by Muslim teachers from Turkey earlier in 1998.

## **6.3. Official position**

For the first time after the collapse of Communism, the Christian religion was introduced as an optional subject in the primary schools of Bulgaria in the 1997/1998 academic year. Starting in the academic year 1998/1999, this kind of education was extended to the level of secondary education. There are still no separate classes on Islam. Currently, Muslim leaders and the Directorate of Religious Affairs are discussing the introduction of education on Islam as an optional subject in state schools (Chakir, 1998).

#### **6.4. Activists' initiatives**

Muslim leaders, Bulgarian state officials and the Bulgarian public are united around the opinion that Islamic foundations from different Arabic countries have a very negative influence on the Bulgarian Muslims, since such foundations allegedly preach “non-traditional” Islam. Reportedly, this type of Islam includes the veiling of girls and women, different ways of praying, and intolerance towards other religions.

The image of these organizations is obscured by the lack of precise information about them. Muslim leaders, although speaking about “sects,” do not dare go into details. The press writes about the “Muslim brotherhoods” and their “evil” spread throughout Bulgaria. The mass media have published the names of some of these organizations, not necessarily connecting them with the “Muslim brotherhoods.” These are: Al-Vakif Islami, Menar, Irshad, Islamic Relief Foundations, Marshal, and others, which were denied re-registration in 1994 under the *Law on the Persons and the Family*. Up to now, these organizations have not shown any signs of “terrorist Islamic fundamentalism” (Kanev, 1998).

Some of these foundations and activists work in cooperation with the regional muftis' offices, while others work on their own. The latter has been true mostly after they were officially banned by the state in 1994. Nevertheless, the press (*Kontinent*, 13/1/95, *168 Chassa*, 3-9/7/95, *Douma*, 11/7/98) and scholars, who wanted to remain nameless, claim that part of the Muslim spiritual leadership had succumbed to the foundations' pressure. This is attributed to the miserable economic status of the official Muslim bodies in Bulgaria.

#### **6.5. Present situation at different levels**

##### **6.5.1. Nursery school and primary education**

There are no special Islamic schools for small children.

##### **6.5.2. Secondary education**

There are three Islamic private high schools in Bulgaria - in Shoumen and Rouse in northeastern Bulgaria and in Momchilgrad in southeastern Bulgaria. The Islamic school in Rouse is mixed, but boys and girls study separately. In the 1997/1998 academic year, 60 per cent of all students were girls. The two other schools are for boys only. Altogether, around 350-380 children attend these schools annually (Yalimov, 1998).

The three schools were sponsored until recently by the Turkish Marmara Foundation through its branches in Bulgaria, the Dunav' 94 Foundation and the Balkani Foundation. The new July 1998 agreement between the Bulgarian and the Turkish directorates of religious affairs canceled the contract. The argument of the Chief Mufti's Office was that

it wants to protect the young Muslims from the influence of “sects,” as well as to benefit from good teachers from Turkish state schools in the future. Some foundations from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been approached to be sponsors of these schools, but the discussions are not finalized yet (*Demokratiya*, 10/7/98).

The status of the three schools is similar to that of the foreign language high schools in Bulgaria, i.e. there are many secular disciplines taught. Therefore, children graduating from these schools can go to any university and not only to the Islamic Institute for Higher Theology in Sofia. The special curriculum includes subjects such as the Holy Koran, interpretations of the Koran, History of Islam, Arabic Language, Islamic Law, Ethics, and others (Yalimov, 1998).

Children can go to these schools only after the explicit agreement of their parents. The students live in dormitories where they are given food free of charge. Occasionally, mainly during the *Kurban Bayram* religious festivities, Arab donors gave out need-based and academic achievement scholarships (Yalimov, 1998).

