

Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment



Man in traditional costume, playing gāida, a folk instrument

IN THE PAST 150 YEARS, vast changes have completely transformed the political and economic situation in Bulgaria, as well as the country's way of life. Poor peasants who served a foreign ruler first became land-owning peasants, then industrial workers who were mostly urbanized and disconnected from the land. Bulgarians who had traveled no farther than the next village began to migrate, often to gain a better education or to get a job in a growing industry. As villages and towns became less isolated, both internal migration and emigration became easier.

The decline in the agricultural way of life also made people susceptible to changes on a national level rather than on a village or regional level. People were less self-sufficient for their basic needs and therefore more vulnerable to fluctuations in the national economy. The traditional support systems of the extended family and cooperative work in the village were replaced by a vast network of national social welfare programs. Instead of receiving help from family and neighbors, the poor, elderly, and disabled grew dependent on governmental programs. The sick no longer relied solely on traditional village healers once villagers and city people alike fell under coverage of a national health system.

After 1944 much was written about the contrast between Bulgaria's traditional past and the modern way of life to which communism had accustomed Bulgarians. Indeed, during the postwar era, Bulgaria made great progress in establishing the structure of a modern, urbanized way of life. Mortality decreased markedly, life expectancy increased greatly, and the educational level of the population improved significantly. However, the modern way of life also generated much greater expectations for housing, education, health standards, work standards, and other aspects of life than the communist system could deliver. The centralization and bureaucracy of traditional communist social policy established a single, rather low standard for everyone, regardless of individual needs. Also, massive industrialization brought pollution and other environmental problems to a land that had been relatively unspoiled before World War II.

After democratization began in 1989, Bulgarians began looking westward and found that many aspects of their way of life were sadly lacking by the standards of Western Europe and the United States. The sense that Bulgaria needed to do fifty years' worth of catching up made the transition to democracy even harder.

Natural Features

The land area of Bulgaria is 110,550 square kilometers, slightly larger than that of the state of Tennessee. The country is situated on the west coast of the Black Sea, with Romania to the north, Greece and Turkey to the south, and Yugoslavia to the west. Considering its small size, Bulgaria has a great variety of topographical features. Even within small parts of the country, the land may be divided into plains, plateaus, hills, mountains, basins, gorges, and deep river valleys.

Boundaries

Although external historical events often changed Bulgaria's national boundaries in its first centuries of existence, natural terrain features defined most boundaries after 1944, and no significant group of people suffered serious economic hardship because of border delineation. Postwar Bulgaria contained a large percentage of the ethnic Bulgarian people, although numerous migrations into and out of Bulgaria occurred at various times. None of the country's borders was officially disputed in 1991, although nationalist Bulgarians continued to claim that Bulgaria's share of Macedonia—which it shared with both Yugoslavia and Greece—was less than just because of the ethnic connection between Macedonians and Bulgarians (see *Macedonians*, this ch.).

In 1991 Bulgaria had a total border of about 2,264 kilometers. Rivers accounted for about 680 kilometers and the Black Sea coast for 400 kilometers; the southern and western borders were mainly defined by ridges in high terrain. The western and northern boundaries were shared with Yugoslavia and Romania, respectively, and the Black Sea coastline constituted the entire eastern border. The Romanian border followed the Danube River for 464 kilometers from the northwestern corner of the country to the city of Silistra and then cut to the east-southeast for 136 kilometers across the northeastern province of Varna. The Danube, with steep bluffs on the Bulgarian side and a wide area of swamps and marshes on the Romanian side, was one of the most effective river boundaries in Europe. The line through Dobruja was arbitrary and was redrawn several times according to international treaties (see *The Balkan Wars and World War I*, ch. 1). In that process, most inhabitants with strong national preferences resettled in the country of their choice. Borders to the south were with Greece and Turkey. The border with Greece was 491 kilometers long, and the Turkish border was 240 kilometers long.

Topography

The main characteristic of Bulgaria's topography is alternating

bands of high and low terrain that extend east to west across the country (see fig. 8). From north to south, those bands are the Danubian Plateau, the Balkan Mountains (called *Stara Planina*, meaning old mountains in Bulgarian), the central Thracian Plain, and the Rhodope Mountains. The easternmost sections near the Black Sea are hilly, but they gradually gain height to the west until the westernmost part of the country is entirely high ground.

More than two-thirds of the country is made up of plains, plateaus, or hilly land at an altitude less than 600 meters. Plains (below 200 meters) make up 31 percent of the land, plateaus and hills (200 to 600 meters) 41 percent, low mountains (600 to 1,000 meters) 10 percent, medium-sized mountains (1,000 to 1,500 meters) 10 percent, and high mountains (over 1,500 meters) 3 percent. The average altitude in Bulgaria is 470 meters.

The Danubian Plateau extends from the Yugoslav border to the Black Sea. It encompasses the area between the Danube River, which forms most of the country's northern border, and the Balkan Mountains to the south. The plateau slopes gently from cliffs along the river, then it abuts mountains of 750 to 950 meters. The plateau, a fertile area with undulating hills, is the granary of the country.

The southern edge of the Danubian Plateau blends into the foothills of the Balkan Mountains, the Bulgarian part of the Carpathian Mountains. The Carpathians resemble a reversed S as they run eastward from Czechoslovakia across the northern portion of Romania, swinging southward to the middle of Romania and then running westward, where they are known as the Transylvanian Alps. The mountains turn eastward again at the Iron Gate, a gorge of the Danube River at the Romanian-Yugoslav border. At that point, they become the Balkan Mountains of Bulgaria.

The Balkan Mountains originate at the Timok Valley in Yugoslavia and run southward towards the Sofia Basin in west central Bulgaria. From there they run east to the Black Sea. The Balkans are about 600 kilometers long and 30 to 50 kilometers wide. They retain their height well into central Bulgaria, where Botev Peak, the highest point in the Balkan Mountains, rises to about 2,376 meters. The range then continues at lower altitude to the cliffs of the Black Sea. Through most of Bulgaria, the Balkan Mountains form the watershed from which rivers drain north to the Danube River or south to the Aegean Sea. Some smaller rivers in the east drain directly to the Black Sea. The *Sredna Gora* (central hills) is a narrow ridge about 160 kilometers long and 1,600 meters high, running east to west parallel to the Balkans. Just to the south is the Valley of Roses, famous for rose oil used in perfume and liqueurs.

The southern slopes of the Balkan Mountains and the Sredna Gora give way to the Thracian Plain. Roughly triangular in shape, the plain originates at a point east of the mountains near Sofia and broadens eastward to the Black Sea. It includes the Maritsa River valley and the lowlands that extend from the river to the Black Sea. Like the Danubian Plateau, much of the Thracian Plain is somewhat hilly and not a true plain. Most of its terrain is moderate enough to cultivate.

The Rhodope Mountains occupy the area between the Thracian Plain and the Greek border to the south. The western Rhodopes consist of two ranges: the Rila Mountains south of Sofia and the Pirin Mountains in the southwestern corner of the country. They are the most outstanding topographic feature of Bulgaria and of the entire Balkan Peninsula. The Rila range includes Mount Musala, whose 2,975-meter peak is the highest in any Balkan country. About a dozen other peaks in the Rilas are over 2,600 meters. The highest peaks are characterized by sparse bare rocks and remote lakes above the tree line. The lower peaks, however, are covered with alpine meadows that give the range an overall impression of green beauty. The Pirin range is characterized by rocky peaks and stony slopes. Its highest peak is Mount Vikhren, at 2,915 meters the second-highest peak in Bulgaria.

The largest basin in Bulgaria is the Sofia Basin. About twenty-four kilometers wide and ninety-six kilometers long, the basin contains the capital city and the area immediately surrounding it. The route through basins and valleys from Belgrade to Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) via Sofia has been historically important since Roman times, determining the strategic significance of the Balkan Peninsula. Bulgaria's largest cities were founded on this route. Paradoxically, although the mountains made many Bulgarian villages and towns relatively inaccessible, Bulgaria has always been susceptible to invasion because no natural obstacle blocked the route through Sofia.

A significant part of Bulgaria's land is prone to earthquakes. Two especially sensitive areas are the borders of the North Bulgarian Swell (rounded elevation), the center of which is in the Gorna Oryakhovitsa area in north-central Bulgaria, and the West Rhodopes Vault, a wide area extending through the Rila and northern Pirin regions to Plovdiv in south-central Bulgaria. Especially strong tremors also occur along diagonal lines running between Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia and Razgrad in northeast Bulgaria, and from Albania eastward across the southern third of Bulgaria through Plovdiv. Sixteen major earthquakes struck Bulgaria between 1900 and 1986, the last two in Strazhitsa on the



Figure 8. Topography and Drainage

Skopje-Razgrad fault line. Together the two quakes damaged over 16,000 buildings, half of them severely. One village was almost completely leveled, others badly damaged. Many inhabitants were still living in temporary housing four years later.

Drainage

The Balkan Mountains divide Bulgaria into two nearly equal drainage systems. The larger system drains northward to the Black Sea, mainly by way of the Danube River. This system includes the entire Danubian Plateau and a stretch of land running forty-eight to eighty kilometers inland from the coastline. The second system drains the Thracian Plain and most of the higher lands of the south and southwest to the Aegean Sea. Although only the Danube is navigable, many of the other rivers and streams in Bulgaria have a high potential for the production of hydroelectric power and are sources of irrigation water.

Of the Danube's Bulgarian tributaries, all but the Iskür rise in the Balkan Mountains. The Iskür flows northward to the Danube from its origin in the Rila Mountains, passing through Sofia's eastern suburbs and through a Balkan Mountain valley.

The Danube gets slightly more than 4 percent of its total volume from its Bulgarian tributaries. As it flows along the northern border, the Danube averages 1.6 to 2.4 kilometers in width. The river's highest water levels usually occur during June floods; it is frozen over an average of forty days per year.

Several major rivers flow directly to the Aegean Sea. Most of these streams fall swiftly from the mountains and have cut deep, scenic gorges. The Maritsa with its tributaries is by far the largest, draining all of the western Thracian Plain, all of the Sredna Gora, the southern slopes of the Balkan Mountains, and the northern slopes of the eastern Rhodopes. After it leaves Bulgaria, the Maritsa forms most of the Greek-Turkish border. The Struma and the Mesta (which separate the Pirin Mountains from the main Rhodopes ranges) are the next largest Bulgarian rivers flowing to the Aegean. The Struma and Mesta reach the sea through Greece.

Climate

Considering its small area, Bulgaria has an unusually variable and complex climate. The country lies between the strongly contrasting continental and Mediterranean climatic zones. Bulgarian mountains and valleys act as barriers or channels for air masses, causing sharp contrasts in weather over relatively short distances. The continental zone is slightly larger because continental air masses flow easily into the unobstructed Danubian Plain. The continental

influence, stronger during the winter, produces abundant snowfall; the Mediterranean influence increases during the summer and produces hot, dry weather. The barrier effect of the Balkan Mountains is felt throughout the country: on the average, northern Bulgaria is about one degree cooler and receives about 192 more millimeters of rain than southern Bulgaria. Because the Black Sea is too small to be a primary influence over much of the country's weather, it only affects the immediate area along its coastline.

The Balkan Mountains are the southern boundary of the area in which continental air masses circulate freely. The Rhodope Mountains mark the northern limits of domination by Mediterranean weather systems. The area between, which includes the Thracian Plain, is influenced by a combination of the two systems, with the continental predominating. This combination produces a plains climate resembling that of the Corn Belt in the United States, with long summers and high humidity. The climate in this region is generally more severe than that of other parts of Europe in the same latitude. Because it is a transitional area, average temperatures and precipitation are erratic and may vary widely from year to year.

