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Regions, minorities and European integration:

A case study on Muslim minorities (Turks and Muslim Bulgarians) in the SCR of Bulgaria

Galina Lozanova, Bozhidar Alexiev, Georgeta Nazarska, Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova and Iva Kyurkchieva

International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR)

Contact details: Dr. Galina Lozanova, Senior Research Fellow, email: galinalozanova@abv.bg; Dr. Bozhidar Alexiev, email: bojidar_alexiev@yahoo.fr; Dr. Georgeta Nazarska, email: Nazarska@yahoo.com; Dr. Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova, email: troeva@abv.bg; and Iva Kyurkchieva, email: ivaphilipova@yahoo.com.

Address: International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), 55, Antim I St., Sofia 1303, Bulgaria, Tel: (+359 2) 832-3112, 832-4044; Fax: (+359 2) 9310-583; e-mail: minority@imir-bg.org
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1. Introduction

The subject of the research are two compact Muslim groups in Bulgaria: Turks and Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks), living in the Kardzhali and Smolyan districts of the South Central Region of Bulgaria, near the Greek border. The objective is to assess the impact of the European regional policy and the forthcoming European integration of Bulgaria on the political mobilization, social-economic status and the perception of the two Muslim minorities of their place within united Europe.

As the European integration represents a part of large-scale historical changes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe over the last fifteen years, it is necessary to outline other internal and external factors which influence the ongoing processes in the border regions with a predominant Muslim (Turkish and Bulgarian) population. These factors are examined in sections two and three of the report and they include the following issues:

1. The legacy of the Bulgarian state policy towards Muslim minorities in the period after the Liberation from Ottoman rule and to the end of socialism. This policy is characterized by two basic features: firstly, the attempts to solve the minority problem by (forced) assimilation and/or expulsion of the Muslim population, viewed as a threat for the territorial integrity of the state (this issue is more extensively discussed in the State of the Art Report, see Lozanova et al. 2005), and secondly, the regional economic policy and especially the impact of nationalization, collectivization of land and industrialization on the social-economic development of the border regions;

2. The impact of the liberalization of the human and minority rights, and of the transfer from totalitarian to a rule-of-the-law state after 1989, on the political mobilization of minorities and their participation in the political processes and the government;

3. The impact of the economic reforms and the transition from state to private property (privatization and restitution) on the social-economic status of the border minority regions;

4. Acceleration of the reforms after the beginning of the negotiations for Bulgaria’s accession to the EU and the significance of the regional planning and European pre-accession funds for the neutralization of the heavy social-economic effects of the economy reconstruction and for the preparation of administrative, political, and economic potential in the minority regions.

Section four of the report contains data on the current socio-economic situation in the minority regions, their prospective development, and the cultural mobilization of the two Muslim groups. It is based on documents, statistical data, experimental analyses and published researches. And yet, all these are insufficient to answer the question about the role of the European integration, and particularly of the pre-accession funds on the status and perceptions of Muslim minorities. This is due at least to three reasons: 1) On the one hand, since the Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 does not recognize the existence of “minorities”, no official statistics do exist on the economic and social status of the population with respect to ethnic and religious characteristics. Most “minority” surveys constitute representative sociological excerpts for the country as a whole. 2) On the other hand, most development analyses and strategy plans refer to the South Central Region as a whole. Among the six districts of the region, Kardzhali and Smolyan occupy the last places with regard to all socio-economic indicators, i.e. the border minority regions appear to be the most underdeveloped and problematic ones. However, it has
become possible to evaluate the concrete parameters of their backwardness only after the publishing of basic data on the so-called “target zones”, inclusive of the two minority districts. 3) Finally, the data on the amounts of the pre-accession funds, allocated to Kardzhali and Smolyan districts, turned out to be collected not on a district or regional level but by the Ministries which distribute the money and monitor the implementation of the projects. Furthermore, some projects (under PHARE and ISPA) are sometimes implemented on the territory of more than one district or planning region, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests reports do not always specify the location of the project-winning company under the SAPARD program.

All of the above enhances the importance of the fieldwork results, summarized in section five of the report. They supplement the official data with information how the minorities and the majority perceive the effects of the ongoing processes on the economic situations of the border regions, the practical aspects of the EU integration policy, the altered role of the local people and their prospects for the future, when they will be part of united Europe.

2. Background of the case

Two main factors determined the development of Bulgaria during 20th century and to a great extent the idiosyncrasy of the Bulgarian democratic transition after 1989: the incomplete nation- and state-building after the Liberation from Ottoman rule, and the post-communist heritage characterized by totalitarian state, coalescence of the Communist Party with all levels of power, state-regulated economy and prevailing state property.

The belated, in comparison to Central and West European countries, and the unfinished from the viewpoint of the national ideal, restoration of the Bulgarian state within its “historical” boundaries incorporating all territories inhabited by Bulgarians, left a grave imprint on the internal and foreign state policy in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The fact that the boundaries of the country were recognized not through bilateral negotiations but at a number of international conferences – the Congress of Berlin (1878), the London Conference of Ambassadors (1912), the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) and the Versailles system of 1919 – entailed the feeling that “somebody outside” determined the development of Bulgaria. (Atanasova 2004: 359). The ceaseless endeavors of the Bulgarian governments to achieve the unrealized territorial claims had determined the external political orientation of Bulgaria to those countries that tried to re-design the European map over the two World Wars and the outset and first half of 20th century.

The lack of stable democratic traditions should also be noted – the multi-party political system experienced a number of crises (1924, 1934, 1935). The idea of the nation-state, according to which there should be a correspondence between a territory and a people, predetermined the attitude of the state towards the “living heritage” of the Ottoman Empire – compact masses of Turkish population in Southeastern and Northeastern Bulgaria and Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians) along the southern border of the country (the Rhodope Mountains).

The state policy towards the Turkish and Bulgarian-Muslim minorities during the first half of the 20th century was marked by the following trends (Lozanova et al. 2005): 1) In general their political and cultural-religious rights were observed, and they were guaranteed by a number of international treaties and by the fundamental law of the country – the Western-type Constitution of the Principality (the Kingdom after 1908) of Bulgaria, adopted in 1879 (Art. 41, 43). However, the minorities did not have political representation except through the national political parties. 2) The policy towards the two minority groups was differentiated: thus, the
Turks were isolated; some insignificant attempts were made to integrate them into the Bulgarian society. On the other hand, considerable efforts were directed to the integration of the Muslim Bulgarian population but they did not bring substantial results. What is more, open assimilation measures were occasionally implemented (1912–1913 and 1943). At the same time successive Bulgarian governments sought solution of the “Turkish problem” mainly by encouraging, sometimes through bilateral agreements with Turkey, the emigration of Turks and Pomaks to Turkey. Thus, from the very beginning the displacements of population had double effect: on the one hand, they were a plausible pretext for reducing the numbers of the minorities, for “cleansing” of the country from the “foreign” population; on the other hand, they had purely economic effect, as they led to redistribution of property (basically land and real estate), due to the fact that the migrants lost their property rights (Stanchev; Atanasova 2004: 361). It should be noted that this policy proved to be quite successful (Vassileva 1992: 58–67).

There are no data of specific Bulgarian state economic policy in the regions with compact minority population until the middle of the 20th century. Obviously the Bulgarian state was reluctant to allocate sufficient funds for the development of the regions inhabited by Turks and Pomaks, which was the cause of the increasing backwardness of these regions (Atanasova 2004: 363). The greater part the Rhodope Mountain inhabitants continued to rely on their traditional sources of income: the seasonal, nomad sheep-breeding, and after 1920s on tobacco-growing.

Having become a part of Bulgaria in 1912, the Southern regions were included in the existing administrative-territorial structure of the country1, and, in spite of the small amount of available data, it may be concluded that the local population preserved its patriarchal social structure and had more confidence in the local (religious) leaders than in the central authorities which remained unwanted. As it was mentioned in the State of the art Report, the Rodina (‘Motherland’) association managed to convince part of the Pomaks to accept the ideas of modernization, but in the end lost its influence as a result of its straightforward assimilation policy, especially during 1940s. In the same vein, although there were Turkish schools financed by the Muslim community and partly by the state, their number was gradually reduced and the quality of education was lower. The outcome of such policies was mass illiteracy among Turks and Pomaks. Such policies also had the effect of marginalizing and alienating these ethnic groups from the Bulgarian state and contributed to the preservation of their feeling of belonging to Turkey (Atanasova 2004: 363).

It is suggested that the Third Bulgarian Kingdom was by presumption established as a national state of unitary type, characterized by overwhelming dominance of the majority (Rokkan and Urwin 1982), since the ruling elites deliberately sought political centralization and ethnic unification. The compact masses of Turkish and Pomak population in dangerous proximity to the border with their kin-state, Turkey, was considered to be constant source of regional instability. Ethnic cleansing and assimilation were considered as natural means for the neutralization of the “Turkish threat”. Any idea of broadening the rights of the Turks and Muslim Bulgarians, institutionalized through international treaties, was considered a step towards autonomy and, eventually, secession from the national territory.

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1 The first Administrative Division of the Principality of Bulgaria Act was adopted in May 1880 and remained in force until 1901, when the second major administrative-territorial restructuring in the country was carried out, and the new status existed for 33 years (until 1934). According to the Act, which was based on Art. 3 of the Tarnovo Constitution, the territory of the country was separated into okrazi (provinces), okoli (districts) and self – governing municipalities and local councils. The reform of 1934 replaced the existing 12 okrazi with 7 oblasti (regions) and the territory of the Rhodope Mountains was governed by the center in Plovdiv.
The situation of the Turks and Pomaks changed dramatically after 1944. The sovietization of the country, the collectivization of the land and the systematic atheistic policy brought a fundamental change to their way of life.

The policy towards minorities during 1944–1989 period was incoherent and determined by the evolution of the views on the nature of the Bulgarian socialist state. Immediately after the coup d’état of September 9, 1944, when the power was seized by the Otechestven Front (Fatherland Front), the situation of the minorities improved for a short period of time. An issue under consideration was a project for the establishment of a Balkan Federation, following the Soviet model but with “people’s – democratic form of government”, which was supposed to resolve all ethnic and territorial issues in Southeastern Europe. As early as 1945 the Turks received large cultural autonomy: private Turkish schools were legalized and their status was made equal to that of the Bulgarian ones, periodical publications in Turkish language reappeared. The Pomaks, renamed in 1942, restored their names, and the requirement for the Turkish names to end in “-ov” “-ev” was repealed (Stoyanov 1998: 96–97; 118).

In the late 1940s the “Turkish national minority” was openly mentioned, and so was it in the First Republican Constitution of 1947, which guaranteed equal rights to all Bulgarian citizens regardless of their nationality, origin, denomination and property, whereas the propaganda of racial, national or religious hatred was declared against the law (Art.71). The initial draft of the 1947 Constitution even envisaged the right of all citizens to freely determine their nationality (in Art. 71), but this proposal was omitted in the final text of the adopted Constitution. (Stoyanov 1998: 98).

The Constitution of 1947 introduced a very important principle enshrined in the 1936 Soviet Constitution: unity of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Thus, the foundations of the legalization of the totalitarian state and “the leading role of the Party”, introduced by the next constitution of 1971, were laid down. The 1947 Constitution proclaimed that “schools shall belong to the state” and that “the church shall be separated from the state”, as a result of which the Turkish schools fell under state control in 1948, and in 1949 the same happened not only to the Orthodox Church, but also to the Mufti Office, the mosques and the rest of the Muslim religious institutions.

In compliance with the new Constitution, the government of the Fatherland Front took further steps to put under total control not only the political, but also the economic life of the country. In 1947 the National Assembly adopted Nationalization of Private Industrial and Mining Enterprises Act, and in 1948 the Management and Exploitation of Forests Act made all forests property of the state. An impetus was given to an intensive industrialization, and the establishment of co-operative farms in the sphere of agriculture started.

Meanwhile two important changes in the international relations had direct effect on the situation of the minorities as well. The first one was the fact that Bulgaria and Turkey found themselves on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain and since the two countries joined the two antagonist blocks – NATO (1950–1952) and the Warsaw Pact (1955), the Turkish and the Muslim Bulgarian minorities had increasingly been viewed as the “fifth column of the imperialism”. The second one, which was equally important, was the fact that G. Dimitrov and J. B. Tito did not reach agreement on the issue of Balkan Federation and since the beginning of 1950s Bulgaria had officially been described as mono-national state.