### **6.5.3. Higher education and research**

The Islamic Institute is the only school of Muslim higher theology in Bulgaria. It is private. It was created in 1990 as an institution with a semi-higher education status. Its status puts it on the same basis as the Institute for Pedagogical Studies and of the Library Institute, for example. The semi-higher educational institutions are a remnant of the Communist time. Now the state is going through a major transformation of the system, creating Bachelor and Master degree programs in the Bulgarian universities. The status and the duration of study at these institutions have changed. The Islamic Institute, for example, was closed down as a semi-higher education institution and was supposed to be reestablished as a higher education institution in 1998. However, until August 1999, the Parliament had not passed a law establishing it officially as an institution of higher education. Thus, the Islamic Institute continues to operate, but its graduation certificates have validity only before the Muslim community in Bulgaria and not before the Bulgarian state (Kanev, 1999). In the 1998/1999 academic year there were 50-60 people studying, 25 of them as full-time students, and the rest, as part-time ones. Out of the total number of students, there were between 15 and 18 female students. Two teachers from Turkey were expected to teach in it during the same academic year. There are also Bulgarian specialists on Islam in the faculty (Yalimov, 1998).

The main aim of the Institute is to educate future Muslim spiritual leaders - muftis and imams. Furthermore, other students are expected to become teachers at the three high schools and at the state schools, provided Islamic classes are introduced sometime in the future. Female graduates qualify only for teachers.

The curriculum of the Islamic Institute builds upon the curricula of the Islamic high schools. Some subjects, such as the Holy Koran and the interpretations of the Koran, are studied in greater detail. This is also true of the Arabic language, Islamic law (mainly

family law), ethics and culture. There are some new subjects such as Islamic cosmology, Islamic dogma and paleography, history of religions, current history of the Islamic states, and the Ottoman Turkish language. One can also choose to study some optional courses: Bulgarian history and language, Turkish language, or a West European language. The duration of study towards a Bachelor's degree is four years (eight semesters) and towards a Master's degree is an additional year and a half (a total of eleven semesters) (Yalimov, 1998).

The research opportunities at the Sofia-based Islamic Institute are insufficient. It does not yet have either its own building or library. Therefore, further research cannot be built upon any serious archives. Rich information on Islam can be obtained through Bulgarian libraries, or through libraries of other institutes abroad. Up to now there have been only a few people specializing in Turkey or in other Islamic countries. Chief Mufti Mustafa Hadzhi, for example, studied in Jordan.

## **7. COMMUNICATION AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA**

### **7.1. Legal situation**

See 6.2.

### **7.2. Press**

There are three newspapers in Bulgaria that focus on Muslim issues. These are the monthly *Musulmanlar* (*Muslims*), the publication of the Chief Mufti's Office; the weekly *Zaman* (*Time*), which is the Bulgarian edition of the eponymous publication in Istanbul and the monthly magazine *Umit* (*Hope*), which is published by the Balkani Foundation chaired by a Turkish citizen (Yalimov, 1998:49).

*Musulmanlar* has been published since 1990. It has editions in Turkish and Bulgarian, which have the same content. During the split in the Muslim leadership in 1992-1997 it was published in two versions by the two leaderships (Yalimov, 1998:48). Since the end of the split it has been published in a single version. The publication is scheduled to be monthly, but in practice it appears rarely due to financial problems. It focuses mainly on issues of religion, religious education, and religious politics. In the last edition -July, 1998- for example, among the things covered are the ongoing problems with the former Mufti, Nedim Gendzhev, and the visits of the current Chief Mufti abroad.

*Zaman* has been published since 1992 and *Umit* - since 1995. Currently, *Zaman* has six pages in Turkish and six in Bulgarian (Yumerov, 1998), while *Umit* has eight pages in Turkish and four in Bulgarian. The two publications focus on different aspects of religious issues. While *Zaman* deals with Islamic dogmas and rites, *Umit* is more dedicated to the Islamic way of life in general (Yalimov, 1998:50). Around 1994 both publications developed an interest to also cover domestic issues concerning the lives of Muslims in Bulgaria. Both dedicate space to the coverage of secular topics. *Zaman* in particular

treated widely the conflict in former Yugoslavia (Yalimov, 1998:51) and dedicated a lot of space to Bulgarian-Turkish relations on different levels (Yumerov, 1998).

