MODERNITY AND TRADITION:
EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL IN BULGARIA

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Project IME:
Identities and Modernities in Europe:
European and National Identity Construction Programmes,
Politics, Culture, History and Religion

International Center for Minority Studies
and Intercultural Relations
Sofia, 2012
This book is an outcome of the international research project IME – Identities and Modernities in Europe: European and National Identity Construction Programmes, Politics, Culture, History and Religion (2009-2012). IME was coordinated by Dr. Atsuko Ichijo from the Kingston University, UK. It involved Universities and research institutes from Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

The project was funded by the Seventh Framework Program of the European Commission (FP7 2007-2013)
Theme: SSH-2007-5.2.1 – Histories and Identities: articulating national and European identities
Funding scheme: Collaborative projects (small or medium scale focused research projects)
Grant agreement no.: 215949

For more information about project IME, visit:
http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/helen-bamber/ime

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ISBN: 978-954-8872-70-6
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In May 2009, the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) started to work on the international research project IME – Identities and Modernities in Europe: European and National Identity Construction Programmes, Politics, Culture, History and Religion. The project was funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission (FP7 2007-2013). IMIR was a part of an international consortium, which included research institutes and universities from nine countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The coordinator of the entire project was Dr. Atsuko Ichijo from the Kingston University, UK.

The project IME studied three main aspects of the European identities: their essence; the ways in which they are formed; and in what ways they are likely to change in future. IME had a very wide geographic range and covered almost all parts of the European continent, which made it possible not just to study different European identities, but also to examine the specific ways in which they are formed and maintained in diverse social and cultural conditions. The aim of the project was to establish the commonalities between the European identities in the nine countries and to assess the possible trajectories these identities might follow through the continuing process of European integration.

The research investigated the attitudes and perceptions of three groups of actors. The first one included representatives of the state and state

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1 Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames; Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens; University of Helsinki, Helsinki; Sciences Po (Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques), Paris; Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI), Essen; The Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), Sofia; Bilgi University, Istanbul; University of Zagreb, Zagreb.
institutions, as well as officials of the EU institutions operating in the nine countries. The second group consisted of different experts and people employed in cultural institutions, the media, non-governmental organisations, representatives of religious and minority organizations, and other civil society actors. The third investigated group were the ordinary citizens.

Various relevant social factors were taken into consideration during the research. They included the strength and impact of the civil society, the dominating religious tradition, and the geo-political and historical heritage. In order to better comprehend the complexity of the European identities, the project gave special consideration to the religious and ethnic minorities and their identity construction programmes.

The results from the research conducted in Bulgaria are presented in this book. Although only three people (Marko Hajdinjak, Maya Kosseva, Antonina Zhelyazkova) are named as the authors of the chapters included in the book, the extensive research work the book is based on was a collective endeavour. The successful realization of the project would not have been possible without Violeta Angelova and Lubomir Petkashev from IMIR, Donka Dimitrova from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and the students Hristo Hristozov and Iva Lazarova. They conducted a large number of interviews, on which the fourth chapter of this book is based. Last, but not least, the successful research work would not have been possible without the administrative-accounting support of Zornica Karadzhova.

The research work on project IME was divided into several stages. During the first phase, we conducted an analytical overview of literature on two interconnected processes – the Europeanization and the modernization of Bulgaria from 1878 to today. From the very beginning of its journey towards modernity as an independent contemporary country, Bulgaria has been oscillating between two extremes: (Western) Europe has been seen as either a role model, which Bulgaria has to follow unconditionally in order to develop and modernize, or as an
obstacle or even a threat on the path towards authentic Bulgarian modernity. There were several turning points in the history of the Bulgarian-European relations, when the poles of this ambivalent relationship changed their place: the Berlin Congress, the First World War and the 1919 peace treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, 9 September 1944 (the communist coup d’état), and 10 November 1989 (the end of communist rule). Since 1989, the general desire and determination to “return to Europe” have been stronger than ever in the newer history of Bulgaria. Formally, on 1 January 2007 Bulgaria achieved its goal and completed its long journey towards modernity and Europe. This process, which lasted almost 130 years, is briefly presented and analysed in the chapter “Catching Up with the Uncatchable: European Dilemmas and Identity Construction on Bulgarian Path to Modernity.”

The research work on this historical overview placed numerous questions on the table. The most important were the following: does the Bulgarian society believe that Bulgaria is truly at the end of its journey; and do the Bulgarian authorities, civil society, and citizens belonging to different ethnic and religious communities recognize Bulgaria today as a modern and European country. We looked for the answers to these two questions during the fieldwork conducted from September 2009 to February 2011.