The tolerant policy towards ethnic and religious minorities was gradually replaced by harsher measures, especially after the April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1956). The first step was the acceleration of the collectivization, since the initial stages of
the reform had led to transfer of the property to the state mainly in the lowland plains (62.5% until 1958). Statistical data display that in 1956, 42% of the Bulgarian Turks were still private owners and 30% of them were included in the co-operative farms. The difference in the situation of the Pomaks was even greater – 3, 44% were included in the co-operative farms and 56, 9% were private owners. The figures speak unequivocally about the dimension of the collectivization campaign: at the end of 1958 it had affected 90% of the farmers (Stoyanov 1998: 123, 125). During 1950s more than 150,000 Turks and Pomaks left Bulgaria as a reaction to the violent collectivization of land.

Measures for modernization and economic development of mountainous regions during the 1960s and 1970s, allowed the Turks and Pomaks to stay apart from the migration processes from the villages to towns, which took place in all parts of the country. Thus they managed to preserve their ethnic, cultural and religious specific characteristics. The state enhanced their unwillingness to mix with the majority by creating employment opportunities in the so called tzebove (workshops) – partial transfer of small industrial units from towns to villages (the so called ‘domestication of industry’, Creed 1995; Giordano and Kostova 1995: 157–164). In addition, minority groups and regions were granted preferential treatment (higher wages and lower prices). According to some incomplete data from the State Savings Bank, in 1989 regions with compact Muslim population held between 1.2 and 1.5 times more savings than the rest of the country. However, given the circumstances (shortages, low consumption rates, etc.), these figures cannot prove that the Muslim population had higher living standard (Stanchev).

The period of intensive industrialization of the border regions coincided with the new rise of state nationalism during 1960s when new assimilation policy with the objective to create homogeneous socialist nation started. This policy continued until the end of 1980s and reached its climax with the “Revival Process”.

Thus, the Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian minorities met the democratic changes in 1989 after a severe ethnic confrontation, political and economic crisis. The relation of ethnic and religious differences with economic territorial structures could be taken as a typical heritage of the state socialism (Anagnostou 2005: 92). Despite being partially influenced by the modernization, the two groups of Muslim population remained isolated and capsulated in the peripheral mountainous regions.

3. European integration and the domestic-regional context of change

The Democratic changes after November 10, 1989, mark total reconstruction of the political and economic life in Bulgaria, including transition from totalitarian state to democratic multiparty system, from state-regulated planned economy to market economy, and building of civil society based on supremacy of law, observance of human and minorities’ rights. All these changes comprise the “internal” factors, determining the political, economic and social development of the Muslim minorities’ regions. Of equal importance are the “external” factors, which reflect the changes in the international position of Bulgaria: the country’s participation in regional structures and especially its accession to EU.
3.1. Changes in the Political System and the Political Mobilization of the Muslim Minorities

3.1.1. Minority Participation in the Central Legislative and Executive Powers

Prior to 1989, Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and its satellite party, Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BAPU), were the only legal political parties. The transition to democracy after 1989 began with the restoration of the multiparty system and reorganization of the state institutions, based on two principles: separation of powers and republican parliamentary system. Bulgaria was the first Eastern European country to adopt a new constitution (July 1991), which laid the legal foundation for the changes.

As mentioned in the State of the Art Report, the beginning of the Bulgarian transition was marked by strong ethnic tensions caused by the cruel assimilation campaign, which started in the mid-1980s. It had a crucial effect on both the Turkish minority and Bulgarian society in general. On the one hand, the Bulgarian Turks united and mobilized themselves along ethnic lines and in 1990 a political party, representing mainly their interests was formed – Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), led from the very beginning by Ahmed Dogan. On the other hand, post-1989 anti-Communist political parties and civic organizations, most of which united to form the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) coalition, became extremely sensitive to minority issues. During the first years of the transition, it was mainly the ex-Communist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, former BCP), which continued to use “ethnic scapegoating” and manipulated notions of “Bulgarian national interest” and the “Turkish threat”. It was exactly BSP to question the legitimacy of MRF (1990–1991) on the grounds that the Constitution (Art.11.4) and the Political Parties Act contained provisions prohibiting the formation of ethnic-based political parties and organizations. The Constitutional Court ruled in 1992 that MRF is not unconstitutional and can function as a normal party. That decision marked the beginning of the successful Bulgarian ethnic model, based on peaceful ethnic coexistence. Since then MRF has always been parliamentary represented, successfully passing the 4% threshold.

As it can be seen by the data on the results of the parliamentary elections, displayed in Table 1, in 1990s MRF became the third strongest party in Bulgaria (both in terms of significance and influence).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>BSP Seats (%)</th>
<th>UDF Seats (%)</th>
<th>NMSS Seats (%)</th>
<th>MRF Seats (%)</th>
<th>Others Seats (%)</th>
<th>Voter turnout %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>106 (33,14)</td>
<td>110 (34,36)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21 (7,55)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>84,82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Nationalist parties appeared in the right sphere of the political spectrum as well but, in spite of their vociferous rhetoric, none of them managed to enter the Parliament with the exception of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), which achieved that by forming a coalition with other parties.

3 A detailed analyses by V. Ganev on the conflicting arguments presented in the course of the constitutional trial that ensued shows how the justices’ anxieties about the possible effects of politicized ethnicity were interwoven into broader debates about the nature of democratic politics in a multiethnic society (Ganev 2004: 75–83). Nevertheless, the “liberal” constitutional interpretation articulated by the Court, was not entirely due to the will to keep the “principle of democratic pluralism”. As D. Anagnostou argues, the role of the Council of Europe in the legalization of MRF should not be underestimated. In January 1991 Bulgaria submitted the application for membership in the CoE, but invoking human rights principle, the CoE delegates had expressed their disapproval of the ban on ethnic parties (Anagnostou 2005: 96).
In the beginning, MRF supported the democratic forces and the first UDF government led by Philip Dimitrov (1991–1992), because the two parties shared common views on the liberalization of minority rights and a foreign policy oriented towards the West. Later MRF became dissatisfied with the government’s approach to the agrarian reform, and finally withdrew its support and gave vote of no confidence to the government together with BSP. In December 1992 the President Zhelyu Zhelev entrusted the task of nomination of Prime-Minister-designate to MRF. This led to the election of the government of L. Berov, which ruled for almost two years, but did not manage to complete its mandate and the next parliamentary elections in 1994 were won by BSP, which acquired absolute majority in the Parliament. When the single-party government of Zhan Videnov was elected, the MRF and UDF MPs did not participate in the voting process.

By the spring of 1996, the ex-Communists’ reluctance to undertake far-reaching structural reforms had contributed to a banking crisis, and after the collapse of the economy and the civic unrest in 1997, the government resigned, preliminary parliamentary elections were called, and the opposition United Democratic Forces (UDF) came to power in a coalition government with BAPU. This produced a strong government backed by a wide majority in the Parliament and a president from the same coalition (Petar Stoyanov, elected in 1996). The new government committed itself to a program of stabilization of finance, privatization, and Westernization through integration with Europe and joining NATO. A currency board was introduced in July 1997, which stopped the hyperinflation spiral that had begun in the winter of 1996–1997, and the banking system resumed functioning.

MRF entirely supported the foreign policy of the government, including its unpopular decision to allow NATO military airplanes in Bulgarian airspace during the Kosovo crisis. At the same time MRF disagreed with the economic policy of UDF, being disappointed by the effect of the fast, unsupported by adequate social measures, privatization in the border minority regions. On their turn the right politicians were disappointed by the reaction of MRF and accused Ahmed Dogan that he was trying to isolate and capstulate the Turkish minority in order to preserve full control over its votes, thus obstructing its integration into the Bulgarian society. Güner Tahir formed an alternative National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (1996–1997), which remained a loyal coalition partner of UDF but did not have enough influence among the Turkish population.

* All basic parties participated in the elections in coalitions: United Democratic Forces (Union of the Democratic Forces, Democratic Party, Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BAPU), Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party (BSDP)); Bulgarian Left (BSP and Ecoglasnost); National Salvation Alliance (BAPU-Nikola Petkov, MRF, Green Party, New Choice, and the monarchist Federation “Kingdom of Bulgaria”).

** The coalitions were ADF (approximately the same composition); Coalition for Bulgaria (alliance of the left parties); MRF (in coalition with the Liberal Union and the Roma party Evroroma (Euroroma)).

*** The coalitions on the last elections: UDF (UDF, Democratic Party, Gergiovden (St. George’s Day), BAPU, National Association–BAPU, Movement for Equal and Social Model); Bulgarian People’s Union (BPU) (Union of Free Democrats, which separated from the UDF, BAPU–People’s Union, IMRO); Coalition for Bulgaria; Coalition Ataka (Attack) (the Attack Party and several other nationalist parties, which have not been represented parliamentary until now).
Two important elections dramatically changed the political status quo in the country in 2001. The parliamentary elections were a landslide for a coalition led by the former King Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, or Simeon II, – the National Movement for Simeon the Second (NMSS). The presidential elections in November brought to power Georgi Parvanov, the leader of the BSP. The results displayed the growing gap between popular perceptions of the democratic system and the elite’s own agenda: only three months after its formation – the ex-king’s Movement achieved victory in 28 of the country’s then 30 electoral districts. By declaring that he would “establish and lead a public movement for new ethics in politics and for new economic solutions,” Simeon successfully appealed to the anti-status quo and to the anti-establishment sentiments of the voters. Following several rounds of negotiations, the NMSS and MRF signed an agreement to govern the country together. As a result, for the first time since gaining its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Bulgaria had two ethnic Turks as ministers.

In spite of the criticism from the right, the NMSS–MRF government continued the UDF policy. It finalized the privatization in the banking sector and almost managed to privatize the big state monopolies in the energy and communication sectors; it signed the treaty with which Bulgaria became a NATO member (2004); it managed to complete successfully the negotiations and to sign the treaty for accession to the European Union (April 2005). Furthermore, unlike the former one, the NMSS–MRF government implemented aggressive social policy, which brought decrease of the unemployment and the relative share of the gray economy sector. On the other hand, the government did not manage to keep the exaggerated pre-election commitments of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, for “immediate and not token increase of incomes” and for reduction of the tax burden on the business. The relations between the coalition partners were not smoothly going either: MRF wanted to acquire larger control over the pre-accession funds and to a great extent managed to achieve that because the minister of agriculture was a MRF member; and the serious parliamentary crisis during the winter of 2005, related to the privatization of the tobacco monopoly “Bulgartabak”, was caused by MRF, which publicly declared support for the privatization but insisted on real compensations for the tobacco producers, most of whom are from the border minority regions.

The results of the last elections of June 2005 proved once again that the greatest challenge to Bulgaria’s electoral system in recent years has been the general public’s declining confidence that through elections individuals can influence policy making. The parties to the right were divided and they were not able to mobilize large support by the voters. The actions of the former Prime-Minister Ivan Kostov contributed significantly to that outcome. In 2004 Kostov did his best to transfer the negative effects of his rule to UDF and created a “new” party – Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB), which display some nationalist attitudes. Another weakness of the politicians to the right is their unwillingness to recognize NMSS as a natural partner, since notwithstanding the fact that NMSS defines itself as a center-right organization, in many aspects it is further to the right than UDF and its factions. NMSS lost half of its supporters as well and still won approximately as much seats in the Parliament as the divided right parties taken together. Having in mind that since 1990, BSP has been trying to move away from its Communist legacy, to build a modern leftist organization, and to legitimize itself in international aspect, it has given up the nationalist rhetoric, and following the 1997 political crisis, the party has supported Atlantic ideas. In 2003, BSP was accepted for full membership in the Socialist International and received serious criticisms from its supporters. In the end, none of the parties managed to win absolute majority and the bipolar model was substituted by a coalition party model, which emerged with the entry into politics of Simeon II and his NMSS. By the way, this
development was facilitated by the fact that the left and right political parties’ positions on key political issues have converged.