The organ of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms *Prava i Svobodi (Rights and Freedoms)* has been published since February 1991 both in Turkish and Bulgarian. It is dedicated to secular topics, mainly in the field of domestic and international politics. The newspaper covers the Muslim holidays -*Ramadan* and *Bayram*- as well as issues concerning the Islamic schools in Bulgaria (Yalimov, 1998:43). It covered in a very detailed way the rift between the two rival Muslim leaderships, but since the unification conference of October 1997 the publication has not been that actively involved in the Mufti's affairs (Chaushev, 1998).

### **7.3. Radio**

There are no Turkish, Bulgarian Muslims or Roma private radio stations in Bulgaria. The only way information on Islam is spread is through the Bulgarian National Radio's broadcasts in Turkish. These are broadcast twice a day for half an hour. The programs are prepared in Sofia and the signal is then transmitted to regional radio stations (Ivanov, 1998). However, religious topics are rarely covered (Hadzhi, 1998). With the new electronic media law of November 1998, it is expected that the programs in Turkish on the national radio will become more numerous, but it is yet unclear how they would be shaped and by whom. The policy will be most probably designed either by the National Council on Radio and Television or by the boards of directors of the respective media.

### **7.4. Television**

The Chief Mufti has the right to address the Muslim believers on national TV during major religious festivities. However, the procedure is quite complicated, since the Mufti has to write a special letter to the board of directors of Bulgarian National TV and to obtain their permission (Hadzhi, 1998).

### **7.5. Internet**

[www.online.bg/politics/who/govern/parpart/dps/htm](http://www.online.bg/politics/who/govern/parpart/dps/htm)

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Muslims in Bulgaria are 13 per cent of the whole population. They are predominantly Sunni, but there is a small group of Shiite Muslims, called Alevis (Alians) or Kizilbashi. The relations between the two groups are normal and relatively unproblematic. The religious practices of the Sunnis are more visible to the wider public than those of the Shiites.

The roots of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria can be traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars are not unanimous on the issue of whether Islam had been present in Bulgaria before the time of the Ottoman conquest in 1396, or came along with the invaders. Moreover, there is not a unanimous opinion on how the further Islamization of the population took place. Islam is thus said to have been imposed either forcefully or voluntarily on the indigenous people, or brought by some colonizers from Anatolia during the times of internal migrations within the Ottoman Empire. Alevis are believed to have been sent to exile by the Ottomans to Bulgaria in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and to be a synthetic population containing Iranian, Kurdish, Turkish and Bulgarian elements. However there are disputes over their origins, some sources claim that they were the first-line shock troops that came into the Balkans as “gazis” before the regular Ottoman military and administration arrived around the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

After Bulgaria’s liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1878, the state had to respect minority rights. This was stated explicitly in the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties, which defined the terms of the liberation of the country. Religion was separated from the state and the principle for respecting religious minority rights prevailed both in international and domestic legislation. This situation started changing gradually at the time of the Congress of Vienna in 1915 and especially after the First World War with the 1919 Treaty of Neuilly. However, during that period, the Bulgarian Turnovo Constitution, respecting the religious principle, was still the law of the land until it was replaced by the first Communist constitution of 1947.

Between 1878 and the Communist takeover in 1944, the Muslims of Bulgaria -ethnic Turks, Bulgarian Muslims (sometimes designated with the term Pomaks) and Muslim Roma- were treated in a relatively benign way. During the rule of the Agrarian government of Alexander Stamboliiski in 1920-1923, they were given broader rights than they had had in other periods. The junta regime of 1923 started supporting the Muslim leadership, which was oriented towards preserving the Islamic identity of its believers against the influence of Turkish nationalism after Kemal Ataturk started his secularist reforms in Turkey. However, Muslims faced some pressures. Bulgarian Muslims in particular were exposed to pressures to change their faith during the time of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913 and in the early 1940s. All Muslims suffered under the restrictive anti-Islamic regime of the junta that came to power after 1934.

