Models of state policy in regulating minority problems

A Bulgarian approach

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Abstract

In the policy of national states, there are four models for addressing ethnic problems: (1) "liberation" of the minority through its physical destruction or eviction; (2) "dissociation" or segregation; (3) "incorporation" or integration; and (4) provision of full rights and freedoms, which, in turn, could facilitate disintegration. These four models can be seen in minority policy in Bulgaria. To one degree or another they have been applied to all kinds and groups of minorities, especially to those who were perceived as a possible threat to the national security. And because in the Balkans the nations are perceived as historically determined ethno-cultural constructions, the fear of the "other" grows with the increasing rate of its difference. That is why the state policy has always been focused on those ethno-confessional groups that stay most remote from the idea of the Bulgarian nation. This positioning shows that the contradictions on the axis "majority – minority" are realized mainly in the civilizational field – as a result of one apprehended as a different culture or way of life (Muslim vs. Christian, settled vs. nomadic, etc.). Hence arises the effort of the state to overcome them or, at least, to "soften" them. Of course, in a universal sense, every person is valuable, regardless of age, gender, race and ethnicity, native language, or confessed religion. Before God we are all equal – *pieces of energy in a material shell.* But when you think with the categories of "nation" and "state," of "us" and "them," of "our" and "other" (i.e. "not our, alien"), these differences play a decisive role. Thus there is the striving for leveling them, and if it is impossible, for rejecting or deleting them, including by "removing" their bearers. This article makes an attempt to trace how these four models are reflected in the state policy of Bulgaria towards the national minorities and what role the religious factor plays.

Keywords Minority policy, models, identity, history, Balkans, Bulgaria, Moslems, Turks, Pomaks, Jews, Roma.

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1. The four patterns

As the Department of History at the still young New Bulgarian University was founded 20 years ago, I had just finished working on my book about the Turkish minority, which I – with naiveté – submitted for printing in the Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. After a three-year "maturing" the manuscript was returned to me, to be published elsewhere with the support of the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) and the "Open Society" Foundation (Stojanov 1998). So the monograph – as the first of its kind – became accessible to a wide audience, while the Publishing House of the BAS continued to produce mainly "patriotic" historiographical works. I have not used this book for my academic growth, but till the Easter holidays in 2014 it has gathered five reviews and at least 198 references in 64 scientific publications, of which 32 are abroad. And if we also add to them the quotations of five more articles on the same issue that came out of the material of this work (Stojanov 1993, Stojanow 1994, Stoyanov 1995, Stojanow 1997, Stoyanov 1998a), we are talking about 267 references in 91 publications, of which 49 are out of Bulgaria. I mention all this not to stroke my ego – I think I have overcome that form of human vanity – but in order to show (1) how short-sighted one's publisher policy may be when it takes into account only the situation of the day, and (2) the relevance of the topic, despite the multitude of works published on it in the past decades.

Two terminological groups of concepts were introduced with this monograph, one of them about the *"imperial"* and *"national"* model of development of the ethnic policy – I was glad to see later that some representatives of academia adopted these (Stojanov 1998, 14), and the other – about the phases of the repeatability during the disintegration of the multinational States, following the four patterns in the solution of ethnic problems: (1) *"liberation"* of the minority through its physical destruction or eviction; (2) *"dissociation"* or segregation; (3) *"incorporation"* or integration; and (4) providing the *full rights and freedoms*, which, in turn, could facilitate disintegration (Stojanov 1998, 18). In the following lines I would like to trace briefly how these "patterns" are reflected in the state policy of Bulgaria on national minorities and what role the religious factor played in them.

