Ethnopolitics in Bulgaria
The Turkish, Macedonian, Pomak and Gypsy Minorities

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Introduction
According to the preliminary results of the 1992 census in Bulgaria, 15.9% of the country's 8.5 million inhabitants do not belong to the predominantly Christian-Orthodox and Slavic-speaking dominant ethnic group of the country's titular nation. However, this recent census concerning the country's ethnic composition — the results of which have not yet been completely made public — will most probably not give a realistic picture due to political interference and because of misleading ethnic self-declarations, particularly by Gypsies and Pomaks.

Most of the numerous non-dominant ethnic groups number less than 0.1% of the population (Alevites, Armenians, Albanians, Circassians, Czechs, Gagauz, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Karakachans, Romanians, Russians, Serbs, Tatars, Vlachs et al.). Two groups are of a medium size. The Pomaks number some 3% and the Macedonians an estimated 2% of the population. Two other groups are larger: The Turks number almost 10% and the Gypsies up to 7% of the population of Bulgaria. There is, however, no reliable source for all these figures. Former censuses either omitted ethnicity, whereas the results of the most recent census of December 1992 have not yet been completely made public. In the appended table a more detailed description is given.

Ethnic Structure and Major Ethnic Problems
From the late 1950s onwards, governmental policies towards non-dominant ethnic groups in Bulgaria were in general aimed at assimilation, and sometimes resorted to open repression, culminating in the violent name-changing campaigns of the early 1970s against the Pomaks and of the mid-1980s against the Turks. Thus, up to 1989 inter-ethnic relations and even more so relations between the state and most of the minorities were poor — a situation that changed only partly after the fall of communism. Both major political camps, the former Communists, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and the anti-Communists, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), instrumentalize nationalist bias in pursuing their political aims.

1. This article is an adapted version of a paper given at an expert consultation in connection with the work of the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Bentveld, the Netherlands, November 5-7, 1993. The text is based on sources quoted in the appended table and on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; European Archives: Bulgaria Today, Media News and Features Digest, Press Survey, no. 1773-1774, 18 and 19 October, 1993.
A result of ethnocentric agitation is the new constitution of July 13, 1991 — a document defining Bulgaria as the 'nationally and politically unified' state of the 'Bulgarian people'² and which grants only very limited rights to what is now called not ethnic minorities, but 'citizens, for whom the Bulgarian language is not their mother tongue'.³ The virtually only right provided is the one to 'learn their language and use it'⁴, while there are numerous provisions which prohibit any political activity carried out by organizations of ethnic minorities.⁵

While there are several serious cases of conflict between ethnic minorities and the state, so far there have been only a few cases of tension among the ethnic minorities themselves (Pomaks vs. Turks and all ethnic groups vs. Gypsies).

Seen from a political perspective and having in mind actual and potential dangers to the internal stability of Bulgaria and to the security situation in the Balkans in general, four of the country’s approximately 30 ethnic groups demand special attention:

(a) Turks: The majority of the country’s 822,253 almost exclusively Muslim Turks (1992) live compactly in two rural areas in the Northeast and Southeast (Deliorman/Ludogorie and Eastern Rhodopes).

(b) Pomaks: This group of Slavic speaking Muslims of unknown ethnic origin is estimated at present to number 250,000 to 300,000 persons and are settled in the Eastern, Central and Western Rhodopes and in the Pirin Region, all four areas bordering on Greece.

(c) Macedonians: This historically very young ethnic group of Slavic speaking Orthodox Christians, whose number can only roughly be estimated at around 150,000 people, inhabits the southwestern corner of the country bordering on Greece and Macedonia. There are also emigrés from Aegean Macedonia (today in Greece) and Vardar Macedonia (today’s Republic of Macedonia) living in most of Bulgaria’s larger towns. The preliminary 1992 census figure for Macedonians — 6,000, i.e., 0.07% — is definitely too low and has to be considered largely the result of intimidation by local authorities who force Macedonians to declare themselves ethnically as Bulgarians.

(d) Gypsies: The issue of the 560,000 to 610,000 Roma Gypsies — 61% Orthodox Christians and 39% Muslims — an ethnic group dispersed throughout all of the country and marginalized in almost every respect, is a challenge which so far none of the five post-1989 governments of the country, have tackled in earnest. In sharp contrast to Bulgaria’s other ethnic problems, that of the Gypsies is highly visible: In all Bulgarian towns and most of the villages there are Gypsy quarters and slums, and the catastrophic economic situation of their dwellers causes severe social tensions.

². Preamble of the Bulgarian Constitution.
³. Para. 36.2 of the Bulgarian Constitution.
⁴. Ibid.
⁵. Articles 11.4, 12.2 and 13.4.