

ETHNIC DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY IN BULGARIA

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FOREWORD

This paper has been prepared as one of a series of Social Assessment studies commissioned by The World Bank to deepen its understanding of economic transition and poverty in Bulgaria. The SA Studies have been conducted in preparation of the Regional Initiatives Fund, a social fund which is being implemented to help alleviate poverty during the transition phase as a pilot Learning and Innovation Loan. The findings of the SA Studies have also generated qualitative data on poverty, as inputs into the 1998 Poverty Assessment.

The SA Studies have been prepared by Bulgaria social scientists. Although comments were provided on earlier drafts, these reports have been written by the Bulgarian scholars independently of the Bank and represent their own views and interpretations of data. Inclusion in the series of SA studies does not imply endorsement of these views by The World Bank. As agreed at the outset, they tell the story of poverty in the words of Bulgarian social scientists.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many decades the statistical data in Bulgaria have been gathered in a way that made it impossible to analyse the different social phenomena on the basis of ethnicity and religion. What is more - in the 80s a huge amount of the information about the social, economic and health status of the different ethnic and religious groups, as well as their demographic characteristics, has been obliterated. Even in the last few years there is no current statistic information about the economic and demographic parameters based on ethnicity and religion.

This report on the ethnic dimensions of the poverty in Bulgaria is based on the information available at the National Institute of Statistics and the National Labour Office, as well as on the results of series of sociological surveys that have been carried out since 1989. The most significant among them are as follows: *The ethnocultural situation in Bulgaria. 1992*; *Gypsies in the transition period. 1994*; *Relations of compatibility and incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria. I stage - 1994, II stage - 1997*; *The Rhodope mountains in the 1990-s - tendencies of development. 1997*.

Analysis of the ethnic dimensions of poverty in Bulgaria is focused on the problems of poverty among Gypsies, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks). The analysis of poverty among the largest ethno-cultural minority communities in Bulgaria has the following structure: number and residence of the representatives of the community; brief historic data; ethnic identity and division within the groups; demographic characteristics; educational and health status, employment and unemployment, residential conditions, access to public services, majority attitude towards representatives of the different minority communities.

Findings And Recommendations

The principal findings of this report are that:

- The transition process has proved to be disadvantageous to large ethnic minorities and, in the absence of targeted programs, led to further marginalization and exclusion of these groups
- Large numbers of ethnic minorities are forced into long-term unemployment, lose social benefits, and are forced into the informal sector
- Land restitution has adversely affected the Roma, more than 50% of who used to work in agriculture. Since restitution was based on prior land ownership, less than 8% now have access to land
- Tobacco production has declined to less than 1/3 its 1989 level, affecting incomes of half of Turks and Pomaks
- Agricultural workers no longer entitled to pensions, and other social benefits
- Closure of textile, carpet, and fabric industry in Turk and Pomak villages: unemployment among women (> 60%)
- Decline in construction industry: used to employ about 30% of male Turks and Pomak
- Decline in mining industry in Rhodope Mountains: employed mainly Turks and Pomaks

The principal recommendations are that:

- Programs need to be targeted at regions with concentration of ethnic minorities
- Policy of social benefits is needed for agricultural workers
- Former employees of agricultural sector should be compensated for loss of livelihoods due to land restitution
- The dominant role of the state monopoly, Bulgartabak, on the tobacco market needs to be replaced with more competitive market mechanisms
- Investments are needed to help minority groups go beyond primary production to processing, and marketing
- Employment of women in light industry needs to be regulated to ensure minimum wage and social benefits
- Infrastructure in minority regions is extremely poor and needs to be developed to encourage private capital investments in those regions
- Eco-tourist potential of mountains needs investments

1.1. POVERTY IN THE ROMA COMMUNITY

It is a widely spread hypothesis that there has been a large Gypsy population in Bulgaria ever since the 13th century, including earlier settlements of small separate groups.

According to data from the 1992 census of Bulgarian population, 313,326 of Bulgarian citizens identified themselves as Gypsies. The unofficial local authority and Ministry of the Interior data in January 1989 estimate the number of Gypsies at 577,000, or 6,45% of the Bulgarian population. Jean-Pierre Liegeois estimates the number of Gypsies in Bulgaria at 700,000 - 800,000 (around 8%) - again on the basis of "objective criteria".

The Roma "community" is the most heterogeneous minority community in Bulgaria. According to the data of 1994 survey "*Gypsies in the transition period*" they divide into four main and 56 smaller subgroups. It is possible that the number of the smaller subgroups is even higher. The subgroups differ in religion (Muslims, Eastern Orthodox Christians, followers of various Protestant churches, Judeans), mother tongue (for the various groups these include different Romani dialects, Turkish, Bulgarian, Wallachian dialects), traditional craft, time of settlement, way of life.

The Gypsies in Bulgaria are dispersed all over the country. There are clearly-defined Gypsy neighbourhoods in almost every town, though a number of Gypsies live among the rest of the population in the residential districts. There are villages - mainly in North-Western Bulgaria, with predominant or entirely Roma population.

According to data from the 1992 census, 52% of the Roma population was already urban, and 48% - rural. The corresponding ratio is 72:28 for the ethnic Bulgarians. In 1991 a law for the return of agricultural land to its former owners was passed, and the former cooperative farms were broken up. The vast majority of the Gypsies living in the countryside were left out without a livelihood. This reinforced the processes of temporary migration to the towns, where the men had a better chance of finding temporary work. Many families turned back to the semi-nomadic style of life.

During the warm months they go to the mountains, where they gather mushrooms, herbs, wild fruit and snails, which find a ready market outside Bulgaria.

The early marriages are one of the reasons for the poverty in the Roma community. Once married, the young do not continue education at school. They are therefore usually very poorly educated and underqualified, which makes them incapable to compete on the labour market. Many premature births and early abortions lead to health problems among young Gypsy women. These are the main reasons for the high mortality rate among Roma women of fertile age from 14 to 40 years. Owing to this, Gypsies are the only group in which there are more men than women.

The age structure of the Roma population is considerably different from that of the rest of Bulgarian citizens and represents another indicator of the poverty in the community. The age structure of pre-industrial societies, characterised with a high birth and death rate is still typical for the Gypsies. According to data from the 1992 census, 66% of Roma are up to 29 years old, while only 5% reach 60 and more years of age. Although to a lower degree compared to the rest of the population, in recent years the Gypsy community is undergoing the same processes as the whole of Bulgarian society - a rise in the marital age and a decrease in the birth-rate.

However typical of the community as a whole, this tendency is not characteristic of the increasing group of highly marginalised Gypsies who already exceed 10-15% of the Roma community. This group indicates a very high and steady birth-rate.

Although to a lesser degree compared to Western and Central Europe, the Roma in the Balkans have always been victims of discrimination and contempt on the part of the surrounding population. Along with the modernisation of Bulgarian society and the sharp decrease in the need for the services provided by Roma, negative stereotypes towards them have increased. Their image is one of persons, unable to adapt to the changing reality; useless for society, living parasitically on private charity and social funds. There are increasing tendencies towards the isolation of Roma. They are gradually "dropping out" of the non-Roma world. This leads in practice to backwardness in all spheres of society - education, culture, social and economic status, participation in political life.

In recent years negative stereotypes and prejudices towards the Gypsies have seriously increased. Social distances between the Roma and other ethnic groups are very high and are still growing. These negative stereotypes and prejudices create discriminative tendencies and attitudes towards the Roma community. The scale of the marginalisation of this third largest ethnic community in Bulgaria is clearly defined: large-scale long-term unemployment spread over more than 75% of the able-bodied population of the group, the related poverty, low health status, decrease in the level of education and qualifications of the coming generation and narrowing of the chances for long-term perspectives for successful integration into the economic and social life in the country, deteriorating living conditions and the processes of anomie among an increasing part of the group.

According to data from the survey *The Gypsies in the Transition Period*, in 1994 there were 81 disabled Roma per 1000 individuals over 16 years old, i.e. more than twice the average for the country. Disabled children are not included in the figure of 81 per 1000 and they comprise 38 % of the disabled. In October - November 1997,

15% of the interviewed Roma living in the Rhodope mountains declare that there is an invalid in their family. 13-14% of the respondents in both surveys declare that they have lost a child under the age of 18, usually in the first year of his/her life.

A considerable number of Roma live in separate ghetto-like districts. Roma homes are inhabited by 6,9 persons on average, as opposed to 2,6 persons in the average Bulgarian home. One Roma has an average use of 7,1 sq.m. of floor area, while the figure for the average Bulgarian citizen including the Roma is 16,9 sq.m. In 17 of the hovels there is no furniture at all, nor even beds. According to National Statistical Institute data from the 1992 census, only 37% of Roma houses have a water supply and sewerage facilities.

The Roma community has the lowest level of education in the country. According the official statistic data in 1992, the educational structure of the economically active population (18-60 years of age) in the larger ethnic groups in the country appeared as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The structure of the ethnic groups according to education (%)

Education	Ethnic Group		
	Bulgarians	Bulg. Turks	Gypsies
Higher/College	20.2	2.0	0.9
Secondary	54.0	24.6	7.8
Elementary	22.6	55.0	46.2
Primary	3.0	16.0	36.7
Illiterate	0.2	2.3	8.5

In 1994 only 52% of healthy Roma children who were subject to compulsory education (from 7 to 16 years old) did not go to school. The number of Roma children who drop out of or never start school is increasing in the next years. The usual explanation of the parents is that they are unable to afford the necessary clothes, shoes and textbooks. Usually their children's labour is necessary for the survival of the family.

Unemployment among the Roma community is a large-scale and lasting process. It reaches very high levels - around 77-80%. During the winter months, the level of unemployment in certain big city neighbourhoods and many villages goes beyond 90%. A considerable part of the Roma were laid off in 1990-1991. Nothing was done in the following few years for the reduction of unemployment. The only operative national programme oriented towards them is the Temporary Employment Programme which guarantees those of the unemployed Roma who registered up to one year ago the right to work in the sphere of services for a period of 5 months at the minimum wage. Problems arise from the fact that in order to have the right to social support, unemployed people must have had at least 6 full working months without a break, while it is very difficult for the Roma to find a job for one more month and have the right to unemployment benefit.

The Roma who have preserved their traditional craft or can still practise it are very few - some 10%. Only 8,5% of Roma families own agricultural land, usually a

small area around the house. According to the 1994 survey data, 14% of Roma households keep fowl, 9% keep sheep or goats and only 2% keep cattle, while in 1992 these proportions were twice as high (according to the 1992 survey *The Ethno-cultural Situation in Bulgaria*). A comparative analysis of these data shows a very marked negative tendency in the medium term.

In this situation, the number of Roma households totally dependent on social security is gradually increasing. Due to long-term unemployment or because of the fact that the young cannot find a permanent job at all, a vast majority of Roma are deprived of the possibility to get monthly unemployment benefit. Special attention has to be paid to the fact that in practice lots of Roma women face serious difficulties in receiving the maternity and child benefit due to them, because of the requirement for a certificate that they have worked at least 7 days. Another permanent problem is that they seldom enjoy their right to benefit for single mothers. In most cases social workers refuse to acknowledge that they have such a status, presuming that Roma mothers do not marry on purpose in order to profit from single parent benefit, while in the same time living together with the father who contributes to the family income. They are not willing to acknowledge the fact that one of the most dramatic consequences of the impoverishment of the Roma community is the destabilisation of the family institution. More and more young men are leaving their families and no longer provide for their wife and children. Even in cases of official marriage and divorce, Roma men seldom take the responsibility to support the deserted family, and the women cannot receive the social aids due to them without presenting certificates that their ex-husband is unemployed, is not receiving child benefit and is not supporting the family. In this situation, more and more deserted Roma women without any chance of a steady job are forced to become prostitutes. In the last few years the number of child prostitutes in the community has sharply increased.

It is a negative fact that in many cases the state system for social support promotes and strengthens passive behaviour and acquired helplessness on the part of its clients. If somebody is caught out doing a temporary job, he/she loses the right for social benefits. In the Eastern Rhodope region where up until 1990 the Roma both worked in cooperatives or industrial enterprises and cultivated tobacco, they are now totally dependent on the state social security. The problem is that a decision has been taken in these municipalities that tobacco-production workers can be granted neither social security nor child benefit. The unemployed Roma, with their large families, have realised that it is more profitable not to cultivate tobacco and live on child benefit and social security. All this leads to the strengthening of prejudices and negative attitudes, as well as to the growing tendency for discrimination towards the Gypsies.

Poverty has traditionally gone together with the Roma community in Bulgaria. In the transition period poverty among the Roma has reached disastrous proportions.

The major factors contributing to poverty among the Roma are:

- ethnic discrimination;
- mass long-term unemployment and low remuneration for the employed;
- decrease in the already low level of education and qualifications, which seriously hampers young people's efforts to take part in the economic and social life of the country;
- early marriages and destabilisation of the marital institution;

- high birth-rate in the poorest families, which have no facilities for bringing up their children;
- increase in the number of chronically and seriously ill, leading to permanent disablement, invalidity and early death-rate;
- decrease in social services cover and limitation of the access to them, to the health system and to education.

The proportion of more well-to-do Roma is very small - about 10%. The same percentage have over 20 sq.m. floor area per person. The main source of income for 6% of them is from their own business. 8% declared that they have savings and are able to make savings at the moment.

Between 20 and 30% of the Roma live the typical life of the average Bulgarian - very simple, suffering all sorts of privations, and yet bearable. Among these is the small Roma intelligentsia; the qualified workers who managed to keep their jobs; some of the Roma who live in villages and possess some land, keep domestic animals or work in the cooperative farms, and some of the craftsmen.

All the rest (60-70% of the community) have to be considered poor, much poorer than the socially disadvantaged from other ethnic groups. Their income is extremely low and irregular. It consists mostly of social benefits and pensions, the income from seasonal work in agriculture and construction, from recycling and gathering of scrap metal in the towns from gathering mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit in the mountains, from cheap services offered to the rest of the population and from work on the Temporary Employment Programme.

At the moment, hard pressed by the crisis and poverty, the Roma tend to rely on the following typical strategies:

- mobilisation of family ties, a practical step aside from the model of the nuclear family and looking for ways of survival within the extended family;
- looking for any kind of informal work which provides some income;
- revival and adaptation of traditional crafts to the changing reality;
- increasing migration in search of better working and social conditions, including regular attempts to leave the country, which decreased apparently after the establishment of strict border controls and difficult access to visas for all Bulgarians;
- regular use of waste food and second-hand clothes;
- using children in the search for income scruples, even at the expense of their education;
- revival of some old forms of mutual help within the community, for instance the *londzha* (a specific form of self-organisation among the Gypsies. It is still called a "guild" or "association" and works on the principle of a mutual benefit society.);
- active search for social services, including those of religious establishments (especially those of the various Protestant churches) in order to secure the minimum of means for existence;
- addressing non-governmental organisations for the solution of some of the problems (mainly among the representatives of Roma intelligentsia);

There is a growing number of poor Roma who suffer drastic impoverishment and marginalisation. The other Gypsies refer to this sub-group as *goli* (naked). It is

estimated at around 10-15% of the community. This group is characterised by a lost cultural identity, broken family ties, widespread alcoholism, personal degradation of parents who do not take care of their children and habitual domestic violence. The living conditions of these Roma are appalling. The birth-rate here is very high and the children usually do not start school at all or drop out in the first few years. There is permanent 100% unemployment. Chronic illnesses and invalidity are widespread.

1.2 POVERTY IN THE GROUPS OF BULGARIAN MUSLIMS (POMAKS) AND BULGARIAN TURKS

Bulgarian Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) have been living within the territory of Bulgaria for many centuries. At the end of the 14th century Bulgaria was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. During the five-century Ottoman domination the conquerors settle colonisers of their own within Bulgarian territories and convert to the Islam significant groups of the local population. The nowadays Bulgarian Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) are their descendants.

According to the 1992 census of the population in Bulgaria data, the number of Turks was 800,052 or 9,4%. They live in compact groups in the east regions of the country. About 94% of them are concentrated in 4 districts - Haskovo, Razgrad, Varna and Bourgas, whereas in Kurjali and Razgrad they constitute the majority of the population. In the regions with mixed population the Bulgarians are concentrated primarily in the towns, and Bulgarian Turks - in the villages.

On expert views the number of Pomaks is about 250,000. Most of them live in the Rhodope Mountains, and there are also small groups in the Pirin region and around Lovech.

The attempt for forced assimilation of the Bulgarian Turks in the 80s led to the interruption of the natural processes of integration between the two groups. Since that period there has been a sharp sensitiveness with regard to the problems of ethnic identity both among Bulgarians and Turks and a clear search for support in the values and the cultural models of "one's own community" considered as a natural environment and a guarantee for free cultural, economic and political expression of one's personality.

The sociological surveys from the period of 1990-1992 indicate strong fears and mistrust between the representatives of both groups, as well as widely spread negative stereotypes and prejudices. Researchers' attention was drawn towards the high degree of rejection and hostility towards Bulgarian Turks on behalf of a considerable number of Bulgarians. Half of the Bulgarians considered the Turks a threat for the national security. More than one-third expressed their desire that everything possible should be done to increase the number of Turkish emigrants from Bulgaria. The results of the October-November 1997 representative sociological survey *The Rhodope mountains in the 1990-s - tendencies of development* give quantitative and qualitative evidence for the obvious process of stabilisation in the relations between the representatives of the two communities in the last few years

The greater part of the Bulgarian Turks and the Pomaks live in the villages. The ratio between village and town population in the group of the Turks is 68% : 32%. The situation is similar for the Pomaks. This fact has a serious influence on the

preservation of the traditional way of life in both groups, as well as on the possibilities for their ethnic separation. It appeared to be the major factor for the restriction of their possibilities to find job in the conditions of increasing unemployment, of their access to comparatively good educational and cultural institutions and of the possibilities for quick and effective health and social services. On the other hand, in the conditions of crisis the people in the villages turned to be favoured from the point of view of the provision of food - which is the main item in the present day budget of Bulgarian households.

The groups of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are characterised with a higher birth-rate in comparison to Christian Bulgarians. The mortality-rate is also higher for the groups of Muslims in Bulgaria. According to National Statistical Institute data more than half of Bulgarian Turks - 51,4% are within the age of 0 - 29, while the same figure for the ethnic Bulgarians is 36,3%. The people of pensionable age (over 60 years) are 22,2% from the Bulgarians compared to 11,6% from the Bulgarian Turks. In the last several years the birth rate among Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks fall down significantly.

The regions inhabited by Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are among the most backward in the country regarding the economy. Therefore, they were terribly affected by the economic crisis in Bulgaria. In general, the situation can be characterised as follows: production capacities inadequate to the local economic resources and their natural collapse after the crush of the socialist market; economic stagnation, stirred up recently by the private initiative; higher level of unemployment compared to the average for the country, despite the large number of emigrants among Bulgarian Turks; undeveloped infrastructure which hampers the investments; increasing poverty of the vast majority of population; monocultural agriculture on small areas with poor soils in the South Rhodope region.