2. The fear of the "others" in national minority policy

The four models appear through an impartial study of minority policy in Bulgaria during its different stages of development after the recovery of its statehood. In one degree or another, separately or together, they have been applied to all kinds and groups of minorities, but most of all to those who at the moment were perceived as a possible threat to national security. And because this is about the protection of

the nation, and it is perceived in the Balkans as an historically determined ethno-culture (but not political) construction, the fear of the "others" grows with the increasing rate of their difference. And what is stranger to the Orthodox Bulgarian – the core of the national body – than the other-faith Muslim communities, considered as later new-comers in the Bulgarian lands and as relics of the past imperial system? It would be easier for him to accept his Catholic and Protestant countrymen than the Bulgarian Muslims (the *Pomaks*),[2] the Greeks and the descendants of the former times *"Patriarshists"*[3] merged in them, the Armenians, the Wallachians and even the Jews (although anti-Semitism has increased over time) than the Muslim Roma and the Turks, supported by one of the most rapidly developing countries in the Islamic world, and heirs of a great Empire. The negative attitude to modern Syrian refugees provides new evidence of such a mentality. That is why the state's minority policy has always been focused on those ethno-confessional groups that stay *most remote* from the historical culture of Bulgaria.

This positioning shows that the contradictions and oppositions on the axis "majority – minority" derived from them are realized mainly in the *civilizational* field – as a result of one perceived as a different community culture or way of life (Muslim vs. Christian, settled against nomadic, etc.). Hence arises the effort of the state to overcome them or, at least, to "soften" them. Of course, in a universal sense, every person is valuable, regardless of age, gender, race and ethnicity, native language, or confessed religion. Before God we are all equal – *pieces of energy in a material shell*. But when you think with the categories of "nation" and "state," of "us" and

[2] The designation "Pomaks" (singular "Pomak") is a conventional term, adopted in the scientific literature as a name for Muslims speaking the Bulgarian (or South Slavic) language. The Pomaks live mainly in the region of the Rhodope mountains (in southern Bulgaria and Northern Greece), but under different names like Akhriani, Torbeshi, Gorani, etc. they are also found in other parts of the Balkans (for more details see Rajčevski 1998, 9-10, 95-180, 180-187). In Turkey, where the Pomaks settled as a result of migrations during the Balkan wars and later, they are considered as "Rhodope Turks" or "Pomak Turks" – descendants of early Turkic settlers who supposedly "forgot" their native language. In Bulgaria and Macedonia they are considered as Islamized Bulgarians or Macedonians respectively; in Greece – as Slavicized and subsequently Islamized descendants of an ancient Thracian tribe, closely related to the Greeks, but who have nothing to do with the Bulgarians and the Turks. Since the 1990s, under the influence of the Arabic (Salafi) missionaries the thesis is spreading that the Pomaks are descendants of Arabs (fighters for the faith, prisoners of war or even messengers of the Prophet Himself), who settled in the Balkans before the Ottoman Turks. These and other speculative "plays" with the theme of the origin of the Bulgarian Muslims (the Pomaks) cause them to appear to be of multiple origins, which is often politicized.

[3] The "Patriarchists" as the East-orthodox Bulgarians were called, after creating with the Sultan's decree from February 28, 1870 the Bulgarian Exarchate (the independent Bulgarian Church), declared by the Patriarch in Istanbul as "schismatic" (so until 1953), remain faithful to Constantinople's Patriarchy. Later they began to be considered as a part of the Greek nation and earned the nickname grăkomani (Mac., Serb. grkomani, Alb,.. grecomani, i.e. "pretended to be a Greek, greedy to be considered Greek"), respectively "Slavic speaking Greeks" (Σλαβόφωνοι Έλληνες).

"them," of "our" and "other" (i.e. "the alien"), these differences play a decisive role. Thus there is the striving to level them, and if that is not possible, to destroy them, possibly by "removing" their bearers.

