

Maeva, M. "Bulgarian Turks and the European Union." – In: Rusu, H. and B. Voicu (eds.) *EU Integration Process from EAST to EAST: Civil Society and Ethnic Minorities in a Changing World. Proceedings from a Round Table for young Social Scientists*. Sibiu: Psihomedica Publ. House, 2005, 119-126.

## **BULGARIAN TURKS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The aim of the article is to show the changes, which have occurred in the status of the Bulgarian Turks in Bulgaria after the fall of the communist regime in November 1989. Before that, however, I would like to take a brief retrospective look at the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) for this minority during the 1944 - 1989 period.

The policy of the BCP to the Bulgarian Turks after it came to power in 1944 has been changed many times and is in compliance with the lack of a well-defined course from the preceding period after the restoration of the Bulgarian State in 1878. It is not possible to talk about a hard-line policy to the Bulgarian Turks, as well as to the other minority groups, such as the gypsies, Bulgarian Muslims, Jews, Armenians, etc.<sup>1</sup> In general, the ethnic policy of the BCP swung like a pendulum from the provision of rights to periodical waves of emigration to the attempts for accession and enforced assimilation<sup>2</sup>.

The real turn in the status of the Bulgarian Turks came in the spring of 1984, when the concept for the change of their native names was approved. This was followed for an enforced action for the changing of their names in December and January<sup>3</sup>. Numerous prohibitions were implemented, which restricted the rights of the minorities: talking in Turkish in public places, wearing the traditional Muslim clothes, practicing the Islamic traditions and rituals (e.g. Bayrams, Muslim marriage rituals and circumcision), even listening to Turkish music and dancing Turkish dances (Kyochek)<sup>4</sup>. Publications in Turkish language were discontinued. The ideological basis for this process was made public only after the end of the campaign for the changing of the names in 1988. The action was referred to as "Revival Process", since it was considered as a part of the "Renaissance, which never happened" of the Turkish population. The Turks in Bulgaria were announced comprise "assimilated by enforcement during the Turkish yoke Bulgarians", who must find their "real" identity. The final aim was to create a "unified socialist Bulgarian nation"<sup>5</sup>. As a result of this Process, between 310 and 370 thousand of Turks left Bulgaria in the summer of 1989 during the cynically referred to by the authorities "Big Vacation Trip"<sup>6</sup>.

After the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria in November 1989, changes occurred in the status of the Turkish population in the country. Since the first opposition meetings after November 1989 requests were voiced for the reinstatement of the “Turkish-Arabic names”<sup>7</sup>. After long debates and inspired by the BCP nationalist protests, the Reinstatement of the Names Act was voted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1990. By the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1991, more than 600 000 applications were processed and approved<sup>8</sup>.

As compared to the reinstatement of the names, a lot more problems occurred with reference to the rights to use and study the native language. Nonetheless, the new Constitution, voted in 1991, provides for the rights of the “*citizens, for whom the Bulgarian language is not native, are entitled simultaneously with the compulsory studying of the Bulgarian language to study and use their native language*” (Art. 36, clause 3)<sup>9</sup>. According to the Constitution, “*everyone is entitled to use the national and generally human cultural values, as well as to develop one’s culture according to one’s ethnic origins, which is accepted and guaranteed by the laws*” (Art. 54, clause 1)<sup>10</sup>. In compliance with the above provisions of the Constitution, in November 1991 the Government issues a decree for the implementation from 3<sup>rd</sup> till 8<sup>th</sup> grades of 4 hours per week study of the native language as a voluntarily selected subject. Later on, this subject was implemented for study as of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (as of 1994). Initially, the students used Turkish school books, but in 1996 the Ministry of Education and Science began publishing Bulgarian editions of the required school books.

In order to provide for the religious education and the training of Islamic spiritual leaders, the Islamic College at the Office of the Chief Mufti was established in 1990. Later on, 4 secondary Islamic schools were established in the country, as well<sup>11</sup>.

As regards the printed publications of the Turkish minority, some developments can be observed during the post-communist period. Since 1990, the published till then only in Bulgarian newspaper “Nova Svetlina” (“New Light”) became bilingual. Other publications for the Turkish minority began to appear, such as “Prava i svobodi” (“Rights and Freedom”), “Hak ve isgurluk”, “Guven”, etc.<sup>12</sup> Much later, as late as 2001, the broadcasting of news in Turkish began by the Bulgarian National TV, as well as individual broadcasts being made in Turkish on the “Hristo Botev” Program of the Bulgarian National Radio.