Unemployment first appeared in the regions with mixed population. As a result of the mass emigration of Bulgarian Turks in the summer of 1989 a lot of unprofitable village factories have been closed down. Later on, when almost one-third of the emigrants returned from Turkey more than half of them remained unemployed. In the beginning of 1990 most of the unemployed were Bulgarian Turks.

The unemployment among Turks and Pomaks is also due to the fact that a considerable part of them worked far from their homes, mainly in industrial and construction projects. Therefore, the production crisis and the sharp rise in the transport costs led to a decrease in the daily and seasonal labour migration and the workers concerned had to rely mainly on their private farming or some rare cases of temporary work. The women and the children from both communities in question (Turks and Pomaks) are permanently engaged in agricultural work.

Tobacco production which is the basic means of living for a considerable part of Turkish and Pomak population, especially in the flat areas, has also undergone severe crisis. Since 1991 it has decreased from 2 to 5 times. The company of BULGARTABAK - a monopolist in tobacco purchasing and manufacture not only reduced the purchasing prices but also delayed the payment for years so that the money has already vanished because of the inflation. This doomed a considerable part of people from the Rhodope mountains to starvation. Another problem is that in some Rhodope regions the women engaged in tobacco cultivation are not granted maternity and children's allowance for they are not considered unemployed and they work

without a labour contract. In 1997, after the subtraction of expenses for the manufacture itself, the monthly income per tobacco producer was the average of 25,000 - 40,000 leva which places them within the group of the poorest people in the country.

The regions with mixed population are characterised with a lasting unemployment on a higher level than the average for the country. Since 1990 municipalities with prevailing Muslim population (Turks and Pomaks) have registered the greatest number of unemployed. According to National Statistical Institute data from 1992, 14.4% of the Bulgarians were unemployed, while the figure reached 25.5% for the Turks. In the following years no current information has been collected about the level of employment among the different ethnic groups. However, the National Labour Office analysis of the unemployment in different municipalities indicates that since 1993 the level of unemployment among Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks has been two to three times higher compared to this among Bulgarians.

It is most likely that these tendencies shall remain in the near future. The reasons for this are the specific characteristics of the local economy, the forthcoming close down of mines in the Middle Rhodope, as well as the lower level of education and qualification of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks compared to Christian Bulgarians.

The regions with compact Turkish and Pomak population are badly provided for hospitals and medical care. It is probably one of the main reasons for the worse health status of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks. According to health experts the sick rate is very high among them. Cardio-vascular illnesses are the main reason for their high mortality and invalidity rate. Kidney diseases, a number of endocrine diseases (most frequently goitre and diabetes) are also typical for the population in the Rhodope mountains.

Due to the fact that a great number of the men are miners they often suffer diseases of the respiratory passages - silicosis, tuberculosis, emphysema, asthma, pleurisy and locomotory system diseases. Invalidity has higher rates among them because of labour traumas. Probably some of the congenital abnormalities of the newborn babies in miners' settlements are due to radioactive pollution of water and their fathers' irradiation in uranium mines.

According to the 1997 survey *The Rhodope Mountains...* data 25% of Pomak, 19% of Turkish and 16% of Bulgarian families have chronically sick members. One in six of the respondents from the group of Pomaks declared that there has been an invalid in his/her family. In most of the cases poor families cannot provide for the medical care of their chronically sick members, even if these are children, which results in the increase in invalidity and children's mortality in the region.

The educational level among Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks is lower than the average in the country. There are many homogeneous Turkish villages in both North-Eastern Bulgaria and the Rhodope Mountains where Bulgarian is not spoken in the family and children start school without speaking the official language in the country. This inevitably hampers their successful education and many of them early drop out of school.

In the last years there was a sharp decrease in the number of children from Turk and Pomak groups who attended secondary schools - due to economic difficulties for the families to provide for the education of their children in another town or village.

In most of the Pomak and Turkish villages there are only elementary schools (up to the 8th class), regardless of the fact that in many cases the number of children is enough for the opening of a secondary school. The negative consequences of this will affect most seriously the girls from the group.

Although in the last two decades a considerable number of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have built large and comfortable houses for their families, the residential conditions under which the communities live are still worse compared to these of ethnic Bulgarians. According to data from the 1992 census, Turkish homes are inhabited by 3,97 persons on average (as opposed to 2,6 persons in the average Bulgarian home). One Turk has on average use of 11,8 sq.m. of floor area, while the figure for the average Bulgarian citizen including the Turks and Gypsies is 16,9 sq.m. Only 59,4% of the Turkish homes have mains water and sewerage.

The regions with mixed population excluding the big cities have a badly developed infrastructure. The major part of the high-way network consists of forth-class roads. Due to the lack of means for their maintenance part of them, in mountain and hilly areas in particular, are usually impassable during the winter months. In the last few years public transport services have been sharply reduced. Many intercity bus routes have been cut down. There is no mains water and sewerage in many villages. In other cases, in spite of the mains network, water is stopped for almost 20 hours a day during the summer, due to the lack of water purification systems or to the bad equipment of the existing ones. The number of Turkish and Pomak families who have a telephone is lower than the average for the country.

The widespread and continual unemployment, together with the loss of many people's savings as a result of the inflation and bankruptcy, led to the sharp increase in the poverty among the vast majority of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks. Many Turkish families suffered great damages due to the emigration campaign in 1989 when they were forced to sell their property dirt cheap.

To summarise the above, the major factors for the poverty in the communities of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are as follows:

- low level of development of the local economy and its sharp deterioration after the beginning of the economic crisis which led to its total crash in certain parts of the country;
- lack of state policy for the establishment of new economic structures in the regions with mixed population;
- severe consequences of the emigration campaign and the bankruptcy;
- undeveloped infrastructure, communication and information network;
- limited access to the social insurance system, good education and health services;
- lack of trade unions which guarantee the interests of the agricultural workers and the workers in the light industry and construction in the regions in question;
- weak non-governmental organisations network in the regions with mixed population which might contribute to the solution of local problems;

- small areas of arable land, in most of the cases barren and infertile, cultivated in a primitive way, due to the lack of agricultural machinery and means of irrigation, fertilization and chemical protection;
- lack of information for the marketability of agricultural and industrial products, thence the chaotic character and failures in the attempts for development of private business and cultivation of alternative crops;
- inhuman exploitation of labour of the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks on part of the tobacco monopolists and the new businessmen in the region.

The main strategies of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks for survival are:

- readiness to accept any kind of work;
- with men - seasonal labour migration in the big cities where they can easily find a comparatively well-paid job in the construction, without social insurance though;
- with women - additional labour as homework (embroidery, hand-knitting, manual work in the shoe industry, etc.);
- intensified agricultural work (at the expense of hard manual labour);
- increase in the self-sufficient food and textile home-production (a lot of families consider it cheaper to produce even their bread at home in stead of buying it);
- sharp decrease in the consumer possibilities of people even regarding some major goods and services;
- change in the demographic model - late marriages and decrease in the number of children;
- mutual assistance within the family and friends circle;
- tendency towards migration and emigration.

2. INTRODUCTION

The preparation of this report was accompanied by many difficulties and complications. For many decades the statistical data have been gathered in a way that made it impossible to analyse the different social phenomena on the basis of ethnicity and religion. What is more - in the 80s a huge amount of the information about the social, economic and health status of the different ethnic and religious groups, as well as their demographic characteristics, has been obliterated. Even in the last few years there is no current statistic information about the economic and demographic parameters based on ethnicity and religion. Therefore, the quantitative analysis of the poverty in the major minority communities in Bulgaria cannot be absolutely precise. We have to rely mainly on the information from the representative sociological surveys from the last few years and on the qualitative analysis of the official statistics.

This report on the ethnic dimensions of the poverty in Bulgaria is based on the information available at the National Institute of Statistics and the National Labour Office, as well as on the results of series of sociological surveys that have been carried out since 1989. The most significant among them are as follows:

- *The ethnocultural situation in Bulgaria.* 1992. Research team: Zhivko Georgiev, Ilona Tomova, Maia Grekova, Krasimir Kanev. 3170 individuals were interviewed. Among them - 765 Bulgarian Christians, 797 Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), 826 Turks, 777 Gypsies. Information was gathered about the ethno-cultural identity of representatives of the different communities, about their social, economic and cultural status, about their basic values, political trends, strategic and geopolitical orientations.
- *Gypsies in the transition period.* 1994. Research team: Ilona Tomova, Zhivko Georgiev. Interviewed: 1844 Roma households and 372 experts (state officials, social workers, teachers, doctors, policemen). The survey was carried out together with sociological observation in 137 Gypsy neighbourhoods. Information was gathered about the ethnic identity and the demographic characteristics of the Roma population in Bulgaria, about family and marriage among Roma subgroups, about their health and education status, employment, residential and everyday living conditions, as well as the attitude of the different state institutions towards them.
- *Relations of compatibility and incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria.* 1994. Research team: Petar-Emil Mitev, I. Tomova, Zh. Georgiev, K. Kanev, Ts. Tomov, L. Yordanova, Ts. Vicheva, V. Penev, P. Alexandrov. 3886 individuals were interviewed. Among them - 1044 Bulgarian Christians, 843 Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), 1069 Turks, 939 Roma. Additional information was gathered by a content analysis of the relations between Christians and Muslims as reflected by Bulgarian periodicals in the period from January 1993 to March 1994; anthropological survey in Gradishte village, Shoumen region; associative test that was carried out among 80 Bulgarians and 80 Turks; documentary analysis of political programmes and pre-election platforms of Bulgarian political parties in the period from 1990 to 1994. The research interest of the team was mainly directed towards the religion of the different communities, their attitude towards people from other communities and the factors for dynamic relations between the ethno-cultural and the religious communities.
- *The Rhodope mountains in the 1990-s - tendencies in the development. October 1997.* (unpublished results). Research team: I. Tomova, E. Ivanova, I. Atanasov, V. Goranov, M. Babelekova. Interviewed: 2445 people from the Rhodope mountains. Among them: 819 Bulgarian Christians, 803 Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), 603 Turks, 220 Gypsies, as well as 353 state officials, school principals, doctors and social workers. There was a sociological observation in 146 towns and villages. The interest of the research team was directed towards changes in the demographic behaviour of representatives of the different communities, towards the socio-economic, educational and health status of the Rhodope population, the relations between the different ethno-cultural communities and the tendencies for development in the near future.
- *Relations of compatibility and incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria - II stage.* 1997. (unpublished data). Research team: Petar-Emil Mitev, I. Tomova, Zh. Georgiev, K. Kanev, L. Yordanova. Interviewed: 2390 individuals. Among them - 614 Bulgarian Christians, 587 Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), 592 Turks, 597 Roma. The survey studied the impact of the religious differences on the changes in the relations between the representatives of the observed communities.

Analysis of the ethnic dimensions of poverty in Bulgaria is focused on the problems of poverty among Gypsies, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks). There

is a summary on the macro-economic situation in Bulgaria in the transition period. The analysis of poverty among the largest ethno-cultural minority communities in Bulgaria has the following scheme: number and residence of the representatives of the community; brief historic data; ethnic identity and division within the groups; demographic characteristics; educational and health status, employment and unemployment, residential conditions, access to public services, majority attitude towards representatives of the different minority communities.

3. THE MACRO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

After 1989 a complex transition period began in Bulgaria from an authoritarian society with a centrally planned economy to a democratic social system built on the principles of political pluralism, the development of a market economy and a respect for human rights. The transition was linked with the hopes of millions of people for overcoming of economic stagnation through the liberalisation of economic relations, the incorporation of the country into the process of modern technological development, active participation in international structures and an increase in cultural exchange. There were mass expectations of big positive changes in social organisation, of a consolidation of democratic values and of increased possibilities for freedom of expression in a very short space of time.

Contrary to mass expectations, however, the transition to a market economy and towards a democratic social and political system has proved to be a drawn-out and painful process.

The state has soon given up its claims to be the major subject of economy and tried to concentrate efforts on its other functions - foreign affairs, defence, legislation, education and health, social security, etc. In the same time, the predominant part of the property is still formally "national", without an effective state control and management of the companies. All Bulgarian governments in the last 8 years declared their will to make reforms, although their measures were often inadequate to the declarations. Favourable conditions were created for the profiteering from the state property by a small part of the ex-communist party members and former managers. The transition to market economy has been imperfect. In the end of 1996 the economy and the state system came to a collapse. The state entered a phase of hyperinflation. In 1997 the average annual inflation reached 1254% - the highest percentage since the beginning of the transition. There was no other alternative but the establishment of a currency board.

Bulgaria is among the few former socialist countries in which the production in the main economic fields and the gross domestic product (GDP) continue their decrease even in 1997. According to the National Institute of Statistics data the decrease in the GDP from 1991 to 1997 is 35%. In 1996 and 1997 alone, it fell to respectively 10,9% and 7,5%.

The drop in production led to mass unemployment. However, the necessary changes in the economic structure are still coming and they will inevitably lead to an increase in the number of unemployed. The continuing high-rate of unemployment, the inflation which reduced the savings of the people and was accompanied by the freezing of the salaries, scholarships, pensions and social aid, as well as the increase in the real tax burden on the personal income led to a sharp deterioration in the quality of life of

most of the people. According to the National Institute of Statistics, from 1991 to 1996 the real incomes index for the population has decreased by 57,7%, the real minimum incomes index (which is the basis for the calculations of all social payments) has fallen by 71,8% and the real average pension - by 64,4%. The price "shock" from the beginning of 1997 caused the consecutive collapse in the real incomes of the population. Most of the families in Bulgaria hardly manage to secure the physical survival of their members and have growing difficulties in providing for their education, qualification and cultural development. The deterioration in the living standard and the large-scale poverty are clearly expressed by the restructuring of the family budget in the last few years. According to the National Institute of Statistics data for the family budget, in the last few years the total family income has been distributed as follows:

Year	Food	House	Electricity	Furnishing	Clothes and shoes	Health and hygiene	Transport	Home production	Others
1992	43,4	3,6	4,3	4,7	8,3	1,9	7,7	4,6	18,0
1993	42,2	4,2	4,5	4,7	8,1	2,5	8,1	4,6	16,9
1994	45,0	4,1	4,3	4,6	7,4	3,2	8,0	4,4	16,0
1995	46,3	3,7	4,5	4,3	7,8	3,7	7,1	4,0	15,4
1996	48,2	3,4	6,7	3,5	6,5	3,6	7,6	3,7	14,3
1997	55,1	2,5	7,6	2,6	4,7	3,8	5,9	4,1	12,3

Note: Data for the period from January to September 1997.

The weight of the crisis is not borne evenly by the whole Bulgarian population. The most seriously affected groups are those living in a precarious situation (the seriously and chronically ill, handicapped, one-parent families, families with one or both parents unemployed, etc.), old-age pensioners, the state employees, mountain and hill populations. Looking at the problem in close-up, the crisis has affected the communities of Gypsies, Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) and Bulgarian Turks to the greatest extent.

4. POVERTY IN THE ROMA COMMUNITY

4.1. THE ROMA IN BULGARIA

It is a widely spread hypothesis that there has been a large Gypsy population in Bulgaria ever since the 13th century, including earlier settlements of small separate groups. Though indirect, the reasons to adopt such a hypothesis are quite convincing. Ottoman fiscal registers from the first decades after the conquest of Bulgaria (1396) refer to the existence of a Gypsy population, specifically indicating the number of Gypsy households and the tax rate they pay the Empire. From the 15th to the 17th century most of the registered Roma were Christians with Slavonic names. This means

that they have been in permanent close contact with the native population for a long time, adopting its religion and naming system and speaking its language.

The first Ottoman document which registers the existence of a significant Roma population in what is now Bulgaria is the Timara register of the Nikopol sandzhak, dated approx. 1430, which contains a record of 431 Gypsy households, constituting 3,5% of all registered households. How many of them were settled cannot be fixed precisely, though in the early 15th century the village of Dabijiv was registered in the Sofia region as having 15 full and 3 widow households - all of them Gypsies.

Together with the Ottomans, new groups of Gypsies arrived in the Balkans, many of them having adopted Islam long before they appeared in Europe. Some of them had served in the army of the conquerors, mainly as craftsmen, army supply transport workers and musicians. The others had just joined the victors in their search for better living conditions.

In the 16th century the first laws especially intended for the Gypsies in the European part of the Empire appeared. In 1530 Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent passed the *Gypsies in the Rumelia Region Act*, and in 1541 yet another law was passed - for the governor of the Gypsy sandzhak. These laws regulate the collecting of taxes from the Roma and prohibit Muslim and Christian Gypsies from coexisting and travelling jointly.

The existing resources provide grounds for research workers to presume that a great number of the Gypsies in the Balkans under Ottoman domination were settled in the early 16th century or at least had permanent houses. They were skilled in various crafts, but the highest tax privileges were granted to those performing army supporting functions such as road building, cannon transportation, cooking, musicians and trumpeters in the fortresses, craftsmen serving the army, etc. In the meantime, a great number of Roma earned their living by agriculture, mainly taking part in seasonal agricultural activities which required additional work (digging, mowing, harvesting, etc.).

Since the 18th century the number of the Muslim Gypsies started to exceed that of the Christians. Obviously the main reason for their change of religion was economic compulsion. This can also be judged by the names in the tax registers - Christian names are found more often among Gypsy women and Muslim names among with men. The adoption of Islam and Muslim names by the men, who communicated more often with the authorities, facilitated the economic activities of the group and led to decreasing taxes. It was approximately the time when the Ottoman authorities undertook more categorical initiatives to settle the Roma permanently and engage them in agricultural labour.

Irrespective of the religion of the Roma, the Ottomans mistrusted them. This is due to their belief that the Gypsies did not observe religious instruction and the rules of the state authority strictly enough. Court documents from Bitolia witness that Muslim Gypsies had to prove that they regularly observed Islam obligations and rituals so as to be exempted from the *cizye* tax. It was specifically stipulated in some regulations that Gypsies were not wanted in the army, even in a supply transport role. When in the 18th century the Ottoman army began to recruit by conscription, Muslim Gypsies were not

recruited until 1874. They were not allowed to become Muslim muftis, nor sometimes to vote for clergymen. With respect to this their situation was very often similar to that of the Christian *raya* (infidels).

In spite of the above restrictions, the situation of the Roma in the Ottoman Empire was incomparably better than that of their fellows in Western and Central Europe, who were the object of consistent persecution, annihilation and assimilation. It is radically different from the semi-slavish statute of the Gypsies in Wallachia and Moldavia, kept until the mid-1860s. It made it possible to preserve the language, culture and traditional way of life of most of the Roma in Bulgaria. Owing to this the Ottoman Empire became a centre of attraction for many Roma refugees from other parts of Europe, who found better living conditions here. This is the explanation for their high number among the population in Balkan countries.

