

Minority Nationalism in the Balkans: the Bulgarian Case

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General Framework of the Problem

Nationalism has traditionally held and still holds an extremely wide appeal in the Balkans. For this reason it was and is an effective tool for social mobilization.

The Balkan nations had not attained independence up to the beginning of the 19th century. Since they are therefore new nations with strong primordial roots, and since national affiliation was not historically synonymous with a sense of belonging to a state, relatively objective pre-state attributes such as language, ethnicity, tradition and culture functioned as common denominators for social cohesion or inclusive/exclusive criteria. The sense of a common destiny for the Balkans' ethnic and ethno-national groups was strengthened even further by oppressive empires. As a result, nationalism was (in the case of all Balkan states) and often still is (in Serbia and Macedonia, for example) typically an instrument for building statehood.

The other consequence of centuries-long foreign rule (and thus of the liberation aspects of nationalism in the Balkans) was the shaping of different national identities in the Balkans, in terms of and within the framework of the *political dispute*. Nationality formed the basis of a *political project*, such as constructing a state. Placing priority upon subjective aspirations (rather than available resources) was a profound step toward the assumption that national self-determination up to and including the formation of independent sovereign states applied, not only to nations that could demonstrate economic, political and cultural viability, but to any and all groups that claimed to be a "nation." This opened the way to the assumption that national self-determination was feasible only in the form of full state independence; this was the Balkan history of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially the last decade (the Bosnian case being the most vivid illustration).

The way the Balkan nations emerged — simultaneously with the nation-states or even preceding them — resulted, however, in the overlapping of two processes: nation-building and state-building. First, this overlap made the new nationalist identities more suspicious and aggressive. Second, as was the case in Bulgaria, the rebirth of independent states often preceded the accumulation of administrative experience by a significant part of the nation's elite, so that those engaged in policy-making were often incompetent and state bureaucracies were extremely corrupt (a "phenomenon" also present in the experience of post-colonial countries).

Foreign rule had, however, an ambiguous impact. On the one hand, the absence of "state protection" hampered the nation-building process. But on the other hand, foreign conquests stimulated the preservation of ethnic attachments and identity, insulating ethno-national groups from the threat of

assimilation and providing the basis for a spurt of nation-building in the 18th and 19th centuries. The multiethnic environment of the empires was not "chosen," it was enforced, and thus remained alien in the perception of the population. For that reason, it was a backdrop against which the basic elements of nationhood — the national language and a common religion — stood out. Since it is a relational ideology, i.e., definable only in relation to a reference point, nationalism needs a backdrop to throw it into relief — and this was provided by the oppressors. After 1945 the issue of foreign rule was "revisited" with the presence of the Soviet Union, which inherited the traditional role of the "oppressor," with all the consequences for national self-determination.

Last but not least, having an interrupted national history turned out to be an ideal breeding-ground for the national historical myths that still play an extremely important role in the Balkans. All sources of national identity in the Balkan nations were and often still are rooted far back in history. That is why history in the Balkans has always been divided and overlapping. The historical myths of different (opposing and conflicting) nations often refer to the same facts, persons and, most importantly, territories.

On the level of contemporary politics this has meant that the nationalist ambitions of all ruling elites in the region have inevitably been in conflict. Conflicting historical arguments could be (and were) easily converted into political ones, and those into military ones. In addition, the various Balkan nationalisms were militant and aggressive, which is rather typical for newly re-emerged nations developing in the context of an "external threat," in which aggressive attitudes are an integral element of the approach to self-defense. All of this predetermined the constant desire to reshape existing borders, a desire which was always based on the assumption of "historical injustice" and which inevitably divided the Balkan states into two groups: the "satisfied" and the "dissatisfied."

This short introduction to the specifics of the nation-building process in the Balkans is necessary for two reasons. First, to point out that the violent, ruthless, sometimes seemingly irrational minority conflicts in the Balkans have their basis neither in the existence of centuries-long hatreds, suppressed into dormancy by their communist regimes and awaiting the right spark to set them off, nor in the "barbarian nature" of the Slav nationalities. These conflicts have a rational explanation. The second reason is to point out that the rational elements of these minority conflicts still exist and must be taken into account when managing minority nationalism. The result of these two elements is the region's high degree of exclusivity of majority nationalism, which perceives every symptom of minority nationalism as a threat. In fact, minority nationalism in the Balkans is perceived solely as exclusive majority nationalism in an embryonic stage.

