

---

## **NEWS FROM BULGARIA**

---

**August 1990**

### **DEEP TENSIONS CONTINUE IN TURKISH PROVINCES, DESPITE SOME HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS**

#### **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background: The Assimilation of the Muslim Minorities .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Bulgarian Government Improves Human Rights Performance .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Language.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Religion.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Culture.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Turkish Political Prisoners.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Participation in the Political Process .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The New Law on Names.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Discrimination and Harassment of Muslims by Local Officials.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Bulgarian-Turkish Relations.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>12</b>

#### **Introduction**

**The destruction of the ethnic identity of Bulgaria's Turks and Pomaks during the 1970s and 1980s constitutes one of the Zhivkov regime's grossest human rights violations. Although the situation of the minorities has improved considerably since the government revised its minority policies, certain ethnic and cultural rights continue to be denied by the new government in Bulgaria. In addition, the assimilation campaign has produced deep tensions and psychological wounds in regions cohabitated by ethnic Bulgarians and national minorities. The lingering tensions may prove to be the most difficult problem for the new government to solve.**

**Between May 22 and July 2, a Helsinki Watch mission visited numerous cities and villages in Bulgaria to examine these issues, including Kurdzhali, Djebel, Orlyak, Perperek, Gotse Delchev, Tolbuhin, Sumen, Preslav, Kaolinovo, and Todor Ikonomovo.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Background: The Assimilation of the Muslim Minorities**

**In recent decades, the Bulgarian government denied its ethnic minorities fundamental human rights that are enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and follow-up documents, including the right to freedom of religion, to religious education, and to one's own cultural and linguistic identity. The Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) were the first victims of the Bulgarian government's assimilation campaign.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970s, the government sent police and soldiers to Pomak villages and forced the Pomaks to change their Turkish-sounding names for Slavic ones. Many Pomaks were reportedly killed. Some observers believe that the assimilation of the Pomaks was a "test" case prior to the assimilation of the much larger Turkish community.<sup>3</sup>**

**The assimilation of the Turks began in the early 1970s when the government banned the teaching of the Turkish language in elementary and secondary schools. In late 1984 and early 1985, police and soldiers surrounded Turkish villages and forced Turks to take Slavic names.<sup>4</sup> Estimates of Turks killed range from 300 to 1,000. Several thousand were reportedly injured or arrested. During this period, the authorities forced the Turks to give up the Turkish language and Islamic practices and to abandon Turkish customs and traditions. In May 1990, a Turkish writer summarized the plight of the Turkish community to Helsinki Watch: "Between 1984 and 1989, we were sleepwalkers, without identity, without rights."**

### **Bulgarian Government Improves Human Rights Performance**

**On December 29, 1989, less than two months after the fall of Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian government announced that it was revising its policy on the minorities and that everybody in Bulgaria would be able to choose his name, religion, and language freely. As a result of this new policy, several human rights that were denied during the assimilation campaign, including the right to go to mosque, to study the Koran, and to wear traditional Turkish clothing, have recently been returned to the minorities. However, other human rights continue to be denied, such as the right of minorities to have access to information in their mother tongue.**

#### **Language**

**After the assimilation campaign was initiated in 1984, Turks were prohibited from speaking**

---

<sup>1</sup>The Helsinki Watch representatives who went to Bulgaria were Theodore Zang Jr., staff counsel to Helsinki Watch, and Laura Sherman, an attorney and consultant to Helsinki Watch.

<sup>2</sup>The Pomak population has been estimated at 200,000 (the population of Bulgaria is approximately 9,000,000).

<sup>3</sup>Approximately one million Turks inhabit Bulgaria. They live mostly in the northeastern and southeastern provinces.

<sup>4</sup>See *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria*, Helsinki Watch, June 1986 (updated September 1987).

