

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

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R e p o r t

JUNE 29-30 AND
DECEMBER 18, 2001



SOFIA, BULGARIA

THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

BULGARIA

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PREFACE

This is a report of two discussions that took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, on June 29-30 and December 18, 2001, respectively, between Bulgarian government and party leaders and the leaders of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), Bulgaria's predominantly ethnic Turkish party.¹

Bulgaria is home to one of the most unusual interethnic arrangements in Southeastern Europe. The leadership of the large (almost 10 per cent of the population)² Turkish minority, which might be expected by some to be militant in pressing for special status and protections along ethnic lines, has instead announced its intention to pursue a civic model as the basis for its efforts to improve the conditions in which that country's Turks and Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims) live.

To Americans and others accustomed to the notion of a social order that treats its members as individual citizens first and only then as members of ethnic groups, this will sound quite familiar. But in the complex ethnic worlds of this region, it is a unique exception that merits special attention. For example, Hungarians living outside Hungary, who make up Central Europe's largest minority, conduct highly organized political campaigns in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia, with the aim of maintaining and strengthening Hungarian cultural identity. And the Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia, and south Serbia have gone to war with their neighbors over the issue of their rights and status.

Bulgaria's Turks have, for now, selected a different path. For example, far from insisting on all-Turkish schools, the MRF's leadership prefers students to attend Bulgarian schools to study English as their foreign language, and to master computer skills, with Turkish language courses taking third place in the schools or left for the home.



Left to right: Georgi Parvanov, Allen Kassof, Ahmed Dogan.

¹ The MRF was accepted into the European Liberal, Democrat, and Reform Party in December 2001.

² The Turkish minority numbered approximately 745,000, according to the 2001 census; there were 6,850,000 ethnic Bulgarians and some 370,000 Roma (Gypsies).

Certainly the recent history of Bulgaria's treatment of its Turks does not account for this peaceful picture. On the contrary, in the 1980s, during the last decade of communist rule, there was a cruel campaign at enforced assimilation. Turks were forced to change their names to Bulgarian-sounding names, and in a wave of official harassment and denigration, many emigrated permanently to Turkey, leaving behind hearth and jobs. Although the demise of communism saw an end to these government measures, there was still plenty of anti-Turkish sentiment in the political system and on the streets. A visitor to Sofia in 1991 could see frequent demonstrations at the parliament and the government protesting any concessions to Turks concerning even *after*-school Turkish language classes.

It may be the Turks' good fortune that, because the fractious parties that make up Bulgaria's political life have rarely achieved lasting or solid majorities, they have sometimes had to depend on the MRF for parliamentary support. In 2001, literally just as the first of the two meetings reported here was underway, the MRF finally joined with a mainstream party—the new, and newly victorious, party of King Simeon II—to form the ruling coalition that is currently in power, thus bringing Turks into a Bulgarian government for the first time in history.

(Parenthetically, it should be pointed out that Bulgaria's experience with its other large minority population—the Roma, or Gypsies—has been no more successful than that of other countries in the region.)

It is tempting to find the reasons for this exceptionalism in the structure of Bulgarian society and in the temperaments of Bulgarians and Turks. Indeed, that is where they may lie in part, and the Bulgarians (and the Turks) have lately taken to describing their situation as the “Bulgarian ethnic model.” But we propose that something else is also going on: a deliberate decision by the senior leadership of the Turkish political elite to follow the civic course. Different leaders might have made a different decision (and one day may).

Why this should be is the more difficult question. Outsiders cannot be certain whether this decision is the result of an underlying conviction among Turkish leaders about how political systems should work, or of a calculation that a non-confrontational approach will yield better results. Nor do we know whether these views are universal within the MRF, or whether there are competing views that have for the moment been kept out of play. But we do know that the present policy is unique among the region's minorities.

This does not mean that the Turks do not have grievances, and plenty of them, or that they are shy about making them known, or that they are infinitely patient. On the contrary, they believe that they are discriminated against by Bulgarians. In fact, by any objective measures they come up short on employment, income, education, and other critical indicators of status and well-being. They live in the poorest parts of the country. And they are almost completely missing from the military, security, and diplomatic services.

Finally, Bulgaria's Turks may be closer to the beginning than the end of defining their long-term strategies. The volatility of Bulgarian politics means that MRF may use its swing position to make different kinds of alliances in the future, and there also could be unexpected changes and challenges within MRF itself. Then there is the matter of results. If the present posture of the Turkish leadership is effective in producing positive changes for Bulgaria's Turkish minority, then it is not only likely to endure but could provide a useful reference point for others in the region. If it fails, then we will see a different picture.

The meetings reported on here will give the reader some first-hand insights into the spectrum of issues confronting Bulgarians and Turks, and the tone of the complex interrelations among their political leaders.

We are grateful for the cooperation of the Institute for Research on Integration and its director, Samuel Levy. Ilia Iliev, PER's representative in Sofia, made an indispensable contribution to the preparation and conduct of the meeting and is the author of this report.

PER assumes full responsibility for the text, which has not been reviewed by the participants.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*

Livia B. Plaks, *Executive Director*

Princeton, New Jersey

September 2002

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the spelling of the name “Kosovo” is used (rather than “Kosova,” the spelling preferred by Albanians, or “Kosovo and Metohija” or “Kosmet,” preferred by the Serbs), because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world.

For the sake of simplicity, “Yugoslavia” is used for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, “Macedonia” for “FYROM” or “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and “Bosnia” for “Bosnia and Herzegovina.”



Left to right: Mihail Ivanov, Nezhdet Mollov, Lutvi Mestan, Junal Lutvi, Livia Plaks, Plamen Panaiotov.



Left to right: Ahmed Doğan, Fatos Nano, Georgi Parvanov.



Left to right: Vladimir Donchev, Allen Kassof, Petre Roman, Lutvi Mestan.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers two separate roundtable discussions that were held in Sofia, Bulgaria on July 29-30 and December 18, 2001. In order preserve the thematic unity of the report, the author reports them here as a single, continuous discussion.

At the time of the first meeting, which took place days after the parliamentary elections, negotiations were going on between the new and newly elected National Movement Simeon II (NMSII) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (the predominantly Turkish ethnic party) that led to the inclusion of the latter in the governing coalition—the first time that Turks were included in a Bulgarian government—and they expected major changes. By the second meeting, the actual experience of governance had, inevitably, tempered some of these hopes.

Georgi Parvanov, President-Elect of Bulgaria, opened the second roundtable. In his greetings to the participants, he emphasized that the protection of national minorities represents one of the key elements of European policy and is of crucial importance at a moment when Bulgaria is seeking a path into the European Union (EU).

The Bulgarian ethnic experience, he said, continues to be one of the most competitive export products of the Bulgarian transition. Its biggest advantage is that it is based on two clearly delineated and accepted principles. The first principle is the firm understanding of the necessity to find working formulae, means, and techniques for *integration* of the different ethnic minorities and for their involvement in the efforts of various state institutions to implement reforms. This must be complemented by the second main principle, the struggle to preserve and develop the *identity* of each of the minorities. This two-fold unity underlies the essence and efficiency of the Bulgarian ethno-political experience. Its success is also a tribute to the contributions made by all state institutions, political parties, and numerous civic organizations.

Mr. Parvanov noted that Bulgarian politicians are to be commended for implementing the ethno-political experience on an everyday level. All too often the ethno-political experience is demonstrated only by declarations of cooperation that are not supplemented by adequate state policy. But our politicians, as well as the people who implement the ethno-political experience, have read the past in an intelligent and benevolent fashion, acknowledging the controversial, complex, and sometimes cruel and brutal history of ethnic relations in the region.