While Muslims enjoyed some rights with respect to their religion before 1944, this was not the case after the Communist takeover. Along with the battle launched against all religions, the new regime targeted Islam in particular as a religion that had retarded the development of the Bulgarian people and civilization during the five centuries of Ottoman rule. It was also stated that Islam prevented believers from adopting a new, modern and “progressive” socialist identity. Anti-Islamic propaganda was typical for the first decade after 1944. Later on the state started closing down the Islamic schools. It also penetrated the religious leadership by infiltrating its own loyalists into the system. Anti-Islamic sentiments became quite strong with the rise of Bulgarian Communist nationalism after

1971 and especially during the name-changing campaign targeting the Turks in 1984-1989.

Using a lot of violence and backed by academic nationalism and the security services, the Communist officials changed the Muslim names of the ethnic Turks and prohibited them from professing Islam. Religious festivities like *Ramadan* and *Kurban Bayram* had been banned for some time, but now, the Turks were not banned from practicing some of their most private rituals. Circumcision and traditional clothing were prohibited and violators of these regulations were given large fines. The Muslim burial rituals were also banned. Instead of that, a new socialist ritual had to be adopted. According to it, Muslims and Christians had to be buried in common cemeteries. Many of the existing mosques were destroyed and turned into museums. The Koran was neither printed in the country, nor imported from abroad.

The Muslims' resistance to these totalitarian policies was quite low-key in the initial phase of Communism. With the rise of Bulgarian nationalism it was pursued on an individual level. Of the three ethnic groups professing Islam, ethnic Turks were the most hesitant to succumb to governmental pressures. A Turkish underground movement was reported to have existed as early as 1985, but its activities stopped short because its activists were betrayed and imprisoned. It was not until the new political currents of *perestroika*, launched first in the Soviet Union and spread to Eastern Europe in the second half of the 1980s, that resistance became more organized under the banner of some human rights organizations. Some smaller organizations were established particularly to defend the rights of the Turks.

The authorities suppressed demonstrations in May 1989 by ethnic Turks in northern Bulgaria. The hunger strikes of some Turks did not provoke any positive reaction on the part of the government. Instead of that, the regime opened the borders with Turkey and let everybody who wanted to emigrate to do so. The result was the mass exodus of around 330,000 Turks, half of whom remained in Turkey, and the other half returned due to discontent with the treatment there.

The 1989 emigration wave was not an isolated phenomenon in the Muslims' history. Big emigrations of Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) took place during and right after the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, as well as during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. Even though emigration was not prohibited afterwards, during the Second World War it was minimal. The collectivization of property, carried out in the first decade of Communism, provoked a new big emigration wave. Later on, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims left the country according to a special agreement between Bulgaria and Turkey that expired in 1978. The assimilation campaign and the restriction on emigration between 1978 and 1989 made the "Big Excursion" the biggest outflow of Muslims from Bulgaria in its modern history.

The May-August 1989 flow of large numbers of people from the country created ethnic tension and speeded up the political developments that led to the downfall of the Zhivkov

regime on November 10, 1989. On December 29, 1989 the new Communist government, following demonstrations by Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and human rights organizations in the capital, issued a decision which allowed the Muslims of Bulgaria to restore their names and their right to profess Islam openly.

Even though November 10, 1989 is considered to be the demarcation line between Communism and Post-communism in Bulgaria, it is only too natural that it did not lead to an overnight societal change. Hostilities between Bulgarians and Turks have continued to plague their relationships for some time afterwards.

In general, Muslims in Bulgaria have been enjoying many rights since 1989. They have no problems with practicing Islam. The Constitution proclaims the freedom of religion and creed. None of the religious leaders interviewed mentioned any restrictions on religious practice on the part of the state. The Muslims have more houses of worship per capita than the Orthodox Christians. Since 1989 many new mosques have been built. There is only one case reported where the building of a mosque was not allowed. Muslims have three private high schools and one school of higher Islamic theology opened and regulated by the Muslim community itself. The Holy Koran is available. Muslims also have their private print media, as well as political representation in Parliament consisting of the secular ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Also the social gaps between Bulgarians and Muslims have become smaller over the course of the 1990s.