3. Expulsion or emigration – Jews and Turks

The *removal* of part of the uncomfortable minority has various manifestations. In Bulgaria the extreme form, physical extermination, was not reached. Despite the burden of the deportation of 11,343 (or, from other data, 11,480) Jews from the occupied "New Lands" during World War 2,[4] the state, as an ally of the Third Reich, managed to preserve the life of its own 48,600 Jews, who were spared the tortures of the Final Solution (*die Endlösung*). Their civil rights were severely limited, their property was partly confiscated, they were not allowed to practice certain professions, and many Jews were interned in labor camps, but most importantly, they survived. After the war their number even grew. In 1945, 49,172 Jews were recorded; they were not only connected with the immigrants from neighboring Balkan countries, but probably also with those citizens of Jewish origin once converted to Christianity with changed names that now declared again their Judaism. In 1951, only 7,676 Jews remained, of which more than half (4,529) were in Sofia. The rest were moved to Israel as a result of the common efforts of local and international Jewish organizations, and with the support of the Bulgarian state. The reduction of this minority continued throughout the whole totalitarian period. In 1992, there were only 3,461 Jews (Büchsenschütz 2000, 29-30, 222; Vasileva 1992, 147),[5] 90% of whom were employed, working in various institutions and productions, and the percentage of officials and intellectuals had reached 66.4% (Vasileva 1992, 147). Many of them were merged to such an extent with the majority that they had changed their family and personal names to Bulgarian ones. Thus they became "accomplices and victims of dismissal of their own collective identity" (Barukh 1998, 237). But their successful integration and assimilation in Bulgarian society would turn them into a positive example and a model for other ethnic groups (Büchsenschütz 2000, 31).[6]

[4] So were named the territories in today's Macedonia, Northern Greece (Aegean Macedonia, Western Thrace) and part of Eastern Serbia (the so-called Pomoravije), in which, before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a compact Bulgarian population lived among other ethnic groups. This gives rise to the aspirations of the Bulgarian state during WW1 and WW2 to acquire them.

[5] Vasileva specified different data: 7 676 Jews at the end of 1951, 7 220 at the end of 1952, 6 853 for 1953, 6 717 for 1954, 6 534 for 1955 and 6 431 for 1956 (according to the mentioned document from the Central State Archive [CSA], fund 622, archival unit 122, sheet 21).

[6] The author uses for them the term "exemplary minority" introduced by Troebst 1994, although he defines it himself for the period after the mid-1950s onwards, as an already imperceptible "deceasing" minority.

The Jewish "migration to the motherland," permitted by the state, gave hope to some Bulgarian Turks to also expect such a resolution for the "Turkish problem." As emigration started at the end of the 1940s, there were two opposed forces that affected the mood of the Turkish population and its decision to seek asylum in the neighboring "*ana vatan.*"[7] Of course, the main factor was the new Communist power, whose initiatives affected to the greatest degree the Muslim population with the laicizing of education, collectivization of private agricultural property, and introduction of a lifestyle that shook the traditional way of life and behavior patterns of the closed Muslim community. At the same time, the propaganda of Ankara was intensified, spreading rumors, for example, that in Turkey one potato weighed 8 kg and that the people who went there would be given new houses and US dollars, while the children of those who remained would be sent to Russia.[8] This process coincided in time with the intention of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists) to liberate the land from parts of the ideologically unreliable Turkish minority. The words of Prime Minister George Dimitrov at the closed Plenum of the Central Committee of January 4th 1948 that the population on the southern border is an "ulcer for our country" and should be removed elsewhere[9] are often cited. This occurred even before the decision for that population's mass eviction. The deterioration of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, however, and the increased pressure from Moscow after the death of Dimitrov contributed to an orientation towards liberation from the more alert elements of the minority by their dispatch to the neighboring Turkey. Between 1948 and 1951, more than 155,000 Bulgarian Turks left the country (Stojanov 1998, 109-115, 237). This was not the first time. Before the conclusion of the Ankara Convention (1925), some 450,000 Bulgarian Turks moved to the South (Stojanov 1998, 237; Totev 1968, 25). About 100,000 were emigrants in the period 1934-1944 (Stojanov 1998, 237; Şimşir 1986). Later, 52,392 new people made use of the "Agreement on the reunification of families" in the years 1968-1972 (Stojanov 1998, 140-141), to get to the Big Trip in 1989 that drove another 214,902 emigrants outside the borders.[10] The raising

[7] Turkish – "Mother Homeland". This term is used to refer to modern Turkey, as a kind of "homeland" for all Turkic speaking citizens of the neighboring Balkan countries which are part of the Ottoman heritage – the descendants of the Turkish Muslim population living in the region before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

[8] See the Central Party Archive [CPA], fund 1, list 6, archival unit 637, sheets 17-27.