The Perceived Threat of Minority Nationalism and Regional Stability

There are several prerequisite conditions for the development and spread of a minority nationalism-based conflict. One is the notion of "nationhood" obsessing a certain group that is separated (or even capsulated) on an ethnic or other basis. The second is the element of oppression (whether real or perceived). In this respect the Balkan region has a vast potential for such conflicts, in terms of aggressive new nations (providing the notion of "nationhood") that are at the same time split between

different states, with their kin living around and outside the borders of the existing nation-states, in the position of minorities (providing the element of “oppression”). That is why the minority issue and minority nationalism in the Balkans have been an integral part of inter-state (inter-majority nationalism) relations since the very beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, minority issues and minority nationalism have been perceived as having a strategic impact on regional stability.

Minorities and especially minority nationalism have traditionally been viewed as a destabilizing element, and therefore a source of the "strategic insecurity" always present in the region. This strategic insecurity, which resulted partly from the fact that the independent Balkan nation-states had only been in existence for a short time, was further aggravated by the Great Powers' constant intervention in the internal affairs of these states, be it in the form of the Berlin congress or the Yalta agreement. To a great extent this "hysteria" was exaggerated by the minorities' intermingled distribution, which provided the "legitimate basis" for conflicting territorial claims. During the pre-World War II period decisive steps were taken toward "national uniformity" in the Balkans, but the result was negative. All of the countries host ethnic or national minorities on their territory, and all still perceive them as a security threat, jeopardizing the integrity of the state.

Since policies toward minorities were based on the assumption of possible "treason," any practical manifestation of minority nationalism was — and still is — perceived with deep suspicion. This suspicion often led to one of the practiced “techniques” for managing minority nationalism: getting rid of them. In fact, this was usually the policy adopted by all governments during different periods in the Balkans, and as already mentioned, there was always some minority to get rid of. The fact that in many cases such an approach caused a backlash, becoming self-fulfilling prophecy, was perceived as an “objective evidence” that minority nationalism is a real and proven source of threat.

Hence it is not correct, at least in the case of the Balkans, to perceive minority nationalism as a new invention. Periods of "ethno-national harmony" in the Balkans were brief and, as a rule, harmony was illusory, the temporary result of previous violent "solutions" to national issues. All of the local wars in the Balkans in the 20th century were fought in the name of reuniting nations with their minorities, reuniting territories, or at least, they all involved an extremely strong "nationalistic component." The same emotions also motivated the Balkan countries' choice of sides in both World Wars. The same emotion provided the driving force for the latest conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

This history has shaped one of the special characteristics of the Balkans: an unusually high sensitivity to the national issue on the part of the region's people, and their extraordinary susceptibility to nationalistic appeals from both “their own” and “alien” leaders. The difference between the two is reverse perception: of their “own” nationalistic appeals as a source of positive motivation and those of the “aliens,” of negative motivation. As a result, people in the Balkans generally succumb easily to the temptation of "historical retaliation" (claimed by their leaders), or vice-versa, if there is the slightest possibility of "historical retaliation" against themselves (claimed by the “aliens”), they immediately feel threatened.

In other words, the peoples of the Balkans are potentially much more open to manipulation on a nationalistic basis than are, say, the peoples of Western Europe, whose nation-building processes

were completed centuries earlier and whose societies are divided along many more cleavage lines than purely ethnic ones. This is also why political mobilization on nationalist grounds has been more significant in the Balkans than in other countries in Eastern Europe. Thus it has been widely used by the local elites. Given the fact that "historical retaliation" is usually perceived as possibly coming from national minorities, minority nationalism as such is perceived as a threat, thus in turn fueling majority nationalism.

The Approach of Different States to Minorities in the Region

Most of the Balkan states still perceive their minorities as security threats. Evidence of this can be found even in their legislation.

For Greece, this is evident in its non-recognition of minority status on the basis of ethnic or linguistic criteria. The Greek Constitution, dating from 1975, does not provide any possibility of the existence of any minority status or the execution assertion of collective minority rights. The term used is to "Greek citizen," which is distinct from "nationality" and aims to define the responsibilities and duties of the individual. The latest census containing data on ethnic affiliation took place in 1951.