However, Muslims are still far from being completely integrated into the Bulgarian society. The Constitution prohibits the formation of parties along ethnic and religious lines, and restricts freedom of conscience on five grounds, one of them related to "national security." Although some provisions of the 1949 *Denominations Act* were changed by a 1992 Decision of the Constitutional Court, it seems that this law still needs to be changed. First, religious leaders attack it, because it obligates the religious denominations and their schools to register with the executive, and not with the court. Second, even according to state officials, the wording of the Act related to procedures is not clear enough.

Muslims face other problems as well. Due to the involvement of the state and politicians in their affairs, their leadership was split between 1992 and 1997. This rift was one of the major problems for the complete restitution of the *vakif* property, which could be the biggest financial source for the now cash-strapped Muslim community. The lack of sufficient financial sources also impedes the development of Muslim education. The Islamic Institute in Sofia and the high school in Momchilgrad do not have their own buildings. Religious leaders are concerned that the financial crisis paves the way for rich Islamic organizations to spread a different form of Islam, which is not traditional for the Muslims in Bulgaria. Many of these organizations were not allowed to register in 1994 in accordance with the *Law on the Person and the Family*. A Muslim school in Rouse was closed down in 1996, and in 1997 the police stopped a seminar on Islamic religion.

Muslims still have problems with the majority. Although the 1984-1989 assimilation campaign is viewed by the majority of Bulgarians as a crime, social gaps between the two

confessional groups still exist. However, they are predominated by ethnic division and not by the religious one. Bulgarians often view Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and Roma as people who cannot be trusted or as an undetermined mass of people. This is to a great extent contradictory, especially in respect to the population in mixed areas, since Bulgarians and Muslims have traditionally good neighborly relations. Although over the 1990s, the press has become relatively tolerant towards Islam, there are still cases of "hate speech." This is especially true when the media treat the Islamic organizations branded as "sects," which spread non-traditional Islam. Out of all Muslim ethnic groups, Bulgarian Muslims have the best image in the press. Turks are still a subject of contradictory coverage, with a stress on the negative. The media's attitude towards the Roma is very negative. It is based much more on the Roma ethnic and social status than on their religious affiliation.

Regardless of all the negative developments one cannot fail to notice a new trend launched in early September 1998. Addressing a forum of the currently ruling United Democratic Forces (UDF) in Pamporovo (southern Bulgaria) on September 6, Prime Minister Ivan Kostov said that the UDF and the local governments must give priority to the integration of the national minorities into the Bulgarian society (RFE/RL, 8/9/98). This move has at least two reasons. The main reason is that local elections are coming in the fall of 1999. The votes of some regions traditionally go to the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). By giving administrative posts to minorities, however, the UDF could outmaneuver the MRF as a rival party. This policy could be successful because poverty among the Muslims has for some time undermined the MRF's political influence.

The second reason for the new governmental program on the integration of minorities is the fact that the ratification of the Council of Europe's *Framework Convention on the National Minorities* by the Bulgarian Parliament was in February 1999. Since the question of the national minorities is still quite a sensitive topic on the domestic scene, this is also a move to educate the Bulgarian public. Some media speculated that all this was a well-thought-of strategy. The Prime Minister was better off informing the public that important administrative posts were already occupied by minorities before the Convention was adopted than to say that he did so in order to comply with a Convention imposed from abroad (24 Chassa, 11/09/98).

It is still unclear whether this state policy will come into effect and, if so, how successful it would be. Disregarding all traditional maneuvering around political decisions, this might be the first chance for some representatives of the minorities to get seriously involved in local administration. Most probably, they will be politically closer to the Movement for Renewal of the MRF led by Gyuner Tahir than to the core of the MRF led by Ahmed Dogan. Furthermore, in mid-December 1998, Tahir was elected the leader of the alternative ethnic Turkish party in Bulgaria, called the National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (NDPS).