Average precipitation in Bulgaria is about 630 millimeters per year. Dobruja in the northeast, the Black Sea coastal area, and parts of the Thracian Plain usually receive less than 500 millimeters. The remainder of the Thracian Plain and the Danubian Plateau get less than the country average; the Thracian Plain is often subject to summer droughts. Higher elevations, which receive the most rainfall in the country, may average over 2,540 millimeters per year.

The many valley basins scattered through the uplands have temperature inversions resulting in stagnant air. Sofia is located in such a basin, but its elevation (about 530 meters) tends to moderate summer temperature and relieve oppressive high humidity. Sofia also is sheltered from the northern European winds by the mountains that surround its troughlike basin. Temperatures in Sofia average -2°C in January and about 21°C in August. The city's rainfall is near the country average, and the overall climate is pleasant.

The coastal climate is moderated by the Black Sea, but strong winds and violent local storms are frequent during the winter. Winters along the Danube River are bitterly cold; however, sheltered valleys that open to the south along the Greek and Turkish borders may be as mild as areas along the Mediterranean or Aegean coasts.

Environment

Like the other European members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon—see Glossary), Bulgaria saw

unimpeded industrial growth as a vital sign of social welfare and progress toward the socialist ideal. Because this approach made environmental issues a taboo subject in socialist Bulgaria, the degree of damage by postwar industrial policy went unassessed until the government of Todor Zhivkov (1962–89) was overthrown in late 1989. The Zhivkov government's commitment to heavy industry and lack of money to spend on protective measures forced it to conceal major environmental hazards, especially when relations with other countries were at stake. Factories that did not meet environmental standards paid symbolic fines and had no incentive to institute real environmental protection measures. Even as late as 1990, socialist officials downplayed the effects on Bulgaria of radiation from the 1986 nuclear power plant accident at Chernobyl'. Citizens were informed that they need not take iodine tablets or use any other protective measures.

In 1991 Bulgarian environmentalists estimated that 60 percent of the country's agricultural land had been damaged by excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers and by industrial fallout. By 1991 two-thirds of Bulgarian rivers were polluted, and the Yantra River was classified as the dirtiest river in Europe. Bulgaria's forests had also been damaged. By 1991, about two-thirds of the primary forests had been cut. However, despite its recognition of the need for greater environmental protection, Bulgaria budgeted only 10.4 billion leva (for value of the lev—see Glossary) to remedy ecological problems in 1991.

Perhaps the most serious environmental problem in Bulgaria was in the Danube port city of Ruse. From 1981 to 1989, the chemical pollution that spread from a chlorine and sodium plant across the Danube in Giurgiu, Romania, was a forbidden subject in Bulgaria because it posed a threat to good relations between two Warsaw Pact (see Glossary) countries. Chemical plants in Ruse also contributed to the pollution. Citizen environmentalists opposing the situation in Ruse organized the first demonstrations and the first independent political group to oppose the Zhivkov regime (see Other Political Organizations, ch. 4). During the Giurgiu plant's first year of operation, chlorine levels in Ruse almost doubled, reaching two times the permissible maximum in the summer of 1990. Over 3,000 families left the city in the 1980s despite government restrictions aimed at covering up the problem. Besides chlorine and its by-products, the plant produced chemical agents for the rubber industry, and in 1991 some sources reported that the plant was processing industrial waste from Western countries—both activities likely to further damage Ruse's environment. International experts claimed that half of Ruse's pollutants came from Giurgiu,

and the others came from Bulgarian industries. In response to the formidable Bulgarian environmental movement, some Bulgarian plants have been closed or have added protective measures; the Giurgiu plant, however, was planning to expand in 1991.

Pollution of agricultural land from a copper plant near the town of Srednogorie provoked harsh public criticism. The plant emitted toxic clouds containing copper, lead, and arsenic. In 1988 it released toxic wastewater into nearby rivers used to irrigate land in the Plovdiv-Pazardzhik Plain, which includes some of Bulgaria's best agricultural land. The groundwater beneath the plain also was poisoned. Work has begun on a plan to drain toxic wastewater from the plant's reservoir into the Maritsa River. Environmental improvements for the copper plant and three other factories in the Plovdiv area (a lead and zinc factory, a chemical factory, and a uranium factory) also were planned, but they would take years to implement.

None of Bulgaria's large cities escaped serious environmental pollution. Statistics showed that 70 to 80 percent of Sofia's air pollution was caused by emissions from cars, trucks, and buses. Temperature inversions over the city aggravated the problem. Two other major polluters, the Kremikovtsi Metallurgy Works and the Bukhovo uranium mine (both in southwestern Bulgaria), contaminated the region with lead, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, ethanol, and mercury. The city of Kŭrdzhali became heavily polluted with lead from its lead and zinc complex. In 1973 the petroleum and chemical plant near the Black Sea port of Burgas released large amounts of chlorine in an incident similar to the one in Srednogorie. Environmentalists estimated that the area within a thirty-kilometer radius of the plant was rendered uninhabitable by that release. The air in Burgas was also heavily polluted with carbon and sulfur dioxide in 1990.

In 1990 environmental scientists claimed that two-thirds of Bulgaria's population suffered from the polluted environment to some degree (see Health, this ch.). In 1991 Bulgaria began seeking international assistance in solving environmental problems. Besides joining Romania, Turkey, and the Soviet Union in joint scientific studies of the critically polluted Black Sea, Bulgaria actively sought environmental technology and expertise from Western Europe and the United States.

Population

Since ancient times, Bulgaria has been a crossroads for population movement. Early settlement occurred mainly in the most fertile agricultural lands. After World War II, however, Bulgarian

cities grew rapidly at the expense of rural population in concert with state industrialization policy.

Administrative Subdivisions

In 1991 Bulgaria was divided into nine provinces (*oblasti*; sing. *oblast*). These administrative units included the city of Sofia (Grad Sofiya) and eight provincial districts: Burgas, Khaskovo, Lovech, Mikhaylovgrad, Plovdiv, Razgrad, Sofiya (the region outside the city), and Varna (see fig. 1). Each province was named for the city that was its administrative center. Excluding the city of Sofia, the provinces encompassed territories ranging from 9.5 percent of the country to 17.2 percent, and their population ranged from 7.5 percent to 14 percent of the national total (see table 2, Appendix). The eight provinces were divided into a total of 273 communities (*obshtini*; sing., *obshtina*); the city of Sofia was divided into districts (*raioni*; sing., *raion*). Because this system was established in 1987, references to another type of district, the *okrüg* (pl. *okrüzi*), remained common in the early 1990s. The new government that took office in 1991 announced that yet another change was needed in Bulgaria's political subdivisions because the 1987 system reflected the discredited policies of the Zhivkov regime.

Settlement Patterns

The first settlements sprang up in Bulgaria very early in the area's history (see Early Settlement and Empire, ch. 1). The biggest and most numerous villages appeared on fertile lands such as the Danubian Plateau, the Dobruja region, and the Maritsa and Tundzha river valleys. Settlements also took hold at very high altitudes (up to 1,500 meters in the Rhodope Mountains and up to 1,200 meters in the Balkans), but only in areas where it was warm enough to grow grain or other crops. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, many Bulgarians were forced to move into villages at higher altitudes. After Bulgaria became independent in 1878, many people returned to the lower altitudes, but most of the upland villages remained. The process of urbanization began at that point, but it progressed slowly because of wars, lack of employment in population centers, and the emigration of the ethnic Turks who had supported the economies of some cities during the Ottoman era. The massive industrialization of the communist era again stimulated temporary settlement at high altitudes for mining or forestry. Generally, only the highest areas in the Rila, Pirin, and Rhodope mountains remained comparatively unsettled. These regions became known for their national parks and seasonal resort areas.

Cities

Bulgaria's cities grew much more rapidly after 1944. In 1946 only Sofia and Plovdiv had populations numbering over 100,000. By 1990, there were ten cities having populations exceeding 250,000: Burgas, Dobrich (formerly Tolbukhin), Pleven, Plodiv, Ruse, Shumen, Sliven, Sofia, Stara Zagora, and Varna (see fig. 9; table 3, Appendix). In 1990 nearly one-third of Bulgaria's population lived in the ten largest cities; two-thirds of the population was urban. Although the urban birth rate declined after the mid-1970s, large-scale migration from rural areas to cities continued through 1990 (see table 4, Appendix). At the same time, migration from cities to rural areas more than doubled from the 1960s to the 1980s, mainly because more mechanical and service jobs became available in agriculture during that period. In cities such as Sofia and Plovdiv, where industrialization started earliest, the population stabilized, and the repercussions of rapid population growth were less obvious in the 1980s.

The population of the average Bulgarian city grew by three to four times between 1950 and 1990. The rapidity of this growth caused some negative trends. The cities often lacked the resources to serve the needs of their growing populations: in particular, housing and social services could not grow fast enough. The cities' great need for social resources in turn diverted resources from smaller, more scattered population centers. The overall rural-to-urban migration pattern caused shortages of agricultural labor, especially in the villages surrounding large cities. The government discouraged new industries from locating in outlying areas because of the lack of workers.

Sofia was founded by the Thracians and has remained an important population center for 2,000 years. Its location in a basin sheltered by the Vitosha Mountains was strategically and esthetically desirable. Long-established communication routes pass through Sofia, most notably the route from Belgrade to Istanbul. Sofia's climate and location caused the Roman Emperor Constantine to consider the city when he selected an eastern capital for his empire in the early fourth century. Hot springs, which still exist today, were an added attraction. After it became the Bulgarian capital in 1879, Sofia became the administrative, educational, and cultural center of the country. Because of Sofia's rapid postwar growth (it grew by 36 percent between 1965 and 1986), in 1986 its city government closed the city to all internal immigrants except scholars and technical experts.

Plovdiv, the country's second most important city, was founded in the fourth century B.C. by Philip of Macedonia. Its exposed



Source: Based on information from Klaus-Detlev Grothusen (ed.), *Bulgarien*, Göttingen, Germany, 1990, 22.

Figure 9. Population Centers, 1990

location on the route from Belgrade to Istanbul gave the city a violent history that included several instances of capture and devastation—both by non-Christian invaders and by Christian armies during the Crusades. At the end of the twentieth century, Plovdiv remained an important commercial city. More rail lines radiated from Plovdiv than from Sofia, and the city had a university, important museums and art treasures, and an old town center with a unique mid-nineteenth century architectural style. Part of old Plovdiv was declared a national monument.

The three main port cities were Varna and Burgas on the Black Sea and Ruse on the Danube River. A relatively young city, Burgas gained most of its size in the late 1800s. Until the 1950s, it was the most active Bulgarian port. Varna, which was founded by Greeks in the sixth century B.C., eclipsed Burgas by attracting the naval academy and the chief naval base and acquiring most of Bulgaria's shipbuilding industry. Ruse, founded by the Romans in the first century B.C., grew into a major industrial center and transportation hub after World War II. The first bridge across the Danube between Bulgaria and Romania was built just north of Ruse.

Internal Migration

The urbanization of Bulgaria began with independence from the Ottoman Turks, but the process did not become widespread until the massive industrialization of the communist era. In 1900 city dwellers composed barely 20 percent of Bulgaria's population, and in 1945 they made up only 24 percent. By the end of 1990, however, more than 6 million people lived in the cities while fewer than 3 million lived in the villages. Bulgarian demographers predicted that 75 percent of the population would live in cities by the year 2000.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when the industrialization process was most intense, most Bulgarians who moved were of working age, had a basic education or less, and wished to obtain new jobs in industry (see *The Era of Experimentation and Reform*, ch. 3). Fully 85 percent of internal migrants in the early 1960s went to work in an industry. The trend of moving to locations with industrial jobs continued at a reduced rate in the next decades, and migrants in the 1980s tended to be younger and better educated than those of earlier years. The migrant population generally included more women than men. The number reflected women who moved to join the work force as well as women who married and moved to join their husbands.

