

Bulgaria

Ethnicity in Bulgaria

Group selection

We identify the following politically relevant ethnic groups: **Bulgarians, Macedonians, Pomaks, Roma, and Turks.**

Power relations

1946-1957

At the beginning of the communist regime, policies towards ethnic minorities were comparatively liberal. Minorities regained rights to restore original names, publish newspapers and even establish schools. The constitution of 1947 is the only Bulgarian constitution ever to directly mention “national minorities”. Article 79 states that “the national minorities have the right to study their mother tongue and develop their national culture.” The constitution guaranteed equal rights to all Bulgarian citizens regardless of their nationality, origin, denomination and property (⁵⁸², 5). On the other hand, all groups were partly discriminated due to communist attitude towards religion. As Kosseva et al. state, “religion was an exceptionally important segment of the national identity on the Balkans, many churches and other places of worship were closed and through various forms of repression, people were diverted away from the religion” (⁵⁸³, 11).

⁵⁸² [Hajdinjak, 2008]

⁵⁸³ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

Political representation was limited to the Communist party. However, this can hardly be qualified as discrimination of any of the ethnic groups. The largest minority groups had a significant voice in the communist party (⁵⁸⁴, 12). Yet, since ethnicity was not politicized during these years, access to state-decision making much rather went via the CP, we code all ethnic groups as irrelevant.

⁵⁸⁴ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

1958-1989

In 1958, the Communist Party Politburo decided to limit minority rights and started a new assimilation policy. “The ultimate goal was to turn Bulgaria into a mono-national country, and to turn its people into an ideologically and ethnically homogeneous nation” (585, 12).

⁵⁸⁵ [Kosseva et al., 2009]

A policy of discrimination of all ethnic groups - limited possibilities to participate, mandatory change of names, forced settlement of Roma and event deployment of army units in resisting villages - was the core means to reach the goal of assimilation. The regime even denied the existence of other ethnic groups in Bulgaria. Thus, Bulgarians had a monopoly on power, while all other politically relevant ethnic groups were “discriminated”.

1990-1998

After the fall of communism, the ruling elite still continued the policy of denial of ethnic identities. However, due to a lack of means of repression, ethnic nationalism flourished (586, 5). “(...) The first democratic Constitution, adopted in 1991, did not include the term ‘minority’ nor its definition, it did specifically mention ‘citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian’ (article 36) and added that everyone had the right to ‘develop their own culture in accordance with their ethnic affiliation, which is endorsed and guaranteed by the law’ (article 54)” (587, 6). Even more, article 11 says that “there shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines”. Thus, discrimination ended in 1990 but the Bulgarian majority still held a monopoly of political power.

⁵⁸⁶ [Rechel, 2008]

⁵⁸⁷ [Hajdinjak, 2008]

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) party was legalized in 1992. Although the party denies being a Turkish party, as ethnic parties are forbidden in the constitution, it is dominated by the Turkish minority. Other minorities (Pomaks and Muslim Roma) are also to some extent represented by MRF. MRF is the 3rd largest party in Bulgaria and played an important coalition-forming role in virtually all post-Communist governments (588, 1211).

⁵⁸⁸ [Rechel, 2008]

The second largest minority group, the Roma, was unable to reach any significant representation on the national level. Because of large political fragmentation, none of the Roma parties has ever played a significant role in national coalition building. Although there is no direct limitation for Roma people to participate in politics, they are affected by an overall discriminatory environment (especially poor access to public goods, including education, etc...). Roma are coded as “powerless” throughout.