The main aim of the second research phase was to examine how the Bulgarian state and the EU institutions in Bulgaria try to influence the process of identity formation – both the national and European ones. We analysed a number of political documents, laws and other legislative acts, programmes and strategies of the government and various ministries, as well as public statements, speeches and interviews of Bulgarian politicians (presidents, prime ministers, ministers). Documents and press releases of the offices of European institutions in Sofia were also analysed. These sources provided us with a very good insight into how various Bulgarian governments formed their policies for formation and consolidation of the national and European identities in the country. The results of our research are presented in the chapter “Identity
Construction through Education, State Promotion and Diaspora Policies in Bulgaria.” The chapter is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the activities of the European institutions in Bulgaria, through which they attempt to consolidate the European self-awareness of the Bulgarian citizens, while the second part is dedicated to the state strategies for formation of the national and European identities. For the purpose of the research, three very different but very interesting policy areas were selected: the state strategy for presentation of a positive image of Bulgaria abroad; the policies aimed at the Bulgarian diaspora; and the educational policies and strategies.

The genuine fieldwork occurred during the third stage of the project. The fieldwork was divided into two phases. The focus of both was on education – one of the most powerful instruments states have at their disposal for influencing and changing the ways in which the citizens perceive their identities. In both phases, a similar interview guide was used, divided into four main groups of questions:

1. Multiculturalism in Bulgarian schools, with a focus on the issue of education of Roma children
2. Influence of liberalization and globalisation on the Bulgarian education and above all the role of the Bologna process
3. History education and the reform of history textbooks from a mono-national historical narrative into a multi-cultural and European one
4. Religious education and the place of religion and religious symbols in schools

The main difference between the two phases of the fieldwork was the profile of the respondents. In the first phase, we conducted 15 semi-standardised interviews with representatives of the civil society or other individuals with a strong social influence, while in the second phase, 28 ordinary citizens with different social, professional, ethnic and religious profiles were interviewed. Some of these altogether 43 interviews were made in Sofia, and the rest in different towns and villages across Bulgaria (some places were chosen because significant Roma com-
munities live there, while in others the Muslim Bulgarians represent the majority population). Through their answers, the respondents revealed how they position themselves and the Bulgarian society within the triangle Bulgarians/Bulgarian, Europeans/European and modernity/ modern. In other words, they revealed how they perceive their identity and how they see Bulgaria vis-à-vis the European Union / Europe and modernity. These views are analysed and presented in the chapter “Living Next Door to ‘Europe’: Bulgarian Education between Tradition and Modernity, and between the European and National.”

The last chapter of this book – “Modernity, Europe and Nation,” summarizes the results of the entire project and compares how state officials, civil society actors and private citizens understand and (re) construct their identities as national, European and modern subjects. Most often, modernity is understood as a synonym for “European.” On the one hand, this carries a positive meaning: modernisation and Europeanization are two interlinked processes with a common goal – to make Bulgaria a better place to live in. On the other hand, the same process can be seen as institutionalised and imposed from outside of the country. A copied and mechanically assembled “European modernity” hardly fits the Bulgarian realities and thus cannot lead to the desired results. At the same time, the link between the Bulgarian and European identity is complex and complicated. Although Bulgaria is already an EU member, Bulgarians largely continue to perceive their country as somewhat “exterritorial” to the other EU countries and in many respects they feel that they live next door to “Europe” rather than in it.

The successful realization of the IME project would not have been possible without the contribution of the following people:

In the first place, I want to express sincere gratitude to all our respondents, who were willing to devote their precious time and share with us their opinions, evaluations, examples, prognoses, and in this way shared with us also a part of themselves. I am also indebted to the
experts who participated in our focus group and who analysed and commented on our preliminary findings from the fieldwork.

I thank the colleagues from the international consortium for the exciting, fruitful and beneficial cooperation and especially Dr. Atsuko Ichijo for the flawless, tireless and spirited coordination and management of the project.

I owe my gratitude to Nevena Tosheva-Hajdinjak for the language editing and comments on the book, and to Donka Dimitrova, Hristo Hristozov and Ina Lazarova for their valuable participation in the fieldwork.

And finally, a huge thank you to my colleagues from IMIR: Antonina Zhelyazkova, Violeta Angelova, Maya Kosseva, Zornica Karadzhova and Lubomir Petkashev. They all immensely contributed to the successful implementation of this project.

Marko Hajdinjak
The following chapter provides a critical review of the selected relevant literature on two connected and interdependent issues: the history of the complicated and ambiguous relation of Bulgaria and “Europe,” and the Bulgarian path(s) to modernity. Europe has always been an important reference point for Bulgaria. Throughout most of the Bulgarian modern history, Europe was the “important other” the Bulgarian society looked up to and whose example it tried to follow. To some extent, this was true even during the Cold War, when the Bulgarian role model became the Soviet Union, as the communist Bulgaria tried to outrun and surpass the “decaying western capitalism.”