About two-thirds of migrant Bulgarians relocated within the same province; hence no region showed a marked population decline.

Bulgaria: A Country Study

The decline in village population, however, concerned demographers, who feared that villages would be completely vacated and the country's population distribution severely skewed. By 1990 this population shift had occurred most noticeably in the southeastern and southern regions, but a similar trend was evident in the northwest.

As workers continued to leave, village populations aged demographically. The share of villages with an average population age above fifty increased from 23 percent in 1956 to 41 percent in 1985. Natural growth in villages, negative after 1975, fell to negative 6 percent in 1985. Some villages recorded no births for an entire year. As the younger population decreased, schools and health facilities closed. The closures, in turn, drove more people to leave their villages.

Meanwhile, demographers and sociologists encouraged younger Bulgarians to return to the villages. Generally, those who followed this advice because of housing shortages, transportation problems, or pollution in the cities found hard, uncongenial work, a lower standard of living, and scant public services and recreation. Many village workers were forced to raise animals to supplement their regular income. The beginning of democratization in 1990 sparked much debate about whether the rural standard of living would rise if the government's agricultural privatization program could stimulate agricultural activity (see *Agricultural Products*, ch. 3).

Foreign Citizens in Bulgaria

During the Zhivkov era, Bulgaria signed several friendship treaties with other Comecon nations to ease the exchange of workers. In the 1980s, for example, a large number of Bulgarians worked in the construction and timber industries of the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Komi ASSR) under an exchange agreement with the Soviet Union. Workers were expected to return to their own countries when their contracts ended, but they did not always do so. For example, some Vietnamese construction workers sent to Bulgaria under a Comecon agreement in the 1980s remained, and in 1991 the Vietnamese population of Bulgaria was 11,000. Because they arrived completely unprepared for life in Bulgaria and began working after only one month of training and language courses, the Vietnamese who remained in Bulgaria generally received the hardest and lowest-paying jobs and often became involved in criminal activity. In 1991 several violent incidents involving Vietnamese provoked calls for their repatriation. In response, the government made plans to expel all resident Vietnamese from Bulgaria in 1992.

Population Trends

The 1985 census recorded Bulgaria's population at 8,948,649, an increase of 220,878 over the 1975 census figure. At the end of 1990, the Central Statistical Bureau had estimated an updated figure of 8,989,172, including about 100,000 more women than men. However, the estimates for 1989 and 1990 did not account for major emigrations in those years: first the massive emigration of Turks in 1989, then the emigration of ethnic Bulgarians in 1990. Adjusting for emigration figures, the population figure actually decreased between 1985 and 1990. Bulgaria's 1989 population density figure of eighty-one people per square kilometer made it one of the least densely populated countries in Europe.

Bulgaria's rate of population growth began a steady decrease in the mid-1920s, and the trend accelerated thereafter (see table 5, Appendix). Before World War II, a man's status in his community was determined by how many children (especially sons) he had. Women who did not marry, or who married but had no children, were seen as failures. As the country became more urbanized, however, such traditional views gradually disappeared. Large families were no longer the economic necessity they had been in agricultural society, and extra children became a burden rather than a boon. As women became more educated and less accepting of the traditional patriarchal family norms, their attitude toward child-bearing changed. In 1990 the majority of Bulgarian women believed two children ideal for a family, but because of economic and social conditions, their personal preference was to raise only one. By the 1980s, this change in attitude had begun to prevail even in villages and with less-educated women. In 1985, 75 percent of Bulgarian women indicated that they would not like to have any more children. Families with three or more children became a rarity, and women who opted for more than two children had a lower standard of living and were generally less respected in society.

Although few social planners advocated a return to the large families of the past, Bulgarian policy makers were dismayed that the population did not increase. During the Zhivkov era, the mass media and scholarly journals expressed concern that the nine millionth Bulgarian had not yet been born, and that families were unwilling to have two children instead of one. By 1985 population experts were urging that 30 to 40 percent of families have three children to make up for those which had none or only one. Meanwhile, although the 1973 Politburo had affirmed a family's right to decide how many children to have and when they should be born, in the 1970s and 1980s contraceptives were not available in sufficient

quantity for family planning. The Zhivkov regime had placed strict restrictions on abortions; these restrictions were not repealed until 1990. Partly because contraceptives were in short supply, abortions had surpassed births by 1985 despite the restrictions. Until 1990 bachelors and unmarried women had to pay a 5 to 15 percent "bachelors' tax" depending on their age. In a more positive step, laws provided family allowances for children under sixteen. The age limit for the family allowance was raised to eighteen in 1990 for children still in school.

In 1990 Bulgarian demographers recorded a negative growth rate (negative 35 births per 1,000 population) for the first time. At that point, the number of live births per woman was 1.8. Demographers reported that the figure must increase to 2.1 to maintain the country's natural rate of population replacement. Mortality figures in Bulgaria were also much higher than those of the developed European countries (see Health, this ch.).

The most alarming demographic trend of the late 1980s, however, was substantially greater emigration totals. The 1989 Turkish exodus caused by the Zhivkov assimilation campaigns had a severe impact on the Bulgarian labor force (see Turks, this ch.). Then, in 1990, economic reform brought harsh living conditions that stimulated a wave of emigration by ethnic Bulgarians (see Standard of Living, ch. 3.). As of March 1991, some 460,000 Bulgarians had emigrated, bringing the total number of Bulgarians living abroad to about 3 million. The majority of the émigré population remained in nearby countries (1.2 million in Yugoslavia, 800,000 in other Balkan countries, and 500,000 in the Soviet Union). Smaller numbers went as far as the United States (100,000 to 120,000), Canada (100,000), Argentina (18,000), and Australia (15,000).

Ethnographic Characteristics

Throughout its past, Bulgaria, like the rest of the Balkan Peninsula, had been home to many diverse ethnic groups that were able to preserve their national identities despite being shifted among the jurisdictions of powerful empires. In modern Bulgaria, the opposite has been true: the largest minority ethnic group, the Turks, remained in territory that their Ottoman ancestors had occupied. After the fall of the Zhivkov government, Bulgaria was forced to moderate its minority policy in order to improve its delicate relations with neighboring countries such as Turkey and Yugoslavia.

Government Minority Policy

The 1893 census listed the following nationalities and religious groups in order of prevalence: Eastern Rite Orthodox Bulgarians,



*Gypsy with trained bear, Varna
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

Turks, Romanians, Greeks, Gypsies, Jews, Muslim Bulgarians, Catholic Bulgarians, Tatars, Gagauz (a Turkish-speaking people of the Eastern Orthodox faith), Armenians, Protestant Bulgarians, Vlachs (a Romanian-speaking people in southwest Bulgaria), and foreigners of various nationalities, mainly Russians and Germans.

Migrations and boundary changes after the two world wars reduced the list somewhat; few Greeks and Romanians remained in Bulgaria by 1990 (see table 6, Appendix). However, Bulgaria's communist leaders often tried to deny the existence of minority groups by manipulating or suppressing census data or by forcibly assimilating "undesirable" groups. In 1985, at the height of the last anti-Turkish assimilation campaign, a leading Bulgarian Communist Party official declared Bulgaria "a one-nation state" and affirmed that "the Bulgarian nation has no parts of other peoples and nations."

After the fall of Todor Zhivkov in 1989, all the minorities in Bulgaria progressed somewhat toward self-determination and freedom of expression. New minority organizations and political parties sprang up, and minority groups began publishing their own newspapers and magazines. Non-Bulgarian nationalities regained the right—curtailed in the Zhivkov era—to use their original names, speak their language in public, and wear their national dress. In

1991 significant controversy remained, however, as to how far the rights of minorities should extend. Legislators making policy on such issues as approval of non-Bulgarian names and Turkish-language schools faced mass protests by nationalist Bulgarians, who successfully delayed liberalization of government policy on those issues (see *The Turkish Problem*, ch. 4).

Bulgarians

Bulgarians have been recognized as a separate ethnic group on the Balkan Peninsula since the time of Tsar Boris I (852-89), under whom the Bulgars were converted to Christianity. Early historians began mentioning them as a group then; however, it is not clear whether such references were to the earliest Bulgarians, who were Asiatic and migrated to the Balkan Peninsula from the Ural Mountains of present-day Russia, or to the Slavs that preceded them in what is now Bulgaria. By the end of the ninth century, the Slavs and the Bulgarians shared a common language and a common religion, and the two cultures essentially merged under the name "Bulgarian" (see *The Slavs and the Bulgars*, ch. 1).

Acceptance of the Eastern Orthodox church as the state religion of the First Bulgarian Empire in A.D. 864 shaped the Bulgarian national identity for many centuries thereafter. The Bulgarian language, which was the first written Slavic language, replaced Greek as the official language of both church and state once the Cyrillic alphabet (see *Glossary*) came into existence in the ninth century. National literature flourished under the First Bulgarian Empire, and the church remained the repository of language and national feeling during subsequent centuries of occupation by the Byzantine and Ottoman empires.

Ottoman rule was the most formidable test of Bulgarian ethnic identity. The Ottoman Turks forced many of their Christian subjects to convert to Islam, and the Turks differentiated their subjects only by religion, not by nationality. The latter policy meant that the empire usually considered the Bulgarians as Greeks because of their common Orthodox religion. Turkish recognition of the Greek Orthodox Church gave the Greeks the power to replace Bulgarian clergy and liturgy with Greek, further threatening Bulgarian national identity. Under the Ottomans, some Bulgarians who had converted to Islam lost their national consciousness and language entirely. Others (the Pomaks) converted but managed to retain their old language and customs.

During the Ottoman occupation, the monasteries played an important role in preserving national consciousness among educated Bulgarians. Later, during the National Revival period of the

nineteenth century, primary schools and reading rooms (*chitalishta*) were established to foster Bulgarian culture and literacy in cities throughout Bulgaria. The vast majority of uneducated peasants, however, preserved their customs in the less accessible regions in the mountains. Traditional folk songs and legends flourished there and became richer and more widely known than the literature created by educated Bulgarians (see *The Written Word*, ch. 1).

Bulgarian is classified as a South Slavic language, together with Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian. One of the oldest written languages in Europe, Bulgarian influenced all the other Slavic languages, especially Russian, in early medieval times. In turn, the Bulgarian language was enriched by borrowings from other civilizations with which it came into contact. Besides 2,000 words from the pre-Cyrillic Old Slavonic language, Bulgarians borrowed religious terms and words used in daily life from the Greeks; vocabulary relating to political, economic, and day-to-day life from Turkish; and many Russian words to replace their Turkish equivalents as Ottoman influence waned during the National Revival period. In the postwar era, many West European words began to appear in Bulgarian, especially in technological fields.

Turks

Because of their status as former occupiers, the Turks have had a stormy relationship with Bulgaria since the beginning of its independence. In 1878 Turks outnumbered Bulgarians in Bulgaria, but they began emigrating to Turkey immediately after independence was established. The movement continued, with some interruptions, through the late 1980s. Between 1923 and 1949, 219,700 Turks left Bulgaria. Then a wave of 155,000 emigrants either were “expelled” (according to Turkish sources) or were “allowed to leave” (according to Bulgarian sources) between 1949 and 1951. The number would have been far greater had Turkey not closed its borders twice during those years. In 1968 an agreement reopened the Bulgarian-Turkish border to close relatives of persons who had left from 1944 to 1951. The agreement remained in effect from 1968 to 1978.

