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REPORT

On the situation of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria

*RELATED TO THE PRECEDING REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE
 FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN BULGARIA
 AND THE CORRESPONDING REPORT OF THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT FROM 2012*

1. Progress

In its 2010 report, the Committee has ranged some suggestions concerning minorities in general and the Macedonian minority in particular but the government had not taken notice of these recommendations. The 2012 government's report proves it right – its parts about achieved improvements do not even mention Macedonians at all.¹ The situation of people with Macedonian awareness did not improve, and the problems have not disappeared. Quite the contrary – they have grown larger.

2. Minority acceptance

About the non-acceptance of the Macedonian minority – we place emphasis on the term "non-acceptance" that it does not depict the real situation. It is about the formal NEGATION (DENIAL) of the existence of the Macedonian minority.

The 1990 Parliament's official declaration, the statements made by two presidents, a ruling by the Constitutional Court in 2000, a sentence by the Sofia City Court in 2007, similar decisions by other institutions, ministers' and deputies' declarations, etc. – they all have denied our existence.

Some recent examples:

- In his visit to the Republic of Macedonia in May 2010, the Minister of foreign affairs N. Mladenov stated: "There is no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. There are no minorities in our country – there are certain ethnic groups only, and we respect their human and civil rights".
- Kristian Vigenin, the present minister of foreign affairs, shares the same opinion.²
- Andrey Kovachev, EU deputy from the than ruling party GERB, on Aug 7, 2012 to the question of the Macedonian Canal 5 if there is a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, answered:

¹ THIRD REPORT SUBMITTED BY BULGARIA PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 25, PARAGRAPH 2 OF THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES, Received on 23 November 2012

² <http://pressadaily.bg/publication/16427-%D0%92%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D0%92-%D0%91%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE/>

“No, no, no. Of course there does not exist a Macedonian minority! How could I explain it in other words? There are no minorities in Bulgaria!”³

- A lot of court rulings deny the existence of a Macedonian minority (see appendix).
- The negation is supported by the fact that a representative of the Macedonians had never been sent to the national Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII).
- The negation can be seen in governmental comments to the 2010 Committee’s reports where Macedonians is a quote-unquote term.⁴ The 2012 Government’s report on the 2011 Census does not even include the term “Macedonian”.
- In June 2013 the Bulgarian government spread its position among various European institutions concerning the European integration of the Republic of Macedonia. Aware of the scandalizing facts which it was containing, this document was disseminated as a non-paper. Judging by the facts we had access to, the Bulgarian government categorically denies the existence of Macedonian culture and history before the year 1944 and outside the borders of the present Republic of Macedonia. It denies too the existence of Macedonian minorities, and considers such as assurance as a violence of good neighboring relations.⁵ This act is very typical of the way not only to deny the existence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria but to deny the acknowledged Macedonian minority in Albania.

This example reveals the nationalistic roots from the emerging Balkan nations of the 19th century, and from the efforts Bulgaria had put to annex Macedonia in the 19th and 20th centuries. These efforts were an important part of the ideology which Bulgaria’s dictator Todor Zhivkov was pursuing. Denying a minority is part of the efforts to deny the entire Macedonian nation – an attitude which sparks tensions to relations with Macedonia. This has to be taken very seriously into consideration in order to understand the problems and the specifics in the Bulgarian position as expressed before the Committee. Bulgarian governments’ policy towards these problems is ambiguous. On one hand, this policy is nationalistic, and the Macedonian minority is its victim. On the other hand, this policy is meant for external observers and committees and aims to repel suggestions or remarks which might have direct or indirect influence on the policy of denial and discrimination towards the Macedonians in Bulgaria. The effort of Bulgaria is enormous to convince international observers that recognition of the Macedonians in itself is needles, that denial of its existence does not violate their human rights and that the registration of a minimum of Macedonians in population censuses is in fact a recognition and sufficient for this purpose.⁶ With those three claims Bulgaria hopes to avoid an official recognition of the minority. It is important to notice that although the registration in population censuses is seen as sufficient to claim an apparent recognition the government insists on the following position „However, by its very nature self-identification is a subjective criterion and does not in itself suffice to qualify for the protection of the Framework Convention“ (2010, page 51, full Reference?). Therefore in contrast to the statement of the committee “that recognition by the State as a minority is not a prerequisite to qualify for the protection of the Framework Convention“(§ 36), the government does not accept even the recognition of a minority status as a sufficient precondition to implement the Convention. The report of the Bulgarian government discloses the same arguments in this regard. This idle talk masks a reality where Macedonians cannot be found in documents describing precisely the problems of minorities and actions to overcome them. The Macedonians do exist only in tables of the population censuses. We are forced to conclude, that the government is apparently not motivated weather to undertake

³ <http://grid.mk/read/news/64869386/767576/bugarski-evropratenik-njama-makedonsko-malcinstvo-vo-bugarija-njama-njama>. Andrey Kovachev is a deputy - head of the Commission of foreign affairs of EP and a member of the sub-Commission of security and defense.

