

B U L G A R I A

SECTION A

Capital

Sofia 1,114,476 (1992 est.)

Area

110,910 sq km (42,823 sq mi).

Form of government

Republic

GDP—per capita

Purchasing power parity—\$4,300 (1999 est.)

Population

8,194,772 (July 1999 est.)

Ethnic composition

Bulgarian	85%
Turkish	9%
Other	6%

Official language

Bulgarian

Minority languages

Turkish, Romany, Vlach

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

Constitution of Bulgaria, Adopted on July 12, 1991

The Law on National Education

The Law on Higher Education

Language Law from 1991

The Bulgarian legislation does not contain references to the notion of “minority language”; instead the term “mother tongue” is used.

Background notes

A Slavic state, Bulgaria achieved independence in 1908 after 500 years of Ottoman rule. Bulgaria fought on the losing side in both World Wars. It fell within the Soviet sphere of influence after World War II. Communist domination ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR, and Bulgaria began the contentious process of moving toward political democracy and a market economy. In addition to the problems of structural economic reform, particularly privatization, Bulgaria faces the serious issues of keeping inflation under control, unemployment, combating corruption and curbing black-market and mafia-style crime.

In the Bulgarian Constitution the term minority is not used; instead minorities are referred to as “citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian”.

ROMA

A Large number of Roma arrived in the present day Bulgaria during the 13th and the 14th century. They came from the East and moved westward. According to “reasonably authenticated sources,” the Roma were first recorded to be present in the Rila Monastery, Bulgaria, in 1378. By the end of the 14th century, Roma had already established settlements in Bulgaria and throughout the Balkans. Although some theories argue for a much earlier settlement of Roma groups in Bulgaria (8th – 9th century), they are not convincing and are usually dismissed by specialists.

Some Roma specialists argue that there were documents available from 1422 and from 1630 that testified as to the Indian origin of the Romany language. According to other interpretations, the Romany language was unknown to the Europeans when they first came in close contact with the Roma in the middle Ages. The Roma’s nomadic way of life made them a great mystery to the local populations, and their language was one of those “mysteries” about them. It was not until the 18th century that the Indian origin of the Romany was discovered. It is interesting to note that the linguistic origins of their language have been used to determine the origin and migration of Roma themselves. The Roma is believed to have originated from the city of Kanauj of Northern India. Due to the extremely great number of language strata, dialects, sub-dialects and geographic divisions, some of its characteristics remain unknown to linguists even today.

Roma are present throughout Bulgaria, in both rural and urban areas. Areas where the Roma population constitutes more than 5% of the population are the districts of Vidin, Montana, Pazardzhik, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Dobrich, Turgovishte and Shumen. Only 3.7% (313,396) of the

Bulgarian population identifies itself as “Roma by ethnicity” according to the Census of 1992.

AROMANIAN (VLACH)

In Bulgaria, the Aromanian communities (some 2,000 or 3,000 people) live in the south, and some more in the capital city of Sofia. These communities are not to be confused with ethnic Romanians living in the north of the country, numbering some 20,000 or 30,000 people.

SECTION B

What does it cost in terms of money, time and government resources to police the country's language restrictions?

ROMA

The state has declared on numerous occasions that the problems of education in Romany stem from the minority's unwillingness to be educated in Romany rather than from the inefficiency of the educational system. However, blame has often been put on the state for not providing quality educational facilities and personnel to the Roma neighborhood schools, as well as not providing for the training of Romany-speaking teachers. An interesting regulation regarding language use is the prohibition of the use of any other language other than Bulgarian during visitation hours in prisons, and allowing the use of a translator at the expense of the imprisoned. A significant number of Bulgarian Roma faces this problem. This is due to the fact that older Roma sometimes do not speak Bulgarian, while prisoners are rarely able to afford a translator, the communication possibilities for the Roma inmates are limited.

The 1996 Law on Radio and Television seemed to put an end to any hopes for broadcasts in minority languages as it included a requirement that broadcasts could be transmitted only in Bulgarian. The amendments to the law introduced in 1997, however, did not address the issue of minority media, and limited the law to the State radio and television, thereby indirectly opened the possibility for the creation of regional and local minority media. It was not until July of 1998, that the Bulgarian Parliament added a provision allowing for the broadcast of programs in foreign languages aired for “Bulgarian citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian”. However, the unfavorable economic situation of the Roma, and the lack of support from a mother country -in contrast to the case of the Turkish minority- is not likely to allow the creation of Roma broadcast channels in the near future.

