

Other or One of Us?
Bulgaria's Attempt to Assimilate Its Ethnic Turks

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From December 1984 to March 1985, Bulgaria's ethnic Turkish minority—some 900,000 people, or 10 percent of the population—was subjected to a comprehensive campaign aimed at their Bulgarization. The decision to launch the campaign was made by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) General Secretary, Todor Zhivkov, and implemented by all levels of the state apparatus. The project represented a profound attack on the cultural, religious, and civil rights of the ethnic Turks, leading to a major refugee crisis and widespread international condemnation of the Bulgarian regime's tactics. Given the political geography of the Balkans at the time, the assimilation campaign also contributed to heightened tensions between Warsaw Pact and NATO aligned enemies, and ultimately accelerated the collapse of the Bulgarian Communist system.

This paper has four sections. The first provides important historical context on the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. The second explores the BCP's varied approaches to its "Turkish problem," and factors influencing its decision to undertake forced assimilation. The third discusses the tactics of the BCP's intensified assimilation campaign against the ethnic Turkish community beginning in the mid 1980s. The fourth examines the international response on behalf of this persecuted minority, with specific focus on the efforts of Amnesty International and the Turkish government, and outlines how the affair contributed to the collapse of the BCP regime.

Historical Background of Bulgaria's Muslim Minorities

One of the myriad legacies of the Ottoman Empire's five-century presence in the Balkans was that it left scattered Muslim communities throughout what was, and remained, a predominantly Orthodox Christian region. In the Bulgarian case, significant

clusters of Muslims remained in the mountainous south and the northeastern interior of the country as it took on its approximate modern borders with the gradual Ottoman collapse. The Muslim communities in Bulgaria were by no means homogeneous, and can be divided into three main ethnic groups: the ethnic Roma, a majority of whom identify as Muslims; the Pomaks, ethnic Bulgarians who speak Bulgarian but have adopted Islam and Muslim cultural mores; and the largest group, the ethnic Turks, who speak Turkish, practice Islam, and are otherwise generally akin to the Turks of neighboring Turkey.

During the late 19th Century, Bulgarian nationalist agitation against the Ottoman Empire was based primarily on the twin cultural pillars of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the revival of Bulgarian-language literature and folk arts. With independence, it logically followed that the new Bulgarian state regarded its natural citizens as those who were Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christians. The fact that between a quarter and a fifth of the people living within the 1878 borders of Bulgaria were ethnic Turks was considered a temporary situation¹, and these communities were generally tolerated by successive Bulgarian governments. From 1878 to 1944, the newly consolidating Bulgarian state's policy toward the bulk of its Muslim population could best be characterized as ambivalent neglect²: no systematic attempts were made to assimilate or integrate the ethnic Turks, and it was generally hoped that most of this population—considered descendents of wayward settlers from Asia Minor—would emigrate back to their “homeland.” Indeed, several hundred thousand ethnic Turks did voluntarily migrate to the Ottoman Empire/Turkish Republic in the period between Bulgarian independence in 1878 and the Communist revolution of 1944.³ The Bulgarian state did, however, take measures to integrate the Pomaks, who, by virtue of their mother tongue being Bulgarian,

were considered descendents of victims of the Ottoman policies of forced religious conversion; these campaigns were never fully implemented due to the outbreaks of the First and Second World Wars.⁴ As Neuberger points out, the thinking behind this integrationist approach to the Pomaks reflected a fundamental complication for Bulgaria's national project, as "Muslim minorities within became unruly symbols of both victims of Ottoman oppression and perpetrator of historical crimes."⁵ Bulgaria's approaches toward its Muslim minorities were always torn by a lack of definitive clarity on whether these minorities were an "other" or an integral part of the Bulgarian nation.

