

# **DESTROYING ETHNIC IDENTITY**

## **The Gypsies of Bulgaria**

**June 1991**

**A Helsinki Watch Report**

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## **Acknowledgments**

**This report is based largely on information gathered by Theodore Zang Jr., Staff Counsel to Helsinki Watch and Lois Whitman, Deputy Director of Helsinki Watch, during fact-finding missions to Bulgaria in October 1990-January 1991 and March 1991-April 1991. It was written by Theodore Zang Jr.**

**We visited numerous cities and villages with Gypsy populations, including the following: Sofia (Fakulteta district and "Cambodia" sub-district), Plovdiv (Stoliponovo district), Sliven (Peyo Dachev and Nikola Kochev districts), Vidin, Lom ("Bangladesh," Stadium, "Like it or Not," and Mladenovo districts), Kostinbrod, Petric, Archar, Dunavtsi, Razlog, Varna, and Vinogradets.**

**We conducted several hundred interviews. Our interviewees included the President's advisor for nationalities questions, a former minister for higher education, a deputy minister for lower education, the press spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense, eight members of Parliament, the chair of the Democratic Roma Union, mayors and local council members, housing and education specialists who work with local councils, teachers and administrators who work in schools with large Gypsy enrollments, and police officers. We made a special effort to interview Bulgarians who live in close proximity to Gypsies to get their point of view.**

**Helsinki Watch expresses its gratitude to Elena Marushiakova, a scholar at the Institute for Ethnography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, for sharing her enormous knowledge about Gypsies in Bulgaria, and to Malina Poshtova, a fifth-year student at the University of Sofia, for interpreting and providing tireless additional assistance to Helsinki Watch. Helsinki Watch assumes full responsibility, however, for the contents of this report.**

## **Preface**

**Gypsies in Bulgaria continue to experience gross human rights violations, despite the political changes that have occurred since Todor Zhivkov's resignation on November 10, 1989. Gypsies have always been the targets of discrimination, even during the monarchy. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Communist government began to assimilate the Gypsies. The assimilation campaign lasted for some thirty years and affected nearly all aspects of Gypsy life. A Gypsy from Archar told Helsinki Watch: "In Bulgaria, there has never been equality in rights between Bulgarians and Gypsies."**

**Today, the government continues to discriminate against Gypsies, and to deny them equal rights. The housing situation of the Gypsies illustrates the disparate treatment that they are accorded. Many Gypsies live in densely populated districts, in the outskirts of cities and villages. The services rendered by the local authorities in these ghettos are vastly inferior to the services provided in Bulgarian districts.**

**The government's educational policies also discriminate against Gypsies. Most Gypsies attend segregated schools where they are denied an equal opportunity to learn the Bulgarian language. Many Gypsies attend special schools that teach technical skills. Gypsies who attend technical schools never have the opportunity to attend university.**

**Gypsies are discriminated against in the workplace. Some told Helsinki Watch that they were denied promotions because they are Gypsies. Others said that they were the first to lose their jobs in enterprises making the transition to a free market economy.**

**The government restricts Gypsies' political rights. Gypsies cannot form political parties based on ethnicity. The Democratic Roma Union, an organization that defends the social, cultural, and political rights of Gypsies, was denied registration as a political party in late 1990.**

**Not a single political party defends the interests of Gypsies, and government officials at both the national and local levels rarely address their problems. More commonly, members of Parliament and other politicians criticize Gypsies for their unclean way of life, noisy parties, or black market activities, all stereotypes which fuel bigotry and hatred. One Gypsy told Helsinki Watch: "Your visit here was the first time someone showed an interest in our problems."**

**The state media portray Gypsies in an unfair light, and this instigates further discrimination against their community. Gypsies are victims of the nationalism that has surfaced in the aftermath of totalitarianism. They experience substantial social discrimination.**

**Despite these hardships, the Gypsies exhibit a remarkable resiliency and retain hope that their human rights will one day be recognized by the state. Manush Romanov, a Gypsy who is a member of the Bulgarian Parliament, said: "It's actually providence that takes care of Gypsies, otherwise we wouldn't survive. We are optimists in spite of this." Another Gypsy said: "Thanks to God we have our jolly hearts and music. This is the only way we survive."**

**To place this issue in perspective, it is sobering to realize that Gypsies are discriminated against throughout the world—including in the United States. As Helsinki Watch was preparing this report, an incident occurred in the United States that received front-page attention in the Bulgarian press. In April 1991, a grocery store owner in St. Anthony, Minnesota threw out a group of Bulgarian members of Parliament and journalists visiting his store. The owner, worried about shoplifters, thought that they "looked like Gypsies" and became suspicious. According to a U.S. State Department interpreter who was escorting the Bulgarians, the store owner said: "Put everything down and leave. We don't want your kind of people in this store."<sup>3</sup> The store owner was reportedly concerned after hearing reports about bands of roving shoplifters. Law-enforcement officials had said that the bands included men, women, and children who spoke a foreign language. "The description was either Eastern or Gypsy-looking type people and when they spoke, they spoke with a foreign accent," the store owner told an Associated Press reporter. The Bulgarians, he said, "fit the description."**

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<sup>3</sup> Associated Press, "Foreign Officials Evicted by Grocer," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1991, p. A15.

## **Introduction**

**The human rights problems of the Gypsies vary from community to community. From one village and city to the next, Gypsies have different living conditions—and human rights problems. Elena Marushiakova, a Gypsy specialist who works at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, cautioned: "The reason for lack of success in solving Gypsy problems is that all Gypsies are regarded as identical and treated the same, when they are really quite different." This report will attempt to illustrate some of the diversity of the Gypsy community in Bulgaria, and the diversity of their human rights problems.**

**Gypsies have their historical roots in India. However, William Lockwood, a Gypsy specialist at the University of Michigan, has noted that it is in some ways appropriate to refer to the Balkans as the "fatherland of the Gypsies," because the earliest reports of Gypsies in Europe come from the Balkans.<sup>4</sup> Scholars believe that the Gypsies reached the Balkans in the thirteenth century, or even earlier. A document from 1378 shows that Gypsies already were present in Bulgaria at that time.<sup>5</sup> Even after many Balkan Gypsies moved westward, the Balkans remained the region with the largest concentration of Gypsies in Europe.<sup>6</sup>**

**The name "Gypsy" is a corruption of "Egyptian," and may have been given to Gypsies by outsiders who were confused about their origin and who believed that they came from Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Gypsies throughout the world speak a common language (with regional variations), Romani. Otherwise, they are a highly diverse**

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<sup>4</sup>William G. Lockwood, "An Introduction to Balkan Gypsies," *Papers from the 4th and 5th Annual Meetings, Gypsy Lore Society*, North American Chapter (1985).

<sup>5</sup>The document indicates that King Ivan Shishman of Bulgaria granted to the Rila Monastery some villages partially inhabited by sedentary Gypsies. Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Lockwood, "An Introduction to Balkan Gypsies."

<sup>7</sup>Today there is a growing tendency among Gypsies to refer to themselves as "Roma" (or "Romanies" in English). In this report, we use the word "Gypsy," because this is how most Gypsies in Bulgaria identify themselves. A Gypsy from Sliven said: "We're not against the use of the word 'Gypsy.' It all depends on how you use the word."

**group of people. Even within a single country, the term "Gypsy" encompasses dozens of different groups and practices.**

**One source in 1955 listed nineteen different Gypsy "tribes" in just the northeastern portion of Bulgaria, using as distinctive criteria religion, occupation, and whether they were nomadic or sedentary.<sup>8</sup> Today most Gypsies in Bulgaria are sedentary. This contrasts with other Balkan Gypsies who tend to travel more, and may be explained by the Bulgarian government's successful campaign in the 1950s to ban travelling. Part of the Gypsy population speaks Bulgarian and part speaks Turkish. The Gypsy population in Bulgaria is also differentiated by religion--some Gypsies practice Eastern Orthodoxy and others practice Islam. Some Gypsies have retained their traditional trades. These include fortune telling, bear entertainment, horse trading, blacksmithing, and woodworking.**

**Gypsies can be found in every city and village in Bulgaria. They usually live in separate quarters or districts, often in the outskirts of cities and villages. Many of these districts are ghettos. Some are surrounded by walls that the authorities built several decades ago to hide the miserable living conditions.**

**The population of Gypsies in Bulgaria is substantial, but impossible to estimate with precision. Virtually no census data on ethnic groups has been published in Bulgaria since the mid-1970s. This was part of the government's policy to try to assimilate ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, it is possible to project the Gypsy population from old statistics. Gypsy families tend to be large. Families of four to six children are common, whereas the Bulgarian average is 1.5 children.<sup>9</sup> Grattan Puxon, a Gypsy specialist, estimated a Gypsy population of 475,000 in 1986 (Bulgaria's total population is approximately 9,000,000).<sup>10</sup> In 1986, Amnesty International's estimate was 400,000.<sup>11</sup> In a May 1989 study prepared by the**

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<sup>8</sup> Lockwood, "An Introduction to Balkan Gypsies."

<sup>9</sup> Carol Silverman, "Bulgarian Gypsies: Adaptation in a Socialist Context," *Nomadic Peoples* (Dec. 1986), p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Grattan Puxon, "Roma: Europe's Gypsies," Minority Rights Group, London (Feb. 1987), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, "Bulgaria: Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks," London (April 1986), p. 1.



**Ministry of the Interior for the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Gypsy population was put at 576,927.**

**The Bulgarian Democratic Roma Union, a social and cultural Gypsy organization, estimates a Gypsy population of one million. Vassil Chaprazov, first deputy chair of the Democratic Roma Union, elaborated: "We think there are about one million Gypsies, and probably there are much more if you include those who are ashamed to call themselves Gypsies. My estimate is based on some old statistical data...There are Gypsies who call themselves Bulgarians because they are afraid to call themselves Gypsies."**



## **Discrimination Against the Gypsies: A Historical Overview**

**Gypsies have experienced human rights violations from the moment that they reached the Balkan peninsula. This long history of human rights abuses against the Gypsy community affects the Gypsies' situation today.**

**Petreiceo Bajdeu, a Romanian scholar, has located documents showing that Gypsies were made slaves in the Balkans beginning some time prior to 1300.<sup>12</sup> Under the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria (from the mid-fourteenth century to the late nineteenth century), Gypsies generally had the status of second-class citizens. However, they usually were treated no worse than ethnic Bulgarians, who also had fewer rights than Turkish citizens. Muslim Gypsies fared somewhat better than Christian Gypsies.**

**Under the monarchy (1878-1946), Gypsies enjoyed fewer rights than other Bulgarian citizens. Manush Romanov, the chair of the Democratic Roma Union and a member of Parliament, witnessed the treatment of Gypsies during this period. He recalled: "During the monarchy, Gypsies had no rights. They were treated as second-class people. I was a child then. I remember that Gypsies were the people who were most deprived of their rights. They were not even allowed to ride the trams...The government was not interested in the rights of Gypsies. Gypsies and ethnic Turks were treated differently--the Turks were on a higher social level. The Turks were given food coupons and Gypsies were not. I know Muslim Gypsies who because of this tried to affiliate as Turks."**

**In 1934, a Law for the Defense of the State, which stated that all anti-state organizations are prohibited, was applied against two Gypsy organizations, the Gypsy society "Egypt," and the Gypsy organization "Future."**

**Although Gypsies were officially discriminated against under the monarchy, many observers credit King Boris with saving Gypsies who were Bulgarian citizens from Nazi concentration camps during World War II. An elderly Gypsy woman told Helsinki Watch: "Hitler wanted to kill all the Gypsies, but Boris wouldn't let him, and this is why we love Boris." (King Boris also helped to save a**

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Hancock, "Land of Pain: Five Hundred Years of Gypsy Slavery," University of Texas at Austin research paper (1981), p. 2.