Parvanov also stressed the crucial role of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in the successful establishment of the ethnic experience. According to him, the participation of the MRF in the executive power and in the ruling parliamentary coalition will create new prerequisites for the development of the ethno-political experience. To be sure, there is a risk that the potential failure of the coalition or a crisis resulting from its internal problems will be translated by malevolent commentators into the language of ethnic conflict. To minimize that risk, he suggested that all representatives of Bulgarian parties and institutions act together to promote the success of the Bulgarian ethno-political experience outside the country.

State and party structures, he said, should take common steps to persuade European or transatlantic partners to move beyond mere positive evaluation of the experience and to invest in it. A growing flow of foreign investments is needed, especially in the regions inhabited chiefly by ethnic minorities.

The President-Elect concluded with an appeal for a new interpretation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which he said has remained stillborn in the Bulgarian political environment. He assured the audience that the Office of the President will work actively to bring about this new interpretation, taking such steps as proposing the establishment of a special Presidential Council on Ethnic Issues.

The MRF leader then summarized the main transformations in the Bulgarian ethnic experience that occurred during the interim between the two sessions of the roundtable. He noted that the year 2001 had been truly successful. At the June roundtable, members of the MRF had just begun the creation of a government with their colleagues from the National Movement Simeon II. On the very day of the roundtable he had had to leave for a few hours in order to finalize the negotiations for the foundation of that government.

Thus, the MRF has joined the executive power for the first time, represented on the level of ministers and deputy ministers as well as district governors and heads of agencies and directorates. As President-Elect Parvanov had recommended, from now on MRF members should be better represented in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as in the judiciary, the police, and the secret

services. The MRF leader asserted that the ideas of the President-Elect have been very carefully thought through and represent a program that should be implemented in practice. Such a program will address the fact that members of the ethnic minorities are not yet incorporated into a range of state institutions and the judiciary. Additionally, certain forms of discrimination persist in the social sphere as well. While indicating that these are matters still under discussion, he said that they shall be dealt with in a responsible way, seeking mechanisms to solve the existing problems.

The same participant further noted that this search has acquired a consensual dimension, with all stakeholders, from the chief political parties in the country to the main state institutions, realizing its necessity. This is the most positive side of the processes that have taken place in the last months, and it represents the outcome of efforts that were begun over the last 11-12 years.

As a partner in the ruling coalition, the MRF has for the first time the opportunity to use EU funds that are specifically targeted at creating parity between the development of regions with ethnically mixed populations and the development of the rest of the country. In addition to the EU funds, there are also special funds and subsidies of other donors such as the US, Japan, and the World Bank, among others, which to date have not been used in the most appropriate way. Thus in spite of these subsidies, unemployment in these regions remains several times higher than the average for the country as a whole, in some places surpassing 50-60%.

Yet in the national plan for regional development, the regions with ethnically mixed populations are seriously disregarded. These problems endanger the very stability of the country and of the whole region, and should not be addressed by moral imperatives and declarations alone. He observed that sometimes it seems that our Western partners engage in competent investigations that uncover the problems, but then fail to act until it is too late. This was the case, he suggested, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Kosovo, and in Macedonia.

THE PAST EXPERIENCE

To begin the discussion, the participants attempted to analyze the process of establishing the Bulgarian ethnic experience, the reasons for its development, and the main impediments it has faced so far.

An MRF representative analyzed the events of the last decade of the socialist regime. A huge ethnic cleansing took place in 1985, after which 350,000 ethnic Turks left Bulgaria for the Republic of Turkey. Bulgaria itself was on the verge of a civil war. Social tensions were so acute that they could have easily led to something similar to the current events in neighboring Macedonia. There were a multitude of reasons for the eruption of an internal conflict.

At the end of the 1980s, the MRF representative continued, there were solid indications that the conflict would deepen. Arab and Turkish names were forbidden and were forcibly replaced by Bulgarian names. All institutions of state bureaucracy as well as the Communist party, the United Front, and police, defense, and intelligence units were involved in the campaign. The majority of the population, in fact more than half of the Bulgarian citizens, had approved of the renaming procedures. The official authorities had managed to create a deep divide between Bulgarian Turks and the rest of the society, persuading ethnic Bulgarians that they needed to help their co-citizens recognize their Bulgarian identity and return to their Bulgarian origins.

The socialist regime, he continued, used this campaign to maintain its power and to divert citizens' attention from its own problems. From 1984 onward, it was clear that Bulgarian economic development had been stalled. The GDP was falling while inflation increased. Other "risk" ethnic groups had already been disempowered. For instance, the names of the Bulgarian-speaking Rhodope Muslims had been changed several times between 1912 and 1982, in some regions up to seven times. Moscow was unable to control effectively the developments in Bulgaria. The then leader of the USSR, Yuri Andropov, was deathly ill, and his successor, Konstantin Chernenko, had failed to analyze the situation adequately. The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) took this opportunity to plan independent action unsanctioned by the Kremlin. Later, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, he opposed the BCP policy and successfully prevented its implementation. Apparently, the Kremlin had either not known about the plans of the Bulgarian leaders or had shut their eyes to them.

Bulgarian Turks reacted by establishing underground structures. They decided, this participant said, to fight terrorist acts without weapons, spreading information to inform the world of the events taking place in Bulgaria. They also organized the Turkish population to engage in passive resistance in the form of economic obstruction and boycott of

elections. Bulgarian Turks stopped producing agricultural goods except for the minimum necessary for their own survival. The MRF founders favored this peaceful approach, and adhered to that principle even after 1989, claimed the representative of the MRF.

After the 1990 Constituent Assembly elections, Bulgarian nationalists surrounded the Parliament to prevent Turkish MPs from entering the building, forcing them to sneak in silently. Similar anti-Turkish feelings were nurtured not only by Bulgarian nationalists, but also by the majority of the society as a whole, which had been duly indoctrinated by the Communist Party. All this has been largely overcome in later years by tact, patience, and a will for dialogue. The MRF representative emphasized that its members use every opportunity to talk openly about the negative experiences, to verbalize and define them, and to bring them to the negotiating table.

Communist repressions targeted not only Bulgarian Turks but also Bulgarian democrats and Christians who did not support Communist ideology.

A representative of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) added that the past is much more complex than the above account. Although the renaming campaign did constitute a grim mark on ethnic relations within the Bulgarian territory, the legacy of the past surpasses by far this relatively short episode from the mid-1980s. During more than six centuries of Bulgarian-Turkish relations in these territories, each people has experienced both the advantages and the shortcomings of their close co-existence. While there have been numerous deep conflicts in previous centuries and in the 20th century, it is preferable to go beyond that past and to seek the many examples of ethnic tolerance that also characterize Bulgarian history.

The Vice-President of Bulgaria asserted that ethnic peace has been preserved despite the dark legacy of the recent past, including the so-called "revival process" (the renaming of the Bulgarian Turks), one of the most regretful events in Bulgarian history. He further pointed out that Communist repressions targeted not only Bulgarian Turks but also Bulgarian democrats and Christians who did not support Communist ideology. As one of those victims, this participant said that the former Communist regime, and not the Bulgarian people, was responsible for the confrontations of that period.

