

**The ethnic geographical investigation of social  
processes in Bulgaria during the first decade after  
the change of regime**

Thesis for the doctor's degree (short version)

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## **Preface**

Bulgaria is a country with a considerable number of minorities (from European and Balkan point of view alike). There is no doubt that the presence of minorities is an unsolved problem for the country, their integration was not realized by the turn of the millennium either. Their situation is still uncertain as the Bulgarian Constitution, which was accepted in 1991 and is still in force, does not admit their presence despite the fact that their obvious separation as well as the social and economic problems deriving from it are imposing a burden on the society more and more.

The Bulgarian literature is trying to explore the processes which are behind the drastic population decline demonstrated by the results of the censuses, however, its ethnic consequences and the scientific studies which show the ethnic problems in general are pushed into the background, in spite of the fact that several foreign studies are interested in these questions. The nature of the problems and their spatiality need research from ethnic geographical point of view, which this paper aims to be connected to.

### **The aim of the research**

The presence of ethnic groups living in the present territory of Bulgaria is the result of migration processes determined by historical events. The factors of formation of identity of the ethnic groups living in this area and that of their spatial and social relationship between each other are the following: the origin of the ethnic groups, the time of appearance in the region, the state organizing activity and the turning points influencing their community and appearing in their collective memory. The exploration of forming factors through centuries is essential, not only for the examination of changes appearing in the ethnic pattern after the change of regime, but the origin of the problems with ethnic background straining the society must be also searched in the historical past, in the interaction occurred during the coexistence. In the first part of my work I have examined the historical background of the presence of the minorities.

On the grounds of the results of the censuses it can be stated that the ratio of the minorities in the whole society increased after the change of regime. Naturally, it can be different in the single minorities, and spatial differences can be observed in changes within the communities of the minorities. This research will be found in the next chapter of my paper.

One of the main consequences of the transition to the market economy is the differentiation of the society, the increase in disparities. It can be manifested in the separation of the minorities as well. Nevertheless, the increase in the rate of segregation is not unambiguous. Differences can be found in the changes of the relationship between the single minorities and

the majority, in the distinction of minorities from each other and within the single minorities accordingly which part of the country they live in. The investigation of this has also been the research aim of this work.

The demographical problems of the Bulgarian society have emerged great attention on national and international level alike. Although the population decline became faster after the change of regime, its intensity is different in the case of the single minorities. The ageing of population shows similar tendencies. However, the spatial examinations can reveal that the single minorities are not the same in these questions either. The differences that can be found in population decline and ageing belong to the research circle of my thesis as well.

The marginalization of minorities in the years after the change of regime was withheld both by the political elite and the representatives of sciences while the international literature has been reminding of this unsolved problem. With the help of the data of the censuses I have also made an attempt to feature the peripheral situation of the minorities within the Bulgarian society.

### **The applied methods**

In my research to reveal the social problems with ethnic feature in Bulgaria I have applied the methods used by the representatives of Hungarian ethnic geographers. The main sources in ethnic geographical investigations are considered to be the censuses, the available results of which the data concerning nationality, language, religion, obligation to ethnic group and to nation have ethnic features. I have created tables with the help of publications of Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (NSI) with the data mentioned above and with data which show the demographic features of the ethnic groups and their status in the society.

After the collection and classification of information I have created a database, which has been integrated to a Geographical Information System, which makes the territorial visualization of information possible. With the further enlargement of the database system it is also possible to investigate the problem demonstrated in this work with other territorial levels thus with other processes, periods and social features.

It is the decade resulting dramatic changes after the change of regime that is in the focus of my research and the information base of which is provided by the censuses of 1992 and 2001. This work invokes the national aggregated data of the previous censuses as the exploration and comprehension of the processes appearing at the turn of the millennium are not possible without knowing the preliminaries. The tendencies of the investigated processes after the turn of the millennium will also appear in my work with the help of Bulgarian papers written in English and with the annual reports of National Statistical Institute.

The territorial aspects of the social problems with ethnic feature are expected to be revealed in Bulgaria as well, thus the main characteristic feature of my work is to attempt to investigate social inequalities with territorial aspects. I have revealed the theoretical background of my methods with the help of the monograph by Róbert Keményfi (2004), which deals with the methods of research with ethnic features in details. The summarizing work of József Nemes Nagy has helped me to become acquainted with the theory of spatial research, the possibilities of the applications of the methods and their concrete contents.