**substantial number of Bulgaria's Jews from Hitler's concentration camps.]**

**During the period of totalitarian rule, the Communist Party initiated an assimilation campaign against the Gypsies. During this time, the Gypsy issue was "taboo" in Bulgaria, and the government officially denied the existence of Gypsies and other minorities. This policy is reflected in the new "socialist" Constitution of 1971, which did not specifically acknowledge the existence of national minorities, but instead referred to citizens of "non-Bulgarian origin." (The Constitution of 1947 used the term "national minorities.")**

**The Communist Party implemented secret policies that were specifically directed against the Gypsy community. The aim of these policies was to assimilate the Gypsies. Gypsies were the first ethnic group to be specifically targeted by the government for assimilation. Manush Romanov explained: "The so-called 'revival process' was begun with the Gypsies. People don't know this. The world was struck when the name changes were initiated against the Turks in 1984. But for thirty years before this, slowly—in an unknown way—in various districts and factories, and by administrative and legal means, Gypsies were assimilated."**

**The turning point may have been the "April Plenum" of the Bulgarian Communist Party, held in 1956, when Todor Zhivkov assumed the leading role within the Party. In December 1958, the Council of Ministers issued a decree (#258) that prohibited Gypsies from travelling.<sup>13</sup> The decree was described in a letter, dated 16 June 1959, that the Central Committee of the Communist Party sent to regional, city, and district committees of the Communist Party, ordering compliance. Helsinki Watch obtained the letter from the Communist Party's archives. The letter criticized travelling Gypsies and urged Party activists to integrate them into the Bulgarian work force (see Appendix A for the complete text of the letter):**

**The problem with the travelling Gypsies is [serious]. There are about 14,000 of them in Bulgaria. Most of them have no home, they wander from town to town, and they practice begging, fortune telling, stealing, etc.**

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<sup>13</sup> **This was not the first time that travelling was prohibited by Bulgarian law. In 1886, two laws prohibited nomadism, as well as the entry of Gypsies from abroad. Kenrick and Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, p. 54.**

**This is the most backward part of the Gypsy population. They accept socialist culture slowly, it is difficult to re-educate them, the old customs and traditions are deeply rooted in them, the remnants of the capitalist past have left deep traces in their consciousness, they still continue to live in the old way.**

**While in the years before 09.09.1944 under the bourgeois and fascist regimes there had been some justification for travelling and begging among the Gypsy population because they were required by the hard conditions of life, today in the conditions of socialism this way of life is harmful and disgraceful.**

**In the People's Republic of Bulgaria there are not and there cannot be conditions for unemployment, begging, and travelling. Every citizen can earn his living by honest work.**

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**The Gypsy population like all other national minorities in Bulgaria has bound its destiny with the destiny of the Bulgarian people, of which it is an inseparable part. The perspective for their development is connected with the development of the Bulgarian people, with the construction of socialism and communism. It is necessary to fight all manifestations of nationalism among the Gypsy population. The tendencies of part of the Gypsy population to affiliate with the Turks, to send their children to Turkish schools, etc. are wrong. The isolation of the Gypsy population in separate districts and quarters is incorrect. This hampers communications with the Bulgarian population, stops the penetration of the more cultured Bulgarian influence among the Gypsy population.**

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**One of the immediate tasks of the party committees and the people's councils is to start working on the fulfillment of the chief task in the decree: the location and employment of those Gypsies who are not engaged in socially beneficial labor, in the factories, the cooperative farms, the cooperatives of craftsmen, the State Owned Agricultural Farms, etc. It is necessary to fight all manifestations of neglect towards the Gypsy population.**

**In the early 1960s, the government initiated a campaign to require Gypsies with Turkish names to accept Bulgarian names. The campaign continued on and off through 1985. The first evidence of the campaign appears in a decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, issued in April 1962 (the full text of the decision appears in Appendix B1. The decision noted "some negative tendencies" which hampered the development of the cultural revolution in Bulgaria, and created difficulties "for the strengthening of the moral and political unity of the people" and served as an instrument of propaganda for the "enemy." The decision identified several negative tendencies among the Gypsy, Tatar, and Pomak (Bulgarian Muslim) populations, including the following:**

**A considerable part of the Gypsies, the Tatars, and the Bulgarian Muslims still tend to affiliate with the Turks under various forms, a tendency which is especially helped by the Muslim religion and the Turkish and Arabic names. Stimulated by the Turkish reactionary propaganda and religious fanaticism, and helped by the incorrect activities of a number of bodies of the people's government, more than 130,000 Gypsies and tens of thousands of Tatars and Bulgarian Muslims in many parts of the country have registered themselves as Turks.**

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**This tendency to affiliate with the Turks was objectively aided in certain towns and villages by the teaching of the Turkish language to the children of Tatars, Bulgarian Muslims and Gypsies in classes together with Turkish children.**

**The religious services for the believers among the Gypsies and the Tatars conducted by imams and Turks also help the tendency towards affiliation with the Turks.**

**The gathering of the young Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarian Muslims with young Turks in common military companies and platoons and labor units also has a harmful effect on their national and patriotic education.**

**The Politburo ordered Communist Party committees and organizations to take a series of steps to raise the cultural level of the Gypsies, enhance their "political consciousness," and gradually overcome their tendency "to affiliate with the Turks." Local councils were prohibited from allowing Gypsies to move to**

**villages or towns with compact Turkish communities. The Politburo also ordered a "campaign of public persuasion" so that the Gypsies would register their names according to their "real nationality" in the public records. The Politburo specifically ruled out the use of force or pressure to achieve this objective.**

**The name changing campaign against Gypsies with Turkish or Muslim names was less violent than the name changing campaign conducted against ethnic Turks in late 1984 and early 1985. Nonetheless, Helsinki Watch received several reports that Gypsies who resisted the name changing campaign were sometimes separated from their families and forced to relocate in Bulgarian communities. According to Manush Romanov, some 400,000 Muslim Gypsies were forced to change their names. By 1985, virtually all Gypsies had Bulgarian names.**

**During this period, the government took other measures to assimilate the Gypsies. Some Gypsies who had "Gypsy" written as their nationality in their internal passports (identity cards) were issued new passports with a "Bulgarian" designation.**

**Muslim Gypsies were affected by the government's clamp-down on Islamic practices in late 1984 and early 1985, when mosques were closed and other Islamic practices were forbidden. Even before 1984, the government apparently took measures to curtail Islamic practices in the Gypsy community. In an April 1962 Politburo decision, the government committee responsible for religious matters was instructed to prohibit the**

**appointment of Turkish clergymen in villages with compact Gypsy populations (see Appendix B).**

**Gypsy customs and traditions, and Gypsy cultural institutions, were also prohibited. For example, in 1953, the Gypsy Theatre Roma was closed down by the government. The theatre was the only professional Gypsy theatre in Bulgaria. Manush Romanov told Helsinki Watch that in the 1970s he had applied to be the director of the military's music theatre, and that he was denied this position because of his Muslim name (it was Mustafa Aliev Demerov at the time). The theatre administrators who interviewed Mr. Romanov for the position asked him: "How can we put your name on the posters announcing our performances?" Mr. Romanov also told Helsinki Watch: "In the past, there wasn't a Gypsy town without a Gypsy orchestra, and they were all liquidated in the 1960s."**

**In 1978, an obligatory system of socialist rituals and holidays was announced for all Bulgarians by the Council of Ministers. In the state gazette dated 30 May 1978, decree #965 was published, setting forth "Guidelines for the Development and Perfection of the System of Holidays and Rituals in the People's Republic of Bulgaria."<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, those rituals that were not specifically allowed or encouraged by the government were officially prohibited.<sup>15</sup>**

**Frequently, the assimilation campaign was conducted by administrative means rather than by government decrees. For example, Gypsies were regularly fined for playing Gypsy music in public, even though there was no law prohibiting this. Helsinki Watch received several reports that Gypsy bands which played Gypsy music at weddings were fined during the totalitarian period. One Gypsy complained: "Before 10 November 1989, they didn't allow us to play our music or to speak our language. They wanted us to make our weddings like funerals, without music, but we cannot live without our music." Gypsy music was also banned from the state television and radio.**

**Helsinki Watch received reports that Gypsies were prohibited by some local authorities from speaking in Romani in public. A Gypsy from Trun said: "We were able to speak in our own language in public only after the 10th of November."**

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<sup>14</sup> Klaus and Juliana Roth, "The System of Socialist Holidays and Rituals," *Ethnologia Europaea* (Journal of European Ethnology), vol. 20, no. 2 (1990).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Elena Marushiakova, Sofia, April 11, 1991.



**Beginning perhaps as early as 1959, and continuing through the 1980s, the government dispersed Gypsies living in compact Gypsy communities to Bulgarian communities to assimilate the Gypsies. Gypsy families living in ghettos were offered new apartments in Bulgarian neighborhoods. Typically, one or two Gypsy families would be put into each apartment entranceway, in new housing complexes. The campaign had a dual purpose: to win Gypsies' support for the Communist Party and to break up compact Gypsy communities. In general, the apartments were allocated to Party loyalists as a perk. The Gypsies usually accepted the new apartments eagerly, even though they were being dispersed. As Manush Romanov explained, "when you live in bad conditions, you want to move." Mr. Romanov criticized this policy: "The purpose was to disperse Gypsies. The motivation was to assimilate them. It was only due to lack of financial means that the government was not fully successful. You cannot disperse 1,000,000 people that easily."**

**Academic specialists were strongly discouraged from making objective studies of the Gypsy community during the totalitarian period. Even at the Institute for Ethnography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Gypsy studies were discouraged. Elena Marushiakova, a scholar at the Institute, described the difficulties she encountered trying to conduct field research on Gypsies: "I couldn't conduct field research very often, especially in Gypsy communities far away from Sofia, because I couldn't earn money doing this. I was never even given money for my transportation. Nothing I have written has been published in Bulgaria, only abroad—mainly in Czechoslovakia, where I wrote my dissertation."**

**According to Ms. Marushiakova, only two dissertations were written on Gypsies during this period, and they both supported the policies of the government. One of the papers, by Asen Asenov—a Gypsy, argued that the Gypsy Lore Society in England and all other organizations that studied Gypsies were formed with the purpose of creating a "fifth column of imperialism" in Bulgaria.**

**Stoyan Stoyanov, a member of Parliament from Sliven, said: "For years and years we didn't have honest sociological studies. We need a serious sociological study of the problems of Gypsies. We should know what part of our nation is Gypsy. Let's start from here. The hard work is still ahead."**

**During the totalitarian period, few Gypsies were involved in politics, and those who were active politically were pressured to support the policies of the Communist Party. This was especially true during the assimilation campaign. A member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (formerly the Communist Party) from Sliven told Helsinki Watch: "In 1984, the local leaders wanted to kick me out of the Communist Party because I was opposed to the name changes."**

**Similarly, Gypsy organizations were discouraged from being too "Gypsy," and sometimes were prohibited. The testimony of a Gypsy from Lom illustrates the difficulties encountered by a group of Gypsies who formed a cultural organization and a soccer club: "In 1963, we learned from the Serbian Gypsies in Yugoslavia that there was a world Gypsy organization with its office in Paris. It was called the 'World Voice of the Gypsies.'<sup>16</sup> A group of twelve of us had a secret meeting here in Lom. We were classmates. We chose people we could rely upon because we were afraid of spies. We gathered at various homes. We met every Sunday at 10 a.m. We met until 1968. We discussed such themes as is there a Gypsy alphabet or not. Through the barges that came from Yugoslavia, we collected information and magazines. We also received a magazine from the Paris organization. We were young men so we saved the pocket money that our parents gave us to pay for translators. We discussed the Gypsy situation."**

**When this group formed a soccer club and gave the teams Gypsy names, the local authorities interfered and called two of the members to the police office. The Gypsy from Lom recalled: "They called me and one other member. They told us we shouldn't have separate Gypsy teams, and that we couldn't have Gypsy names for the teams. We had collected money for the teams by recycling paper. So we were forced to change the team names to Botev, Levski, etc. (all Bulgarian national heroes). I don't remember when State Security called us. But even after we changed the names, our competition was stopped. A State Security agent said**

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<sup>16</sup> According to Donald Kenrick, there was a Gypsy organization based in Paris, called the "Communaute Mondiale Gitane" (World Gypsy Community), which published a magazine called "The World Voice of the Gypsies." Interview with Donald Kenrick, Sofia, April 9, 1991.

**we didn't have the right to use Bulgarian heroes to name Gypsy teams. We were ordered to have five Bulgarians on each team, so we stopped the teams."**

**Gypsies were generally segregated from other Bulgarian citizens in the military and given the worst assignments, usually in the construction troops, which undertook a variety of civilian as well as military building and maintenance projects. A 1978 decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party contains language that implies that this policy was already in effect by that time. It stated: "More young Gypsies who are activists in the Komsomol should be taken in the army, and those who are taken in the construction troops and in the army should be sent to such units where there is a considerable Bulgarian ethnic element."<sup>17</sup> This decision was apparently never implemented.<sup>18</sup>**

**The government's minorities policies during the totalitarian period created tension—and sometimes hatred—between minorities and ethnic Bulgarians. The policies also strained relations between minority groups. Several interviewees told Helsinki Watch that the tensions were artificially created, and did not exist before the assimilation campaign.**

**A small number of Gypsies told Helsinki Watch that their overall situation improved between 1944 and 1989. In particular, they noted improvements in the economic and social conditions of Gypsies. Sergei Ivanov Rusenov, a Gypsy who teaches history at a high school in Dunavtsi, said: "Forty-five years ago, no one paid any attention to the problems of the Gypsies. Before, Gypsies relied just on casual jobs or they begged or were thieves, and now most go to work. They have the opportunity to build their own houses. Forty-five years ago, Bulgaria was a poor country. The Gypsies could only get seasonal work. During the summer, they would dig or plant wheat...All good changes over the past 45 years are due to the policies of the BCP [Bulgarian Communist Party]. Before this, no one paid any attention to the Gypsies. I can't say that any special policy was directed towards the Gypsies. But their general policies were positive. They didn't differentiate Gypsies from the rest of the population, and this was good."**

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<sup>17</sup> **Decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, approved in minutes #850 of the Secretariat (27 Sept. 1978).**

<sup>18</sup> **Interview with Elena Marushiakova, Sofia, March 30, 1991.**

## **The Situation of the Gypsies Today**

**Today, Gypsies in Bulgaria continue to be discriminated against by the government, and are denied some of the most basic human rights, rights which the government now recognizes for other Bulgarian citizens. These policies led one Gypsy from Trun to observe: "Today, we are treated as second-class citizens."**

**Gypsies and other ethnic minorities suffer from the consequences of nationalism that is pervasive in Bulgaria. As Dimitrina Petrova, a member of Parliament, explained, an ethno-centric idea is emerging in Bulgaria. As part of this process, "Gypsies are being excluded from the national identity." Several political parties, such as the National Radical Party and the Fatherland Party of Labor, argue that the government pays too much attention to the rights of minorities and thereby violates the rights of Bulgarians. They object to the further extension of rights to minorities.**

**Many leading politicians oppose the registration of ethnic groups—such as the Democratic Roma Union, which represents Gypsies—as political parties. For example, Rumen Vodenicharov, a member of Parliament and ironically the founder of the Bulgarian Helsinki Watch (which is unaffiliated with the International Helsinki Federation), argues that registration of such groups would endanger the "civil peace" and would not be appropriate at this moment, because Bulgaria's democracy is "tender." Mr. Vodenicharov cites Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to support the proposition that when a nation's security is endangered, human rights can be suspended. Mr. Vodenicharov claims that Gypsies and other minorities "misinterpret" human rights to mean freedom to do whatever they want, and that the registration of their groups as political parties would threaten the public order.<sup>19</sup> Mr. Vodenicharov**

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<sup>19</sup> **Actually, Article 4 sets very stringent requirements for the suspension of human rights. Three basic requirements must be met before human rights may be derogated: 1) there must be a "public emergency which threatens the life of the nation"; 2) the existence of this public emergency must be "officially proclaimed"; and 3) only those restrictions that are "strictly required by the exigencies of the situation" may be imposed on human rights. Article 4 also requires that the measures taken may not involve discrimination "solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin," and that a nation derogating human rights "immediately inform" other parties to the Covenant of the Covenant provisions that it is derogating from, and the reasons for the derogation.**

also objects to the registration of ethnic political parties on the grounds that this would amount to the recognition of group rights, which, he claims, is not mandated by international law.<sup>20</sup>

Bulgaria's two leading political parties, the Union of Democratic Forces (an umbrella opposition group) and the Socialist Party, have failed to take strong positions against nationalism, probably because they fear they will alienate many of their constituents. Lyubomir Boev, the secretary of the election committee for the Union of Democratic Forces in Varna, described the psychology of Bulgarian voters in an April 1991 interview with Helsinki Watch: "You know that in Bulgaria there exist nationalistic movements. In our region, they aren't very popular. But in the country as a whole they can influence the psychological thinking of the voters. So too close contact between the minorities and the Union of Democratic Forces may have a negative influence on the voters. This might turn the people who aren't our strong supporters against us."