After the establishment of the independent Bulgarian state in 1878 as a result from the war between Russia and Turkey in 1877-78, the process of integration of the Roma in Bulgarian society continued to be inconsistent to some extent. On the one hand - the tendency towards discrimination against them in different spheres of social life remained. In 1901 Parliament passed a law, which abolished the voting rights of Muslim Roma (i.e. most of the Gypsies during that period) and those of no fixed abode. After continual organised resistance, their political rights were restored in 1908. On the other hand - permanent contacts between the Roma and rest of the population were intensified in various spheres of social life. The participation of poor Roma people increased in the developing Bulgarian production enterprises. In Sliven, for example, many Roma textile workers were hired. There were numerous Roma workers in the brick-making industry, in tobacco manufacture, in construction and road and railway building. The average number of literate Roma increased, especially among young men in groups living among Christian Bulgarians. Under the influence of the social and economic changes in the country growing tendencies appeared among the Roma towards a settled life, more participation in agricultural activities and changes in some crafts which were fundamental in the past.

In the meantime, the slow changes in Bulgarian economic life after the liberation and its mainly agricultural character created conditions for the preservation of traditional lifestyles, and hence of many crafts practiced by the Roma and directed mainly towards meeting the different needs of the poor rural population. However, economic development led to the narrowing of the craft services market. A considerable number of Roma continued to earn their living as blacksmiths, farriers and tinkers, as producers of wooden, pottery and copper kitchenware, of items and raw materials for home-made textiles, construction, agriculture and the breeding of domestic animals. Roma musicians and artists at fairs (bear-trainers, dancers, puppet-makers, etc.) preserved their status in Bulgarian society, and some of the most talented musicians took part in the newly created public and military brass-bands.

After WW1 the first Gypsy choirs and amateur theatricals appeared. During the 1920s and the 1930s Roma cultural clubs in Sofia, Sliven, Shoumen, Varna, Lom, etc. carried out active educational and cultural work. In 1919 the "Egypt" Gypsy organisation was established. It was prohibited in 1925 under the Amendment to the State Defence Act. In 1929 a new Roma organisation was established in Sofia: the "Istikbal" ("Future") Muslim National Education and Culture Organisation, that in 1933 issued the "Terbie" ("Education") newspaper - the first and only Roma periodical

from the time of their settlement in Bulgaria until 1946. After the coup d'etat on the 19th May 1934 this organisation was also prohibited.

From 1940 Bulgarian Gypsies were the victims of a series of discriminating actions. They were forbidden access to the centre of Sofia and other big cities and were not allowed to use city transport services. Their food rations were quite insufficient compared to those of the rest of Bulgarian population, even the Jews, who have been subjected to a special policy of discrimination. Some Gypsies in Sofia and other big cities were sent to labour camps together with Jews. Despite its alliance with Nazi Germany, Bulgaria never allowed its Jewish and Gypsy citizens to be sent to the death camps or annihilated just because of their ethnicity.

The new Communist authorities (September 1944 - 1990) had an ambiguous influence on minority communities in Bulgaria, including the Gypsies. Under the influence of world tendencies towards respect for human rights and the example of the Soviet Union, the Roma at first received broad opportunities for the development of their culture, and their equal rights in all spheres of social life were declared. Serious efforts were made to raise their level of education and qualifications. Favourable possibilities were created for decreasing unemployment among them. The number of Roma working in agricultural cooperatives, governmental agricultural farms and production enterprises increased. There was a gradual increase in their welfare and an improvement in the living conditions in Roma households. In March 1945 the "United Roma Organisation for the Struggle Against Fascism and Racism and for the Cultural Promotion of the Gypsy Minority" was established, creating many local organisations in various towns and villages in the country. In 1947 the "Roma" Gypsy theatre was set up. Amateur arts and sports among the Roma were encouraged.

Since the mid-50s, however, again mainly under the influence of social processes in the Soviet Union, state policy towards Gypsies was radically changed. Cultural assimilation of the Roma "into the structure of the Bulgarian socialist nation" began in earnest. Local Roma organisations were closed down and their activities were transferred to the district sections of the Fatherland Front (From 1944 the Fatherland Front (FF) was the only legal non-political organisation in Bulgaria and was subjected entirely to the policies of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). It was responsible for organising many different activities: educational, cultural, social, sports, etc. among those who were not members of BCP or the Komsomol). The "Roma" theatre was closed down. Shakir Pashov, Chairman of the United Roma Organisation, Member of Parliament and editor of the first Roma newspapers in the country - "Istikbal" and "Romano Essi", was denounced as police informer from the period before 9th September 1944 and sent to the concentration camp in Belene.

On the 20th October 1956 Decree No. 685 of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR was issued "?? ?????? ????? ? ?????? ??????, ??????? ? ?????? ?????? ??????????" (For the Incorporation of Vagrant Gypsies into Labour). It was followed by Decree No. 1216 of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, dated 8th October 1957, "For the Solution of the Problem of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria" and by Decree No. 258 of the Council of Ministers, dated 17th December 1958, "For Resolving the Problems of the Gypsy Population in Bulgaria". These instruments provided for the settlement, education and employment of the Bulgarian Roma. **"Nomadic life and begging" were prohibited.** There were stipulations for a housing budget for newly settled Roma families and

recommendations for their engagement in afforestation activities. **This was the beginning of the process of forced name-changing and official attempts at the formation of their Bulgarian ethnic self-identity imposed on the Muslim Roma. The name "Gypsy" itself was perceived as something shameful and offensive, and the Roma were given the right to bring those who "insulted them" in this way to court. In 1984-1985, together with the name-changing campaign imposed on Bulgarian Turks, the names of the Muslim Gypsies, preserved until then, were also changed.**

4.2. ETHNIC IDENTITY

The Roma "community" is the most heterogeneous minority community in Bulgaria. In fact, the Gypsies are only "a community" as far as the others are concerned, since the internal diversity of the group is bigger than the differences with the rest of the population. The subgroups differ in religion (Muslims, Eastern Orthodox Christians, followers of various Protestant churches, even Judeans), mother tongue (for the various groups these include different Romani dialects, Turkish, Bulgarian, Wallachian dialects), traditional craft, time of settlement, way of life.

Gypsies themselves seldom have any awareness of a uniform Roma "community". In practice, actual communities turn out to be separate subgroups, such as the *kardarashi*, the Thracian *kalaidzhii*, *burgudzhii*, the "*Turkish Gypsies*", the *lingurari*, etc., united by tight family bonds, traditional occupation and their own dialect. Only a few members of the Roma intelligentsia and the leaders of the numerous Gypsy organisations carry any consciousness of a specific ethnic group and a wider community. Roma ethnic identity sometimes finds expression among wider circles of Gypsy population as a reaction against the racist press or the policy of discrimination in the exercise of economic and social rights by representatives of the Roma community - i.e. it is built "from the outside".

There are currently various processes of ethnic identification among the numerous Gypsy groups in Bulgaria. Quantitative data on the percentage of Gypsies with a preferred alien self-identification have to be interpreted very carefully. The way of self-identification to the "others" depends on various situation factors. While, during the census of the population at least half of those, identified by the others as Roma, identify themselves as Bulgarians, Turks or Wallachians, two thirds of the respondents of the representative sociological survey "Gypsies in the Transition Period" from 1994, which covered 1844 Roma families from the compact Gypsy neighbourhoods, declared that they belong to the Roma community. 22%, mainly from the regions with mixed population, demonstrated preference towards Turkish self-consciousness. One tenth of the respondents indicate that they are ethnic Bulgarians, and 5% that they are Wallachians.

According to data from the above survey 47% of the respondents indicate that they belong to the "Bulgarian Gypsy" group. In very rare cases they call themselves *dasikane Roma* or even more seldom *gadzhikane Roma*. (The word "*das*" in Balkan Romani is used to name Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs and Croatians, "*horahai*" denotes Turks, and "*gadzho*" refers to all non-Roma). Three quarters of them do not indicate any other name for their group. The rest of them mostly give the name of the traditional or contemporary occupation of the group, or nicknames given to them by

other groups. 21 "Bulgarian Gypsy" sub-groups are identified on the basis of the way they present themselves: *burgudzhii* (woodworking tool makers), *kalaidzhii* (tinsmiths), *koshnichari* (basket-makers), *dzhambazi* (horse-dealers), *kovachi* (blacksmiths), *kopanari* (wooden bowl makers), *zhelezari* (ironmongers), *sitari* (sieve-makers), *reshetari* (coarse sieve-makers), *kasapi* (slaughterers), *brusnari* (barbers), *hamali* (porters), *bakurdzhii* (coppersmiths), *builders*, *painters*, *woodsmen*, *kozhari* (leather workers), *kokalari* (bone handle makers), *dzhourevtsi* (half-breeds), *goli* ("naked") and *gadzhali* (robbers). Many of the traditional crafts indicated ceased to be practised long ago, but the name of the group is still preserved. Some of the respondents identifying themselves as Bulgarian Gypsies indicated that their parents or grandparents had been Muslims but that they themselves are now Christians (i.e. that they have passed over from the group of "Turkish Gypsies" to the group of "Bulgarian Gypsies"). Traces of the old religion are preserved in some of these groups; they still circumcise their boys or have their funerals conducted by a Hodja.

Out of the respondents who consider themselves Gypsies, 46% identify themselves as "Turkish Gypsies". More than two-thirds of these do not indicate any other sub-group. The others are dispersed in 18 sub-groups: *kalaidzhii*, *tenekedzhii* (tinsmiths for building and transport materials), *pechkari* (stove makers), *kovachi*, *bakurdzhii*, *zvanchari* (bell-makers), *muzikanti* (musicians), *rogozhari* (rush mat makers), *vuglishtari* (charcoal burners), *borinari* (resin candle makers), *hamali*, *touhlari* (brick-makers), *karoutsari* (carters), "*bombadzhii*" (explosives experts), *drundari* (carders), *kurbati*, *dali*, *dunkoulari* (Balamo Horohane Roma, or "Greek Muslim Gypsies" in the Pleven region).

The "Wallachian Gypsy" group is much smaller than the above groups, forming only 5% of the respondents. They identify themselves as *vlach*s (Wallachians), *vlachoria* (or *lahovi*), *kopanari*, *ursari* (bear-trainers) and *vretenari* (spindle-makers).

The *kardarashi* and *lovari* groups from the extract in 1994 are the least numerous - only 1,6%. Probably their percentage is higher, but due to the fact that they usually live scattered around outside the large Gypsy quarters, with a few families per village, they were not well covered by the sociological survey, representative only for the Roma, living in compact neighbourhoods. They identify themselves as *kardarashi*, *lovari*, *serbski* (Serb), *niamtsura* (German), *Hungarian* or *Austrian*, *grastari*, *zlatari* (goldsmiths), *zhupli*, *laeshti* and *kardarashi kalaidzhii*.

One of the main markers for the ethnic identity of Bulgarian citizens is their mother tongue. Half of the Gypsies in Bulgaria usually speak Romany at home. Internal group differences are very clearly defined here. **Romany is the mother tongue of 85% of the *kardarashi* and *lovari*, 75% of the "Bulgarian Gypsies", 34% of the "Turkish Gypsies" and 14% of the "Wallachian Gypsies"**. Bulgarian is the main language spoken in the homes of one-fifth of the "Bulgarian Gypsies", one-tenth of the *kardarashi* and *lovari* and among one-twentieth of the "Turkish Gypsies". 61% of the latter usually talk among themselves in Turkish. 84% of the "Wallachian Gypsies" speak Wallachian. Although most Gypsies in Bulgaria can speak Bulgarian up to a point, it is important to note that it is the main means of communication in only 14% of all Roma homes in Bulgaria (mainly the homes of those who prefer to identify themselves as Bulgarians). Due to the insufficient knowledge of the official Bulgarian language, many children have difficulties at school and leave the school system very early, which makes it impossible to find job and leads to poverty for them and their families.

In contrast with the West European concept about the nomadic character of Roma, most of those who lived in Bulgaria were already settled at the time of the Ottoman Empire. The settlement has a different character with the particular groups: *ierlia* are the most permanently and long-settled group. Some sub-groups have preserved a semi-settled way of life for a long time - a permanent winter house, which they leave during the warm period while practicing their traditional craft (this is usually the case among the groups of *kalaidzhii*, *rogozhari*, *kopanari*, *vretenari*, *ursari*, etc.) Others preserved the nomadic and semi-nomadic way of life until 1958, when the last nomadic groups were forcibly settled.

The long-settled Roma selectively include and transform into their cultural model whole areas of the traditional culture of the surrounding population, losing certain peculiarities of their group's cultural model - for example, their own potestarian bodies, in some cases - their language and traditional crafts. The semi-nomadic (until the middle of the XX c.) sub-groups, especially those of *kardarashi* and *lovari* (who are still very mobile now), preserved the traditional Roma culture to the largest extent. The **specific traditional judicial institution of *meshere*** - Gypsy court (in Central and Western Europe this institution is known as "Romano Kriss") - still operates only in their group. 85% of this group have preserved and actively use their own language. They rigorously preserve marriage within the community. In comparison with the other sub-groups, they have preserved traditional crafts to the greatest extent and are the richest Gypsies in the country. Two-thirds of them declare they have considerable savings and possess cars, usually expensive Western models. Half of them have some kind of business. They claim to be "the real Gypsies", descending from the highest castes of ancient Indian society and usually do not conceal their contempt for the rest of the Roma.

The Roma community is characterised by a **considerable heterogeneity with regard to religion**. The last population census does not supply precise statistical data about the religions of the Roma, as there are no tables correlating ethnic identity and religion. However, we have data from the 1992 population census about the correlation between the mother tongue and religion of the Bulgarian citizens, where 310 425 of the respondents declared that Romany is their mother tongue - it is the vast majority of those who identify themselves as Gypsies. 59,7% of them have declared that they are Christians, and 39,7% that they are Muslims. The majority of the Christians belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. According to the representative sociological surveys from 1994-1997 concerning Gypsies, some 14% of them belong to various Protestant Churches. In the meantime, 88% of Muslim Roma usually do not indicate Sunni Islam or Shia Islam as their religion but "the Islamic culture as a whole".

Religion, like other spheres of Gypsy culture, is borrowed from the cultural model of the population they have been in long contact with, adopted to a varying degree. With a view to their better adaptation to the society around them during the period of Ottoman domination, a considerable number of Gypsies in the Southern Balkans adopted Islam. After the establishment of independent Christian states in the Balkans a vast majority of Muslim Roma became Christians, either voluntarily, or under duress from the state or the police, as is the case in Serbia and Bulgaria. In both cases, they do not adopt all the religious ideas, beliefs, practices and feelings into their

cultural model, but only those which answer the existential needs of the Roma groups in question.

A clear example with regard to their manner of choosing between Christian codes as a powerful social and moral regulator are certain *lovari* and *kardarashi* groups who practice pick-pocketing and theft as traditional crafts. In Bulgaria, as in Romania, Moldavia and other Eastern European countries, they belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church and proudly declare their devotion and the fact that they have never changed their religion. Although they have professed the Christian faith for centuries, with regard to *gadzho* and "the other" Roma these groups have never accepted the norm "Thou shalt not steal". They have created a whole set of legends and myths, "proving" their group's specific God-given right to earn their living by theft and deceit. They have also created a range of poetic rationalisations which help them believe that in practising their "craft" they are loved by God as much as anyone else.

Official religious institutions have usually been distrustful and contemptuous towards the Roma. For long periods they were not allowed access to the "high religion", and Roma could become neither imams, nor priests. This fact also determines the "folk-style" religious character of the Roma with its emphasis on traditional rites and purification rituals, especially those referring to birth and death, the widely spread superstitions and the belief in supernatural powers and demons.

For many Roma in Bulgaria religion is the basis for the social and cultural reorganisation of the group. The Protestant Roma provide clear proof of this. In recent years of deep social and economic crisis, Protestant missionaries work very successfully among the most marginalised groups and those threatened with anomie, because of their isolation from social life. Religion becomes the basic means for the preservation of the mental equilibrium of thousands of Roma, living in inhuman conditions. It gives them hope for a better life and makes them feel that they belong to a respectable, sacred and prestigious community, so necessary for their self-respect and dignity.

For a number of Muslim Roma it is again their religion which incorporates them to the more prestigious community of Bulgarian Turks. Hence their effort to observe religious rituals and practices strictly. However, later surveys of the religiousness of the Roma community indicate that the group of "Turkish Gypsies" is less religious at the moment. Many of these cannot define their religion and some of them gradually adopt different forms of the Christian religion. As a whole, the community of Muslim Roma is more strict than Christians in observing religious feasts and in celebrating the main religious holidays. Religious syncretism is more common among their group - they are twice as active as the rest of the Roma in celebrating the holidays of the other religion.

The fatalism and the belief that human life is in the hands of God and fate are most typical for the Roma community and predetermine the world view of some two-thirds of the group. Only those who do not belong to any of the religions in the country in most cases answer: "I have no opinion" instead of "God controls human life". The continuing marginalisation of the Roma community does not allow its members to escape from the acquired helplessness syndrome and to take the responsibility for

themselves and their families. Only one-fifth of the respondents are convinced that they control their own life.

4.3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

4.3.1. NUMBER, RESIDENCE AND MIGRATIONS:

According to data from the 1992 census of Bulgarian population, 313,326 of the Bulgarian citizens identified themselves as Gypsies. The unofficial local authority and Ministry of the Interior data in January 1989 estimated the number of Gypsies at 577,000 or 6,45% of the Bulgarian population. These data were gathered on the basis of "objective criteria" and the estimates of the local population and the local authorities regarding the ethnic identification of Bulgarian citizens. Jean-Pierre Liegeois estimates the number of Gypsies in Bulgaria at 700,000 - 800,000 (roughly 9% of Bulgarian population) - again on the basis of "objective criteria". Because of the low social status of the group a considerable number of its members prefer to introduce themselves as Bulgarians, Bulgarian Turks or Wallachians and the people who identify themselves as Gypsies are hardly half of those who are referred to as Roma by the rest of the population.

The Gypsies in Bulgaria are dispersed all over the country. Their proportion tends to be lower in mountainous regions. In some towns (Lom, Sliven, etc.) Roma constitute one-third of the population (according to objective criteria). There are clearly-defined Gypsy neighbourhoods in almost every town, though a number of Gypsies live among the rest of the population in the residential districts. There are villages - mainly in North-Western Bulgaria, with predominant or entirely Roma population.

There have been substantial changes in the living environment of the Roma between the beginning of this century and the present day. According to the 1975 census, most of them lived in villages. In 1900, 71,180 Gypsies lived in villages and only 18,369 in towns; 79,5% of the Roma population was rural. At the turn of the century, its structure in this respect was very similar to that of the whole population; 80,2% of all Bulgarian citizens lived in a rural environment.

Social and economic changes led to a steady migration of the rural population towards the towns. This process was more in evidence among the ethnic Bulgarians than among the Roma. According to data from the 1992 census, 52% of the Roma population was already urban, and 48% - rural. The corresponding ratio is 72:28 for the ethnic Bulgarians.