Greece has signed the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities but has not yet ratified it. At the same time, it has undertaken a concrete commitment to respect the rights of persons with Muslim religious affiliation, whose status is codified by the Lozana Treaty of 1923. On the basis of a Greek-Turkish protocol of 1968, Muslim schools are permitted in the country. However, the Greek civil code still prohibits the granting of Greek citizenship to persons with non-Greek linguistic roots.

The Constitution of Turkey, which was adopted in 1982 and amended in 1995, also does not deal with the term "minority." Its Article 66 states that every person having citizenship relations with the Turkish Republic is a Turk. Official data on the number of different ethnic groups are nonexistent. The right to use one's mother tongue is granted indirectly by Article 26, while banning the use of any language is prohibited by law. Article 28 declares the existence of "indivisible unity between state and nation," opening the way for the prosecution of persons declaring the existence of national minorities. At the same time, the above-mentioned Lozana treaty of 1923 recognizes the existence of non-Muslim minorities, but not Muslim minorities defined along *denominational* lines. In 1994 the Turkish representative refused to sign the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, on the grounds that not all cultural, linguistic or religious distinctions lead to the emergence of national minorities. Turkey still has not signed the convention.

Yugoslavia demonstrates the greatest discrepancies between legislative regulation and administrative practice. Article 11 of the Constitution adopted in 1992 recognizes and guarantees the right of national minorities to preserve, develop and manifest their ethnic, cultural and other distinctions, as well as to use their national symbols, in accordance with international law. Article 15 allows the official use of their native languages in regions populated by minorities. Article 49 grants them the right to use their native languages in court, and Article 46 allows them to use it at school Article 48

even guarantees their right to establish and develop interpersonal contacts with persons of their nationality in other states. Two autonomous regions, Kosovo and Vojvodina, existed with their own local parliaments and legislation, which for a period further extended their minority rights. However, the discrepancy between generally democratic legislation and current practice is most evident in the Yugoslav case. A direct sign of this discrepancy is the fact that Yugoslavia has not signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The relatively advanced legislation concerning minority rights is in some respects inherited from the old Yugoslav constitution, and the tradition to codify all possible minority rights. As a result, the inherited legislative framework clashes with current attitudes toward the issue of minority rights, which are far from respected. The case of the conflict in Kosovo is a clear example in this respect, proving that when necessary, formal rights can easily be ignored.

In FYR Macedonia the entirety of the country's legislation is built upon the assumption of the ideology of "Macedonianism", with its basic pillars: the existence of the "historically rooted" "Macedonian nation" and "Macedonian language." The preamble to the Macedonian constitution declares Macedonia to be a "nation-state of the Macedonian nation," which coexists with other nationalities. In the annex to the signed Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Macedonian side points out that the term "national minorities" is treated exactly as it is treated in the country's constitution. These are listed as including Albanian, Turkish, Wallachian, Roma and Serbian minorities. According to the constitution, these minorities can use their national languages as official languages in the communities and regions where they constitute the majority of the population (Art. 7). They are also allowed to declare their national identity, to teach their native language and to establish their own cultural and educational institutions (Art. 48). The Bulgarian nationality does not exist as a minority, according to the Macedonian interpretation.

This Macedonian experience, similar to the case in Yugoslavia, explicitly show that a developed legislative framework regulating minority issues is not sufficient, either for managing minority nationalism or for providing objective evidence of the degree to which minority rights are respected. Usually rights are granted, but only to the recognized minorities, which act as some kind of "official dissidents." The recognized minorities are marginal, in terms of both number and possible security impact. In some cases the recognized minorities do not exist, and are invented in the name of a "democratic" approach to the issue of minority-based conflicts. And vice-versa: any significant minorities are treated as nonexistent. As a result, the reported picture depicts a nonexistent, illusory "reality," which fits perfectly into the "comprehensive" legislative framework. This means that a detailed normative structure is not sufficient for handling minority nationalism.

Nationalism as a Result of What?