In view of the knowledge of these works methodological questions emerged during my research, which will be presented in this chapter. As territorial investigations are brought into focus, I have to define the territories and their level on the basis of the theory of spatial division. Considering the three vertical divisions of social space, I will focus on the macro and mezzo level processes of the problem. I regard it necessary to emphasize as it determines the research methods, the results and their interpretation.

The basis of the horizontal spatial division is provided by the administrative units, in which different levels can be distinguished. This work with the spatial research shows the processes in the territory named Bulgaria, but if it is necessary, in international context and in historical times as well. I will explore the territorial inequalities of the Bulgarian social problems with ethnic feature appearing at the turn of the millennium on the level of the local administrative units with the help of the available data. Facilities for these territorial investigations have been provided by the series of issues titled Census 2001 (Prebrojavane 2001) and published till 2006, which consists of 28 volumes and contains data at the LAU 1 level of the Bulgarian administration.

The LAU 1 is the level of *obshtinas*, the territory of which is similar to or larger than our subregion named *kistérség* and these are the scenes of local government. There can be more settlements within an *obshtina*, moreover they are very heterogeneous according to their population number and legally they can be regarded as the successors of village communities, which functioned for centuries. Their number has been changing since the change of regime, which makes the comparison of the data of the censuses harder. While 256 *obshtinas* existed in 1992, in 2001 their number increased to 263. It means that certain *obshtinas* were divided thus new borders came into being only within the former territorial units. In this work the basis of my research is the administrative division in 1992 as in this way it is possible to contract the data of *obshtinas* in 2001 and as a result the homogenization of the data.

Since the basis of my research is provided by numerical data, I will apply the facilities of the statistical data analysis and quantitative methods. It also means that I wish to secede from

the descriptive geographical interpretation of the problem in spite of the fact that it would also fill a gap both in Hungarian and in Bulgarian geography. I will use the national aggregated data mainly for the investigation of the long time processes. I have analysed the processes after the change of regime with the help of data surveyed and calculated in the course of the censuses of 1992 and 2001.

Due to the great territorial and population differences, I have used specific (mainly compared to population) data when comparing the differences of territorial units. For the sake of expressive comparability, I have visualized these data in maps. The cartographic basis of these figures has been provided by Peter Jordan's (1995) work about the ethnic structure of South-Eastern Europe and I have made the basic map of territorial division according to this. As a further source I have used the administrative atlas of Bulgaria published in 2005. The small-scale maps of this publication indicate the administrative division of the counties (oblasts), the obstinas (LAU 1) and every settlement within the proper territorial unit (it would be the LAU 2 level in the territorial division of the EU, however, the borders of the settlements do not appear on these maps, accordingly, the basic map I have made is not settlement level) as well as the number of residents.

On the figures which show the spatiality of the available data I have carried out the representation of the ethnic and demographic composition and their changes in territorial units with diagram-method. I have represented the spatial position of the ethnic groups, the changes of their ethnic structure and demographic situation with the method of surface-cartogram.

In Hungarian ethnic geography some authors remind us of the possibilities of applying quantitative methods. I have used these instruments on the grounds of these examples. I have measured the inequalities of the compared spatial position of the ethnic groups living in Bulgaria with Hoover-index from the spatial inequality indexes. I have explored the changes in spatial position of the ethnic groups during the examined decade with the method of the centre of gravity based on physical analogy. I have represented the ratio of the ethnic groups compared to each other in the obshintas in a triangle-diagram and I have characterised the territories with its help.

It is necessary to remind that there are limits of investigations like this therefore they have dangers thus the results of my thesis need to be treated carefully. General tendencies can be revealed and the results of the analysis of social processes in Bulgaria with quantitative data can be interpretative on macro and medium level, however, the everyday social problems in people's life stay hidden during such a type of examination. Furthermore, it is also important

to emphasize that using foreign (especially Bulgarian) literature is essential for the knowledge of the social background of the processes appearing in my research.