After the enforced collectivisation of agricultural land carried out by the communist authorities, the large-scale migration of young Bulgarians from the countryside into the towns gave many Roma the opportunity to start work on the new cooperative and state farms. On the other hand, many of the Roma craftsmen whose work had served the rural population were left without a livelihood as a result of the declining number of customers and the changes in their way of life. Most of them re-trained as agricultural workers, while others left their villages.

In 1991 a law for the return of agricultural land to its former owners was passed, and the former cooperative farms were broken up. The vast majority of the

Gypsies living in the countryside were left out without a livelihood. This reinforced the processes of temporary migration to the towns, where the men had a better chance of finding temporary work, and to the mountains, where entire families gather mushrooms, herbs, wild fruit and snails, which find a ready market outside Bulgaria.

We can expect the influx of Roma into the towns, where they will settle as permanent residents to increase in the near future. On the other hand, some of the settled rural and urban Roma populations may start to lead a semi-nomadic way of life, mainly in the warmer months of the year. Such processes have already occurred since 1992 and are becoming more steady.

At the moment, Bulgarian society is not ready to meet the changes taking place in the Roma ethnic community. It is impossible for Roma households to pay the excessive rents of houses, while the surrounding population is not willing to let out its property to Gypsies. Some of the Roma are forced to occupy desolate houses or to build rickety shelters out of materials at hand, which do not suit any sanitary requirements. These "houses" are without electricity, water-supply, lavatories; they are moist and dirty. The families who move to the mountain areas in the summer usually build "tents" out of polythene, covered with branches and straw. Their "beds" are made of thin rugs right on the ground. This leads to frequent colds and renal disorders, while their access to medical services is very limited and the diseases often become chronic. In the meantime, it has become a common practice that their deserted houses are plundered during their absence, usually by other Roma. All this leads to the **progressive pauperisation of a considerable part of the Roma population.**

There is no normative set-up for regulating temporary stops of the nomads, nor any camps on local authority or state land in which they can stay during the summer. There are no flexible alternative forms of education for nomad children, which often leads to their premature leaving of school. Conflicts between the Roma and the mountain and hill populations arise, not only as a result of thefts of domestic animals and agricultural produce, but also from economic rivalry; a large part of the mountain and hill populations are unemployed and supplement their family income by gathering mushrooms and wild fruit. These conflicts reinforce negative attitudes to the Roma community and will hinder any normative settlement of the problems of semi-nomadic groups and the setting up of camps where they can stay temporarily in the near future.

After 1990 many Roma took the opportunity to leave the country. In the beginning they were oriented mainly towards Germany, while the establishment of strict visa regime in 1992 quickly changed the direction towards Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Some of them make attempts to enter the "closed" countries illegally. Although the economic crisis is the main reason to leave Bulgaria, there are certain cases when in order to get foreign citizenship, persons claimed that they have been discriminated.

Most of the emigrants do not leave "forever". They want to take part in the international labour market, to save up some foreign currency, to live under better conditions until the crisis in Bulgaria is over and to go back. They are usually ready to start any dirty and unattractive job without a contract. There are whole families who for many years cross the Greek border illegally during the olive and orange harvest, always coming back after it. They often become blood-donors, which is well paid. There are also some who take part in the international traffic of stolen cars and other illegal activities.

4.3.2. MARRIAGE, BIRTH RATE AND MORTALITY:

Bulgarian Roma have preserved the model of marriage typical of pre-industrial societies, characterised by **early universal marriages**. According to data from the survey entitled *The Gypsies in the transition period*, 40% of Gypsies marry before the age of 16, and 80% - before the age of 18. This survey confirmed the hypothesis that the 784 marriages of children under 14 years old registered in the census are concentrated among those who referred to as Roma by the surrounding population, irrespective of their own self-identification.

The early marriages are one of the reasons for the poverty in the Roma community. Once married, the young do not continue education at school. They are therefore usually very poorly educated and underqualified, which makes them incapable to compete on the labour market. A vast majority of young girls are not prepared for sexual life and experience it as violence and trauma. Many premature births and early abortions lead to health problems. These are the main reasons for the high mortality rate among Roma women of fertile age from 14 to 40 years. Owing to this, **Gypsies are the only group in which there are more men than women and represent the gender demographic structure characteristic for Bulgaria up to 1929.**

The age structure of the Roma population is considerably different from that of the rest of Bulgarian citizens and represents another indicator of the poverty in the community. The age structure of pre-industrial societies, characterised with **a high birth and death rate** is still typical for the Gypsies. According to data from the 1992 census, 66% of Roma are up to 29 years old, while only 5% reach 60 and more years of age. The number of Roma children and young people is twice as high as that of ethnic Bulgarians, although their chance to reach the age of retirement is 4,4 times less.

The birth rate among the Gypsy community is the highest in the country. According to data from the representative survey *The Rhodope Mountains: a model of tolerance*, carried out in October - November 1997, the coefficient for the average number of children in the Roma family is 3.868, while it is 1.729 for ethnic Bulgarians. **Under present conditions in Bulgaria the existence of three or more children in a family, even if both parents work, usually leads to poverty.** This is acutely true for Roma families, where usually both parents are unemployed or rely on casual and temporary income.

Although to a lower degree compared to the rest of the population, in recent years the Gypsy community is undergoing the same processes as the whole of Bulgarian society - a rise in the marital age and a decrease in the birth-rate. According to data from the 1994 survey *The Gypsies in the Transition Period*, the coefficient for the number of children in families where parents are 18-29 years old is 2.34, while among families with 50-59 year old parents it is 4.32.

However typical of the community as a whole, this tendency is not characteristic of the increasing group of **highly marginalised Gypsies who already exceed 10-15% of the Roma community.**

This group indicates a very high and steady birth-rate. The new babies are born in already large families, their mothers totally weak and their fathers usually different, as if the only reason for this is the social support given for children under 2 years of age, which is the only family income in many cases. A vast majority of these children are underweight and undersized and suffer from rickets and congenital diseases. They

live under terrible conditions - without furniture, electricity and water, in many cases without clothes, suffering from chronic malnutrition. Children are often victims of family violations or are forced to beg, steal and become prostitutes. They seldom go to school.

Some Roma sub-groups only acknowledge family relationships on the paternal side. In these cases marriage between cousins on the mother's side is permissible. At the same time, other sub-groups who recognise blood ties on both sides accept intermarriages within the group because of their closed way of life.

4.4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS:

4.4.1. SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROMA:

Although to a lesser degree compared to Western and Central Europe, the Roma in the Balkans have always been victims of discrimination and contempt on the part of the surrounding population. Other communities (Greeks, Turks, Southern Slavs, Jews, Armenians) have always demonstrated their "indisputable superiority" over the Roma. This attitude was apparent in various ways, from tendencies towards patronisation to mockery and isolation.

Along with the modernisation of Bulgarian society and the sharp decrease in the need for the services provided by Roma, negative stereotypes towards them have increased. Their image is one of persons, unable to adapt to the changing reality; useless for society, living parasitically on private charity and social funds. There are increasing tendencies towards the isolation of Roma. They are gradually "dropping out" of the non-Roma world. This leads in practice to backwardness in all spheres of society - education, culture, social and economic status, participation in political life.

The low social status of the group and its neglect by "the others" have been the main reasons for the attempts by some of the Roma - usually the settled - to "move" to another, more prestigious ethnic group. This tendency is indicated by the early Ottoman registers, and still remains from the Liberation until now. It is registered in population censuses at the end of last century, as well as by the surveys of ethnologists, folklore specialists, politicians and sociologists.

In recent years negative stereotypes and prejudices towards the Gypsies have seriously increased. Social distances between the Roma and other ethnic groups are very high and are still growing. These negative stereotypes and prejudices create discriminative tendencies and attitudes towards the Roma community. All this takes place against the background of apparent normalising of relations between Bulgarians and Turks, Christians and Muslims, gradually registered by surveys from 1990 until now, which makes the situation of the Gypsies in the country even more painful.

There are grounds for grave concern over the refusal of the politicians and civil society to realise the depth, the dimensions and the destructive character of the ongoing processes within the Roma community as a result of its practical isolation from all social spheres, and the eventual price we will have to pay later in order to solve the "Gypsy problem" resulting from the attitudes and actions of the non-Roma population.

The scale of the marginalisation of this third largest ethnic community in Bulgaria is clearly defined: **large-scale long-term unemployment spread over more than 75% of the able-bodied population of the group; the related poverty; low health status; decrease in the level of education and qualifications** of the coming generation and narrowing of the chances for long-term perspectives for successful integration into the economic and social life in the country, deteriorating living conditions and the processes of **anomie** among an increasing part of the group.

4.4.2. HEALTH STATUS:

According to data from the survey *The Gypsies in the Transition Period*, **44% of Roma families have a chronically ill member**, and one in five of the respondents declare that there are two or more chronically ill people in the family. According to expert estimates the health situation of the Gypsy group has declined since 1994, as a result of the chronic malnutrition, the bad residential and living conditions and the lasting distress to which its representatives are exposed. These data are confirmed by the interviewed doctors from the Roma neighbourhoods.

In the last years poverty-related illnesses such as tuberculosis, rachitis, anaemia, gastric or intestinal diseases, etc. have increased. As they cannot afford to buy medicines, **many Roma stopped going to the doctor**. This led to a decline in the already poor health of their group. Many parents do not vaccinate their children. As a result of this in 1992, 90 Gypsy children in the Sliven area caught poliomyelitis, while there is no such case among children from the other ethnic groups there. In 1993 diphtheria broke out, again in the same Gypsy neighbourhoods in the Sliven area. Every summer the number suffering from hepatitis increases in Roma neighbourhoods. Cases of tapeworm are often registered. Roma suffer more frequently than the rest of Bulgarian citizens from kidney and respiratory diseases. Because of the untimely diagnostics most of the Roma suffering from cancer usually die young. Gynaecologists working in Gypsy neighbourhoods assert that practically all women from the community have gynaecological problems caused by early marriages, numerous abortions and frequent childbirth. According to doctors Gypsy women much frequently suffer from cancer of the breast and of the womb compared to the rest of the women in Bulgaria. Because of the hard living conditions and systematic home violence Gypsy women grow old or become handicapped very early.

According to official statistics the percentage of handicapped among the Gypsies is lower than average for the country and almost twice as low as among the Armenians and Jews in Bulgaria. According to data from the survey *The Gypsies in the Transition Period*, however, there are 81 handicapped per 1000 individuals over 16 years old, i.e. more than twice the average for the country. Infantile invalidity in this ethnic group has to be taken into account. Child handicapped are not included in the figure of 81 per 1000 and they comprise 38 % of the invalids registered at the time of this research. In October - November 1997, 15% of the interviewed Roma living in the Rhodope mountains declare that there is an handicapped in their family. 13-14% of the respondents in both surveys declare that they have lost a child under the age of 18, usually in the first year of his/her life. In the 1997 Rhodope survey, 10% more of the respondents have lost a child from their extended family, including brothers and sisters with their household.

The higher and early invalidity among Roma is due to different factors: hard manual labour at a very early age; low qualified work under harmful labour conditions in the chemical, metal-processing, leather or ore-dressing industry; low labour and civil discipline; high level of invalidity due to insufficient health care and home violence, etc.

The high number of chronically ill and handicapped among Roma families is clear evidence of the poverty of the group, as well as one of the major factors contributing to the poverty of the community. Families with chronically ill and handicapped members are the most vulnerable in crisis conditions. The situation is more difficult for Roma households where the level of unemployment is much higher and the income is lower.

4.4.3. RESIDENTIAL CONDITIONS:

A considerable number of Roma live in separate ghetto-like districts. Overpopulation is the norm in these neighbourhoods. Most of the Roma houses do not meet any sanitary standards. According to data from the survey *The Gypsies in the Transition Period*, Roma homes are inhabited by 6,9 persons on average, as opposed to 2,6 persons in the average Bulgarian home. One Roma has an average use of 7,1 sq.m. of floor area, while the figure for the average Bulgarian citizen including the Roma is 16,9 sq.m. In 17% of the hovels there is no furniture at all, nor even beds. According to National Institute of Statistics data from the 1992 census, only 37% of Roma houses have a water supply and sewerage facilities.

The housing problem of the Roma will continue to deteriorate in the next few years. This will be due to the fact that the state no longer carries out building work for the socially disadvantaged; even in the past the Roma were discriminated in this respect. Roma families have many children who in turn start having their own families in their early teenage years and will be increasingly difficult to accommodate in their own homes. Many Roma families which do have large attractive houses will lose them because of unpaid debts to the State Savings Bank (DSK). 13% of Roma families are threatened with this perspective. Many of the Roma living among the surrounding population in the residential districts have sold their apartments in the last few years and returned to their neighbourhoods. This led to a sharp deterioration in their housing conditions.

4.4.4. EDUCATION & QUALIFICATION:

The Roma community has the lowest level of education in the country. Up till 1946, 81% of the Gypsies in Bulgaria were illiterate. In spite of the efforts of the Communist government for the elimination of illiteracy and the improvement of education, the vast majority of them remained half-illiterate and very poorly educated. According to National Institute of Statistics data in 1992, 8,5% of the Roma over the age of 18 were illiterate, 36,7% had primary education, 46,2% had elementary education. Only 7,8% had secondary school education (as opposed to 54% among the ethnic Bulgarians), and only 0,9% had higher college or university education, while the figure for ethnic Bulgarians is 20,2%. The 1994 and 1997 sociological surveys data for the educational level of the Roma are even more alarming. In the separate Gypsy

neighbourhoods, 16% of the adult population is illiterate, in 1997 it reached 22% in the Rhodope mountains.

The number of Roma children who drop out of, or never start, school is increasing drastically. According to *The Gypsies in the Transition period*, **52% of healthy Roma children of 7-16 years old do not go to school**, although education is compulsory for this group. This means that nearly 100 000 children will remain illiterate or uneducated with no chance for integration in the Bulgarian society. Due to the lack of interest on part of the executive power it is most likely that this tendency will go deeper and deteriorate in the next years.

One of the teachers' explanations of this fact is that after Roma children stop going to kindergarten for economic reasons, many of them do not speak Bulgarian when they start school, which leads to poor results, poor motivation and quickly dropping out of the educational system. The usual explanation of the parents is that they are unable to afford the necessary clothes, shoes and textbooks. Usually their children's labour is necessary for the survival of the family.

We should not underestimate the fact that many parents stop their children from going to school as a protest against the social policy of Bulgarian governments after 1989. Up until then, local cooperatives and town halls paid for food in school canteens in most villages and small town schools, as well as in newly-built schools in Gypsy neighbourhoods. Until 1992 most textbooks were paid for by the state. Many Roma children were educated in boarding schools where the state paid for all the food, heating, clothing, sport, daytime lessons and upbringing. After 1989 most of these social benefits were abolished. Representatives of the Roma community often see the shrinking of social benefits for education as a breach on the part of the state of a tacit agreement, in accordance with which they would let their children go to Bulgarian schools if the state takes on all or most of the expenses for their maintenance while they are at school.

Many parents are convinced that because of the discriminative attitude of the rest of Bulgarian citizens towards the Roma, their children will remain unemployed regardless of their education. This demotivates them in their special efforts to provide for their children's education. Parents often point out the objective fact that in the last few years the quality of education has sharply diminished, which makes any sacrifices for education even more useless.

All these factors will soon lead to an additional decrease in the low educational level of the Roma community, and thence to its progressive marginalisation and the inability of a vast majority of Gypsies to integrate successfully into the economic and social life in the country, even after Bulgaria begins to overcome its economic crisis.

4.4.5. EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT:

The low level of education and qualifications among representatives of the Roma community makes them practically incapable to compete on the labour market. Only one-tenth of the Roma over the age of 18 are highly qualified. An additional factor is the preconception deeply-held by non-Gypsy Bulgarian citizens that the Gypsies are "lazy, irresponsible, undisciplined and careless". Like all stereotypes, this is applied indiscriminately to all Roma and in practice leads to discrimination against them on the labour market. As a result of this, unemployment among the Roma has reached very high levels. According to *The Gypsies in the Transition Period* (1994), **77% of the Roma were unemployed**. In the "Relations of compatibility and

incompatibility between Christians and Muslims" survey, in the summer of 1997, again only 23% of the Roma declared that they work full-time (some of them in temporary employment programmes), and 11% more declared that they can get some seasonal job from time to time, usually in agriculture and construction. **During the winter months, the level of unemployment in certain big city neighbourhoods and in the villages goes beyond 90%.**

The sharp increase in the level of unemployment among Roma in the last few years is due to different reasons. After the return of agricultural land to its expropriators and the close down of socialist cooperatives Gypsies in the villages (nearly half of all the Bulgarian Gypsies) remained unemployed. The number of those who are involved in seasonal agricultural work is gradually decreasing for different reasons: because of the prejudices against them, due to the growing tension in the inter ethnic relations as a result of the frequent thefts of agricultural production on part of the Roma, etc. These are the main reasons for the high percentage of unemployment among Gypsies in the villages - over 90%.

Gypsies in the towns were usually involved in the hardest, low qualified and dirty work. A great number of Roma remained unemployed after the close down of some injurious to health branches of the chemical, metal processing and ore-dressing industry, as well as after the reduction of low qualified staff in the industrial enterprises and in the cleaning and maintenance services.

Unemployment among the Roma community is a large-scale and lasting process. A considerable part of the Roma were laid off in 1990-1991. Nothing was done in the following few years for the reduction of unemployment among this ethnic group. On the contrary, it was increased. The only operative national programme oriented towards them is the Temporary Employment Programme. It guarantees those of the unemployed Roma who have been registered for the period of 12 months the right to work in the sphere of services for a period of 5 months at the minimum wage. Problems arise from the fact that **in order to have the right to unemployment compensation, unemployed people must have had at least 6 full working months without a break, while it is very difficult for the Roma to find a job for one more month and have the right to this benefit.**

The share of Roma who have preserved their traditional craft or can still practise it is very small - only some 10%. Only 8,5% of Roma families own agricultural land, usually a very small area around the house. According to the 1994 survey data, 14% of Roma households keep fowl, 9% keep sheep or goats and only 2% keep cattle, while in 1992 these proportions were twice as high (according to the 1992 survey *The Ethno-cultural Situation in Bulgaria*). A comparative analysis of these data shows a very marked negative tendency in the medium term.

4.4.6. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE:

In this situation, the number of Roma households totally dependent on social security is gradually increasing. The problem is that in conditions of economic stagnation, high average unemployment and large-scale pauperisation of the population, the state is not able to provide even for the most needy.