In general, nationalism — both minority and majority, and in terms of both doctrine and political movements — is elitist. For this reason, its main role is inevitably an instrumental one. The ideology of nationalism is mainly a "technology," a means for mass mobilization. So, in the Balkans, is minority nationalism. It can utilize individual attitudes (such as patriotism) or the desire to protect a distinct identity; but they are utilized by a certain elite, and as a result of initiative taken by an elite. It

is always an elite or an elitist group that launches a massive nationalist campaign. In the Balkans, this has for decades meant that the ruling elite always succeeded in gaining support, whenever it requested such support on nationalistic grounds. And this is one of the reasons for which the nationalist argument is often exploited by Balkan elites.

It would also be reasonable to distinguish two types of minority nationalism, according to emotional or pragmatic objectives. Of these, the former is more susceptible to historical or other mythology, and has greater support among the less educated strata of the population or in regions at a lower stage of civilizational development. This type of minority nationalism usually promises the restoration of historical glory and all its requisites, and is directed toward state-building, rather than the preservation of distinct identities. Here we have a direct correlation: the lower the state of development, the less certainty in the community that it can lose in a nationalism-based conflict. This is the main reason why the less educated and poorer strata of society are more susceptible to nationalist-type mobilization.

The second, pragmatic, type of nationalism deals mainly with the issue of enhancing the rights of the minority, of granting it equal access to opportunities in political and economic terms, and of preserving its identity, rather than with the building of a nation-state. Its emergence is closely connected not with the desire to establish of a “state of our own,” but rather with the evolution of the existing state structure. The pragmatic type of minority nationalism is in this respect more integrationist, more oriented toward seeking solutions within the existing legal framework. Of course, such an approach is possible only at a certain stage of development of the state itself, when a necessary minimum of democratic traditions and procedures are in place.

On the other hand, the desire of a certain community to be distinct and separate is often a consequence of the “erosion” of the state, of its decentralization. With the advancement of market reforms and modern communication technologies, the state is no longer the same important source of social cohesion. Inter-community relations and locally-defined links become more and more significant. This phenomenon is even more evident in the case of the post-socialist countries in the Balkans, where after the collapse of the old system a civilizational vacuum arose. On a declarational level the countries “switched” to liberal democracy and market economies immediately after the start of the 1990s, but in practice the whole normative framework of the new system was absent for a long time. In such a situation minority nationalism is often a means of self-realization. It no longer has the objective of creating a nation-state, but rather aims to create new sources of social cohesion as a means to achieve individual realization. In this respect minority nationalism verges on a “strategy” of defending individual, rather than collective, rights. That is why in this case the accent should be placed on the word “minority,” rather than on the word “nationalism.” If properly understood, this should be a much smaller threat than that which is usually (traditionally) perceived.

In summary, the elite and society at large have different motivations when launching a nationalistic project. The elite is, by definition, statist. The members of the community at large are more inclined to seek guarantees for their individual rights. As a result, incorporating the elites into the process of governance is one way of managing minority nationalism.

When speaking about the objectives of a minority nationalism movement in the Balkans, it is also important to distinguish internal from external sources of motivation in those processes. Driven from “inside” are those cases of minority nationalism whose representatives (elites) have the consciousness and the desire to be distinct on an ethnic or national basis. Usually they are representatives of a broader social body, from which, due to historical circumstances, the group has been separated. The pattern of “creating” a minority is driven from outside. According to this pattern, certain political elites (usually not belonging to the minority in question) can push for the group’s separation from the common multiethnic and multinational body, creating new ties and loyalties in order to achieve short- or long-term political objectives.

The Parameters of the Bulgarian Political Environment

Given the reality in the Balkans, Bulgaria did not have too many options to choose from. It has minorities on its territory. It has the tradition of perceiving them as a security threat. It has also had experience in attempting to find violent “solutions” for the problem.

According to the latest census (1992), Bulgarians accounted for 7.271 million, or 86 percent, of the country’s population; Turks accounted for 0.8 million or 9.4%, and the Roma accounted for about 0.3 million. However, almost half of the Roma population declares itself to be either Bulgarian or Turkish, so the real number is estimated to be about half a million. Several thousand people reported themselves to be Macedonians - almost a quarter of the 13,000-strong ethnically Armenian community.