When the BCP took power in late 1944, its initial focus was on state consolidation and the rapid construction of a Stalinist Communist system. For the first several years of BCP rule, ethnic politics were left largely by the wayside as Sofia followed the Soviet lead in trying to foster a sense of the model Communist citizen that had transcended national affiliations.⁶ In the mid 1950s, with de-Stalinization retooling Communist governments throughout the Warsaw Pact Bloc, the BCP looked to legitimate its rule through less abstract, more home-grown means, of which nationalism proved the most readily exploitable. Beginning with the Roma and the Pomaks, who were smaller and thus simpler targets, and then moving on to the sizable population of ethnic Turks, the BCP began a multi-pronged campaign to assimilate its Muslim minorities. Although many of the strategies employed in these campaigns—including the forced changing of Turkish-Arabic names to Bulgarian-Slavic ones and attempts to compel religious conversion—had been tested on the Pomaks in the pre-war assimilation campaigns, the size of the ethnic Turkish population—consistently between nine and ten percent of the total population⁷—and the community's ties to neighboring NATO member Turkey

complicated matters for the BCP.⁸ Having sketched the historical context of Bulgaria's various Muslim minorities, this examination now takes on a more narrow focus on the BCP's treatment of the largest minority, the ethnic Turks.

Overview of the BCP's Approaches to the Ethnic Turks

During the 45 years of BCP rule, Bulgaria had two distinct constitutions. The first constitution (1947-1971) guaranteed full recognition for Bulgaria's national minorities.⁹ This allowed ethnic Turks to study in Turkish-language schools through the university level, provided state radio broadcasts and a range of printed press in Turkish, and meant that the state paid the wages of Muslim clerics, subsidized the upkeep of mosques, and permitted Islamic worship. Islamic religious rites and customs, such as the wearing of *shalvari* trousers and circumcisions, were also permitted. The BCP's first major friction with the ethnic Turks—and the Bulgarian population at large—occurred in the early 1950s, when the state began collectivizing peasant landholdings. When ethnic Turkish peasants objected to the collectivization process, Sofia and Ankara negotiated a bilateral agreement in which Bulgaria granted passports to over 150,000 ethnic Turks, allowing them to emigrate to Turkey. These emigrants were essentially refugees and were not fully accepted by Turks in Turkey either. Indeed, despite the bilateral deal, Turkey closed its borders a short time later due to the scale of the immigration.¹⁰

Beginning in 1958 and throughout the 1960s, the BCP implemented a program aimed at integrating the ethnic Turkish population into the Bulgarian state and playing down its "otherness." Large numbers of ethnic Turks were given positions in the party apparatus and the state invested heavily in improving ethnic Turkish living standards,

while simultaneously an increasing number of Turkish-language schools and press outlets were closed and there was a precipitous drop in the number of practicing Muslim clerics.¹¹ At the same time, Sofia continued to rely on the safety valve of negotiation with Ankara; in 1968, another bilateral accord permitted some 130,000 relatives of the early 1950s ethnic Turk exodus to join their family members in Turkey.¹²

In Bulgaria's new constitution (1971-1991), the previous constitution's references to "national minorities" were replaced by the term "citizens of non-Bulgarian origin."¹³ This was a concrete step toward the institutionalization of the BCP's policy shift away from notions of a multinational state unified by its pursuit of Communism toward a more nationalist conception of the state as a unified whole with a clearly defined Slavic culture and little room for "others." By the mid 1970s, official speeches and publications often referred to a "unified Bulgarian socialist nation"¹⁴, while most of the cultural rights earlier guaranteed to ethnic minorities—from Turkish-language schooling to the upkeep of mosques—had been effectively withdrawn.

Despite the emigration accord, the incorporation of many ethnic Turks into the BCP ranks, and the curtailment of most minority autonomy, the BCP still harbored a long list of concerns about Bulgaria's ethnic Turkish population. First, the BCP was alarmed by the ethnic Turks' high birth rates, which considerably outpaced those of the ethnic Bulgarian majority, throwing into doubt the state's long-term ethnic balance.¹⁵ Second, the BCP was worried about the potential economic repercussions of the concentration of ethnic Turkish and other Muslim communities in two of the country's key agricultural areas.¹⁶ Third, the BCP had come to accept scholarly studies which suggested that the

bulk of the so-called ethnic Turks were actually indigenous to Bulgaria, and that, like the Pomaks, they had been forcibly converted to Islam (but had also then learned the occupiers' language). Likewise, investigations of intermarriage between Pomaks and ethnic Turks gave the BCP a new angle to reclaim still more Muslims as ethnic Bulgarians.¹⁷ And fourth, after 1974 some BCP officials became privately concerned by the "Cyprus precedent" and pondered the possibility of an irredentist Turkish invasion aimed at unifying with Turkish compatriots in Bulgaria.¹⁸