Another Bulgarian participant reminded the group that in the summer of 1989, just before the fall from power of the socialist regime, many Bulgarians appealed for “death to the traitors,” meaning those Bulgarians who had signed declarations in support of human rights of Bulgarian Turks. The situation became even more ignoble several days after the fall of Communism, when one of the opposition leaders made a speech during the first democratic meeting. He appealed for returning the names to Bulgarian Turks but was rebuffed by the crowd.

Only in 2001, eleven years later, has one Bulgarian political organization acknowledged, officially and for the first time, that a Turkish political organization might play a leading role in coalition with a political party dominated by ethnic Bulgarians. During the last election campaign, the Liberal Union was the junior partner in a coalition with the MRF. While the results were not entirely satisfactory, still the breakthrough had been made.

Participants discussed the attitudes of Bulgarian society toward ethnic minorities. A Bulgarian representative underlined that there exists a centuries-old tradition of peaceful co-existence among different ethnicities that cannot be obliterated by party politics. A representative of the MRF disagreed. Other Balkan lands can also boast centuries-old traditions of peace, he said. In fact, for several decades, Bosnia was cited as an example of peaceful co-existence. Yet roughly a decade after becoming an Olympic capital and a capital of peace, Sarajevo was engulfed by the flames of war. Something similar could happen in Bulgaria, all the more likely since the initial predispositions here are even worse: Bulgaria is the only state to have executed a renaming campaign.

BASIC PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

The discussion proceeded toward delineating the main principles of the Bulgarian ethnic experience that allow it to function smoothly. As a representative of the MRF suggested, the Bulgarian ethnic experience is probably the most palpable product of political transition in the country. All other outcomes, economic reforms included, are subject to debate. To be sure, mistakes committed in other spheres during transition are probably less dangerous and have less catastrophic consequences. On the other hand, every serious incident of bloodshed in the Balkans has been triggered by unresolved ethnic problems.

MRF founders presume that a viable peace is based on two principles, namely, the principle of identity and the principle of integration into the society. This concept might appear too simple but is at the very heart of what is called “the Bulgarian ethnic experience.” Among its crucial features is the achievement of adequate integration of minorities into civil society. Members of minorities should enjoy the same educational, cultural, and social status as members of the majority, so as to feel like authentic Bulgarian citizens.

A viable peace is based on two principles, namely, the principle of identity and the principle of integration into the society.

A member of the BSP urged theoretical discussion of how the nation is understood. Academic as well as political interpretations favor the ethno-political understanding of the nation as a sum of individuals belonging to one ethnicity. However, we should perceive the nation instead as a sum of citizens belonging to one society. In this case, ethnic identity would not interfere with the sentiment of national identity, and the different ethnic communities would feel that they are full Bulgarian citizens.

Another MRF representative affirmed that one of the most serious problems endangering the future development of the Bulgarian ethnic experience is the absence of political dialogue. Currently, active dialogue takes place among ethnic communities within civil society, but not among politicians. One of his Bulgarian colleagues pointed out that this lack of dialogue is grounded in some basic principles incorporated during the establishment of all Balkan states. There is a contradiction, he said, between the fact that people from different ethnicities inhabit the territory of each Balkan country, on the one hand, and the ideology of those countries, which focuses instead on the establishment of mono-ethnic and ethno-national states, on the other hand. Therefore, each country in the Balkan Peninsula attempts to institutionalize the culture and traditions of one ethnicity only. This in turn leads to a limitation of the rights and of the attempts to assimilate on the part of the other ethnic groups, as well as to something much worse, namely, the conviction that this neighbor is also a potential enemy.

This ideology was elaborated and embraced during the 19th century, but the world has since changed. Instead of being treated as a mono-ethnic body, the Bulgarian nation should be conceived of as a civic

and political nation. Otherwise, all compromises will be temporary. The MRF representative continued by saying, this is the crucial difference between Bulgaria and Macedonia. Since the state ideology in Macedonia is based on the nation understood as something based on ethnicity, at a latter stage it logically presupposes two different nations, the Albanians' attempt to construct themselves as the second-nation ethnicity. This would produce two nations in one

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state, based on two ethnicities. In contrast, Bulgarian Turks endeavor to integrate themselves into one unitary civil and political nation together with all ethnic and religious groups in the country.

In a true civil-political nation, each ethnicity will rely on the other groups for purposes of mutual legitimation. An objective basis for an ideological change in this direction lies in the context of Euro-integration. In this context, and specifically under the shield of NATO, the Balkan states are potentially free to conceive of their neighbors — the Other — as partners in mutual legitimation vis-à-vis Euro-Atlantic values, instead of as potentially threatening enemies. In this new context, nationalism has its own future, not as ethno-nationalism but as civil-political nationalism, called patriotism.

BUILDING AN INTERETHNIC COALITION

The next topic addressed by the participants concerned the principles of common work within the framework of a ruling coalition of parties including both ethnic minorities and the majority. There has not been a tradition of coalition cooperation among Bulgarian political parties as a whole, a BSP representative pointed out, and the dominant style of political communication over the past twelve years has not included dialogue. Thus consensus has emerged only on questions of external policy.

It is quite understandable, he continued, that in the absence of dialogue no coalition culture could ever flourish — a situation that benefits nobody. In this sense, the coalition between the NMSII and MRF is not a happy coincidence but the outcome of a bitter experience from which both politicians and voters have drawn appropriate conclusions.

One of the most unpleasant aspects of the lack of coalition culture is the style of political haughtiness, continued the BSP representative. He declared with regret that for a period this style was characteristic of his own party as well as of the activity of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). For a long time, Bulgarian political stakeholders considered the MRF to be primarily an important and valuable instrument for achieving power and ruling the country.

An MRF representative summarized some of the main stages of his party's experience in coalition cooperation. Collaboration began after the elections in late 1991 that produced an extremely interesting configuration in the Parliament. Three political parties were represented: UDF with 110 MPs, BSP with 106 MPs, and MRF with 24 MPs. For a variety of reasons, the coalition between the UDF and MRF from the end of 1991-1992 had only a formal character.

What would have happened had we decided to act more firmly, had we insisted at that time on ministerial positions and key appointments? he asked. His question presumed that the MRF could in fact have afforded to do so, given the power configuration that existed at that time in the Parliament. The BSP and UDF were not even talking to one another, so the very idea of cooperation between them was absurd. None could form a majority without the MRF. But, the MRF member maintained, society was not yet ready for the presence of Turks in the government, and to include them would have led to cataclysms. That is why the MRF decided to seek compromise, filling its government quotas with ethnic Bulgarians exclusively. The then foreign minister was part of this quota.

Unfortunately, the MRF representative went on, the coalition partners from the UDF did not properly evaluate this move and requested even more steps backward from the MRF. The UDF based their strategy on the following logic: until recently, the Turkish population had been persecuted by the Bulgarian Communist Party; consequently, Turkish leaders could not possibly collaborate with the heirs of former Communists. UDF members decided that the MRF therefore had no choice but to support them (the UDF) and they made this conviction a key element of their strategy. The price for this miscalculation was their fall from power.

Another representative of the MRF enumerated additional reasons for dissatisfaction with their former coalition partners. The UDF partners did not consult with them on legislative policy, did not communicate to them which laws should be supported, and did not ask their opinion on

the work of the government, even though the MRF had assumed responsibility for those acts. The MRF could not accept this lack of coalition culture and the government fell, seriously slowing down the Bulgarian transition.

There should be consensus among all political parties that sometimes even the sheer inclusion of political representatives of ethnic minorities in the government is important, even if their parliamentary support is not necessarily crucial for the government's survival.