Nevertheless, the limits mentioned above do not question the necessity of such research. On the one hand the ethnic conflicts generating social tensions take shape both in social and geographical space therefore this research can be the starting-point of further research working mainly with empirical methods, which can focus on particular problems and territories. On the other hand these general statements are much-needed both in Hungarian and Bulgarian geography. Becoming acquainted with this question is also important for us as the social tensions with ethnic feature appearing in Bulgaria are special forms of a problem which exists not only in our southern neighbours, in the Balkan countries, but in fact it is typical in whole Eastern part of Europe and generates further social problems.

### **The results of the research**

The scientific results of my thesis can be summarized in short in the following findings:

1. I made a short synthesis of the position and results of Hungarian Ethnic Geography when I collected and processed the available literature, which was necessary for the theoretical background of my thesis.
2. I have explored the changing aspects of the Hungarian literature specialized in the Balkans to throw light on why the exploration of this territory examined by me takes special status in Hungarian science.
3. I have created a database integrated to a GIS system, which makes extensive analysis possible with the help of created tables on the evidence of data referred to LAU1 territorial units - the level of the smallest independent territorial units with the possession of self-government according to the administrative division, which is in the Bulgarian Constitution - and published by Bulgarian National Statistical Institute. Regular updating makes further research possible.
4. The exploration of social processes in the course of centuries, which determined the coexistence of the ethnic groups in the territory of Bulgaria, has been carried out with the consideration of the ethnic geographical aspect therefore they provide basis to the investigation of territorial and social differences of the problems appearing in my work as the factors influencing the ethnic structure have been formulated in the historical eras.
5. The knowledge of the ethnic structure of the country with numerous minorities is essential for exploring the spatiality of social problems with ethnic feature. Besides the static analyses referring to the time of the two censuses (1992 and 2001) of the decade

after the change of regime, the dynamic research of the processes in the examined era has been completed as well. In the latter case the research has been supported by statistical methods.

6. The thesis has pointed out that changes appearing in the age structure of the Bulgarian society due to population decline, as well as their research from spatial and ethnic aspects have overriding importance from numerous point of views.
7. The last chapter of my thesis has revealed that the minorities of Bulgaria are situated in the periphery of the society, which means that they are present in the society as potential source of tension even after the millennium; their integration was not realized during the transformational processes appearing after the change of regime. The appearance of peripheral status among minorities could be explored by the investigation of unemployment and the size of households on the basis of the available data of the censuses.

### **Conclusion**

The peripheral status of minorities is due to the fact that they are different from the state-creator nation in basic identity-keeping elements. The three pillars of the origin of Bulgarian people (Thracian, Slavic and Proto-Bulgarian elements), their orthodox Christian religion and their Slavic-origin culture are in contrast with their minorities because of the 500 years of Ottoman rule moreover the presence of these minorities is the heritage of that era in Bulgaria, on the land, which is considered by the Bulgarians as their own on historical basis with reference to their former state. The history of the modern Bulgarian state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by the social conflict forming from this opposition. The resolving attempts led to more and more violent assimilative and discriminative policies, which resulted in the isolation of minorities from the major society by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The problems appearing due to population decline had been developing simultaneously with the unsolved status of the minorities then the two questions became radical under the influence of the transformational processes after the change of regime.

It can be claimed in general that the change of the ethnic structure has been affected by drastic population decline, however, the differences among minorities have caused shift in ratio. While the proportion of minorities with larger number compared to the state-creator nation – especially in the case of Gipsies and less in the case of Turks – has increased, the minorities with fewer numbers (e.g. Jews and Armenians) have disappeared almost completely from the country after the opening of the borders.

Examining the spatial inequalities it can be realized that in the decade after the change of regime migration became more intensive in the society and highly affected the territories inhabited by minorities. The radiating region was considered to be mainly the territories with largely Turkish inhabitants like district Kardjali in the south and Razgrad, Shumen, Targovishte oblasts in the north-east, from where the migration took place towards the larger towns and cities close to their population-concentration, and towards the coast of the Black Sea. The districts mentioned above are regarded as the crisis areas of the country as these regions had prepared for tobacco-graining and after the collapse of tobacco-industry they had large amounts of unemployed people without qualifications who had to find living. The regions having advantages during the economic transformation can be indicated with the fact that the Bulgarian inhabitants could preserve their number and proportion from the whole population in these areas, like Sophia and its surroundings, in the south-western obshtinas of district Blagoevgrad and in the coast of the Black Sea.

