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MUSLIMS IN BULGARIA

DEGREE OF INTEGRATION, POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND SOCIAL STATUS OF THE TURKISH, POMAK AND ROMA PEOPLES

Marco Arndt

Bulgaria is home to up to one million people of the Muslim faith, making them the largest autochthonous Muslim population group in the European Union. However, they are not a homogenous group, but are divided up into ethnic Turks (hereafter referred to simply as Turks), Bulgarian-speaking Pomaks¹ and Roma.² All three groups only share a common Sunni Muslim faith; otherwise negative dispositions towards each other predominate. The Turks have a historical tradition of looking down on the Pomak people, while for their part, the Pomaks are often critical of the Turks for not practising their religious beliefs strictly enough. In turn, both groups share a common negative attitude towards the Roma, an attitude that is also prevalent amongst the Christian majority in the country. What is more, the Turks, Pomaks and Roma all tend to live apart, whether they are in rural settlements or in towns and cities.

- 1 | On the Pomaks cf. Ulf Brunnbauer, "Pomaken in Bulgarien. Der schwierige Prozeß der Identitätsstiftung", *Ostwest-Gegeninformation*, 9:3, 1997; idem, "An den Grenzen von Staat und Nation. Identitätsprobleme der Pomaken Bulgariens", in: *Umstrittene Identitäten. Ethnizität und Nationalität in Südost-europa*, idem (ed.), Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2002, 97-121.
- 2 | The results of the 2011 census showed there were 325,000 Roma and 588,000 Turks in the country. The census did not contain a question on Pomak identity, so the number of Pomaks is not known. The Pomaks are also not recognised as a national minority. 577,000 people claimed to be of the Muslim faith, although 22 per cent of respondents declined to answer questions relating to their religious beliefs. They were allowed to specify their affiliation to a religion or ethnic group, and it is suspected that up to 50 per cent of the Roma claimed to be Turks. In this respect, the data cannot be considered to provide a realistic picture of the Muslim minority. For details on the census (30 Apr 2013) cf. Национален Статистически Институт (Bulgaria's National Statistical Institute, НСИ), <http://www.nsi.bg/EPDOCS/Census2011final.pdf> (accessed 7 May 2013).

Although there is little ethnic conflict with the majority of the population, the three Muslim groups are far from fully integrated into society. This is particularly noticeable in terms of the distribution of wealth and poverty. Achieving some kind of full integration for these groups is currently the greatest challenge facing both the Muslims themselves and the Bulgarian state. And great care needs to be taken to ensure that initial steps in this direction do not bring about the infiltration of otherwise moderate Muslims by more radical Islamists.

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MUSLIMS IN BULGARIA

The Muslim community in Bulgaria formed during the 500 years of the Ottoman Empire and included Turkish migrants, Muslim migrants from neighbouring and distant provinces of the Empire and locals who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule (Pomaks).³ This development generally led to Islam co-existing peacefully alongside other cultures in the Balkans, something that today continues to distinguish it from the Salafist form of Islam found in Arab lands.

According to the 2011 census, approximately 588,000 Bulgarians, or nine per cent of the population, consider themselves to be Turks, that is to say people whose forefathers remained in the country after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1878. Therefore they cannot be considered a classic migrant group. The same is true of the Pomaks, whose total numbers are estimated at approximately 250,000.⁴

- 3 | The conversion of a minority of Bulgarians to Islam took place over a long period of time and for various reasons. The largest wave of conversions occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. Enforced Islamisation tended to be rare and was usually instigated by fanatical religious leaders. It is more likely that the main motives for conversion were the privileges, tax advantages and better legal and social status that the "orthodox" enjoyed in comparison to non-Muslims. However, there are Pomaks who believe their people were already Muslims before the Ottoman invasion of 1396.
- 4 | In 2001 131,531 citizens declared Islam their religion and Bulgarian their mother tongue, as no separate column for Pomaks or Muslim Bulgarians was included in the census.

Generally speaking, the Muslims tend to live in rural areas, with few members of the Muslim communities represented amongst the upper strata of urban society. Many of their settlements are concentrated in the Rhodope Mountains and the Dobruja region. Large, closed communities are also situated in southeast Bulgaria, while a smaller number live in villages scattered across the Western Rhodopes.