⁴ „persons identifying themselves as “Macedonians” (p. 62)

⁵ It is worth to compare the words of Minister Mladenov from May 2010 addressed to his Macedonian colleagues: “If you want us to stop talking, let’s start talking about Macedonian minority”.

⁶ „These facts are included in the official census results which are freely available and do not require any additional specific act of recognition by the state authorities.“ (2010, c. 51)

any actions neither to improve the situation of the Macedonians nor to implement the Convention in favour of them.

Presence of Macedonians in the results of the census does not in itself mean acknowledgment (actually in the society the artificially under calculated number is used as an argument of denial rather than recognition) since in fact all state institutions officially deny the recognition of Macedonian minority and the state refuses to apply the Convention in its favor. This unreal and targeted reduction of the Macedonians to symbolic number, together with their formal denial in Bulgaria has quite effective and negative consequences, such as the following:

- *People who self-determine themselves as Macedonians usually become an object of hate speech and are treated as illiterate liars, traitors and enemies of the Bulgarian state and also as foreign agents. The mere assertion that there is such a minority is treated as a threat to national unity and national security (see Appendixes).*
- *None of the rights in the Convention on minorities actually is implemented on them.*
- *Denial of the Macedonian minority is being used as an argument to refuse registration of Macedonian organizations.*

In terms of the argument of the government that Macedonians do not differ from other citizens linguistically and culturally, we want to underline that this is a controversial, speculative opinion which Macedonians themselves do not share. Indeed some linguistic and cultural proximity with Bulgarians is evident, but this itself is not enough for a denial of the national identity. On one hand this similarity is a consequence of both languages being from the Slavic language family. On the other hand the spoken language is a result of decades of assimilation (1948 - present); the results of the planned and natural assimilation could not be an argument for not giving adequate rights and recognition but rather should be encouraged to take measures to "cure" this situation and to keep the linguistic and cultural diversity. Thirdly the proximity is a phenomenon of the globalization of culture which makes it equally difficult to distinguish also other minorities from the majority (Greeks, Jews, Serbs for example), but this argument is not use to deny these peoples national identity. This unequal treatment is used only in respect to the Macedonians and Pomaks because the official national doctrine treats them as ethnic Bulgarians, radically denying their self-determination and the expression of free will. Fourthly, the proximity is due to the specific state policy that aims to claim all peculiarities of the language and culture of the Macedonians are actually Bulgarian. But this position is not objective, nor can it be an objective criterion, as claimed by Bulgarian government, but is nationalistic and subjective; using the same "objective" method it is possible to renounce the specificities and the very existence of all minorities.⁷ Insistence on "objective" criteria as mandatory conditions for the recognition of minority rights accepted in the Constitution essentially protects the "right" of the government to deny the minorities which existence does not fit into the dominant national mythology of the state and not to apply the Framework of the Constitution on them.

Macedonians feel and think about themselves as different from Bulgarians and being treated as Bulgarians or as "ignorant Bulgarians" who only claim to be Macedonians is discriminative and degrading. They, the Macedonian nationals, insist on being officially recognized by the government which will reject and replace the current official denial by full recognition of their national identity.

⁷ It is sufficient to point out that according to the "objective" criteria being used by the Bulgarian state today Macedonian language does not exist whatsoever nevertheless that the mentioned one is the literate language of the neighboring Republic of Macedonia, that it has been recognized and studied in Bulgaria and that at the present time is being taught by tens of universities around the world. The unnatural collision in the modern Bulgarian philology in respect to this matter is a result of repressions against those philologists who thought that Macedonian language was a separate one from Bulgarian. Famous example for this is the mother of the ex-Prime Minister, now leader of the European socialists Sergei Stanishev – Dina Stanisheva who has been dismissed from her job in 60-es of XX century because she supported the idea that Macedonian was different from Bulgarian language.

3. Census.

Due to the abnormal atmosphere and numerous violations of their rights, Macedonian organizations even before the release of the census, announced that they will not recognize the results. We will not go into detail of this problem because in the Annex we attach a full detailed report on the matter. We want only to add something concerning the results in the preparation of the report (version of the document before its release) which was not known, more precisely the abnormally high number of people declared as "not self-determined", being about 10% or more than 700 000, which is ten times more than on the previous censuses. This is due not so much to the failure of the people to self-determine themselves but as a conscious policy of not asking the people to specify their nationality (or ethnicity, something that used to be common practice that targeted in particular the Macedonians. The increase of the number of those who did not self-determine is produced on the account of the minorities and is evident by the results themselves - minorities as Turkish, Roma and Macedonian are drastically reduced as compared to the previous censuses.