The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other

THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE

The Bulgarian language is compulsory in schools according to Article 3 of the Constitution, which proclaims it as the Republic's official language. Article 36 (1) stipulates that "the study and use of the Bulgarian language shall be the right and obligation of every Bulgarian citizen", while Article 36 (2) proclaims that "citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own mother tongue together with the mandatory study of the Bulgarian language".

Article 8 (2) of the Law on National Education as well as the Council of Ministers' Decree No. 223 from 1992, provides practical arrangements for the study of the mother tongue in municipal schools. The Law on National Education and its rules of procedure (State Gazette No. 3, dated January 10, 1995) and the Law on Higher Education explicitly prohibit any restrictions or privileges on account of national and ethnic origin, race, sex, religion and material or social status. Teaching ideological or religious doctrines in schools is inadmissible. Teachers are strictly instructed not to encroach on the human and civil rights of pupils, not to degrade their personal dignity, and not to resort to physical punishment or psychological harassment.

ETHNIC LANGUAGES

Minority languages are freely used in family and social settings, as well as in cultural and religious services. The Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology uses school textbooks published in ethnic languages. It also uses textbooks imported from other countries. Mother tongue education is taught four hours weekly, from the first to the eighth grade, in municipal schools. Mother tongue education is regulated by the following documents; Law on National Education, the Council of Ministers' Decree No. 183, dated September 5, 1994 (State Gazette, dated September 9, 1994); Instruction No. 4 of the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology, dated October 27, 1994; Instructions for Organizing the Functioning of General Schools (Sofia, 1995).

Persons belonging to ethnic minority groups are free to disseminate any information in their mother tongue. There are no restrictions on importing fiction or religious literature, as well as maintaining personal contacts with members of the same ethnic, religious and linguistic groups living in other countries.

Persons belonging to different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in the Republic of Bulgaria are fully entitled to set up their non-governmental, cultural and religious organizations and institutions, in order to promote their culture, to practice their religion and to use their mother tongue.

Persons belonging to those groups are entitled to the same civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as the rest of the Bulgarian citizens. At present there are members of Parliament of Turkish origin, Jewish and one Roma. Persons belonging to ethnic groups occupy high positions in the State and Government, banking, financial and business circles; there are also mayors and local municipal leaders.

The media law restricts the use of minority languages and there is no legislation protecting minority media access. However, Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin publish two newspapers in Bulgarian and Turkish. Almost all the minorities form national organizations (Roma, Russians, Armenians, Wallachians, Tatars, Jews).

ROMANY

In Bulgaria 90% of the Roma population speak Romany, the highest percentage among European countries, yet only 50% speak Romany on a regular basis at home. Since 1990 the Roma have been free to use Romany at home and within the minority community. Programs for incorporating the Roma into the school curriculum have been developed and Romany has been taught with various degrees of success in Roma neighborhood schools. The Ministry of Education recommended to municipal authorities (who have a prerogative over education) to level the educational standard in neighborhood schools to equal those of the general education system. They were asked to selectively introduce the study of the Roma language into the curriculum, and to create special pre-school groups for helping Roma children to learn Bulgarian.

Romany is defined as a "mother tongue" by the Constitution, and thus can be studied for up to four hours per week as an elective course in schools. Moreover, since 1997 it has been possible to study Romany in Bulgarian schools. In recent years, some elements of multicultural education in the field of music, literature and history have also been introduced.

Due to the assimilation policies of the past, most Roma speak Bulgarian, Turkish or Vlach and claim them as their mother tongue in various surveys. The increasing school drop out rate, however, leaves more and more Roma children with almost no knowledge of written or even oral Bulgarian.

AROMANIAN (VLACH)

Currently the Aromanian community in Bulgaria enjoys few political or cultural rights. For the most part this is the result of the policies of the previous government, which before 1989 had promoted an active policy of assimilation of national minorities. Even though this policy was aimed primarily at the Turkish minority residing in the south, the Aromanian and Romanian communities have been also affected. In recent years the two Romanian-speaking communities have been successful in organizing several cultural associations. Furthermore, the fact that the Romanian

National Television and Radio are readily available throughout much of the northern part of the country and the fact that many Aromanians and Romanians travel regularly to Romania might help them preserve their language and culture.