The Law on Political Parties, adopted by Parliament in April 1990, prohibits the registration of political parties on an ethnic or religious basis. Article 3(2) states: "No political party can be constituted...on a religious or ethnic basis..."

Bills in Parliament that aim to extend human rights to minorities receive little support. For example, a "Bill Against Ethnic Discrimination," introduced by the environmental group EcoGlasnost in January 1991, has not been adopted and is unlikely to be passed by the current Parliament. The bill includes provisions which track international human rights law. For example:

- Article 1: "Every Bulgarian citizen freely defines his/her ethnic identity."
- Article 2: "All Bulgarian citizens, regardless of their ethnic identity, have equal civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights."
- Article 6(1): "The persons belonging to an ethnic group have the right--

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<sup>20</sup> Actually, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides: "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language."

**individually, together with other members of the group, or through their organizations--to freely express, preserve and develop their ethnic specificity and culture; attempts at assimilation against their will are forbidden."**

**The disadvantaged situations in which many Gypsies find themselves today have their origins in prior government policies. In many instances, however, the government continues to deny Gypsies the same benefits accorded to other Bulgarian citizens, or it distributes these benefits unequally. Moreover, as Bulgaria faces new problems that are associated with the transition to democracy, such as high unemployment, these problems are experienced more acutely in the Gypsy community. Vassil Chaprazov, the first deputy chair of the Democratic Roma Union, elaborated: "We are at the bottom of Bulgarian society. Against the backdrop of the problems Bulgaria is facing now...the most disadvantaged people are Gypsies." Yordan Asenov Angelov, a Gypsy from Sliven, said: "We have many problems. They are so serious I don't know where to begin."**

**In interviews with Helsinki Watch, Gypsies asked for human rights. Dr. Saby Golemanov, a member of Parliament and a Gypsy, emphasized the ability of Gypsies to be equal in all respects to Bulgarians: "Gypsies have intellectual capabilities and can take part in the political, economic, and cultural life here. The problems with Gypsies and their tragic fate are not due to genetics. Gypsies are homo sapiens and have the possibility to have a civilized way of life." A Gypsy who lives in Stoliponovo, a ghetto in Plovdiv, said: "If we have the opportunity to prove what we are, we would be proud to be Gypsy."**

## **Housing**

**Several Gypsies said that the most egregious human rights violations committed against their community involve housing. In the cities and villages visited by Helsinki Watch, it was often the case that the housing situations of Gypsies were vastly inferior to the housing situations of Bulgarians. Many of the districts inhabited by Gypsies are ghettos. Per capita, these districts tend to have less living space than adjoining Bulgarian districts. Most Gypsy districts are severely overcrowded. Frequently, two or more families live in the same room. Sanitation services are less frequent. The underground water infrastructure is inferior. Gypsy districts have fewer telephones. The roads are not as well maintained, and sometimes are not even asphalted. The housing problems of the Gypsies produce other problems. One Gypsy living in a ghetto in Plovdiv, a mother, complained: "Our children have pneumonia and other diseases and spend much**

time in hospitals because of the bad living conditions." Another Gypsy from the same district said: "The Bulgarians want us to be cultured and educated, but we can't living under these conditions."

Until the late 1950s, many Gypsies in Bulgaria were travellers. This life offered both advantages and disadvantages to Gypsies. It gave them mobility and allowed them to move from village to village to find seasonal employment. At the same time, the travelling life was often harsh—living conditions were primitive, children did not receive proper educations, and local authorities and residents harassed travelling Gypsies. Travelling was prohibited by the government in 1958. At first, the prohibition shocked many of the travellers. Elena Marushiakova explained: "You can hear many moving stories from the Gypsies about how they were affected by these decrees—for example, that someone had a heart attack when his horse was taken away from him." But Ms. Marushiakova also noted positive effects. The travellers could obtain the benefits associated with a settled existence, such as better educations for their children.

Many former travellers have adjusted to the settled life, although they look back on their nomadic existence with nostalgia. An ex-traveller said: "It would be a good movie script—our life then. We had travelling caravans. This meant freedom—everyone went wherever he wanted. But we don't really remember this time. Now we travel with our cars for short trips. Here in Bulgaria there are few Gypsies who still travel. The travelling life is over now. We are used to our homes and our comfortable lives. I was a kid when this life stopped...The older people think the travelling way of life was better; the younger people think the settled way of life is better."

Gypsies acknowledge the beneficial effects of the decrees. Manush Romanov said: "I prefer the Gypsies to have a settled way of life rather than a nomadic one. This will give us an opportunity to achieve equality with other Bulgarians...The nomadic Gypsies don't get an education. You can't live in the modern world without an education." Today, Gypsies are once again free to travel, but only a small number have resumed the travelling life.

At the same time that the government forced Gypsies to settle, it initiated policies to relocate them. Beginning perhaps as early as 1959, and continuing through the 1980s, the government dispersed Gypsies living in compact Gypsy communities, typically by offering them apartments in new buildings.

Helsinki Watch received numerous complaints from Bulgarians who live

**in close proximity to Gypsies, who alleged that Gypsies violate their rights. The following comments were typical. "The Gypsies have too many noisy parties." "They play their music loudly day and night." "The hygiene of the Gypsies is terrible." "They are romantic and free-thinking people. The problem is that Gypsies can't cope with the urban way of life." "In a nice, decent block of flats, they put horses inside the apartments. In the center of the room, they build fires." "Some Gypsies drink at night and have quarrels. Bulgarians who pass by...have fear." "You cannot live with Gypsies in the same place. They break windows, beat our children, drink downstairs." "We cannot communicate with them."**

**Some Bulgarians said that they have good relations with their Gypsy neighbors. A Sliven resident observed: "Most Gypsies have the same hygiene as Bulgarians. You shouldn't generalize about the Gypsy population." Several interviewees reported that relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies are better when only a few Gypsy families live in a Bulgarian district, and that relations and living conditions "deteriorate" when the population is more integrated.**

**Gypsies complained that local councils ignore their housing problems. They also complained that local council officials who distribute housing discriminate against Gypsies. In theory, housing allocation is made according to several "objective" criteria, such as size of family and date of application. However, in practice, housing officials allegedly deviate from the objective criteria because the process is not always open to public scrutiny.**

**Today, a severe housing shortage exacerbates the housing problems faced by Gypsies, and will make it difficult for the government to remedy past discrimination against their community. Georgi Bunov, a member of Parliament who represents Plovdiv, said: "The tragedy is that we cannot build housing fast enough."**

**Several Gypsies told Helsinki Watch that they are willing to build their own homes if given land. Self-help projects have worked well in the past for Gypsies. However, it is unclear how much land will be made available to the Gypsies and under what terms, now that land privatization is under way in Bulgaria. In an interview with Helsinki Watch in April 1991, Manush Romanov predicted that the new land allocation system will be unfair to Gypsies: "The largest number of people who don't have land are Gypsies, and this will continue to be the case. So Gypsies will remain under the stars."**

**In some densely populated Gypsy districts, Gypsies have built homes**



**without obtaining local council approval. Some of them expressed concern that their homes will be destroyed by the local authorities. They explained that they built the homes because they needed to accommodate new family members, and that the local councils would not give them housing when they applied. This issue may be a controversial one in the months ahead and may further damage relations between Gypsies and local authorities. At a meeting of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee on 17 April 1991, Mayor Somlev of Plovdiv announced: "Starting from today, we will not allow people who have built illegal homes to live in them. We will start destroying them."**

**The following section describes the housing situation of Gypsies, and those who live in close proximity to them, in several specific cities and villages.**

**Sliven:**

**The city of Sliven has the largest population of Gypsies in Bulgaria, some 50,000, or one-quarter of the city's population. Gypsies live in several crowded districts, on the outskirts of the city, and are mostly segregated from Bulgarians.**

**Peyo Dachev is Sliven's most densely populated Gypsy district. In this ghetto, it is common for three or four families to live in one home, and for five or six people to sleep in the same room. Homes often lack toilets. One resident said: "Sometimes pigs live in our homes. We put our animals in our homes because we have no other place to keep them." Another reported: "We want new housing. The local council says that it has no housing and then gives it to their own people. I have been waiting seven years for new housing."**

**Sanitation in Peyo Dachev is a problem. Litter fills the streets. Panayot Todorov Boyadjiev, the chairman of the local branch of the Union of Democratic Forces, said: "We have bad sanitation. The sanitation workers come here two times per week. This isn't enough. They go much more often to other districts. We don't have garbage baskets." Mr. Boyadjiev also reported problems with the local water supply: "Half of the people in the district have not had water for six months."**

**Dissatisfaction with the living conditions cuts across party lines. A local Socialist Party activist complained: "The population is very dense here, so we can't achieve cultural development...Ten thousand of us live here and we have three food stores, one of which only sells vegetables. We don't have any cultural facilities, kindergarten, bath. The elementary school is three kilometers away. If a pregnant woman gets sick, we don't have a telephone to call a doctor...Most of the**

time we don't have running water, because there are breakdowns and no one comes to repair them."

With the assistance of the local authorities, residents of Peyo Dachev have taken steps to improve living conditions. Nikolai Hubanov, a political activist, said: "Half a million leva were allocated to us by the local council to build a medical care facility. They gave us materials for the clinic, and we built it ourselves.<sup>21</sup> We have started to construct new sanitation facilities. When they are completed, we will have running water in every home. We were given 84,000 leva for street lights by the local council. We also have a sports complex here. We have a project and money to build a public bath, a kindergarten, and a new school. We have a contract whereby we have agreed to help with the construction. The local council gives us some workers, as well as materials. We provide additional workers...We have two food stores and are trying to construct a third one."

Local authorities acknowledge that living conditions need to be improved in Peyo Dachev. At a forum convened by Sliven's mayor in November 1990 to discuss the situation of Sliven's Gypsies with Helsinki Watch, Marin Kevrekov, a representative of Sliven's police, said: "We have a Gypsy ghetto in Peyo Dachev. It has a high density population. This ghetto was built in the last century. We have to think about solving all of the problems there." Ivan Dobrev, Sliven's mayor, warned that the locality has few resources: "Our power when we distribute housing is very limited. For 1990, we have less than one hundred apartments available."

Conditions in Sliven's Nikola Kochev district are somewhat better for the eight to ten thousand Gypsies who live there. One resident offered the following explanation: "Our district is closer than Peyo Dachev to the center of town, so it was necessary to keep it looking better."

Gypsies in Nikola Kochev still lack sufficient housing, however, and over the years they have built new homes without obtaining local council approval. Now they worry that the local council will take these homes away. A

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<sup>21</sup> According to Dr. Saby Golemanov, a member of Parliament from Sliven, the death rate for Gypsy children in Peyo Dachev was 80/1,000 before the clinic was built. "This could only be compared to the death rate in South America and Africa," he told Helsinki Watch. "In 1989, the death rate was 9/1,000. I'd like such polyclinics to be built in other areas where there are Gypsy ghettos."