Many Roma complain about the quality of social services. They are convinced that due to the discriminative attitude towards their group, they are deprived of the

social benefits enjoyed by other Bulgarian citizens. Due to long-term unemployment or because of the fact that the young cannot find a permanent job at all, a vast majority of Roma are deprived of the possibility to get monthly unemployment benefit. Special attention has to be paid to the fact that in practice **lots of Roma women face serious difficulties in receiving the maternity and child allowances due to them, because of the requirement for a certificate that they have worked at least 7 days. This seems a rather frivolous requirement in view of the state budget income those 7 days would provide.**

The problem with the social assurance for pregnant women and young mothers (with children under the age of 3 years) is very serious among Roma not only because of the fact that their community has the greatest number of newly born children. Up until 1990 a considerable part of Roma women and their families were almost fully dependent on state social assistance in accordance with the National programme for encouragement of births. The state provided young mothers with a regular payment and a length of service for a period of three years. So that if a woman has worked for a short period of time and after this she gave birth of 5 children within 3 years she was provided for payment and length of service for a period of 15 years and was given the right to retire earlier as a mother of many children. Apart from this, the state undertook a great part of the expenses for children. Families with 2 children paid half of the tax for nursery and kindergarten, the third and every next child went to kindergarten on state expenses. Young families could take a loan for newly married couple for building or buying their own house. After the birth of a second child within a period of 3 years they were remitted 40% of this loan and if they had 3 or more children the remission was 80%. Mothers with 3 and more children used 50% discount for public transport and could go to sea and mountain resorts at reduced fare. Although, after 1990 most of these privileges for families with many children dropped out most of Roma women still believe that if more persistent they could enjoy social assistance again and do not change their family planning in accordance with the changing realities.

Another permanent problem is that **Roma women seldom enjoy their right to benefit for single mothers.** In most cases social workers refuse to acknowledge that they have such a status, presuming that Roma mothers do not marry on purpose in order to profit from single parent benefit, while in the same time living together with the father who contributes to the family income. They are not willing to acknowledge the fact that **one of the most dramatic consequences of the disastrous impoverishment of the Roma community is the destabilisation of the family institution.** More and more young men are leaving their families and no longer provide for their wife and children. Even in cases of official marriage and divorce, Roma men seldom take the responsibility to support the deserted family, and the women cannot receive the social aids due to them without presenting certificates that their ex-husband is unemployed, is not receiving child benefit and is not supporting the family. In this situation, **more and more deserted Roma women without any chance of a steady job are forced to become prostitutes. In the last two years the number of child prostitutes in the community has sharply increased.**

Although prostitution among Roma women existed in the past it has never been so widely spread as in the last few years. It was typical for small marginalised subgroups in towns with military garrisons. At present most of the young Gypsy women neglected from their husbands have such a fate. Usually they (and their children) remain with their parents in law for several months but the poor financial circumstances force them to go back to their own parents

home. For a certain period of time they are given shelter and selfless care. However, if the young woman has a brother or brothers who live in the same house with their own families, she soon becomes a victim of permanent harassment and violence because there is usually no room for other people in the house. Then the young woman, who can hardly find a job, has to become a prostitute. The most beautiful go to Greece, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic or Germany and their families jealously hide the fact that they prostitutes there. The rest remain in Bulgaria but this usually leads to turned out of their parents' home.

It is a negative fact that in many cases **the state system for social support promotes and strengthens passive behaviour and acquired helplessness on the part of its clients.** If somebody is caught out doing a temporary job, he/she loses the right for social benefits. In the Eastern Rhodope region where up until 1990 the Roma both worked and cultivated tobacco, they are now totally dependent on the state social security. The problem is that **a decision has been taken in these municipalities that tobacco-production workers can be granted neither social security nor child benefit. The Roma, with their large families, have realised that it is more profitable not to cultivate tobacco and live on child benefit and social security, with additional income from gathering mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit, or the small services they offer to the surrounding population. All this leads to the strengthening of prejudices and negative attitudes, as well as to the growing tendency for discrimination towards the Gypsies.**

4.4.7. THE SPREAD OF POVERTY IN ROMA COMMUNITY:

Poverty has traditionally gone together with the Roma community in Bulgaria. However, during the period of Communist government a lot was done to overcome its most acute effects. In the transition period poverty among the Roma has reached disastrous proportions.

The **major factors** contributing to poverty among the Roma are:

- ethnic discrimination;
- institutional racism;
- mass long-term unemployment and low salaries for the employed;
- decrease in the already low level of education and qualifications, which seriously hampers young people's efforts to take part in the economic and social life of the country;
- early marriages and destabilisation of the marital institution;
- high birth-rate in the poorest families, which have no facilities for bringing up their children;
- increase in the number of chronically and seriously ill, leading to permanent disablement, invalidity and early death-rate;
- decrease in social services cover and limitation of the access to them, to the health system and to education.

The proportion of more well-to-do Roma is very small - about 10%. The same percentage have over 20 sq.m. floor area per person. The main source of income for

6% of the whole Roma community is from their own business. 8% declared that they have savings and are able to make savings at the moment.

A considerable proportion of these more well-to-do Roma belong to the *kardarashi* and *lovari* groups who have preserved the traditional Roma culture to a greater extent. 60% of them possess cars, usually expensive Western models. Half of them have a private business, and one-tenth openly declare that they live on thefts (pocket-picking is considered a traditional craft among particular *kardarashi* and *lovari* groups). Some years ago they accumulated money by keeping domestic animals and working in cooperatives which specialised in roofing insulation. After the political changes some of them turned to "moonshining", from which they made a lot of money. But the number of *kardarashi* and *lovari* is very small - they constitute no more than 5% of the whole Roma Group.

The proportion of wealthy *ierlia* ("Bulgarian" and "Turkish" long-settled Gypsies) is much smaller - about 4-5%. Gypsy businessmen (traders, money-changers and much less frequently producers of goods) and some of the musicians are notable among this group. Most of the businessmen cleverly act as middlemen in the trade in cheap Turkish goods, which are sold in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Macedonia. Usually the initial circulating capital necessary for such a trade is earned during a longer stay in Germany in the early 1990s.

The few scrap dealers and pimps are among the wealthiest in all the large urban Gypsy neighbourhoods. Since 1996 a few of "the most enterprising" Roma in the big cities have established offices for purchasing second-hand goods. They buy up the personal property of the families of the growing number of young drug-addicts (mainly Bulgarians) for a low price and sell them cheaper drugs of poor quality. The negative consequences quickly showed up among the Roma community - the use of heroin is becoming an everyday occurrence, while two years ago there were almost no drug-addicts among the Gypsies (apart from alcoholics and homeless children who sniff acetone glue or other chemicals).

Between 20 and 30% of the Roma live the typical life of the average Bulgarian - very simple, suffering all sorts of privations, and yet bearable. Among these is the small Roma intelligentsia; the qualified workers who managed to keep their jobs; some of the Roma who live in villages and possess some land, keep domestic animals or work in the cooperative farms, and some of the craftsmen.

All the rest (60-70% of the community) have to be considered poor, much poorer than the socially disadvantaged from other ethnic groups. Their income is extremely low and irregular. It consists mostly of social benefits and pensions, the income from seasonal work in agriculture and construction, from recycling and gathering of scrap metal in the towns, from gathering mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit in the mountains, from cheap services offered to the rest of the population and from work on the Temporary Employment Programme.

According to social workers, about one-third of the Roma have an additional income from scrap dealing and gathering activities which they do not generally declare. Because of the frequent thefts of copper wire from the telephone and electricity networks, in 1997 serious restrictions were introduced on the purchasing of non-ferrous metals, which had an adverse effect on Roma households whose yearly income

was totally dependent on this. As an obvious consequence, prostitution among young women increased.

The gathering of mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit secures an additional income for 10-20% of the Roma population, mainly those who live in the mountain or hilly areas and some of those who live on flat land but leave their homes in the summer for this purpose. It is hard to define the average incomes from this activity. According to the experts, purchasing mushrooms in the Rhodope region, the incomes depend on the rainfall quantity, the temperatures, the number of pickers, the continual decrease in the quantity of wild mushrooms and the interference of mafia structures in the purchasing. However, according to their opinion, the daily income for one person could be about 3000-4000 levs. The number of the days when one can reach such income ranges between 60 and 90 in the different years. This means that if the conditions are favourable one picker can make about 360,000 levs and if not favourable - about 180,000 levs. Except mushrooms, the Roma gather and purchase also herbs, raspberries, blueberries, *cornels* ??? and other wild fruit which usually doubles the above sums. These activities engage the whole family, including the children, so by the end of the summer the pickers generate a considerable amount of money. The income from this purchasing helps them cover their food bills almost until the middle of winter, though it is not sufficient for other expenses. The problem is that because of sometimes careless and excessive gathering of mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit, supplies gradually diminish. In addition, the local population in mountain areas is also very active in gathering activities, reducing the income per head. In the last 4-5 years the purchasing of wild mushrooms and fruit has been controlled by mafia structures, leading to a slump in their purchase prices.

At the moment, hard pressed by the crisis and poverty, a mentality is being formed among the Roma which can be summarised in the following **typical strategies**:

- mobilisation of family ties, a practical step aside from the model of the nuclear family and looking for ways of survival within the extended family;
- looking for any kind of work which provides some kind of income;
- revival and adaptation of traditional crafts to the changing reality;
- increasing migration in search of better working and social conditions, including regular attempts to leave the country, which decreased apparently after the establishment of strict border controls and difficult access to visas for all Bulgarians;
- readiness to resort without any particular qualms to income generating activities of any kind;
- regular use of waste food and second-hand clothes;
- using children in the search for income without any particular scruples, even at the expense of their education;
- revival of some old forms of mutual help within the community, for instance the *londzha* (a specific form of self-organisation among the Gypsies. It is still called a "guild" or "association" and works on the principle of a mutual benefit society.);
- active search for social services, including those of religious establishments (especially those of the various Protestant churches) in order to secure the minimum of means for existence;

- addressing non-governmental organisations for the solution of some of the problems (mainly among the representatives of the Roma intelligentsia);

There is a growing number of poor Roma who suffer drastic impoverishment and marginalisation. Their group is characterised by a lost cultural identity, broken family ties, widespread alcoholism, personal degradation of parents who do not take care of their children and habitual domestic violence. The living conditions of these Roma are appalling. The birth-rate here is very high and the children usually do not start school at all or drop out in the first few years. There is permanent 100% unemployment. Chronic illnesses and invalidity are widespread. The other Gypsies refer to this sub-group as *goli* (naked). It is a fact that the children of the marginalised groups go naked almost all the year round.

On expert data, up until 1990 the proportion of this highly marginalised Gypsy group was 1,5-3%. Observations show that **the process of total marginalisation is spreading over the more preserved communities and until now it has probably affected 10-15% of the whole Gypsy community.** The community itself is not in any condition to cope with these problems in the traditional manner, by socially and physically isolating this group in ghettos within ghettos. Impoverishment and marginalisation of the community frequently result in the traditional Roma culture being replaced by the culture of poverty and its characteristic violence, alcoholism, breaking of family ties, lack of motivation for work, passivity, living from day to day. At the same time, society is not inclined to take social measures to restrict the destructive tendencies in the Roma community and gradually reintegrate its members.

The Roma do not have the resources to cope with this situation, especially in conditions of growing discriminative tendencies towards them. Some of them, mainly those who live dispersed among the rest of the population and, in some cases, whole neighbourhoods and groups, are trying to cope with the situation by identifying with Bulgarians or Turks instead of their traditional identity. This is characteristic of the better educated and qualified Roma, of those who have been part of the working class of the country or traditional agricultural workers and stock-breeders for many decades. The problem is that in most cases the surrounding population refuses to accept them under their new identity and keeps referring to them as Gypsies. Generally, identifying with a more prestigious group is easier on an individual and family level, but not on a group level. In the meantime, the Roma appear to make almost no attempt to find a way out of the situation by increasing the level of education and culture of young people. Nor are they trying to work harder, like Bulgarians and Turks. This is due to the fact that the Roma community is practically excluded from the sphere of labour and its members are discriminated in all social spheres.

5. THE POVERTY IN THE GROUPS OF BULGARIAN MUSLIMS (POMAKS) AND BULGARIAN TURKS

5.1. TURKS AND POMAKS IN BULGARIA

Bulgarian Turks and Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) have been living within the territory of Bulgaria for many centuries. Proto-Bulgarians, one of the fundamental components of the people who established the Bulgarian state in the 7th century were a Turk-lingual tribe. In the 11th-13th century period other Turk-lingual tribes settled within the territory of Bulgaria - Pechenegs, Ouzes, Koumans and Tatars who adopted Christianity.

At the end of the 14th century Bulgaria was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. During the five-century Ottoman domination the conquerors settle colonisers of their own (parts of the Ottoman beilik, Urouks, Persians, Circassians, etc.) within Bulgarian territories and convert to the Islam significant groups of the local population. Reliable hypotheses exist that there has been a mass Islamisation of the medieval Turk-lingual population in Bulgaria which settled mainly in the North and Western part of the country. The dialect peculiarities of the Bulgarian Turks in North-Eastern Bulgaria have preserved the Ogouz-Kipchak language characteristics of the above tribes. A considerable part of the Slavonic population also adopted the Islam in order to get free from slavery, for economic reasons or being forced to do so. Present-day Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are their descendents. In the early 19th century the last governor of the Danube vilayet (province of the Ottoman empire), Mithad Pasha, declared that there have been more than one million Muslims among the Bulgarians who did not come from Asia Minor, but were "descendants of Bulgarians who have adopted the Islam during the conquest and in the following years" (*Mithad Pasha. La Turquie: Son passe, son present, son avenir. Revue scientifique de la France et de l'etranger, N 49, 8 Juin 1879, p. 1152*).

After the Russo-Turkey war in 1877-1878 the Muslims in Bulgaria (both Turks and Bulgarians) found themselves in a totally different situation. They have lost their privileged statute and turned to marginal minority group. The new realities considerably influenced their way of life and created the necessity for them either to adopt to the numerous political, social and cultural changes in the newly established state, or to emigrate.

From the liberation in 1878 up until 1956 the conception for the nation not as a political entity but as an entity based on ethnicity has been predominant in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Turks have been considered "alien" to the rest of the population, a part of the Turkish nation. This prevented the state authorities from allocating sufficient funds for the economic, social and cultural development of the regions densely inhabited by Muslims. In the course of time these regions remained the most backward from the point of view of economy and culture. Bulgarian Turks considered this an official state policy directed against them. The state did not take enough measures to defend the rights of Bulgarian Turks from the aggressive acts on behalf of some Bulgarians and local xenophobic organisations.

The situation of the Pomaks was not any better. Bulgarian authorities did not take measures to facilitate their incorporation into the state. On the contrary, they have treated them as a Turkish population. The censuses from the end of the 19th century included Pomaks in the column of "Turks". Not until 1905 they have been considered a separate group - Pomaks. However, the state did not change its former policy and no measures were taken for economic support for the regions where they lived. There were frequent cases of economic and administrative arbitrariness. When after the Balkan wars the territory of Bulgaria was enlarged with new lands where Bulgarian

Christians and Muslims lived, some of the Christians undertook series of violations against Pomaks, aiming their forced emigration, in order to buy their land and cattle cheap. An utmost expression of **the short-sighted policy of the state towards the Pomaks has been the series of forced changing of their names and religion lasting from 1912 on.**

As a result of this policy the Turks and Pomaks who remained on the territory of Bulgaria have preserved for many decades their strong feelings for belonging and affiliation to the Ottoman Empire and later on to the Republic of Turkey.

In the same time, Bulgaria has signed international documents with provisions that oblige the state to make efforts for the preservation of the cultural identity of the Muslims on its territory and to facilitate their participation in the state institutions. The *kadi* (Muslim judge) courts have been preserved and the Turks from the areas with mixed population could elect their own **justice of the peace**. Firstly abolished, the army service for the Muslims has been restored in the early 1880 (besides, this led to discontent, because many Muslims considered the service for the Bulgarian army contradictory to their religion). There have always been Turkish members in Bulgarian Parliament. Already in 1883, 20 Turks have been elected vice-governors in the regions with mixed population. From 1878 to 1944, for different periods of time, there have been 117 central and local newspapers issued in Turkish.

In accordance with the 1919 *Regulations for the Religious Organisation and Administration of the Muslims in Bulgarian Kingdom*, Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have been governed by the Grand Mufti's Office, subsidiary Mufti's offices and ecclesiastical courts in clerical, administrative and judicial matters. The education of the children was carried out in Turkish in private religious and secular schools with their own educational programmes. These schools were financed by the Muslim community and partly by the state. Their economic status was considerably worse than that of Bulgarian schools and the quality of education was also lower. Not until the 30s they were allowed teachers in Bulgarian language, history and Bulgarian geography. Until then, the children of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have learned only history and geography of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Since the beginning of the 20s the state has increased its financial support for the Muslim school five times and has also guaranteed the right of the teachers to receive pensions. However, after the 1923 state coup d'etat these acquisitions were abolished. In the following years many Turkish schools have been closed for financial reasons. From 1300 in 1922, they have been reduced to 605 in 1939 and at the end of WW2 there have been only 367 private schools for the needs of the Turkish population in Bulgaria. In the same time, the children of the Bulgarian Turks were not allowed to go to Bulgarian schools. All these led to a mass illiteracy among Bulgarian Turks. The illiteracy among the Pomaks was also widely spread. This intensified the cultural backwardness of the Muslim population in Bulgaria and seriously hampered its adequate participation in the economic, social and political life in the country.

After the establishment of the communist power in 1944, a policy of separation of the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria has been imposed, aiming the establishment of a federation following the Soviet model. The periodicals in Turkish were resumed. Conditions were created for the development of the specific culture of Bulgarian Turks. Their living conditions have been gradually improved. Young people have been intensively admitted into the communist party. The private Turkish schools were granted the statute of the Bulgarian ones and gradually went under the guidance

of the Ministry of Education. **Up until 1958, the education in 1150 elementary state schools (1st-8th class) has been completely carried out in Turkish**, while particular subjects (history, geography and literature) have been taught in Bulgarian. In order to improve the quality of education in Turkish in the different subjects, teachers with university degree have been invited from Azerbaijan. Four high schools with education in Turkish were opened. Teacher training institutes were established in 3 towns and the Sofia University created a Turkish Philology Department.

Notwithstanding the success in the liquidation of illiteracy and the augmentation in the educational level of Bulgarian Turks it was not equal to the Bulgarian one. The children were not able to study the official Bulgarian language well enough for their adequate integration in the Bulgarian society.

After 1958, the governing communist party changed its policy towards the minorities and started consistent attempts for cultural assimilation of the largest ethnic communities, together with a sharp restriction for the religious rights of the all Bulgarian citizens.

Within the period from 1944 to 1969, the state subsidised 25 central and local newspapers and magazines in Turkish. They have gradually become bilingual, their number decreased, and since 1984 the two remaining newspapers have been issued only in Bulgarian. In 1958 the four amateur Turkish theatres, created soon after the establishment of the communist power, were closed down.

Since 1958 the Turkish and Bulgarian schools have been gradually mixed and the education in the high schools, colleges and universities has been carried out completely in Bulgarian. Since 1959 the elementary education of the children of Bulgarian Turks has also been carried out in Bulgarian, while the Turkish language was only one of the subjects. **In 1975 Turkish was excluded from the school curriculum. Since 1978 the Turkish Philology Department has stopped the admittance of students. The policy of unification of the Bulgarian society has been established.** The right of ethnic self-identification was denied and the idea that all the citizens of Bulgaria were ethnic Bulgarians has been promoted and "given proof of".