## ADDRESSES

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

- Current information on the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria  
Mr. Mustafa Hadzhi, Chief Mufti  
address: Chief Mufti's Office, 27, Bratia Miladinovi St., 1000 Sofia  
tel. (00359 2) 981-60-01
- Mr. Huseyn Karamolla, Head of the Supreme Muslim Council  
address: Chief Muft's Office, 27, Bratia Miladinovi St., 1000 Sofia,  
tel. (00359 2) 981-60-01
- Mr. Ali Hairaddin, Mufti of Sofia  
address: Chief Mufti's Office, 27, Bratia Miladinovi St., 1000 Sofia,  
tel. (00359 2) 980-69-73
- Mr. Ali Hadzhi Sadik, Mufti of Plovdiv  
address: 1, Sofroniy Vrachanski St., 4000 Plovdiv  
tel:(00359 32) 62-31-09
- Mr. Bilial Mehmed, Mufti of Dobrich  
address: 10, Kniaz Dondukov St., 9300 Dobrich  
tel:(00359 58) 3-68-27
- Mr. Ibrahim Kiorpe, Mufti of Aitos  
address: 1, Tsar Osvoboditel St., 8500 Aitos  
tel:(00359 558) 63-64, 58-64
- Mr. Mehmed Allia, Mufti of Razgrad  
address: 13, Aprilsko Vazstanie St., 7200 Razgrad  
tel:(00359 84) 2-23-73
- Mr. Nasuf Nasuf, Mufti of Kurdzhali  
address: 3, Momchil Voivoda St., 6600 Kurdzhali  
tel:(00359 361) 2-18-32
- Mr. Osman Ismail, Mufti of Shoumen  
address: 2, Dimitar Blagoev St., 9700 Shoumen  
tel:(00359 54) 5-72-51, 5-03-59
- Mr. Shifket Hadzhi, Mufti of Smolyan  
address: 3 Chinara St., 4700 Smolyan  
tel:(00359 301), 3-37-02, 3-22-37
- Mr. Dzhemal Hamid, Mufti of Gotse Delchev  
address: 4, Ilia Batakliiev St., 2900 Gotse Deltchev

tel:(00359 751) 2-55-70

- Mr. Basri Pechlivan, Mufti of Pleven  
tel:(00359 64) 2-80-47

## **2. Minority institutions and/or associations concerning education**

- Institute of Islamic Studies,  
Mr. Ibrahim Yalimov, Rector  
18a, Stefan Stambolov St., tel. (00359 2) 981-64-15, fax (00359 2) 980-55-51
- Islamic school in the town of Shoumen  
Mr. Hilmi Embiev, Director  
tel:(00359 54) 50-259, 50-359
- Islamic school in the town of Rouse  
Mr. Namik Agushev, Director  
tel:(00359 82) 222-392
- Islamic School in Momchilgrad  
Mr. Abdul Kadir Abdishev, Director  
tel:(00359 631) 3194

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

- Movement for Rights and Freedom  
Ahmed Dogan, Chair of the Central Operative Bureau  
45A, Alexander Stamboliiski St., Sofia  
tel:(00359 2) 87-69-13

## **4. Minority media**

### *Radio stations*

### *Newspapers*

- *Prava i Svobodi* newspaper  
Mr. Ismail Chaushev, Editor-in-Chief  
address: 45A, Alexander Stamboliiski St., 1000 Sofia  
tel:(00359 2) 988-52-91, 981-53-13
- *Zaman* newspaper  
Mr. Salih Ildici, Editor-in-Chief  
address: 31, Gladston St., 1st floor, 1000 Sofia  
tel:(00359 2) 980-17-82

### *Magazines*

- *Umit* magazine  
Yusuf Kerim, Editor-in-Chief  
tel:(00359 2) 882 881
- *Television Stations*  
*Internet Web Sites*  
*Publishing Houses*

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