**representative of the Democratic Roma Union who lives in the district said: "One of the tasks of the Union is to make sure that houses built in this district on individual initiative are deemed legal. We've been living illegally in our houses for years and years. The Union wants the houses legalized so we can be sure we can live here. There was a case last year where the local council destroyed a house because it was built illegally. A big family lived in it--they have five or six children. Probably Bulgarians also build houses illegally sometimes, but it happens very often in Gypsy communities. We have no other way."**

**Plovdiv:**

**Plovdiv's Stoliponovo district is a ghetto inhabited by some some 30,000 Gypsies, ethnic Turks, and Bulgarians.<sup>22</sup> The majority of residents are Gypsies and ethnic Turks. In the words of one interviewee, Stoliponovo is "a living hell." Residents complained about the crowded living conditions. They said that the district was meant to house a small number of people and that the population level reached its saturation point years ago, due to decades of ill-considered policies and neglect on the part of local government officials. A resident said: "We asked the local council many times for better housing. They did nothing. They paid no attention to us." Today, residents say that the crowded living conditions create other human rights problems.**

**Bulgarian residents told Helsinki Watch that the Gypsies beat and rob them, burglarize their apartments, and commit other serious crimes. They said that the police rarely enter the district, lack control, and rarely follow up on complaints.<sup>23</sup>**

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<sup>22</sup> **The ethnic Turks are called "Gypsies" by other residents, but refer to themselves as "ethnic Turks." One person who calls himself an ethnic Turk told Helsinki Watch: "To be called a Gypsy is an insult, and therefore we don't want to be called Gypsies."**

<sup>23</sup> **Lack of police control is a nationwide problem. The police are reluctant to act because they do not know the extent of their authority. They are waiting for Parliament to pass a law defining their powers.**

**In the summer of 1990, a number of Gypsies occupied empty apartments in Bulgarian apartment complexes,<sup>24</sup> without obtaining local council approval (the local council uses the apartments to house people temporarily in emergencies). This further damaged relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies.**

**One Gypsy squatter was forced by his Bulgarian neighbors to leave the apartment he was occupying. In an interview with Helsinki Watch, he explained why he occupied the apartment: "I am married and have three children. We lived in a room that was twelve square meters. I had applied to the local council in December 1987 for a new apartment...When I felt that things would not work out in a legal way, I occupied the apartment. The local council doesn't give us apartments. This is their usual way...The Gypsies have more problems with housing than other Bulgarians. Our housing is not fit to live in. We cannot raise our children properly here. At the local council office, they don't treat us well. A worker once told me: 'Get out of here—enough of your Gypsy tricks. If you don't get out of here, I'll call the police.'"**

**He occupied a vacant apartment in August 1990. A few days later, it became clear to him that his Bulgarian neighbors "didn't want a Gypsy." He elaborated: "About twenty Bulgarian men came one night at 11 p.m., and said that if I didn't leave within twenty-four hours, they would throw me out with force. I left. After that, the neighbors turned off the electricity in the apartment."**

**In March and April 1991, Bulgarian residents from Stoliponovo set up tents outside of Plovdiv's local council and staged a strike, demanding new housing outside of Stoliponovo. The strike received national attention. In April 1991, Parliament's Human Rights Committee held a hearing on the housing situation in Stoliponovo (however, only Bulgarian residents and local officials were invited to testify, not Gypsy or Turkish residents). The following are excerpts from the testimony of Bulgarian residents. "We are living in a nightmare." "In 1971-72, the government moved Bulgarians to Stoliponovo by administrative decree. This social experiment has failed. After twenty years, we haven't been able to achieve an harmonious co-existence with the Gypsies." "Bulgarians in Stoliponovo are foreigners, emigres in their own town. They are held there like hostages. These people are prisoners in their own homes."**

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<sup>24</sup>**In general, Bulgarians, Gypsies, and ethnic Turks live in separate housing areas in Stoliponovo, although all three groups live in close proximity to each other.**

**At the end of the hearing, Manush Romanov, a member of the Human Rights Committee, said: "This is a dark picture which I know very well. I have visited Stoliponovo three times. The situation is exactly as it was described. There are unpleasant, even tragical things happening there." Mr. Romanov agreed with those who argued that Bulgarians and Gypsies should live in separate districts. "At the moment," he said, "things aren't ripe enough for Gypsies to be integrated with Bulgarians."**

**Mr. Romanov criticized the government for neglecting the problems of Gypsies: "For years and centuries, the problems of the Gypsies haven't been solved. We'll create normal relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies only by addressing the problems of Gypsies."**

**Lom:**

**The "Bangladesh" district in Lom is a Gypsy ghetto with several thousand residents. Most of the district's roads are unpaved and muddy, in contrast to roads in most other districts, which are paved. Some of the mud is ten to fifteen centimeters thick and impossible to drive or walk through. A resident said: "We can't invite anyone to our homes. No one would come to this district because it is such a mess." Pavel Nikolov Georgiev, a Gypsy and former mayor of the district, said: "When it rains here, we lose our electricity, because the electrical station is exposed. We just want normal streets and electricity. We don't ask for anything else."**

**Bangladesh is overcrowded. Some residents have built houses on their own initiative after waiting many years for housing from the local council, without results. They worry that the local council will destroy their homes. A resident recalled: "In 1974, the authorities destroyed some houses we had built illegally. They destroyed them with bulldozers and police."**

**The following comments illustrate the desperation of Bangladesh residents. "This is India, India." "I can't tell you everything about our situation here, because if I did, you wouldn't believe me." "It's worse than India here." "We don't have human rights."**

**The Mladenovo district in Lom is another Gypsy ghetto. The roads are unpaved and muddy. The district is surrounded by a fence that is two and one-half meters tall. It was built in the late 1970s to hide the district from passing cars.**

**Vidin:**

**Approximately 6,000 Gypsies live in Vidin's Gypsy quarter. Residents said that their housing was generally adequate, but complained about the services provided to them by the local council. These services are inferior to the services provided to other Vidin residents. For example, the Gypsy quarter receives no water from the locality, and residents must dig their own wells. Residents in other districts obtain water from the locality.**

**Many roads in the Gypsy quarter are unpaved and muddy. Rumen Petrov Seferinov, the chairman of the local branch of the Democratic Roma Union, told Helsinki Watch: "Our roads are in worse condition than any other roads in Vidin." Residents also complained about the sanitation service.**

**Telephone service is inferior to that provided in Bulgarian quarters. Out of some 1,100 homes, reportedly only five have telephones. Dimcho Yordanov Vankov told Helsinki Watch that about 300 homes were supposed to receive telephones in 1990, but only one telephone was actually installed, and it was given to the secretary of the local chapter of the Socialist Party.**

**Sofia:**

**In Sofia, some Gypsies live in apartment complexes with Bulgarians and others live in separate districts. "Cambodia," a quarter within the Fakulteta district, is one of the worst Gypsy ghettos. Approximately 1,000 Gypsies live here. Conditions are extremely crowded. Some of the houses have dirt floors. Most of the roads are unpaved. Garbage lies uncollected in the streets.**

**Gypsies live under similar conditions in other parts of Fakulteta. Many roads are unpaved. Sanitation service is inferior to that provided in other city neighborhoods.**

**Dunavtsi:**

**This village, near Vidin, is an example of a community where the houses and services provided to Gypsies are comparable to those provided to Bulgarians. Sergei Ivanov Rusenov, a Gypsy who teaches history at the local high school, noted many improvements over the past forty-five years: "Forty-five years ago in Dunavtsi, Gypsies lived in small houses with straw roofs. They didn't have beds. They slept on the ground on straw carpets. Today, the Gypsies have big houses--**

**the biggest house in Dunavtsi is a Gypsy house. Most of the streets in the Gypsy quarters have asphalt."**

### **Education**

**The government's educational policies discriminate against Gypsies. A large portion of the Gypsy community is affected by these policies because so many Gypsies--perhaps up to half--are under the age of sixteen (due to a high birth rate). In many areas of the country, Gypsies receive an inferior education, compared to the education Bulgarians receive. In Gypsy ghettos, Gypsies tend to attend segregated schools. Some of these schools teach students special technical skills rather than the normal curriculum. Gypsies who attend technical schools do not have the opportunity to attend university. The Gypsy community bears part of the blame for its educational problems. Gypsy parents frequently do not encourage their children to study or to go to school.**

**The educational level of Gypsies is higher today than in the past. The travelling life impeded education. Many Gypsy children whose families were travellers could not attend classes regularly. As reported earlier, travelling was prohibited by the government in 1958.<sup>25</sup>**

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<sup>25</sup>**Today travelling is permitted, but the number of Gypsy travellers is small.**

**During the totalitarian period, the Communist Party generally ignored the educational problems of Gypsies. Christo Kyuchucov, a Gypsy who teaches elementary students, reported: "During the past forty-five years, the government simply improved the living conditions of Gypsies, but paid no attention at all to raising their cultural or intellectual level."**

**Beginning in the 1950s and continuing perhaps through the early 1970s, preference for admission to higher education was given to minorities. Manush Romanov questioned the motivation behind the government's policy: "They gave us preference to try to assimilate us. This was a special kind of trap which served the idea of assimilation very effectively."**

**A 1962 Politburo decision supports the thesis that the government used its educational policies to assimilate the Gypsies. It stated, in pertinent part:**

**The Ministry of Education and Culture and the regional people's councils must take measures so that the Turkish language is not taught to the children of Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarian Muslims. These children must be taught in Bulgarian. The appointment of Turkish teachers at schools where the children of Gypsies, Tatars and Bulgarian Muslims predominate must be avoided. The children of Bulgarian Muslims and Gypsies must not be allowed to live in hostels or to study in the same groups with Turkish children wherever this is possible.<sup>26</sup>**

**Despite the government's efforts to attract Gypsies to higher education, very few Gypsies actually attended university. Only thirty percent of Gypsy children completed primary school, according to a 1978 Communist Party document.<sup>27</sup> The same document noted that the number of Gypsies who completed secondary school was "negligible," and that more than fifty percent of Gypsies above the age of thirty were illiterate.**

**Today, the educational situation of Gypsies remains more or less the same. A Gypsy who is studying medicine offered an explanation for why so few**

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<sup>26</sup> **Decision A101 of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (5 April 1962). See Appendix B for the full text of the decision.**

<sup>27</sup> **Decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, approved in minutes #850 of the Secretariat (27 Sept. 1978).**



**Gypsies attend university: "Most Gypsies who want to go on to higher education have an inferiority complex, a psychological barrier. Both the individual and the system are to blame, but I think the root of the problem lies within the system. Gypsies do not receive enough social care." He said that young Gypsies lack role models because those Gypsies who are intellectuals leave the community, afraid "that their development will be stunted if they stay." Some interviewees cited the early marriage age within the Gypsy community as a factor. Many Gypsies marry by age fifteen or sixteen and have children at that age. They must work or stay at home and take care of their children, and they are therefore unable to continue their education.<sup>28</sup>**

**Gypsy parents who did not receive higher education told Helsinki Watch that they would like their children to have this opportunity. A Gypsy mother of five children from Kostinbrod said: "We want our children to be able to go on to higher education, so they can be scholars and scientists, and not blind like us."**

**Education officials acknowledged that the state must do more to create the necessary conditions for Gypsies' intellectual development. Professor Ilya Konev, a former minister for higher education, suggested: "We should identify those Gypsies who have promise and nurture them."**

**From the moment they begin their schooling, many Gypsies receive inferior educations compared to Bulgarians. Gypsies who live in segregated areas tend to go to all-Gypsy schools, where—for a variety of reasons—the education is inferior. In principle, parents can send their children to any elementary or high school, but in practice, children generally attend the nearest school. Transportation to other districts is expensive, often time-consuming, and sometimes not available.**

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<sup>28</sup> Education is compulsory in Bulgaria through age sixteen.

**Beginning in 1969, the Ministry for Lower Education opened special schools in Gypsy districts to teach students technical skills. The first school was established in Plovdiv. Stefan Chernev, a deputy minister for lower education, explained the policy:**

**In 1969, in Plovdiv, a school was set up for the first through eighth grades to offer certain professional training. The number of general subjects was very slightly reduced.<sup>29</sup>**

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**Students who graduated from the eighth grade received a document saying that they had technical skills. Almost immediately we saw good results.**

**Now about seventy to eighty percent [of the Gypsy students] graduate from such schools. There are thirty-one of these schools with about 18,000 students, taught by 1,600 teachers. Anyone can attend these schools. However, about ninety percent of the students in the special schools are Gypsies.**

**Many Gypsies prefer to go to technical secondary schools as well. Before 1979, ten to fifteen percent of the Gypsies who completed eighth grade went on to secondary schools. After 1979 [when technical education was first offered in secondary schools], it was about twenty-five to thirty percent.**

**Mr. Chernev said that the government treats all students equally and does not want to create "ghetto schools." "But," he said, "it turns out that we have better results with the technical schools." Mr. Chernev also said that the**

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<sup>29</sup> According to Mr. Chernev, students in the technical schools skip one lesson per week in Russian, mathematics, art, and music. These lessons are replaced with four hours of technical education. Because all Bulgarian students study technical education for two hours per week, the students in the technical schools receive a total of six hours of technical instruction per week. Anywhere from three to six of these hours are devoted to actual work. Technical schools sign contracts with local firms to produce work. Some of the profits are given to the students. The remainder of the profits go to the teachers and the schools.