The forced assimilation of the Pomaks has also been very strong. Their access to the mosques and the celebration of religious rituals and ceremonies has been restricted. Campaigns have been carried out for the changing of their traditional clothes and Muslim names with Christian ones. These processes of forced transition were taking place intermittently from the late 60s until 1972. There were certain cases of police violence. Lots of people have been murdered, tortured, exiled, sent to prison or labour camps.

In the winter of 1984 the so called "revival process" of the forcible change of names of Bulgarian Turks began. They were forbidden to speak Turkish in public and to carry out their religious rituals. When in spring of 1989 Bulgarian Turks organised the first mass protest demonstrations in defence of their ethnocultural rights, the communist party leaders retaliated with violence and provoked a mass emigration campaign.

After the downfall of communist regime the process of gradual restoration of infringed rights of the minorities in Bulgaria began. *The Names of Bulgarian Citizens Act* passed on the 5th March 1990 and the November 1990 amendment to this act

created possibility for the reinstatement of the Muslim names of all the affected. The sanctions against the use of mother tongue of minorities in public were ceased. The right of the representatives of minority communities to receive and spread information on their mother tongue was restored. The restrictions against the religious rights of the Muslims were ceased. Issues in Turkish were renewed. Already in 1990, in some areas of the country with a considerable number of Bulgarian Turks local radio-stations started broadcasts in Turkish. **Since 1991 Turkish language has been introduced into the elementary school curriculum as an optional subject.** Four religious high schools and a High Islamic Institute have been established. There are two teacher training colleges and the specialty of Turkish Philology is restored in the Sofia University and in the University of Shoumen. There are no legislative obstacles for the establishment of culture and education associations, social libraries, groups of artists and cultural centres for the preservation and the development of the traditions of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks.

Since 1989 there has been a considerable change in the role of Bulgarian Turks and Muslims in the administrative structures of the society and the government of the country. **In January 1990 the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the so-called "Turkish party", was established.** The purpose of the organisation was the defence of the rights of the Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria. After all the elections since the downfall of the communist regime it has been represented in the National Assembly and the local administrative bodies. The government of Prof. Luben Berov (December 1992 - September 1994) was formed by the mandate of the MRF after the vote of nonconfidence for the government of the Union of the Democratic Forces and the failure of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the formation of government.

5.2. ETHNIC IDENTITY AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS:

From the point of view of the ethnic identity **the communities of Bulgarian Turks and Christian Bulgarians are the most "homogeneous"**. In practice, all the representatives of these groups have a clear sense for belonging to their ethnic community, firm confidence in its merits and qualities and unwillingness to become members of another group, adopting its cultural models and values. Both communities are strictly endogamous and the **Christian Bulgarians express to the greatest extent their unwillingness for mixed marriages with the representatives of the other ethnic groups in the country.**

The attempt for forced assimilation of the Bulgarian Turks in the 80s led to the interruption of the natural processes of integration between the two groups. Since that period there has been a sharp sensitiveness with regard to the problems of ethnic identity and a clear search for support in the values and the cultural models of "one's own community" considered as a natural environment and a guarantee for free cultural, economic and political expression of one's personality.

The sociological surveys from the period of 1990-1992 indicate strong fears and mistrust between the representatives of both groups, as well as widely spread negative stereotypes and prejudices, which have been the grounds for different acts of aggression easily directed by Bulgarian politicians. Researchers' attention was drawn towards the high degree of rejection and hostility towards Bulgarian Turks on behalf of a considerable number of Bulgarians. **Half of the Bulgarians considered the Turks a threat for the national security. More than one-third expressed their desire that**

everything possible should be done to encourage emigration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria.

The 1994 sociological survey *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria* indicated a considerable relief in the relations between the two biggest ethnic groups in the country. But it also registered the strong potential of conflicts in the Rhodope region where the reticence of the two communities is far more tangible compared to the analogous groups in North-Eastern Bulgaria.

The results of the October-November 1997 representative sociological survey *The Rhodope Mountains - Tendencies of development* not only give quantitative and qualitative evidence for **the obvious process of stabilisation in the relations between the representatives of the two communities in the last few years**, but also give a clear proof for the strength of these positive changes in the East Rhodope. There are more similarities and common things than differences between the two groups (Bulgarians and Turks) in many different spheres of social life. The realisation of this fact contributes to overcoming the alienation between them. The survey revealed the sharp decrease in social distances, the overcoming of a number of negative emotions and fears, the clearly expressed tendency towards friendship, the restraint of the acts of hostility against representatives of "alien" communities - significant changes that took place in the last 3 - 4 years.

In comparison to the 1994 data the proportion of Bulgarians keeping friendly relations with Turks and Pomaks has increased by 10 - 20%. While in 1994 27% of Bulgarians had a close friend from the Turkish community now this figure is 56%. There is a sharp increase in the number of Bulgarians who are ready to give their vote to representatives of the other two ethnic groups: 61% would vote for a Pomak representative (while some 3 - 4 years ago the average figure for the country was 28%), 40% would vote for a representative of the Turkish community (as opposed to 18% in 1994). There is a very strong tendency among the Bulgarian Christians in the Rhodope Mountains to live together with Pomaks and Turks.

These positive changes are even more explicit among the Turks and the Pomaks in their attitude towards the other ethnic and religious communities in the region. 86% of the Turks declared that they have Christians friends, while 76% were in close relations with Pomaks. 84% of the Turks from the Rhodope Mountains would give their vote to a Bulgarian Christian representative (as opposed to the 69% of all Bulgarian Turks in 1994, and having in mind the much higher rates of such readiness among the Turks from the North-Eastern Bulgaria).

The proportion of those who declared antipathy towards the other ethnic communities is very small among the three major groups.

The group of Bulgarians is the least subjected to antipathy on behalf of the Pomaks (2%) and the Turks (3%). However, there is still a comparatively high proportion of negative feelings on part of Bulgarians against the Turks - 15%. The groups of the highly educated and the young tend to be most tolerant and friendly towards "the others". The people from the regions with mixed population, from the towns and the high mountain villages also demonstrate a decrease in the social distances towards the other ethnic communities.

A much serious attention should be focused on the "group of the reticent" which comprises about one-third in the three major communities. These people are highly prejudiced and suspicious towards "the others", and in the same time they have

adopted the stable mechanisms of peaceful relations that have been gradually established in the Rhodope mountains in the course of centuries. If well manipulated these groups might be involved in acts of conflict. On the other hand, if the conditions are favourable they might participate in active programmes for positive changes. It all depends on the type of leaders who will mould the ideological processes and on those who will influence the spread of information - conscious politicians or people discussing nationalistic issues from self-interested motives.

The significance of these results cannot be underestimated, especially given the fact that the processes of improvement and relief in the inter ethnic relations take place in the conditions of a continual economic, social and cultural crisis in the country. We must also consider the high degree of tensions due to the conflicts in the neighbour countries which frequently give ground for insinuations that similar conflicts are also possible in the Rhodope region. Anywhere else in the world such conditions usually lead to separation of the communities, strengthening of the ethnocentrism and the discriminative tendencies. The tendency in Bulgaria is just the opposite - a decrease in the tensions and fears from "the others".

The survey once again demonstrated how weak such fears from separatist movements and secessions are. But it also alarmed about the lack of reliable mechanisms for keeping the region safe from the transformation of social, economic and political problems into ethno-religious conflicts.

Since the 1992 census of the population in Bulgaria the question about the ethnic identity of Pomaks has been a permanent object of attention and all kind of speculations. The fact that almost one-third identified themselves as Turks and more than 40 000 declared that although they do not speak Turkish it has been their mother tongue, provoked great worry and discontent, turned a main topic of discussions in the media for a long period of time and became the grounds for political speculations. It went so far that the Parliament voted for a proposition to invalidate the results of the census in the West Rhodope regions where the greatest number of the Pomaks identified themselves as Turks and authorised representatives of the different Parliamentary groups to be given the right to judge on the real ethnic identity of the Pomaks. Both politicians and journalists pretended to misunderstand the most important clue given by this part of the Bulgarian population. While it was clear - the Pomaks, especially those living in the West Rhodope Mountains, suffered from the isolation and the neglect on behalf of the Christians living among them, as well as the mistrust and the discriminative attitude of the state institutions towards them. **All their attempts for adequate integration into Bulgarian society have been hampered.** These were the reasons for the separation of the community and its increasing alienation from the Bulgarian state. The feeling of permanent threat from administrative arbitrariness led to their search for protection and security in either the identification with the respectful and powerful Muslim group in the country - the Turkish one, or the formation of their separate ethno-cultural community. It is no accident that the **greatest part of those who declared that they want to leave Bulgaria, because here they were treated as "second hand" people, belong to the group of Pomaks.**

The results of the survey *The Rhodope Mountains - Tendences of Development* confirm the earlier observations of active processes of ethnic

formation and transformation within the Pomak community. A considerable part of those who live in the East and in the North-Western Rhodope identify themselves as Bulgarians. They comprise about one-third of the group of Pomaks. Probably, their number has increased recently, for in the last few years many of them adopted Christianity and identify themselves as Christian Bulgarians.

The number of those who identify themselves as Turks has decreased - less than 5% from the Pomaks. On their account the group of those who identify themselves as Bulgarian Mohammedans, Muslims, Pomaks or Ahrians has enlarged.

It would be hardly reasonable to state firmly that there is a process of formation of a new ethnic community in the country. It is rather the fact that the respondents put an emphasis on the cultural differentiation of the Pomaks as a result of the adoption of a different religion and the refusal of the majority to consider them "real" Bulgarians. If they are exerted strong political and cultural pressure for a quick adoption and declaring of Bulgarian ethnic identity, together with an obvious neglect for their social and cultural problems, it might result in additional isolation of the group and various processes of ethnic transformation.

5.3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

5.3.1. NUMBER AND RESIDENCE IN THE GROUPS OF POMAKS AND BULGARIAN TURKS:

According to the 1992 census of the population in Bulgaria data, the number of Turks was 800,052 or 9,4%. They live in compact groups in the east regions of the country. About 94% of them are concentrated in 4 districts - Haskovo, Razgrad, Varna and Bourgas, whereas in Kurjali and Razgrad they constitute the majority of the population. In the regions with mixed population the Bulgarians are concentrated primarily in the towns, and Bulgarian Turks - in the villages.

On expert views the number of Pomaks is about 250,000. Most of them live in the Rhodope Mountains, and there are also small groups in the Pirin region and around Lovech.

The greater part of the Bulgarian Turks and the Pomaks live in villages. The ratio between village and town population among Turks is 68% : 32%. The situation is similar for Pomaks. This fact has a serious influence on the preservation of the traditional way of life in both groups, as well as on the possibilities for their ethnic separation. It appears to restrict their possibilities to find jobs under conditions of increasing unemployment, inhibits their access to better educational and cultural institutions and quick and effective health and social services. On the other hand, periods of crisis people in the villages are better off from the point of view of provision of food - which is the main item in the present day budget of Bulgarian households.

5.3.2. BIRTH RATE, MORTALITY AND MARRIAGE:

According to National Statistical Institute data in the beginning of the 20th century the birth rate was 38,3 per 1000 for the Muslims (Turks and Pomaks) and remained such until the middle of the century. In the period 1956 - 1974 the birth coefficient for the Bulgarian Turks decreased from 40,4 per 1000 to 24,5 per 1000. (We must consider the fact, usually concealed by the demographic experts, that in the

end of the 1940s a considerable part of the Gypsy population had been listed as Turks, in order to be included in the emigration campaigns meant for the Turkish population. This situation remained practically unchanged until the late 60s.) Since 1974 no observations have been carried out on the dynamics of the birth-rate in the different ethnic groups. The 1992 census does not provide such data either. Therefore, we have to make conclusions on the grounds of indirect data from statistical bulletins and sociological surveys. The birth-rate for the Bulgarian Turks and the Pomaks is higher than for the Christian Bulgarians, although these differences are not so big and are gradually decreasing. According to data from the 1992 census the average birth-rate for all of Bulgaria is 10,5 per 1000, while in the regions with mixed population it varies between 12 and 14,7 per 1000 (in the region of Kurjali where most of the population is Turkish).

The mortality-rate is also higher for the groups of Muslims in Bulgaria. While in 1956 the mortality coefficient for the Bulgarians was 8,7 per 1000, it was nearly twice as high for Bulgarian Turks - 15,5 per 1000. In the following two decades the mortality-rate for Bulgarian Turks dropped to 6,8 per 1000 (1974 data).

As a result of the higher birth and mortality rate for Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks the age structure of these communities is quite different from that of the other Bulgarians. According to National Institute of Statistics data more than half of Bulgarian Turks - 51,4% are within the age of 0 - 29, while the same figure for the ethnic Bulgarians is 36,3%. The people of pensionable age (over 60 years) are 11,6% from the Bulgarian Turks compared to 22,2% from the Bulgarians. Compared to the majority Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have an earlier marital age and a lower share of unmarried and divorced people.

The 1997 Rhodope survey clearly showed that by the end of 1997 the group differences in the demographic structure of the major ethno-cultural communities in the Rhodope Mountains (excluding the Gypsies) were smaller compared to the differences between generations. This means that now there are great similarities between the demographic behaviour of young Christian Bulgarians, Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks, while the case is different for the age structure within the communities. This is explained in greater details in next section.

According to 1997 Rhodope survey the average marital coefficient for the Bulgarians in the Rhodope Mountains is 22,2 years. It is 20,9 years for those who identify themselves as Muslims (Pomaks), and 20,6 years for the Turks. The average number of children in the Bulgarian families is 1,9. It is 2,3 for the Pomaks and 2,9 for the Bulgarian Turks.

The young (in the age group of 18 - 30 years) decisively change the traditional marital and family model of the main groups. 55% of the Bulgarians within the above age are not married. Such is the situation for 52% of the Turks and for 40% of the Pomaks. Although the stronger pressure on behalf of the parents and the community traditions, the young people from the Rhodope Mountains express the same reaction to the crisis as their coevals from the rest of the country.

In practice, the young families from this age group (18 - 30 years) in the three ethnic groups (Christian Bulgarians, Pomaks and Bulgarian Turks) show equal tendency towards later marriage and only one child in the family. The survey did not find a single young family with three children from any of the three

groups! The average number of children in the young families varies between 1,19 and 1,32 compared to the much larger variation among Bulgarian Turks. The coefficient for the number of children in the oldest families (over 60 years) is 3,32. For 50 - 59 year olds it is 2,84, for 40 - 49 year olds it is 2,25, 2,09 for the 30 - 39 year olds; and only 1,32 for the youngest group!

It is useless to comment on this, except probably for one thing. In 1990 the Christian Bulgarians were almost possessed by fear the high birth-rate of Bulgarian Turks. This fear from “demographic invasion” on the part of the Turkish minority was one of the main reasons for the increased ethnocentrism of the Bulgarians. It provided a justification for discriminatory measures against the Turks which reinforced emigration trends. It is most likely that today’s peaceful attitude towards the Turks is to some extent due to the actual demographic processes within their group which are very similar to the Bulgarian model, as well as to the decreasing number of the group as a result of the emigration in the last few years.

There is traditionally high infant mortality rate (IMR) in the regions with a dense Turkish and Pomak population. Although there has been considerable decrease in the IMR, the above tendency still prevails. In 1989 infant mortality in the villages of the former Kurjali district were the highest rates for the country - 21 per 1000 compared to 13 per 1000 in the capital and the average of 17,5 per 1000 for the country. In 1990, 1991 and 1994 the IMR in the regions with mixed population continued to be very high.

According to data from the 1997 Rhodope survey, since 1997 the same tendency has been observed among the three ethno-cultural communities (of those who identified themselves as Bulgarians, Pomaks and Turks). The children mortality rate reaches the highest rates among the oldest families. The percentage of those who have lost a child is 33% for the 60 year old Pomaks, 25% for the Turks at the same age and 16% for the Bulgarians. Children mortality decreases and has the lowest rates in the group of 30 - 39 year olds - 1% for Bulgarian families, 2% for the families of Bulgarian Turks and 3% for the Pomaks. Although very clearly expressed the tendency is disturbed in the group of the youngest. Although half of them were unmarried, the proportion of the young families, who have lost a child has increased. It is 2,4% for Bulgarian families and 4% for the families of Bulgarian Turks! Once again - processes absolutely identical for the three major groups. In the last few years there has been an increase in child mortality due to poverty and worsening health care.

There are other disturbing indexes showing similarities between the three communities - the **increase in the mortality-rate even in the groups of the 40 - 50 year olds, the decrease in the number of children and young people** on account of the mature and the older population. These processes are typical for the whole country but until recently they were not a problem of the Muslims (Bulgarians and Turks).

5.3.3. MIGRATIONS:

The emigration processes among the Bulgarian Turks have a long history. They date back to the period of the Russo-Turkish war (1877 - 1878). According to Turkish sources, about one and a half million Turks have left Bulgaria after the war. In different periods and with varied frequency from 1879 to 1945 another 580 000 have followed this first emigrant wave. According to experts the emigration processes among this community are influenced by three major factors: 1) the character of the political regimes in Bulgaria and Turkey; 2) the intensity of the nationalistic propaganda in

Bulgaria and the increasing tensions between the ethnic groups in the country; 3) the outside interference on behalf of international organisations in their attempt to find solutions to the ethnic problems in the Balkans and Bulgaria in particular.

The emigration policy towards Bulgarian Turks is based mainly on the fear of "the demographic invasion on the part of minorities". Different Bulgarian governments considered the emigration of Bulgarian Turks a good solution of the problem.

Turkey was also interested in the settlement of Roumelian Turks in the areas abandoned by the Bulgarian, Greek and Armenian population that was annihilated or driven away from Thrace and other parts of the country after the emigration agreements in the beginning of the 20s. The fact that a large number of Bulgarian Turks had relatives in the "fatherland" kept their national Turkish self-consciousness alive and gave grounds to the continual emigration tendencies. Very indicative of the above is the increasing number of emigrants in all following campaigns which has always exceeded the capacity and willingness of the Turkish state to accept them.

The Communist regime brought serious changes in the traditional way of life of Bulgarian Turks which they painfully accepted. These led to another increase in emigration tendencies. By the end of 1951, another 155 000 Bulgarian Turks left for the Republic of Turkey. The next emigrant wave, connected with the forced collectivisation of agricultural land, was preceded by the 1968 special emigration agreement between Bulgaria and Turkey. As a result of this agreement the number of emigrants reached 113 000 - 130 000.

Special attention has to be paid on the largest emigrant's wave in the new history of Bulgaria - the one in 1989. For a period of three months (from the end of May to the end of August), 370 000 or 43% of the Bulgarian Turks left the country. Although many of them came back (another characteristic of this wave), 218 000 Bulgarian citizens remained in the territory of Turkey. Bulgarian Turks who emigrated in 1989 as a result of the forced assimilation policy of the Communist government in Bulgaria and immediately after the bloody repression of the peaceful human rights demonstrations, have to be considered political refugees.