Bulgaria is still a poor country, although its poverty is not evenly distributed. The poorest people tend to be those living in rural areas, including Muslim minorities. 33 per cent of all households in Bulgaria are found in rural areas, but these include 66 per cent of all households that live below the poverty line. Population groups with low levels of education make up approximately 36 per cent of the total Bulgarian population. 80 per cent of these badly educated people are poor and live in rural areas. In this respect, the Bulgarian Turks and Roma are disproportionately affected by poverty. In fact two-thirds of the Roma and a fifth of all Turks are considered poor. There are indicators that suggest poverty is also widespread amongst the Pomak people.

Table 1

Place of residence of the major ethnic groups in Bulgaria in per cent

Place of residence	Bulgarians		Turks		Roma	
	1992	2001	1992	2001	1992	2001
Urban	71.6	73.5	31.6	37.0	52.3	53.8
Rural	28.4	26.5	68.4	63.0	47.7	46.2

Source: Национален Статистически Институт (Bulgaria's National Statistical Institute, НСИ).

Table 2

Education levels of the major ethnic groups in Bulgaria, people over the age of 20, in per cent

Education level	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma
University or polytechnic	19.1	2.4	0.2
School leaving examination or vocational diploma	47.7	21.9	6.5
Secondary school	24.9	46.9	41.8
Primary school	7.0	18.6	28.3
No schooling	1.3	10.1	23.2

Source: HCI (updated figures).

COMMUNIST POLICY WITH RESPECT TO MINORITIES

After the communists seized power in 1944, an initial period of tolerance was followed by constant attempts to try to force the Turks and Pomaks to assimilate and effectively give up their group identities.⁵ In 1948 the Pomaks were initially resettled along the entire southern border. Their traditionally closed settlements were partially destroyed in the process. The blueprint for this kind of resettlement policy came from the forced resettlement of entire population groups in the USSR.

In 1958 the Communist Party began what became known as the unveiling of the Muslims. The aim was to do away with their traditional clothing from the fez and the chador to the traditional Turkish trousers and the headscarf. However, the Muslims in many places did not accept the new regulations and continued to wear their traditional dress. At the beginning of the 1960s, attempts to Bulgarise Turkish and Pomak names met with violent resistance from those affected. This policy of homogenisation towards the Pomak people was taken up once again in the 1970s. Once again the situation escalated and many people were killed

5 | Bulgaria has seen repeated waves of "ethnic cleansing" following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The number of Muslims dropped from 1.5 million to just 680,000 in the first decade of the new Bulgarian state alone. Brunnbauer, "An den Grenzen von Staat und Nation", n. 1, 103. For more on the assimilation attempts and cycles cf. *ibid.*, 107.

in the ensuing unrest as the militia and police resorted to using force to quell the resistance.

After 1980 the communist state ramped up its restrictive policies toward the Muslims by banning the wearing of "Turkish" clothing altogether as well as the practising of their religion, the building of mosques and the use of the Turkish language in public. These drastic measures were followed in 1984 by yet another campaign to change people's family names, something which became known in Bulgarian history as the "Process of Rebirth".⁶ It lasted from 1984 to mid 1989. Once again the Muslims resisted and again people were killed and wounded as a result.

Despite all attempts at resistance⁷ the names of more than 800,000 Muslims were Bulgarised by the end of the campaign. The fierce opposition of those affected prompted the government to open the border with Turkey, heralding the beginning of the mass exodus, known sarcastically as the "Big Excursion", during which more than 350,000 people left Bulgaria for Turkey. This expulsion had

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serious economic, ethnic and foreign policy repercussions for Bulgaria that are still felt today. The "Process of Rebirth" is still seen as a traumatic experience, especially amongst older Muslims, whose trust in the Bulgarian state and the majority population has been irrevocably damaged. Another direct consequence was that after 1990 most Muslims devoted themselves even more fervently to their religion and culture.

By early 1992 the government had dealt with approximately 600,000 applications from Muslims who wanted to change back to their old names.⁸ However, only around

6 | Not to be confused with the "Process of Rebirth" in Bulgaria in the 19th century after 500 years of Ottoman rule.

7 | As a reaction to the communist Party's repressive policies, the Muslims opted for the most radical form of resistance: terrorist acts. Bombs were set off on 30 Aug 1984 at Varna airport and Plovdiv railway station, resulting in one woman's death and many injured. On 9 Mar 1985 another bomb exploded in a train travelling from Burgas to Sofia in a compartment reserved for mothers and children. Seven people died.