**Turkish in public. Those who spoke Turkish were fined. Today, Turks are free to speak in Turkish in public. However, Turkish language instruction is not offered in the universities or secondary schools. Many Turks told Helsinki Watch that they would like Turkish language instruction to be offered again. A Turk from Zlata explained: "The Turkish language must be offered in school because Turkish is our mother tongue. Each free person on this earth must be able to read and write his mother tongue."**

**The Movement for Rights and Freedoms, a political party that advocates Turkish rights, has proposed that four hours a week of optional Turkish language instruction be offered in the schools. Most younger Turks are not fluent in the language. A Turk who teaches high school in Momchilgrad said: "The Turkish students only know simple words, like bread and water, from their parents. They don't know written Turkish at all." He also said that there is a shortage of Turkish textbooks.**

## **Religion**

**After the assimilation campaign of 1984-85, most mosques were closed and Muslims were prohibited from practicing their religion. Today the mosques have been re-opened and Muslims can attend services. Turkish wedding and burial ceremonies are also permitted, as is circumcision.**

**Muslim leaders reported that young people want to learn about Islam. For example, the hoja (religious teacher) in Luzhnitsa told Helsinki Watch: "There is great interest in religion. I started teaching 260 children the Koran. They're very interested in studying the Koran and religion. But it's difficult because I have no textbooks or place to meet -- we meet in the mosque now, in small groups. In the future, we would like to have a religious school. We also need Korans. Saudi Arabia recently exported some Korans to us, but they're very expensive so not every child can have one."**

**Many mosques were damaged or destroyed during the assimilation campaign and now must be rebuilt. Several Muslims told Helsinki Watch that they would like the government to assist in the restoration of the mosques. As of this writing, the government has not offered technical assistance or financial support for the restoration work.**

**Many Muslim graveyards were also damaged or destroyed during the assimilation campaign. Muslims have asked the government to support their restoration as well. To date, no support has been provided.**

## **Culture**

**During the assimilation campaign, in some areas the wearing of traditional Turkish *shalvari* (trousers) was prohibited. Today, Turks can wear traditional Turkish clothing. They are also free to play Turkish music. A Turkish musician said: "I play Turkish music in the restaurant now and no one stops me. In the past, I wouldn't even play music in my home."**

**Many Turks told Helsinki Watch that they are disappointed because no television or radio time has been allocated for Turkish broadcasting. They would like the state television and radio to include Turkish language programs.**

**The Movement for Rights and Freedoms has applied to the government for permission to publish a bi-lingual newspaper (containing articles in both Bulgarian and Turkish). As of this writing, the government has not granted permission. Some members of the Movement fear that the government will deny permission and will base its decision on Article 11 of the Bulgarian Constitution (amended in April 1990), which states that the "official" language in Bulgaria is Bulgarian.**

### **Turkish political prisoners**

**In January 1990, the government announced an amnesty under certain articles of the Criminal Code for individuals imprisoned for political "crimes." According to Amnesty International, 31 ethnic Turks imprisoned for opposing the name changing campaign were released under the amnesty in January. However, a number of ethnic Turks remain in prison for opposing the assimilation campaign. These individuals were convicted under Criminal Code provisions not covered by the amnesty. In June 1990, Amnesty International estimated that at least 50 Turks remained imprisoned for opposing the assimilation campaign. Helsinki Watch plans to compile and document a political prisoner list this fall.**

### **Participation in the political process**

**Perhaps the most encouraging development in recent months has been the active participation of Turks and Pomaks in politics. During the assimilation campaign, ethnic Turks who advocated Turkish rights were prohibited from participating in politics. In 1987, Halil Ibisoglu, a member of Parliament from 1976 to 1986, described the former situation: "As a member of the Bulgarian National Assembly, I requested documentation of the decision of the Bulgarian Communist Party Central Committee on the Bulgarization issue from the Party and the police. In response, I was told this decision was not documented and that I should not persist in requesting the document...The Bulgarian authorities later summoned Assembly members of Turkish origin...The authorities read a protest letter addressed to Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal which they forced us to sign...Prior to this, an official from the Varna District Committee had given me a serious threat. He warned that if I opposed the decisions of the Party I would not only lose my membership in the Assembly, but also would never be able to see my spouse and children."**