**government allocates more money to Gypsies for their education than to Bulgarians. "More Gypsies get scholarships," he told Helsinki Watch.**

**The technical education program is controversial. Some interviewees said that it provides the students with useful skills. Others said that the program discriminates against Gypsies. Manush Romanov told Helsinki Watch: "With this program, Gypsies are destined to be illiterate. They don't learn what children in other schools learn. Even the small number who go on to secondary school fail in the first year because they aren't competitive with other students. These special schools exist throughout the country, but only in Gypsy neighborhoods. Not a single Bulgarian goes to these schools, even if they live in Gypsy neighborhoods." Elena Marushiakova, a Gypsy specialist, agreed: "The technical education program discriminates against Gypsies."**

**Until recently, many Gypsy children, particularly those from Turkish-speaking families, began school with a handicap—they could not speak the Bulgarian language as well as Bulgarian children. In 1990, the Ministry for Lower Education initiated a program to teach Gypsy children the Bulgarian language before they attend regular classes. The language program is optional and is offered to six-year olds. However, this program may not be enough to provide Gypsies with adequate language skills. Helsinki Watch received many reports that Gypsies who attend segregated schools fail to learn proper Bulgarian because they have little contact with native Bulgarian speakers outside of the classroom. A teacher in a school near Varna that has a predominantly Gypsy and Turkish student population said: "One day I was having lunch with the children and one of them asked me, 'Sir, what is the name for this thing,' and he showed me the fork. In order to understand a given lesson, we have to explain things several times. The language barrier is big because at home they speak in Romani or Turkish."**

**Some interviewees suggested that the government should integrate Bulgarian and Gypsy students in the schools. Professor Ilya Konev, a member of Parliament and the former minister for higher education, said: "Children should not be segregated at an early age. It is my opinion that Gypsy and Bulgarian children should go to school together. Then the Gypsy children will pick up good habits from the Bulgarians."**

**Others complained that Gypsy children bring down the level of education and create additional problems in the schools. Stefan Chernev, a deputy minister for lower education, said: "Gypsy children break furniture in the schools. They**

**aren't clean. They smoke. Some of them steal." Several Bulgarian parents told Helsinki Watch that they do not want their children to attend the same schools as Gypsies.**

**In the past, many Gypsy children did not attend classes. Several years ago, however, the Ministry began an intensive campaign to encourage Gypsy parents to send their children to school. Today, the attendance rate has improved. Approximately 95 percent of school-age Gypsy children attend school, according to Stefan Chernev, a deputy minister for lower education. Mr. Chernev added: "But it's a different story about getting them to study. We find Gypsies who are age 16 and only in the third grade, because they have to repeat classes, and at this age many of them get married, particularly women. Many Gypsies work on the black market, and this also works against their education...The problem is that they work less at home. They don't care much for their education."**

**Recruiting Gypsies to teach in the schools may help to raise the educational level of Gypsies. At present, very few Gypsies teach, and Gypsy students lack role models. Gypsy interest in education may also increase if students are allowed to study the history of Gypsies and other minorities. At present, no such lessons are offered, although Bulgarian children do study black American history. Deputy minister for lower education Chernev explained: "We study about black Americans, because their history is very different from white Americans' history."**

**Studying Gypsy history may foster better understanding between young Bulgarians and Gypsies. A Gypsy who teaches history to high school students in Dunavtsi said that he tells his students a little about Gypsy history, even though there is nothing in the textbooks. "By teaching a little myself," he explained, "I think the Bulgarian children get a better understanding of the Gypsies." He suggested that this should become a formal part of the curriculum: "In areas where there are Gypsies, a little information about Gypsies would be useful. Even in areas with few Gypsies, it would be useful, because Bulgarians may come into contact with Gypsies at work."**

**Some Gypsy parents would like their children to be able to take optional Romani language classes in school.<sup>30</sup> It may be difficult for the Ministry of Lower**

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<sup>30</sup>**The first constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, adopted on 4 December 1947, gave national minorities the right "to be educated in their vernacular" (article 71). The 1971 constitution limited this right, granting citizens of non-Bulgarian origin**

**Education to offer Romani classes, however, because many Romani dialects are spoken in Bulgaria. Unlike the Turkish community, which strongly supports the introduction of optional Turkish language classes in the schools, language classes are not a top priority in the Gypsy community. A Gypsy father of three from Plovdiv expressed typical sentiments: "Because we live in Bulgaria, we want our children to learn the Bulgarian language as best they can...We don't insist on our children learning Romani. We want our children to be equal in their communication with others."**

**The following section describes the educational situation of Gypsies in several specific cities and villages.**

**Sliven:**

**School #6 in Sliven's Peyo Dachev district provides technical education. Boys learn how to work with iron and girls learn weaving and tailoring. Its student population is almost all-Gypsy, and Gypsy parents have asked that the school be closed down. The chairwoman of the local branch of the Democratic Roma Union, Dora Decheva Dimitrova, said that the school does not adequately prepare students in general subjects. Another parent objected to the segregation of Gypsy children in the school, saying that it makes it difficult for them to learn the Bulgarian language.**

**However, the director of school #6 defended its program: "The school year 1972-73 was my first year as director. Before then, when Bulgarian and Gypsy children went to the same school, the situation was bad. In those mixed classes, usually only the Bulgarian children participated in the discussions. The Gypsy children didn't participate. They were listeners, and sometimes they didn't even listen. The curriculum wasn't interesting for them, and this explains why they didn't go to school...It was much more difficult to get Gypsy children to go to school than today, and the process of learning for Gypsy children was much less effective than it is today."**

**The director of school #6 also defended the district's segregated school system: "It is no exaggeration to say that over 90 percent of the Gypsy children**

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**the right to study "their own language" (article 45, paragraph 7), but not to study other topics in their own vernacular. Classes have never been taught in Romani in Bulgaria's schools, nor have optional Romani language classes been offered.**

**begin school without knowing how to speak the Bulgarian language. It would be very difficult for them to go to school with Bulgarian children." Ms. Dimitrova disagreed. "If Gypsy children go to Bulgarian schools, they can prove themselves," she said.**

**In an interview with Helsinki Watch, a 12-year-old Gypsy boy who attends the technical school in Peyo Dachev expressed a desire to go to school with Bulgarians: "There are no Bulgarians in my school. We make iron gates and doors. We fulfill orders from factories...The Bulgarian children don't make iron works. I want to be a musician. I want to play the clarinet. I learn how to play at home—we don't have lessons at school. We don't have any Gypsy teachers...I would like to go to school with Bulgarian children. This would be better because when we Gypsies are together, we only fight among ourselves."**

**Some schools in Sliven's Nikola Kochev district are also segregated. Yordan Asenov Angelov, a local activist for the Union of Democratic Forces, complained that the preparation in the Gypsy schools is inferior to the preparation in Bulgarian schools: "Our children used to go to Bulgarian schools, but for ten years they have been separated...I have two daughters. The older one is lighter-skinned, so we lied and said that she is a Bulgarian, and she was admitted to a Bulgarian school. The younger one is darker-skinned and goes to a Gypsy school...From Peyo Dachev, only one Gypsy went to university, and from here, just one to two percent of our children. The reason is that they don't have the proper background knowledge."**

**According to Zheko Tanev, an educational specialist at Sliven's local council, special preparatory classes are now offered to Gypsy children prior to their first year of school. Enrollees study the Bulgarian language.**

**Mr. Tanev said that the school system has a problem with truancy among Gypsy children. "They don't go to school, and their parents aren't interested in sending them," he explained. "They're absent very often, and this affects the quality of the education that they get." The absentee rate at Gypsy schools is much higher than at Bulgarian schools. To reduce truancy, teachers visit the homes of Gypsy parents and encourage them to send their children to school.**

**According to Mr. Tanev, the school system employs approximately 2,500 teachers. About twelve of them are Gypsies.**

**Plovdiv:**

**Schools in Plovdiv tend to be segregated, particularly in the Stoliponovo district, where both Gypsies and Bulgarians live. Several Bulgarian parents told Helsinki Watch that Gypsy children bring down the level of education when they study in the same schools as Bulgarians, and that they start fights with the Bulgarian children. Georgi Bunov, who represents Plovdiv in Parliament, said: "Parents tell me that it is very difficult for both groups to go to school together peacefully."**

**Vladimir Milushev, an educational specialist at the Plovdiv local council, reported that Gypsy children have always been "the object of special attention" by his office. He said that special funds have been allocated for them, although "probably not enough." He described the local council's efforts to place Gypsy children in Bulgarian schools:**

**There was a tendency in the past to send Gypsy children to Bulgarian schools. The motivation was good—it was to foster their cultural development. But the results were not as good as we had intended them to be. In general, they are backward compared to Bulgarians. There are usually 30 to 40 children in one class so it's very hard to pay attention to every one and especially those who are backward. So now we're trying to reduce the number in each class. We haven't stopped putting Gypsies in Bulgarian schools.**

**Mr. Milushev pointed to special problems caused by the "new democratization":**

**The Gypsies feel democracy as an absolute freedom to do what they like. Democracy does not mean anarchy, but obedience to the laws. Children have more freedom of choice as to what they will study. Generally speaking, discipline in the Gypsy community has decreased since the process of democratization has started. They interpreted democracy in the wrong way to mean they can go to school or not as they like or take property or not as they like. Teachers are afraid to teach in some schools. In some cases the lives of people have been threatened.**

**Teachers make special efforts to communicate with Gypsy parents, but they are not always successful. "The Gypsy parents don't have the attitude that their children should go to school, and this is one of the key problems for teachers," Mr. Milushev said. The local council tries to get all Gypsy children to**

attend school at the kindergarten level, so that they can learn the Bulgarian language at an early age and can be more easily integrated into the educational process. Mr. Milushev said: "We even have some groups during the summer to prepare them for learning the Bulgarian language. Our goal is for these children to go to school in a normal way."

The local council tries to identify intelligent Gypsy children and to place them in predominantly Bulgarian schools. However, in the Stoliponovo district, this policy has been unsuccessful. Mr. Milushev explained: "We tried to put them together, but the effort was fruitless. We tried to force them to go to school together, but there is a natural process of separation."

**Vidin:**

A special technical school in Vidin's Gypsy district offers classes through the tenth level. Students study carpentry. Dimcho Yordanov Vankov, a local secretary for the Social Democratic Party, complained: "Why should our children be separated from the Bulgarian children? The professional education isn't useful, because the children don't get the same general education that the Bulgarian children get. When the Gypsy children finish the tenth year, they have the equivalence of a fourth year education. Out of the 1,500 children who attend the local school, only two or three of them continue their secondary education. It's very difficult because they don't have the necessary preparation. Several families send their children to Bulgarian elementary schools, but this is very difficult. We want to close this school, so our children can get the same education as Bulgarian children."

A Gypsy who studies at a Bulgarian secondary school outside of the Gypsy district described his experience: "It has been harder for me than for the Bulgarians because the level of general education is lower at our elementary school. In our district, the education we receive is on a lower level. Here, you only have to learn one paragraph to get a high grade, whereas the Bulgarians have to learn the whole lesson, and the teachers ask them questions...In my class, I am the only Gypsy out of 36 students...Bulgarians and Gypsies should really go to the same schools, because Gypsies here feel very lonely and isolated."

**Sofia:**

Sofia's Fakulteta district has a technical school for elementary and secondary level students (school #75). The school teaches boys to become



**construction workers and girls to become tailors. According to one of the school's teachers, only one graduate has attended university over the past ten years.**

**Ivanka Ivanova, vice-director of the school, offered an explanation: "Our biggest problem is to get the children to come to school, and then to keep them here. The problem is that they get married at a very early age—some even at 12 or 13—and they also have a language barrier. This is why so few go on to secondary or university education. Many Gypsies have children at an early age, and have to stay home to care for them. Others have younger brothers or sisters and must stay at home to take care of them."**

**The school attempts to raise the educational level of its students and to increase educational awareness in the community. For example, it sponsors frequent parent-teacher meetings. However, according to Ms. Ivanova, "parents rarely come." "Less than ten percent of the parents attend," she reported. The school also has an optional program before the first year of classes to teach Bulgarian to students.**

**Bozhidarka Georgieva, a biology teacher in school #75, said: "I think the technical education our students get is good, because the students don't have much interest in other things...I have taught in other schools. The interest here is very, very low. It's very difficult to teach them."**

**Dunavtsi:**

**Gypsies are integrated with Bulgarians in Dunavtsi's schools. Sergei Ivanov Rusenov, a Gypsy who teaches history at Dunavtsi's high school, offered a positive assessment of the educational situation for Gypsies: "Forty-five years ago in Dunavtsi, few Gypsies could read or write. Today, about 70 percent of the Gypsies complete secondary education. It's such a high percent because our children go to elementary schools together with Bulgarians, whereas in Vidin, the Gypsies go to separate elementary schools. In Vidin, they don't have better students with which to compare, and therefore they aren't stimulated. Eight Gypsies in Dunavtsi have completed higher education...My father received six years of education and my mother was illiterate. I received higher education—this illustrates some of the positive changes over the years."**

## **Employment**

**Gypsies in Bulgaria hold a variety of occupations, ranging from traditional trades to factory labor. Many Gypsies told Helsinki Watch that they are discriminated against in the workplace. Some claimed that they were denied promotions because they are Gypsies; others reported that they were the first to lose their jobs in factories forced to make cutbacks. Gypsies who practice traditional trades, such as blacksmithing and iron working, complain that they are disadvantaged because the government does not give them land for their workplaces. Gypsies resent the fact that Bulgarians blame them for the black market.**

**Historically, Gypsies tended to work in occupations that were suited to the mobile way of life, such as selling copperware and wooden spoons, playing music, telling fortunes, and providing entertainment with bears. These occupations became less popular once travelling was prohibited in 1958, and some trades, such as the playing of Gypsy folk music, were specifically prohibited by local authorities during the assimilation campaign.**

**Today, Gypsies complain that they are discriminated against in the workplace, but the evidence tends to be circumstantial. Yordan Asenov Angelov, a Gypsy from Sliven, said: "In the workplace, we're always given the hardest work. Gypsies can be much better philosophers than Bulgarians, but no one cares for our opinions...I work in a textile factory. There are eight of us in our brigade. Seven of us are Gypsies. We have five superiors. All are Bulgarians."**

**In Sliven, Angel Asenov, an unemployed Gypsy, reported: "I have been having problems finding a job because of racial discrimination. I had been a waiter for some time. My superiors forced me to quit my job in a restaurant because they knew I was a Gypsy. Most of us have jobs, but we don't get jobs we feel we are qualified for. We want to be shopkeepers...but we can't. The local council decides who can be a shopkeeper. I once worked in a wool factory. There was a breakdown in the work. I wasn't to blame, but I was blamed and got sacked for this."**