The main demands of the Aromanian and Romanian communities have been to achieve some sort of cultural recognition in Bulgaria, and to be able to use their native language when dealing with the local officials in the few mainly Aromanian/Romanian villages.

Did the country ratify any international treaty dealing with the protection of minorities?

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed on October 9, 1997, ratified on May 7, 1999 and enacted on September 1, 1999.

SECTION C

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

Updated (June 2002)

The Bulgarian Constitution does not use the term “national minority” but refers instead to “citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian” (Article 36 (2)). Article 54 provides for the right of “everyone to develop his/her own culture in accordance with his/her ethnic belonging.” The only variation of this wording is in the decree assigning the tasks of the National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues, which refers to “Bulgarian citizens of different ethnic and religious groups” and “Bulgarian citizens belonging to minority groups.” Thus the term “national minority” appears nowhere in Bulgarian law, despite ratification of the Framework Convention for National Minorities (FCNM), and there is no enumeration of groups recognized as minorities in law.

The opportunities to use minority languages in dealings with public authorities, as called for in the FCNM, are extremely limited in practice.

The Constitution provides that Bulgarian is the official language of the Republic, but also that “citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language” (Article 3, 36).

However, at the same time, there are more than 100 laws, decrees, ordinances, regulations and binding court decisions on the obligatory use of Bulgarian by public authorities, juridical persons and citizens. These include mandatory and exclusive use of the Bulgarian language in the activities of political parties and of the military; in appeals to the courts and

in judicial proceedings; and in civil claims.¹ No legislation has been adopted to regulate the use of minority languages in communications between minorities and administrative authorities, or the public display of traditional local place names in the minority language.

Translators and interpreters are provided by the state in a case of penal proceedings. During prison visits, however, the detainees and visitors must pay for interpretation themselves.² In practice, visits are carried out in Bulgarian, which is difficult for some detainees and their families. During visits to the notary, the parties involved must pay for translation.

EDUCATION

Legal provisions ensuring the right to study minority languages in the Bulgarian education system have not resulted in the organization of classes in the Romani language on a systematic basis. Moreover, Roma culture and language are not given any space within the general curriculum.

The Constitution, the Law on National Education (Article 8) and other legal acts allow for languages other than Bulgarian to be taught as an “obligatory selectable subject” in municipal schools from grade one to eight, four times a week, if minimally eleven students wish to study it. Textbooks and other teaching facilities are provided by the state.³ Though it is legally possible to obtain a university degree in the mother tongue, including the Romani language, this possibility does not exist in practice. There are no provisions allowing for general education in minority languages. At present, Roma children do not exercise their constitutional right to study in their mother tongue.

When between 1990–1991, the possibility to receive mother tongue education was introduced in some Roma schools; a number of Romani language classes were established. According to various estimates, the total number of Roma children studying at these schools reached 4,000. However, courses were not organized or supported systematically, and no measures were taken to ensure provision of teaching materials, teaching standards, or the harmonization of mother tongue classes within the broader educational plan. As a consequence, the number of Roma children studying in the Romani language had gradually decreased to zero by 1999.

¹ Political Parties Act (Art.5); Law of Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (Art.9); Tax Procedure Code (Art.122); Law for the Supreme Administrative Court (Art.17 and Art.35); Law on the Judiciary (Art.105); Civil Procedure Code (Art.98).

² Code of Criminal Procedure (Art.11); Law for the Execution of Sentences (Art.33 (1b))

³ Decree No.183, Art.4 states that “textbooks for the study of mother tongue are not paid for by the students,” and Art.5 provides that “the finances for mother tongue instruction are supplied by municipal budgets.”

MEDIA

Bulgarian law stipulates that programs shall be broadcast in the official language, although it also provides for the possibility to air programs in languages other than Bulgarian, "for Bulgarian citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian."⁴

There are no specific restrictions in law or in practice for the minorities to form media. According to the 2000 Bulgarian Helsinki Committee the presence of the Roma press in the life of Roma is only symbolic. Relatively few Roma have access to Roma periodicals. It means that Roma media cannot survive without some form of external support. However, there are no tax exemptions on minority media initiatives, and no government support for minority media.⁵ Unlike in the case of the Turkish minority, the state-owned electronic media do not produce programs in the Romani language either at local or national level.