At different times in history, Europe sometimes appeared from the Bulgarian point of view as a guiding light, which directed the country towards progress and modernity, and sometimes as a menace, threatening the Bulgarian national interests and undermining the national identity. Likewise, the Bulgarian path to modernity oscillated between the two extremes – one in which modernity equalled Europe, and another in which Europe was viewed as an obstacle on the unique Bulgarian modernisation trajectory.

Apart from providing a quite comprehensive list of the relevant state of the art on the discussed issues, the research work for this chapter also identified blank spaces in the existing scholarly work. In this way, the main lines of investigation were set for the field research conducted in the period September 2009 – February 2011. The results of the research are presented in the following chapters of this book.
Part I: Construction and maintenance of European identity in Bulgaria

The Bulgarian nation was a relative late-comer to the modern nation-building processes. Situated on the Balkan Peninsula, on the border between Christianity and Islam and between Europe and Asia, Bulgaria was established as a modern state in 1878 after the Russian-Turkish war (1877-1878), which ended the five centuries of Ottoman rule over the Bulgarian lands.\(^1\) In Bulgaria, the event is generally referred to as the Liberation, and the Russian-Turkish war is known as the Liberation War. The period of the re-establishment of the Bulgarian statehood was marked by a strong emphasis on the Bulgarian national identity and Christian religion.

Separation from the Ottoman heritage and Islam was strongly linked to the notion about the Bulgarian belonging to Europe. Europe was seen as a synonym of modernity and progress – something Bulgaria had been allegedly deprived of because it was occupied and dominated by a non-European, Islamic and “backward” empire.

However, the Bulgarian “return” to the European family was met by a very unenthusiastic reception. Fearing the appearance of a too powerful Russian ally on the Balkans, the Great European Powers decided at the Congress of Berlin (13 June - 13 July 1878) to cut Bulgaria into several parts and less than a third of what was perceived by the Bulgarians as their national territory actually became an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria.\(^2\) A so-called province of Eastern Rumelia remained a part of the Ottoman Empire with a special status, while what is today the Republic of Macedonia remained an integral part of the Empire. In 1885, the Bulgarian Principality annexed Eastern Rumelia and in

\(^1\) For a short overview of the Bulgarian nation- and state-building processes, see Zhelyazkova, 2008, pp. 570-582.
\(^2\) Even the reduced Principality of Bulgaria, ruled by a prince elected by a congress of Bulgarian notables and approved by the Great Powers, was not recognised as a fully independent state, but remained under the nominal Ottoman sovereignty.
October 1908\textsuperscript{3}, after Prince Ferdinand had himself crowned as Tsar, it was unilaterally proclaimed a fully independent kingdom.

The Berlin Congress marked the beginning of the long ambiguous relation of Bulgaria with “Europe.” Although its geographical position clearly placed Bulgaria on the very edge of Europe, the Bulgarians took pride in their history as one of the first European states (established in 681) and in their perception that in the early Middle Ages they and the neighbouring Byzantine Empire were the Europe.\textsuperscript{4} The humiliating manner in which the Great Powers treated Bulgaria in Berlin soured the relations of the young country with the Western European states and strengthened its bond with the Tsarist Russia. Despite that, “Europe” remained an ideal Bulgaria was trying to imitate and achieve, both in its struggle to modernise socially, economically and politically, and in its efforts to accelerate the nation-building processes and consolidate the newly established nation-state.

The Bulgarian nationalism included elements of the German cultural and ethnic nationalism and of the French civic nationalism. The Bulgar-

\textsuperscript{3} October 1908 saw a significant redistribution of geo-political cards on the Balkans. In addition to proclamation of Bulgarian independence, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina which it occupied in 1878.

\textsuperscript{4} Some Bulgarian historians go as far as to claim that Bulgaria was the first European nation state and that Bulgarians were the first Europeans. For example, Bozhidar Dimitrov, the doyen among the nationalistic historians, a long-time director of the National Museum of History and a former minister in the Bulgarian government (who was in charge of the national historical heritage and the Bulgarian diaspora) has a book called Bulgarians – The First Europeans. In it, he claims that the first highly developed European civilisation (namely the Thracians) appeared in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BC in the present Bulgarian lands. Thus, the ancestors of the present-day Bulgarians were the first Europeans. According to Dimitrov, Bulgarians were also the first to develop and implement the concept of nation state, thus laying down the foundations of contemporary Europe, as the nation state became the model for Europe’s development instead of the concept of universal Christian empire. Finally, Dimitrov praises the unique historical role of Bulgaria among the Slavs – namely the creation and spreading of the Cyrillic script and the liturgy in the Old Church Slavonic (i.e. Bulgarian) language. See Dimitrov, 2002.