**A Gypsy from Petric alleged: "If a Gypsy and a Bulgarian apply for the same job, they will always give it to the Bulgarian applicant." In Sliven, a Gypsy musician said: "The director of the center for musicians here uses his connections to make sure that Gypsies don't get jobs."**

**Gypsies fear that as unemployment increases in Bulgaria, they will be the first to lose their jobs because employers discriminate against them. Their**

**lower educational level may also be a factor. At a forum on Gypsies in Sliven, Marin Kevrekov, a representative from the Sliven police, predicted: "Soon there will be high unemployment because of privatization. Gypsies will be the hardest hit." Mr. Kevrekov noted that crime is already increasing among Gypsies—more than among the general Sliven population—and he attributed this increase to a rise in unemployment in the Gypsy community.**

**Several Gypsies expressed concern about the new laws that are being written by Parliament to establish rules for the privatization and apportionment of state-owned land, and told Helsinki Watch that they want equal opportunities to purchase state-owned land. They worry that the system of priorities for land acquisition will make it difficult for them to acquire land. Gypsies owned little land prior to 1944, and therefore will be unable to make many claims for land confiscated by the Communists after 1944.**

**Gypsies who work in traditional professions such as blacksmithing told Helsinki Watch that they need land so that they can build workshops. In Plovdiv, Asen Stoyanov Boshnakov, a blacksmith, said: "Now we cannot practice our profession properly because we don't have workshops. We must work outside, on the street. Everyone should have a place to work. Some people take different jobs now because they don't have the conditions and opportunities to practice their profession. But blacksmithing is in our blood." In Vidin, a Gypsy complained: "Sixty percent of us breed animals, but we aren't given any land." Referring to the new land laws, Manush Romanov said: "The largest number of people who don't have land are Gypsies, and this will continue to be the case. Gypsies will remain under the stars."**

**Many Bulgarians hold Gypsies responsible for the country's black market. The common perception, reinforced by reports on the state-owned television and radio, is that most Gypsies are black market dealers. In reality, only a portion of the Gypsy community works on the black market, and some Bulgarians are also involved in black market activities.**

**Rumen Vodenicharov, a member of Parliament and a founding member of the Bulgarian Helsinki Watch (not affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation), expressed a typical Bulgarian opinion: "Gypsies are not very fair playing. They only want to get their rights, and don't care for their obligations. They're entirely involved in the black market." A Bulgarian from Plovdiv said: "Gypsies might complain, but now they are the richest people in the country. They are rich because they deal on the black market."**

In late 1990, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted a law that imposes stiff penalties on black market activities. A member of Parliament, speaking off the record, told Helsinki Watch that the law was directed against Gypsies, although it did not single them out by name. As the law took effect on January 1, 1991, it is too early to determine whether it will be applied in a discriminatory fashion.

### **Political Process**

Until recently, Gypsies had little opportunity to participate in the political process, aside from a small Gypsy *nomenklatura* who supported the policies of the Communist Party. Today, as a result of the reforms that have been implemented since November 10, 1989, Gypsies (and other Bulgarian citizens) enjoy the right to vote in free elections, to participate in demonstrations, and to express their views through the media. In early 1991, the Democratic Roma Union--an organization that defends the social, cultural, and political rights of Gypsies--began to publish a newspaper. However, Gypsies' political rights continue to be infringed in many respects by the government. The Law on Political Parties prohibits the registration of political parties based on ethnicity. The law was applied against the Democratic Roma Union in November 1990 to deny it registration as a political party. In the June 1990 parliamentary elections, Gypsies in some areas were intimidated by local government officials, who were attempting to influence their voting. Helsinki Watch received many reports that national and local government officials do not address the problems of Gypsies or defend their interests.

Helsinki Watch concluded that local government authorities and Communist (now Socialist) Party officials manipulated the Gypsy community during the June 1990 parliamentary elections by spreading various rumors--for example, that the Gypsies would lose their apartments or their pensions if they voted for the Union of Democratic Forces.<sup>31</sup>

Today there is not a single political party that defends the interests of Gypsies. A Gypsy from Plovdiv told Helsinki Watch: "We have no one to defend us." In an April 1991 interview with Helsinki Watch, the secretary of the Varna election committee for the Union of Democratic Forces explained that "too close contact

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<sup>31</sup> See Helsinki Watch, "News from Bulgaria: Election Report" (June 1990), p.5.

**between the minorities and the Union of Democratic Forces may have a negative influence on the voters."**

**Gypsies are prohibited from forming their own political parties. Article 3 of the Law on Political Parties prohibits the registration of political parties organized on an ethnic or religious basis. It states, in pertinent part: "No political party can be constituted...if directed against the territorial integrity of the country and the unity of the nation, or against the rights and liberties of citizens...[or] on a religious or ethnic basis or for the incitement of national, ethnic and religious hostility."**

**In November 1990, the Democratic Roma Union was denied registration as a political party by a Sofia court. The court apparently concluded that registration of the Democratic Roma Union as a political party would violate the Law on Political Parties.<sup>32</sup>**

**Members of the Democratic Roma Union contend that their association is not accorded respect by members of Parliament. Rusko Yordanov, a member, told Helsinki Watch: "Our Union has been attacked by all kinds of parties. Mr. Romanov is a lonely fighter for our interests in Parliament." Vassil Ivanov, another member, said: "Manush Romanov made a speech in the Parliament about the history of Gypsies in Bulgaria, but the chairman of the Parliament interrupted him. The Socialist Party MPs booed him. We want Gypsies to have equal rights in this country. We are currently fourth class citizens."**

**Helsinki Watch received many complaints that government officials on both the national and local levels are indifferent to the problems of Gypsies. Manush Romanov said: "In the government's program, no Gypsy problems were mentioned." In Kostinbrod, a Gypsy complained: "No politician ever comes to see us here." In Vinogradets, a Gypsy said: "The local council ignores us." In the "Bangladesh" district of Lom, a Gypsy reported: "The government treats us like dogs." In Vidin, a Gypsy activist for the Union of Democratic Forces said: "Although**

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<sup>32</sup>**The Democratic Roma Union was registered as a group in May 1990. Its goals--as enumerated in its statutes--include the following: working to ensure that Gypsies are accorded equal rights, solving the housing and educational problems of Gypsies, working for the political, social, and cultural advancement of Gypsies, and publishing materials on Gypsy folklore. Manush Romanov, the chairman of the Democratic Roma Union, represents the Union of Democratic Forces in Parliament.**

**we pay our taxes, the government doesn't pay much attention to us...Our member of Parliament came to the Gypsy community before the elections, but then never came again." In Sliven, a Gypsy stated: "Whenever we bring complaints to the mayor, he kicks us out." Another Gypsy in Sliven said: "The authorities do not pay attention to us because we are Gypsies."**

**Gypsies want governmental organs to address their problems. Anastas Anastasov, a Gypsy from Sliven, said: "There should be some executive organs to lead the Gypsies out of the swamp that they are in now."**

### **State Media**

**Helsinki Watch received numerous reports that the state media portray Gypsies in an unfair light, and that this instigates further discrimination against their community.<sup>33</sup>**

**Gypsies complained that the state media single them out for working on the black market, even though Bulgarians also work on the black market. Nidan Asenov Dimitrov, a Gypsy from Archar, said: "I am worried by what I see on television—they call us 'dark-skinned traders.' Why don't they say how many Bulgarians cross the border and how many Gypsies? This is nationalism." Echoing the same theme, Manush Romanov said: "The unfortunate thing is when the mass media attack Gypsies and imply that all black marketers are Gypsies."**

**Crime reporting was also criticized by Gypsies, who alleged that the state media identify criminals by ethnicity only when the criminals are Gypsies. Vassil Chaprazov, the first deputy chair of the Democratic Roma Union, said: "Some years ago, the whole mass media, including a special Gypsy newspaper, never mentioned the word 'Gypsy.'<sup>34</sup> Now just the opposite happens. They say 'Gypsy criminal.' On the radio today they referred to Gypsies who became violent at a bus station. It's curious how journalists single us out for violating the public order." A**

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<sup>33</sup> Bulgarian television and radio stations are state-owned.

<sup>34</sup> According to Carol Silverman, the word "Gypsy" disappeared from the print media in the 1970s, and stopped being used on radio and television in the 1980s. Carol Silverman, "Reconstructing Folklore: Media and Cultural Policy in Eastern Europe," *Communication*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Spring 1988).

**Gypsy in Plovdiv told Helsinki Watch: "When a Gypsy commits a crime, they say that all Gypsies are criminals."**

**Some broadcasts have a devastating effect on Gypsy morale. A Gypsy mother from Lom reported: "On the state television, they said that a Gypsy's development is one year later than a Bulgarian's development. I have a daughter who is more intelligent than most of her Bulgarian schoolmates, and she was really stunned." Todor Kochev, a Gypsy from Sliven, suggested that the media should focus on other stories: "We would like television and radio to pay greater attention to the positive cultural traditions of Gypsies--to our folk music, for example--because this will boost the morale of Gypsies."**

### **Police**

**During the period of totalitarian rule, the police enforced restrictions against travelling, required Gypsies to change their names, prohibited Gypsies from playing their traditional music, and implemented other aspects of the assimilation campaign. Today, the police violate the human rights of Gypsies in isolated instances. Helsinki Watch received complaints from Bulgarians who said that the police fail to protect their rights and do not maintain order in areas where Gypsies and Bulgarians live in close proximity to each other. The police are waiting for Parliament to pass a new law defining their rights and obligations.**

**In April 1990, members of a West German film crew were arrested in Pazardzhik while making a documentary about Gypsies. Elena Marushiakova, who was accompanying them, was also arrested. She described the incident: "In April 1990, I was helping a West German company make a film about the Gypsies in Pazardzhik. We were arrested. When the police took us into the car, they wanted to destroy the film. The problem is that younger officers arrested me who didn't yet know that it's all right to make films about Gypsies. When we got to the station, the senior police officials let us go."**

**Although Gypsies currently have few human rights problems with the police, their situation remains precarious. Ms. Marushiakova explained why: "If the police decide to fight someone, it will be Gypsies because they don't know their rights and won't complain. Gypsies need to be educated about their rights. I never knew a Gypsy who knew that the police have no right to beat them...Gypsies are made scapegoats and are accused by the police because they never protest, they never complain. The problem is first that Gypsies don't get enough**

**information, and second, that they think the law doesn't apply to them—that they have no rights—because everyone has always told them what to do."**

**Gypsies tend to be underrepresented on police forces. Several interviewees, including police officers, suggested that local councils should make special efforts to recruit Gypsies to serve on police forces. They pointed out that this might improve relations between Gypsies and the police.**

**Bulgarians who live next to Gypsies complained that the police do not maintain order, and thus violate Bulgarians' rights. In the Stoliponovo district of Plovdiv, a Bulgarian woman reported: "If you have an emergency, you can't count on the police. Gypsies will kill you before you can get in touch with the police." Another Bulgarian resident of Stoliponovo said: "The police don't come here. When they hear the name of our street, they just hang up the phone and don't pay any attention to us."**

### **Military**

**Gypsies have traditionally been relegated to second-class positions in the military. As the U.S. State Department noted in its 1990 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, "Construction troops, which undertake a variety of civilian as well as military building and maintenance projects, are largely composed of minority conscripts of ethnic Turkish or Gypsy descent." Today, most Gypsy conscripts continue to get the worst assignments during their periods of compulsory military service.<sup>35</sup>**

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<sup>35</sup> **Male citizens are required to serve for one and one-half years in the Bulgarian military.**



**Vassil Chaprazov, the first deputy chair of the Democratic Roma Union, described the situation of the Gypsies in the army: "When our boys join the army, they go to the labor groups. This makes them feel like second class citizens. We can't say this is an official policy, because it's not on paper, but it's the practice. They construct roads and new buildings." A soldier from a barrack in Plovdiv, performing his compulsory military service, reported to Helsinki Watch in May 1990 that his unit, which performed manual labor, was made up of mostly Gypsies and Turks. Several sources told Helsinki Watch that there are very few Gypsy officers in the military.**

**In April 1991, Helsinki Watch interviewed the press spokesman for the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense, Tsviatko Donchev, to obtain the government's position with respect to Gypsies in the military. Mr. Donchev acknowledged that Gypsies were often relegated to second-class positions during the totalitarian period: "You know that the Communist government treated the question of ethnic groups in a very peculiar way...there were no official restrictions on the ranking of minorities, but in practice, there were...During those years, the political element was very strong, and Gypsies were usually not allowed to serve in specialties that involved the use of secret armaments..."**

**Today, according to Mr. Donchev, ranking is determined independently of ethnic status. But education is very important for the determination of ranking, and the lower education level of many Gypsies means that they tend to serve in lower-ranking units. When asked if the army has special programs to raise the educational level of Gypsies, Mr. Donchev responded: "Recently the term of military service was reduced from 24 months to 18 months. The army cannot take young people who are unprepared, prepare them for a year or so, and then have them serve for only half a year. So we have no special education programs for minorities in the army."**

**Helsinki Watch asked Mr. Donchev if the Ministry maintains information about the percentage of Gypsies who serve in the army. He responded that it does not, "because we do not differentiate people according to ethnicity." But he added: "We know the percentage of**

**Gypsies who were supposed to join the army last fall and didn't. Eighty-seven out of approximately 3,000 conscripts who didn't show up were Gypsies." When asked why he had these statistics, Mr. Donchev replied that the Ministry of the Interior had compiled them.**

### **Treatment by Other Citizens**

**Gypsies experience frequent social discrimination. Prejudice has always existed against Gypsies, but several interviewees told Helsinki Watch that relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies soured after Todor Zhivkov's assimilation campaign was initiated.<sup>36</sup> The assimilation campaign produced tensions between various ethnic communities. Although the campaign has officially ended, its effects linger. Gypsies are also victims of the nationalism that has surfaced now that citizens are able to express their views more freely. Many Bulgarians—including some leading politicians—openly express their prejudices.**

**Gypsies experience discrimination in a variety of settings, ranging from their workplaces to the street. A Gypsy accordion player told Helsinki Watch: "Yesterday, I played at a Gypsy wedding at the Novotel (a large hotel in Sofia). The wedding was absolutely classy. But in spite of this...the waiters gave off a bad feeling. They had an ironic attitude towards our music and dancing." In Plovdiv, a Gypsy resident said: "The Bulgarians insult us on the streets. They try to hurt us. They do this because we like to listen to our music and have fun." In Sliven, Asen Asenov Lolov told Helsinki Watch: "Gypsies in Sliven are very oppressed by the Bulgarians in the stores and factories. Their first word is always 'dirty Gypsy.' This is our pain, and where are we to complain? We want to be equal with Bulgarians. We suffer in the same way as blacks in the United States."**

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<sup>36</sup> Helsinki Watch received similar testimony about relations between ethnic Turks and Bulgarians. See Helsinki Watch, "News from Bulgaria: Deep Tensions Continue in Turkish Provinces, Despite Some Human Rights Improvements" (Aug. 1990), p. 10.