According to data from the Information department of the Ministry of Interior, 600 000 Bulgarian citizens have left the country during the period from 1989 to 1996. In 1989 and 1990 the flow of emigrants reached its highest numbers and after that it gradually decreased to 55 000 - 60 000 persons per year. The decrease is mainly due to the severe restrictions against Bulgarian emigrants by West European countries, the USA, Canada, the Republic of South Africa and Australia. The number of emigrants in the period of 1989 - 1995 varies as follows:

1989	-	218 000 persons
1990	-	85 000 persons
1991	-	45 000 persons
1992	-	65 000 persons
1993	-	54 000 persons
1994	-	64 000 persons
1995	-	53 000 persons

I do not have precise quantitative data for the emigration processes among Bulgarian Turks in the last two years. Observations reveal that the number of those who leave Bulgaria illegally has increased among their community.

There are serious differences regarding the number of emigrants from different ethnic groups. In practice, all Bulgarian citizens who left the country in 1989 were Bulgarian Turks. In the following year (1990) the Turks comprised 81% of the emigrants, while in 1994 their number fell to 18%.

The economic crisis after 1989 was the main reason for emigration for the representatives of all the ethnic groups.

The various destinations of the external migration in 1989 and in the following few years determine the serious demographic differences between the flows of emigrants.

In 1989, when Bulgarian Turks felt threatened and sought asylum in the Republic of Turkey, they were usually leaving with their whole families. More than half of the 218 000 emigrants were women (111 569 persons). The number of children was also very high - about one-fourth of the emigrants were aged from 0 to 18 years (51 828 persons) and the adults (over the age of 60) comprised one-tenth of those who left Bulgaria. The educational level of the emigrants was lower than the average for the country. Actually, the age and educational structure of the first flow of emigrants was very close to that of the community of Bulgarian Turks in which the children up to the age of 18 comprise 33% and the adults over 60 years old amount to 11,6%.

After 1989 most Bulgarian Turks left for the Republic of Turkey due to economic reasons, therefore the emigrants were mainly young men. In order to guarantee the better life of their children Bulgarian Turks usually wanted to leave the country with their families. The problem was that the Republic of Turkey imposed severe visa restrictions upon children and adults which gave rise to the illegal traffic of people as a basic means of bringing families together. Bulgarian police and media regularly alarm about the horrible conditions under which the traffic of children has been carried out for huge sums of money paid by their parents. At the same time there are no legal instruments entail the illegal traffic of people.

According to data from the 1997 *Rhodope* survey the tendencies among Pomaks and Turks from the West Rhodope Mountains towards emigration to Turkey have sharply decreased nowadays compared to the beginning of the 90s. Naturally, Turkey is still preferred by 60% of the Bulgarian Turks who want to emigrate. The tendency shows that it is the preferred country for emigration among the adults. Only the youngest break this model. Hardly one-third of the emigrants from this most mobile group would prefer Turkey as a country for emigration. This percentage varies from 55 to 100% for the other age groups.

5.4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS:

5.4.1. ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGIONS WITH MIXED POPULATION:

The regions inhabited by Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are among the most backward in the country regarding the economy. Therefore, they were terribly affected by the economic crisis in Bulgaria. In general, the situation can be characterised as follows: **production capacities inadequate to the local economic resources** and their natural collapse after the crush of the socialist market; **economic stagnation**, stirred up recently by the private initiative; **higher level of unemployment** compared to the average for the country, despite the large number of emigrants among Bulgarian Turks; **undeveloped infrastructure** which hampers the investments; **increasing poverty** of the vast majority of population; **monocultural agriculture on small areas with poor soils in the South Rhodope region.**

The industry in the regions with mixed Bulgarian and Turkish population has been developed in the last 30 - 40 years. There is a small number of big industrial enterprises mainly in the sphere of non-ferrous metals processing in the East Rhodope area, as well as some branches of the military industry seriously affected by the economic crisis. The small factories of the manufacturing and the light industry built in most of the villages are unprovided for local raw materials. These are usually branches with peripheral production established in order to keep the labour force. In the early years of the economic crisis most of these factories, especially those in the villages, were closed due to the lack of markets and raw materials. The dismissed workers were not guaranteed alternative employment. On the other hand, the processing of raw materials produced in the region was centralised which deprived the local population of job and incomes. Therefore, the economy in the regions with mixed population was among the most damaged by the crisis in nation-wide aspect.

Due to the fact that all Bulgarian governments after 1989 were not able or willing to start the restructuring of the economy, **most of the state enterprises in towns have been working at reduced power and low efficiency of labour for years on end, paying the workers the minimum salary or periodically giving them compulsory holidays without pay.**

Instead of increasing their production as well the number of employees, part of the privatised enterprises are also eking out a miserable existence. The forthcoming close down of the loss-making enterprises of GORUBSO (the Bulgarian-Russian state mining and processing works) will considerably increase in the number of unemployed, especially in the Middle Rhodope region. At the end of 1997 only 10% of the local population were engaged in the industrial, construction and transport enterprises.

Municipal mayors and councilors from the Rhodope region have been constantly applying to the Council of Ministers and the Industrial Ministry for to be consigned the buildings and the equipment of the closed down factories. They had all the necessary reasons to do so: these factories have been built at the expense of municipalities; if granted the opportunity to use their buildings and equipment municipalities could more easily put them up for privatisation, grant them on lease to Bulgarian and foreign investors, or restructure them. These requests have not been granted in most of the cases.

Local authorities have been seriously alarmed by the unwillingness of all Bulgarian governments after 1989 to take measures for the establishment of new economic structures in the above regions as well as carry out a differentiated regional policy. The recent unrest among the well organised GORUBSO miners and the mutual consent between Bulgaria and Greece for the establishment of four border checkpoints

in the Rhodope area will probably create conditions for initiation of alternative programmes for restructuring of the local economy, for development of the infrastructure and more vigorous support for the private business.

According to data from the National Institute of Statistics in 1946 75% of Bulgarians and 86% of Bulgarian Turks lived in villages and were engaged mainly in agricultural labour. On the average, however, Bulgarians possessed more land than Bulgarian Turks. In addition, the land of Bulgarians was usually situated on more fertile and flat country areas. Before the nationalisation the average area of land owned by Bulgarian families was within the range of 30 - 50 decares, and by families of Bulgarian Turks - 10 - 20 decares. After the strong migration processes from the country towards the towns, typical of Bulgarians, many Turks moved from the mountain and hilly areas down to the plains. Now the land which Bulgarian Turks have been cultivating for years on end is returned to the ex-proprietors, while their own land is usually eroded, abandoned, afforested or insufficient to provide for their living.

The women and the children from both communities in question (Turks and Pomaks) are permanently engaged in agricultural work. The men usually have a permanent or a seasonal job in the construction, industrial enterprises and ore output (in the Rhodope region). They take part in the agricultural work only during the season.

Turks from the villages in North-Western Bulgaria live under better economic conditions. They possess larger areas of more fertile and easily arable land. They are able to grow fodder and breed more domestic animals. They produce all the necessary cereals to provide for their family and for sale. The men have better chances to find job in the industrial enterprises in the near towns.

58,4% of the land in the Southern border areas inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians, Pomaks, Bulgarian Turks and a small number of Gypsies, is covered by forests. Significant areas of land are eroded. The ratio between cultivated and not fit for cultivation land is 16,2 : 83,8. Therefore in the Rhodope mountains where the land is wasted, parceled out and of a small area the monocultural agriculture is predominant - people cultivate mainly potatoes on the higher parts of the mountain and tobacco - on the rest of the area.

Tobacco production which is the basic means of living for a considerable part of Turkish and Pomak population, especially in the flat areas, **has also undergone severe crisis. Since 1991 it has decreased from 2 to 5 times.** This had a negative effect on the employment and the incomes of tens of thousands of families. Tobacco producers suffered to a greatest extent from the crisis in the branch. The company of BULGARTABAK - a monopolist in tobacco purchasing and manufacture not only reduced the purchasing prices but also **delayed the payment for years** so that the money has already vanished because of the inflation. This doomed a considerable part of people from the Rhodope mountains to starvation.

However they tried to reorient towards cultivation of other crops like potatoes, beans, onion and gherkins, it has been done in a chaotic manner without establishing the necessary infrastructure. All these discouraged the agricultural workers. In the last few years they have been exchanging the potatoes on barter grounds against fodder, cooking oil, rice and clothes. The rest of the cultivated crops are used for living as a final barrier against the starvation. When recently a slight hope appeared for solution of the problem with the tobacco purchasing a vast majority of people from the Rhodope

Mountains turned back to this traditional production. In 1997, after the subtraction of expenses for the manufacture itself, **the monthly income per tobacco producer was the average of 25,000 - 40,000 levs which places them within the group of the poorest people in the country.** We must have in mind that **tobacco cultivation is the basic means of living for more than one half of the people in the Rhodope Mountains.**

Tobacco producers organised series of protest demonstration against the low purchasing prices for tobacco, the delays in payment and the way the production is qualified. There were different forms of protest - strikes, burning of tobacco packs, blockades on the roads. However, the most radical form of protest were the thousands of Bulgarian Turks who left the country.

Governments, politicians and media neglected these protests until they seriously affected the interests of powerful economic groups and of the country as a whole. It was in 1996 when the National Assembly passed the amendments to the *Tobacco and Tobacco Products Act*. However, nowadays the tobacco producers complain that they actually do not take part in the qualification of tobacco and in the same time they do not dare to put in claims or require expert settlement of the problems. In 1997 thousands of Turkish and Pomak families had to bribe tobacco purchasers in order to gain any income because the quantities produced were bigger than expected. They also suffer serious damages due to the delay in tobacco purchasing. Another problem is that in some Rhodope regions the women engaged in tobacco cultivation are not granted maternity and children's allowance for they are not considered unemployed and they work without a labour contract. This practice affects mainly Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks in the East Rhodope Mountains.

A few years ago the team of the social minister Jordan Hristoskov worked out the tobacco workers' social security project, according to which there should have been three parties equally responsible for the provision of necessary resources as follows: the *Tobacco Fund*, *Professional Qualification and Unemployment Fund* and the tobacco producers themselves. This would guarantee maternity and children's allowance, as well as health insurance and pensions. However actively supported by the President Mr. Zhelev this project was not taken into consideration. It should once again submitted for discussion within the context of the forthcoming enter of the new *Bulgarian Citizens' Social Insurance Act*.

In general, the experts did not consider it serious to speak about sustainable revival of economy in the regions with mixed population. The slight economic uplift in some of the municipalities is much due to restoration of already existing manufacture than to establishing of new structures. The processes of privatisation of state enterprises are very slow and difficult to carry out. The rare cases of industrial vitality are still sporadic and not stable. There is a certain revival of economy and a decrease in the level of unemployment in cases when local authorities support the development of private business.

However, we must not jump to conclusions. The observations among people in the Rhodope Mountains show a general lack of initiative. In cases when it exists there is usually no information, management abilities or a clear strategy for the development of private business. If a group of people have established a successful timber and woodworking business they are momentarily followed by dozens of similar formations in the same village or town. The strong competition leads to the failure of most of

them. The same applies for the gathering of mushrooms, for the cultivation of alternative agricultural products, everywhere.

In a number of villages in the West Rhodope local authorities promoted the establishment of Greek companies - mainly in the sphere of textile industry. Thus, they intended a decrease in the high level of unemployment among women. However, **these companies offer job under unbearable conditions - longer working time, no social insurance and lower salary than the minimum for the country.** A few years ago there were similar complaints regarding Turkish companies in the East Rhodope. This results in the increasing discontent from both local authorities and the state. People working in these companies are convinced that their labour rights are not defended because they belong to minorities. This is again the case when unsettled social problems are interpreted on the grounds of ethnicity and religion.

The alarming conclusions from the observations on a field level show that local authorities are not concerned enough about the economic development and the establishment of new economic structures on the territory of their municipalities. There is a wide spread passive discontent from the central authorities who do not take measures to solve their problems. In most of the cases they dream about re-establishment of the decrees which guaranteed border and mountain regions privileged regime. The initiative is missing for the establishment of new economic structures on the grounds of local resources. In the same time central authorities have to observe article 20 of Bulgarian Constitution, according to which the state is obliged to create conditions for equal development of the different regions in the country and to support local bodies and activities by means of appropriate financial, credit and investment policy. This is still in the sphere of expectations.

5.4.2. EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT:

Unemployment is one of the most serious problems of today's Bulgaria. It first appeared in the regions with mixed population where the consequences have been most dramatic.

As a result of the mass emigration of Bulgarian Turks in the summer of 1989 a lot of unprofitable village factories have been closed down. Later on, when almost one-third of the emigrants returned from Turkey more than half of them remained unemployed. **In the beginning of 1990 most of the unemployed were Bulgarian Turks.**

The unemployment among Turks and Pomaks is also due to the fact that a considerable part of them worked far from their homes, mainly in industrial and construction projects. Therefore, the production crisis and the sharp rise in the transport costs led to a decrease in the daily and seasonal labour migration and the workers concerned had to rely mainly on their private farming or some rare cases of temporary work.

The regions with mixed population are characterised with a lasting unemployment on a higher level than the average for the country. Since 1990

municipalities with prevailing Muslim population (Turks and Pomaks) have registered the greatest number of unemployed.

According to National Institute of Statistics data from 1992 the percentage of unemployed among the population of working age varied for the different ethnic groups. 14,4% of the Bulgarians were unemployed, while the figure reached 25,5% for the Turks. In the following years no current information has been collected about the level of employment among the different ethnic groups. However, the National Labour Office analysis of the unemployment in different municipalities indicates that **since 1993 the level of unemployment among Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks has been two to three times higher compared to this among Bulgarians.** This tendency was very clearly expressed recently. According to data from the National Labour Office the average unemployment in February 1998 was 14,3%. In the same time in almost half of the municipalities with a considerable number of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks (in 28 such municipalities, to be more precise) the level of unemployment varied between 30% and 47,5%. It must be borne in mind, that a significant number of those who have been unemployed for a long period of time are discouraged to rely on some kind of help to find a job or to receive unemployment assistance and actually do not register at the labour offices. The fact that unemployment is most widely spread among minorities is inevitably considered by them a discriminative measure which might transform into ethnic and religious conflict.

It is most likely that these tendencies remain in the near future. The reasons for this are the specific characteristics of the local economy, the forthcoming close down of mines in the Middle Rhodope, as well as the lower level of education and qualification of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks compared to Christian Bulgarians.

5.4.3. INCOMES:

According to the 1997 survey *The Rhodope ...* there are lots of similarities between the income structures of Bulgarian, Turkish and Pomak families in the region. In two-thirds of the families there is at least one member who gets a salary. There is a pensioner in every third family. Nearly one in ten of the respondents have received some social aid - one-time in most of the cases. Half of them declared private income from their own farming (in cash or in kind). About one-third have some savings and one in six generate additional income from gathering of mushrooms, herbs and wild fruit. More than one-third of the men are engaged in temporary labour migration.

More explicit differences between the groups are observed in the private sector. 17% of Bulgarian run their own business, while this figure is 10% for those who identified themselves as Pomaks. 14% of Bulgarians are engaged in tobacco cultivation as opposed to 45% of the Turks.

The representatives of the three major ethnic groups in the region gave similar data about the property status of their families. If we do not take into account the quantitative characteristics of their property there are no significant differences between the groups. However, the economic situation is better for Bulgarians compared to rest of the population in the region. Their group is characterised with the lowest level of unemployment. The number of Bulgarians who declare real estate in another town or village except the main house is twice as large as the this of Turks and Pomaks. There are more Bulgarian families who own cars. Bulgarians have a better access to bank-credits which increases their possibilities to start private business. They are more resourceful in the search for opportunities to cope with the crisis through

services against payment, private business, additional income, rents, interest from savings. Pomaks and Turks are in a better position with regard to domestic animals. In general, Bulgarians keep more often swine, fowl and goats and rarely - cattle, sheep and horses. Emigration tendencies are very marked among the group of Bulgarian Turks - 25% of them are quite determined to go abroad as opposed to 8% of the Bulgarians.

Despite these clear social differences between the ethnic groups, experts do not consider the situation in the Rhodope mountains very tense. There is a small number of very rich people while the other differences in property status are not so shocking. It is rather the case that Pomaks and Turks claim to be discriminated in comparison to the majority in the big cities. They often point out the problems with purchasing the agricultural products, the low salaries in the mountain areas, the unemployment, the feeling of limited access to public services and the lack of opportunities in general. Any neglect towards these negative tendencies may lead to conflicts.

5.4.4. ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES:

5.4.4.1. MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH STATUS:

The regions with compact Turkish and Pomak population are badly provided for hospitals and medical care. This applies for the East Rhodope and the mountain villages in particular. 1985 data of the National Institute of Statistics show that the average number of physicians taking care of the health of 10,000 Bulgarian citizens was 29, while the figure was 14 for the East Rhodope region and 16 for Razgrad (the region in North-Eastern Bulgaria with the highest number of Turkish population). The situation is similar with regards to medical accommodation in the areas with mixed population. After the emigration campaign in 1989 the number and quality of the medical staff of hospital and ambulatory-polyclinic departments deteriorated because of the fact that the majority of the qualified people left the country or the region. **It is probably one of the main reasons for the worse health status of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks.** According to health experts the rate of illness is very high among them. Cardio-vascular illnesses are the main reason for their high mortality and invalidity rate. Kidney diseases, a number of endocrine diseases (most frequently goitre and diabetes) are also typical for the population in the Rhodope mountains.

Due to the fact that a great number of the men are miners they often suffer diseases of the respiratory passages - silicosis, tuberculosis, emphysema, asthma, pleurisy and locomotory system diseases. Invalidity has higher rates among them because of labour traumas. Probably some of the congenital abnormalities of the newborn babies in miners' settlements are due to radioactive pollution of water and their fathers' irradiation in uranium mines.

In the last few years there has been a sharp increase of cancer diseases in the Rhodope region. However, specialists draw our attention to the fact that the above might be due to the development of health diagnostics rather than to the actual increase in this kind of illnesses. This development provides possibilities for timely medical treatment of cancer.

In some cases, the possibilities for marriage restricted to nearest villages leads to the increase of congenital diseases including epilepsy, mucoviscidose, mental handicap. There are many cases of hip dislocation among the babies of Pomaks in particular. The lack of timely treatment of this defect results in the early infant

handicap, as well as in the higher mortality-rate among young mothers suffering hip dislocation.

The frequent cases of gastric or intestinal diseases and hepatitis in the whole area of the Rhodope mountains are often due to the lack of sewerage and drinking water purification mechanisms.