**With a constituency of one million, the Turks were an important factor in the recent parliamentary elections, and all major political parties courted their vote, although their platforms did not always advocate full minority rights. In the end, the Turkish community voted heavily for the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, a political party headed by an ethnic Turk. The party advocates human rights for all Bulgarians and its platform includes several programs to restore Turkish cultural and ethnic rights. It won 23 seats in the 400-member Parliament.**

**On a less positive note, the roundtable meeting of government and opposition leaders that met prior to the elections banned the registration of political parties organized on ethnic or religious bases. The agreement was subsequently approved by Parliament.**

**After the parliamentary elections, leaders of both the Socialist Party and the Union of Democratic Forces (the umbrella opposition party) argued that the Movement for Rights and Freedoms violates this law and that its deputies should not be allowed to sit in the new Parliament. As of this writing, these leaders have apparently dropped their demand that the deputies be removed from Parliament.**

### **Recommendations**

---

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian government to create conditions for the further promotion of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of its minorities. In particular, Helsinki Watch urges that the following steps be made a priority:**

- o The Ministry of Justice should rehabilitate those ethnic Turks who were convicted for opposing the assimilation campaign, and should seek the immediate release of any ethnic Turk imprisoned for opposing assimilation.**
- o Parliament should rescind the law that bans political parties from forming on an ethnic or religious basis.**

### **The New Law on Names**

**Each of the measures taken by the Zhivkov regime to assimilate the Turks and Pomaks was reprehensible, but the name changing campaign probably left the deepest psychological wounds. One ethnic Turk told Helsinki Watch that the campaign to change names created "a wound that can never be healed. Neither I nor my child will ever forget this."**

**The campaign aimed to destroy the heart of individual identity. As one Turk explained, "My name is important to me because my mother and father gave it to me. I had it for 35 years before they changed it." Numerous Turks and Pomaks told Helsinki Watch that they want the newly-elected Parliament to re-examine the issue of names and to establish an equitable procedure to allow Turks and Pomaks to reclaim their original names.**

**In early March, the Bulgarian Parliament enacted a Law on Names to implement the government's new minority policy. The following are the key provisions of the Law on Names:**

- o Bulgarian citizens whose names were forcibly changed can restore their former names;**
- o citizens who wish to restore their names must apply in writing to a district court;**
- o the court considers the application in the presence of the applicant and two witnesses who can testify that the applicant is voluntarily making the request to restore his or her name;**
- o if the court grants the name change, a new birth certificate is issued to the applicant;**
- o after December 31, 1990, a more complicated procedure must be followed to change names, and a fee will be charged;**
- o the law seems to require individuals to retain the traditional Bulgarian endings (ov, ev, ova, eva) on their names.**

**In most Turkish and Pomak villages, few residents have applied to change their names (one Turkish leader told Helsinki Watch that, nationwide, less than one-third of the Turks have restored their names) because they object to the burdensome procedure, particularly the requirements that they appear in court and that they have two witnesses present at the hearing. Most Muslims argue that they**

should not have to use a legal procedure to reclaim their names because their names were taken away illegally. As one Turk said: "It is humiliating for us to go to court to change our names given the circumstances under which our names were taken away." Those who take this position argue that they should be able to reclaim their names by a simple administrative procedure.

The Muslims also object to the requirement that they take traditional Bulgarian name endings. The law itself seems to leave open the possibility that they need not take Bulgarian endings (Article 6 of the Law on Names states: "The patronymic ends in the suffix *ov, ev, ova, eva* depending on the child's sex except when the father's first name precludes those suffixes or when they are at variance with the name traditions."). However, many Turks and Pomaks interviewed by Helsinki Watch believe that they will be required to take Slavic endings. The authorities have confirmed this interpretation of the law. In Bukovo, for example, the local mayor's office told a group of Pomaks that they could not change their names without taking the traditional Bulgarian suffixes. This interpretation was also confirmed to the same group of Pomaks by a regional judge.

Some ethnic Bulgarians have defended the traditional Bulgarian endings on the basis that they indicate Bulgarian citizenship. An ethnic Bulgarian from Kurdzhali explained: "The 'ov' and 'ev' endings speak of one's belonging to Bulgaria."