The biggest wave of Turkish emigration occurred in 1989, however, when 310,000 Turks left Bulgaria as a result of the Zhivkov regime’s assimilation campaign. That program, which began in 1984, forced all Turks and other Muslims in Bulgaria to adopt Bulgarian (Christian or traditional Slavic) names and renounce all Muslim customs. Bulgaria no longer recognized the Turks as a national minority, explaining that all the Muslims in Bulgaria were descended from Bulgarians who had been forced into

the Islamic faith by the Ottoman Turks. The Muslims would therefore “voluntarily” take new names as part of the “rebirth process” by which they would reclaim their Bulgarian identities. During the height of the assimilation campaign, the Turkish government claimed that 1.5 million Turks resided in Bulgaria, while the Bulgarians claimed there were none. (In 1986 Amnesty International estimated that 900,000 ethnic Turks were living in Bulgaria.)

The motivation of the 1984 assimilation campaign was unclear; however, many experts believed that the disproportion between the birth rates of the Turks and the Bulgarians was a major factor. The birth rate for Turks was about 2 percent at the time of the campaign, while the Bulgarian rate was barely above zero. The upcoming 1985 census would have revealed this disparity, which could have been construed as a failure of Zhivkov government policy. On the other hand, although most Turks worked in low-prestige jobs such as agriculture and construction, they provided critical labor to many segments of the Bulgarian economy. The emigration affected the harvest season of 1989, when Bulgarians from all walks of life were recruited as agricultural laborers to replace the missing Turks. The shortage was especially acute in tobacco, one of Bulgaria’s most profitable exports, and wheat.

During the name-changing phase of the campaign, which saw Turkish towns and villages surrounded by army units, citizens were issued new identity cards with Bulgarian names. Failure to present a new card meant forfeiture of salary, pension payments, and bank withdrawals. Birth or marriage certificates were issued only in Bulgarian names. Traditional Turkish costumes were banned; homes were searched and all signs of Turkish identity removed. Mosques were closed. According to estimates, 500 to 1,500 people were killed when they resisted assimilation measures, and thousands of others went to labor camps or were forcibly resettled.

Before Zhivkov’s assimilation campaign, official policy toward use of the Turkish language had varied. Before 1958, instruction in Turkish was available at all educational levels, and university students were trained to teach courses in Turkish in the Turkish schools. After 1958, Turkish-language majors were taught in Bulgarian only, and the Turkish schools were merged with Bulgarian ones. By 1972, all Turkish-language courses were prohibited, even at the elementary level. Assimilation meant that Turks could no longer teach at all, and the Turkish language was forbidden, even at home. Fines were levied for speaking Turkish in public.

After the fall of Zhivkov in 1989, the National Assembly attempted to restore cultural rights to the Turkish population. In 1991 a new law gave anyone affected by the name-changing campaign



*Woman in folk costume, Koprivshtitsa
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

three years to officially restore original names and the names of children born after the name change. The Slavic endings -ov, -ova, -ev, or -eva could now be removed if they did not go with one's original name, reversing the effect of a 1950s campaign to add Slavic endings to all non-Slavic names. The law was important not only for Turks, but also for the minority Gypsies and Pomaks who had been forced to change their names in 1965 and 1972

respectively. In January 1991, Turkish-language lessons were reintroduced for four hours per week in parts of the country with a substantial Turkish population, such as the former Kŭrdzhali and Razgrad districts.

Pomaks

Pomaks—a term that loosely translates as *collaborators*—were the descendants of ethnic Bulgarians who accepted the Islamic faith during Ottoman rule, mostly between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1990 about 150,000 Pomaks lived in mountain villages in southern and southwestern Bulgaria. They were chiefly employed in agriculture, forestry, and mining. Because of their relative isolation in the mountains, the Pomaks did not become ethnically mixed with their coreligionist Turks during the occupation, and they largely retained their Slavic physical features. Because the Ottoman Turks showed little interest in Pomak lands, and because the Pomaks were converted rather late, most of their traditional Bulgarian customs remained intact. Thus, for example, the Pomaks never learned to speak Turkish. The Bulgarian government always considered the Pomaks as Bulgarians rather than as a separate minority.

As a result of the 1972–73 assimilation campaign, about 550 Pomaks were arrested and imprisoned at Belene in north central Bulgaria and in Stara Zagora. Unrest flared in 1989 when Pomaks from the Gotse Delchev area in southwest Bulgaria were refused passports that would have enabled them to emigrate with the Turks. Some Pomaks in southwest Bulgaria were subjected to a second name change because the names they received the first time were not definitely Bulgarian. Riots, work stoppages, and hunger strikes ensued. According to reports from the Plovdiv region, local officials banned public gatherings of more than three Pomaks and forbade residents to leave their villages.

Macedonians

Beginning with the withdrawal of the Ottoman occupation, the region known as Macedonia was divided among two or more European states. The entire region was never included in a single political unit. In 1990 Macedonia included all of the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, the Pirin region of southwest Bulgaria, the part of northern Greece bordering the Aegean Sea and including Thessaloniki, and a very small part of eastern Albania. The Macedonian language, in which no written documents are known to have existed before 1790, had three main dialects. One dialect was closest

to Serbian, one most resembled Bulgarian, and a third, more distinctive group became the basis for the official language.

The region's location in the middle of the Balkans and its lack of defined ethnic character made the dispute over the existence and location of a separate Macedonian nationality and control over its territory one of the most intractable Balkan issues of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In general, Bulgaria and Greece asserted that the Macedonians within their jurisdiction were ethnically indistinguishable from the majority population. Yugoslavia saw the Macedonians of all jurisdictions as a distinct ethnic group. But, beginning with independence in 1878, Bulgarians also claimed various segments of non-Bulgarian territory based on the ethnic Slavic commonality of the Bulgarians and the Macedonians. Residual claims on Macedonian territory were a primary reason for Bulgaria's decision to side with Germany during both world wars. In the division of territory after World War I, most of Macedonia became part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), and was renamed "South Serbia." After World War II, Yugoslavia strengthened its hold by making Macedonia a separate republic and recognizing the Macedonians as a distinct nationality (see World War I and Foreign Policy in the Late 1930s, ch. 1).

The Bulgarian position maintained that leading patriots such as Gotse Delchev and Iane Sandanski (who had fought for Macedonian independence from the Turks) and cultural figures such as the Miladinov brothers (who promoted education and the Slavic vernacular during the National Revival period) were products of Bulgarian culture and considered themselves Bulgarians, not Macedonians. In 1990 many people in the Pirin region identified themselves as Bulgarian, but some opposition Macedonian organizations such as Ilinden (named after the 1903 Ilinden-Preobrazhensko uprising for Macedonian independence on St. Elijah's Day) sought recognition by the Bulgarian government as a minority separate from the Bulgarians. This position was based on the assertion that Macedonians were a separate nationality with a distinct language and history.

No reliable data showed how many people in Bulgaria, or in all of Macedonia, considered themselves Macedonian or spoke a Macedonian dialect in 1990. Those who considered the Slavs in Macedonia as Bulgarians cited statistics for the whole region at the time it was first divided after World War I. At that time, 1,239,903 Bulgarians, or 59 percent of the population, were listed. The Bulgarians were a majority in both Yugoslav (Vardar) Macedonia (759,468 people) and in Bulgarian (Pirin) Macedonia (226,700

people). Later Bulgarian censuses, however, showed sharply varying numbers of Macedonians according to what political agenda was to be supported by a given census. The 1946 census, for example, identified over 250,000 Macedonians, reportedly to back President Georgi Dimitrov's short-lived plan for federation with Yugoslavia. Then, between the censuses of 1956 and 1965, the number of Macedonians dropped from 187,789 to 9,632. After that time, the Bulgarian census ceased identifying citizens by nationality.

Gypsies

Although Gypsies are known to have lived in Bulgaria since the fourteenth century, most of the Gypsy population arrived in the past few centuries. The last known group was forced to settle in 1958, having remained nomadic until that time. The Gypsy population was divided into three groups. According to the 1965 census, the last that enumerated Bulgarians by nationality, 42.5 percent were Orthodox and spoke Bulgarian; 34.2 percent were Orthodox and spoke Romanian or Romany, the Gypsy language; and 22.8 percent were Muslim, spoke Turkish, and considered themselves ethnic Turks. Estimates in 1990 put the Gypsy population at about 450,000, some 10 percent of whom lived in the southeastern city of Sliven.

The Gypsies had a long history as one of Bulgaria's most disadvantaged and maligned nationalities. They were the focus of official name-changing campaigns in every postwar decade between 1950 and 1990. Despite their numbers, Gypsies did not contribute much to Bulgarian society because only about 40 percent of them attained the educational and cultural level of the average Bulgarian. The other 60 percent lived in extremely disadvantaged conditions, isolated from the mainstream of society by the Gypsy tradition of preserving ethnic customs and by Bulgarian government policy. Government programs to improve the lot of the Gypsies usually meant construction of new, separate Gypsy neighborhoods rather than integration into Bulgarian society. Housing in Gypsy neighborhoods was always poor and overcrowded. In 1959 when a new neighborhood was built in Sofia, 800 people moved into 252 apartments. Each apartment had one and one-half rooms and no kitchen or inside plumbing. By 1990 about 3,000 people lived in these same apartments.

The education of Gypsies who spoke Romany was inhibited because the language has no alphabet or written literature. Gypsy children were exposed to Bulgarian only in school, hampering completion of studies for many. The illiteracy rate among Gypsies was believed to be still quite high in 1990, although no statistics were

available. According to the only known literacy figures for nationalities, given in the 1926 census, 8.2 percent of Gypsies were literate, compared with 54.4 percent of Bulgarians overall (see Education, this ch.). The Gypsy community exerted little pressure on students to finish school; many dropped out before reaching legal working age, increasing the tendency to marry and begin having children early.

In 1990 about 70 percent of Gypsy workers were unskilled and worked as general laborers, custodians, street cleaners, dishwashers, or in other minimum-wage occupations. About 20 percent of Gypsies worked at skilled jobs. The small Gypsy intelligentsia, which included musicians, scholars, professionals in various fields, and political figures, tried to influence their countrymen to gain more education and job skills. Pressure also was exerted for elimination of separate Gypsy neighborhoods and official replacement of the derogatory Bulgarian word *tsiganin* with *rom*, the Romany word for Gypsy.

Other Minorities

Because of official suppression of nationality statistics, little information was available on less numerous minorities in Bulgaria between 1965 and 1990. Most of the Tatar population (6,430 in 1965) had migrated from the Crimea to the cities of the Dobruja area in the nineteenth century. The Greek minority (8,241 in 1965) comprised political émigrés from Greece and the remainder of a population in southern Bulgaria that had been largely forced out of Bulgaria by government oppression and violence between the world wars. The Armenian population (20,282 in 1965) was mostly added between 1896 and 1924 during the massive emigration of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians were concentrated in the cities, especially Sofia and Plovdiv. In 1946 some 44,209 Jews remained in Bulgaria, which had conducted no large-scale persecution despite its wartime alliance with Nazi Germany. But massive emigration of Jews to Israel in the 1950's substantially reduced that number.

Religion

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which played a crucial role in preserving Bulgarian culture during the Ottoman occupation, remained central to the sense of Bulgarian nationhood even under the postwar communist regimes. In spite of the official status of Orthodoxy, Bulgaria also had a tradition of tolerance toward other Christian religions. Tolerance of Islam, however, remained problematic under all forms of government because of that religion's

historical identification with the occupation and subjugation of Bulgaria.