It is important to note that, while the official BCP line essentially no longer recognized a multinational Bulgarian state, in private, party officials still acknowledged a clear ethnic—or at least cultural—difference between the largest Bulgarian Muslim minority and the majority population. As Vesselin Dimitrov explains, "A quarter century of evolutionary assimilation did not fulfill the expectations placed upon it by the party leadership. By the mid-1980s, the Turkish minority was interacting with the ethnic Bulgarians to a greater extent, but maintained its distinct identity in terms of language, religion and attitude towards Turkey."¹⁹

The Mechanics of the Assimilation Campaign of 1984-1985

In the mid 1980s, faced with the failure of its "soft" integration policies to have any major effect on the ethnic Turkish community's "otherness" and its perceived alignment with NATO Turkey, BCP General Secretary Zhivkov opted for a hard-line approach. Without consulting the Bulgarian Politburo, Zhivkov decided to radically intensify the assimilation campaign in December 1984, in the face of a plummeting domestic economy and in what he considered a window of opportunity while Moscow

was distracted by a succession of weak, ailing leaders and Ankara was preoccupied with its military campaign against the ethnic Kurdish uprising and heightened tension with Greece.²⁰ Zhivkov also felt that, with a five-year census wrapping up in December 1985 with the issuance of all new identification documents, it behooved him to act quickly and decisively in order to resolve Bulgaria's "Turkish question" once and for all.²¹

Once launched, the assimilation campaign marshaled the full coercive powers of the Bulgarian state, employing civil officials from all levels, military and police units, and even collaborationist members of the Muslim religious leadership. It aimed at nothing less than the forceful erasure of Turkish identity and its replacement by a Bulgarian one; those who refused to submit to assimilation were left essentially stateless. Even the long-standing possibility of emigration to Turkey was precluded by the BCP's controls on mobility and its new official position that there were no "real" ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, and thus, no reason for Bulgarians to go to Turkey.

The campaign had short-term and long-term tactics for ensuring the assimilation, and its techniques often depended on local demographic factors: the more ethnic Turks in a given town or village, the higher the propensity to use stronger, often physically abusive tactics. From December 1984 to March 1985, regions with ethnic Turkish populations were closed to unauthorized visitors and the following routine was systematically visited on one community after another. By night or in the early hours of the morning, Bulgarian soldiers and police using tanks, trucks, and dogs would surround predominantly ethnic Turkish towns and villages. State bureaucrats and police brandishing lists of ethnic Turks went door to door soliciting "voluntary" applications

from families seeking to change their Turkish-Arabic names to Bulgarian-Slavic ones.²² The choice of a new name was to be taken on the spot, though in some cases, officials removed that option by simply distributing pre-prepared identification documents to ethnic Turks with their new, state-chosen names already in place.

While this initial phase of the campaign was conducted with incredible efficiency—some 310,000 people had new names within its first 24 days²³—the effort was reinforced by long-term, institutionalizing policies that complemented the somewhat superficial nature of the name-changes. Since state identification cards were required for a range of activities, such as using banks and healthcare facilities, receiving wages from state employers, or obtaining visas to travel, those who lacked a document with a Slavic name were quickly marginalized in terms of their socioeconomic rights and well-being.²⁴ The use of the Turkish language was forbidden in public and in the workplace, punishable by fines. Telephone calls between ethnic Turks were monitored by eavesdropping officials who interrupted conversations to enforce the ban on Turkish, and letters addressed to Turkish names were returned to their senders stamped “unknown.”²⁵ Islamic religious rites were curtailed: circumcision was only permitted when performed by state-licensed medical practitioners, and applications for the procedure by Muslim families were reportedly routinely turned down²⁶, while the pre-burial washing of the dead was outlawed on the grounds of hygiene. Traditional Turkish dress was barred, and sometimes ripped from transgressors in public.²⁷ State funding for imams and muftis, save those who were party members cooperating with the campaign, was cut off, and some mosques and Muslim cemeteries were destroyed.²⁸ Officials confiscated or destroyed traditional Turkish items and books, sometimes bulldozing homes to speed up

the process.²⁹ At its most coercive level, the BCP used internal banishment, imprisonment, torture, and summary executions to stamp out ethnic Turk resistance to the assimilation campaign.³⁰