Following long and intense negotiation, in the summer of 2005, a three-party coalition (BSP–NMSS–MRF) was formed with the MRF’s mandate. The positions in the government were distributed under the formula 8: 5: 3, which approximately corresponds to the number of the parliamentary seats of the coalition partners.

The direct participation of MRF in the government of the country after the last elections is without precedent. The Movement won 34 seats in the Parliament – the greatest number since 1989 – and in the Council of Ministers, headed by the leader of the socialists Sergei Stanishev, MRF received two key ministries, which are directly related to the pre-accession funds: Dzhevdet Chakarov is the Minister of Environment and Waters and Nihat Kabil is the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Moreover, for a first time MRF has a Deputy Prime-Minister who is Minister of Disaster Management Policy – the former Deputy–Chairperson of MRF Emel Etem. District governors from MRF were appointed – once again in correspondence with the formula 8: 5: 3.

Another surprising result of the last elections is the success of Ataka (Attack) because this is the first time since 1989 for a Bulgarian nationalist party to be represented in the Parliament (see Table 1). The program of Attack deals with such painful issues as low incomes, and personal safety, and the blame for these is thrown upon the political class in general and the presence of the “illegitimate Turkish party MRF” in the government in particular. Attack stands behind the demonstrations against the appointment of district governors (and deputy-governors) from the MRF quota in “purely Bulgarian” districts, regardless of the fact that some of the nominated persons are ethnic Bulgarians. The success of the nationalistic populism was caused by the public disappointment by the reforms of the last 14 years, and the failure of successive governments on the left and right to fulfill public expectations for a rapid improvement of the Bulgarian economy; and also – as paradoxically as it sounds – by the refusal of the parties demonstrating “moderate” nationalism (BSP and DSB, and even IMRO) to use the ethnic confrontation in order to overcome the social tensions.4

On the other hand, MRF is subject to criticism on the part of the Turkish nationalists: the Turkish Democratic Party of Adem Kenan has been active since the autumn of 2005, and during the visit of the president of Turkey A. Sezer an individual named Menderes Kongün started to gather signatures under an appeal for recognition of the Turkish minority and against the “ethnic party” of Ahmed Dogan. MRF distanced itself from the nationalist actions in both cases; moreover, they were not supported by the Turkish population and had mainly media effect, while as a party from the ruling coalition MRF is well represented on all levels of the government.

Although MRF has never declared to be an ethnic party and Ahmed Dogan has stated, that new members are welcome regardless of their ethnicity or religion, MRF continues to be mainly a party of the Bulgarian Turks. Since the beginning of the transition the majority of Muslim Bulgarians from the mixed Blagoevgrad District have voted in support of MRF. The situation in the Smolyan District, however, is different:

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4 The most recent example was the decision of the Central Electoral Commission (based on the Bulgarian Electoral Law, Art. 6. line 2, and the d’Hont system, involving a mathematical model in which positions are shared between different parties on the basis of proportionality) to give all five places in the Parliament from the Kardzhali electoral district to MRF, notwithstanding the fact that the BSP’s candidate – a famous actor, who is at the moment minister of culture – received more votes than each of the MRF’s candidates taken individually. In spite of the fact that in the past the local BSP structures alluded to the “Turkish origin” of the MRF’s representatives, this time the protests were only political in their nature.
Table 2: Parliamentary Elections in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kardzhali District</th>
<th>Smolyan District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(seats in Parliament, %)</td>
<td>(seats in Parliament, %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP*</td>
<td>(10.88)</td>
<td>(7.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>1 (15.33)</td>
<td>(10.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRF</td>
<td>5 (59.94)</td>
<td>5 (58.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMSS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(14.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This situation confirms the trend described in the State of the Art Report: the Muslim Bulgarians look for representation through the national political parties, and predominantly through the parties to the right, thus following the general Bulgarian electoral model. At the same time, in contrast with the other regions of the state where – especially at the beginning of the transition – the former Communist Party used to gain more votes in the villages, while the population of the big cities supported in general the democratic forces, the border minority regions displayed the opposite characteristics: BSP had more supporters in the city of Smolyan, while the rest of the municipalities of the district voted “in blue”. The Table displaying the results of the last three parliamentary elections shows that since 2001 the voters for UDF have redirected their support towards NMSS and MRF. This trend can be seen more clearly if the results of the local elections in the districts of Kardzhali and Smolyan are compared.

3.1.2. Participation in the Local authorities

Table 3. Results of the 1999 and 2003 Local Elections in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kardzhali District</th>
<th>Smolyan District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mayors Seats in LC</td>
<td>Mayors Seats in LC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP*</td>
<td>- 15</td>
<td>- 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>1 28</td>
<td>- 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRF</td>
<td>4 94</td>
<td>7 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMSS</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>6 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2 14</td>
<td>- 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned in the State of the Art Report, the local authorities in Bulgaria are based on the territorial–administrative division of the country into municipalities and districts, which in general follows the model of the First Bulgarian (Tarnovo) Constitution (1879). The changes in the local government started in 1991 with the adoption of the new Constitution and of the Local Self-governement and Local Administration Act. With the Administration Act of 1998 and the Civil Servant Act of 1999 the legislative reform of the civil service has started. The basic territorial and administrative unit in the country is the municipality, while the division into districts is only for coordination between the national government and the municipalities. The municipalities are legal entities, have the right to own property, and have independent budgets.

* For the names of the coalitions – participants in the elections see Table 1.
They have authority to deal on a normative and executive level with all issues of local importance, including governance of municipal property, municipal development policies, education, healthcare, culture, provision of local public goods, social aid, environmental protection, etc. According to the Constitution, the district governors are appointed by the Council of Ministers. The bodies of municipal power are elected: the municipal council as a body of self-government, and the mayor as a body of local executive power.

Before 1989 Bulgarians held the major positions in the local administration of mixed regions. As a result of the changes the Turks and Muslim Bulgarians are now well represented on all levels of the local authorities and the relationships inside the municipal councils are rarely politicized. Contradictions on ethnic grounds are even rarer. Disputes are oriented mostly towards practical issues, like the need of restructuring of the local economy and of supporting private business. The field research found an astonishing unity of the municipal councilors from different political parties when voting on various initiatives, linked with the EU integration.

Although the budgets of the municipalities have been autonomous since 1992, the heaviest problem for the municipal authorities is their funding. Municipal governments have two sources of revenue: central budget subsidies and local and property taxes. Because of the constitutional requirement all tax rates to be approved by the National Assembly, local and property tax rates are defined by each municipality and then adopted en block by the parliament. The municipalities have complete control over their own budgets, except when they receive money from the central budget for targeted national programs. Traditionally, most municipalities rely on central government subsidies for many of their needs and in a lot of cases the municipalities governed by mayors belonging to the ruling party or coalition are in more favorable position.

In 2000 the UDF government took the first cautious step giving the local governments more control over their own money, but the process of enhancing local governance is still impeded by constitutional barriers to the financial autonomy of municipalities, despite the ongoing programs that have been promoting fiscal decentralization since 2003.

Since MRF participates directly in the central executive power for a second consecutive mandate, the contradictions between the local authorities in Kardzhali District and the central government are reduced to a minimum. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the municipalities need additional resources in order to co-finance the PHARE and SAPARD programs in which they participate actively. Another problem, partially resolved by the new development plans for 2007–2013 period, was that local authorities expected the enforcement of old decrees that guaranteed border and mountainous regions privileged regime.

### 3.2. Protection of Human Rights and Minority Rights in Bulgaria

Political changes in Bulgaria in the end of 1989 and the subsequent democratization enabled a full restoration of the rights of ethnic and religious communities. The fundamental law of the state – the 1991 Constitution – emphasizes the protection of the fundamental human rights. The Constitution also guarantees freedoms of speech, press, assembly, internal movement, and emigration. In addition, it guarantees the right to privacy and bars racial, ethnic, gender, and other forms of discrimination (Art. 6). It specifically protects economic freedom (Art. 19) and the right to property (Art. 17). It is true that the 1991 Constitution does not use the term

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5 This was not the case in the 1990s when MRF was in power in the Kardzhali district but did not participate in the central government, which was run either by BSP or by UDF. For details, see Anagnostou 2005: 97–98.
“minority”. The main argument behind this is that official recognition of the term would create grounds for claims that go beyond the sphere of human rights and involve certain complications in the sphere of interstate relations. Thus, instead of collective rights of the minorities, the Constitution protects the individual rights of every citizen. Several of its articles guarantee to persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic communities the right to preserve their culture, to practice their religion and to speak their language (Art. 36, section 2; Art. 37).

Prior to the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, the state undertook concrete measures to restore the rights of the Bulgarian Turks who had been subjected to legal persecution and forced assimilation. In January 1990, the government granted amnesty to 31 people who had been imprisoned since 1984 for opposing the assimilation campaign. In March 1990, the Parliament passed legislation that allowed ethnic Turks and Muslim Bulgarians to restore their original names, which had been forcibly changed, and in 1991 some 600,000 Turks, Pomaks, Roma and Tatars used this right. Another statute granted amnesty to all persons sued in connection with the assimilation campaign of 1984–1989: in November 1990 Article 273 of the Criminal Code, which criminalized “spreading untrue allegations” that lead to a “dissatisfaction with the government” or “confusion within society,” and other similarly vaguely worded offences was repealed. An amnesty was declared for those imprisoned under the law. The Parliament amended Article 108, which addresses “anti-state agitation and propaganda,” so that the provision now only prohibits the advocacy of violence, “fascism or another anti-democratic ideology”.

In December 1990, the rights of ethnic Turks to choose their own names, speak Turkish, and practice Islam were fully restored. Approximately 60 Turks who had been imprisoned for “treason and espionage” were freed. The assimilation campaign was officially recognized as an illegal act and violation of basic human rights. However, human rights organizations have complained that local prosecutors and magistrates sometimes fail to pursue vigorously crimes committed against minorities.

Two decrees of the Council of Ministers (No. 29, 1990 and No. 170, 1991) and the so-called Dogan Act (1992) constituted an indemnity package dealing with the housing, property and employment of Bulgarian citizens who had emigrated to Turkey in 1989 and had later returned. In conformity with these acts, no less than 3,000 houses were returned to their previous owners (Nedeva 1993: 134–135). The next step for regulation of the economic and social rights of the Turkish citizens was undertaken by the second UDF government. In the course of Ivan Kostov’s visit in Turkey in November 1998 the two states signed an agreement about the welfare payments by the Bulgarian government to the Bulgarian citizens permanently residing in Turkey. The agreement affects some 40,000–50,000 Bulgarian Turks who migrated to Turkey after May 1989.

Again, during the rule of the second UDF government, the president Petar Stoyanov signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe in October 1997, and on February 18, 1999 the Bulgarian National Assembly adopted a law for the ratification of the Convention. In order to synchronize the Bulgarian legislation with that of the European Union, Bulgaria has signed and ratified all internationally-adopted conventions on human rights protection (including the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

The institutional base, which should guarantee the protection of these rights, has been set up. In December 1997 the UDF government established the National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues within the Council of Ministers (recently renamed into National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues). The Council is a state-public institution with
the task to coordinate the cooperation between government institutions and NGOs, aimed at the implementation of the national policy on ethnic and demographic issues, and issues of migration. The level of minority rights respect and protection in Bulgaria is monitored by a number of non-governmental watchdogs concerned with human rights, and by international organizations.

Special provisions exist regulating the right of the members of the minorities to learn their mother language and securing their religious rights. As early as the beginning of 1990s, MRF insisted that instruction in Turkish language should be introduced as part of the regular curriculum in all Bulgarian schools. The demand caused a Bulgarian nationalist backlash. As a result the Bulgarian Parliament adopted Public Education Act in October 1991, which stipulated that Turkish could be taught only outside state schools. Several months later the newly appointed minister of education revised this policy. In view of the fact that most of the schools in Bulgaria are controlled by the municipalities and not by the state, the minister instituted Turkish instruction in public schools on an extracurricular basis. After 1989 two colleges for training of Turkish teachers as well as four religious high schools and a High Islamic Institute were established in Bulgaria. The teaching of Turkish language and literature was restored at the universities of Sofia and Shumen (Nitzova 1997: 729–739; Atanasova 2004: 394–397). In another positive development, the state-owned national television has launched a short Turkish-language newscast.