Eastern Orthodoxy

In 1991 most Bulgarians were at least nominally members of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, an independent national church like the Russian Orthodox Church and the other national branches of Eastern Orthodoxy. Because of its national character and its status as the national church in every independent Bulgarian state until the advent of communism, the church was considered an inseparable element of Bulgarian national consciousness (see Bulgarians, this ch.). Baptism, before 1944 an indispensable rite establishing individual identity, retained this vital role for many even after the communists took power. The power of this tradition caused the communist state to introduce a naming ritual called "civil baptism."

Although communist regimes could not eliminate all influence, they did undermine church authority significantly. First, the communists ruled that the church only had authority on church matters and could not take part in political life. Second, although the constitution made the church separate from the state, the clergy's salaries and the fees needed to maintain the churches were paid by the state. This meant that the clergy had to prove its loyalty to the state. From 1949 until 1989, religion in Bulgaria was mainly controlled by the Law on Religious Organizations, which enumerated the limitations on the constitution's basic separation of church and state.

The number of Orthodox priests declined from 3,312 in 1947 to 1,700 in 1985. Priests associated with the prewar regime were accused of engaging in illegal or antisocialist activities, supporting the opposition, and propagandizing against the state. Upon taking control of all church property, the state had the choice of maintaining churches or closing them down. Thus, for example, Rila Monastery, the largest monastery in Bulgaria, became a national museum in 1961.

In 1987 the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria had 3,720 churches and chapels, 120 monasteries, 981 regular and 738 retired priests, 135 monks, and 170 nuns. The church was administered by a Holy Synod. Under communist rule, the synod had the authority to publish limited quantities of religious material such as magazines, newspapers, and church calendars. A new translation of the Bible was published in 1982, but in such small quantities that the size of the printing could not be determined. By 1988 the 1982 edition was being resold at ten times the original price.



*Rila Monastery, for many centuries a cultural and religious center
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

After the fall of Zhivkov, the Orthodox Church and other churches in Bulgaria experienced a revival. Church rituals such as baptisms and church weddings attracted renewed interest, and traditional church holidays were observed more widely. Christmas 1990, the first Christmas under the new regime, was widely celebrated and greatly promoted in the mass media. During the post-war years, Christmas had received little public attention. The government returned some church property, including the Rila Monastery, and religious education and Bible study increased in the early post-Zhivkov years. The Orthodox seminary in Sofia returned to its original home in 1990 and attracted over 100 male and female students in its first year of operation. The Konstantin Preslavski Higher Pedagogical Institute added a new theology department to train theology, art, and music teachers as well as priests. The Holy Synod planned to publish 300,000 Orthodox Bibles in 1992.

Islam

The Muslim population of Bulgaria, including Turks, Pomaks, Gypsies, and Tatars, lived mainly in northeastern Bulgaria and in the Rhodope Mountains. Most were Sunni Muslims (see Glossary) because Sunni Islam had been promoted by the Ottoman

Turks when they ruled Bulgaria. Shia sects (see Glossary) such as the Kuzulbashi and the Bektashi also were present, however. About 80,000 Shia Muslims lived in Bulgaria, mainly in the Razgrad, Sliven, and Tutrakan (northeast of Ruse) regions. They were mainly descendants of Bulgarians who had converted to Islam to avoid Ottoman persecution but chose a Shia sect because of its greater tolerance toward different national and religious customs. For example, Kuzulbashi Bulgarians could maintain the Orthodox customs of communion, confession, and honoring saints. This integration of Orthodox customs into Islam gave rise to a type of syncretism found only in Bulgaria.

As of 1987, Muslims in Bulgaria had 1,267 mosques served by 533 *khodzhai*, or religious community leaders. The Muslim hierarchy was headed by one chief mufti and eight regional muftis, interpreters of Muslim law, all of whom served five-year terms. The largest mosque in Bulgaria was the Tumbul Mosque in Shumen, built in 1744.

Bulgarian Muslims were subject to particular persecution in the later years of the Zhivkov regime, partly because the Orthodox Church traditionally considered them foreigners, even if they were ethnically Bulgarian. In addition, the Bulgarian communist regimes declared traditional Muslim beliefs to be diametrically opposed to communist and Bulgarian beliefs. This view justified repression of Muslim beliefs and integration of Muslims into the larger society as part of the class and ideological struggle.

Like the practitioners of the other faiths, Muslims in Bulgaria enjoyed greater religious freedom after the fall of the Zhivkov regime. New mosques were built in many cities and villages; one village built a new church and a new mosque side by side. Some villages organized Quran (also seen as Koran) study courses for young people (study of the Quran had been completely forbidden under Zhivkov). Muslims also began publishing their own newspaper, *Miusulmani*, in both Bulgarian and Turkish.

Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholic missionaries first tried to convert the Bulgarians during the reign of Boris I. They were unsuccessful, and Boris I led the Bulgarians in their conversion to Orthodoxy. In 1204 the Bulgarian Tsar Kaloian (1197–1207) formed a short-lived union between the Roman Catholic Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as a political tactic to balance the religious power of the Byzantine Empire. The union ended when Rome declared war on Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian patriarchate was reestablished in

1235. The Catholic Church had no influence in the Bulgarian Empire after that date.

Catholic missionaries renewed their interest in Bulgaria during the sixteenth century, when they were aided by merchants from Dubrovnik on the Adriatic. In the next century, Vatican missionaries converted most of the Paulicians, the remainder of a once-numerous heretical Christian sect, to Catholicism. Many believed that conversion would bring aid from Western Europe in liberating Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire. By 1700, however, the Ottomans began persecuting Catholics and preventing their Orthodox subjects from converting.

After Bulgaria became independent, the Catholic Church again tried to increase its influence by opening schools, colleges, and hospitals throughout the country, and by offering scholarships to students who wished to study abroad. Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, first ruler of independent Bulgaria, was himself Catholic and supported the Vatican in these efforts. The papal nuncio Angelo Roncalli, who later became Pope John XXIII, played a leading role in establishing Catholic institutions in Bulgaria and in establishing diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the Vatican in 1925.

The communist era was a time of great persecution for Catholics, nominally because Catholicism was considered the religion of fascism. Bulgarian communists also deemed Catholicism a foreign influence because, unlike Orthodoxy, it had no ties to Russia. The logic was that anything anti-Russian must also be anti-Bulgarian. Under the communist regimes, Catholic priests were charged with following Vatican orders to conduct antisocialist activities and help opposition parties. In 1949 foreign priests were forbidden to preach in Bulgaria, and the papal nuncio was forbidden to return to Bulgaria. Relations between the Vatican and Bulgaria were severed at that time. During the "Catholic trials" of 1951-52, sixty priests were convicted of working for Western intelligence agencies and collecting political, economic, and military intelligence for the West. Four priests were executed on the basis of these charges. In the early 1950s, the property of Catholic parishes was confiscated, all Catholic schools, colleges, and clubs were closed, and the Catholic Church was deprived of its legal status. Only nominal official toleration of Catholic worship remained.

In 1991 about 44,000 Roman Catholics remained in Bulgaria, mostly in Ruse, Sofia, and Plovdiv. Another 18,000 Uniate Catholics were concentrated in Sofia. (Uniate Catholics recognize the pope as their spiritual leader, but practice the Eastern Orthodox rite.) Bulgaria reestablished relations with the Vatican in 1990, and

the Bulgarian government invited the pope to visit Bulgaria. Uniate Catholics began assisting Western-rite Catholics in conducting masses in Bulgarian, making the liturgy more accessible, and prompting predictions that the two branches would unite. Relations had not been established between the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in 1991, however, and Catholics blamed official Orthodox intolerance for the continued rift.

Protestantism

Protestantism was introduced in Bulgaria by missionaries from the United States in 1857–58, amid the National Revival period. The two main denominations, the Methodists and Congregationalists, divided their areas of influence. The former predominated in northern Bulgaria and the latter in the south. In 1875 the Protestant denominations united in the Bulgarian Evangelical Philanthropic Society, which later became the Union of Evangelical Churches in Bulgaria. Besides setting up churches, the Protestants established schools, clinics, and youth clubs in Bulgaria, and distributed copies of the Bible and their own religious publications. The Union of Evangelical Churches produced the first translation of the entire Bible into Bulgarian in 1871 and founded the non-denominational Robert College in Constantinople, where many Bulgarian leaders of the post-independence era were educated. After independence in 1878, the Protestants gained influence because they used the vernacular in services and in religious literature.

The communist regimes subjected Protestants to even greater persecution than they did the Catholics. In 1946 church funding was cut off by a law curbing foreign currency transactions. Because many ministers had been educated in the West before World War II, they were automatically suspected of supporting the opposition parties. In 1949 thirty-one Protestant clergymen were charged with working for American intelligence and running a spy ring in Bulgaria. All church property was confiscated, and the churches' legal status was revoked. Most of the mainstream Protestant denominations maintained the nominal right to worship, as guaranteed by the constitution of 1947.

According to estimates in 1991, the 5,000 to 6,000 Pentecostals in Bulgaria made that sect the largest Protestant group (see table 7, Appendix). The Pentecostal movement was brought to Bulgaria in 1921 by Russian émigrés. The movement later spread to Varna, Sliven, Sofia, and Plevan. It gained popularity in Bulgaria after freedom of religion was declared in 1944, and the fall of Zhivkov brought another surge of interest. In 1991 the Pentecostal Church

had thirty-six clergy in forty-three parishes, with sufficient concentration in Ruse to petition the government to establish a Bible institute there.

In 1991 the Adventist Church had 3,500 Bulgarian members, two-thirds of them young people. The Adventist movement began in the Dobruja region of Bulgaria at the turn of the century and then spread to Tutrakan, Ruse, Sofia, and Plovdiv. It gained momentum in Bulgaria after 1944. Under the communist regimes, mainstream Adventists maintained the right to worship. Some twenty parishes with forty pastors remained active through that era, although a breakaway reformed group was banned because of its pacifist beliefs. Some Adventists were imprisoned for refusal of military service.

Judaism

The Bulgarian communist regimes officially considered Jews a nationality rather than a religious group. For that reason, and because nearly 90 percent of the country's Jewish population emigrated to Israel after World War II, the Jewish society that remained in Bulgaria was mainly secular. Under the Zhivkov regime, synagogues rarely were open in Sofia, Samokov, and Vidin. In 1990 the Jewish population was estimated at about 71,000. At that time, only two rabbis were active, although several synagogues reportedly were reopened under the new regime. Most of the Jews in Bulgaria were Sephardic, descended from Spanish Jews who spoke Hebrew or Ladino (a Judeo-Spanish dialect). A much smaller number were Ashkenazi, with Yiddish-speaking ancestors. However, very few Jews in postcommunist Bulgaria remembered their ancestral languages, and frequent mixed marriages further diluted feelings of Jewish identity. The Jews of Bulgaria assimilated easily into Bulgarian society, partly because they traditionally lived in cities and worked as tradesmen or financiers.

The fate of Bulgarian Jews during World War II was a source of Bulgarian pride. The approximately 50,000 Jews then living in Bulgaria had long been well integrated into the fabric of Bulgarian city life. Because of this integration, neither society in general nor Tsar Boris III was inclined to follow the anti-Jewish policies of Bulgaria's Nazi ally. Boris tried to appease the Nazis by passing comparatively benign anti-Jewish laws, which nevertheless were protested widely, especially by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Twice in 1943, Boris personally blocked orders to deport Bulgarian Jews, sending them instead to so-called labor camps inside Bulgaria. Many Jews also received transit visas to Palestine at this time.