All of the above changes in the status of the Bulgarian Turks would have been much more difficult without the participation of its representatives in the management of the country. Immediately after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the members of the illegal until then “Turkish National Freedom Movement of Bulgaria” gathered and decided on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1990 to cast the foundations of the “Movement for Rights and Freedom” (MRF) as an independent,

individual political organization. On the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1990, the National Founding Conference of the MRF was convened in Sofia. Two alternatives for the program were presented. The first was the “Program Declaration of the MRF for the Turks and the Muslims of Bulgaria”, and the second was the “Program Declaration of the MRF”. One of them expresses the idea for the unification of the Turks and the Muslims. According to the words of the movement members, “this is a consequence of the attempt for the separate assimilation of the totalitarian regime on the basis of ethnic and religious principles – division of the minorities and weakening of their resistance capabilities.” The accent in the other program declaration was on the common national characteristics of the MRF.

The elections for the Great Parliament were held on the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1990.<sup>13</sup> The MRF succeeded in having 23 Members of Parliament elected to the same. Since then, the Movement has become the third political force at the Bulgarian Parliament. At present, the MRF has 20 MP’s at the Parliament<sup>14</sup>.

The movement also plays an active role in the local municipal management throughout the country. After the local elections in October 2003, the Municipal Mayors, elected by the ballot of the MRF amounted to 29, while local Mayors numbered 549<sup>15</sup>.

All of the above leads to the conclusions that for the last 15 years Bulgaria has achieved a lot in improving the status of the Bulgarian Turks. Our country makes significant efforts to adjust our legislation in compliance with the European legal standards, to establish sustainable democratic institutions, and to develop its civil society. This is aided by the accession to the Council of Europe and the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1992.<sup>16</sup> The Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities was also ratified (in 1999). In synchronization with the requirements of the EU on the rights of the minorities, our Parliament voted to implement the Protection from Discrimination Act (2003). The National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues also tries to resolve the problems of the Turkish minority in the country (since 1997).

However, there are a lot of not yet resolved problems. It has to be noted with reference to the legislation, that the Protection from Discrimination Act is not enforced. The reason for the above is the failure to incorporate the required authority body to perform the control in accordance with the requirements of the EU, namely, the State Agency for the Minorities. There are also a lot of problems remaining with reference to the education of the Turkish minorities – shortage of qualified teachers, speaking good Turkish, and of updated school books and aid in the native Turkish language; unsatisfactory learning of the taught at school due to insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language; insufficient range of education of the children in Turkish language and

unsatisfactory level of teaching quality; ethnic centrism in the contents of the educational agenda and teaching methods, which forms a negative attitude to the Turkish minority; difficult adaptation of the children of Turkish origin at the kindergartens and primary schools<sup>17</sup>.

The main issue, however, remains the elaboration and approval of a strategy for the development of the underdeveloped from economic point of view regions with a compact minority, Turkish in this case, population. Notwithstanding the fact that the elaboration and approval of such a strategy comprised a part of the program of the current Government, no efforts to resolve this issue are to be observed<sup>18</sup>. As of date, the unemployment rates in the regions with a mixed population reach 80%. This year, the project for the Urbanization and Social Development of the Regions with Prevailing Minority Population has been started (2003). However, this project is very small and will affect not more than 2000 persons<sup>19</sup>.

The general impression is that even though the Turkish population has been given certain rights throughout the country, its economic status has dropped sharply after the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria. The reasons for this lie in the fact that the transition to the market economy has led to high inflation and unemployment rates, restrictive credit and taxing policies, as well as low production levels. The regions with a mixed population are characterized by less investments and lower income levels, as well as higher dependence on state subsidies, as compared to the average values for the country as a whole. The less developed infrastructure, the privatization of the land, and the differences in the educational and professional profiles of the Turkish minority communities affect adversely the constantly worsening economic status of these communities<sup>20</sup>. After 1989, the state withdrew its support for the small textile and sewing companies, established in the regions with a mixed population, while the constant problems in the field of tobacco production and grain production additionally weigh down the economic status of the Turkish minority<sup>21</sup>.

The critical economic situation and the limited employment market in Bulgaria have forced the Turkish population to seek other ways to provide for its food. New migration practices appeared after 1989 among the ethnic Turks. These are directed along two lines – the EU and Turkey. I would like to discuss in more detail the seasonal migration to Western Europe. It includes both Bulgarian Turks and Turks, who for one reason or another, reside permanently in Turkey. It has to be noted that the seasonal migration is not something new for the Bulgarian Turks, who have had long-term traditions in practicing the same within the framework of the Bulgarian State.

The main countries of destination for the seasonal search for jobs of the Turks in Western Europe are Belgium, Germany, Greece, Holland, and Sweden. This migration grew even more after the discontinuation of the requirements to hold a visa for Bulgarian citizens since April 2001.