Statement in the government report of 2012 that "In the process of preparation for the Census, the National Statistical Institute in cooperation with the NCCEII held consultations with representatives of ethnic minority groups on the methodology of collection of data on ethnicity, mother tongue and religion" (p. 19) is not true, at least with regard to the Macedonian minority. Not only that no such consultations with the Macedonians were made, but sub column "Macedonian" from the pilot census (2010) was deleted, and the views and recommendations submitted by the Macedonian organizations were completely ignored. Instead of reassuring publicly the people with Macedonian consciousness that they can freely declare as Macedonians five NSI employees were sacked because they allowed the sub column "Macedonian" to be present in the pilot census of 2010 (see Appendixes).

We strongly persist to declare that no organization or Macedonian party in Bulgaria does not accept the result of the census, and that the actual census itself we accept as manipulated and falsified!

4. Absence of dialogue

Despite the recommendations of the Committee to initiate dialogue with the authorities and the Macedonians, nothing like this has been done and the attempts of the Macedonians themselves to engage in dialogue are ignored. Representatives of the Macedonians were not invited neither have been consulted on any of the questions concerning the minorities in the country and were not registered in any institution dealing with similar issues. Macedonians are strongly discouraged by the numerous failed attempts in the past to draw the attention of public bodies such as the Ombudsman, the Government, the President, various state commissions against discrimination.

5. Promotion of tolerance and fighting negative stereotypes

Opposite to the assertion of the government in 2012 (p.13) concretely against people with Macedonian self-determination, no steps were taken any to promote tolerance. On the other hand, hate speech is quite obviously tolerated. Nothing is generally done to overcome negative and criminal stereotypes but separate groups of political elite even try very openly and with impunity to reinforce them.

6. Registration of parties and organizations

Contrary to the government insistence (p.51) that "It should be reiterated, though, that these persons enjoy fully and effectively, without any discrimination, the rights and freedoms

guaranteed to all Bulgarian citizens", the rights of people with Macedonian identity are systematically violated. In the past 2 years the efforts for registration of three organizations failed and the registration has been denied on the grounds that they were Macedonian (see Appendixes). It has been officially registered that there already had been won eight cases of breach of Article 11 in ECHR, yet none of the organizations got registration as official parties in Republic of Bulgaria.⁸

7. Participation in public and political life

Due to the unregistering of the Macedonian parties and organizations the existing stereotypes and refusal to start dialogue with their representatives, the Macedonians are objectively left out of the social and political life in the country.

There is no registered political party that advocates the rights and interests of the people of the Macedonian minority. The two parties that people with Macedonian identity have tried to register until present time (OMO PIRIN and OMO "Ilinden - PIRIN") have received a series of refusals and haven't been registered till now. The authorities have also taken effective measures to make impossible the registration of such parties by changing the law and obvious personal pressure on members of these parties.

It is worth mentioning that although since 1990 until today eight parliaments have been elected and replaced, with 2160 members of parliaments, i.e. 1 for every 3 to 4,000 citizens, it has never been a case until present time a member of parliament to be a person with Macedonian identity although according to the drastically lowered census results in this period Macedonians should have been one of every 800 to 3,500 citizens. Election laws, policies of discrimination and denial of registration, together with the negative atmosphere makes this impossible. The representatives of the Macedonian minority are not represented in the relevant committees at central and regional level dedicated to the minorities.

Outside the census there are no such documents and ways for citizens wishing to express and record their ethnicity to do so, so any claims that the government has taken all measures to ensure fair representation in employing all ethnical groups in the administration remains pure nonsense. On the contrary, there have been complaints to the (unofficial) Macedonian organizations about dismissals from jobs due to their ethnicity and "Macedonian activity", while officially declared reasons for the dismissals from the jobs redundancy was declared. Therefore, there is no way to prove and demonstrate the real reasons, which makes the whole battle against discrimination mainly formal and inefficient.

8. of hate speech

Macedonians are subject of hate speech that is not discouraged but actually is considered acceptable, or seen as something that is "right" and even "patriotic". The fact is that no one is penalized because of such statements, no institution has been self-ceased in such cases and the Macedonians are discouraged by rejecting their attempts to defend themselves in courts or in front of other institutions in the past.

The fact is that our denial is not treated as hate speech!

Example: On February 10, 2013, deputies from the ruling coalition and former Minister Bozhidar Dimitrov declared the following: "*Basically to be a Macedonist⁹ in Bulgaria should mean either of the two things: either be a total ignorant jerk, or know that Macedonism is a complete fabrication, but it pays well.*"¹⁰

⁸ It has been officially registered that there already had been won eight cases of breach of Article 11 in ECHR, yet none of the organizations got registration as official parties in Republic of Bulgaria.