As a result, there is only one exclusively Roma electronic outlet, a local cable channel "TV Roma," operating 2-3 hours a day in the neighborhood of Vidin and broadcasting news (in the Bulgarian and the Romani language), songs, and shows for children and adults. In the year 2000, there were several one-hour programs on "Channel 1" of Bulgarian National Television and the private "7 Days TV" dedicated to Roma issues. A joint Roma-Bulgarian staff prepared both programs. In three cities (Sofia, Stara Zagora and Sliven) local radio stations irregularly broadcast programs for Roma, prepared mostly by Roma staff.

At present, two Roma periodicals appear regularly in Bulgaria – the monthly bilingual "Drom Dromendar" of the United Roma Union, (circulation 2,500) and the bi-monthly bilingual "Andral," published by the private SDS, 2000 Editorial House (circulation 500).

Source:

http://www.eumap.org/reports/content/10/100/minority_bulgaria.pdf,
The EU Accession Monitoring Program Report on Minority Protection, Open Society Institute 2001 on <http://www.eumap.org/reports/content/10>

⁴ Radio and Television Act, Art.12 (1), Art.12 (2) and Art.49 (1)

⁵ For the entire period between January 1997 and September 2000 the total amount of money spent by the Ministry for Roma cultural activities was 8,400 Leva (Euro 4,500). None was reserved for minority media. In addition, the Ministry included one Roma community center in a joint project with the UN development program. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture spends millions of Leva for different types of mainstream cultural activities and supports a variety of mainstream cultural institutions. Letter from the Ministry of Culture to the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 14 September 2000.

Updated (March 2003)

The Law on Radio and Television (the Law was passed by the 38th National Assembly on September 23, 1998 and on November 13, 1998)

S. 7.

The Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) and the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) shall be a national public radio broadcaster and a national public television broadcaster, respectively, which shall:

1. Ensure programs for all nationals of the Republic of Bulgaria
2. Assist the development and popularization of the Bulgarian language and culture, as well as language and culture of the citizens in accordance with their ethnic origin

S. 12.

(1) The programs of the radio and television broadcasters shall be broadcast in the official language, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

(2) The programs of the radio and television broadcasters may be transmitted in another language when:

1. They are transmitted for educational purposes
2. They are intended for Bulgarian nationals whose mother language is not Bulgarian

S. 49.

(1) The Bulgarian National Radio and the Bulgarian National Television shall produce national and regional programs; programs intended for abroad, including for Bulgarians living abroad; programs for Bulgarian nationals whose mother language is not Bulgarian, also in their own language.

S. 76.

(2) It shall not be allowed to broadcast advertisements based on national, ethnic, religious, racial, sex or other discrimination.

The National Education Act (promulgated in the State Gazette No. 86/ October 18, 1991, amended SG No. 90/1996)

Article 4

(2) Restrictions or privileges based on race, nationality, sex, ethnic and social origin, religion and social status shall not be tolerated.

Article 8

(1) School education shall ensure mastery of the official Bulgarian literary language.

(2) Pupils, whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, besides compulsory study of the Bulgarian language, shall have the right to study their own mother tongue outside a state school curriculum under the protection and control of the state.

In Bulgaria there are no legal provisions regulating the use of minority languages in private sphere. The use of a minority language in public is possible only when the use of Bulgarian is not obligatory.

The Judiciary Act

Article 105

(1) Bulgarian is the language used in courts.

(2) The court shall appoint an interpreter when an individual participating in the court proceeding does not speak or understand Bulgarian. In criminal proceedings of a general nature the court shall cover the expenses connected with interpreting.

Code of Civil Procedure

The Code of Civil Procedure has a number of provisions specifying the obligatory use of Bulgarian.

Article 5

The language in courts is Bulgarian. When persons who do not speak Bulgarian participate in the proceedings, the court appoints an interpreter with the help of whom these persons take part in the proceedings and the actions of the court are explained to them.

Article 98 provides that the action must be written in Bulgarian. Article 147 requires that documents presented before the court in any foreign languages must have a Bulgarian translation. Article 478 provides for an appointment of an interpreter in the proceedings before a notary.

Code of Criminal Procedure

Article 11

(1) The criminal proceedings shall be conducted in Bulgarian.

(2) Individuals, who do not speak or understand Bulgarian, can use their mother tongue or another language. In such cases, an interpreter shall be appointed.