Indeed, overt resistance was rendered largely futile by this all-encompassing array of punitive and proscriptive measures.³¹ The vast majority of the ethnic Turks did submit applications to “voluntarily” change their names. By the end of March 1985, the BCP announced that its so-called “revival process” was complete.³² Zhivkov confirmed, “There are no Turks in Bulgaria.”³³ While the ethnic Turks retained their Bulgarian citizenship, they had lost most of their rights to carry on their cultural, religious, and social customs and traditions.³⁴ In essence, Bulgarian citizenship had become hollow for the ethnic Turks, for they had been simultaneously “othered” out of Bulgaria while being integrated into it.

The International Reaction and Attempts to Intervene

The assimilation campaign was so swift and so secretive that the international community barely learned of it or had time to react until its implementation was almost complete. Dissidents within Bulgaria suspected something was up in the ethnic Turkish regions³⁵, but the official media did not report on the unfolding events until prompted to respond by the international press, which began reporting the campaign as it was drawing to a close.³⁶

Once reports began circulating, Amnesty International was quick to respond. Amnesty “adopted” 13 ethnic Turkish prisoners of conscience and lobbied Sofia for

information about the detention of 153 others.³⁷ Beginning 26 February 1985, Amnesty sent multiple letters to the Bulgarian government expressing its concern over reports of the killing of ethnic Turks by state forces; an October 1985 letter requested permission for an Amnesty delegation to meet directly with Bulgarian officials to discuss the concerns. While pursuing direct advocacy efforts with the Bulgarian government, Amnesty also attempted to raise awareness of the assimilation campaign in international forums. Amnesty's testimony at the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Geneva on 23 August 1985 succeeded in eliciting a rambling and evasive response from a high-ranking member of Bulgaria's UN mission.³⁸

In April 1986, Amnesty released a 42-page report called *Bulgaria—Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks: Human Rights Abuses During the Forced Assimilation of the Ethnic Turkish Minority*, which was based on smuggled documents, eyewitness accounts, refugee testimonies, and what little information outside observers had been able to obtain on trips to Bulgaria. The report detailed the abuses committed by the Bulgarian state against its Muslim minorities, and included appendices referencing the rights guaranteed to Bulgarian citizens by both the Bulgarian constitution and international treaties and covenants to which Bulgaria was a party.³⁹ As had been the case in its testimony in Geneva, Amnesty's report made clear that Bulgaria was not living up to either its domestic or international legal obligations to safeguard the rights of ethnic minorities. Amnesty followed up the 1986 report with another in 1987, and Helsinki Watch issued three similar reports between 1986 and 1989.⁴⁰

Among state actors, Turkey was the best-positioned and most obvious choice to act on behalf of the persecuted ethnic Turks of Bulgaria. On 22 February 1985, Ankara asked Sofia to agree to a new emigration accord, a request Sofia dismissed on the grounds that it was conducting an internal matter beyond Ankara's concern. In response, Turkey cut off crucial trade pacts with Bulgaria and raised the issue of the ethnic Turks' treatment in several international institutions including the Council of Europe, NATO, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and UNESCO.⁴¹ Despite widespread negative international press attention and the eventual condemnation of its actions by the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the European Court of Justice, and other international bodies⁴², the BCP steadfastly refused to reverse course and the restrictions on Muslim rights stayed in effect for the following four years, essentially making second-class citizens of the same people the BCP claimed were long-lost Bulgarians. As the newest international pariah, Bulgaria's economy ground to a halt just as its foreign debt surged. Sensing Zhivkov's weakened position, the new Soviet Premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, was in no hurry to come to his aid, and by 1989 was actively supporting an anti-Zhivkov bloc within the Bulgarian Politburo.⁴³