Then a new attempt at political coalition was made. This was the technocratic government, founded by the MRF and others, but without direct representatives of the Movement in it except for an ethnic Bulgarian and deputy prime minister. This government lasted for two years, and its primary goal was to bring about stability. But due to the lack of a clear political mandate, stability was not accompanied by development.

As a whole, the MRF representative summarized, the Movement can point to sufficient experience in political coalition-making. Cooperation with the NMSII is one outcome of this experience, and the coalition partners know very well where potential obstacles to their common work lie. Current partners understand correctly what to expect from each other, what should be proposed, what must be avoided, and what the common targets should be.

A representative of the NMSII announced that current relations between the NMSII and MRF have produced a partnership that is very different from the previous years. He pointed with pride to the fact that there is a new spirit of cooperation in the Bulgarian National Assembly. A majority of MPs, including members of the opposition BSP, frequently support and vote for laws other than those proposed by the ruling coalition alone, and a representative of the BSP said that his party has overcome the impulse to identify any legislation proposed by political opponents as necessarily bad.

A former head of government in Romania indicated that there should be consensus among all political parties that sometimes even the sheer inclusion of political representatives of ethnic minorities in the government is important, even if their parliamentary support is not necessari-

ly crucial for the government's survival. For example, a few years ago in Romania, a ruling coalition was established with the participation of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). Since the coalition partners already possessed more than 50% of the votes in Parliament, the involvement of the Hungarian party was not imperative from the point of view of proper parliamentary functioning. In spite of this, the coalition partners decided to invite the UDMR into the coalition and also into the government. Romanian society was initially astonished, since nothing like this had ever happened before in the country. But the experiment proved successful and the Hungarians behaved like loyal partners. They adamantly fought for their interests, yet this did not undermine either the development of the country or the relationships within the coalition.

A foreign participant contended that the formation of a coalition alone is not enough. For example, in Macedonia, a coalition between Albanians and Macedonians had little effect on the relationship between the two groups. Thus this fragile structure rapidly disintegrated.

Formation of a coalition alone is not enough.

Romanian political life saw another similar coalition, this time between Hungarians and Romanians. It was successful only to a certain extent, since it had no sufficient parliamentary support and had its own problems. Even so, the political union between Hungarians and Romanians represented a serious step forward and prepared the stage for a future partnership agreement. That it has been successful at all is in large part due to its focus on addressing concrete problems with concrete programs that will yield good results in the future. A third coalition that can be cited as an example is found in Slovakia.

A Bulgarian participant declared that the new ruling party frequently tries to address the most severe problems. However, in order to make a comprehensive plan to improve the situation of minorities, agreement must be reached with other political forces too. No single political party can execute radical reforms without widespread support, and any hastily implemented policies will be extremely ineffective and might harm ethnic minorities instead of helping them. For example, the use of the Turkish language in the media, schools and administration can be achieved only after serious talks with all political powers. A Turkish representative agreed that a comprehensive policy toward minorities could

be devised only when both the minority and the majority become convinced that it is inevitable. However, he suggested that such a process of designing a common policy actually began 10-11 years ago.

A foreign participant summarized some of the key points made in the discussion to this point. First of all, negotiations between an ethnic minority and an ethnic majority are least successful when they are based on foreign “recipes” and when they are ready-made decisions imposed by foreign leaders. Even successful negotiations are politically risky,

Even successful negotiations are politically risky, since if the local balance becomes unstable, two parallel societies could be created on one and the same territory.

since if the local balance becomes unstable, two parallel societies could be created on one and the same territory. Experience from other states where similar negotiations have been conducted indicates that progress is minimal until the two parties begin discussing concrete details of the interethnic agreements, with concrete figures, numbers, and deadlines that can lead to concrete arrangements.

Secondly, the ethnic minority has an inherent difficulty in attracting the attention of the majority population and getting it to understand its problems and demands. This is due to a host of reasons and not necessarily to malevolence. Politicians from the ruling party do not easily decide to address minority problems, since this can often be an unpopular task that jeopardizes their careers. Additionally, minority demands are often considered exaggerated. Sometimes they are indeed exaggerated, and this creates structural problems — common for the whole region — in the course of solving minority demands.

It is very difficult, he continued, to create conditions in which a minority voice can be heard. Macedonia witnessed the worst approach to seeking attention to the demands of minorities. Political coalition is another possibility, though for political leaders to defend the interests of an ethnic minority always involves a risk. The minority party can easily become unpopular, since minority problems themselves are often unpopular in that they do not affect every member of the society.

The human factor appears to play the single greatest role in bringing minority issues to public attention. Our experience demonstrates that

the most important interethnic agreements are often based on individual, personal understanding between particular leaders. In Romania, these were several key figures who realized that it was in their interest, as well as in the interest of the minorities they represented, to bridge the gap between their perceptions of the problems and to seek solutions together. What can be inferred from the speeches of MRF members is that no such person currently exists in the large Bulgarian parties. There appears to be a lack of individual leaders who might undertake such a role, and this absence creates several problems. Such partners should be sought and cultivated in order to enter into a dialogue. Ethnic minorities should do their part of the job, he concluded: they must persuade the majority that addressing their demands will yield benefits for the whole country that will not threaten the majority.

The most important interethnic agreements are often based on individual, personal understanding between particular leaders.

WHEN AN ETHNIC MINORITY IS REPRESENTED IN THE RULING COALITIONS

The discussion then turned to the specifics of governmental coalitions that include the participation of parties representing ethnic minorities. A representative of the MRF began his speech with the news that the Movement had just been accepted as a full member of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party together with most of the European liberal parties. This fact allowed him to criticize the tendency of many participants at the roundtable, foreign observers as well, to refer to the MRF as the “party of Bulgarian Turks.” While it is true that the majority of the voters for the Movement are ethnic Turks or Muslims, this does not automatically make the party ethnic. Such a label would prove too narrow and consequently incorrect. The inclusion of the MRF in the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party marks the end of a long process of its acceptance as a normal party, normal in the context of both Bulgarian and European political life. In terms of Bulgarian politics, this would mean that there exist prerequisites to make the MRF the necessary corrective in all future coalitions and governments, as was the case in Germany with the Party of Free Democrats.

A Romanian participant reflected on the fact that all parties defending the interests of ethnic minorities do, in fact, share common characteristics not shared by other parties. That is why, according to him, all of them face similar problems. The leaders of the Hungarians in Romania also seek a balance between their need to represent voters from a particular ethnic minority and their need to identify themselves with the main trends in Romanian society. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania is a member of the European People's Party, yet it is comprised of Hungarian liberals and Hungarian social democrats alike (alongside Hungarian Christian democrats).

One of the leaders of the MRF pointed out that, in the Bulgarian case, cooperation with the NMSII has been greatly facilitated by the fact that the essence of the NMSII corresponds to a considerable extent with the nature of the MRF. The figure of the king has been associated with such categories as balance, understanding, respectfulness, and common national cooperation, he said. The anti-party leaning of the NMSII also helped. At the start of the coalition cooperation, the NMSII did not have a clear political identity, its members only recently having decided to adhere to Christian-democratic values. This absence of identity actually helped, because there were no founding values to hamper partnership with any particular political subject. Therefore no fundamental contradictions emerged that would encumber or altogether prevent cooperation.

One of his colleagues asked whether there are political parties with which cooperation is impossible due to fundamental contradictions. He assumed that such contradictions might exist in cases when one is confronted with an entirely different understanding of the Bulgarian ethnic experience.