**A Gypsy from Petric reported that he had rented a restaurant for his son's wedding reception in July 1990. A few days before the wedding date, the restaurant owner told him that he would have to close the restaurant for repairs. On the day of the wedding, the Gypsy passed by the restaurant and saw that it was being used for a Bulgarian party. Its owner reportedly told him: "You have restaurants for Gypsies only. So go to a Gypsy restaurant."**

**Bulgarians often use the word "Gypsy" in a derogatory way. A Gypsy from Sliven said: "You can use the word 'Gypsy' to insult someone. This hurts us." A common perception among Bulgarians is that all Gypsies are dirty, or liars. For this reason, some Gypsies relinquish their Gypsy identity. One interviewee said: "To be called a Gypsy is an insult, and therefore we don't want to be called Gypsies."**

**Many Gypsies are proud of their Gypsy identity, and object to those who deny them this identity. One told Helsinki Watch: "When we travel to the northern parts of the country, they call us Macedonians. But we are Gypsies, not Macedonians." A Gypsy from Lom asked: "Why does Ahmet Dogan consider Turkish Gypsies to be Turks?"<sup>37</sup>**

**Gypsies want to be respected by other Bulgarian citizens. Sando Boshnakov, a Gypsy from Plovdiv, said: "We are people just like them. We also eat bread. We are not animals. The fact that our complexion is a little bit darker doesn't mean that we are worse than them. We also work. Everyone wants to have a future for his children. No Bulgarian would ever live in the conditions that we live in. They laugh at us. We know how to live a human life, but we don't have the opportunity to do it."**

**In some districts, Gypsies and other citizens co-exist with relatively few problems. Everyday interaction seems to foster peaceful relations. In Kostinbrod, a Gypsy reported: "Relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies are generally good because we grow up together and go to school together. There is one Gypsy student in every class."**

**Gypsies suggested that the government should identify strategies to improve relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies. Georgi Parushov, a member of the Democratic Roma Union in Sliven, said: "The program the government develops [to address Gypsy problems] should focus on psychological intolerance between Bulgarians and Gypsies."**

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<sup>37</sup> Ahmet Dogan, an ethnic Turk, is the chairman of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.

## **International Law**

**International law protects the right of individuals to belong to an ethnic or national minority, and to express, preserve, and develop their cultural traditions:**

**To belong to a national minority is a matter of a person's individual choice and no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such choice. Persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects, free of any attempts at assimilation against their will. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (1990), Paragraph 32.)**

**In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), Article 27.)**

**The participating States...reaffirm that respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as part of universally recognized human rights is an essential factor for peace, justice, stability and democracy in the participating States. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 30.)**

**International law prohibits states from discriminating on the basis of ethnic or national identity, and requires states to take positive measures to prevent discrimination on these grounds:**

**All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 7.)**

**All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law**

**shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 26.)**

**The participating States will adopt, where necessary, special measures for the purpose of ensuring to persons belonging to national minorities full equality with the other citizens in the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 31.)**

**The participating States...commit themselves to take appropriate and proportionate measures to protect persons or groups who may be subject to threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, and to protect their property... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 40.2.)**

**In Copenhagen, the CSCE countries (i.e., the countries that signed the Helsinki Final Act and follow-up documents, among them Bulgaria) specifically recognized the problems of Gypsies, and pledged to take measures to remedy them:**

**The participating States clearly and unequivocally condemn totalitarianism, racial and ethnic hatred, anti-semitism, xenophobia and discrimination against anyone as well as persecution on religious and ideological grounds. In this context, they also recognize the particular problems of Roma (gypsies). They declare their firm intention to intensify the efforts to combat these phenomena in all their forms... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 40.)**

**International law protects freedom of association, including political association:**

**Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 20.)**

**(The participating States will...respect the right of individuals and groups to establish, in full freedom, their own political parties or other political organizations and provide such political parties and organizations with the necessary legal guarantees to enable them to compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment before the law and by the authorities... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 7.6.)**

**The participating States reaffirm that...the right of association will be guaranteed...[This right] will exclude any prior control. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 9.3.)**

**Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity [without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status]...and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives... (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 25.)**

**International law requires states to ensure free elections and to protect against intimidation or manipulation of voters:**

**(Free elections...will be held at reasonable intervals by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure, under conditions which ensure in practice the free expression of the opinion of the electors in the choice of their representatives... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 5.1.)**

**To ensure that the will of the people serves as the basis of the authority of government, the participating States will...respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 7.5.)**

**To ensure that the will of the people serves as the basis of the authority of government, the participating States will...ensure that law and public policy work to permit political campaigning to be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere in which neither administrative action, violence nor**

**intimidation bars the parties and the candidates from freely presenting their views and qualifications, or prevents the voters from learning and discussing them or from casting their vote free of fear of retribution... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 7.7)**

**International law allows parents the right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children:**

**Everyone has the right to education...Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit...Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.)**

**International law requires states to ensure that minorities have adequate opportunities for instruction in their mother tongue:**

**The participating States will protect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities on their territory and create conditions for the promotion of that identity. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 33.)**

**The participating States will endeavour to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, notwithstanding the need to learn the official language or languages of the State concerned, have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue, as well as, wherever possible and necessary, for its use before public authorities, in conformity with applicable national legislation. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 34.)**

**International law requires states to take account of the history and culture of national minorities when preparing curriculums, and to take other measures to promote racial and ethnic tolerance through education:**

**In the context of the teaching of history and culture in educational establishments, [the participating States] will...take account of the**

**history and culture of national minorities. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 34.)**

**The participating States (will)...endeavour to ensure that the objectives of education include special attention to the problem of racial prejudice and hatred and to the development of respect for different civilizations and cultures... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 40.4.)**

**Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.)**

**International law requires states to take additional measures to promote mutual understanding and tolerance:**

**Every participating State will promote a climate of mutual respect, understanding, co-operation and solidarity among all persons living on its territory, without distinction as to ethnic or national origin or religion, and will encourage the solution of problems through dialogue based on the principles of the rule of law. (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 36.)**

**The participating States (will)...take effective measures, in conformity with their constitutional systems, at the national, regional and local levels to promote understanding and tolerance, particularly in the fields of education, culture and information... (Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 40.3.)**

**International law allows states to take special measures (i.e., "affirmative action"), for a limited period of time, to ensure members of all ethnic groups the equal enjoyment and exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms:**

**Special measures taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate**



**advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals requiring such protection as may be necessary in order to ensure such groups or individuals equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms shall not be deemed racial discrimination, provided, however, that such measures do not, as a consequence, lead to the maintenance of separate rights for different racial groups and that they shall not be continued after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved. (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), Article 1)**

## **Recommendations**

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

**Abide by its obligations under international law to respect and promote human rights; and specifically, to:**

- **Take steps to remedy past discrimination against the Gypsy minority.**
- **Prohibit all forms of discrimination against Gypsies, including harassment and intimidation by government officials. Also prohibit all forms of discrimination by Gypsies against other citizens. Allow citizens effective remedies against discrimination. For example, a special civil rights unit could be created within the Ministry of Justice to investigate and prosecute alleged acts of discrimination.**
- **Assure free voting in all elections and protect against the intimidation and manipulation of the Gypsy minority.**
- **Allow members of the Gypsy minority the right to establish their own political parties.**
- **Assure Gypsies the right to equal participation in local administration and local government. Local councils should make a special effort to recruit Gypsies to work with them as specialists.**
- **Guarantee Gypsies equal rights, in policy and practice, to obtain land, houses, apartments, and workplaces.**
- **Guarantee Gypsies equal rights, in policy and practice, to education.**
- **Ensure that the Gypsy minority has equal opportunities to learn the Bulgarian language and adequate opportunities to learn the Romani language. Optional Romani language classes should be offered in elementary and secondary schools.**
- **Include teaching about the history and culture of Gypsies in secondary and elementary schools.**

- **Take additional measures to promote mutual understanding and tolerance among Bulgarians, Gypsies, and other ethnic minorities.**
- **Direct the state-owned television and radio to provide objective and balanced reporting when airing stories about Gypsies.**
- **Conduct a census to determine the population of the Gypsies and other ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, as well as the religious affiliations and language abilities of all citizens.**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian Parliament to take all possible steps to implement the above recommendations, and to adopt laws that do the following:**

- **Clearly define the powers of local government officials, make their activities open to public scrutiny, and provide remedies to individuals who believe that their rights have been violated by local officials in the performance of their duties.**
- **Clearly define the authority of the police.**
- **Allow Gypsies equal opportunities to obtain land and property.**

## **Appendix A**

**The following letter, dated 16 June 1959, was appended to minutes #A182 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, dated 4 June 1959.**

**The minutes state that the following people were present at the meeting: Todor Zhivkov, Dimitar Ganev, Boyan Bulgaranov, Mitko Grigorov, and Pencho Kyubadinsky. The minutes were signed by Todor Zhivkov.**

**TO THE REGIONAL, CITY AND DISTRICT  
COMMITTEES OF  
THE BULGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY**

**Comrades,**

**On 17.12.1958 the Council of Ministers passed a decree #258 "For the solution of the problems of the Gypsy population in the People's Republic of Bulgaria." In the decree measures have been adopted for the elimination of travelling and begging in our country, settlement of the travelling Gypsies, a positive reorganization of the way of life, raising of the culture, and incorporation of that population to the construction of a socialist society. This is a new expression of the Party and the government's attention towards the Gypsy population and the national minorities as a whole. For the more speedy and correct solution of the issues connected with the Gypsy population the most active cooperation of the committees of the party and its organizations and the community as a whole is needed. In their activities with respect to the solution of the tasks set in the decree of the Council of Ministers, the party committees and the social organizations must take into consideration the mode of life, the culture and the peculiarities of this population.**

**As a result of the attitude of neglect and discrimination towards this population in the past on the part of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, the Gypsy population has lagged behind considerably in its development compared to the**

**common level of the Bulgarian people.**

**The Gypsies could not find permanent jobs in the sphere of production, and were doomed to lead a pitiful existence earning their living with chance work. Starvation forced them to wander all over the country, and a large number of them were forced to steal and beg. The children of the Gypsies had no opportunity to study and therefore illiteracy, ignorance and poverty were a constant companion to this population. As a result of these conditions of life, for which the bourgeoisie and its policies of exploitation are wholly responsible, a "public opinion" was formed that they were lazy, incapable of working in the sphere of production, lacking culture, etc.**

**After 09.09.1944 together with the whole Bulgarian people the Gypsy population received freedom and a large opportunity to earn a living and develop culturally. The victory of socialism in Bulgaria, the socialist reconstruction of industry, the reconstruction of agriculture on a socialist basis, and the thorough cultural revolution which are taking place in our country caused a change in the life of a considerable part of this population. A large part of the Gypsy population joined in the socialist material and spiritual culture of the Bulgarian people and the difference between them and the rest of the Bulgarian population is small. This part of the Gypsy population is making its contribution to the construction of socialism together with the whole Bulgarian people.**

**A considerable part of the Gypsy population joined in the industrial production, the construction and the labor and production cooperatives of craftsmen, they received technical qualifications, grew up to be good workers, and became part of the Bulgarian working class. Many Gypsy workers became foremen in their shifts and workhouses, and were awarded for their excellent work. Seventy percent of the Gypsies who live in the villages are already members of the cooperative farms or work in the State Agricultural Farms or the Machine and Tractor Stations. Yesterday's homeless and landless travellers and beggars who were enslaved by the landowners and the**

**rich people in the villages, have turned into wealthy members of the cooperative farms, and conscientious constructors of socialism.**

**The power of the people has opened the doors of all types of educational institutions for the Gypsy children, and tens of thousands of them are now going to school. Among the Gypsies there are now doctors, officers in the army, mechanics, etc. There are 3,500 Gypsy members of the organizations of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and tens of thousands of Gypsy members of the Fatherland Front, the Komsomol, and other organizations.**

**But together with this there are still Gypsies who although settled and with permanent residence, have no permanent work and practice odd jobs, and sometimes even begging or stealing.**