Source: Bulgarian Institute for Legal Development,
<http://www.bild.net/legislation/> and Minority Rights in Bulgaria by the
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, September 1999, <http://www.ihf-hr.org/reports/Minoroties/Bulgariafin.pdf>

Background notes

Updated (May 2002)

THE POMAKS

Concentrated in the mountainous region of Thrace in the Rhodope Mountains of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, the Pomaks share a linguistic and religious commonality. They are generally considered Slavic-speaking Muslims.

HISTORY

There are numerous theories as to the origin of the term Pomak. Bulgarian historians have several as well. The first theory states that the term Pomak is derived from the word *pomagach* (helper) describing collaboration with the Ottoman government in order to maintain land rights. A second theory claims that the term comes from *pomachamedanci* (Islamicized). A third theory connects the colloquial Greek term, *Achrjani*, which is often used in reference to the Pomaks.

The word can be traced back to its old Slavonic root, *aagarjani*(infidels). Yet another theory maintains that it is a corruption of the phrase *po mâka* (by pain [of death]), as Pomaks were Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Christians, who were allegedly forced to convert to Islam by the Turks during the reign of the Ottoman Empire. According to this tradition, refusal to convert meant a summary execution.

Historically, the Pomaks have been considered undesirable or even outcasts within Bulgarian society. As several interpretations of their name suggest, they were seen as infidels and traitors to their fellow countrymen. When the Communist party came to power shortly after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Pomaks continued to bear the brunt of their countrymen's onslaughts.

The exodus to Turkey was not the solution for the Pomaks because as ethnic Bulgarians, they tend to share more cultural traits and general way of life with Bulgarian Orthodox Christians. Linguistically, however, in Pomak villages one can hear various dialects of Bulgarian, heavily influenced by Turkish and Greek. Furthermore, though Muslims, the majority of Bulgarian Pomaks speak little or no Turkish except a few words that have been added to their vocabulary over the last five centuries.

The Bulgarian government began to deal with its intercultural dilemma in 1948, when the Communist regime unleashed a number of assimilatory

measures aimed at eliminating all minority ethnicities. These included the Turks, Roma, Armenians, Tatars and Pomaks.

The first wave was a resettlement program designed to relocate the Pomak population from Bulgaria's southern border regions. The second major set of measures was aimed at the assimilation of the so-called "national consciousness." In this process, the Communist government forced all Bulgarian Muslims to change their names from Arabic-Islamic names to Slavic-Christian. This process came to be known as "*vâzroditelen protses*" (the process of rebirth). The government hoped that by adopting conforming names, all non-ethnic Bulgarians would both abandon their former values and beliefs and embrace the Bulgarian "national consciousness" and a value system. This practice was extended to other non-Christian minorities, as well.

Crossing the border regularly (both to graze animals and to maintain contact with relatives) was viewed by the Communist regime as an unacceptable threat to national security. To insure the stability of the borders between Bulgaria and Greece and Turkey in June 1948, the Communists began to remove people whom they considered disloyal to the Communist regime from the border inland.

In 1950's government promised to improve the conditions of the country's Turkish language schools and to widen minority cultural activities. By 1984, the birth rate among the Muslim minorities was at 2.5 percent compared to the zero annual birth rate of the Bulgarians (Bousfield and Ricardson, 1996). Another motivating factor for the forced assimilation was the rising Albanian population and ethnic conflicts in present day Kosovo. Within this historical context the name changing campaign of the Pomaks began in the mid seventies and eighties. Failure to accept the Slavicized version of their Arabic names, Pomaks, Turks and Roma were either killed outright, sent to forced labor camps or deported. Živkov's hard-line methods of resolving Bulgaria's ethnic dilemma nearly cast the country into anarchy and pandemonium.

Source: Shane Jacobs, The plight of the Bulgarian Pomaks, 28 May 2001, <http://www.ce-review.org/01/19/jacobs19.html>

Updated (March 2003)

The Bulgarian state was created after the 1878 Russian-Turkish war. The 1878 Treaty of Berlin guaranteed interests of the ethnic Turks, Romanians, Greeks and other ethnic groups living together in Bulgaria.

In the first years after the Liberation, the curricula of all private schools offered broad opportunities to study in a mother tongue. This policy had changed gradually since the beginning of the century and in the mid 1920s, compulsory Bulgarian-language education was introduced for a number of subjects also in minority schools.