8 | This was achieved only with great difficulty. It meant overcoming a huge nationalist campaign organised in the mixed settlement areas and the capital by the Communist Party and members of the former state security apparatus.

50 per cent of the refugees returned home after 1989. It was not until January 2012 that an overwhelming majority in parliament voted to apologise for the earlier expulsion of so many people and described it as a kind of “ethnic cleansing”. But to date no-one has been brought to justice for this crime.

ORGANISATION

The traditional Sunni form of Islam is widespread amongst Bulgarian Muslims. This is considered the most tolerant and liberal school of Islam and has survived since the days of the Ottoman Empire. However, nowadays it is increasingly coming under pressure from more radical forms of Islam in other countries.

The country’s Muslims are represented by the Bulgarian Muslim Community, which in turn is represented by the Higher Islamic Council (HIC). This is led by a Chief Mufti as spiritual leader and highest representative. The HIC is elected every five years by the National Islamic Conference, a meeting of all active imams recognised by the HIC. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is the country’s only constitutionally recognised religious community, so the HIC is registered as a kind of association in accordance with Bulgaria’s laws on religion.

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Imams must have Bulgarian citizenship. They are supposed to be educated in Bulgaria, though this does not mean they cannot also study in other countries, with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Egypt being popular destinations. Here, many of them end up being influenced by Salafists, a development that could lead to a security problem. However, debates within the community have so far tended to follow a moderate line.

In 2011 1,225 mosque committees were officially registered in Bulgaria. Some of them organise instruction on the Koran, which is overseen by the Chief Mufti, who himself organises Koran summer schools and sets exams to test children’s ability to learn the Koran by heart.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The DPS, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, does not officially define itself as ethnic, preferring to describe itself as a liberal party. It was founded after the fall of communism by Ahmed Dogan, who was the party leader until 2013.

Although in theory Bulgaria's constitution forbids the formation of ethnic political parties, one such party was in fact set up in 1990 and is now successfully represented in parliament. The DPS, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, does not however officially define

itself as ethnic, preferring to describe itself as a liberal party.⁹ It was founded after the fall of communism by Ahmed Dogan, who was the party leader until 2013.¹⁰ In 2007 it came out that he had worked unofficially for Bulgarian state security since 1974, but this does not appear to have had any serious political consequences for him. The movement, popularly known amongst Bulgarians as the "Turkish Party" is the dominant political force in the Muslim settlements. Among the Turks alone, the number of DPS voters rose from 44 per cent in 1994 to 72 per cent in the 2005 election year. In the last 20 years the DPS has consistently won the local elections in more than 30 of the country's 270 local authorities. Turks and Muslims are therefore represented at all political levels within the country. The party has been a junior coalition partner in three different governments with its own ministers, providing clear evidence of its political "flexibility". The DPS has been the source of much debate due to its ongoing participation in political power and its influence on the economy, not to mention its authoritarian internal party structure and the involvement of some of the party elite in corruption scandals.

9 | The DPS has made every effort to counter this claim. In the European Parliament election in 2007, 50 per cent of the party's candidates were ethnic Turks, while the other 50 per cent were ethnic Bulgarians.

10 | Dogan's stepping down as party leader was spectacular: during his speech to the party congress on 19 Jan 2013 he was threatened by an ethnic Turk with a gas-powered pistol, which did not fire properly. The would-be assassin was then overpowered by security personnel and was badly beaten, despite being held down on the ground. Political opponents suspected that the whole thing had been staged, but the motives for the attack are still unclear. Cf. "Attentat bei Rede: Anschlag auf Politiker in Bulgarien verurteilt", *Spiegel Online*, 19 Jan 2013, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-878576.html> (accessed 7 Jun 2013).