The MRF representative asserted that the UDF covertly helped to promote the perception that if Turks were to join the judiciary, the prosecution, the police, and the special services of the army, this would bring about a Macedonian type of development in Bulgaria. He has no doubt that the UDF continues to hold such fears, and this is the basis on which they contest the inclusion of the MRF in the rule of the country. This makes the contribution of the other political parties all the more significant since, in contrast to the UDF, they support the active participation of the Movement in the work of the government and state administration on all levels. This demonstrates that a psychological barrier has been overcome. Yet it should be clear that this was not easy to accom-

plish, and that coalition partners from the NMSII are constantly faced with covert or open attacks and with attempts to change their positions. This is one of the main challenges confronting the Bulgarian ethnic experience, he concluded.

A representative of the NMSII agreed with him, saying that one of the primary contributions of the ruling coalition was its success in defeating ethno-nationalism, the belief that each ethnic group should be ruled exclusively by its own representatives (Bulgarians by Bulgarians and Turks by Turks). As an example, he mentioned the difficulties facing the NMSII when its members were trying to convince the voters that the district governor of Sofia, the capital of the country inhabited primarily by ethnic Bulgarians, could be chosen by the MRF.

A member of the MRF pointed out that the Movement had espoused this strategy for some time as part of its efforts to build a civic-political nation. At the moment, the Movement has some 50,000 members, including the youth organization. Nearly 10% of them are ethnic Bulgarians, especially in Northern Bulgaria. The MRF is consciously trying to avoid ethnic exclusivity given its final goal of creating a civic-political nation. In this context, the MRF should not be considered an ethnic party, but rather a party holding a certain vision of the nation. I am not sure that the parties of the ethnic minorities in Romania, Macedonia, and other Balkan countries maintain similar ideas, he said; that is why all direct parallels must be taken quite cautiously. Unlike the MRF, those parties do not attempt either to include regularly in their lists MPs from the ethnic majority or to attract party members from majority circles.

In the last 11-12 years, the MRF leaders have done their best to disseminate and propagate the civic-political understanding of the nation. Such an effort was absent in Macedonia, where the talk was about a Macedonian nation, about authentic Macedonians who had existed from time immemorial, and about equally authentic Albanians. In Bulgaria, the leaders of the Bulgarian Turks and several Bulgarian colleagues of theirs have always struggled to impose a vision of the nation as a civic-political system and of Bulgarian society as a civil society in which parties express and defend the interests of certain groups of citizens and participate in the work of Parliament and of government in a legal way according to the Constitution.

Although these principles seem rather theoretical, continued the Movement leader, they nonetheless trace the main directions in

Bulgarian political life. They are far from unanimously accepted among representatives of the Bulgarian political elite. For example, the national doctrine adopted some years ago treats the nation as function of Bulgarian ethnicity. If other ethnic groups think in similar terms and put forward their own competing national doctrines, then confrontation will be guaranteed, and its eruption will be just a matter of time.

MECHANISMS OF COALITION PARTNERSHIP

Since all participants seemed to agree with the main principles of the Bulgarian ethnic experience, the meeting proceeded toward a discussion of concrete mechanisms of coalition partnership in the framework of the government and the ruling majority.

An NMSII representative enumerated some of the main forms of collaboration. First, there exists ongoing cooperation between the ruling bodies of the two political parties and between their parliamentary groups. They debate bills together and, together with their representatives in the executive power, regularly discuss strategic questions of government. Additionally, a special format has been created to allow discussion of the most significant problems between the two political parties. The goal is the elaboration of a common policy not only regarding legislation but also underlying successful collaboration between the legislative and the executive branches. In this way, parliamentary sessions are better linked to the common policy of the two political parties and the government. While those forms of collaboration need to be further improved, what has been achieved so far in the short period of work after the coalition's foundation is quite a lot, he concluded.

A member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party proposed some alternative mechanisms of cooperation. He pointed out that the newly elected Bulgarian president had consciously used the term "ethno-political" instead of "ethnic" experience, placing the emphasis on local-level functioning. There are several positive examples of cooperation between the structures of political parties and of the local administration. In a number of districts and municipalities, the BSP has established a successful partnership with the MRF that has been in place for several years already. There are a number of mayors who were elected with the support of the two political parties, and also common teams of experts in the local administrations and collaboration between groups of municipal counselors. Partnership on the local level has logically led to part-

nership between the parliamentary groups of the two political parties. What happens is just partnership and nothing else, but something else is hardly necessary for establishing the legislative priorities of the Bulgarian parliament, he said.

Continuing the discussion on concrete mechanisms of coalition cooperation, a foreign participant asked about the concrete goals of the MRF in the coming months and years. Do you have a package of such demands, for example, in the field of education, or about investments in ethnically mixed regions, or the use of the mother tongue in the administration? According to him, the Romanian example suggests that until a concrete plan has been elaborated, there is a risk that stakeholders will be satisfied with common, though unquestionably useful, talks and good intentions.

An MRF representative replied that during the last 10-12 years his party has consciously refrained from mentioning concrete plans. The Movement has neither packages of requirements for its participation in the executive power nor a social and political program for the regions in which its voters are concentrated. As regards its positions defended within the coalition, the MRF has a dynamic package. The dynamic depends on the maturity of the society, on the speed of the Euro-integration process, on mutual trust within the coalition, and on the level of dialogue with the rest of the political parties. Conditions in Bulgaria are such that any hasty declaration of big packages of demands would be detrimental, he insisted. No responsible Bulgarian politician could afford such a risk, even if European standards recommend this.

Society must be really mature in order to accept, for example, that areas with over 20% minority population can introduce the minority language in the administration, and in all stages of education, as is the case in Transylvania. This might be Europe's recommendation, but no responsible Bulgarian politician can insist on it if society is not ready to accept it. In this sense, European requirements surpass the MRF demands and the Movement's leadership would be satisfied to be in second place. If Europe were to impose such a practice, the MRF leaders and voters would gladly accept it because then Bulgarian society would not react too sharply against it. The reaction would be entirely different if such a demand were to be initiated by the Bulgarian Turks, however. Then stability would be replaced by instability.

A member of the MRF leadership proposed an alternative strategy, namely the gradual and consensual imposition of cumulative minimal changes. According to him, such a success would be more lasting since the whole society would support it. As an example, he mentioned the use of the Turkish language in the administration, in procuring services for the population, or during debates between municipal counselors in municipalities with predominantly Turkish populations. Without being normative, such practices do exist, even though they are not officially permitted by the Constitution. The practice of using the Turkish language in public places has been introduced gradually, so that people are not shocked and hysteria is not provoked. Even at the opening of this roundtable, leading Bulgarian politicians greeted their Turkish colleagues with good wishes for the Bairam, offered with perfect Turkish pronunciation, he noted. But if someone attempts to institutionalize such naturally occurring practices into a norm, this would immediately provoke very sharp discontent and would generate instability. However, if the practice is imposed informally, in a natural way and following the internal logic of the processes, it would not distress a reasonable person. According to the MRF representative, these successes should not be paraded.

His colleague from the NMSII gave another example. He reminded everyone that 10-12 years ago the society suffered a “heart murmur” at the mere mention of the concept of “ethnic minority,” a concept that was also forbidden by the Constitution. The political language first referred to a “citizen whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian,” then used “ethnic community,” and only later used the phrases “ethnic minority” and “national minority,” as in the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities that is already an official part of Bulgarian legislation. The Framework Convention was debated and voted in Parliament without provoking particular surprise. There was no panic and hysteria and no apocalyptic beast, he said.