Individuals who want to change their names must apply to the district court using a form supplied by a mayor's office or local council office. Although the exact wording of the form varies, most forms require applicants to fill in the Bulgarian names of their parents, but leave no space for applicants to include the Turkish names of their parents. Some Muslims told Helsinki Watch that the application forms must be changed. A Turk from Orlyak said: "If we don't write our parents' Turkish names, and if these application forms are stored somewhere, after many years it will look like our parents were Bulgarian and we were Turkicized. We want to use different forms to avoid this confusion."

Most application forms do not allow the applicants to indicate that their names were forcibly changed. Some Turks and Pomaks told Helsinki Watch that they want the record to be clear on this issue, too, and therefore that the application forms should be revised to allow them to indicate that their names were forcibly changed.

Many Turks and Pomaks object to the fee that will be charged after December 31, 1990, to those who wish to change their names.

## **Recommendations**

**The new Parliament should amend the Law on Names:**

- o A simple administrative procedure should be established to allow Turks and Pomaks to reclaim the names taken away from them during the assimilation campaign;**
- o Turks and Pomaks should be able to take their names without Bulgarian endings, if they so choose;**
- o On the application forms used to change names, applicants should be allowed to include their parents' Turkish names to show that they come from Turkish ancestors;**
- o The application forms should state that the names of Turks and Pomaks were forcibly changed during late 1984 and early 1985;**

- o **No fee should be charged after December 31, 1990, for the name change procedure.**

### **Discrimination and Harassment of Muslims by Local Officials**

**Throughout the assimilation campaign, local officials implemented the government's assimilation policies. They frequently persecuted Turks and Pomaks. In many of the villages that Helsinki Watch visited during May-June 1990, we received reports that local officials continue to intimidate and discriminate against minorities, although the central government appears to have scuttled its assimilation policy. Conditions vary from village to village. In some villages, the human rights situation of the Muslims is significantly improved. The following examples illustrate both the human rights improvements and the areas where problems still exist.**

- o **In Novi Pazar, three policemen visited a Turkish wedding on June 10 and told the musicians to stop playing Turkish music. The police allegedly told the gathering that "it is wrong to sing in Turkish" and that "Turkish music is absolutely banned." The police fined the musicians and the bridegroom's father about 1,000 leva each.**
- o **In Todor Ikonomovo, officers from the local police station allegedly drive through the village every day and single out Turks for minor infractions such as traffic violations. One Turk was reportedly fined four or five times within a short period of time for traffic violations.**
- o **A Turk from Todor Ikonomovo told Helsinki Watch: "When we see a cop in the street, we stop speaking in Turkish. He wouldn't fine us, but he looks at us in a bad way. So we stop speaking in Turkish because of fear."**
- o **Fear of the authorities seems to be more widespread in villages where the authorities used force against the Turks in 1984-85 or during the May 1989 demonstrations. In Orlyak, one Turk said: "There is a lot of fear here because we have been through hell in the past. We have suffered a lot. The mayor and police don't mistreat us now, but people are just very afraid." Another Turk from Orlyak concurred: "During the May demonstrations, the army came with machine guns and they expelled us in three days. There were beatings and arrests. So we are still very afraid."**