The formation of the DPS as the party of the Turks and other Muslims, including a significant number of Roma, gave these ethnic minorities a sense of peace and security after the fall of communism and guaranteed they would have equal rights to participation in Bulgaria's political and economic future. However, the DPS did not in fact represent the interests of Muslims in the true sense of the word, nor did its political activities make any significant contribution to their lives. Fortunately, they have also not shown any politically religious or Islamic tendencies and have in fact probably helped to hinder the development of any Salafist or radical influences. In this respect the DPS cannot be considered a true ethnic party in practical political terms. The same can be said of its relations with Turkey. Neither the DPS nor the Bulgarian Turks in general see themselves as any kind of "fifth column" for Ankara, even though Turkey continues to be the number one destination for those emigrating from Bulgaria.¹¹

It is not only in the predominantly Turkish regions of Bulgaria that the DPS is the dominant party. Over the last ten years it has also become the most popular party amongst the Pomaks, but this has been a slow process of change. The dominance of one party is not set in stone, especially as voting – in local elections in particular – appears to be heavily influenced by the clan principle. The larger the candidate's family, the greater their chances of being elected, whatever their political affiliation. Poorly educated Pomaks tend to trust the opinions and recommendations of local politicians and leaders. This does not actually represent the ideal of informed citizens participating in the democratic process. It can therefore be seen as positive that this situation has begun to change in recent years as more Pomaks have become better educated.

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11 | The alternative "Turkish Party" (People's Party Freedom and Dignity), founded three years ago and massively supported by Turkish prime minister Erdogan fared very badly during the country's parliamentary elections of 12 May 2013, winning only 1.5 per cent of the vote, while the DPS secured 11.3 per cent. Cf. Michael Martens, "Türkische Minderheit in Bulgarien. Kolonne fünf antwortet nicht", FAZ.net, 21 May 2013, <http://faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/-12188757.html> (accessed 7 Jun 2013).

THE CURRENT STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN BULGARIANS AND ETHNIC TURKS

The national sense of identity is still very much tied in with the country's (historical) resistance against the Ottomans/Turks, a fact which continues to affect relations with the Turkish minority in the country today.

Despite the fact that Bulgaria took part in two world wars and lived for a long period under a communist dictatorship, the "Ottoman yoke" and the country's liberation with Russian assistance in 1878 is the event that has historically had the greatest influence on Bulgarians to date. The national sense of identity is still very much tied in with the country's (historical) resistance against the Ottomans/Turks, a fact which continues to affect relations with the Turkish minority in the country today. For their part, the Turks have generally remained loyal to the state, for example during Bulgaria's involvement in various wars. In spite of this, Muslims have been accorded few minority rights and have had to accept that, whatever tolerance it may have, Bulgaria still considers itself an essentially Christian nation, and that Islam and Islamic culture will forever be associated with the "Turkish yoke".

At a personal, private level Christians, Muslims, Turks and Bulgarians live quite peacefully alongside each other. This is mainly due to mutual respect for each other's traditions and culture and neighbourly relations built on a willingness to help one another. Although these relations have constantly been and remain subject to a certain degree of mistrust and prejudice, along with cultural and social revanchism, this has rarely developed into real ethnic tension.

The transition from totalitarianism to democracy carried into the new era the trauma of the 1989 expulsions as a kind of security. People gained a stronger sense of ethnic identity and divisions became more pronounced. For the Bulgarians on the other hand, the fall of communism was effectively a crisis of national identity that triggered the growth of various forms of nationalism.¹² And yet it is still surprising that the Bulgarians appear to harbour far more reservations than the Turks, who in spite of their experiences in the recent past have demonstrated a surprising amount of openness and tolerance. In a relatively recent

12 | And yet only approximately ten per cent of Bulgarians support radical right-wing parties such as Ataka.

survey¹³ 87 per cent of Turks said they are happy to live in the same country as Bulgarians and 85.5 per cent claimed they counted Bulgarians among their acquaintances. 94 per cent felt it was possible to befriend Bulgarians, while only 50 per cent of Bulgarians suggested they could imagine being friends with a Turk. However, this tolerance tends to quickly disappear when it comes to the question of interethnic marriage. Only 7.5 per cent of Bulgarians and just over 40 per cent of Turks could imagine being in a mixed marriage. In reality the number of mixed marriages in the country is near to zero. As ethnic origins and children are essential to the maintenance of ethnic identities, mixed marriages still appear to be taboo. Insurmountable religious and cultural differences certainly play a part in this.