In December 2002, the National Assembly adopted the new Religions Act, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of religious beliefs (according to existing data, 84.9 % of the population is Orthodox Christian; another 13.1 % is Muslim; 0.8 %, Jewish; 0.7 %, Catholic; 0.3 %, Protestant; and 0.2 %, other). The interference of the state in the internal organization of the religious communities is declared inadmissible. Although it is a step forward in comparison with the old Denominations Act of 1949, the new statute was strongly criticized by religious groups and associations working in the field of human rights for its preferential treatment of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (by the way, according to Art.13, Sec. 3 of the 1991 Constitution the Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the “traditional” religion in Bulgaria). Furthermore, there are fears related to the wide powers of the Denominations Directorate within the Council of Ministers, especially with regard to its exclusive prerogatives to deliver “expert opinions” before the court on issues of registration, which procedure seems selective, sluggish, and non-transparent (IRF Report 2004).

3.3. Transition from centrally planned economy to market-based economy

3.3.1. Privatization of industrial enterprises and its social effect

The economic impact of the transition from centrally planned economy to market-based economy on the Muslim minorities in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District could be analyzed within the larger framework of economic transformation in Bulgaria. The first step of the changes was the transfer of property. Since 1989, privatization has been carried out in three main forms: restitution of land and urban property; cash sale of state and municipal assets; and mass privatization programs, including privatization through vouchers (Stanchev 2004). The restitution of land and urban property was regulated by four 1992 and one 1998 restitution acts, the 1991 Ownership and Use of Agricultural Land Act (the “Land Restitution Act,”) as well as by implementing provisions. The 1992 Transformation and Privatization of State-Owned and
Municipal-Owned Enterprises Act (or the “Privatization Act,” as it is often referred to) regulates the other methods of privatization; by-laws contain provisions on the different procedures for cash sales.

The actual privatization process began slowly and the transition proved to be a lengthy and costly process. There were many factors contributing to that. One of the important ones was the slow overcoming of the post-Communist legacy in the economic structures, and as a result the gross domestic product (GDP) continued to decrease well until 1997. The second UDF government (1997–2001) introduced fiscal austerity and undertook the necessary regulative and administrative measures to accelerate the reforms. The privatization procedures were simplified and accelerated. The government intended to privatize smaller mining, manufacturing, and food processing companies under a less rigorous timetable, and the general trend was the state to withdraw from the economy. By October 1997, approximately 43 % of the assets of these smaller companies had been exchanged for coupons held by citizens or managed for them by investment funds. In all, approximately 32 to 35 % of the long-term assets of the state-owned enterprises had been privatized by the end of 1997, and until the end of its rule in 2001, UDF managed to privatize almost all small and medium size enterprises, and a significant part of the large ones.

The fast privatization had a crucial effect on the local economy in the regions inhabited by the Muslim minorities. It had also a very high social price. The unemployment increased drastically, especially after insolvent firms that traditionally employed large numbers of people were closed. That is exactly what happened with the enterprises of the mining and ore processing industry, which were the basic source of income for the local population – Turks and Muslim Bulgarians.

The UDF strategy of fast privatization and state withdrawal from economy had also a strong political effect and led to an open conflict with MRF – the Movement criticized the UDF government and insisted on regionally-specific strategy, in which the central state should assist economic development of peripheral municipalities (Anagnostou 2005: 100–103). On the other hand, the liberalization of the economy and macroeconomic indicators were developing in compliance with the requirements of the EU integration and negotiation process.

### 3.3.2. Agrarian reform and its influence on regional development

The agrarian reform in Bulgaria consisted of two major processes carried out in parallel: land reform and structural reform. As a result of the land reform program, the socialist bi-modal agricultural structure — large state co-operatives (TKZS) and small household plots — had been destroyed and replaced by new structures: individual private farms and farming companies, or cooperatives, established by owners who usually did not cultivate the restituted lands but preferred to grant them on a lease (Kopeva, Mihaylov 1999). The restitution of property over agricultural land was completed in 2001, while 80 % of the forests, where the restitution process started much later, are restituted.

According to the 1992 census, the prevailing part of the landless had ethnic minority identity. However, the statistical data reveal that the Turkish population in the Kardzhali District region has restored its ownership over the land and its members do not have legal problems to prove their property rights. Unlike them, the Muslim Bulgarians are listed on second place, after the Roma, as a community that does not own or owns insignificant amount of agricultural land (Kopeva, Mihaylov 1999). Probably the reason for that situation is the fact described in the
previous report – almost 70% of the territory of the Smolyan District is covered by forests, while the agricultural land does not exceed 25%. Furthermore, although the agrarian reform is de-facto finished, its formalization through the issuing of proper deeds is still in progress. The field research revealed that the aged Muslim Bulgarians in the region are not in a hurry to show the notarial deeds for their restituted lands. This attitude is partially caused by their unwillingness to face the bureaucratic administration, and partially by the fact that the collectivization was never really felt as a fact in the highland areas – the agricultural lands are small and separated by the distance, so even after the collectivization all individuals new very well “their own lands”. And yet, the unclear situation with the legal documents is an obstacle for both the development of the agricultural land market and of the long-term leases to farming companies.

Land restitution is often identified by local elites as a precondition for solving the problems in agriculture. The practice has proved that the issue is not that simple. It has become clear that the basic problems are caused by the quality of the soil and the climatic conditions, which allow the cultivation of a limited number of plant sorts (mainly potatoes and tobacco). The land owned by Turks and Muslim Bulgarians as a rule is eroded, deforested or insufficient to provide for a living. Thus, agriculture proved not to be a viable solution to poverty and unemployment in Southern Bulgaria. What is more, tobacco production, which provided the basic means of living for more than half of the Muslim population in the Rhodope Mountains, suffers severe crisis.

3.4. EU Integration and regional development

The most important external factor stimulating the democratic changes in Bulgaria and directly influencing the development of the minority regions is the European integration and the European regional policy in particular.

At the beginning of the transition, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community and the signing of the Convention on Trade, Business and Economic Relations in May, 1990, were important steps, due to which Bulgaria managed to overcome the political and economic isolation, caused by the assimilation campaign against the Bulgarian Turks. The PHARE Program was opened for Bulgaria, and in the first half of the 1990s several governments and the Bulgarian Parliament confirmed the desire of Bulgaria to become a member of the European Community (1990–1992), and the European Union respectively (after 1993). The preliminary consultations in relation to the accession conditions were started by Luben Berov’s Cabinet (1993). The next steps were made by the government of Zhan Videnov (in March 1995 the Council of Ministers adopted Decree No 66 whereby a special European integration mechanism, involving a Government Committee, a Coordinating Commission, and a Secretariat on European Integration at the Council of Ministers, were created; in December 1995 the Bulgarian Parliament adopted a decision for official application of Bulgaria for EU membership), but the financial collapse and the following political crisis postponed with several years the possibility for Bulgaria to meet the Copenhagen criteria, adopted in June 1993.

Agenda 2000 of July 1997 mentioned the desire of Bulgaria to apply for membership, but the opinion expressed was that the country was still not ready to begin negotiations for accession. Meanwhile the Ivan Kostov’s government prepared a National Strategy on Bulgaria’s Accession to EU (1998) and a National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (NPAA),
which set in detail the first steps and actions of the country; the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed (1997) and ratified (1999). During the rule of the second UDF government the European integration became a basic priority for Bulgaria, and that idea was accepted with consensus by all political forces represented in the Parliament.

Immediately after the decision of the European Council to start negotiations for accession with Bulgaria and five other countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Malta), adopted in Helsinki at the end of 1999, the Council of Ministers issued Decree No 3 upon which the Chief Negotiator of Bulgaria, the core team for negotiations, and work groups according to negotiations’ chapters were appointed, and the Parliament established a Commission on European Integration (2000).

The next important steps towards accession were made in 2002: the regular report of the European Commission recognized Bulgaria as a “functioning market economy” and supported its desire to join the EU in 2007 (officially confirmed on the meetings in Prague and Copenhagen at the end of 2002; at that time the so-called Roadmap for accession was adopted). The accession treaty was signed in Luxembourg on April 26, 2005, and the so-called “safeguard clauses” were incorporated in it, which guarantee the possibility for a review of “serious problems that may arise before accession or in the three years after accession”. These clauses allow the EU to temporarily exclude Bulgaria from certain policy areas from 2007 until 2010 if the country implements reforms too slowly. Besides, the EU will continue to closely monitor Bulgaria’s progress in the implementation of the reforms.

Within the five-year period (2000–2004), during which Bulgaria managed to implement the Copenhagen criteria to a degree enough for it to start and complete the accession negotiations, the country received support through the PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD programs. The increased funding from the EU, the requirement for co-financing from Bulgaria, and the policy of continuity between the pre-accession and structural funds on the one hand and the cohesion fund on the other, which Bulgaria will start to receive after 2007, necessitated concrete institutional and legislative changes, which were mentioned in the previous report.

3.4.1. Legislative amendments and regional development planning

In 2000 the Council of Ministers (Decree No 145/27.07.2000) defined six planning regions (corresponding to the level NUTS II of the EU), as basis for planning, execution and monitoring of regional interventions in the decentralized system, consistent with the practice of EU regional policy. Consequently, the changes were regulated with the new Regional Development Act of February 2004 (State Gazette, No 14/20.02.04), which substituted the former statute of 1999 (SG, 26/1999 г.). The objectives of the Act are “establishment of conditions for balanced and stable development of the regions in the Republic of Bulgaria” and “…reduction of interregional and intraregional differences in the economic development of the country”. The Act envisages two types of regional divisions:

Six planning regions (the fifth one is the South Central one, which includes the two districts, subject of the research: Smolyan and Kardzhali), and

Target zones within each planning region, which correspond to the degree of development. These are: economic development areas, industrial decline areas, underdeveloped border areas, underdeveloped rural areas, and underdeveloped mountainous areas. The target zones are defined as territorial foundation for the implementation of regional policy and include the territories of one or more neighboring municipalities. It is important to notice that a single
municipality can be included in more than one target zone, if the municipality meets the criteria for that (Art. 7, Sec. 7).

The development of national and regional strategies for regional development started as early as 1999–2000, and those strategies were based on economic analysis of the planning regions; definition of the priorities for development; as well as the means through which the desired results must be achieved. National, regional and municipal development plans for 2000–2006 period were created on the basis of the strategies; the plans envisage the funds necessary for their implementation, in correspondence with the state budget.

3.4.2. Implementation of the pre-accession funds in the South Central Region (SCR)

Of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the EU the Bulgarian administration has most experience with the PHARE program. The total budget of the program for Bulgaria is 2,400 million Euro and contracts for ninety-three projects have been signed; 12.9% of the projects and 10.2% (245,619 Euro) of the budget funds have been received by the six regions of the SCR. The Smolyan district has 2.2% of the projects and has received 0.9% of the funds (for the country) and the Kardzhali one – 1.1% of the projects and the funds (Ikonomicheskolo 2003).

There are no statistics on the implementation of the aid under SAPARD program because the projects are individual and are accounted for under measures for the country as a whole. Bulgaria has been a party to the annual SAPARD programs from 2000 to 2003 including, and the general budget under these four annual programs has been 291.8 million Euro, the contracts signed have been for projects with the value of 234.8 million Euro, while the de-facto utilized funds have amounted to 78.4 million Euro. The projects from the ISPA program, which, albeit only partially, are realized on the territory of SCR, have the value of 15,921.5 thousand €; in addition to that an ecologically oriented project is being implemented by the Smolyan and Kardzhali municipalities (24,471 and 14,547 Euro respectively).

4. Changing opportunities and constraints for minorities

4.1. Social-economic characteristics of Smolyan and Kardzhali Districts of SC Region

The territory of the two district subject to the research (Smolyan and Kardzhali) is 6 402 sq. km. (3 209 sq. km. and 3 192.9 sq. km. respectively). The Kardzhali District (KD) includes seven municipalities and the Smolyan District (SD) – ten.