The seasonal employment migration of the Turkish minority has certain specific characteristics. First, its aim is not a permanent residence in the EU. It is illegal and is generally within the terms of the three-month permitted stay without a visa in the countries of the EU. The employment migration is illegal, because the Bulgarian Turks work without holding official work permits. It also has to be noted that the seasonal search for employment in the EU is characteristic of the men. Family couples migrate in certain cases, more rarely – lone women, and even more rarely – unmarried girls. The reason for the above may be found in the fact that the unemployment among the Turkish population in Bulgaria is higher among the men, than among the women. The larger part of the women are employed in small textile plants in Bulgaria, which provide them with a minimum, but regular income for their families. Last, but not the least reason for the male migration comes from the traditionally strict family control and the aims to maintain the typical for the Turkish ethnos moral lifestyle.

Most Turkish villages have already established their own “colonies” in the larger Western European cities. They use well-established routes. Something else is characteristic of the Turks, who reside permanently in Turkey. Most of them prefer to come back to their native places and go to Western Europe from there. The reason for this lies in the belief that the joint employment migration with the common villagers provides a certain feeling of support and security in the foreign country.

One cannot miss the impression that the compact Turkish villages are very well organized for the export of workers. They have established means of transport and accommodation in the selected western city. This saves a lot of problems during the trips to the large cities for the purchase of tickets and useless expenditures. The money can be repaid only after a job has been found.

Most of the immigrants prefer illegal jobs since, according to their opinion, they are better paid. They do not complain of the heavy work loads and the often long working hours. The basic jobs occupied by the Turks in Western Europe are in the field of qualified laborers in construction and related to construction activities. According to the opinion of the immigrants, they are welcomed by the local residents as workers to perform the dirty work, since the local residents rarely engage in unqualified work.

In general, the employment immigrants live several persons in a common home, with the selection of the roommates being generally based on blood relations or the common village origins. They generally avoid gathering in large groups in order to avoid the attention of the neighbors and the police.

It is an interesting fact that some of the Turks prefer to travel, using their Bulgarian names, due to the negative attitudes in the West with reference to Muslims. This is especially valid for the Bulgarian Turks, who are now permanent residents in Turkey. The change from the Turkish names to the Bulgarian ones also is made in cases of having a black stamp in the passport and a prohibition to work in the EU. In some cases, such immigrants have even succeeded in changing their Unified ID numbers.

Most of the immigrants are employed by Turkish or other Muslim entrepreneurs, who are permanent residents of the respective West European country. In this way, language problems are avoided, but the people do not learn the local language, notwithstanding their long-term work there.

At this stage, the migration to the EU is fully oriented towards the home and the relatives in their country of origin. In the destination country, the immigrants live very frugally and send most of their income home<sup>22</sup>. Initial terrain studies among such immigrants, who have returned to Bulgaria, indicate that these incomes are used mostly for domestic needs. The bravest “investments” till date comprise the acquisition of real-estate properties in the nearest towns, but no cases of development of one’s own business with the saved money from the months of immigration have been registered as yet. Without knowing the language, being very restricted in their social contacts, the immigrants do not inter-relate with the new environment, they do not learn anything about the same and, respectively, they do not bring home any new economic or social experiences<sup>23</sup>.

Finally, I would like to discuss the way the Bulgarian Turks look on the EU and how they see its image. First of all, they relate the EU to the better economic conditions and the higher standards of life. Second, they point out the respect for the rights of the minorities – the possibilities for ethnic and religious self-determination.

The Bulgarian Turks indicate as an important factor the quick accession of Bulgaria into the EU, as well. The main reason for this comes from the economic advantages and the achievement of higher standards of life. The Bulgarian Turks also are interested in the accession of Turkey to the European structures. This, for them, is a strategic move, which will expand the markets and change its image as an underdeveloped economically and culturally country. The reason for the slow progress of the negotiations between Turkey and the EU is pointed out in its numerous population, which causes the economic problems of the country<sup>24</sup>. Another reason for the difficulties on the road of Turkey’s accession to the EU lies in the fact that it is a Muslim country. This, however, is viewed as the main requirements for its accession into the European structures. The accession of Turkey into the EU is viewed by the communities of the Bulgarian Turks as a prerequisite for the successful defense against the Muslim organizations.

Another reason for the importance of the accession into the EU lies in the self-determination of the Bulgarian Turks as “Europeans” and their views that they are an integral of the European civilization<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, I would like to point out that even though Bulgaria has achieved a lot with reference to the rights of the Turkish minorities in the country and to the synchronization of the Bulgarian to the European legislation, there is still a lot to be done with reference to their economic status. Due to this unresolved problem, the migration of the ethnic Turks creates problems for the EU member-countries, while for this minority this is the only road to survival, to the maintenance of certain standards of life and social status in their country of origin.