[9] CPA, f. 1, l. 5, a. u. 19, sh. 17.

[10] With the "Big Trip" ("Great Trek" or "Great Excursion") is designated the forced eviction in the summer of 1989 of about 320 000 Bulgarian Turks, who made use of the changes in the Bulgarian legislation which occurred in unison with the agreements at the Vienna meeting of the participating States of the CSCE and, in particular, the removal of any restrictions on private travel abroad. Formally, they left as "tourists" to Turkey (so "the trip"), but they were driven to this decision both by the actions of the Bulgarian authorities and by the activity of the illegal Turkish organizations, most leaders of which later

of the Iron Curtain and the deterioration of life in Bulgaria in the following years drove some 140,000 more Bulgarian Turks to emigrate until 1993. They are a small part of the more than a million humans with potential who left the country in the last quarter-century. The state policy in all its possible spheres, like economy, health care, science and education, including in the cultural and minority areas, has also contributed to this, purposefully or not. They have provided a convenient way for getting rid of the inconvenient and more alert elements that otherwise would have sought their rights after the post-Communist elite seized power.

4. Inclusion vs. exclusion – the Roma case

Segregation as a model of minority policy in Bulgaria is not officially practiced. It occurs anyhow – in some Muslim communities, and particularly among the Gypsies (Roma), groups of which separate themselves from the rest of the world in ghettos, from whence it is difficult to get out. But this is a product of their own development and culture, with which the state cannot cope. Gypsies were always a marginalized heterogeneous community, practicing handicrafts typical of the preindustrial era that also specify the designations of some particular subgroups, e.g. *ursari* (bearwards), *lovari* (dealing with horses), *calderari* (or *kaldarashi*, tinkers), and so on. The socio-political changes after the coup of September 9th 1944[11] had a positive impact on the Gypsies' development – the restrictions on the sojourning of Roma in parts of the inner cities and on their use of public transport were abolished. Their belonging to the lower social strata turned them into a natural supporter of the new "people's power." And in return measures were taken to "improve the way of life and culture" of the Roma population, providing limited cultural autonomy, which included the creation of cultural organizations, opening of special schools, the issue of newspapers, etc. (Büchsenschütz 2000, 39-64; Marušiakova, Popov 1993, 88; Tomova 1998, 72-80). Special attention was paid to the education of the Roma, of whom in 1946 81% were illiterate (Tomova 1995, 58). In 1947 in the Sofia quarter "The Faculty" had opened the first school for Roma children, followed by similar institutions in Stolipinovo, a district of the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv, and in other areas with a dense Roma population. Over time, these institutions increased their emphasis on career education (the pupils acquired qualifications as tailors, locksmiths, etc.), and one provided students with free meals. There were also boarding schools for children from wandering families, who, through separation from their traditional environment, could adapt to a more modern way of life. In 1962, about

turned out to be closely associated with the services of the former State security. About 42% of the "tourists" came back until September 10th 1990; in Turkey 214 902 other people settled down.

[11] With it begins the positioning of Bulgaria in the Soviet sphere of political, economic, ideological and cultural influence.

3,000 Roma children were placed in such institutions; by 1967, the number had tripled. However, the efforts of the authorities to force the Roma to also accept education in their value system were not crowned with success. Over time the number of illiterate Roma decreased significantly, reaching just over 11% by the end of the totalitarian period. This allowed them to get some qualifications and be successful in the labor market. And the few Roma with higher education, who went beyond the average level of the community, successfully entered the Bulgarian socialist nation. Because of the nature of the Communist regime, this integration policy was implemented through pressure. Therefore, subsequently, some facts of the totalitarian education system were pointed out by right-protected NGOs almost as examples of intentional segregation of the Roma population by the Communist regime. Most of the measures after 1989, however, introducing elements of the foreign experience, did not succeed in improving the condition of the Roma, which at the end of 1992 were officially 313,396 people (3.69% of the population). Gypsies at the end of the 20th century were among those who suffered most from the transformation processes, especially after the closure of the state-owned enterprises (including handicraft and agricultural cooperatives) in which they earned their living. As poorly qualified and marginalized social groups, they were easily criminalized and had to rely on state support through financial aid for the unemployed, or as users of social benefits for the birth and upbringing of children. The large mass of them now live in isolated areas in the settlement conglomeration, which leads to their separation and ghettoization. With few exceptions, only their leaders thrived who, in alliance with Bulgarian politicians, continue to use the Roma masses for their own prosperity.