- o **Several Turks expressed disappointment that the government has not investigated the expulsion of Turkish activists to Turkey in May-June 1989. Local officials played a large role in the expulsions.<sup>5</sup>**
- o **The secret police apparently still function in some localities and intimidate Turkish activists. In Preslav, the local coordinator for the Movement for Rights and Freedoms was stopped on the street by a plainclothes officer named Ivan Ivanov and taken to the police station for questioning. He was interrogated on June 14, three days prior to the runoff elections for Parliament. Ivanov showed the coordinator a map of Bulgaria that was partially highlighted (the highlighted area was supposed to indicate an autonomous Turkish region) and asked him whether the local Movement for Rights and Freedoms had prepared it. The coordinator told Ivanov that he had never seen the map before, and Ivanov released him. According to several Turks, the authorities in the Preslav region spread rumors during the election campaign that supporters of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms would be called into the Preslav police station after the elections and questioned about their campaign activities.**
- o **In the small Pomak village of Luzhnitsa and other nearby villages, there seem to be noticeable human rights improvements since Helsinki Watch visited the region in November 1989. In November, Pomak residents reported that they were under surveillance by the police, and they were afraid to speak to Helsinki Watch's representatives. In November, Helsinki Watch's two representatives were briefly detained by the local police. However, in June 1990, Pomaks in Luzhnitsa spoke openly to Helsinki Watch and did not fear repercussions. The village hoja explained the difference: "We were in a horrible situation in November. The police almost shot us when you left. Now the police don't bother us. The secret police have stopped watching us and even the uniformed police seem to have disappeared."**
- o **In Ardino, a Turkish high school teacher reported that the authorities no longer fine or arrest Turks on trumped up charges as they did in the past.**
- o **Many Muslims want local elections to be held soon so that they can freely choose local officials and replace those who have abused them in the past.<sup>6</sup> A Turk in Dushinkovo said: "All of the local *nomenclatura* who beat our brothers are still here. Under these conditions, we are afraid and want to have local elections." Several Turks emphasized that the new officials need not be Turkish. In Ardino, a Turkish man said: "We have a Bulgarian mayor now. We don't necessarily want a Turkish mayor, just a good man."**

---

<sup>5</sup>See *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks*, Helsinki Watch, October 1989.

<sup>6</sup>Local elections will probably be held this fall, although Parliament has not yet set the date.



- o Some Muslims envision a new role for local government. In the past, the central government directed the local officials' actions and behavior. Today, the possibility exists for local officials to spearhead programs to recognize and reinforce minority rights. A Turkish workshop manager from Zlatar explained: "Until now the local mayor could not improve the situation of the minorities. He was a pawn, a puppet. After the democratic reforms are fully implemented, let's hope he can have some autonomy. He is capable of having personal attitudes towards the people, which can have a positive effect for the minorities."**
- o In predominantly Muslim communities, minorities are underrepresented on local councils and council committees. For example, in Ardino, where the population is 90 percent Muslim and 10 percent Bulgarian, eight Bulgarians and one Turk sit on the local council's commission on intellectual development. The commission is responsible for setting educational policy in the community.**

## **Recommendations**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian Parliament to do the following:**

- o Set a date for early elections. Until local mayors and local councils are popularly elected, it will be difficult for the national government to implement its new policies. Early local elections will also give Bulgarian citizens a sense that the democratic reforms are continuing and that they have a direct role to play in the reform process. Once elections take place, the new mayors and local councils should establish adequate minority representation on those committees that have responsibility for such matters as education, delivery of services, and allocation of public resources.**
- o Appoint a commission to investigate the suppression of peaceful Turkish demonstrations by the government in the summer of 1989 and the subsequent expulsion of Turkish activists. Once the commission completes its work, the Parliament should make its findings public.**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian government to do the following:**

- o Direct the uniformed police to stop discriminating against members of minority groups.**
- o Direct State Security to cease questioning members of minority groups without well-founded evidence that they are using violence or are engaging in activities that directly threaten the nation's security.**

## **Bulgarian-Turkish Relations**

**In many regions of the country, and particularly in the provinces, the Turks are subject to discrimination and scorn. The reasons are complex and varied, including five centuries of conflict between Bulgaria and Turkey, Bulgarian nationalism, and deep-seated prejudices fueled by the Communist Party for more than 40 years. Until these problems are addressed by the government, the human rights of the Turks will continue to be jeopardized by individual citizens and the recently-extended legal rights to the minorities will remain unfulfilled promises.**

**Sometimes, prejudice against the Turks is expressed overtly. For example, numerous demonstrations have been held since the government's December 29 decision to return rights to the minorities. On July 1, more than 2,000 nationalists demonstrated in front of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia and chanted "Turks go to Turkey" and other anti-Turkish slogans. The nationalists are particularly well-organized in Kurdzhali (southern Bulgaria).**

**The assimilation campaign against the ethnic Turks produced deep psychological wounds in the Turkish community. A Turkish factory manager from Zlatar described the lingering effects:**