By 1989, the situation was untenable for Bulgaria, with imprisoned ethnic Turkish leaders on hunger strike and their followers growing increasingly militant. In May, following Gorbachev's lead, Bulgaria signed on to an international treaty requiring it to permit the free travel of its citizens.⁴⁴ With the closed system no longer an option, Zhivkov appeared on television later in May to announce that those who wanted to go to Turkey could do so; by August, between 300,000 and 450,000 ethnic Turks had emigrated to Turkey.⁴⁵ The safety valve was abruptly shut off when Turkey,

overwhelmed by the flood of migrants, closed its borders in August 1989. Images of the ensuing refugee crisis, with thousands of ethnic Turks piling up at the Bulgarian-Turkish border, made world news and brought a renewed round of international condemnation. Sofia was completely isolated, and on 10 November 1989 Zhivkov was replaced by Foreign Minister Mladenov in a palace coup (with the Kremlin's blessing).⁴⁶ The new Communist leadership rescinded the policies of the "revival process" and within weeks talks were opened with opposition figures, including representatives of the ethnic Turkish minority. By March 1990, legislation was passed allowing all Bulgarian citizens to choose their names freely, while some 42 percent of the emigrants involved in the recent mass exodus had returned. In national elections in June, the Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF) party finished third in Bulgaria's first open elections.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In seeking to deal with its Muslim minority populations, successive Bulgarian governments pursued strategies ranging from encouragement of emigration and inducements to integration up to coercive assimilation. The BCP's 1984-1985 assimilation campaign against the ethnic Turks was based on an ideologically suspect decision to reclaim a large community of people who were said to be descendents of Bulgarians forcibly converted to Islam during the Ottoman occupation. By curtailing the cultural and religious rights of its largest ethnic minority—and even denying that the group was a different ethnicity—the BCP created a large mass of essentially stateless citizens; while citizenship was not denied to Bulgaria's ethnic Turks, it could only be maintained by compliance with a set of policies designed to erase the identity of the ethnic Turkish community. The international community vociferously denounced the

Bulgarian policies, with Turkey and Amnesty International emerging as particularly vocal critics, naming-and-shaming the BCP in both the international media and a plethora of international bodies. As a result, condemnation of Bulgaria's actions was nearly universal.

Ultimately, the BCP sowed the seeds of its own demise, for the party leadership severely underestimated the global response to its hard-line approach. When support from within the Eastern Bloc receded, Bulgaria found itself isolated. Trapped by treaty obligations and the limits of its own hypocrisy—for the BCP, by repeatedly negotiating emigration accords with Turkey, implicitly acknowledged the “Turkishness” of those it claimed as Bulgarians—the BCP sealed its fate by concentrating more on its nationalist agenda than on the swirling economic and political upheavals of 1989. As electoral democracy set in during the early 1990s, with a new constitution guaranteeing all Bulgarian citizens their individual rights, the ethnic Turk MRF party emerged as a political kingmaker, sought as a coalition partner by the former Communists and the opposition alike. This has helped foster the current conjuncture in which Bulgaria's ethnic Turks enjoy a level of respect and tolerance considered by many to be a model situation for the rest of the Balkans.

Notes

¹ Dimitrov p. 4 citing p. 71 of Eminov, Ali. (1997) *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*. London: Hurst & Co. and p. 193 of Stoianov, Valeri. (1993) “Turkoto Naselenie v Bulgariia i Ofitsialnata Maltsinstvena Politika (1878-1944)”, in Isusov, Mito (ed.) *Stranitsi of Bulgarskata Istoriia*. Sofia, Bulgaria.

² “Ambivalent neglect” is my characterization of the de facto outcome of a wide variety of ideological positions on the “Turkish question” prevalent in the early decades of independent Bulgaria, of which no single current was dominant. Neuberger describes it thusly: “Acceptance, rejection, tolerance, and intolerance coexisted and competed for a place in evolving Bulgarian sentiments and the imperatives of national modernization projects.” [Neuberger p. 4]

³ Dimitrov p. 4, Petkova p. 43

⁴ Dimitrov p. 4. Tracking the treatment of the Roma minority by successive Bulgarian governments is a complicated affair, due to the marginalization of this ethnic group, their religious heterogeneity (with adherents to both Islam and Orthodox Christianity), and their tendency to self-identify as ethnic Turks or ethnic Bulgarians due to the stigma attached to being Roma. [Vassilev p. 42]. Thus, ethnic Roma in Bulgaria were often subjected to the same integration and assimilation tactics as the Pomaks and ethnic Turks. In the 2001 census, the Roma were calculated to be 370,908 people, or 4.7 percent of the Bulgarian population, making them the second largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria (after the ethnic Turks).