According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI) data for 2004, the population of the two districts is 292 893 people, while according to the last census (2001), the number of the population was 302 143, i.e. the demographic trends in the two districts follow the negative model of the country as a whole. Over the period 1995–1999 the population of SCR decreased with 4.8%. This trend continued in the next three years (1999–2001), and the greatest decrease was in KD – 18.8% (9.5% for SD); this was caused by negative natural population growth and by emigration. And yet the decrease of population in SCR was on a slower rate than that in the rest of the regions; the birth rate for the 1999–2001 period increased from 8.9 to 9.1%.

The population density of the KD and SD is the lowest for the SCR – only 8.3% and respectively 7% of the population live there and most of it is in the rural areas. The two districts
are the only ones in SCR where the urban population is below or near 50%: 32.7% for Kardzhali and 50% for Smolyan.

**Table 4. Population of Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts in December, 2004, by Place of Residence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In city/town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>7 761 049</td>
<td>5 431 846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCR</td>
<td>1 933 271</td>
<td>1 269 908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smolyan D</td>
<td>133 015</td>
<td>70 034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kardzhali D</td>
<td>159 878</td>
<td>65 159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned in the previous report, the population is of mixed character: The Turks are the majority in KD (in all the municipalities of the district) – 61.6%; the second largest group are the Christian Bulgarians – 34%, and the smallest group are the Muslim Bulgarians - approximately 4.2%, although it is possible that an insignificant part of the latter group (approximately 0.7%) define themselves as Turkish. The number of the individuals living in the Smolyan District who self-identify as Bulgarians is 87.6% but only 29.6% declare that they belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church (21.4% in Kardzhali District), while 41.9% self-identify themselves as Muslims (69.6% in KD), and the percentage of those who refuse to declare religious affiliation is relatively high (11%). The Turks is Smolyan district are 4.4%, living in three villages in the Devin-Dospat area. According to the third criterion used in the 2001 census – mother tongue – Bulgarian is the native language for 34.7% of the population of the Kardzhali district, while the Turkish speaking individuals are 61.53%; in the Smolyan district the numbers are 92.2% and 4.1% respectively. The comparison of the data from the three indicators leads to the conclusion that in SD the majority of residents are Muslim Bulgarians, considerable number of whom are with latent religious affinity, or preferring not to declare their confession; the second largest group are Christian Bulgarians; and a small number of Turks also live in the district (in the three villages). Therefore, the Bulgarian national majority is “local minority” in both districts subject of the research.

SD and KD are located in the Rhodope Mountains. The infrastructure is relatively well developed, but its overall condition in unsatisfactory. As a result of the natural environment, the inherited social-economic structure, the policy in the past, and the dynamics of the development in the transition period, well displayed disproportions can be observed in the economic development, employment, incomes, and living standard of the population of the two districts, both with regard to the indicators for the SCR, and for the country in general. This can be displayed by the preliminary territorial range of the target zones (i.e. the areas that need aid), determined in April 2005 on the basis of the data from the NSI and in correspondence with the Regional Development Act after its amendments and supplements (SG 31/12.04.2005).

**Table 5. Target Zones in Smolyan and Kardzhali Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>underdeveloped rural areas</th>
<th>underdeveloped border areas</th>
<th>underdeveloped mountainous areas</th>
<th>economic development areas</th>
<th>industrial decline area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borino</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dospat</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zlatograd</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it can be seen from the table 5, there is not a single municipality in both districts, which can be included in the most perspective group of the “economic development areas”. Furthermore, most of the municipalities (with the exception of the towns of Kardzhali and Dzhebel) fall under more than one target zone. Almost all municipalities (all ten in the SD and six out of seven in the KD) are classified as “underdeveloped mountainous areas”, characterized by average altitude of 600 meters above the sea level, low degree of development of transport, technical and social infrastructure, limited possibilities for employment, high levels of unemployment, low incomes, and depopulation. The second significant group – “underdeveloped border areas” – includes six municipalities from SD and two from KD, which are situated on the border with Greece, and also are characterized by low social-economic development. Six municipalities (four in SD and two in KD) are “underdeveloped rural areas”, and four towns (Madan and Rudozem in SD, and Kardzhali and Momchilgrad in KD) are classified as “industrial decline areas”, characterized by a high relative share of old industries (mining and ore-processing), worsened economic results, and high percentage of unemployment accompanying the structural reform.

The location of the KD and SD is exceptionally favorable for CBC with Greece, which is highly relied upon to overcome the isolation of the two districts in the context of the European integration of the country. The greatest problem at the moment is the absence of border checkpoints on their territory, despite the existing intergovernmental agreements under PHARE–CBC.

The basic indicators for the social-economic condition and for the adaptability of KD and SD to the changing demands of the economic activity are: their contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Bulgaria, the situation on the labor market, the structure of the economy, the degree of penetration of the private sector and the development of middle and small enterprises (MSE), the amount of the direct foreign investments.

The SCR contribution to the GDP of the country has been relatively constant: during the period 1999–2003 the region was second in significance for the Bulgarian economy after the South West Region, having a relative share of 20% (21% for 1999, 20.89% for 2000 and 20.64% for 2001), and real growth of 9.39% for 2001. The analyses made for the preparation of the National Plan for Development envisage that this trend will continue until 2006. On the other hand, the relative share of the KD and SD is lower than that of the other four districts in the SCR (under 20% for 2001) and has dropped by 1.88% for KD, and has increased with 2.2% for the SD.

Labor Market. Less than 700,000 individuals are engaged in the different economic spheres of the SCR (690, 400 for 2000). Until 2000, the trend for the country in general and for the SCR in particular was decrease of employment and increase of the number of the unemployed. Over the period 1999–2000 the registered unemployment in SCR increased from
16.7% to 17.9%, while in both of the districts, subject to the research, the climax came in 2001–2002. This negative trend was to a great extent related to the restructuring of the economy. The public sector offered less employment possibilities because of the ongoing privatization, while the private sector was incapable to accommodate all individuals, dismissed from the public one. Still, in 2000, 52.7% of the employees in SCR worked for the private sector.

In order to describe the economic characteristics of the SCR, it is important to display the employment structure in accordance with the sectors of the economy. The share of the employed in agriculture, forestry, and industry has decreased. The greatest number of individuals works in the services sector. There is some increase of the employment in the industry in the KD and SD, but as a result of the lack of data on the movement of the employed in the agricultural sector, we can only conclude that the percentage in this sector is rather high; as it can be seen in the table, this percentage is near and above fifty. It is important to highlight the lower level of unemployment in the KD in comparison with that for the country. This situation is caused mainly by the high number of tailoring firms in the district (approximately fifty to sixty). On the other hand, SD occupies one of the last places in the national table of employment, the lowest unemployment rates being registered in the center – Smolyan – and in the small town of Chepelare.

Table 6. Labor Market and Unemployment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative share of the employees in the industry compared to the total number of employed individuals (%)</th>
<th>Employees in the agriculture</th>
<th>Unemployment (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>39.98</td>
<td>39.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ardino</td>
<td>38.39</td>
<td>40.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzhebel</td>
<td>22.09</td>
<td>45.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkovo</td>
<td>34.97</td>
<td>37.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krumovgrad</td>
<td>37.38</td>
<td>39.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kardzhali</td>
<td>48.79</td>
<td>49.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momchilgrad</td>
<td>48.95</td>
<td>57.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chernooshene</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>30.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banite</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>18.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borino</td>
<td>22.13</td>
<td>33.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>35.22</td>
<td>39.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dospat</td>
<td>58.42</td>
<td>63.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zlatograd</td>
<td>48.69</td>
<td>50.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madan</td>
<td>55.54</td>
<td>55.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nedelino</td>
<td>40.55</td>
<td>43.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudarez</td>
<td>58.21</td>
<td>59.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smolyan</td>
<td>34.09</td>
<td>38.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepelare</td>
<td>26.46</td>
<td>32.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agriculture, a traditional occupation in the past, is in decline in the SD as a result of the abrupt transition to private property and fragmentation of the land. In 2000 the sector took the last place among the six basic sectors of the district’s economy in terms of sales; trade, industry, construction, transport, and tourism were ahead of it. In KD the agriculture has preserved its monoculture nature – the region is well-known producer of oriental tobacco brands. Tobacco growing is the basic activity and source of income in five out of the six municipalities in the district, in Krumovgrad municipality, for example, more than 50% of the active population works in that sphere.
The industry in SCR produced 34.05% of the gross added value (GAV) in the region in 2001 and 34.2% in 2003. The distribution of the production of the industrial enterprises in the SCR is an important indicator for the industrial profile of the region, which is characterized with, albeit insignificant, increase of the relative share of the food industry at the expense of other industrial branches. In 2001 the basic products of the region were foods, beverages, and tobacco – 23.06%. Metallurgy and the production of metal goods had relatively stable rate of development and market demand (internal and foreign) – their share of the production was 11.5%. The production of machines (smelting and metal processing) and resource extracting industries displayed similar level of performance, losing their role as factors determining the economic structure; their production had reduced to 11.3%. These trends and indicators didn’t change significantly during the next couple of years.

The number of the MSE in the SCR has been constantly increasing in the recent years. This is a typical trend for the country in general and a natural result of the restructuring of the economy. There were 53,809 registered companies at the end of 2000, which employed 30% of the total number of employees. At the same time approximately 93.5% of the MSE had one to ten employees. The KD and SD have the lowest concentration of MSE – 7% and 8% of all companies in the SCR are located on their territories and the number of the employed in the private sector is the lowest for the country.

The situation with the direct foreign investments is not good either. In 2001 the SCR took the place before the last among the six planning regions in accordance with the distribution of the direct foreign investments; it had 5% or 132,462.7 million USD. The distribution within the region is extremely uneven. The KD is one place from the bottom for the country as a whole. Over the period 1992–2001 it managed to attract investments of 2.4 million USD. In 2001 the share of the KD in the investments in the SCR was only 3%, while the share of the SD was even smaller – 1%; according to the foreign investments indicator, SD holds 22nd place in the country. Over the period 1992–2001 it managed to attract investments of 12.9 million USD, which was an insignificantly small amount.

The analysts assessment of the social-economic situation in the SCR is that the region has a potential for development but there are considerable disproportions between the most developed districts – Plovdiv and Stara Zagora – and the most underdeveloped ones – Kardzhali and Smolyan, the latter being included among the areas that are in need of aid. As a result of that the National Plan for Economic Development (2000–2006) proposes the region to receive investment support for economic and social approximation, financed under the PHARE program. The SCR was the first one for which a Regional Innovation Strategy was developed (2001–2004). On the basis of the regional development plan, a SWOT-analysis was made of the advantages and disadvantages, of the possibilities for and the limitations of the social-economic development of KD and SD, which came to the following generalized results:

**Advantages:** preserved nature; presence of resources and a potential for development of tourism, logging and wood-processing, textile, power production etc; existing facilities in the mining industry; presence of qualified labor force; well developed power supply network.

**Disadvantages:** high unemployment; poor infrastructure and road network, which is not in compliance with the European safety and comfort standards of traveling; increase of the incomes received in kind; low purchasing capacity of the population; absence of own investment capital for the local entrepreneurs; ineffective institutional structure to support the development of the private initiative; difficult access to bank credits.
**Possibilities:** the opening of new border check-points will increase the economic attractiveness of the region; the building of road network in the municipalities will contribute to the improvement of the transport communications and the normal functioning of the economy; the introduction of technologies to prevent the production of industrial waste in logging and wood-processing industries; reform in the structure of the production of goods by directing it to products based on the local agriculture and resource extracting industry, in order a complete production and technological line to be created; establishment of exchange and commodity markets for agricultural products; stimulation of the producers of organic food; search of prospects for establishment of joint ventures with foreign participation; expansion of the offering of tourist services through encouragement of rural, hunting, fishing, speleological, mountain trekking, and other alternative types of tourism.

**Risks:** the region is distant and peripheral; the investment regional projects are not financially guaranteed; the dependency on the central budget financing increases; the liquidation of entire sectors as extraction of uranium, electronics, mining; chain reaction emigration of people and enterprises; insufficiently developed infrastructure; absence of markets for part of the producers; the agriculture cannot be the only alternative on the territory of KD and SD.