5. Absorption or integration – the Pomaks

The Bulgarian state with its policy of "*inclusion*" of the minorities is the largest historical experience. The history of the so-called "Revival Process"[12] belongs here, as well as the treatment of Roma in Communist Bulgaria. The necessity of integration measures was realized early enough and already in the first half of the 20th century amplified the weight of the studied "Patriotic disciplines" (Bulgarian language and literature, Bulgarian history and Bulgarian geography), included in the minority schools. But then this was the practice in every national state, including the Balkans. Another institution that contributed to the Patriotic education, and hence the integration, was the barrack. It is not surprising that the young generation of

[12] The term, designating the attempts to "integrate" the Turkish population by violent changes of its names and elements of its culture, customs, clothing, etcetera, refers mainly to the period 1984-1989. More broadly, however, it includes all previous attempts on the integration of the Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) and the Roma Muslims into the dominant part of the nation by changing their cultural models.

Pomaks at the heart of the so-called "Bulgarian-Muslim Motherland movement"[13] passed through the "school" of the Bulgarian barracks. The history of the "Friendship Motherland" reveals the main flaw in Bulgarian minority policy: impatience, the demand for a solution to such a complex problem of several years, and this in a field, where decades of effort with patient and consistent work are necessary.

The delicacy of the issue is further complicated by the fact that the main element in the "diversity" of the Pomaks is their religion – they profess Islam, while the dominant majority of Bulgarians are Christians (Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants). This is what makes Bulgarian Muslims (the Pomaks) more foreign to the authorities. In the revived Bulgarian state, they were initially treated with Turks as one confessional community with cultural-autonomous status. The problems began with the outbreak of the Balkan wars for the final eviction of the Ottoman Empire from Europe and for the division of its inheritance. Bulgaria acquired new territories, with which the number of Pomaks in the Rhodope mountains reached 109,984 people (Rajčevski 1998, 127). In 1912, the first attempt to change their identity was launched, known in history under the name "krăstilkata" (the Christening). It took place under strong organized pressure, in which the Bulgarian Orthodox Church led the "fight of the Cross against the Crescent" (Eldărov 2001, 612, 624). Groups of villagers took Christian names. Often a kind of ritual was used, which included not only the spraying of the converted with holy water, but also forcing them to bite a piece of pork, as a symbolic rejection of Islam (Drugite 1995, 146). The mosques were turned into churches, and there was physical violence. Thus until September 1913, 150,000-200,000 Muslims were baptized. After the defeat of Bulgaria in conflict with its former allies, the names and the religious freedoms of the Bulgarian Muslims were restored. During World War 1, Bulgaria and Turkey were allies on the side of the Central powers, and in the Bulgarian army Turks and Pomaks were also mobilized. The problems with them began only when, with the reforms of Ataturk and their echo in Bulgaria, the Muslims became an object of

[13] The cultural educational organization "Friendship Motherland" was established in 1937 in the town of Smolyan (in the Central part of the Rhodope Mountains) with the mission to lead the struggle for the full incorporation of the Pomaks into the Bulgarian nation. It preferred the designation "Bulgarian-Muslims" for them and developed some methods and strategies for revival activity, collected materials for their Bulgarian origin and founded their own sections in different localities. As a result of its activity the Muslim names were "rejected" (1942), there were changes in the domestic sphere and the clothing of the Pomaks, and also the Bulgarian language was introduced for the needs of their religious cult. The commitment of the organization with some state structures, however, gave an occasion to stigmatize it after the war as a nationalist and "fascist" one, and its leaders were sent to camps and prisons. In 2011, the "Friendship Motherland" had been restored to preserve the Bulgarian self-awareness among the Pomaks and to resist attempts for their Turkization and separation. For some details see Stojanov 2011; for a different point of view see Mehmed 2007 as well as the critical analysis of his book, made by Petrov 2008.