**The problem with the travelling Gypsies is even a more serious one. There are about 14,000 of them in Bulgaria. Most of them have no home, they wander from town to town, and they practice begging, fortune telling, stealing, etc.**

**This is the most backward part of the Gypsy population. They accept socialist culture slowly, it is difficult to re-educate them, the old customs and traditions are deeply rooted in them, the remnants of the capitalist past have left deep traces in their consciousness, they still continue to live in the old way.**

**While in the years before 09.09.1944 under the bourgeois and fascist regimes there had been some justification for travelling and begging among the Gypsy population because they were required by the hard conditions of life, today in the conditions of socialism this way of life is harmful and disgraceful.**

**In the People's Republic of Bulgaria there are not and there cannot be conditions for unemployment, begging, and travelling. Every citizen can earn his living by honest work.**

**But it must definitely be said that in certain places there still exists an underestimation of the work among the Gypsy population and especially among its most backward part: the travellers. There are certain manifestations of neglect towards the Gypsies, the attention paid to their re-education and allocation to work is not sufficient. Certain industrial managers support the theory that the Gypsies are lazy and cannot learn to work and be disciplined, so they are reluctant to give them work in their factories and are ready to fire them**

**at the smallest occasion.**

**This understanding and attitude towards the Gypsy population is unjustified. Marxism-Leninism teaches us that there are no races or peoples of smaller or greater value. The concrete material and social conditions of life define the situation and the qualities of a given people or ethnic group.**

**The change in the material and social conditions of life cause changes in the consciousness and way of life of the people.**

**Under the conditions of the construction of socialism all opportunities exist for the overcoming of the backwardness among these categories of the Gypsy population as well as the radical change in their way of life.**

**The Gypsy population like all other national minorities in Bulgaria has bound its destiny with the destiny of the Bulgarian people, of which it is an inseparable part. The perspective for their development is connected with the development of the Bulgarian people, with the construction of socialism and communism. It is necessary to fight all manifestations of nationalism among the Gypsy population. The tendencies of part of the Gypsy population to affiliate with the Turks, to send their children to Turkish schools, etc. are wrong. The isolation of the Gypsy population in separate districts and quarters is incorrect. This hampers communications with the Bulgarian population, stops the penetration of the more cultured Bulgarian influence among the Gypsy population.**

**That is why in the future this must be taken into consideration when employing jobless Gypsies and developing housing areas so that the concentration of many Gypsies in one place should not be allowed.**

**The historic development of Bulgaria, the common economic, political and cultural organizations, in which the working people participate without difference as to their religion and language, the common goals and tasks lead to a close relationship, to a complete moral and political unity of the people. The People's Republic of Bulgaria has turned into a socialist fatherland of all working people.**

**Measures provided for by the decree of the Council of Ministers are aimed at the quick overcoming of the backwardness among the Gypsy population in comparison to the common level of the Bulgarian people and the**

**incorporation in the construction of socialism of that part of the Gypsy population which is still not engaged in socially beneficial work.**

**The fulfillment of the tasks set up by the decree must be the work of the party committees and organizations and of all communists employed by the mass organizations. In connection with this the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) considers necessary the following:**

**The Bureaux of the regional committees of the BCP and the party organizations must consider the situation of the work among the Gypsy population and must set up measures for its considerable improvement.**

**The party committees in the towns and districts where a large Gypsy population lives must create groups of activists among Gypsy communists which should be used in the work among this population.**

**One of the immediate tasks of the party committees and the people's councils is to start working on the fulfillment of the chief task in the decree: the location and employment of those Gypsies who are not engaged in socially beneficial labor, in the factories, the cooperative farms, the cooperatives of craftsmen, the State Owned Agricultural Farms, etc. It is necessary to fight all manifestations of neglect towards the Gypsy population.**

**The trade unions in the factories and the management of the cooperatives where Gypsies work must pay more attention to their professional qualifications and their attraction to qualification schools and courses.**

**The basic task of the trade unions in the factories where there are Gypsy workers must be patient educational work for the formation of work habits in the Gypsies, the strengthening of their labor discipline and the abolition of fluctuation of manpower, as well as for the professional qualification of the workers.**

**The measures that the people's councils must take for the labor adjustment and the re-education of the Gypsy population must be combined with patient, steady and systematic work for their political education as well. This is a basic task of the party organizations, the organizations of the Fatherland Front, and the organizations of the Komsomol.**



**The Fatherland Front organizations and committees must give permanent assistance to the people's councils in their work for the fulfillment of the tasks laid by the decree. It is necessary to take measures for the mass attraction of Gypsies to the organizations of the Fatherland Front and for their most active participation in them. Special attention must be paid to the women Gypsies.**

**The organizations of the Komsomol are also faced with important tasks. The Komsomol societies and the pioneer organizations in the separate districts must discuss the work they have done so far among the young Gypsies and must seriously begin working for the inclusion of more young Gypsies in their organizations if possible. They must work systematically for their communist and labor education. A large circle of Gypsy Komsomol and pioneer activists who are enthusiastic and devoted to socialism must be created in all Komsomol and pioneer organizations where there is a Gypsy population.**

**The party, Fatherland Front and Komsomol organizations and the people's councils must pay special attention to the correct training and communist education of the children. All children of Gypsy descent must study on common grounds in the Bulgarian schools. The exactitude and the care with respect to the Gypsy children must increase.**

**The Secretariat of the Central Committee of the BCP would like to point out that the work among the Gypsy population is an important and permanent task of the party committees and organizations, the people's councils, the Fatherland Front and the Komsomol. The successful fulfillment of this task requires perseverance, hard work and patience, so that the great difficulties in the education of this part of our population in the sound spirit of communism could be overcome.**

**It is necessary for the party committees to listen periodically to information by communists who work at the people's councils and other organizations about the fulfillment of the tasks laid in the decree of the Council of Ministers.**

**The regional committees of the BCP must send by the end of September information to the Central Committee of the BCP about the work among the Gypsy population.**

**The Central Committee of the BCP appeals to the party committees and**

**organizations to start working seriously on the fulfillment of the tasks in the decree of the Council of Ministers, so that all Gypsies are included in the construction of socialism and turned into conscientious and good constructors of socialism.**

**The Central Committee of the BCP**



## **Appendix B**

**The following decision (A101), dated 5 April 1962, was taken by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The decision was appended to minutes A101 of a Politburo meeting held on 5 April 1962. According to the minutes, the following people were present at the meeting: Boyan Bulgaranov, Mitko Grigorov, Raiko Damyanov, Todor Zhivkov, Ivan Mihailov, Encho Staikov, Georgi Tsankov, Anton Yugov, Dimitar Dimov, Todor Prahov, Boris Velchev, Tano Tsolov, and Zhivko Zhivkov. The minutes were signed by Mitko Grigorov.**

### **Decision A101**

**In its policies towards the national minorities the BCP (Bulgarian Communist Party) has always been guided by the Marxist-Leninist theory on the national question. Securing a complete political and social equality of rights to all working people with no difference as to language, religion, or nationality, the Party and the government of the people have taken a number of special measures for the quick liquidation of the great economic and cultural backwardness of the Turkish and Gypsy population. The victory of 09.09.1944 opened new bright perspectives for the economic and cultural development of the Bulgarian Muslims as well. This correct policy of the Party has given its positive results. Almost all capable workers from this part of our people participate in the construction of socialism, their material status is improving quickly, their culture is rising, a local intelligentsia is created, the children go to school, they are entitled to free medical services etc.**

**But in the process of successful realization of the cultural revolution some negative tendencies can be noticed which hamper its development, create difficulties for the strengthening of the moral and political unity of the people, and serve as an instrument of the propaganda of the enemy. A considerable part of the Gypsies, the Tatars, and the Bulgarian Muslims still tend to affiliate with the Turks under various forms, a tendency which is especially helped by the Muslim religion and the Turkish and Arabic names. Stimulated by the Turkish reactionary propaganda and religious fanaticism, and helped by the incorrect activities of a number of bodies of the people's government, more than 130,000 Gypsies and tens of thousands of Tatars and Bulgarian Muslims in many parts of the country have registered themselves as Turks.**

**The families of Bulgarian Muslims move from the Rhodopes region to villages with Turkish populations and register themselves there as Turks. The intermarriages between Bulgarian Muslim women and Turks and vice versa are used for the "acquisition" of a Turkish nationality both for the spouses and their children.**

**This tendency to affiliate with the Turks was objectively aided in certain towns and villages by the teaching of the Turkish language to the children of Tatars, Bulgarian Muslims and Gypsies in classes together with Turkish children.**

**The religious services for the believers among the Gypsies and the Tatars conducted by imams and Turks also help the tendency towards affiliation with the Turks.**

**The gathering of the young Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarian Muslims with young Turks in common military companies and platoons and labor units also has a harmful effect on their national and patriotic education.**

**In order to stop these negative tendencies for affiliation with the Turks, which are in fact leading to the assimilation of the Bulgarian Muslims, the Gypsies, and the Tatars by the Turkish influence, and in order to strengthen their patriotic education even more, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the BCP**

**DECIDED:**

**1. The party committees and organizations, the committees and organizations of the Fatherland Front, the Komsomol, the trade unions and other social organizations, the bodies of the ministries, the administration, the people's councils, and the economic organizations in the places with Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarian Muslims should take as one of the major tasks in their political and ideological work among this population systematic and diligent activities for the enhancement of its political consciousness and labor activity, for the raising of its culture, for the gradual overcoming of the tendency to affiliate with the Turks by leading a systematic ideological and political struggle against the Turkish religious and chauvinistic propaganda and its pan-Turkish and pan-Islamic aims and aspirations.**

**2. The Ministry of Justice together with the Department for the People's Councils at the Council of Ministers on the basis of the constitution and the**

**legislation of the country must work out instructions for the application of art. 16 of the regulations on maintaining registers on the civil status, in which to give detailed instructions on the process of registration of the population. The instructions must especially point out that religion and personal names are not criteria for nationality. It must also be made clear that intermarriage does not lead to change of nationality of the spouses. The children of the intermarried couples can be registered as Bulgarians completely voluntarily and with the explicit agreement of both parents.**

**The instructions must elucidate the rights of the citizens of non-Bulgarian descent, who in accordance with their internal conviction and openly declared personal desire can register themselves and their families as Bulgarians, can change their names without asking for permission from the people's court but by making a written application to the respective people's councils. It must also be included in the instructions that the same right to a simplified procedure for the change of their names is given to the Bulgarian Muslims.**

**The enforcement of the instructions must be accompanied by a large and systematic popular persuasion, and by no means should any form of violence or administrative force be used. The regional committees of the Party and the other bodies and organizations of the Party as well as the bodies of government which are in charge of these questions must take all the necessary measures against the violation of the laws and regulations and the possible perversions which might occur in the registration of the citizens of non-Bulgarian descent and the Bulgarian Muslims.**

**3. The party committees and organizations and the people's councils must carry out a large campaign of public persuasion among the Tatars, the Gypsies, and the Bulgarian Muslims, who are registered as Turks according to Letter # 5-434 from 11.05.1950 by the Civil Status Department of the Ministry of the Interior or for other reasons, so that these people should be registered with their real nationality according to the Law on Civil Status and the instructions for the application of this law, with the exception of those who have already registered themselves as Bulgarians. Measures must be taken during the registration not to allow any perversions, pressure or administrative force.**

**4. The people's councils must not allow Bulgarian Muslims and Gypsies to move to villages or towns with compact Turkish populations.**

**5. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the regional people's councils must take measures so that the Turkish language is not taught to the children of Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarian Muslims. These children must be taught in Bulgarian. The appointment of Turkish teachers at schools where the children of Gypsies, Tatars and Bulgarian Muslims predominate must be avoided. The children of Bulgarian Muslims and Gypsies must not be allowed to live in hostels or to study in the same groups with Turkish children wherever this is possible.**

**6. The Ministry of the People's Defense and the Chief Headquarters of the Labor Services must ensure favorable conditions for the correct education of the young Bulgarian Muslims, Gypsies or Tatars. The Chief Political Department of the Ministry of the People's Defense and the Political Department of the Chief Headquarters of the Labor Services must strengthen the educational and political work for the national awareness, the communist and patriotic education of the young servicemen and members of the labor corps of Gypsy, Tatar or Bulgarian descent, who tend to affiliate with the Turks.**

**7. The Committee on the Questions of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Religious Cults at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must take measures for the correct explanation of the Bulgarian-Muslim, Gypsy, and Tatar questions to the Muslim clergymen; should see that the imams comply with the socialist legislation and should not allow them to carry out any reactionary propaganda in favor of the affiliation with the Turks, especially through religious services; should not permit the**

**appointment of Turkish clergymen in the villages with compact Gypsy and Tatar population and among Bulgarian Muslims.**

**8. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences must send complex expeditions of historians, ethnographers, philologists, etc. for the comprehensive study of the national origins and the nationality of the population in the respective regions of the country; the expeditions should establish especially the ethnic origin and the national peculiarities of Turks, Tatars, Gypsies who live in Bulgaria. The study of the historic past of the Bulgarian Muslims in the Rhodopes, the Lovech region and other parts of the country must continue in order to make further discoveries about the historical truth about the results of the assimilation policies of the Turkish oppressors, about the mass and individual conversions to Islam.**

**A special section must be set up at the Institute for the History of Bulgaria at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the study of the historic past of the Bulgarian Muslims.**

**9. At the Propaganda and Campaigning Department of the Central Committee of the BCP a committee must be formed to study the problems and to design activities for the national awareness and the communist education of the Bulgarian Muslims. For this purpose an instructor for the work among Bulgarian Muslims must be appointed by the department.**