Another MRF representative supported a slightly different approach. I understand the need for a package of demands, he said, but they must

be very clearly formulated and should take into account such factors as the society’s maturity, the degree of Euro-integration, and the concrete situation. Instead of haste, a public debate should be initiated only when the existing practices and the naturally generated social consensus need to be sanctioned. Hastiness creates new problems, he insisted. It was a happy day for him, he continued, to hear from President Parvanov that the Framework Convention must be reinterpreted. This signals that a new level of maturity has been attained in Bulgarian society. Participants’ reaction would have been entirely different had this statement come out of my mouth, he concluded.

Of course, the Movement has demands even if they are not listed in concrete packages, said another MRF representative. He summed up the opinion of several participants from the MRF, saying that it is better not to formulate requirements in special packages to be implemented for years to come, because this will produce sharp opposition. It is more productive, he suggested, to introduce the requirements one by one, as society is ready to accept them.

An NMSII representative sharply criticized attempts at the direct implementation of foreign experiences into Bulgarian interethnic relationships. Until recently, the understanding of ethnic processes in Eastern Europe was incomplete and vague, he contended. Ten years ago, there were 9 states in the region; now there are 31. Until 1989, Sovietologists hardly distinguished between Slovenia, Slavonia, and Slovakia. While this is no longer the case, the old constructs are still in use. Thus, the average Western analyst seeking interpretive models to comprehend events in Macedonia or the Caucasus, for example, always starts from a common understanding about the former Eastern block, which is perceived as more or less homogeneous. According to this way of thinking, all countries there were Communist, all were members of the Warsaw Pact, all of them are trying to reform, and all of them are alike. Their thinking does not take into account the fact that the processes taking place in Romania are different from processes happening in Bulgaria, Macedonia, or Bosnia.

THREATS CONFRONTING THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

Discussion of the threats challenging the Bulgarian ethnic experience proved the most ardent. The majority of the participants agreed that, at this moment, poverty constitutes the biggest threat.

An MRF representative argued that reforms in the country come at a price, and it seems that ethnic minorities pay a higher price than other citizens. Poverty and unemployment are two or even three times as high among them as among the rest of Bulgarian society, and it is poverty among ethnic minorities that most endangers stability in the region.

One of his colleagues from the BSP agreed, saying that there is no longer a danger of police and administrative measures directed at suppressing the ethnic and religious conscience of the minorities. Rather, what matters now are the social parameters of ethnic phenomena. For example, unemployment reached the highest rates in ethnically mixed regions after the privatization of Bulgarian industry, while agrarian reform left the Turks and the Roma landless.

It is poverty among ethnic minorities that most endangers stability in the region.

The Turkish and the Romani minorities were also the victims of health and educational reforms, since now most of them cannot afford health services and education. As social tension can easily acquire ethnic dimensions, we need a more active state policy toward the ethnically mixed regions. Such an investment would enrich the Bulgarian ethnic experience.

A member of parliament from the MRF contended that if one-tenth of the moneys spent by NATO to put down the Kosovo conflict were to be invested in the Rhodope mountains instead, ethnic tensions in Bulgaria would be alleviated altogether and the country would become a guarantee for stability in the region.

A BSP representative focused once more on the depth of the crisis in the regions inhabited by ethnically mixed populations. Our American and European partners, he said, must realize the complexity of the problem and understand the need for adequate measures. Otherwise, their assistance will be limited to analysis and discussion alone without helping the ethnic experience, a dimension that could make Bulgaria an island of stability in the Balkans. From this point of view, it is of vital necessity for the survival of the ethnic experience and of Bulgaria itself that there is support for ethnic peace.

Foreign assistance must go beyond discussion. The regions inhabited by ethnically mixed populations are in the worst of conditions. He quot-

ed figures showing unemployment rates of 70-75% in some of those regions. Investment in the ethnically mixed regions should become the primary task of our American and European partners. This would also help to persuade Bulgarian citizens that they are moving in the right direction. Help is needed now, as a clear sign of support not to a particular government or majority, but to a particular type of ethnic relations sorely needed in the entire region.

A top state official spoke of what he regards as an extremely significant aspect of the crisis in these regions. According to him, the MRF leadership attempts to keep the processes in the Movement unadvertised, so that foreign observers sometimes understand the Movement to be a kind of army that obediently follows orders from its general. In fact, however, inside the Movement there exists a sound feedback mechanism that obliges the leaders to take into account the opinions of their supporters. The crisis within the 1992 coalition with the UDF was to a great extent provoked by pressure from MRF voters whose views the leadership could not disregard. Should there continue to be disproportional growth between the social and economic development of the ethnic minorities and the majority populations, the MRF leadership could be again subject to very strong pressure, warned the top state official.

An MRF colleague continued this line of argumentation. According to him, the Movement's acquisition of power, represented by its ministers and district governors, generated very high expectations among its followers. They anticipated that their situation would improve rapidly, in a matter of months or even days. Now they constantly ask, "Why do we need these ministers, if they cannot improve our way of life and our financial situation?"

One of the points of the coalition agreement postulated that the new government will take measures to overcome gradually the lack of balance between social and economic development in regions inhabited by ethnically mixed populations and development in the rest of the country. If this particular point is not implemented, the very idea of a coalition government with minority representatives will be discredited in the eyes of MRF supporters, a situation that could have far-reaching consequences.

Roundtable participants discussed other risks that could jeopardize the very principles of the Bulgarian ethnic experience.

A foreign diplomat pointed out spheres in which the spirit of the ethnonational state seems to have retained its dominance. For example, there

are no high-ranking military officers in the police and in the army from the ethnic minorities so long as the ideology of these institutions is grounded in the values of one nation only. There is frequent talk about

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the role of Orthodox religious values in the functioning of the army, but this overlooks the fact that similar values can also be found in Judaism and in Islam. The same is true for the Denominations Act and the Law of the Bulgarians Abroad.

A member of parliament from the MRF observed that in his electoral district, inhabited almost entirely by Turks, there is not even one sergeant with a Turkish name. He further contended that the local population has not overcome completely its fear and distrust, rooted in the events of 15 years ago, of the law enforcement institutions of the state.

A member of parliament from the UDF objected that the army and the police in particular are extremely conservative institutions, trapped by inertia and changing only slowly and painfully. This also relates to the fact that, since its inception more than a century ago, the main army propaganda has been directed at ethnic minorities. Attempts to reform the military and para-military structures have therefore encountered hidden internal resistance. Even so, the former government did its best to try to transform the representatives of these institutions from instruments of repression into members of civil society, i.e., citizens in uniform. These positive developments, however incomplete, should be acknowledged.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

The meeting continued with discussion of the future directions of development of the Bulgarian ethnic experience. This phase of the discussion was dominated by representatives of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria sharing their views on possible short-term and long-term changes and on their priority political demands. The first topic discussed was the extent to which international legislation adopted by the Bulgarian state defines the framework of future developments.

A member of parliament from the MRF pointed out that Bulgaria has signed a range of documents, including the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, the International Pact on Social, Political and Cultural Rights, the Vienna Agreement, the European Human Rights Convention, and the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities. He went on to say that there is a considerable difference between signing and ratifying a treaty and implementing it in practice. For example, the Framework Convention postulates that citizens have the right to use their mother tongue, “when it is necessary,” when receiving administrative services. Official authorities have judged, however, that it is not necessary and therefore this norm is not implemented in practice.