**When they changed our names it was awful. This is a wound which can never be healed. Neither my children nor myself will ever forget this. Fear is still primary...We had no conflict before the name changes. The name changes opened up a rift in this village between Bulgarians and Turks. The fear among the Turks is greater than among the Bulgarians. I doubt the fear will change. It's very difficult to change people. In my children there is fear too. It has been instilled in my children. It will take one or two generations to dissipate because we were very humiliated. The humiliation is that you can't feel equal. We will lose our fear only when Ivan and Hassan [the proverbial Bulgarian and Turk] can feel equal...During the assimilation campaign, it was the faith in people that was killed. We couldn't sleep during the campaign. My children lay motionless in bed like two doves. It was dark and all we could hear were the soldiers' boots. We lay there breathless in bed. After the assimilation campaign all of us had to be actors. We are still actors.**

**An ethnic Turk from Momchilgrad who teaches French and music in the local high school told Helsinki Watch: "I am afraid. Many Bulgarian citizens still view us as outsiders, strangers to this land." He said that he fears to speak in Turkish in public. He also worries that the authorities will discover a collection of Turkish books that he keeps in his home. Five years ago, when the assimilation campaign began, he buried the collection of 200 books in his backyard so that the authorities would not confiscate them. But last year he dug them up and returned them to his home. He explained: "I dug them up because without these books I couldn't go on living. They give me courage. The books are spiritual food. One can't go on living on money and food alone. They are my treasure. There are lots of texts, fairytales, short stories, which educate man, make him good, humane. In them I see the people who live in the world. We are all mortals. We will live 50-60 years and then we will die. Why shouldn't we understand each other? Man must not be a beast, a wolf." The teacher fears that the authorities will discover the books: "If they find them, they will burn**

me and the books, even today." He expressed the hope that one day he will be able to tell his students about the books and teach from them, but said that the time is not yet right to do this.

Bulgarians also have anxieties, particularly those Bulgarians who live in predominantly Turkish regions. A Bulgarian from Kurdzhali told Helsinki Watch: "If you speak to old people here you won't find anyone who didn't witness the massacre of Bulgarians by the Turks in the Balkan Wars. Our consciousness is historically burdened." These Bulgarians fear that once again their land will be taken away by the Turks. An 85-year-old woman from Perperek explained: "If the Turks are many, they might kick us out again." She still remembers the day in August 1912 when she and her family were forced to leave their home: "I was seven years old when we fled. I was wearing a cardigan and nothing else. We fled just as we were -- naked and barefooted."

Some Bulgarians worry that the Turkish government will make territorial demands on Bulgaria; others fear that the politically-empowered Turkish minority within Bulgaria will seek an autonomous region. A Bulgarian woman from Perperek said: "Geographically we are very close to Turkey. We are afraid because if the Turks achieve political autonomy we will be the first to be affected." Another resident of Perperek, a librarian, echoed this view: "We are afraid because we live near the Turkish border and the region might secede. The Turks taunt us that this area will become Turkish again." Professor Ilko Dimitrov, a former Bulgarian Minister of Education and a member of the Communist Party, wants guarantees from Turkey that it will not "manipulate" the Turkish community to seek autonomy. "First and foremost we want these guarantees," he said.

Mincho Minchev, speaker of the Fatherland Party of Labor, fears a loss of national identity: "In the future we should pay special attention to the patriotic upbringing of the Bulgarian nation because in the past 45 years the Bulgarian nation lost much of its patriotism. In 50 to 60 years it is possible that the Bulgarian nation will not exist. If at this historical moment we do not unite, I fear we will be doomed."

Minchev described his party's platform to Helsinki Watch: "We are for the rights of the individual, but not for the differentiation of separate groups within the country because this would lead to a split of the nation. We are against the generation of separate ethnic identities. Contemporary theoreticians make a mistake because they project interethnic problems characteristic of the Soviet Union onto Bulgaria. The Bulgarian nation cannot be viewed as a sum total of different ethnic groups. We are one nation with a 14-century-long history..Muslims have the opportunity to choose between two motherlands whereas Bulgarians have just one and Bulgaria is a very small country. In the United States, everyone is proud to call himself an American. In Turkey, they speak of Turks. In Bulgaria, we speak about ethnic groups, not about Bulgarians. We would like to see everyone in Bulgaria call himself a Bulgarian."