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A significant number of Bulgarians consider Turks to be religious fanatics who are a potential threat to national security and not loyal to the state. It is therefore all the more amazing that only 17 per cent of Turks believe Bulgarians are hostile towards other ethnic groups and that only three per cent admit to feeling like strangers in their own land. 87 per cent of Turks consider Bulgaria to be their homeland (the figure is 89 per cent for Bulgarians). Any hostility the majority may have does not seem to manifest itself in day-to-day life, probably because most Bulgarians also consider Turks to possess largely positive qualities, such as fairness, honesty, hospitality, industriousness and amiability – feelings that must be based on personal experience. The prevailing inter-religious tolerance and ethnic acceptance appears to follow a recurring pattern that has taken hold over the centuries. The survey also shows that while the Turkish minority has a very positive view of the state, their emotional connection with it is weak. People tend to identify with their own ethnic group, while acceptance of the state is gained through rational arguments. As a result, the relationship between majority and minority is quite ambivalent. There is a mutual acceptance of each other, which reduces the potential for conflict, but it would

13 | Results of a study on the relations between Bulgarians and ethnic Turks: Неделчева, Таня, Националната идентичност в събитийността на етноса. В. Търново, 2011, 240. Неделчева, Таня и др., Националната идентичност и социални времена. София, 2011, 326.

be wrong to say there is a real meeting of minds or even genuine integration.

THE POMAKS

The Bulgarian Pomak religious minority mostly consider themselves to be Bulgarian; they speak the Bulgarian language or Bulgarian dialects and are Sunni Muslims. However, a number of Pomaks in the region around Gotse Delchev consider themselves to be ethnic Turks, although the Turks themselves do not consider them to be Turks as they do not speak Turkish and because they have customs and traditions that are very different to their own. This perception of their own identity suggests that the Pomaks struggle with the concept of "ethnic affiliation" and have difficulty deciding whether they are actually Bulgarians or Turks. Nor do they seem particularly concerned. This may well be because they tend to see their identity in terms of small geographic areas and their direct surroundings. This would explain why in Bulgaria there are significant differences within the ethnic group in terms of attitudes and ways of life.

There are two plausible explanations for the origin of the word "Pomak". The first is that it comes from the word "pomagatch", meaning "helper", and is based on the assumption that the Pomaks provided various forms of assistance to the Turks during the time of the Ottoman Empire. The second suggestion is that the word "Pomak" comes from "pomätschen", meaning tortured, forced, coerced, which may have something to do with their conversion to Islam.

The Pomaks live predominantly in rural regions around Smolyan, Chepintsi and Razlog in the Rhodope Mountains of southern Bulgaria and along the Mesta river. However, there are also Pomaks living in northern Bulgaria around Lovech and Teteven, between the Vit and Panega rivers and along the Skat river. Large groups also live around Burgas, Razgrad und Veliko Tärnovo. This isolation in often mountainous, inaccessible areas has played a significant role in preserving Pomak culture. However, apart from religious customs, this culture is not markedly different from that of their Christian neighbours.

In most Pomak villages, the main source of income is the local textile factory, many of which have sprung up over the last ten years. It is mostly women who work in these businesses, while the majority of the men are employed in timber extraction. In addition to having regular jobs, most families supplement their incomes by growing tobacco or other agricultural products and survive in part from subsistence farming. Hard work is considered the standard by which a person's character is measured, so holidays and free time are often used to do additional work, and children regularly help their parents in the fields from a very young age. The Pomaks are renowned for their humility, a result of their simple lifestyle.



Religious feasts and customs: Pomaks celebrating the Ramazan Bayram. | Source: Klearchos Kapoutsis, flickr (CC BY).

However, the modern world has encroached upon their lives. Many customs and practices have been lost or have changed, including some of the rites involved in a traditional wedding. But their traditional hospitality and conviviality remain untouched. Their way of life, traditions and culture largely depend on whether they live in urban or rural areas. The better-educated often move to the towns and cities or even emigrate to other countries, and this trend is growing.

Islam may define the Pomaks' self-image, but their actual knowledge of the religion in terms of religious facts tends to be somewhat limited¹⁴ and so religion seems to be almost solely a cultural issue. Religious festivals and customs are

14 | During the 2011 census very few knew the difference between Shiites and Sunnis.

observed out of respect for tradition, but few seem to know their origins or what they mean and the same can be said of their observance of religious principles such as no alcohol, no fortune telling, no use of charms, the duty to pray, giving alms, etc. Circumcision is no longer as widespread as it once was. So religious practice is more often a question of simply following rituals without understanding what they mean or their religious background.

However, in recent years this situation has begun to change. Key positions in the mosques are now being taken by young imams who have been educated at the Islamic Institute or other universities. While most women still do not wear the headscarf or the veil, the number of women dressing according to the norms of Islam is beginning to grow. At the moment there is still a tendency for traditional clothing such as Turkish trousers, headscarves and veils to be worn almost exclusively by older women, while the younger generation prefer normal clothing that has nothing to do with Islamic tradition.