⁹ "Macedonist" is a term used in Bulgaria in the sense of a person self-determining himself as "Macedonian".

¹⁰ Bozhidar Dimitrov: "The behavior of OMO "Ilinden" PIRIN is insolent", 10 February 2013 | 15:04 | Agency "Focus", http://archive.is/1GvqI_Бождидар_Димитров:_Поведението_на_ОМО_„Илинден_–_Пирин“_е_нагло,_10_февруари_2013_|_15:04_|_Агенция_„Фокус“, <http://archive.is/1GvqI>

10. Culture and language

It is not by accident that the government never mentions Macedonians when it makes comments on the questions about the culture and language of minorities or about their study and support. This is because in this area it does not want to do anything at all. Education in Bulgaria is ethnocentric, purely Bulgarian and denied to all Minorities.

- Macedonian language is not taught, its very existence as a separate language in Bulgaria is denied. Nevertheless, it was recognized in the past and studied in the Bulgarian schools in the academic year 1947/1948 and was broadcasted on Bulgarian state radio in the early 60-es of XX century.

Macedonians wish to study Macedonian literary language in order not to lose contact with the cultural progress of their countrymen in the Republic of Macedonia. Although it has been attempted to start negotiations with the Ministry of Education to introduce Macedonian language, dialogue has so far been categorically refused.

- There is no possibility for studying Macedonian history and culture by Macedonian children. In Bulgarian history textbooks nothing is written about this minority and its contribution to Bulgaria. On the contrary, history is presented so that it conveys the idea that the Macedonian nation does not exist and that the Macedonian culture, history and language is Bulgarian.

- The culture of the Macedonian minority has no financial or other support from the authorities; on the contrary organizations trying to devote to this activity do not get registered.

- The government did not make any effort to publish books, magazines, newspapers in Macedonian language or did not pay attention to the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. All such publications were self-financed by the minority. There has been lawless confiscation by security services of Macedonian newsletter "Macedonian Voice" in 2011, a case which had afterwards been concealed by the prosecution, the newsletter has not been reestablished, and no one has been punished, nor has any one claimed responsibility.

- There are not programs in Macedonian language on Bulgarian state television and radio, and in many places in Blagoevgrad District members of various Macedonian organizations consistently report problems with the programs of the Macedonian TV. Macedonian TV programs regularly have been stopped from broadcasting on a number of cable TV in Pirin Macedonia, despite protests from the viewers; broadcasting staff was responding that it is because of pressure from the security services. Of course no single such case could be proved as no TV representatives would dare to witness those illegal activities officially.

By the government report from 2012 p. 15, 16 it is obvious that the government has no intention to support minority languages and programs, as well as minority radio and television in spite of lack of formal prohibitions in this regard. Unfortunately, the legal procedures do not only make it very difficult to obtain radio frequency, but also leave more freedom to reject such requests on a purely arbitrary basis by the relevant authorities. In the case of minorities suffering from negative social stereotypes (such as the Macedonian), the possibility of obtaining frequency is not only unlikely, but thanks to their specific requirements and policies impossible.

11. Legal framework.

We believe that there are three basic legal texts, creating problems to minorities. The first is The Constitution which bans organizations based on ethnicity and the ambiguous principle of unity of the nation, conceived as which could be seen in the following sentences as ethnic unity and serving as a basis for denial of minorities and non-registration of their organizations. In the Constitution there is no direct text that protects the rights of minorities or even use of the term minority, and as they could be distortedly interpreted by the

government, these texts are far from sufficient to provide effective protection. The Law about the political parties too makes it impossible for minority political parties to be registered. Election law makes it impossible for smaller and denied minorities to participate effectively in the electoral process as such and to hope for success. There are not mechanisms as in some other countries (e.g. Romania) for the representation of small minorities in parliament and other important institutions.

We consider it essential the term minority to be included in the Constitution together with a supporting text for the rights of minorities. Precise citation of minorities, in particular the Macedonian one in The Constitution would be an enormously effective way to protect against denial of one or all minorities. Texts related to the unity of the nation should be clarified in the sense of being political and legal rather than ethnic unity.

Macedonians do not feel the least protected by the Constitution and laws of the state, on the contrary it has been expressed the conviction that they are more restrictive and discriminative rather than protective to the rights of the Macedonians.

The city of Sandanski,

November 2013

APPLICATIONS

- Report on the census in 2011
- 2 Declarations of Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria in terms of the test and regular census.
- Quotes from the court decision against registration of Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria.
- Pages from non-paper distributed by the Bulgarian government in June 2013.