⁵ Neuberger p. 4

⁶ Dimitrov p. 7

⁷ Despite several mass emigrations and state attempts to assimilate them, ethnic Turks have remained the largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria. In 1946, the ethnic Turks were 675,500 of a total population of 7,029,349 (9.6 percent) [Petkova p. 44]. In the mid 1980s, the ethnic Turk population was estimated to be 900,000 people of a total 1982 population of 8,917,457 (10 percent). [Amnesty p. 1]. In 2001, the ethnic Turks numbered 746,664 of a total of 7,928,901 (9.4 percent). [Vassilev p. 42]. The consistency of this ratio can be explained largely by the high birth rates among ethnic Turks in comparison to the declining birth rate among the ethnic Bulgarian majority.

⁸ Petkova p. 44

⁹ Petkova p. 42

¹⁰ Hupchick p. 427, Amnesty p. 3

¹¹ Petkova pp. 45-46, Dimitrov p. 5

¹² Crampton p. 203

¹³ Petkova p. 42, Amnesty p. 3

¹⁴ Amnesty p. 5

¹⁵ Amnesty pp. 4 & 24

¹⁶ Amnesty p. 1. The fertile northeastern Dobrudzha region was Bulgaria’s primary producer of wheat, while the southern Haskovo-Kardzhali region was Europe’s largest tobacco zone.

¹⁷ Dimitrov pp. 7-8

¹⁸ Dimitrov p. 12, Petkova p. 47

¹⁹ Dimitrov p. 6

²⁰ Dimitrov pp. 11-13

²¹ Amnesty p. 25

²² Bulgarian-Slavic surnames almost exclusively end with the suffix *-ev/a* or *-ov/a*. First names tended to be drawn from Christian tradition, with some popular names deriving from medieval Bulgarian historic figures that predate the Bulgarians’ conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Even before the forced name-changes, the Muslims’ surnames had already become somewhat Bulgarianized (in terms of construction), though they clearly derived from Islamic tradition; most Muslim first names were clearly of Islamic origin. Amnesty’s 1986 report [p. 12] gives examples of some name-changes among the ethnic Turks: Yusuf Bilalova became Yosef Angelov, and Behriye Mestanova became Borislava Mladenova).

²³ Dimitrov p. 13

²⁴ Petkova p. 47, Amnesty pp. 23 & 27, Anguelov p. 137

²⁵ Amnesty p. 23

²⁶ Amnesty p. 17

²⁷ Anguelov p. 137

²⁸ Amnesty p. 16, Hupchick p. 428

²⁹ Anguelov p. 137

³⁰ Amnesty pp. 9-15

³¹ Nonetheless, ethnic Turkish families did resist in subtle ways, from continuing to speak Turkish and use their Turkish names in private to secretly continuing such religious rites as circumcision and the washing of the dead. Armed resistance was fast and fleeting, and made no serious impact on the campaign's rapid success. By 1989, however, hunger strikes by imprisoned ethnic Turkish leaders and growing ethnic Turkish militancy did worry BCP officials.

³² Dimitrov p. 15. Amnesty p. 9 relays part of Chairman of the National Assembly Stanko Todorov's speech as follows:

[Todorov] reported that the "resumption" of Bulgarian names by citizens with "Turkish-Arabic" names had been "completed safely", stressing that Bulgaria was a "one-nation state" and that in "the Bulgarian nation there are no parts of any other peoples and nations". This operation had, he said, taken place "speedily, spontaneously and calmly".