In some Turkish regions, Turkish residents reportedly discriminate against Bulgarians, and this reinforces Bulgarian fears. A Bulgarian woman from Perperek told Helsinki Watch that when she goes to the village shop to buy food, the Turkish manager hides the food and later sells it to Turks.

A primary school teacher from Perperek fears that if the Turks win the local elections, they will suppress Bulgarians' rights. A resident of Kurdzhali said: "We are a minority here. After local elections, we are not sure that they will protect our interests. There is great tension. We don't trust each other."

**In some regions, Bulgarians and Turks co-exist with relatively few problems. For example, in Bukovo, the chairman of the local Movement for Rights and Freedoms, said: "There is no confrontation today. Bulgarians and Muslims work together." Everyday interaction seems to foster peaceful relations, even in those areas where some tensions have been reported. In Perperek, for example, a Bulgarian primary school teacher dissented from the views of her fellow Bulgarians who said that they feared the Turks: "I myself don't have any fear. I have no fear because I know the Turks. I am in constant contact with them. They have never done anything bad to me." A Pomak from Luzhnitsa expressed guarded hope for the future: "I am hopeful things will remain as they are now, but they may regress because part of the Christian community treats you as a second class citizen the moment they learn you are a Muslim. This is due to a psychosis. Perhaps their mentality will change as they get to know us. For centuries, Muslims and Christians lived together without any problems."**

**Re-examination of the past -- and particularly of Zhivkov's assimilation campaign -- may also help to reduce tensions. An ethnic Turk from Benkovski noted: "During the election campaign, we had an opportunity to give the Bulgarians an objective picture of the events in May. Tension between us is subsiding because they are beginning to understand that we were not responsible for the tension in May."**

## **Recommendations**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian government to promote respect for human rights by taking the following steps:**

- o A special Civil Rights Unit should be created in the Ministry of Justice to investigate and prosecute alleged violations of human rights.**
- o Parliament should adopt a Civil Rights Law to prohibit workers and managers in state-owned enterprises from discriminating against minorities.**
- o Parliament should appoint a special commission to investigate the government's assimilation campaign. The commission should issue a report that discusses the causes of the assimilation campaign and how it was conducted. Any memoranda prepared by government officials should be made public.**
- o Government policies should foster interaction between ethnic Bulgarians and minorities in such areas as education and housing.**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Turkish government to provide assurances that it will not violate the territorial integrity of Bulgaria by seeking the annexation of Turkish regions within Bulgaria.**

**Helsinki Watch urges ethnic Turks and ethnic Bulgarians to engage in regular dialogue to discuss their concerns and to come up with common strategies to unify their communities.**

## **Helsinki Watch Publications on Bulgaria**

*News from Bulgaria: Election Report*, **June 1990.**

*News from Bulgaria (on minority problems and pre-election conditions)*, **March 1990.**

*Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks*, **October 1989 (66 pages).**

*News from Bulgaria (on harassment of independent groups)*, **May 1989.**

*News from Bulgaria (on harassment of independent groups)*, **January 1989.**

*News from Bulgaria (letter from political prisoner)*, **June 1988.**

*Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria, An Update*, **September 1987 (58 pages).**

*Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria*, **June 1986 (39 pages).**

---

**This edition of *News from Bulgaria* was written by Theodore Zang Jr. and is a publication of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, a non-governmental human rights organization founded in 1979 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. Its Chairman is Robert L. Bernstein; its Vice Chairmen are Jonathan Fanton and Alice H. Henkin; its Executive Director is Jeri Laber; its Deputy Director is Lois Whitman; its Washington Representative is Catherine Cosman; Staff Counsel are Holly Cartner and Theodore Zang Jr.**

**Helsinki Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that links Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch.**

**Helsinki Watch is affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, which is based in Vienna.**