The most spectacular changes have been produced by the Gipsy inhabitants, the drastic increase in their number can be observed in the whole territory of the country, apart from the economic situation. This is primarily due to their emerging self-consciousness and only secondly to their higher fertility rates.

It became evident from the spatial investigation of the inhabitants who could not determine their nationality in the censuses that the minorities with a large number and with the most uncertain identity are the Pomaks, who live in the Rodope Mountains. Their mother tongue is Bulgarian, their religion is Muslim and the assimilation is at an advanced stage in their communities.

The changes in territorial separation of the minorities from the major society show specific tendencies. The measure of segregation declined in case of every minority due to migration toward primarily to the cities which took place as a result of economic transformation, however, the segregation of the Turkish minority and the major society has been sharp even after the turn of the millennium.

The shifts that occurred in ethnic structure due to more intensive mobility demonstrate the movements with existential impulse in the years after the change of regime. It can be established in general that mainly the coast of the Black Sea could increase its population with immigration, which is due to the neighbouring Turkish population-concentration, from where the migrants move mainly to this region rather than to the capital city. In contrast with this the capital city and the prospering south-western obshtinas relatively

close to the capital city attracted mostly ethnic Bulgarians. Ethnic Turks were shifted to the north-east because of the movement of the Turkish inhabitants from the crisis area of district Kardjali, however, their segregation from the major society is still significant. In the case of the Gypsies the significant positive changes in their proportion modified the ethnic structure, but did not cause shifts in the space as the number of the Gypsy inhabitants increased in their traditional settlement territories (mostly in the cities and in their surroundings).

At the turn of the millennium a number of characteristic territories can be highlighted in the ethnic spatial structure which formed as a result of processes mentioned above. The two major population-concentrations of the ethnic Turks essentially concentrated in four smaller territories by the turn of the millennium. The territories where the Gypsy minority lived outside the cities and became a determining factor took shape. The southern territories inhabited by Pomaks were not similar to each other and the minorities with fewer numbers were rather inhabitants of larger cities therefore they do not appear as characteristic factors in the spatial structure.

The ethnic differences, which are peculiar to the whole country and demonstrable in population decline and in age structure, indicate specific disparities among territorial units and within the communities of the ethnic groups. The drastic shifts in proportion in the Bulgarian age structure, which appeared in the decade after the change of regime, burden the society, however, ageing appears at different extent among ethnic groups and it has different causes, which deepens the problems. If we examine the question from ethnic aspect, opposite tendencies can be observed.

Among the state-creator Bulgarians similarly to the western civilisation the success of individualisation can be seen as a result of modernisation. Due to the former migration to the cities in the previous decades, ageing is at an advanced stage in their rural communities while the modern urban way of life, which is characteristic of the major society, decreases their number in the more developed regions as well. After the opening of borders a part of the mainly young, fertile age groups left the country escaping from the poverty.

Among the minorities similar tendencies can only be seen in the case of Pomaks, however, not in every community of theirs. In the case of the ethnic Turks the population decrease and ageing appear less strongly in general, however, in the territory of crisis area of East-Rodope the age structure spectacularly became more disproportionate in the era of the censuses between 1992 and 2001. The Turkish minority remained without living in the

most underdeveloped region of Bulgaria therefore the traditional family structure, which had been characteristic in the former centuries, broke up. In the communities of the Gipsy minority the tendencies seem to be completely different from the national ones. They command a typical young age structure in every obshtina apart from the other features of the territorial units.

Different tendencies from the major society have appeared among minorities both in employment and in the features of households. The rate of unemployment is rather high in their communities, and the dominance of large households can be observed. The latter feature among Turks is not characteristic in their ageing central territories. The peripheral status of minorities has proved to be demonstrable indirectly as well with the standardization of the obshtinas on the basis of proportion of ethnic minorities. Due to this fact it has been successfully highlighted that differences with ethnic feature appear behind the spatial inequalities of the level of qualification furthermore the reason why larger households are more characteristic among minorities is that originally they are mainly inhabitants of rural areas. They live in obshtinas where the proportion of urban inhabitants is lower than in regions inhabited by mainly the state-creator nation.

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