Another problem is learning the mother tongue. Bulgaria adamantly refuses to sign the Charter of Regional and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. Bulgarian politicians continue discussing whether learning the mother tongue is necessary, while instruction in the mother tongue is not even subject to debate.

Furthermore, he continued, Bulgaria has still not joined the additional protocol of the European Human Rights Convention, namely Protocol No. 12 of Article 14. This Protocol contains a prescription to adopt a special anti-discrimination act. The Bulgarian state needs such a law, stressed the MRF representative. Last year, a decision was made to establish a working group to develop such a law. The working group was to be attached to the National Council of Ethnic and Demographic Questions Issues, yet representatives of the MRF were not allowed to participate. In this sense, it would be highly appropriate to recommend not only making Bulgarian legislation consistent with international treaties, but also consistent with international practice in its implementation.

MRF representatives next shared their views on the future of the Bulgarian ethnic experience in the sphere of culture and education. They emphasized that there are no state subsidies for publications targeted at ethnic minorities, which is why there is practically no Turkish-language press.

MRF members also insisted on urgent changes in the elective school subject “religion,” which has been taught since 1998. Before its inclusion in the school curriculum, it was required to be taught either in the form of comparative religious studies, or, if addressing Orthodox reli-

gion only, accompanied by a similar but separate subject for pupils of Islamic denomination. This notwithstanding, in the beginning only the elective school subject “Orthodox religion” was instituted, and two years

There would be no hostility at all in Bulgarian society today if the Turkish minority were to insist on having their own schools. Bulgarian society is ripe for the idea of opening such schools. The only question now is whether there exists political will to achieve this on behalf of the ruling elite rather than the MRF alone.

later was joined by a similar subject called “Religion – Islam.” However, the salaries of the teachers of Orthodox religion are paid by the municipalities, while the teachers of Islam are paid by the Chief Mufti at the written request of the Minister of Education. The same is valid for the manuals too.

For now, the MRF does not intend to request quotas for ethnic minorities in the universities, although the education of minorities does encounter some problems. The schools in the Rhodope mountains, as well as the Romani schools, are extremely under-

equipped. Except for in the towns, the schools in the Rhodope mountains have neither licensed teachers of English nor computer rooms. Such circumstances generate discrimination, because the resulting difference of minorities in educational and cultural status will immediately result in a difference in their social and economic status as well. Without high quality education, members of ethnic minorities will not be able to compete in the labor market and will remain forever outside mainstream society.

A foreign observer asked how Bulgarian society would react if the MRF were to present a concrete program for Turkish schools, with all necessary figures, dates, and budget lines for textbooks and teachers. Would this affect the balance in public opinion and lead to sharp protests?

An MRF representative asserted that there would be no hostility at all in Bulgarian society today if the Turkish minority were to insist on having their own schools. Bulgarian society is ripe for the idea of opening such schools. The only question now is whether there exists political will to achieve this on behalf of the ruling elite rather than the MRF alone.

Participants then discussed principal differences in the educational policy among ethnic minorities in different Balkan countries. A Romanian

representative recounted the debates around Hungarian-language education in Romania. The program of the Hungarian political leaders included various demands, among them a guarantee for instruction in Hungarian on all levels, from primary school to the university. The Hungarian leaders insisted before their coalition partners and succeeded in sanctioning the use of Hungarian in all administrative structures in districts inhabited by Hungarians. In places where Hungarians surpass 20% of the population, the Hungarian language is widely used in administration and Hungarian signs are seen everywhere in the streets.

All this was connected to massive and complex changes, but did not destroy the balance in the Romanian political structure, he summarized. According to him, Bulgaria has a serious problem with minority representation in state structures, such as the army, the police, the diplomatic corps, and in the judiciary, whereas in Romania the principal struggle was for establishing a state university with teaching in Hungarian. Romanian parties from the coalition insisted on the multicultural character of the university, and on presenting the cultures of all ethnic groups. They were against parallel and autonomous education; this notwithstanding, the position of their Hungarian partners triumphed.

A representative of the MRF declared that they would be happy to support and implement such a policy

in Bulgaria if the European institutions take the initiative. In fact, the goal of Turkish political leaders is that their heirs know the Bulgarian language perfectly well. Young citizens of the country who do not master Bulgarian sufficiently well

The goal of Turkish political leaders is that their heirs know the Bulgarian language perfectly well.

will not be able to find themselves within the Bulgarian political, cultural and social space. On the other hand, it is also not realistic to expect that the young generation will speak both Bulgarian and Turkish equally well. Such an expectation is not well grounded.

Another MRF representative emphasized that their plea is for teaching OF the mother tongue, and not for teaching IN the mother tongue. There is a crucial difference in these approaches, he maintained. Instruction in the mother tongue typically asks that all subjects be taught in that language, and conditions in Bulgaria are not yet appropriate for adopting such a stance. More importantly, this is not the goal

of the MRF. At the moment, its goal is to attain a high quality of education in which the main package of subjects is taught in the official language of the state, he said.

Of course, this does not exclude thinking about the establishment in the future of specialized schools in which the main subjects will be taught in Turkish. We have now English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian language secondary schools, so why not a Turkish language school too? However, as regards mass education, the goal of the MRF is to achieve a high quality of learning OF the mother tongue. The Movement's chief priority is that children from all ethnic groups should have equal access to good instruction. Mass education should be governed by the principle of multiculturalism on all levels, meaning that the various cultures must be taught within the framework of one and the same institution, and not to establish parallel institutions.

The same MRF representative addressed the low level of educational services in ethnically mixed regions. He quoted data revealing that over 90% of schools in the Rhodopes do not offer modern educational services such as instruction in foreign languages, basic knowledge of computer work, etc. The exceptions occur only in schools in which a non-governmental organization, implementing a concrete project, brought in 3-4 computers. The low quality of educational services leads to low credentials and in turn to low social status for many young people. An urgent short-term program is needed to overcome deficits in education, he repeated. Otherwise, despite the good political will, the basis of a future discrimination will be laid out in practice.

A foreign observer intervened very energetically, citing as an example identical fears among Romanian politicians. According to him, the problem with the quality of education is harder to overcome even more than the problem of introducing instruction in the mother tongue, since it cannot be solved by concrete political agreements. What happens is that high-quality teachers lose motivation or leave altogether, for they are underpaid and not respected by society. Children of poor Romanian or Romani families drop out of school; there are no resources for maintaining, let alone modernizing, the educational infrastructure, he said. The problem concerns the whole nation, which is why educational reform should be non-political and beyond party interests. It must be based on consensus and on a common strategy supported by all political parties. In Romania, this strategy is called the "National Pact

for Education" and is currently endorsed by all political parties. One of its chief elements is the requirement to allocate at least 6% of the GDP each year to education (compared to 1.6% spent by the Bulgarian government). Supported by Romanian politicians from different parties as well as by members of the ruling coalition and of the opposition alike, this program has been adopted in Parliament with full consensus and will be implemented over the next 10 years by all subsequent governments.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

The next stage of the discussion addressed the role of international institutions in building up the Bulgarian ethnic experience. A BSP representative emphasized that their role is often a controversial one. For example, the war in Yugoslavia, which began in the name of more security and stability on the Balkans, achieved the opposite effect. The war stimulated and catalyzed the ambitions of various communities for armed resolution of the conflict. In this sense, the international community simultaneously fosters two contradictory trends, one toward fragmentation and one toward integration.