Data from the field work of 1997 Rhodope survey confirm expert conclusions. **According to these data 25% of Pomak, 19% of Turkish and 16% of Bulgarian families have chronically sick members.** One in six of the respondents from the group of Pomaks declared that there has been an invalid in his/her family. The great number of chronically sick and disabled is not only a symptom for drastic poverty. The bad state of health of one single member of the household is enough to condemn the whole family to misery. What makes the picture even more dramatic is the fact that **in most of the cases poor families cannot provide for the medical care of their chronically sick members, even if these are children, which results in the increase in invalidity and children's mortality in the region.**

5.4.4.2. EDUCATION:

The analysis of the general characteristics of the level of education among Bulgarians, Pomaks, Turks and Roma reveals serious differences which have always drawn the attention of scientists, politicians and society. According to data from the census of Bulgarian population hardly 2% of the adult Turks had higher and college education (as opposed to 20,2% for ethnic Bulgarians). 24,6% of the Turks and 54% of the Bulgarians had secondary education. 55% of the Turks and 22,6% of the Bulgarians had elementary school education and those who had only graduated primary school comprised 16% of the Turks and 3% for the Bulgarians.

According to data from 1997 survey in the Rhodope Mountains the educational structure of the economically active population of the region appeared as shown in the following table:

Table N 2:

The structure of the ethnic groups in the Rhodope mountains according to education.

Education	Bulgarians %	Pomaks %	Turks %	Gypsies %
Higher/College	27	15	13	0
Secondary/ Special secondary	46	37	42	10
Elementary	20	32	32	32
Primary	7	13	9	37
Illiterate	1	3	5	22

The educational structure of the ethnic Bulgarians is undoubtedly far more favourable which increases their competitive power on the labour market. The level of unemployment among their group is below the average for the country. In the previous period Bulgarians held the major leading positions in the region. The usual explanation

was that they had a higher education and qualification. After 1990 when new authorities have been established in the Rhodope region, Bulgarians gave this change a cold reception. One of the reasons was that the Turks and Pomaks - representatives of the new local government were considered of a lower educational level.

The situation is different if we consider data from the point of view of the age structure. It is natural to expect that the level of education is higher for individuals within the age of 18 - 40 years but here again the similarities between people of one and the same age from the different ethnic groups are much clearer than the differences between communities. Despite the emigration of the most educated representatives of the Turkish community, the group of 30 - 39 year olds has the highest level of education. The group of the youngest - at the age from 18 to 29 is the most homogeneous. 19% of the ethnic Bulgarians, 18% of the Turks and 13% of the Pomaks form this group have higher and college education. 72% of the young Bulgarians, 66% of the Pomaks and 57% of the Turks have secondary education and those who continue their education comprise 20% of the young Bulgarians, 15% of the Turks and 10% of the Pomaks.

There are many homogeneous Turkish villages in both North-Eastern Bulgaria and the Rhodope Mountains where Bulgarian is not spoken in the family and the children start school without speaking the official language in the country. This inevitably hampers their successful education and many of them early drop out of school.

Another fact that makes impression is that young Bulgarians and Turks are to a certain extent lagging behind with regard to education. One in five individuals from the group of 30 - 39 year olds have higher education and the new generation is going to increase this level very slightly. This is mainly due to the economic crisis. The group of Pomaks is the second after this of Roma, most seriously affected by the crisis. The number of families that can maintain a student materially is very small, especially if tuition fees are to be paid. What is more, recently there was a sharp decrease in the number of children from this group who attended secondary schools - again due to economic difficulties for the families to provide for the education of their children in another town or village. In most of the Pomak villages there are only elementary schools (up to the 8th class), regardless of the fact that in many cases the number of children is enough for the opening of a secondary school. The negative consequences of this will affect most seriously the girls from the group.

5.4.4.3. RESIDENTIAL CONDITIONS:

Although in the last two decades a considerable number of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have built large and comfortable houses for their families, **the residential conditions under which the communities live are still worse compared to these of ethnic Bulgarians**. According to data from the 1992 census, Turkish homes are inhabited by 3,97 persons on average (as opposed to 2,6 persons in the average Bulgarian home). One Turk has on average use of 11,8 sq.m. of floor area, while the figure for the average Bulgarian citizen including the Turks and Gypsies is 16,9 sq.m. Only 59,4% of the Turkish homes have mains water and sewerage.

Turkish homes are badly provided for some major facilities, such as a supply of hot water, a boiler, a toilet in the home, etc. The difference between Turkish and Bulgarian homes as regards to these major facilities varies from 16% to 22%. Rural Turkish homes are worst provided for public utilities, then come the

houses in the big cities where the Turks live in separate, comparatively isolated neighbourhoods at a low level of development and infrastructure compared to Bulgarian quarters. There is a small number and low quality shops, work rooms, cinemas, libraries, community centres, youth clubs, etc. The residential conditions are comparatively equal for ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks in small towns.

5.4.4.4. INFRASTRUCTURE:

The regions with mixed population excluding the big cities have a badly developed infrastructure. The major part of the high-way network consists of forth-class roads. Due to the lack of means for their maintenance part of them, in mountain and hilly areas in particular, are usually impassable during the winter months. In the last few years public transport services have been sharply reduced. Many intercity bus routes have been cut down. There is no mains water and sewerage in many villages. In other cases, in spite of the mains network, water is stopped for almost 20 hours a day during the summer, due to the lack of water purification systems or to the bad equipment of the existing ones. The number of Turkish and Pomak families who have a telephone is lower than the average for the country.

The insufficient state subsidies hamper the establishment of municipal programmes for priority development of infrastructure in the regions with mixed population. Local authorities are well aware of the fact that the development of the regional infrastructure is best way for the temporary settlement of the problems of unemployment and that in the long-term perspective it will create conditions for foreign investments, for the decrease in the migration tendencies, among young people in particular, as well as for the development of tourism.

5.5. SPREAD OF POVERTY AMONG POMAKS AND BULGARIAN TURKS:

The widespread and continual unemployment, together with the loss of many people's savings as a result of the inflation and bankruptcy, led to the sharp increase in the poverty among the vast majority of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks. Many Turkish families suffered great damages due to the emigration campaign in 1989 when they were forced to sell their property dirt cheap. According to official data, more than 3500 houses of emigrants (mainly in the towns) have been purchased by the municipal councils at incredibly low prices. There is no data available for the purchasing of houses in the small villages. Around 350 Turkish homes have been demolished in the town of Haskovo as a measure of repression against the emigrants. Many of those who have rented state-owned or municipal apartments found homeless after their return to Bulgaria because their rental relations with the state or the municipality have been illegally suspended. After two ministerial decrees and the adoption of the special re-establishment of the *Immovable Property of Bulgarian Citizens Affected by the Emigration Campaign Act*, most of them were restored their homes. The housing construction in Haskovo for the reimbursement of those whose homes have been demolished is not completed yet. All these problems led to the deterioration in the economic status of many Turkish families.

To summarise the above, the **major factors for the poverty** in the communities of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are as follows:

- low level of development of the local economy and its sharp deterioration after the beginning of the economic crisis which led to its total crash in certain parts of the country;
- lack of state policy for the establishment of new economic structures in the regions with mixed population;
- severe consequences of the emigration campaign and the bankruptcy;
- undeveloped infrastructure, communication and information network;
- limited access to the social insurance system, good education and health services;
- lack of trade unions which guarantee the interests of the agricultural workers and the workers in the light industry and construction in the regions in question;
- weak non-governmental organisations network in the regions with mixed population which might contribute to the solution of local problems;
- small areas of arable land, in most of the cases barren and infertile, cultivated in a primitive way, due to the lack of agricultural machinery and means of irrigation, fertilization and chemical protection;
- lack of information for the marketability of agricultural and industrial products, thence the chaotic character and failures in the attempts for development of private business and cultivation of alternative crops;
- inhuman exploitation of labour of the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks on part of the tobacco monopolists and the new businessmen in the region.

The **main strategies of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks for survival are:**

- readiness to accept any kind of work;
- with men - seasonal labour migration in the big cities where they can easily find a comparatively well-paid job in the construction, without social insurance though;
- with women - additional labour as homework (embroidery, hand-knitting, manual work in the shoe industry, etc.);
- intensified agricultural work (at the expense of hard manual labour);
- increase in the self-sufficient food and textile home-production (a lot of families consider it cheaper to produce even their bread at home in stead of buying it);
- sharp decrease in the consumer possibilities of people even regarding some major goods and services;
- change in the demographic model - late marriages and decrease in the number of children;
- mutual assistance within the family and friends circle;
- tendency towards migration and emigration.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

As a result of the continual, inconsistent and in most cases discriminatory policy of the Bulgarian governments the regions with a dense minority population (Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks) are among the most backward in economic and social terms. This applies even to a greater extent to the compact Gypsy neighbourhoods with more than 1000 inhabitants. The number of such neighbourhoods in Bulgaria exceeds 200.

In the last few years these regions were most severely affected by the economic crisis in the country. They are characterised with a long-term unemployment reaching disastrous proportions and with a comparatively low share of individuals receiving unemployment compensations and social assistance for unemployment. In addition, unemployment benefits have progressively lost even their short-term income support function, as the initial replacement rate has been steadily lowered.

With the increase in long-term unemployment, unemployment assistance is becoming more and more important. However, it has eroded even more than unemployment benefits. Its financing is supported entirely by the state budget and the tighter budget constraints have significantly eroded its value and led to a severe decrease in the number of people who could obtain it. According to the National Labour Office data for February 1998 the percentage of the registered who have been actually entitled the right for unemployment assistance was less than 1%!

The shrinking eligibility and generosity of unemployment benefits and unemployment assistance have increased the level of poverty especially among those who have been unemployed for a longer period of time. According to UNICEF expert assessments for 1993, the risk of falling into poverty per individual in Bulgaria was about 80% (as opposed to 58% per unemployed individual in Hungary). (See: *Poverty, Children and Policy: Responses for a Brighter Future. Economies in Transition Studies. Regional Monitoring Report No. 3 - 1995. UNICEF*). Bulgarian experts are unanimous in their opinion that in the last four years and especially after 1997 when the hyperinflation sharply reduced the savings of the vast majority of Bulgarians, the risk for jobless people to fall into poverty has been additionally increased.

The start of the forthcoming structural reform will inevitably lead to another increase in the level of unemployment in the regions with mixed population. Most of the mining and processing enterprises will be closed down. This might result in organised protests on part of the workers in the mining industry and the destabilisation of the government. Bearing in mind that the majority of miners who will be discharged are Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks, there is a very clear risk that their economic problems and demands will be interpreted on ethnic and religious basis.

While agriculture is the possible solution of the problems with poverty and unemployment for most Bulgarian Turks living in North-Eastern Bulgaria it is not the same for those who live in the Rhodope Mountains (Bulgarian Turks, Pomaks, Christian Bulgarians). They possess very small areas of infertile land which is insufficient to provide for their living. The number of Roma who could earn their living through agriculture is extremely low, especially after the restitution of land to its ex-owners.

The process of distribution of municipal and state-owned land among the landless and poor Bulgarian citizens is very slow. The problem is that there is almost no agricultural land available in the regions with mixed population. The situation did

not change even after the emigration of thousands of Turks from the East Rhodope Mountains. Due to the undeveloped infrastructure in most of the abandoned villages, they are not attractive for new settlers. The great number of waste abandoned fields is a result of the scattered state of villages and the large distances between plots of arable land. At best, these abandoned fields can now be used as pasture-grounds.

It is becoming more and more difficult to find jobs beyond the territory of the municipalities most affected by the crisis. The labour market is very limited. The poorer educational level of Bulgarian Turks, Pomaks and Gypsies in particular makes them less competitive compared to ethnic Bulgarians. The high transport costs and the fact that most of the intercity bus routes have been cut down recently, make the daily labour migration impossible for an increasing number of people from the mountain areas.

At the same time, due to the fact that Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are known to be the most disciplined and conscientious workers, more than one-third of the men from both communities easily find work in private companies and in the construction. In most of the cases they do not sign labour contracts (guaranteeing social insurance) but get their salary cash after the work is done. Therefore, these workers are not provided for social pensions and it is entirely on the account of their families to take care after them when they grow old.

The situation is even more difficult for the Gypsies. The negative prejudices against their community lead to their practical isolation from the economic and social structures of Bulgarian society. These result in the drastically increasing destructive processes within the community, the widespread alcoholism, drug-addiction (in the last two years) and violence among Roma, as well as the tendency towards early dropping out of school of Roma children. We become witnesses of the destabilisation of Roma families which additionally reduces the possibilities of the neglected women and children to cope with the poverty. The Roma community does not have the necessary resources to solve these problems alone, while the society and the state institutions are not willing to consider Gypsy issues an issue of Bulgaria and to take measures for its solution.

Another alarming tendency is the quick deterioration in the health status of the representatives of the three minority communities in the last decade. It is mainly due to the bad living conditions, the permanent stress to which they are exposed and their limited possibilities to enjoy good quality health services. The deterioration in the health of one single member of the household sharply increases the risk for impoverishment of the whole family. In cases when one of the parents is sick or unemployed the probability for family impoverishment reaches almost 100%.

According to UNICEF in the last few years under the conditions of economic crisis in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe the mere existence of two children in the family increased the risk of its impoverishment. In the majority of cases the families of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks have at least two children, while the large families - with three and more children are still typical for the Roma. The families bring up their children under sharply deteriorating conditions due to the disastrous proportions of unemployment within the communities in question. The number of those who cannot provide for the good education of their children is gradually

increasing. All these will leave long-term negative consequences for the three communities. Poverty and related to it low level of education and lack of an adequate qualification will mostly affect young girls. Young girls and women in Roma and Muslim communities have been traditionally expected to make compromises and sacrifices.

The process of establishment of non-governmental organisations and other structures of the civil society in the regions with mixed population and in villages and small towns in particular is very slow. The recent split up of both Muslim and Christian clergy was an obstacle for the effective participation of religious institutions in the settlement of certain social issues in local communities. The jealous attitude of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms leaders towards Bulgarian non-governmental organisations and all kind of local structures in which they do not have the leading part led to the actual self-isolation of the Muslim groups and to the restriction of cultural, educational, sports and social activities among Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks. It makes them even less initiative than the rest of Bulgarian citizens in submitting their issues to different state institutions, in giving suggestions and working out their own projects in the search for alternative decisions. In more cases their behaviour is determined by the maxim that in the present situation everybody must act on his/her own account. Therefore, the radical way out of the crisis is most frequently found in emigration instead of local integration.

It seems that Roma have a certain advantage with this respect. After 1989 they have established dozens of non-governmental organisations which to a different degree of effectiveness have been trying to give publicity to Roma issues or to solve some of the problems of a particular Roma sub-group. The establishment of Roma women's organisations has been an entirely new tendency in Bulgarian society. These organisations focus their activities mainly on educational issues, vocational training, family planning and social assistance for women in Roma neighbourhoods.

For many years the local administration has been aware of the fact that the development of infrastructure could be the best way to solve many of problems in the regions with mixed population. The establishment of different programmes on infrastructural improvement will reduce the level of unemployment, especially as regards to individuals with low education. Such programs will lead to the improvement of the living conditions of local population, to the increase in its access to public services, to new investments, to the establishment of better conditions for the development of private business and tourism.

The state did not allocate sufficient funds for such projects so far. This was due both to the difficult economic situation in the country and to the lack of national policy for the development of regional economy and for the attitude towards minorities. The delay in the discussion of problems of the regions with mixed population is very often due to the political short-sightedness of the governing parties. Even at the present situation of a considerable relief in the nationalistic tendencies, fears and prejudices in the whole country, when Greece at last declared its readiness for the establishment of four border checkpoints in the southern regions with mixed population the political mistrust between the ruling party -The Union of the Democratic Forces and The Movement for Rights and Freedoms leads to the unwillingness of the government to prioritise on the settlement of the most serious

economic and social problems in these regions. This additionally creates conditions for the transformation of the social contradictions into ethnic and religious conflicts.

I am deeply convinced that a significant part of the pilot projects, financed by the World Bank through the forthcoming Learning and Innovation Loan must be focused on the regions with mixed population and the towns and villages with big Gypsy neighbourhoods. They meet the major criteria that have to be considered in the discussions and approval of future projects:

- a higher proportion of active population compared to the average for the country and a significant number of children and young people who have fallen into the group of the poor;
- a very high level of unemployment and its future increase as a result of the structural reform;
- alarming processes of migration and a strong tendency towards emigration;
- a very poorly developed infrastructure;
- insufficient development of the sphere of public services;
- a necessity to promote the establishment of private sector and public institutions and to assist them in planning and managing microprojects.

It is very important to bear in mind the typical culture peculiarity of the population in the mixed regions which is the tradition to expend voluntary labour on the improvement of the living conditions in the settlement. Therefore, it would be easy for those who apply for microprojects at the World Bank to engage unemployed men for reasonable payment in the development of sewerage, in mains water projects, in roads and public buildings reconstruction.

Environmental development projects should be promoted in the mountain regions and in the regions with mining and heavy or chemical industry in particular. Such projects will answer the need to clear up the heavily polluted environment inherited from the communist period.

It is necessary to promote environmental awareness among the population in the mixed regions which would provide against water pollution and guarantee the establishment of scrap recycling mechanisms.

People from the Rhodope region point out the necessity of a more effective use of the numerous thermal springs for health, industrial and everyday needs. This could be done through expertise, know-how and financing of small projects on the use of mineral water.

In the last few years large forest areas in the Rhodope Mountains have been demolished. Local population cannot provide for afforestation with the typical for the region deciduous woods which were unreasonably replaced by coniferous during the communist period.

It might be a positive step if as regards to the World Bank Loan a portfolio of well analysed eco- and infrastructure projects are initiated that guarantee a satisfactory return of investments, entail a relatively modest cost per job created and offer wages that will not attract current employees but will ensure the livelihoods of new workers.

The allocation of funds through the forthcoming Learning and Innovation Loan of the World Bank might result in other very important social changes:

- It would strengthen the cooperation between the representatives of different ethnic and religious groups in the achievement of mutual objectives set by the local communities themselves. In the course of this positive cooperation distances and prejudices towards "the others" would gradually decrease. Conditions would be created for integration between the different groups. Thus, the implementation of projects financed by the World Bank will contribute to the inter-ethnic stability in Bulgaria - essential for the political stability and peace in this part of Europe;
- The widespread concept among the local population that the state institutions are not concerned about the development of the mixed regions due to their discriminative attitude towards minority communities would be gradually overcome. This would also lead to the overcoming of the alienation from the Bulgarian state which is very strong at the moment. It might be expected that such a change would directly result in a decrease in the emigrants flow towards Western Europe and the Republic of Turkey;
- Better possibilities would be created for cooperation between local authorities and non-governmental organisations, however small their number is in the region. Civil society structures would strengthen their position within local communities as a result of their more active participation in the decision-making process.
- Favourable conditions would be created that people themselves set the priorities for future development of the community through their participation in general meetings, cooperatives or local boards. This would also enable them to be the active part in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local projects and to take personal initiative and responsibility instead of leaving it in the hands of the state institutions. Bulgarian citizens and minority representatives in particular would gradually overcome the syndrome of acquired helplessness to which they have been taught for many decades.

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