Social System

Most manifestations of traditional Bulgarian familial and societal relations disappeared in the initial postwar wave of modernization. Some traditions, however, proved surprisingly persistent and survived into the 1990s, especially in parts of western and southwestern Bulgaria. Although postwar communist regimes nominally emphasized emancipation of women, strong elements of paternalism and emphasis on traditional female roles remained in Bulgarian society. By 1990 economic forces had eliminated traditional extended families and limited the number of children, especially in urban areas. Some evidence of resurging traditional relationships was seen in the immediate post-Zhivkov years.

Traditional Society

Traditional Bulgarian society had three classes: the peasants (almost everyone in the villages), the *chorbadzhii* (a small wealthy class that owned large tracts of land and hired peasants to work them), and the *esnafi* (skilled tradespeople in towns, who later became the bourgeoisie). Most references to traditional Bulgarian society described village or peasant society because until the communist era the great majority of Bulgarians were peasants.

The most important institution of traditional Bulgarian society was the *zadruga*, an extended family composed of ten to twenty small families, related by blood, who lived and worked together, owned property jointly, and recognized the authority of a single patriarch. The extended family most often included four generations of men, the wives whom these men brought into the household through marriage, and the children produced through these marriages. Once a girl married, she would leave the *zadruga* of her parents for that of her husband. No member of the *zadruga* had any personal property other than clothes or the women's dowries.

Traditional Bulgarian society was strongly patriarchal. The *zadruga* leader, called the "old man" or the "lord of the house," had absolute power over his family and was treated with the utmost respect. He was considered the wisest because he had lived the longest. His duties included managing the purchase and sale of all household property, division of labor among *zadruga* members, and settling personal disputes. Older men within the household could offer advice, but the "old man" had the final word. Obligatory signs of familial respect included rising whenever he appeared and eating only after he had begun and before he had finished his meal. The "old man's" wife (or the senior woman if he were widowed) had similar authority over traditional women's activities such as tending

the garden, observing holiday rituals, and sewing. The senior woman commanded similar respect from *zadruga* members, but she was never allowed to interfere in functions designated for men.

When a *zadruga* broke up (normally because it became too large for easy management), property was divided equally among its members. Before the twentieth century, many villages were formed as outgrowths of an enlarged *zadruga*. The largest of the extended family organizations in Bulgaria began breaking up in the 1840s. At that time, the Ottoman Empire instituted new inheritance laws that did not take *zadruga* property patterns into account. A second stage of fragmentation occurred as the expectation of automatic integration into the extended family gradually weakened in younger generations: sons began leaving the *zadruga* at the death of the "old man," and newly arrived wives failed to adjust to the traditional system. As a result of such pressures, smaller households began to proliferate in the nineteenth century.

The *zadruga* breakup accelerated after Bulgaria gained its independence and began instituting Western-style laws that gave women equal inheritance rights, although in many parts of Bulgaria women did not begin demanding their legal inheritance until well into the twentieth century. The disintegration of large family holdings gradually led to the impoverishment of the peasants as land ownership became more fragmented and scattered with each generation. The durability of the extended family was reflected in the 1934 census, however, which still listed a category of household size as "thirty-one and over." Furthermore, even after extended families broke up, many peasants continued to work cooperatively.

The familial system sometimes extended to include godparents and adopted brothers and sisters—unrelated individuals enjoying the same status as close relatives. Godparenthood included another set of traditional relationships that knit village society together. Godparents kept close ties with their godchildren throughout their lives, and the godparent/godchild relationship could be transferred from generation to generation. Godparents were treated with the utmost respect and had an important role in all important events in a godchild's life, beginning with baptism. The familial relationship was so strong that a taboo developed against the marriage of children related to the same family only through godparenthood.

After the decline of the *zadruga*, the patriarchal system continued to flourish in the smaller families, where husbands gained ownership of family property and all the patriarchal status the old men once had. The status of wives remained distinctly secondary. Upon marriage a woman still severed all ties with her family if her husband's family lived in another village. Thus, couples always looked





*Town of Melnik in Pirin Mountains
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

forward to the birth of sons rather than daughters because sons would always remain family members. Men traditionally married between the ages of twenty and twenty-two; women, between eighteen and twenty. In areas where daughters were needed as laborers at home, marriage might be postponed until age twenty-five. Arranged marriages, common until the communist era, persisted in the most traditional villages until the 1960s.

Only in the twentieth century did men begin to consult their wives in family decisions. Until that time, wives were expected to give blind obedience to their husbands. A woman who dared question or interfere in a man's work was universally condemned. Women waited for a man to pass rather than crossing his path, and wives often walked with heavy loads while their husbands rode on horseback. The wife was responsible for all work inside the house and for helping her husband in the field as well.

Children typically began to share in household work at the age of five or six. At that age, girls began to do household work, and by age twelve they had usually mastered most of the traditional household skills. By age twelve or thirteen, boys were expected to do the same field work as adults. Alternatively, boys might begin learning a trade such as tailoring or blacksmithing at six or seven. As the size of farmland parcels diminished and field labor became less critical, more families sent children away from home to learn trades. Village boys apprenticed in cities sometimes became accustomed to city life and did not return to the village.

Family Life and Modern Society

Throughout the era of postwar communist modernization, family life remained one of the most important values in Bulgarian society. In a 1977 sociological survey, 95 percent of women responded that "one can live a full life only if one has a family." From the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1970s, the marriage rate in Bulgaria was stable at close to 10 percent per year. The rate was slightly higher just after the two world wars. The rate fell beginning in 1980, however, reaching 7 percent in 1989. Slightly more couples married in the cities than in the villages, a natural development considering the aging of the village population. Most women married between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, most men between twenty and twenty-five. Village men and less educated city men typically married before they were twenty. The first men to marry often were those who had completed their military service, did not plan further education, and could support themselves financially (see *Recruitment and Service Obligations*, ch. 5; *Education*, this ch.). Those who continued their education often

delayed marriage until their late twenties. In choosing their spouses, the less educated and those from more traditional regions of Bulgaria sought qualities most highly valued in traditional society: love of hard work, modesty, and good character. Among the educated classes, values such as personal respect, commonality of interests, and education were more often predominant in the choice of a spouse.

Until 1944 divorce was quite rare in Bulgaria, and great stigma was attached to all individuals who had divorced. After 1944 the divorce rate rose steadily until 1983, when it reached 16.3 percent. Between 1983 and 1986, however, the rate fell to 11.2 percent. In the 1980s, the divorce rate in the cities was more than twice that in the villages, in part because the village population was older. The divorce rate was especially high for couples married five years or less; that group accounted for 44 percent of all divorces. In 1991 the rate was increasing, however, for those married longer than five years.

Concerned about Bulgaria's low birth rate, the government issued new restrictions on divorce in its 1985 Family Code. The fee to apply for a divorce was more than three months' average salary, and every application for a divorce required an investigation. The grounds most often listed in a divorce application were infidelity, habitual drunkenness, and incompatibility.

In 1991 the average Bulgarian family included four people. Families of two to five people were common, whereas families of six or more were rare. In the larger families, moreover, the additional members usually included one or two of the couple's parents. In 1980 extended families spanning three or even four generations made up 17 percent of all households, indicating the persistence of the extended family tradition. Although the tradition was more prevalent in the villages of western and southern Bulgaria than in the cities, many urban newlyweds lived with their parents because they could not afford or obtain separate apartments.

Socialist Bulgaria greatly emphasized the emancipation of women. The 1971 constitution expressly stated that "all citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria are equal before the law, and no privileges or limitations of rights based on national, religious, sex, race, or educational differences are permitted" and that "women and men in the People's Republic of Bulgaria have the same rights." Bulgaria's Family Code also affirmed equal rights for men and women.

In 1988 Bulgaria's work force included an almost equal number of men (50.1 percent) and women (49.9 percent). By 1984 nearly 70 percent of working women surveyed said that they could not

imagine life without their professional work, even if they did not need the pay. Only 9 percent of the women preferred being housewives. However, most men surveyed in 1988 cited economics as the reason for their wives to work, asserting that the wives should give up their work if they were needed at home.

Household chores remained primarily the responsibility of women, including most working wives. In 1990 the average working woman spent eight and one-half hours at her job and over four and one-half hours doing housework: cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes, ironing, mending, and tending the children. In many households, such tasks were still considered "women's work," to which husbands contributed little.

In their social planning, Bulgarian legislators usually viewed their country's women mainly as mothers, not as workers. Besides the laws passed in an effort to increase the country's birth rate, legislators passed laws giving certain privileges to women in the workplace, often keeping their reproductive capability in mind. Women were prohibited by law from doing heavy work or work that would adversely affect their health or their capacities as mothers. Women sought such jobs because they generally offered better pay and benefits. The list of prohibited jobs changed constantly. Depending on the type of work, women could retire after fifteen or twenty years, or after reaching age forty-five, fifty, or fifty-five. Women who had raised five or more children could retire after fifteen years of work, regardless of their age or type of work. Men were generally offered retirement after working twenty-five years or reaching age fifty, fifty-five, or sixty. Some jobs were restricted to women unless no women were available. Without exception these were low-skill, low-paying jobs such as archivist, elevator operator, ticket seller, coat checker, and bookkeeper. Other jobs, such as secretary, stenographer, librarian, cashier, and cleaning person were considered "appropriate for women." Men in the workplace often expressed resentment of women in positions of authority.

Social Groups and Their Work

Postwar Bulgarian society was divided into three social groups, according to type of work: *Workers*, who held jobs in the "productive" manufacturing sector of the economy; *Employees*, who worked in "non-productive" service and education jobs; and *Agricultural workers*. The intelligentsia, usually considered a subsector of the employee category, held professional or creative positions requiring specific qualifications. In 1987 nonagricultural workers made up 63 percent of the population, employees made up 18 percent, and agricultural workers made up 19 percent. The intelligentsia



*Male dance ensemble at folk festival held every five years at Koprivishtitsa
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

made up 13.5 percent of the total population in 1985. Both the nonagricultural worker and the employee category grew about 15 percent between the censuses of 1975 and 1985, but the number of agricultural workers dropped steadily through the 1970s and 1980s (see table 8, Appendix). Of all people in the work force in 1990, only 21.7 percent were rated as highly qualified. According to sociologists, that figure would have to more than double if Bulgaria were to become economically competitive with the West.

Most of those registered as workers had jobs in industry. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of workers in the machine-building, spare-parts and metal-processing industries increased. Other industries, such as the food industry, the lumber industry, and the fuel industry, lost workers. Most workers were comparatively young, with little education and few work qualifications (see table 9, Appendix). In 1990 some 66.8 percent of industrial workers had a basic education or less. However, young workers were valued because they were considered most capable of adapting to new technology—a critical requirement for upgrading Bulgaria's outdated industrial infrastructure (see Labor Force, ch. 3).

In the 1980s, employment grew in the trade, supply, construction, and transportation sectors. Growing the fastest, however, were the sectors requiring primarily intellectual work: research and

research services, education, and administration. After growing by 90 percent between 1965 and 1985, administration included 26 percent of all employees and was the largest division of this category. The housing sector was the only component of the employee category that lost jobs between 1975 and 1990.

The number of agricultural workers decreased markedly from 50 percent of all workers in 1965 to 20 percent in 1985. As agricultural production intensified, many agricultural workers were transferred to nonagricultural jobs. In the late 1980s, however, a shortage of agricultural workers occurred because so many people had left the villages. For this reason, labor-intensive farm activities such as harvesting required recruitment of brigades from schools and nonagricultural enterprises. Many of the remaining farm workers could not adapt to new technology. This lack of adaptation inhibited the modernization and mechanization of agricultural processes.