This means that international bodies need a new strategy for the region. The EU, the US, and Russia must not only put out fires which erupt from time to time, but must also invest in peace in the Balkans for the long term. The most serious investment in this direction would be acceleration of the Euro-integration process. The Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, he stressed, could be much more effective if intervention were to occur in advance, before the conflict has already exploded. Until now, Bulgaria has missed numerous opportunities under the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe because of the entirely unacceptable and truly provocative policy of the former government. At the same time, the former government is not solely responsible, since the protracted and belated fundraising for Stability Pact for Southeast Europe projects is inexplicable. True stability in the Balkans is vested in the implementation of large international infrastructural projects made possible by foreign investment, as well as in Bulgaria's integration into the EU and NATO in the long term.

A member of parliament from the MRF pointed out that minority rights have been a priority for the Council of Europe since its very

inception and also for the EU and NATO, especially after the beginning of the crisis in Yugoslavia.

A participant from abroad made it clear that international institutions can recommend and suggest general frames of reference, but cannot enforce particular laws or compel Bulgarian institutions to take any specific measures. One of his colleagues sketched the general frame of reference delineated by legislation and EU decisions. According to him, the EU has taken minority problems seriously in recent years. First, the Maastricht Treaty pays enormous attention to human rights. It is true that the treaty is internal for the EU and is not applicable to accession countries, but in the longer run these states should take it into consideration.

There are economic as well as political criteria for joining the EU. The accession countries must improve social and economic conditions throughout their territory in order to become part of a common economic zone. Hence, one of the aspects of the present discussion, namely regional development, is also very important. Inside the regions, there is a huge potential for overcoming economic hardship.

A representative of the Institute for Research on Integration drew the participants' attention to the fact that EU programs oriented to non-governmental organizations and to civil society at large do not necessarily reach civil society in Bulgaria. In fact, he contended, civil society in Bulgaria has not yet been constituted. The precursors of that civil society, the not-for-profit organizations, depend on governmental institutions or political parties. The Delegation of the European Commission to Bulgaria works with intermediaries who are connected to the government or the political parties and who administer funds as they wish, he claimed. As a result, when the Turkish party was in the opposition, about 15% of all EU programs directed at minorities went to the Turkish minority while the remaining 75% went to the Romani minority. But the Turkish minority constitutes 10% of the Bulgarian population while the Roma constitute not more than 6%. This does not mean that there are no projects proposed by the Turkish NGOs, but that these NGOs are simply ignored.

A Turkish representative asked what kind of mechanism the Council of Europe has envisioned by which it can evaluate the contents of the report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities. He expressed his indignation that the report had been written without the participation of the ethnic

minorities and their representatives, who are the main subject of research. He recommended that the report from the current year be discarded and that in the future a concrete procedure be elaborated for its compilation and discussion, a procedure in which representatives from ethnic minorities and NGOs would take an active part.

A Turkish representative insisted on the more active involvement of international institutions. According to him, societies with older democratic traditions share a public consensus on the need to protect minority rights. Yet realities in the Balkans are different. Centuries-old historic and psychological factors create animosity between ethnic groups, and it can be virtually impossible to overcome them in a period of 10-11 years. Conflicts are especially acute in places where Christians and Muslims live together, namely in Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Chechnya. The Council of Europe and the European Commission attempt to establish a framework of cohabitation while trying not to interfere too directly. Yet these problems cannot be solved through resolutions and recommendations, he said. There must be direct and imperative international control over the implementation of international treaties which Bulgaria has signed.

Otherwise, what happens is that a PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) monitoring mission comes, writes a report, and returns without having changed anything whatsoever. The EU can mobilize more powerful instruments because Bulgaria is applying for membership to the EU. The EU itself will benefit from a more active policy, since the sooner ethnic problems here are solved, the better for the EU.

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL HOMELANDS

The discussants addressed the role of external homelands for maintaining ethnic peace. (Participants also referred to external homelands as "mother states.") A participant from Serbia declared that his state can be of primary importance, and gave as an example the fate of Serbian minorities in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. According to him, their problems were a direct result of the policy of Slobodan Milosevic, former president of the Serbia. He proposed that external homelands organize a new Berlin Congress whose mission would be not to redraw frontiers but to elaborate new rules for managing internal and external minorities as a guarantee for normal life in the Balkans.

A foreign diplomat pointed out that Turkey never incited the Turkish minority in Bulgaria to undertake actions against the Bulgarian state and population, even during the Communist regime. At the same time, there exist international treaties, signed by Bulgaria and Turkey, which give to Ankara a series of rights and duties not only toward the Turks but also toward all Muslims in Bulgaria. After 1989, he alleged, Turkey always supported democracy in Bulgaria, hoping that problems will be solved peacefully and through the efforts of the whole Bulgarian society. Turkey continues to worry about the Turkish minority in Bulgaria but strives not to make them public, and also to place them in the context of bilateral relations between the Bulgarian and the Turkish governments. During its informal contacts with the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, Ankara has always recommended that the community be moderate and realistic in its demands. As a whole, Turkey continues to hope that problems will be solved in a democratic manner.

One of his colleagues underlined that one of the specifics of Bulgaria is that both the local Turkish minority and its external homeland wish that problems be solved peacefully, which sets an excellent example for the whole region.

A foreign participant said that relations with the external homeland sometimes create additional problems instead of offering help. For instance, Budapest continues to demand more rights for the Hungarian minority in Romania even though its too-sharp interference often produces a negative effect.

SPECIFICITIES OF THE BULGARIAN EXPERIENCE

Continuing the discussion on the voters' fears and expectations, a foreign observer asked whether the unique position of the MRF — unique in Central and Eastern Europe in the sense of goals and strategies for their implementation — owes its stature to a specific political philosophy of its leaders, or whether it can be explained by the traditional attitudes of the Turkish minority in the country. An MRF leader replied that the question is not posed correctly, since no political philosophy could be imposed if it did not reflect societal attitudes. At the same time, the role of political philosophy is to mold societal attitudes to a certain extent, and to outline future directions in a longer run.

The MRF began its existence as an underground organization at a time when all preconditions for the eruption of violence were in place: the forced change of names, prohibition of the language, and mass exodus. This notwithstanding, the Movement's leaders decided to adhere to non-violent methods of resistance, thinking primarily about the long-term perspective. A vision of the future can be created only with the help of political philosophy; it cannot be taken from the documents of the Council of Europe or the EU. According to him, the documents regarding the rights of the minorities do not contain a consistent, coherent political philosophy on human rights in general. Efforts are made in that direction, but there is no presentation of consistent basic principles. A well thought out political philosophy is a prerequisite for choosing among the myriad of directions possible.

At the same time, he noted, without a philosophy the attitude of political subjects would be fragmentary and *ad hoc*: i.e., they hit me and I respond, and then they hit me again. According to him, the MRF founders could have entered into such a spiral, but refrained from doing so because they espoused a clear political philosophy and had a clear vision of the future that could not be attained by a policy of revenge or a policy of exchanging blows.

Another example of a similar long-term strategy is the MRF appointment of representatives of different ethnic groups to key power positions. This policy is governed by a particular vision of the nation as a civic and political system. Ethnic Bulgarian members of the MRF parliamentary group have been present in all five National Assemblies since the transition. Neither Macedonia nor Romania can boast with such examples. With the help of the MRF, ethnic Bulgarians have been elected as mayors in municipalities inhabited predominantly by ethnic Turks. In many places the choice of a mayor is competitive, and when the Bulgarian candidate appears more suitable, the Movement has supported him. Those are not haphazard events, nor clichés from an unsophisticated political game, but the product of a well thought out long-term strategy. This is an element of building a civic-political nation, he concluded.

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