The analysis of the regional economy displays that it is in recreational and defensive strategic position, which means that it cannot rely on stabilization without centralized investments and implementation of centralized programs; the gaps between advantages and disadvantages are too great, which means that their closing requires significant amount of time; the level of the risks is high, which implies a serious hazard for the implementation of the strategic programs for development of the region.

According to the SWOT analysis, the two fundamental approaches for recreation and stabilization of the local economy are:

- **Resource approach**, based on the utilization of the resources existing in the region. This approach can be developed in two directions: organization of production of goods with higher degree of processing of the raw materials, and commercialization of the resources, which have not been used until now. This approach is for the local authorities and institutions.

- **Investment approach**, relying on commitments on the part of the central authorities to the region, while the local authorities and institutions are to propose, direct, and lobby for centralized investments and to create conditions for their realization.

4.2. Cultural mobilization of Turks and Muslim Bulgarians in Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts

The constitutional and legislative regulation of the language and religious rights of minorities, including in the sphere of education, is referred to above. Studying of Turkish language (by the Turks) and the religious education (for the Bulgarian-Muslims and the Turks) are evaluated by the representatives of the minorities as a means of preservation of their group cultural identity and coherence, as well as a way for them to acquire the right of equal opportunities by reforming previously discriminatory educational policies (Atanassova 2004: 393). However, this is only the first point at issue. The other is related to granting an equal access to education for minorities and majority, which is to put on an equal basis the perspective for professional career. These two aspects of the situation of the minority education are analyzed hereunder, mainly on the basis of sociological surveys, as no sufficient statistical data are available.
4.2.1. Studying of Turkish Language

The supplements to Art. 8, Sec. 2 of the National Education Act (SG No 36/1998), legalized the practice introduced by Decree No 183 of September 1994, of the Council of Ministers: “Pupils, whose mother language is not Bulgarian shall have the right, apart from the mandatory study of Bulgarian language, to study their mother language in the municipal schools...”; and the term “mother language” is defined broadly in another legal document (Rules on the Application of the National Education Act, Art. 5, Sec.4) as “…the language in which the child communicates in the family before the child starts to go to school.”

The studying of Turkish language is an optional subject from first to eighth grade (four hours per week, outside the regular curriculum). Teaching programs, textbooks, and dictionaries are prepared and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, and the children are provided with textbooks free of charge, i.e. they are paid for by the municipality. On the other hand, the opinion of parents is that the textbooks are out of date (they have not been changed since 1993) and insufficient in number. Another problem is the requirement for a minimum number of pupils willing to study Turkish in order for a group to be created – the general requirement for the country is for thirteen children and in small settlements the number of the pupils may be lower (down to seven) if the corresponding municipal council has adopted decision to that end. All this impedes the process of teaching and creates dissatisfaction among the parents.

In 1999 the Turkish language became a part of the curriculum after 8th grade as well (72 school hours in ninth and tenth grade, and 108 school hours in eleventh and twelfth); it was included among the so-called mandatory-selection subjects (MSS – i.e. a list of subject from which the student is obliged to pick a certain number) and once again restrictions on the number of students in a group were introduced (no less than eleven and no more than 20). The Turkish language became a MSS from the first grade in the 2002–2003 school year, the other two in the list were English language and choreography i.e. today the parents have to choose if their children will study their mother language or one of the other two subjects. According to a representative sociological survey, this is one of the reasons for the difference among the number of children who wish to study their mother language (30%) and the actual number of children who do that (only 19.5% of the Turkish pupils are studying Turkish in school); the parents prefer their children to study English language, which gives them better perspectives for the future.

According to the statistical data, in the 2001–2002 school year, the Turkish language was studied by 34,860 pupils in 520 schools, and taught by 703 teachers, most of whom (over 80%) licensed to teach that subject.

Apart from the municipal schools, where Turkish is studied as “mother language”, it is also taught as foreign language in the Muslim denominational schools in Shumen, Russe, and Momchilgrad, and in specialized private schools: “Balkan School” of the “Bulgarian Colleges’ Foundation and the Private Language School “Druzba” of the Bulgarian-Turkish Democratic Foundation.

4.2.2. Religious education of the Muslim Minorities

The religious education of the Muslim community children is an important stage of their socialization, giving them the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their religious obligation. Immediately after 1989, the local mesdjit (small mosques) and mosques resumed the
traditional “teaching of the Koran” (including recitations of the holy book in Arab language, explanation of the rules of the prayer, and of the fundamental principles of the religion) for the children in the primary grades of school, and even for those too young to go to school. The classes were taught by local *hodja* (teachers) outside the school curriculum. In the end, an exam had to be taken before the local *ulema* (the body of scholars of Muslim religion and law) and the children were gradually becoming part of the local community of believers. There are no data on the number of children who have finished this type of training, but especially in the first years this approach was wide-spread. The textbooks and other necessary equipment were provided by the Office of the Chief Mufti.

In the 1997–1998 school year, after more than fifty years of suspension, the general schools reintroduced religion as an optional subject, and the “Religion-Islam” discipline was introduced as optional subjects for grades from one to four in the next year (as part of the basic subject). In order for the subject to be included in the curriculum at least 12 pupils were required. Over the period 1999–2001, 3215 children in 78 settlements underwent experimental teaching. The teaching programs were created by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in cooperation with the Office of the Chief Mufti, the latter providing the textbooks. The “Secondary Education” Department of MES has had an expert on religion since 2001 (Doklad 2003).

In 2002, the amendments in Educational Degree, Basic Educational Minimum, and Curriculum Act, made the subject “Religion” a MSS in the cultural-educational sphere “Social Sciences, Civil Education and Religion” for grades from one to twelve.

Until 2002 this form of education was financed by the central budget and the Office of the Chief Mufti. After the reform of 2002, the task was transferred to the municipalities, and the lack of funds there meant that the discipline could not be studied even if there were individuals willing to attend such classes.

As early as 1991, the National Assembly adopted a decision, which created three denominational Islamic schools in Shumen, Russe and Momchilgrad (with a branch in the village of Rogozche, Dzhebel Region, Eastern Rhodopes). The teaching there is from ninth to twelfth grade under curriculum approved by the MES and the Office of the Chief Mufti. The denominational schools teach general disciplines (as in the regular high schools) and eight special subjects in the sphere of religion (history of religion, history of Islam, science of Koran, Arab language, etc.). The students do not have to pay for tuition, their textbooks and equipment are provided free of charge and are approved by MES and the Office of Chief Mufti. At the end of their studies the students receive diploma for secondary education from MES and diploma for *imam hatip* from the Office of the Chief Mufti, which allows them to work as imams in the mosques. The students are predominantly boys (138 in Momchilgrad in 2004), while the branch in Rogozche teaches girls (87 in 2004).

The applicants for the denominational schools are more than the available places and selection procedure is being implemented, giving priority to orphans and children from poor families from the regions of Gotse Delchev, Blagoevgrad, Devin, Dospat, Pazardzhik, Madan and Rudozem; these children a provided with board and lodging.

The students and the teachers are both Turks and Muslim Bulgarians. The teachers are mainly alumni of the secondary denominational schools and of the High Islamic Institute in Sofia; many of them have additional qualifications acquired in Turkey, or come from Turkey. The educational process is controlled by the regional inspectors on education of MES and by the Office of the Chief Mufti; no offences have been found until now.
The Islamic denominational schools are financed by the Office of the Chief Mufti, the Dyanet Vakfi (Directorate on Denominations of the Republic of Turkey), and by donations.

In addition, the so-called “illegal Islamic schools” exist; usually under the name “Koran Teaching” (two of them are on the territory of SD – in Dospat and Ustina). Such schools can be licensed only by the Bulgarian Denomination Directorate and a class must last for at least 2–3 months. Most of these classes have been licensed only by the Office of the Chief Mufti (Sarnitsa) or remained unlicensed and covered up as “boarding houses”. The courses in the illegal schools are nine months long and those who have taken them do not receive any document for acquired qualification or degree. The unclear status of that type of teaching creates suspicions that these classes are dedicated to “radical Islam”, that Jihad and “religious intolerance” are propagated. According to a journalist investigation (“Capital” Weekly of August 2004), and statements of high-ranking Muslim clerics (who are in opposition to the Chief Mufti), these illegal schools are funded by the “al-Waqf al-Islami” Foundation, which was banned in Saudi Arabia in 2001, and which prior to that, in the beginning of 1990s, had financed the construction of mosques in Northeastern Bulgaria. These allegations have not been proven until now, but it is sure that the ideological controversy over the issue whether these schools teach the “traditional” for the Bulgarians Hanifi Islam, or the fundamentalist Wahabi one, is actually a cover for political and economic interests.

The Muslims have one more form of religious teaching, the so-called “Summer Classes in Islam”, which started in 1998 and are organized by the Office of the Chief Mufti during the summer holiday. The large-spread interest in these classes can be displayed by the fact that in 2001 in the region of Smolyan they were attended by 1,000 children from 45 settlements.

### 4.2.3. Educational Level of the Muslim Minorities

According to the national statistical data from 2001, the educational structure of the Bulgarian population is clearly differentiated. Table 7 represents basic data on the population of KD and SD in respect to the level of education. As these data do not incorporate ethnic and religious belonging, and in many of the settlement the population is of mixed character, the data from national representative survey on the educational situation among minorities could also be referred to (Project 2003).

**Table 7. Population in accordance with level of education at March 31, 2001.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Bachelor</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Secondary School</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Not displayed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>716 863</td>
<td>333 671</td>
<td>2 826 821</td>
<td>2 049 443</td>
<td>1 372 722</td>
<td>132 888</td>
<td>471 686</td>
<td>24 807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>3 178</td>
<td>4 875</td>
<td>3 599</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ardino</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1 757</td>
<td>3 278</td>
<td>2 264</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzehebel</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>4 544</td>
<td>8 948</td>
<td>7 040</td>
<td>1 167</td>
<td>1 621</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkovo</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>3 868</td>
<td>6 750</td>
<td>5 597</td>
<td>1 201</td>
<td>1 404</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krumovgrad</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>3 868</td>
<td>6 750</td>
<td>5 597</td>
<td>1 201</td>
<td>1 404</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kardzhali</td>
<td>4 237</td>
<td>3 285</td>
<td>20 861</td>
<td>20 139</td>
<td>13 158</td>
<td>3 206</td>
<td>4 552</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momchilgrad</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>3 981</td>
<td>5 971</td>
<td>4 250</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>1 099</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chernoochene</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>1 772</td>
<td>4 077</td>
<td>2 938</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1 867</td>
<td>1 945</td>
<td>1 969</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banite</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1 200</td>
<td>1 227</td>
<td>1 130</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>4 472</td>
<td>4 857</td>
<td>3 391</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dospat</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3 317</td>
<td>3 198</td>
<td>2 345</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zlatograd</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>4 863</td>
<td>3 864</td>
<td>3 170</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madan</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>4 295</td>
<td>4 431</td>
<td>3 350</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nedelino</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>2 855</td>
<td>2 459</td>
<td>2 120</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the sociological surveys, more than 97% of the well-educated individuals in the country are Bulgarians, while the share of the Turks with university education among all citizens with university education is approximately 1.2% (the Muslim Bulgarians are not included in the results). This means that only 2.7% of the Turkish population is with university education. In particular, it is disturbing that the share of those who do not even have primary education is 5.6%, and most of them are absolutely illiterate (3, 45%). The situation looks even worse, given the fact that the school education is free of charge and accessible to all citizens.

The problems start even below the school level – approximately 16% of the Turkish children have not been in kindergarten (6.8% for the Bulgarians). Approximately 16%–18% of the parents explain that situation with their inability to pay the required taxes and fees. The absence of pre-school teaching has a permanent effect on the teaching and the integration of the children in the schools. Approximately 46% of the Turks does not know the Bulgarian alphabet when they start to go to school (17.2% of the Bulgarians does not either) and 59.3% of the Turkish children respond that they need additional classes in Bulgarian language. As a result, the average grades of the children (both belonging to the minorities or the majority) who have not been in kindergarten are significantly lower.