The biggest ethnic minorities those days were Turks, Greeks and Roma. From the Liberation to World War II, the Kingdom of Bulgaria was involved in four population exchanges, all connected either with eviction of non-Bulgarians or their “exchange” for Bulgarians living abroad. These steps significantly reduced the numbers of Turks, Greeks, Romanians and Germans in the country.

The 1920s and 1940s witnessed name changes of the Bulgarian Muslims, which were both violent and unsuccessful.

As a result of World War II, many Bulgarian Jews emigrated to Israel (1948-1953). Several other minorities were either uprooted or substantially reduced through population transfers (15,000 Armenians, 2,000 Czechs and Slovaks, 100-200 Serbs). Despite three exoduses, in 1950-1951, 1969-1978 and 1989, Bulgarian Turks have remained the largest minority community in the country.

During its first years, the communist regime promoted ethnic identity of some minorities; however, the situation changed since the 50s, when it abandoned its “internationalist” policy. One of the first signs of repression came in 1948, when the government issued two decrees dealing with resettlement of the Bulgarian Muslims from the districts along the Bulgarian-Greek border to Northern Bulgaria. In 1958, the resolution to merge Turkish and Bulgarian schools was adopted, thus initiating their eventual “bulgarization” achieved in 1984-1985.

In 1984, publication of bilingual national periodicals stopped and since then newspapers and magazines were published only in Bulgarian.

After changing names of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (completed by 1973), the attention focused on the names and identity of the Bulgarian Turks. Between 1984 and 1985, the government forcibly renamed more than 850,000 Turks and some Muslim Roma with the explicit aim - to “bulgarize” them. Since the police and special troops were largely involved in these persuasion procedures almost 350,000 Turks escaped to Turkey in 1989. About 100,000 of them returned to the country after the fall of the communist regime in November 1989.

As for Roma, the communist policies were just as erratic. After encouraging Roma organizations, press and culture in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in the 60s, all Roma institutions were either closed down or radically reformed. A 1958 decree forced nomadic Roma to settle down. A gradual process of name changes of Muslim Roma started in the 1950s and was finalized in 1984-85.

Still, the most controversial was the policy aimed at the Macedonian minority living in Bulgaria. In the 1940s and 50s, the Communist Party neither opposed nor encouraged inculcation of Macedonian self-awareness in Pirin Region. However, in the mid-1950s, this policy dramatically

reversed and authorities refused to recognize Macedonian identity not only in Bulgaria, but also in the neighboring Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The number of Macedonians dropped from 169,544 in the 1946 Census to 9,632 in the 1965 Census (Macedonians were not included in the 1992 Census). In the 1960s and 70s, there was a number of political trials of people charged with activities based on "Macedonian nationalism."

After the fall of the communist system in Bulgaria in 1989, an effort to restore ethnic and religious rights of the country's main minority communities was observed. In late 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party resolved to restore the names of all people forcibly renamed and to amnesty those persecuted in connection with the forced name changes. Legal and political obstacles to establish cultural and educational associations, professional organizations, and drama companies of minority communities were removed. Turks, Armenians, Roma, Jews, Karakachani and Vlachs registered their own cultural organizations. In 1998, Macedonians finally managed to register their Traditional Macedonian Organization Ilinden. In 1999, the United Macedonian Organization PIRIN was registered as a political party by the Sofia city court.

Source: Minority Rights in Bulgaria by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, September 1999, <http://www.ihf-hr.org/reports/Minoroties/Bulgariafin.pdf>

To what extent are minority groups in this country disadvantaged by their language?

Updated (March 2003)

THE MACEDONIAN MINORITY

The Bulgarian government has continuously restricted a number of fundamental rights of the Macedonian minority, either through outright discrimination or uneven application of the laws, which on their surface do not seem to discriminate against the Macedonians.

Besides Turks and Roma, other minorities did not have a chance to declare their ethnic identity in the 2001 Census. The state refused to recognize its sizeable Macedonian minority (in 1992, 10,800 people) and used the census to promote its official attitude that the members of this group are ethnic Bulgarians. Various radio and TV stations promoted the notion that Bulgaria is largely a homogenous country and people should identify themselves as Bulgarians.