No special law on minorities has been adopted in Bulgaria, but according to the constitution international legislation ratified by the parliament becomes an integral part of Bulgarian legislation. Bulgaria's president signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in October 1997, but it has still not been ratified by the parliament. Its ratification will probably be accompanied by an intense public debate on the issue of what exactly constitutes a minority, and in what areas the convention is applicable. At the same time Bulgaria has signed and ratified all internationally-adopted conventions on human rights protection, automatically making them part of its own legislation.

The dominant approach of the Bulgarian government toward minority issues is based on several general assumptions. These are:

- _ the territorial integrity of the state;
- _ the priority of individual over collective rights;
- _ the openness of the borders for the free movement of people, and thus the decreasing significance of the borders;
- _ treatment of the minority issue as an element of the political debate.

At the same time, the Bulgarian political environment has a few characteristics that are important from the point of view of possible minority nationalism. First, there exists in Bulgaria a *de facto* minority party. Although the constitution rules out the existence of political parties based on ethnic

or confessional lines, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (a Turkish minority-dominated party) was registered in 1990. The registration was the outcome of a complex political compromise (described in detail in the next section). From the perspective of the eight years of transition, however, it would appear that the existence of a minority party on the political landscape has contributed to political stability.

The second significant parameter of the political environment in Bulgaria is the low level of secessionist attitudes among minorities. This is partly due to the fact that the existing minorities did not have (and still do not have) a really important motive for seceding (neither political nor economic). On the other hand, after the small-scale ethnic conflict in Bulgaria in the 1980s (the forced name change and expulsion of Bulgarian Turks) society at large became extremely sensitive to minority issues, and ethnically-based political mobilization (which is a necessary condition for the secessionist agenda) is now perceived with suspicion.

The third important parameter of the political environment in Bulgaria is the fact that the possible societal division lines (wealth vs. poverty, inclusion vs. exclusion, etc.) do not coincide with ethnic affiliation. The case of the Roma minority is different. Poverty is common for Roma communities. However, this is not a result of ethnic discrimination but rather of the declining social role of the state and the collapse of the state-dominated economic structure. The state no longer provides every citizen with guaranteed employment, including the low-qualified and uneducated labor force (as is usually the case with Roma workers).

In this environment, historical experience has also played an extremely important role. The only relatively contentious issue was that of the Bulgarian Turks, although in this case too the "perceived threat" was more serious than the real one. Nevertheless, the "perceived threat" — in this case self-determination and secession — did bias Bulgarian politics, and in fact led to assimilation attempts during the 1980s. Other minorities in Bulgaria (no matter whether these are labeled as "ethnic," "ethno-national" or "national") have marginal significance in terms of possible minority-nationalism conflicts. These minorities are the Roma, Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and Macedonians. Neither the Roma nor the Pomaks can be treated as a "national minority," and the issue of the Macedonians is rather an example of a successful nation-building project that took place over the last five decades outside Bulgaria. Thus the latter can be treated in terms of the foreign policy debate, rather than in terms of minority nationalism.

The Benefits of a Small-Scale Ethnic Conflict: the Case of the Turks in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's ethnic Turks mainly inhabit two parts of the country: the regions around Kurdjali in the Rhodopi Mountains and around Razgrad. They are descendants of Turkish peasants who settled in the Balkans during Ottoman rule. Until the 1989 crisis, they numbered about 900,000. After attempts by the Bulgarian government to change their names to Bulgarian ones, about 250,000 of them emigrated to Turkey. Some 40% of these returned to Bulgaria at the beginning of the 1990s. As mentioned, Turks comprised 9.4% of the population in 1992.

The emigration wave in the 1980s was not the first of Turks from Bulgaria, nor was it the first assimilation campaign. All Balkan wars were followed by larger or smaller Turkish emigration flows, beginning with the Russo-Turkish war in 1878, when Bulgaria was liberated and about 1.5 million Turks left the country. Turks constituted about 26% of the Bulgarian population in Northern Bulgaria in 1876. By the turn of the century this percentage had dropped to 14%, and to 10.5% in 1926. The next significant wave of emigration took place after World War II: some 250,000 Turks left Bulgaria between 1949 and 1951, about 155,000 left at the beginning of the 1950s, and 55,000 to 130,000 (Bulgarian and Turkish data differ) left between 1968 and 1978.