³³ Neuberger p. 6

³⁴ Some will find it peculiar that Bulgaria's nominally atheist Communist government insisted on the exclusion of Islamic names and practices in favor of Christian ones. This can be explained by the historical roots of Bulgarian nationalism, which essentially fused the practice of Bulgarian Orthodox Christianity with Bulgarian ethnicity under the structure of the Ottoman millet system. Thus, despite the Communist's nominal atheism, the entire vocabulary of Bulgarian nationalism was suffused with an aura of Christianity. Some observers, such as British historian R.J. Crampton, have called the assimilation campaign a direct attack on Islam, since the BCP explicitly proscribed Islamic customs and important religious rites such as the taking of Islamic names—"an integral part of the maturation of a Muslim"—and effectively impeded the hajj to Mecca through its travel controls. [See Crampton p. 209.] Indeed, some Bulgarian intellectuals and party officials acknowledged that the BCP was confronting Islam, which was seen as a reactionary break on Socialist maturation. In 1977, *Filosofska Misul*, an official BCP journal, ran an article stating:

[The BCP] set as its objective the elimination, above all, of the social roots of Islam in the Rhodope [Mountains] along with the age-old separation and isolation of Islamicized Bulgarians ... to accelerate their joining of the Bulgarian socialist nation.... [T]he cultural revolution in the Rhodope requires a more active interference in the way of life and in "expelling" Islam from the realm of family relations.... A characteristic feature of the struggle for atheism in the Rhodope is that not only is it being deployed in the struggle against Islam but is also linked with the struggle for Bulgarian nationhood, and for the development of a new awareness, way of life, customs, and traditions, This presumes their cleansing from accumulated Islamic-Turkish influence. [cited in Amnesty pp. 5-6]

In these analysts' eyes, a prerequisite for the creation of a unified socialist state was an ethnically homogeneous population, and within the constraints of post-Ottoman nationalism, that population would have to align around the primary ethnic-national group within the state's borders, even if that meant the persistence of (reactionary?) Christian Orthodox conventions.

³⁵ Anguelov pp. 135-136

³⁶ Amnesty p. 21

³⁷ Amnesty p. 29

³⁸ Valentin Bojilov, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, testified at the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in response to Amnesty's testimony at the same body. In addition to citing some historical remarks from Ottoman officials, Bojilov noted the right of citizens to change the names of places, drawing a parallel with the right of people to change their own names. Bojilov held the BCP line, insisting that what was occurring in Bulgaria was "the voluntary restoration of the Bulgarian names by Bulgarian Moslems, whose ancestors have had their names forcibly Turkanized." [Cited in Amnesty pp. 39-41]

³⁹ In an appendix to its 1986 report, Amnesty listed the following obligations which it held Bulgaria was in contravention of: Bulgarian Constitution: Article 35 (1), (2), (3), (4); Article 45 (7). Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 2. International Convention on Civil and Political Rights: Article 1 (1), (2), (3);

Article 2 (1); Article 26; Article 27. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: Article 1 (1), (2), (3), (4); Article 5 (a), (b), (c), (d: i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, vii, viii, ix), (e: i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi), (f).

⁴⁰ The subsequent report by Amnesty International (1987) was entitled *Bulgaria: Continuing Human Rights Abuses Against Ethnic Turks*. Helsinki Watch issued three reports: *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria* (June 1986); *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria—An Update* (September 1987); and *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks* (October 1989).

⁴¹ Petkova p. 47. Petkova notes that Greece was the only EC member state to openly support Bulgaria, even signing a friendship declaration with Bulgaria in September 1986. This was a predictable move from Athens, however, given its animosity toward Turkey over the Cyprus situation.

⁴² Crampton p. 209

⁴³ Dimitrov p. 17

⁴⁴ Dimitrov p. 16

⁴⁵ Dimitrov (p. 16) put the number of migrants at over 300,000. Crampton (p. 215) put the figure at 344,000, Hupchick (p. 428) at 360,000, and Neuberger (p. 6) at some 450,000.

⁴⁶ Crampton p. 215

⁴⁷ Crampton pp. 218-219. The statistic about the percentage of returning migrants is cited in Neuberger (p. 7) and drawn from p. 347 of Vasileva, D. (1992) "Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return" *International Migration Review*. Vol 26, No. 2 pp. 342-352.

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