1999

Macedonians are the only minority group with an explicitly ethnic party. The party OMO "Ilinden" was registered in 1999, but banned by the constitutional court as a separatist party in 2000 (⁵⁸⁹, 18; ⁵⁹⁰, 336). The party remains active while being still banned from political participation. The number of Macedonians is a contentious issue in Bulgaria. According to the census there were about 200'000 Macedonians living in Bulgaria in 1956 (⁵⁹¹, 18). The 2001 census was the first since 1965 to list Macedonians in the official results. But according to its results only about 5 000 Macedonians (0.06% of total population) live in Bulgaria (⁵⁹², 335). Experts of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee hold it to be the Macedonian population at about 20'000 (⁵⁹³, 4). This estimation has been used for coding. Discrimination seems to have continued since 2009; for example, it is reported that the Census conducted in 2011 did not include the possibility to self-identify as Macedonian, which is interpreted as a denial of the existence of the ethnic group itself (⁵⁹⁴). A report to the UN Human Rights Council (⁵⁹⁵) highlighted the need for the country to recognize Macedonians as an ethnic group and grant the appropriate, constitutionally guaranteed rights.

⁵⁸⁹ [Hajdinjak, 2008]⁵⁹⁰ [Rechel, 2008]⁵⁹¹ [Hajdinjak, 2008]⁵⁹² [Rechel, 2008]⁵⁹³ [Hajdinjak, 2008]*2000-2001*

Codings as before, except Macedonians are coded as "discriminated" from here on.

2002-2009

Starting in the second half of the year 2001, the MRF (Turks) participated in a coalition cabinet with the National Movement Simeon II. 2005 saw the emergence of the "self-avowed (ultra-)nationalist organization, Ataka (Attack), as the fourth-largest political formation" (⁵⁹⁶, 25) in the parliament. Although Ataka remains out of power, its rising popularity could lead to some changes in the power configuration in the future.

⁵⁹⁶ [Kavalski, 2007]

2010-2013

Due to the victory of GERB in parliamentary elections in 2009 and the single-party government that was constituted thereafter, Bulgarians are coded as being dominant for this period. After the elections in 2009, the MRF was excluded from government, which consisted of members of the party "Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria" (GERB) only. Therefore, the Turkish are coded as being powerless from 2010 to 2013.

2014

Parliamentary elections were held in 2013, resulting in no party winning a majority of the parliamentary seats. The government was formed afterwards by the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the latter of which mainly represents the interests of the Turkish ethnic group. This implies that for the period after 2013, the Turks should be coded as Junior Partner. However, the government resigned shortly after its initial formation (in August 2014) due to criticism and protests (⁵⁹⁷; ⁵⁹⁸).

⁵⁹⁷ [Deutsche Welle, 2013]⁵⁹⁸ [The Sofia Globe, 2014]*2015-2017*

In October 2014, parliamentary elections were held again. The coalition formed afterwards consisted of members of GERB and the Reformist Bloc, and did not include any minority parties (⁵⁹⁹). Thus, the Turks are coded as powerless again from 2015 on, while the Bulgarians regained a Dominant status.

⁵⁹⁹ [Euractiv, 2014]

The Roma remain socially marginalized, underrepresented in national politics and characterized by a very high unemployment rate, although initiatives of societal inclusion were taken by the government. However, no political discrimination is observable and on the local level, the Romani parties gain in influence (⁶⁰⁰). The Pomak political participation remains restricted to the local level and, to a certain extent, to their representation in parliament through the MRF (⁶⁰¹; ⁶⁰²). However, only those Pomaks that feel close to the Turks feel represented by the MRF, which means that the specific Pomak ethnic identity is not politically active. The Macedonians are still politically discriminated, as their existence as an ethnic minority remains denied by the government (⁶⁰³).

⁶⁰⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2015]⁶⁰¹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2015]⁶⁰² [Novinite, 2013]⁶⁰³ [OMO "Ilinden" - PIRIN, 2017]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria

From 1946 until 1957

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	IRRELEVANT
Turkish	0.1	IRRELEVANT
Roma	0.05	IRRELEVANT
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	IRRELEVANT

From 1958 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	DISCRIMINATED
Roma	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Pomaks	0.017	DISCRIMINATED
Macedonians	0.002	IRRELEVANT

From 1990 until 1998

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	IRRELEVANT



Figure 97: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1946-1957.



Figure 98: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1989.



Figure 99: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1990-1998.

From 1999 until 1999

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	POWERLESS

From 2000 until 2001

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	MONOPOLY
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2002 until 2009

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	SENIOR PARTNER
Turkish	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2010 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	DOMINANT
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 100: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-1999.