During the communist years, the number of Pomaks who studied for degrees was exceptionally small, partly because of a politically-motivated restriction on allowing them access to universities.

In addition to religious education at school, many children also attend courses at the local mosque, although the content of the classes does not appear to be of the fundamentalist variety. During the communist years, the number of Pomaks who studied for degrees was exceptionally small, something that was not only due to the fact that the Pomaks tended to afford education little value, but also because of a politically-motivated restriction on allowing them access to universities. These days, it tends to be the cost of studying that deters many of them from going to university. Having said that, the number of Pomaks attending university, including women, has risen significantly in the last ten years. It should be said, however, that there are cultural factors – such as traditional views on the role of women – that still prevent many women from attending university. Marriage at a very young age is also slowing the process of change, although such marriages are generally becoming less common.

Relationships between men and women in Pomak society are still very much based on the patriarchal principle and so religion is just an additional factor that serves to

hinder the emancipation of women. However, in the last ten years there has been a noticeable shift in perceptions about gender roles and in people's views on marriage and sexual mores. A direct indication of this shift in attitudes is the growing number of men who are prepared to help with housework and raising children and the increasing divorce rate. This growing number of divorces is linked to better education, as it is primarily educated women who file for divorce. The average age at which women get married is also steadily increasing.



Bulgarian investigators reenact Burgas bus bombing. | Source: © Vassil Donev, picture alliance, dpa.

RADICAL INFLUENCES

In 2005, the U.S. ambassador wrote a highly confidential paper on the situation of the Muslims in Bulgaria with respect to radical Islamic influences.¹⁵ The analysis suggested that different radical groups from other countries were seeking to influence Bulgarian Muslims. The Pomaks were supposedly the main targets because they look “European” and were more likely to be open to this kind of propaganda on account of their more isolated, traditional way of life. The report makes a clear distinction between (moderate) traditional Islam in Bulgaria and attempts at radicalisation, predominantly by young Muslims who have

15 | Bivol.bg report from 13 Jul 2011 with reference to Wikileaks, 15 Apr 2013, <https://bivol.bg/wlislambg.html> (accessed 25 Apr 2013).

lived in other countries. New foreign-funded mosques have sprung up to compete with existing ones, but many Muslims are against the influence of this kind of dogmatic Wahhabism. According to the report, al-Qaida, Ansar al-Islam and Hezbollah are active in Bulgaria, although the extent of their activities is not specified. In summer 2012 Bulgaria was also to witness the effects of Islamist terror. A group of tourists from Israel were victims of a bomb attack in Burgas. The group of 154 people had just left the airport and got onto buses to take them to Sunny Beach resort when a suicide bomber detonated a bomb on one of the buses. Seven people died: five Israelis, the bus driver (a Pomak) and the bomber. So far no group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Iran strenuously denies being involved. According to sources within the U.S. government, the bomber was apparently a member of a Hezbollah group operating in Bulgaria.¹⁶ In February 2013, the Bulgarian commission set up to investigate the bombing reached the same conclusion, though Hezbollah continues to deny this.

A currently stalled court case against twelve Imams (Pomaks) and one woman in Pazardzhik has been running since October 2012 and has caused quite a stir. During house searches, police found Islamist literature, predominantly in Arabic. Computers were seized and the men were charged with disseminating Islamist and anti-democratic ideas both orally ("hate speech") and in writing. It was proven that three of them had received money from the World Muslim League for delivering their sermons. The mission of this NGO, which is loyal to its Saudi Arabian government, is the spread of Wahhabi Islam around the world, and it has billions of dollars at its disposal. The court case will recommence at the end of May 2013.

These developments demonstrate that one of the government's most pressing tasks is combating radicalisation through appropriate integration measures, targeted economic and labour policies and financial assistance, so that Bulgaria's Muslims can continue to live in peaceful coexistence.

16 | See Nicholas Kulish and Eric Schmitt, "Hezbollah Is Blamed for Attack on Israeli Tourists in Bulgaria", *The New York Times*, 19 Aug 2012, <http://nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/europe/explosion-on-bulgaria-tour-bus-kills-at-least-five-israelis.html> (accessed 25 Apr 2013).