Another serious problem is the fact that, unlike the Bulgarians, most of the children belonging to minorities tend to leave school before reaching the age of 16. According to the NSI data, in the 2003–2004 school year 2.93% of the pupils in KD and 0.86% in the SD had stopped to go to school, the main explanations being: departure abroad (approximately 55% of the respondents in KD and 25% in SD) or family considerations (17% and 48% respectively) (Novatorski 2005). The NGOs have positive experience in overcoming this situation: IMIR, for example, has been implementing for six years the stipend program “Rodopi” (Rhodopes) for Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian children living in the border and remote regions in the Eastern and Western Rhodopes. The program has proved that the parents of the children who perform excellently in school need insignificant encouragement to send their talented kids to the nearby town/city to continue their education in elite high schools; and almost 90% of these children enter the universities as a next step.

To sum up, the overall situation is disturbing, as the lower education level places the Turks and the Muslim Bulgarians in a disadvantaged position on the labor market, and this is one of the reasons for the high levels of unemployment among them. Most of them have secondary education, which is not enough to make them really competitive. On the other hand, the low incomes from unqualified labor create a barrier before securing of better education for the next generations.

5. Local actors responses and perceptions

5.1. Economic development of the region and the EU integration

The opinion of the respondents about the socio-economic development of the Kardzhali and Smolyan districts almost fully corresponds to the expert evaluations. Unemployment, underdeveloped infrastructure, weak interest of investors – both domestic and foreign, isolation
and emigration were named as the main problems. Some respondents also noted the limited possibilities of enterprises for introduction of new technologies, low-skilled work force, and closure of small manufactures, which used to provide employment in mountain areas. In agricultural regions, the main problems are small size and segmentation of arable land, which makes the use of agricultural machines difficult. Lack of initiative and disbelief that people could improve their situation on their own has been also mentioned as important obstacles.

The economic situation begun to improve in 2000–2001, and especially after 2003, when the government of NMSS–MRF took several concrete measures (respondents named the following as the most important: in 7 out of 10 municipalities of Smolyan district, enterprises were granted significant tax cuts, which increased the investments from other parts of the country; subsidies from the fund of the program for regional development “Rhodopes”).

Although the revival of the regional economic development roughly corresponds to the arrival of pre-accession funds to the region, not all interviewees are convinced that there is a direct link between the two. The main reason is that few believe that the project realized until now – mainly from PHARE program – will have long-term effects (“No long-term jobs are being created”) and the interviewees from the private sector stress that they are not encouraged to develop their businesses and make profit. The fact is that the effect of pre-accession funds is negligible outside the local administration, NGOs and few businesses, which are involved in the work on EU funded projects.

However, most respondents believe that it is logical that the EU funds are directed above all towards building of civil society structures, training of personnel and providing employment to the most vulnerable social categories – the so-called “from people to people” PHARE projects. The general conclusion is that local people will not feel any significant improvements in their daily lives until the real economic revival is first stimulated and then achieved.

5.2. The effect of pre-accession EU programs on local administration and non-governmental sector

The regular arrival of pre-accession funds to KD and SD since 1999–2000 has altered the roles of municipal (elected) and district (appointed by the central government) authorities and their administrations, and led to personnel and structural changes.

The general feeling was that the employees in the municipal and district administration were on average very young. Most of them had technical or humanitarian educational background, and in addition also a Master degree (or at least a specialization) in economy. Some of the administrators have also undergone special training, financed by PHARE, on how to prepare and write projects. The special attention given to the education and training of people employed in the administration is a consequence of the fact that one of the main reasons for the small number of projects funded from pre-accession programs was the lack of trained personnel (both in terms of quantity and quality). This partially explains why until recently the better-educated ethnic Bulgarian minority in Kardzhali and Smolyan districts was more active regarding these programs. Lately, however, a visible effort has been made to increase the education level of ethnic minorities – a task listed as one of the priorities of MRF on the last parliamentary elections. Another reason for training of local administrators is that they have to be prepared for the implementation of structural funds and to be familiar with the rules for strategic planning. These rules have been used in practice in preparation of the municipal plans for development in the 2007–2013 period.
One of the visible results of the structural changes in municipalities and in district administration was the establishment of special departments for Euro-integration. Another one are experts hired to regularly follow information on forthcoming projects, and then forward the relevant information to all interested persons and institutions. The information from the government is spread also during the so-called “informative days” for employees of the district administration and through brochures. According to the opinion of respondents, however, the latter is expensive, slow and ineffective.

A very positive development we noticed is that in all activities, linked with providing information on EU projects, a very good cooperation exists between NGOs and municipalities. All respondents have highlighted the importance of informal contacts and personal initiative during work. Useful working links have been established also with colleagues in relevant ministries. A serious weakness, though, was also mentioned – a bad practice, typical at least for the time before the introduction of the new Law on State Servants. Every time a minister was changed – even during the term of one government – the teams trained for work on the EU funds left, and precious time was lost before the new cadres got familiar with their work.

Some respondents noted also the astonishing unity of municipal councilors from different political parties when voting on various initiatives linked with the EU integration (Respondent 17 and Respondent 22). Yet, others hinted that some councilors and MPs from the region are not concerned with general interest, but only of “their people” (most likely, the respondent had in mind MPs and councilors from MRF, who supported mainly their party members).

Municipalities also prepare, win and realize their own projects – mostly linked with the efforts to overcome the ecological problems and problems of unemployment in former mining and steel-producing areas (“Construction of the regional center for waste-management in Kardzhali”; “Partnership for the cleaner river Arda”; in Rudozem a shoe-making factory was opened in a reconstructed building and with modern equipment). The result of these projects was positive, since it improved the environment and provided dozens of jobs, which is very important in a region with high unemployment.

5.3. Influence of EU pre-accession programs on SME and agricultural producers

Awkward enough, the high degree of political mobilization of the Turks in Kardzhali District was not accompanied by the same degree of economic mobilization. Notwithstanding the MRF’s concerns and efforts related to the district – or maybe as a result of them – the dominant part of the local population continues to rely on state subsidies, tobacco growing, and small tailoring enterprises founded by Greek and Turkish businessmen.

The young individuals from Kardzhali district – both from the majority and from the minority – prefer to work abroad in Western Europe and mainly invest their money in real estates; only a small number of the local inhabitants start their own business. The general impression is that the Bulgarians are more active economically – both in terms of founding small and middle size enterprises, and in participation in European projects, regardless of the logical assumption that the Turks have greater possibilities through MRF. Most probably this passive behavior is a result of the lack of enough trained specialists. (Therefore, the creation of well-educated local administrative elite from the Turkish minority should be noted as one of the positive changes.)

Approximately the same situation can be observed in Smolyan District. On the one hand, one can see an inert and skeptical to the future elder generation, on the other, young prepared
specialists, who return after they have finished their education or have worked abroad, with the intention to achieve realization in their native places. In general, the economic activity in this district is higher both among the Christian and Muslim Bulgarians.

Local elites rely strongly on the European funds, and yet, Smolyan District also seems to display slow utilization of the opportunities granted under SAPARD for improvement of the quality of the agricultural products – most projects here are related to the development of the rural tourism. As a result, the local MRF activists have undertaken the task to inform the producers about the conditions of the program (because the agricultural minister is representative of MRF in a second successive Government) and to convince them that in order to survive the producers must make at least the initial steps: to obtain the documents proving ownership over land, to organize themselves in associations in order to group the separated pieces of land and the small animal-breeding farms. This practical approach will probably increase the MRF’s influence in the areas inhabited by Muslim Bulgarians; the extent of the increase will become clear on the forthcoming local elections. It must be emphasized that the economic interests in Smolyan District enhance the political mobilization.

Two groups of private entrepreneurs have been so far applying for funding through pre-accession programs. One group consists of people, who have lost their jobs, but who are not looking only for a way to survive, but are trying to find their own “niche” of activity. In the second group fall persons, who already have their own small and medium-size business, and hope either to expand it or to improve the quality of their production in order to obtain the necessary certificates, without which they will not be able to operate after 2007. All those, who had their projects approved, are satisfied with what has been achieved and intend to participate also in other appropriate EU programs. They, however, just like the people whose projects were not approved, or who did not meet the application criteria, commented on difficulties they encountered in the procedure. The most problematic requirement is that those agricultural producers, wishing to apply to the program, need to have more arable land, more livestock and larger turnover than it is realistically possible in the Rhodopes. Local agricultural producers also experience difficulties in coming up with the initial capital, since the program funding covers 50% of the investment only after the completion of the project and evaluation of the result. This is the reason why many people view SAPARD with skepticism. Finding a loan with low interest rates and a longer paying off period is another problem.

Despite the difficulties, respondents note that participation in the EU programs raises self-confidence and prestige of people. They become more open for new ideas and begin to think more positively. Several respondents commented that training for participation in pre-accession programs is “a very good opportunity to change our mentality,” that “people become more European” and that “Europe becomes much closer” (Respondent 6, Respondent 29). The internal barriers are crossed, and people are not afraid any more that they will not be able to deal with the new situation after the EU accession. The effects of the pre-accession assistance are evaluated positively, but it seems that there are much higher expectations for the structural funds.

The opportunities for CBC with Greece, created by the pre-accession funds, are utilized mainly through joint projects on a municipal level in the spheres of ecology, telecommunications, or exchange of information about the activities of Bulgarian and Greek companies. The plans for opening of new border check-points have not resulted in positive development until now. It is interesting that the contacts between the representatives of Muslim elites on both sides of the border seem not to create feelings of ethnic or religious solidarity and they obviously prefer to stay “on their own side”.

5.4. Expected effect of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007 on the economic development of the region

The general opinion is that Bulgaria’s accession to the EU will have a predominantly positive effect on the economic development of the country and the region in particular. This is due above all to two factors: the introduction of “European norms” and the structural funds. On the other hand, there are serious concerns that accession will also lead to mass bankruptcy of small enterprises, which do not meet the EU criteria for quality of production and working conditions. Even the expected rise of the standard of living is seen as unfavorable factor for small-sized proprietors. The examples set forward are small textile manufactures, which are currently attractive for investors from neighboring Turkey and Greece mainly because of cheap labor.

Another possible difficulty is the need to quickly restructure the agricultural production. Respondents note that the importance of traditional tobacco cultivation will progressively decrease and farmers will have to shift to alternative agriculture, and especially to eco-production.

5.5. Relations between the Bulgarian majority and the Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian minorities.

When asked to comment on relations between the Bulgarian majority and Turkish and Bulgarian Muslim minorities in connection with the problems of regional development or participation in EU projects, all respondents categorically described it as “partnership.” The members of working teams are selected strictly on the basis of their professional qualities, not because of their ethnic or confessional belongings. Business representatives also view qualification as the most important criterion when hiring their employees. In NGOs dealing with the issues of inter-ethnic relations and prevention of ethnic conflicts, representatives of main ethnic groups work together. (However, it seems that in NGO’s Bulgarians are more active.)

The basic reason is the solidarity created by the common interest in improving the economic status of the district. Another frequently pointed factor is the long-standing tradition of peaceful cohabitation in the two districts with mixed population. On the other hand, some – not only from the majority (Respondents 13, Respondent 26), but also from the Turkish minority (Respondent 31) – imply that many Bulgarians leave Kardzhali and resettle in the central regions of the country, and the one to blame is the “party MRF”, which has occupied all power positions. The Bulgarian Muslims express dissatisfaction with the “construction of churches” in the area of Nedelino, where mainly Muslims live and where the well-known priest of Pomak origin father Saraev “converts” local Muslims to Christianity (Respondent 9). Some Bulgarians expressed certain worries about the increased interest of Turkish businesspersons to buy property in Bulgaria.

Certain contradictions and concealed tensions do exist, but people deliberately do not comment on that. Many note that more time will have to pass before ethnic and religious differences will entirely cease to matter.

Minority representatives believe that now, their rights are protected and respected in Bulgaria. Despite that, they note that “there is still room for improving” and that “after our EU accession, such problems will finally disappear.” (Respondent 45). The representatives of the
local minorities definitely develop the feeling that there are supranational (European) power structures, which are not indifferent to the economic welfare of the region and to some extent could guarantee that their rights would be respected. In the words of Respondent 31, the EU accession will offer additional guarantees for effective realization of young people “without outright or concealed forms of ethnic discrimination.”