The democratization that followed the Zhivkov regime raised the problem of unemployment, unknown in Bulgaria after 1944 (see Labor and Economic Reform, ch. 3). As of April 1991, some 124,000 Bulgarians were unemployed. With the country in the midst of economic restructuring, enterprise shutdowns, and scarcity of raw materials, employment figures showed no sign of improvement. The highest unemployment rates occurred in Plovdiv and Sofia. Most unemployed persons were under age thirty, and over 60 percent were women. Job vacancies continued to decline in 1991; most remaining opportunities were in low-skilled jobs or jobs requiring hard physical labor. Persons with the highest level of education, such as engineers, economists, and teachers, were least likely to find suitable positions. In 1990 the lack of skilled professional positions spurred a "brain drain" emigration that further threatened Bulgaria's ability to compete on technologically oriented world markets. In the meantime, the country's economy had lost its protected position as a member of the defunct Comecon, putting more pressure on the domestic labor force (see Bulgaria in Comecon, ch. 3).

Because the national welfare system could only accommodate those who lost their jobs because of enterprise shutdown, in 1990 the Bulgarian government began seeking ways to create more jobs. It considered rewarding businesses that added shifts or offered part-time or seasonal work, and it encouraged development of small business. One proposed solution, replacing working pensioners with young unemployed workers, was unworkable because enterprises found it less expensive to continue hiring pensioners.

Social Services

Between independence and the communist era, the Bulgarian government had used its social welfare funds mainly for government



*St. Paraskeva Orthodox Church, Nesebür
Courtesy Sam and Sarah Stulberg*

workers, army officers, white-collar workers, craftsmen, and tradesmen. The 1949 social welfare law founded a new social welfare system that endured into the 1990s. The new system greatly expanded the categories of people eligible and the amounts they could receive. The social welfare system in 1991 was largely based on the 1951 section of the Labor Code that regulated monetary compensation and supplements, and the 1957 Law on Pensions. Both laws were revised countless times and no longer agree with each other. The National Assembly delayed creation of a new law until the new constitution was ratified in the summer of 1991.

In 1991 two-thirds of Bulgaria's social welfare budget was spent on pensions; the rest went for monthly child-care allowances and other programs. As of late 1990, the Bulgarian government provided over 4 billion leva per year to 2,300,000 pensioners—about one fourth of the entire population. To keep pace with the rising cost of living in the transition to a Western economic system, the government had to index pensions several times in 1990. By the beginning of 1991, some 165 leva were being added monthly to every pension, casting doubt on the long-term possibility of maintaining the program. The ratio of Bulgaria's pensioners to its total population was the largest in the world, almost twice that of most Western countries. Because the society was aging, some experts declared

that workers should be encouraged to remain in the work force and participate actively in society much longer than had been the practice under the communist regimes.

In early 1991, in a further effort to keep pace with the rising cost of living, the Council of Ministers established a new minimum wage and new subsidy levels for all social welfare programs. Anyone who had received the old monthly minimum wage of 165 leva would now be compensated 270 leva to provide for a new minimum wage of 435 leva. This minimum wage was subsequently changed three times in 1991, peaking at 518 leva. The 1991 program also gave 242 leva to pregnant or nursing women and to those on temporary workers' disability. Child-care compensation for households with children under three years of age was raised to 90 leva, with a monthly supplement of 100 leva per child. In 1991 several cost-of-living increases were added to those categories as well. In 1991 unemployment compensation was set at 270 leva per month; students over eighteen received 130 leva per month; graduate students, 230 leva. Those payments were funded from the state budget and from enterprise salary budgets, neither of which seemed adequate to keep pace with rapidly changing prices in 1991.

Under socialism all citizens who had been awarded the title "active fighter against fascism and capitalism" for military or civilian contributions in World War II received a large pension and special privileges such as free public transportation, free medical prescriptions, and free vacations at special resorts. After much controversy, those privileges were abolished in 1990.

Health

Until the 1920s, peasants relied on traditional medicine and went to a doctor or hospital only as a last resort. Traditional healers believed that many illnesses were caused by evil spirits (*baïane*) and could therefore be treated with magic, with chants against the spirits, with prayers, or by using medicinal herbs. The knowledge of healing herbs was highly valued in village society. For healing one could also drink, wash, or bathe in water from mineral springs, some of which were considered holy. Even in postcommunist Bulgaria, some resorted to herbal medicine or to persons with reputed extrasensory healing powers. Herbalists and "extrasenses" regained popularity in Bulgaria after the overthrow of Zhivkov. Because of the skepticism of conventional doctors, little research was done on the validity of traditional herbal medicine, but in 1991 doctors began to consider rating skilled herbalists as qualified specialists.

Beginning in 1944, Bulgaria made significant progress in increasing life expectancy and decreasing infant mortality rates. In 1986

Bulgaria's life expectancy was 68.1 years for men and 74.4 years for women. In 1939 the mortality rate for children under one year had been 138.9 per 1,000; by 1986 it was 18.2 per 1,000, and in 1990 it was 14 per 1,000, the lowest rate in Eastern Europe. The proportion of long-lived people in Bulgaria was quite large; a 1988 study cited a figure of 52 centenarians per 1 million inhabitants, most of whom lived in the Smolyan, Kŭrdzhali, and Blagoevgrad regions.

The steady demographic aging of the Bulgarian population was a concern, however. In the 1980s, the number of children in the population decreased by over 100,000. The prenatal mortality rate for 1989 was 11 per 1,000, twice that in West European countries. In 1989 the mortality rate for children of ages one to fourteen was twice as great as in Western Europe. The mortality rate for village children was more than twice the rate for city children. However, in 1990 some Bulgarian cities had mortality rates as low as 8.9 per 1,000, which compared favorably with the rates in Western Europe.

Poor conditions in maternity wards and shortages of baby needs worried new and prospective mothers. Hospital staff shortages meant that doctors and nurses were overworked and babies received scant attention. Expensive neonatal equipment was not available in every hospital, and transferral to better-equipped facilities was rare. In 1990 the standard minimum weight to ensure survival at birth was 1,000 grams, compared with the World Health Organization standard of 500 grams.

The number of medical doctors, nurses, and dentists in Bulgaria increased during the 1980s. Bulgaria had 27,750 doctors in 1988, almost 6,000 more than in 1980. This meant one doctor for every 323 Bulgarians. Some 257 hospitals were operating in 1990, with 105 beds per 1,000 people.

Like other aspects of society, health services underwent significant reform after 1989. In 1990 health officials declared that the socialist system of polyclinics in sectors serving 3,000 to 4,000 people did not satisfy the public's need for more complex diagnostic services. They claimed the system was too centralized and bureaucratic, provided too few incentives for health personnel, and lacked sufficient modern equipment and supplies. Thereafter, new emphasis was placed on allowing free choice of a family doctor and providing more general practitioners to treat families on an ongoing basis. Beginning in 1990, Bulgaria began accepting donations of money and medicine from Western countries. During the reform period, even common medicines such as aspirin were sometimes in short supply. Prices for medicines skyrocketed. Shortages

Bulgaria: A Country Study

of antibiotics, analgesics, dressings, sutures, and disinfectants were chronic.

In November 1989, the Council of Ministers decreed that doctors could be self-employed during their time off from their assigned clinics. Doctors could work for pay either in health facilities or in patients' homes, but with significant restrictions. When acting privately, they could not certify a patient's health or disability, issue prescriptions for free medicine, perform outpatient surgery or abortions, conduct intensive diagnostic tests, use anesthetics, or serve patients with infectious or venereal diseases. In 1990 the National Assembly extended the right of private practice to all qualified medical specialists, and private health establishments and pharmacies were legalized. Church-sponsored facilities were included in this provision. The 1990 law did not provide for a health insurance system, however, and establishment of such a system was not a high legislative priority for the early 1990s.

In 1991 the government created a National Health Council to be financed by 2.5 billion leva from the state budget plus funds from donors and payments for medical services. The goal of the new council was to create a more autonomous health system. Also in 1991, the Ministry of Health set up a Supreme Medical Council and a Pharmaceuticals Council to advise on proposed private health centers, pharmacies, and laboratories and to regulate the supply and distribution of medicine.

In 1988 the top three causes of death in Bulgaria were cardiovascular illnesses, cancer, and respiratory illnesses. An expert estimated that 88 percent of all deaths were caused by "socially significant diseases" that resulted from an unhealthy lifestyle and were thus preventable. Strokes, the most prevalent cause of death, killed a higher percentage of the population in Bulgaria than anywhere else in the world. In 1985 nearly 58,000 Bulgarians suffered strokes, and nearly 24,000 of them died. The mortality rate for strokes was especially high in northern Bulgaria, where it sometimes exceeded 300 fatalities per 100,000 persons. In villages the rate was three times as high as in the cities. Doctors cited unhealthy eating habits, smoking, alcohol abuse, and stress as lifestyle causes of the high stroke rate.

In 1990 about 35 percent of Bulgarian women and 25 percent of men were overweight. Sugar provided an average of 22 percent of the calories in Bulgarian diets, twice as much as the standard for balanced nutrition. Another 35 percent of average calories came from animal fat, also twice as much as the recommended amount. That percentage was likely much higher in the villages, where many animal products were made at home. Modernization of the food

supply generally led to increased consumption of carbohydrates and fats. In contrast, the traditional Bulgarian diet emphasized dairy products, beans, vegetables, and fruits. Large quantities of bread were always a key element of the Bulgarian diet. Average salt consumption was also very high. In 1990 the average Bulgarian consumed 14.5 kilograms of bread, 4.4 kilograms of meat, 12.6 kilograms of milk and milk products, 15 eggs, and 15 kilograms of fruits and vegetables per month.

In the 1980s, Bulgaria ranked tenth in the world in per capita tobacco consumption. Tobacco consumption was growing, especially among young people. Each Bulgarian consumed 7.34 liters of alcohol per month, not including huge amounts of homemade alcoholic beverages. Between 1962 and 1982, recorded alcohol consumption increased 1.6 times.

In 1990 an estimated 35 percent of the population risked serious health problems because of environmental pollution (see Environment, this ch.). In the most polluted areas, the sickness rate increased by as much as twenty times in the 1980s. By 1990, pollution was rated the fastest-growing cause of "socially significant diseases," particularly for respiratory and digestive disorders. Doctors in the smelting center of Srednogorie found that the incidence of cancer, high blood pressure, and dental disorders had increased significantly in the 1980s.

Pollution had an especially adverse effect on the immune systems of children. In the first few years of the Giurgiu plant's operation, the number of deformed children born across the Danube in Ruse increased 144 percent. From 1985 to 1990, this number increased from 27.5 to 39.7 per 1,000. Miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature, low-weight births doubled during that period. The infant mortality rate in Srednogorie was three times the national average in 1990. Excessive lead in the soil and water at Kŭrdzhali had caused a great increase in skin and infectious diseases in children there. In 1990 environmental authorities named the village of Dolno Ezerovo, near Burgas, the "sickest village in Bulgaria" because over 60 percent of its children suffered from severe respiratory illnesses and allergies.

In 1987 Bulgarian health authorities instituted limited mandatory testing for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). All prospective marriage partners, all pregnant women, and all transportation workers arriving from outside Bulgaria were required to be tested. Hemophiliacs, Bulgarian navy sailors who had traveled abroad after 1982, and students and workers visiting vacation resorts also fell under this rule. As of October 1989, some 2.5 million people in

Bulgaria, including about 66,000 foreigners, had been tested for HIV, and 81 Bulgarians were diagnosed as HIV-positive. According to government figures, six of that number had contracted AIDS. Foreigners diagnosed as HIV-positive were ordered to leave the country. Bulgaria estimated it would spend over US\$4 million to treat AIDS and HIV-positive patients in 1991.