influence for the Turkish national idea – using the new organizations created in the country, like *Turan* (Turan), *Türk Ocakları* (Turkish hearths), *Boz Kurt* (Gray wolf) and others. This elicited a strong reaction from the Bulgarian nationalists. Members of the "Home Protection," for example, exerted pressure on the Turkish population, forcing people to speak only in Bulgarian, restricting religious rights and by various provocations (the burning of fezzes, throwing pieces of pork fat in the wells, suspension of pig tails on mosques, etc.) tended in many ways to keep the people under tension, urging them to emigrate. With the military coup in 1934, the activities of all parties were stopped; the "Home Protection" as well as "Turan" were prohibited, but with its support for the "Friendship Motherland" the state showed its preference for methods of forced integration.

After the Second World War, the pendulum swung back. The "Friendship Motherland" was declared "fascist," and the results of its activity were removed. The traditional names of the Bulgarian Muslims were reinstated and the Turks received cultural autonomy in the Soviet pattern. Soon, however, the authorities recognized that this model, successful in multi-ethnic States, carried risks for the mono-national ones, because it increased the centrifugal tendencies. A policy of integration of minorities in the "Bulgarian socialist nation" began to be imposed, including by promoting economic development, which, however, limited their cultural identity. The amorphous mass of the Roma failed most easily under pressure, because the amorphous mass of the Roma, because the abolition of the nomadic lifestyle through "establishment per decree"[14] went along with assurance of livelihood of the newly settled in cooperative farms and enterprises, and the creation of workshops for souvenir articles (wicker chairs, mats, baskets), in accordance with their traditional production. After unsuccessfully attempting to change the names of the Bulgarian Muslims in the 1960s, a decade later, the process of their "inclusion" was registered as completed. Now came the turn of the Turks themselves – first, of families with mixed marriage, and then, of the purely Turkish families. They were forced to change their identities by changing their names, language, clothing, etc. in favor of a supposedly "re-uncovered" Bulgarian identity. This was called "Revival Process" and was officially stigmatized ten years later in order to legitimize the power of the transformed elite in the early 1990s.

The fluctuations of state policy indicated the lack of long term perspective and made mockery of the attempts to find a firm solution to the "minority problem." This explains the failures of each pressure and its subsequent abolition. Going from one to the other extreme and back testifies not only to the refusal to maintain

[14] Through the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 258 dated December 1958 vagrancy and begging were officially banned.

established national priorities, but also to the short-sightedness of the political actors, who in their ambition to taste the fruits of their own initiatives overlooked the perspective. So they became accomplices and "co-powers" of unwanted developments that strengthened the disintegration processes. In the case of the Pomaks it is already there – with creation of multiple identities (Ivanova 2013, Ivanova 2014), enabling the denationalization and "trans-nationalization" of this old Bulgarian population.

6. Back to the "Imperial model"

That is why the liberal model, which would provide full rights and freedoms for the minority communities and greatly benefit their cultural development, is unacceptable for the national state. Least of all is it acceptable in an environment like the Balkan one, where every Bulgarian neighbor is seeking to consolidate its own national unity. This supports the old zones of tension and creates new ones by crossing the mutual influences – ethnic, linguistic, religious and so on. Therefore, in the medium term, the most promising model seems to be a modified policy of integration of minorities while maintaining their cultural individuality and avoiding final assimilation, as the attempted "Revival Process" had already failed previously. The alternative would be the destruction of the national State in the framework of "Balkans of the regions," which would be part of a new "United Europe", different and spreading beyond its natural borders.

But this return to the "Imperial model," set against that of the "nation-state," will not be something different, no matter in what shape it will be presented to the general public.

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