Attitudes toward the Turkish minority have been a strange mixture of two extremes: from complete recognition of their rights and even preferential treatment on the one hand, and total rejection of the very existence of minorities on the other. Preferential treatment was for years part of the state policy of "incorporating" that population into Bulgarian society, the practice in itself an indirect sign that the group was perceived as an alien body. Preferential treatment was, however, mainly conducted in economic terms, through higher prices for the traditional product of the Turkish-inhabited regions (tobacco) and subsidized prices. Direct evidence of this treatment is the fact that, according to incomplete data from the State Savings Bank (the largest savings institution in Bulgaria), in 1989 regions with compact Muslim populations held 1.2 to 1.5 times more savings than the rest of the country. Preferential treatment was a rather constant element in the Bulgarian "landscape" after World War II.

This was not the case with political attitudes toward minorities, and in particular the Bulgarian Turks. The regime hesitated between recognition of their rights and status and total rejection of the very idea that minorities exist, which was the ideological basis of the forceful assimilation attempts. The 1947 constitution guaranteed the rights of "national minorities," but the 1971 constitution mentioned only "citizens of non-Bulgarian origin" (Article 45). This was how the official attitudes evolved. Until 1970, Turks could study in Turkish schools, Turkish-language newspapers were published and Radio Sofia broadcast in Turkish. In the middle of the 1970s, this attitude changed drastically and the Turkish minority was perceived as a potential secession-oriented group, whose very existence threatened the country's integrity. The conflicts in Lebanon and Cyprus were used by the political establishment as a "point of departure" for projecting similar scenarios for Bulgaria. The fact that Turkey was a NATO member and thus perceived as potentially hostile was rather of secondary importance; the "perceived hostility" had also been present in the 1950s and 1960s. From today's point of view, things do not look that clear-cut, but the fact is that the "perceived threat" was a strong enough motive for action. As in the case of the Pomaks, it was undertaken through the forced changing of names of Arab origin, once again proving that one of the basic problems in the Balkans was that of questioned identities, both collective and personal. The campaign was cynically labeled a "renaissance process," since the official version of assimilation was that it was a "voluntary process" on the part of the Turkish population which, it was claimed, is in fact not Turkish but ethnic Bulgarian converted to Islam during Ottoman rule and had become conscious of its Bulgarian roots by the mid-1980s. The name changes were also voluntary from a procedural point of view: people had to sign a standard form in which they stated their wish to change their names. The campaign

completely blurred the difference between those who were forced to change their names (the majority) and those who did so voluntarily (a number of Turks as well as Pomaks preferred to use names of Slav origin for reasons already described).

Forced assimilation was too ignorant as an attempt to change the Turkish minority's identity. For that reason, a change of identity was probably not the real aim but rather just camouflage for a smarter "project.". According to one of the many hypotheses about the reasons for this abrupt change in the regime's strategy, enforced assimilation and the changing of names of Arab origin were designed as a means of antagonizing Bulgarian society along ethnic lines in order to lay the groundwork for the nationalistic mobilization of the Bulgarian majority, "under the auspices" of the Communist regime. According to this scenario, communism could play the role of the "redeemer" of the Bulgarian nation. From today's point of view, and following the development of events in Serbia in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s, this explanation of the ethnic conflict in Bulgaria in the 1980s now seems to be the more reasonable one.

Assimilation attempts, and especially reactions by the Bulgarian majority in 1989, revealed the real dimensions of the "Turkish minority problem" in Bulgaria: the problem does not lie with the minority but with the majority. It is based on the division between those Bulgarians who regard Turks (and in broader terms, Muslims) as citizens with equal rights, and those who opt for the Bulgarians' privileged political status. It is not surprising that after 1989 the latter group found itself concentrated mainly within the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the former Communist one, which was playing a patriotic card with nationalist overtones, although on a far lesser scale than its Serbian counterpart.