5.6. Identities and Europe

“Ethnic” and “cultural-religious” differences are not publicly demonstrated and – as stated – are of no importance when members of majority and minority work together on pre-accession programs. There are, however, some differences in “self-awareness” and “declaration” of identity. When asked to grade their identities according to importance, Bulgarians usually place the national and civil identity at the top, followed by regional (“Rhodopian”) or local identity, and in the end, they mention – with reservations or without – also their European identity. Turks and Bulgarian Muslims seem to stress on the regional and civil identity. (While actually Turks prioritize their ethnic (Turkish) identity, and Muslim Bulgarians their religious (Muslim) identity.)

The question if and how much they view themselves as “Europeans” triggered a dual reaction. At first, there was a sense of offence, as the question was understood as excluding Bulgaria from European historic and cultural community. The division Europe/Asia represents an important element of the national identity, especially in the regions with Turkish population. There is no equation between “Europe” and “European Union.”

“Europe” is inseparably linked with norms, laws, freedom of choice and better possibilities for professional development. The qualities described as “European” are tolerance, responsibility, order, and higher quality of work.

For most of the respondents (from all groups), acquiring the “European identity” and “a sense that they are a part of Europe” was equal to “obtaining a European self-awareness.” This self-awareness has both symbolic and real dimensions, like higher standard of living, freedom of choice and better personal and professional development.

The role of the EU in this process is evaluated in two ways. For some, more pessimistic, changes for better can come only from outside the country, by being “forced” upon Bulgarians after the EU accession. Others note that “the EU will not raise their salaries” and therefore “we should go towards Europe, and not wait for Europe to come to us.”

Pre-accession programs are seen as a first step towards this positive development. As noted, the programs have helped those involved in them to change their mentality for the better. They are satisfied with their experience and the results they have achieved, and are proud that their activities have contributed to the development of their city and region. The rest are more skeptical.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents stated that even after EU membership local people “should try not to lose […] their culture and identity” (Respondent 9, Respondent 29, Respondent 38). This attitude is typical for the Muslim Bulgarians who hope to become a part of a larger diversity and thus escape the humiliating ‘historical’ perception of their religious identity by the majority.

Generally speaking, the field research outlined two patterns of attitude towards and perceptions of the EU integration: a “more optimistic” and a “more pessimistic” one. Optimistic approach can be met among politicians (both on local and central level), persons employed in
municipal and district administration, representatives of non-governmental and civil sector, and among those individuals and entrepreneurs, who participated in projects. People (mainly from the private sector), who were left outside of these processes – as stated above, not only for subjective reasons – are more pessimistic. They worry that the EU accession will not bring only positive developments (in particular, “European” rules and better business environment), but also represents a danger: higher quality and lower prices of products the Bulgarian producers will not be able to compete with.

6. Concluding remarks: relationship between ethnic-national identity and territory

Two basic factors influence the changes in the two districts of Kardzhali and Smolyan, which are inhabited mainly by Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, and namely: the liberalization of the minority rights and the restructuring of the local economy. These factors stimulate the political and cultural mobilization of the two Muslim minorities, change their economic status, and create new foundations for their attitude towards the state and the Bulgarian national majority. It should be noted that the changes that occurred after 1989 have been viewed as part of the overall Europeanization of the country, and as such they have been welcomed and positively accepted by the representatives of the minorities. The penetration of the pre-accession funds in the region has been perceived in the same context: as part of the new political situation, and yet, it is probably too early to assess their overall impact.

The changes in the two minority districts, subject of the research, which outline the specific “Bulgarian” characteristics of the project, are the following:

1) Since 1989 both Muslim communities, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, have displayed strong political mobilization.

For the Turks this mobilization is related to MRF, to which they have delegated almost unlimited rights (more than 60% of the Turks vote for MRF on parliamentary and local elections) to represent them on all levels of the legislative (the Parliament and the local councils) and executive power (the central government and the mayor institution). One of the reasons for the Turks to recognize MRF as “their own” party is the fact that it was established and is now led by community leaders who have opposed the policy of forced assimilation of the socialist state. Very important also is the fact that MRF demonstrates real concerns for the socio-economic situation in the border minority regions and has always held the opinion that these regions must be assisted by the state at least until they find an appropriate alternative for the local economy (mainly tobacco growing). Yet another factor is that, regardless of the criticism against MRF for being “ethnically based” coming from both right and left parties, MRF has always conducted realistic and moderate policy of minority right protection in compliance with the Bulgarian and International Law. The MRF’s political platform is built upon the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Bulgarian state, and therefore MRF has a significant contribution to the development of the model of peaceful ethnic tension elimination. The latter attracts the members of the Turkish minority without aspirations for territorial separation, especially on the eve of the Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, because they are satisfied not only by the degree of their participation in the government, but also by their civil freedoms and the possibility to freely maintain contacts with their “motherland”, etc.

The political mobilization of the Bulgarian Muslim minority manifests itself in different ways. At first glance the failure of the attempts for the formation of “Pomak” party (discussed in
the State of the Art Report), and the absence of absolute confidence in MRF among the Muslims in the Smolyan District, whose political behavior follows the general Bulgarian electoral model, are result of the frequently reported by the researchers “absence of internal group cohesion”. The reality is not exactly the same. The refusal of the Bulgarian Muslims to recognize MRF as their own party is a result of the reputation of MRF’s being a “Turkish” party, while the differentiation between the two Muslim groups on ethnic grounds was the basic process determining their relations in 20th century, and this differentiation was enhanced deliberately by the policy of the Bulgarian state. As some of the respondents imply in their interviews, the Muslim Bulgarians, living in the Middle Rhodopes, would not wish to be criticized by the majority for being “Turkicised” by MRF. Therefore, since the beginning of the transition, the Bulgarian Muslims have supported the natural defender of their rights – the Union of the Democratic Forces. In spite of the economic collapse of the region, caused by the intensive privatization carried out by the second UDF Government, the Muslim Bulgarians continue to support parties in the right of the political spectrum, relying not so much on the party programs, but on local individuals whom they know well and in whom they believe. As the Turks in Kardzhali District do, the Bulgarian Muslims also exercise total control over their local authorities, regardless of the fact that their representatives belong to different parties.

2) Notwithstanding the lack of concrete data on the effect of the pre-accession funds, it can be concluded, that in Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts they have led to the creation of new administrative capacity, prepared to plan and manage the local economic policy; the negative consequences of the closing of the unprofitable socialist enterprises (mainly in the mining and processing industries) have been mitigated to some extent through the creation of new, although insufficient in number, employment opportunities; the local businessmen and agricultural producers are encouraged to introduce new technical equipment and new production technologies, in order to adapt themselves to the competitive economic environment, which they will enter after the accession to the EU.

3) The representatives of both minorities, Turkish and Muslim Bulgarians, think that their minority rights are guaranteed by the Bulgarian legislation and are respected, despite the fact that some disturbing phenomena are noticed. Besides, they are convinced that there are supranational (European) power structures, which are not indifferent to the economic welfare of the minority regions and which could guarantee that their rights would be respected in the future as well.

4) On the other hand, as far as conclusions could be drawn from the attitude of the Turks to the studying of their mother tongue, the linguistic mobilization of the community is of less significance than the political one. At the same time the Turks, and especially the Bulgarian Muslims, insist on the teaching of religion: the religious education is considered as extremely important for the spiritual development of the young people – at least in the religious families, – and for the Muslim Bulgarians it has an important role contributing to the cohesion of the community and the creation of community’s identity.

5) The overall impression is that all respondents representing the political and cultural elites, and the business circles, relate their future to their region and its economic and cultural prosperity. The relations among representatives of the majority and the minorities, engaged
with the issues of regional development and European integration, are characterized by dominating spirit of cooperation.

6) The respondents – both from the majority and from the minorities – have not displayed openly their ethnic, religious, and even party affiliation. This fact proves per se that the ethnic and religious differences are still important enough to be silently omitted, although the mutual tolerance is always emphasized.

7) When asked how they visualize Europe and how they see their place in it, all respondents from the majority and from the minorities are unanimous on two issues: Bulgaria has always been part of the European historical and cultural space, and its citizens are Europeans. Yet, they confess that they don’t feel ‘real Europeans’ as something is lacking (the most frequently mentioned are the different – ‘Oriental’ – attitudes towards labor and the low incomes). There is also unanimity that upon entering Europe, all communities must preserve their specific (national, ethnic, cultural, etc. characteristics.)

Finally, if we have to summarize the results of the research with regard to the expected four “ideal forms” of (re)configuration of minority-majority interests and identities in subnational regions, which are distinguished by their relationship to the central state and the way they view the connection between the cultural, political and territorial unit and variable conceptions of the EU, then the Bulgarian model will definitely not belong to the first two types (national-state and national-civic forms). The members of the local elites tend to present the situation in the region within the framework of the third type (regional-civic form), which probably corresponds to their idea of the “ideal” model they wish to achieve. It is characterized by: extensive regional co-operation, support for decentralization, as well as increasingly institutionalized regional-local alliances across political parties and across national-ethnic communities; local-subnational government increasingly operating as a representative of the region rather than of the ethnic or national community; minority-majority interests and politics defined by growing convergence around economic and regional development objectives; declining politicization of cultural identity issues and their re-orientation away and dissociation from the state; identification with Europe is widespread and the EU is seen as an entity where various cultural identities can flourish but primarily as a source of more efficient government, economic competence and regional competitiveness. At the same time, especially in Kardzhali District, where the Bulgarian national majority is actually a local minority and MRF has strong positions in the local government, some characteristics of the forth type (regional-ethnic form) can be detected: a dominant minority in the region or in areas within the region, which has established or seeks to establish control over local government and economic resources; local government operating as representative of the ethnic community rather than of the local population. On the other hand, some important characteristics are absent: the interests of the minority are definitely not aligned with a national state center outside Bulgaria; the minority does not express aspirations for regional political autonomy, and while speaking about that issue, MRF opposes not only any separatist claims, but also any demands for collective minority rights, now and then raised by other Turkish nationalist organizations without serious support among the Turkish population.
References


Dogan, A. Bulgaria i noviat svetoven red, Sofia: Institut za liberalni izsledvania.


Appendix: List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Political representative (UDF) – minority</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28 September 2005</td>
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<td>14 June 2005</td>
<td>Smolyan</td>
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<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Momchilgrad</td>
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<td>15 June 2005</td>
<td>Smolyan</td>
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| Respondent 5 | Civil society – majority
President of NGO
Female
April 2005, Kardzhali |
|---|---|
| Respondent 6 | Media/civil society – minority (MB)
Journalist
Female
16 June 2005, Smolyan |
| Respondent 7 | Development/public sector – majority
Municipality
Female
26 April 2005, Kardzhali |
| Respondent 8 | Project beneficiary – majority
Business/private sector
Male
27 April, Kardzhali |
| Respondent 9 | Development/public sector – minority (MB)
Municipality
Male
16 June 2005, Rudozem |
| Respondent 10 | Development/public sector – minority (T)
District
Male
27 September 2005, Kardzhali |
| Respondent 11 | Business/private sector – minority (MB)
Female
15 June, Rudozem |
| Respondent 12 | Project beneficiary – majority
Business/private sector
Male
24 April, Kardzhali |
| Respondent 13 | Political representative/Private sector – majority
Member of the Municipal Council of Kardzhali
SAPARD beneficiary
Male
27 September 2005 – Kardzhali |
| Respondent 14 | Project beneficiary – majority
Business/private sector
Female
16 June 2005, Smolyan |
| Respondent 15 | Development/public sector – minority (MB)
District
Female
17 June 2005, Smolyan |
| Respondent 16 | Development/public sector – majority
District
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27 September 2005, Kardzhali |
| Respondent 17 | Development/public sector – minority (MB)
Municipality
Female
15 June 2005, Rudozem |
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<td>Male</td>
<td>15 June 2005, Rudozem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Media/civil society – majority</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28 September 2005, Kardzhali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Community leader – minority (T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28 September, Kardzhali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Political representative (MRF) – minority (T)</td>
<td>Member of the Municipal Council</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27 September, 2005, Kardzhali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Political representative (MRF) – minority (T)</td>
<td>Member of the Municipal Council</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27 September 2005, Kardzhali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Civil society/media – minority (T)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26 April 2005, Kardzhali</td>
<td></td>
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