Figure 101: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2000-2001.



Figure 102: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2002-2009.



Figure 103: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2010-2013.

From 2014 until 2014

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	SENIOR PARTNER
Turkish	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED

From 2015 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bulgarians	0.83	DOMINANT
Turkish	0.1	POWERLESS
Roma	0.05	POWERLESS
Pomaks	0.017	IRRELEVANT
Macedonians	0.002	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 104: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2014-2014.



Figure 105: Political status of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 2015-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Bulgaria

From 1946 until 1957

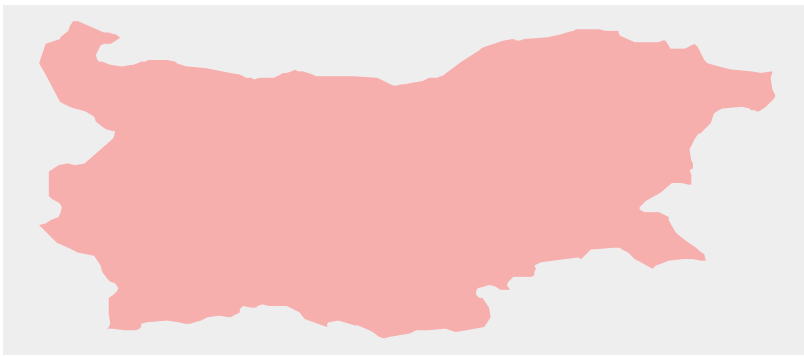


Figure 106: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1946-1957.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Bulgarians	110 821	Statewide

Table 33: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1946-1957.

From 1958 until 1998

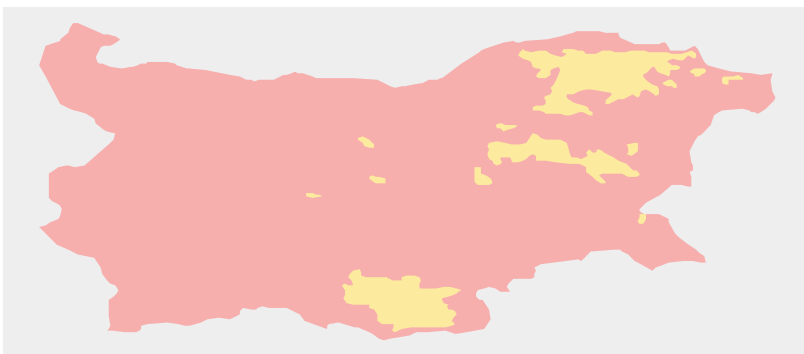


Figure 107: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1998.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Bulgarians	110 821	Statewide
■ Turkish	9 973	Regionally based
Pomaks		Dispersed
Roma		Dispersed

Table 34: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1958-1998.

From 1999 until 2017

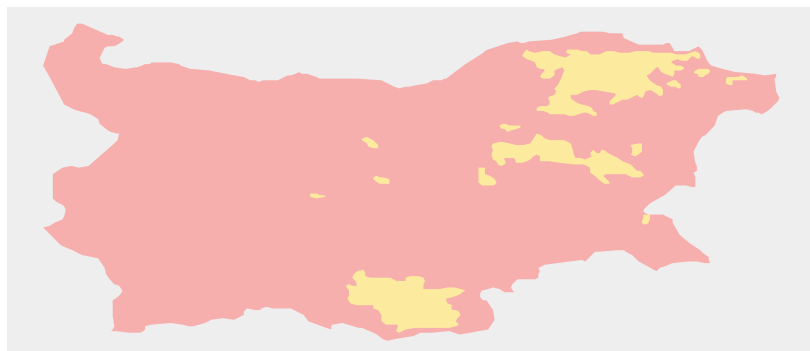


Figure 108: Map of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-2017.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Bulgarians	110 821	Statewide
■ Turkish	9 973	Regionally based
Macedonians		Dispersed
Pomaks		Dispersed
Roma		Dispersed

Table 35: List of ethnic groups in Bulgaria during 1999-2017.