The totally pragmatic approach that was adopted in this respect was obvious from the BSP's attitude toward the MRF. The MRF was registered in 1990 thanks to the support of the BSP, and it was thanks to the BSP that it took part in the 1990 parliamentary elections. The aim was to split the non-Socialist vote, and this was achieved: the MRF took 7% and entered parliament, and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) came in second. Later, when the MRF started supporting the UDF at the parliamentary level, it was the BSP that raised the issue of the unconstitutional character of the MRF, since it was perceived as an ethnically-based party and the new Bulgarian Constitution adopted in 1991 forbids the existence of such organizations. The issue was addressed to the Constitutional Court, and the MRF won by a margin of one vote. The BSP, however, continuously uses the Turkish problem for nationalist-based mobilization.

The assimilation campaign of the 1980s had a crucial effect on both the Turkish minority and Bulgarian society in general. The Turkish minority was the real winner in the long term. Thanks to the attempt to force assimilation, the prevailing part of that population began to identify itself along ethnic and national lines. Also, for the first time in probably a century, the Turkish minority became emancipated. For the first time it felt the obvious support of its "kin state."

In a paradoxical way, the dramatic events of 1986-89 cemented the future of the democratic process in the country. Thanks to them, a Bulgarian opposition was formed in the context of the minority issue and became extremely sensitive to it. The "small scale conflict" in 1989 was a necessary experience in order to prevent a nationalist clash on a broader scale. But what is more important is

that the Turkish minority itself turned into a rational political actor, and the problems it faces can now be solved at the political, parliamentary level. Although many issues are still disputable (such as the nature of the constitutional limitation forbidding the existence of ethnically-based parties), the MRF is now part of the political landscape just as the Turkish minority is part of the Bulgarian one.

Managing Minority Nationalism: the Outcome of the Last Decade

Being a "small-scale ethnic conflict," these attempts were to shape the future policies of both the state and the minority communities. Both sides joined the transition process with incomparably higher sensitivity to the minority rights issue. The concrete manifestation of this sensitivity was the fact that secession — the reason for the "perceived threat" in the 1980s — was simply ruled out as an option. Thus, from the very beginning, both sides set certain "invisible limits" in solving the minority issue.

The second aspect of the problem was the mutual understanding of the opponents' *rationales*. The majority's representatives in the democratic political elite had a kind of "guilt complex" as a result of the violation of Turkish and Bulgarian Muslim human rights in the 1980s, and they were therefore "willing to cooperate." The minorities' representatives were aware of the Bulgarian public's sensitivity to the state integrity issue, and they based their strategy on the assumption that this integrity should be maintained. This is obvious from all the bylaws the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, in which the integrity of the state and the affiliation to the "common fatherland — Bulgaria" is stressed.

The "invisible limits" were also obvious in the debate on the legitimacy of ethnicity- and religion-based political parties. After serious discussion, the registration of such parties was forbidden, and that is one of the reasons why the MRF is registered as a "Movement." However, at the same time, the Turkish minority party does exist, and for more than one year was practically a ruling party: MRF deputies' votes were decisive and responsible for the survival of the government formed on the MRF ticket in 1993-94. This seemingly paradoxical situation demonstrates the existing *de facto* consensus that national and religious minorities (in this case, Turkish) exist, that their interests should be represented and their rights defended at the *political* level, but within the framework of the existing multinational community, defined as the "Bulgarian people." Ethnic tensions are translated into political language that rationalizes ethnic conflict, and makes it much more manageable. It does not presuppose the impossibility of violence, but the approach to conflict management is essentially political, based on the presumption that the ethnic disputants behave as rational actors, deploying their resources to promote and defend group interests that are real, not illusory.

The issue of "invisible limits," or to put it more directly, limited minority rights, may sound provocative and discriminatory. However, the basic assumption is that in every multiethnic community there are some collective — not individual — minority rights, which are inevitably limited by definition, due to the fact that they *are* minorities. Especially in intermingled communities with existing historical prejudices (as in the Balkans), this seems to be the only realistic option. Having to choose between full respect of collective and individual minority rights, it seems more

reasonable to choose the latter. The ideal — absolute equality of collective rights, including the right to territorial self-determination through secession without affecting the individual rights of the representatives of other communities (other minorities, or the majority, who are a minority on the local level in areas dominated by the minority) — seems unfeasible, at least because of the high degree of intermingling of the representatives of the different ethnicities.

The basic limitation in this respect concerns the right to secede, which is, in fact, part of an agreement between the minority and the state. This agreement raises the integrity of the multiethnic community to a higher level of priority. It also means that other minority rights should be applicable, depending on their impact on the integrity of the broader community.