Housing

In the postwar era, housing in Bulgaria improved significantly as more and better-quality homes were built. Expectations for housing availability also increased significantly in that time, however. According to a 1990 survey, 51 percent of all Bulgarians were dissatisfied with their current housing, and 73 percent (especially young families) did not believe that their current housing would be adequate for their future needs.

In 1990 the average home in Bulgaria had three rooms and an area of 65 square meters. This small average size reflected the policy of the command economy, which was to build many small one- or two-room apartments in large prefabricated housing complexes in order to maximize the number of available housing units and meet growing demand. In 1985 some 15.6 percent of all homes had one room, 31.5 percent had two rooms, 29.6 percent had three rooms, 14.4 percent had four rooms, and only 8.9 percent had five or more rooms. As a result, 65 percent of the population averaged only half a room per family member. Only 36 percent of families with children under eighteen had a separate children's room; 65 percent used the living room as a bedroom; and 57 percent used the kitchen as a bedroom. By 1990 communal apartments were becoming rarer, however; at that time, 12 percent of families shared a kitchen with another family.

The predominance of small housing units put larger families at a disadvantage. The situation was also difficult for young couples, 60 percent of whom were forced to stay in their parents' homes after marriage. In 1990 over 40 percent of homes included two or more families or other relatives of one family. Members of three or even four generations often lived together. Traditional acceptance of the extended family contributed to this situation, but long waits for separate housing also played a critical role. In 1979 the government established a special Young Newlywed Families Fund that ensured that new families would receive at least 25 percent of new government housing. This program delivered more housing to young families in the 1980s, but waiting lists also grew longer during that period.

Living space was much more available in villages than in cities. One-room homes were unusual in villages, and villagers were much more likely to live in separate homes than in apartment complexes. Village houses usually had more rooms, but they lacked many of the modern conveniences available in city apartments.

In 1985 hot running water, a shower or bathtub, and an indoor toilet were available in only 42.4 percent of homes. Between the 1975 and 1985 censuses, the number of households with bathtubs or showers almost doubled, from 34.0 percent to 63.7 percent. Still, only 39.3 percent of villagers had a bathtub or shower, and only 7.3 percent of them had an indoor toilet. In 1990 many villages lacked a sewage system and relied on wells for water. At that time, about 30 percent of Bulgarian homes had electric heating, and 34 percent were connected to a steam central heating system.

Housing planners often overlooked the need for convenient schools, stores, and recreational facilities. (For Bulgarians, proximity generally meant fifteen minutes' walk.) On the average, 70 to 80 percent of construction funds went to constructing the housing complexes themselves, and only 20 to 30 percent went to building facilities to serve the residents of the complexes. This was especially true in Sofia, where some of the newest neighborhoods were isolated from the rest of the city.

Housing was affected by the drastic reform-period price hikes in Bulgaria. At the end of 1990, apartment owners in Sofia were offering to sell two-room apartments at between 100,000 and 200,000 leva, or to rent them for 600 leva per month. Moreover, the new economic system gave landlords the right to evict tenants for nonpayment of rent. In 1990 prospective homebuyers frustrated by the steeper housing prices established a tent city in Sofia to dramatize the threat of homelessness (see *The Ferment of 1988-90*, ch. 4).

Also at risk for homelessness were many Bulgarian Turks who had emigrated in 1989 but returned after the overthrow of Zhivkov. By 1991 the state had bought many of the Turks' homes and resold them; other homes were occupied illegally. In 1991 many who lost their homes in this way went through the bureaucratic process of reclaiming their property. In 1990 Sofia created a new foundation to help the homeless, especially elderly and single people, and to aid in the building and financing of homes.

Education

Before the National Revival of the mid-nineteenth century, education usually took the form of memorization of the liturgy and other religious material. Supporters of the National Revival movement

were instrumental in establishing and supporting Bulgarian schools in the cities—first for boys, and later for girls as well. These activists also introduced the *chitalishta*. Often located next to a school, the *chitalishta* served as community cultural centers as well as reading rooms. The first schools, which began opening in the early nineteenth century, often did not go beyond a basic education; students wishing to continue their education had to go abroad.

The educational system established after Bulgaria gained its independence retained the same basic structure through 1989. The 1878 Temporary Law on National Schools established free compulsory education in primary school for both sexes. The schools were designed to teach reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. In practice, not everyone received that education, but the law gave the villages an incentive to open new schools. By the turn of the century, one-third of all Bulgarian villages had primary schools. In the early days, the immediate demand for a large number of teachers meant that many new teachers had little more education than their students. Later reforms specified a seven-year standard education with a curriculum based on a West European model. Some peasants, especially uneducated ones, withdrew their children from school because they believed the classes were unrelated to peasant life. This situation led to the offering of textbooks and prizes as an incentive for students from poorer families to remain in school.

Communist rule in Bulgaria brought forth a new approach to education as a means of indoctrinating Marxist theory and communist values. Literacy was promoted so that the communist-controlled press could be disseminated throughout society. New classes for both adults and children aimed at providing as many as possible with a high-school education and abolishing illiteracy. Schools switched their focus from liberal arts to technical training and introduced a curriculum modeled on that of the Soviet Union. Russian language study was introduced for all, from kindergartners to adults who had already completed their education. Copies of *Pravda*, the primary newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, were distributed even in isolated villages. After the overthrow of Zhivkov, however, English became the most studied foreign language in Bulgaria, and the study of Russian declined dramatically.

In 1979 Zhivkov introduced a sweeping educational reform, claiming that Marxist teachings on educating youth were still not being applied completely. Zhivkov therefore created Unified Secondary Polytechnical Schools (*Edinna sredna politekhnicheska uchilishta*, ESPU), in which all students would receive the same general

education. The system united previously separate specialized middle schools in a single, twelve-grade program heavily emphasizing technical subjects. In 1981 a national program introduced computers to most of the ESPUs. The change produced a chaotic situation in which teaching plans and programs had to be completely overhauled and new textbooks issued to reflect the new educational emphasis. This project proved unworkable, and by 1985 new specialized schools again were being established (see table 10, Appendix).

The fall of Zhivkov resulted in a complete restructuring of the country's educational system. In retrospect Bulgarian educators recognized that the socialist way of educating was not only bureaucratic, boring, and impersonal, but also led to disregard for the rights of the individual, intolerance of the opinions of others, and aggressive behavior. The centralized system with its regional hierarchies was therefore scrapped in favor of a system of educational councils in which every 400 teachers could elect a delegate to the National Council of Teachers. The first goal of the new organization was to depoliticize the schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Education.

In 1991 the Bulgarian educational system consisted of three types of schools: state, municipal, and private (including religious). The grade levels were primary (first to fourth grade), basic (fifth to seventh grade), and secondary (eighth to twelfth grade). Children began first grade at age six or seven and were required to attend school until age sixteen. Parents also had the option of enrolling their children in kindergarten at age five. Secondary school students had the choice of studying for three years at professional-vocational schools or for four years at technical schools or general high schools. Religious schools operated only on the high-school level. Specialized high schools taught foreign languages, mathematics, and music; admittance to them was by special entrance exams. Special programs for gifted and talented children began as early as the fifth grade. Special schools also operated for handicapped children. Children suffering from chronic illnesses could receive their schooling in a hospital or sanatorium.

Prior to the postcommunist reform era, about 25,000 students dropped out every year before reaching their sixteenth birthday; another 25,000 failed to advance to the next grade. Under the new system, parents could be fined 500 to 1,000 leva if their children failed to attend school; fines also were levied for pupils retained in grade for an extra year.

Public opinion on the educational reform focused mainly on depoliticization. By the 1990-91 school year, new textbooks had been

introduced in many subjects, but many of them were not completely free of socialist rhetoric. A first-grade mathematics textbook published in 1990 contained the following exercise: "Count how many words there are in this sentence: 'I am grateful to the Party, for it leads my country to beautiful, radiant life and vigilantly protects us from war.'" A newly published music book contained songs about the party, a communist youth organization, and Lenin. Many teachers likewise continued to espouse the communist rhetoric in which their profession had been long and firmly indoctrinated. In late 1990, about 50,000 Sofia University students demonstrated against poor education and against continued requirements to attend courses in Marxism. Their protest caused the university to eliminate compulsory political indoctrination courses. The 1991 Law on Public Education declared that "no political activity is allowed in the system of public education."

Depolitization was expected to be a slow process because of the extent to which the schools had been politicized before 1990. At the end of 1990, over 90 percent of all teachers were still members of the Bulgarian Socialist (formerly Communist) Party. For this reason, the Law on Public Education prohibited teachers from becoming members of political parties for a period of three years, beginning in 1991. Because the Zhivkov regime had tinkered often with Bulgaria's educational system, longtime teachers had developed a cynicism toward reform of any type. This attitude hampered the removal of the old socialist structures from the educational system.

Some students married and began families while they were still in school, and two-student families were not uncommon. Such families often depended on help from parents because of their low income and because of a shortage of student family housing. By 1990 most Bulgarian students worked in their free time, unlike their predecessors in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Reform also reached higher education. In 1990 a new law on academic freedom emphasized the concept of an intellectual market in which universities, teachers, and students must maintain high performance levels to stay competitive. The law gave every institution of higher learning the right to manage its teaching and research activities without government interference. This right included control over curriculum, number of students, standards for student admissions and teacher hirings, training and organization of faculty, and the level of contact with other institutions of higher learning in Bulgaria and abroad. Students received the right to choose their own professors. The higher education law was criticized

for withholding students' rights and because the legislature had failed to consult students in the law's formulation.

In 1991 experts evaluated the state university system as weak in critically needed technical fields of study. The availability of interested students was also questioned. In the 1990-91 school year, no graduate students with enterprise scholarships majored in subjects such as computer systems, artificial intelligence systems, or ecology and environmental protection. Graduate programs in critical nontechnical fields such as management economics, marketing, production management, and finance also had no students.

After the overthrow of Zhivkov, France and Germany made early commitments to help Bulgaria carry out educational reforms. In 1991 the United States began planning a new American college in Blagoevgrad, where students would be taught in English using American educational methods. The first 200 students were to include 160 Bulgarians, 20 students from neighboring European countries, and 20 Americans majoring in Balkan studies. The University of Maine was to supply the teachers. Plans called for business and economics to be the major areas of concentration. Affordability was a potential barrier to participation in this plan by Bulgarian students; the cost was low by American standards, but far above the average Bulgarian's price range. And the tuition-free Bulgarian university system was expected to lure many qualified students from the new university. Nevertheless, Western education assistance was an important symbolic step in moving the social institutions of Bulgaria into the European mainstream, from which they had been isolated for forty-five years.

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Because the societal change stimulated in Bulgaria by the process of democratization is likely to continue through the 1990s, translations of the Bulgarian press are an invaluable source of current information. A wide variety of articles and broadcasts on social topics, as well as government documents and laws, is translated in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service's *Daily Report: East Europe* and the Joint Publication Research Service's *JPRS Report: East Europe*. Amnesty International's *Bulgaria: Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks* is an impartial source of information on the Turks and other minorities during the assimilation campaign of the 1980s. Hugh Poulton's *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict* includes material on ethnic policy and regional issues after the overthrow of Zhivkov. *Kak Zhiveem* (How We Live) is a new Bulgarian-language sociological magazine that includes Western-style surveys

Bulgaria: A Country Study

on topics such as housing and the standard of living. *Bulgarien*, volume six in the German series of southeast European handbooks, offers chapter-length treatment of most aspects of society, including education, minorities, population, and religion; some articles are in English, most are in German. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)