The United Macedonian Organization (OMO Ilinden) was unable to counter this view because their access to the media has been denied. Instead they printed and distributed throughout the Region of Pirin almost 80,000 flyers stating that people have the right to declare themselves as ethnic Macedonians and should not fear persecution. Several Bulgarian lawyers were consulted and even though they said that the flyers were legal, the

police and Bulgarian media started a campaign to frighten the Macedonian population by claiming that the leaders of OMO Ilinden Pirin will be charged and jailed.

The only Macedonian newspaper in Bulgaria, "*Narodna Volya*," is published in Blagoevgrad, in both the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages. This newspaper has its subscribers also in Macedonia; however, they have not received their copies since August 2001. The Editor-in-Chief filed complaints against the post office and the police in Blagoevgrad but the problem has not been solved yet.

Source: MHRMC (Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada) 2001 Annual Report, the Macedonian Minority in Bulgaria, January 21, 2002, <http://www.mhrmc.ca/reports/b01.html>

THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN PRISONS AND ADMINISTRATION

One serious problem that arose after 1990 was enforcement of Article 33 of the Law on the Executions of Sentences. All prisoners were forced to speak only Bulgarian with their relatives during the family visits even though their command of the Bulgarian language was poor. This hampered communication and sometimes led to the conflicts between prisoners and guards.

There is no legal provision prohibiting the use of minority languages in contacts with the administrative authorities. In oral communication, Turkish is often used in the municipalities having Turkish officials. All written documents; however, are in Bulgarian as a matter of custom and because the subsequent court procedures must be carried on in Bulgarian.

LOCAL NAMES

The Turkish minority, but in fact also all other minorities have had problems to display traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications intended for the public in their language. The procedure and requirements for naming and renaming of the objects is established by the Decree 1315 from 1975, which is still in force. According to this decree, names of the objects with a national significance (mountains, rivers, forests, lakes, islands, national parks, big dams, etc.) are given by the President of the Republic and names of the objects with a local significance (streets, gardens, schools, neighborhoods, etc.) are given by the Municipal Councils. One of the requirements is that the names must "reflect the wealth and beauty of the Bulgarian language" (Article 4). This Article blocked several times municipal decisions to rename a local object in the region populated by ethnic Turks.

Source: Minority Rights in Bulgaria by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, September 1999, <http://www.ihf-hr.org/reports/Minoroties/Bulgariafin.pdf>

The use of language in everyday life, education, broadcasting and other

Updated (March 2003)

HIGHER EDUCATION

Programs fostering knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of the national minorities exist at different departments of Sofia University, Plovdiv University, New Bulgarian University and Shumen University. Some minority languages are taught in the Balkan College in Sofia.

Several textbooks and other teaching materials for elementary, middle and high schools were produced through private initiatives but they are used in a very limited number of urban schools.

There are very few teachers belonging to the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. They usually teach in minority schools and no special training is organized for them by the state. The majority of teachers in schools with predominantly minority students are ethnic Bulgarians. Some NGOs organize teacher-training courses for both the minority teachers and the teachers working in minority schools, but not on a systematic basis.

A lot of textbooks for all levels of education are produced in Bulgaria. They have to be approved by the Ministry of Education. Some of the high school textbooks include knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of the minorities living in Bulgaria. However, their use is not mandatory and there are no data available whether and to what extent these textbooks are used.

There are no secular private schools for the ethnic and linguistic minorities in Bulgaria. The Muslims have three private high schools offering regular high school diplomas – in Shumen, Russe and Momchilgrad. The subjects studied at these schools have to meet the state educational high school standards. In addition, the Holy Koran, Interpretations of the Koran, History of Islam, the Arab language and Islamic law and ethics are studied there.

Source: Minority Rights in Bulgaria by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, September 1999, <http://www.ihf-hr.org/reports/Minorities/Bulgariafin.pdf>

APPENDIX A

MAP OF BULGARIA



APPENDIX B

BULGARIA - CONSTITUTION

(Adopted on July 12, 1991)

(Document Status on July 12, 1991)

Article 3

Bulgarian is the official language of the Republic.

Article 36

1. Every citizen has the right and the obligation to study and use the Bulgarian language.
2. Citizens, for whom the Bulgarian language is not the mother tongue, will have the right to study and use their own language alongside the duty to study the Bulgarian language.
3. Cases where only the official language is to be used will be determined by law.

Note: The full text of the Constitution and further information on the constitutional background of Bulgaria are provided by the International Constitutional Law Project at the University of Wuerzburg.

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