---

1 Бюксеншютц, У. (2000). *Малцинствената политика в България. Политиката на БКП към евреи, роми, помаци и турци (1944-1989)*. София: МЦПМКВ; Василева, Д. (1992). Изселническият въпрос в българо-турските отношения. В: *Аспекти на етнокултурната ситуация в България* (с. 58-67). София: АКСЕС

2 Стоянов, В. (1998). *Турското население между полюсите на етническата политика*. София: Лик; Трифонов, С. (1991). Строго поверително! *Поглед*, 16-19; Eminov, A. (1990). Nationality Policy in the USSR and in Bulgaria: Some Observations. *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 19 (2) from [http://condor.depaul.edu/~rrotenbe/aeer/aeer9\\_2.html](http://condor.depaul.edu/~rrotenbe/aeer/aeer9_2.html); Petkova, L. (2002). The Ethnic Turks in Bulgaria: Social Integration and Impact on Bulgarian-Turkish Relations (1947-2000). *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 1(4), 42-59; Poulton, H. (1993). *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict* (pp. 119-171). London: Minority Rights Publications.

3 ЦДА, ф. 16, оп. 63, а. е. 72.

4 Eroğlu, H. (1986). The Question of Turkish Minority in Bulgaria from Perspective of International Law. In: *The Turkish Presence in Bulgaria* (pp. 59-90). Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi; Memişoğlu, Ş. (1989). *Bulgarian Oppression in Historical Perspective*. Ankara: Devran Matbaası Necatibey Cad; Şimşir, B. (1966). *Contribution a l'histoire des populations turques en Bulgarie (1876-1880)*. Ankara.

5 Живков, Т. (1988). Етнокултурно развитие на Възродителния процес. В: *Проблеми на развитието на българската народност и нация* (с. 127-143). София: БАН; Живков, Т. (1997). *Мемоари*. София: Сив” АД; Загорев, О. (1993). *Възродителният процес. Теза. Антитеза. (Отрицание на отрицанието)*. София; Михайлов, Ст. (1992). *Възрожденският процес в България*. София: М&М; Тахиров, Ш. (1981). *Единението*. София: ОФ.

6 Георгиева, Ив. (1993). “Възродителният процес” и “Голямата екскурзия” (Опит за орална история). В: *Етническата картина в България (проучвания 1992 г.)* (с. 105-109). София: Клуб’90; *Етническият конфликт в България през 1989 г. (1990)*. София: Профиздат; Желязкова, А. (ред.). (1997). *Между адаптацията и носталгията. Българските турци в Турция*. София: МЦПМКВ.

7 Стоянов, В. (2000) (1). По трудният път към възраждането – българските турци и мюсюлмани в отвоюване на малцинствените си права. В: Русанов, В. (съст.) *Аспекти на етнокултурната ситуация. Осем години по-късно* (с. 190-205). София: Аксес; Стоянов, В. (2000) (2). Българските мюсюлмани в годините на преход (1990-1997). Етнокултурни аспекти. *Исторически преглед*, 1-2, 112-173.

8 Кънев, Кр. 1998. Законодателство и политика към етническите и религиозните малцинства в България. В: Кръстева, А. (съст.) *Общности и идентичности в България* (с. 67-117). София.

9 Bulgarian Parliament. Retrieved: December 1994 from <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=const&lng=bg>.

10 Bulgarian Parliament. Retrieved: December 1994 from <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=const&lng=bg>.

11 Стоянов, В. (2000) (1). Ibid. (с. 195-202).

12 Ялъмов, И. (1998). Турският периодичен печат в България (1878-1996). В: *Периодичният печат на малцинствата в България (1878-1997)* (с. 6-67). София.

13 Двжинеие да права и свободи. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.dps.bg/bg/history/history2.php#1>.

14 Bulgarian Parliament. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=ns&lng=bg&nsid=5>.

15 Bulgarian Parliament. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=ns&lng=bg&nsid=5>.

16 Bulgarian local elections (October 2003). Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.izbori2003.is-bg.net/rez/partii.html>.

17 Bulgarian President’s speech. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.president.bg/slovo-43.php>.

18 National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Questions. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.ncedi.government.bg/>.

- 
- 19 Bulgarian Government's Program. Retrieved: December 2004 from <http://www.government.bg/Government/Program/397.html>.
- 20 UNDP. (1995). *National Human Development Report. Bulgaria* (pp.27-31).
- 21 Statistic for unemployment National Statistic Institute (1992).
- 22 Kabakchieva, P. R. Guentcheva, P. Kolarski, (2004). Migration Trends in Bulgaria. *IOM* (forthcoming publication).
- 23 Маева, М., М. Манчева. (2004). Миграция на български турци (1878-2004). В: Султанова, Р. (съст.). *Български миграции и миграционни движения от 80-те години на XX в. до днес. София*.
- 24 АЕИМ, № 574-III: 25.
- 25 АЕИМ, № 574-III: 18.