Minority language status is a good case in point. Elevating a minority language to the status of an official language is more than dubious, since it may be a direct step and a powerful tool for alienating minorities, a real obstacle to their integration into societies (which is a far cry from their "assimilation"). As a result, such an approach may foster the isolation of the minority, preparing the ground for the dissolution of the multiethnic entity. Hence, the only reasonable approach seems to be the guaranteed right, but by no means obligation, to use or study a minority language. Otherwise, majority or smaller minority groups' rights (as in the case of the Pomaks) may be violated.

Paradoxically, in terms of minority nationalism issues Bulgaria benefited from its economic collapse. First, the economic hardship pushed the perception of the issue from the discourse of mythological, emotional, potentially militant and secession-oriented nationalism toward a more pragmatic approach. As a result, secession from a multiethnic state was not perceived to be of value as such. Real value was given to economic rights: equal access to capital, credit, privatization. Second, the euphoria over secession-oriented self-determination ended quite quickly, thanks to the war in former Yugoslavia. So Bulgaria's approach can be defined as "nonviolent and non-secessionist." It is a model that opts for realistically limited, and thus defensible, minority rights. This is also indirect evidence that in the civilized world ethnic conflict is more metaphorical than real.

However, the problem of limited rights is not that evident. Minority and majority status are usually asymmetrical. Sides that are deprived in some respects are often privileged in others. One of the advantages minorities usually have is access to a distinct culture (that of the majority), which in broader civilizational terms means an additional opportunity for individual development (a case in point here is the uniqueness of the Pomak tradition, as a result of their "location" on the border between Islam and Christianity). Another example is seen in the broader political rights of national minorities with recognized dual citizenship. The case of the Bulgarian Turks who emigrated to Turkey and still participate in parliamentary elections in Bulgaria is an example. On the eve of parliamentary elections on December 18, 1994, the possibility of significant support for the MRF from Bulgarian Turkish voters in Turkey was strongly debated in the Bulgarian media. Their number is estimated at 150,000 eligible voters. The main question was whether citizens with dual citizenship who are not resident in Bulgaria have the right to influence Bulgarian internal politics. In the 1997 parliamentary elections the debate simply did not exist; the population had much more serious problems to solve, coping with survival. The same group is also somehow privileged in economic

respects. For example, dual citizens may receive their pensions in Turkey while continuing to use free Bulgarian health-care services.

Another example of the "enhanced rights" of minorities is the situation in which they have the right to secede (the case of national minorities with their own nation-state outside the disputed community). The idea is a very rational one: that the right to secede must be recognized after certain procedural or economic obstacles have been overcome, and this may be seen as a test of determination and the real need for secession. It does not "forbid" but rather converts the political issue into economic one, establishing a "price of separation." However, it would seem reasonable to apply this approach only in cases when a minority has no other possibility of becoming a majority, except via secession. **When the possibility of choice exists, as in the case of minorities with a "national home" outside the existing state borders, secession should be ruled out. This is the case with most Balkan minorities that have a right to choose a state where to live (the choice is between the state where they are living as minorities and their "national home"). The majorities do not have such a right to choose.** However, there is also a problem with the option of choice, since it is based on the assumption that complete freedom of movement, in political as well as economic terms, does in fact exist. As experience of the consecutive migration waves from Bulgaria to Turkey shows, the recipient country is often unable to absorb all of the immigrants. Lower population mobility in Europe in comparison to the United States also has to be taken into account. All of this makes the "choice option" less realistic than the consensus-oriented, "invisible limits" approach.

The Bulgarian approach to minority issues was not a model that was invented and introduced; rather, it simply *happened*. It resulted from a peculiar set of circumstances — which does not mean, however, that it cannot be introduced elsewhere. It turned out to serve as an existing and functioning model of a nonviolent approach to the issue of minority nationalism. Its core is comprised, first, of recognition of the inevitable "invisible limits" to minority rights and, second, of the primacy of the multiethnic community's integration. In other words, the formula "democracy means self-determination through secession from a multiethnic state" was treated as inapplicable in the Bulgarian case, and the chosen option was "democracy means constitutional guarantees of minority rights in multiethnic communities."