Most of Dimitrov’s claims are based on selective, manipulative and inconsistent interpretation of history and can be easily challenged, but are noted here because of the exceptional popularity of his works in the country and the authority he enjoys in important intellectual and political circles.
ian Principality was a (semi)state in need of citizens, while the majority of ethnic Bulgarians, which were left outside its borders, represented a religious, linguistic and cultural community in need of a state in order to become a nation. The Bulgarian nation-building process was therefore on the one side driven by a purely ethnic nationalism with the clear goal of establishing a Bulgarian state for the (ethnically defined) Bulgarian nation. However, the presence of a large number of people belonging to various confessional and ethnic communities different from the Orthodox Christian, Bulgarian speaking majority, also necessitated a different approach – hence the elements of civic nationalism and the periodic attempts of the Bulgarian state to come to terms with the ethnic and religious diversity in the country and to make Bulgaria a home for all its citizens.

The streak of the so-called national catastrophes (defeats in the Second Balkan and both World Wars) in which Bulgaria lost significant territories, which were seen by the Bulgarians as a part of their historical national space, had extremely negative consequences both for the development of the national self-consciousness and for the country’s relations with “Europe.” The development of the Bulgarian national identity was deeply troubled by two negative aspects. The first was the perennial need to blame someone else for own failures and problems. The other was the related need for paternalistic salvation from outside, leading to the mechanical copying of foreign actions and models in a (fruitless) desire to repeat their success (Проданов, 2006, pp. 23-52).

After the WWII and the coming of Communist Party to power, the Bulgarians abandoned nationalism and to a large extent even their national identity for the sake of (proclaimed) internationalism and the creation of a supranational socialist identity. The last two decades of the communist rule, however, witnessed the return to nationalism as the ruling elites tried to preserve their legitimacy by rallying the masses under the nationalistic-patriotic banner. The obvious victims of this nationalistic drive of the Bulgarian Communist Party were the Bulgarian minorities (especially Turks and Muslim Bulgarians). Another less visible
“victim” were the country’s relations with the Western Europe. Already practically frozen since 1945, the relations hit the all-time low in the 1980s, when Bulgaria earned international condemnation for the treatment of its minorities.

After 1989, Bulgaria emerged on a troublesome and painful transition not just towards becoming a functioning democracy and market economy, but also towards redefining its relations with “Europe” and finding its proper place in it. Two decades later, the transition seems completed. The democracy is functioning, the economy (after the collapse in 1996-97) is relatively stable, and to top it all, Bulgaria became an EU member on 1 January 2007. However, after a long night of partying, fireworks and champagne, the Bulgarians woke up into the same old reality. Bulgaria is still the poorest EU member, widely perceived (above all by the Bulgarians themselves) as the most corrupt and crime-ridden one. Above all, still deeply confused about the European nature of their national identity, many Bulgarians do not feel completely “European,” nor do they see their country as fully “European.”

1. “She loves me, she loves me not” – the European dilemmas and identity construction in Bulgaria between the Liberation and the WWI

Studies of the Bulgarian identity and the processes of its formation and development became especially popular in the 1990s, attracting the interest of philosophers, sociologists and cultural anthropologists (Еленков, Даскалов, 1994; Еленков, 1998; Кръстева, Кацарски, Богомилова, Макариев, 1995; Кръстева, Димитрова, Богомилова, Кацарски, 1996; Кръстева, 1998). Historians also analysed this theme, but most often as a part of their studies of the Bulgarian national question in the period after the Liberation (Андреева, 1998). The works dealing with the Bulgarian identity in the post-Liberation period most often examined its connection with the Bulgarian national question (problem of Bulgarians who remained outside the borders of the state),
the development of the national culture, and the nation-building efforts of the Bulgarian intelligentsia of the time.

The first period of the search for the Bulgarian identity and its place in Europe lasted from the Liberation to the end of the WWI (1878-1918). It was marked by a strongly expressed European orientation and a search for the Bulgarian place among the European nations. This abruptly changed after 1918 as a consequence of the fact that Bulgaria was among the losers of the WWI and was severely punished for its participation on the wrong side. The period between the two world wars (1918-1941) was thus marked by a considerable Bulgarian disappointment with Europe. In the spirit of the European nationalistic ideas, the Bulgarian intellectuals began exploring the Bulgarian Golden Age and looking for the “genuine Bulgarian” features – for something that made Bulgarians unique. Yet, even in this period the Europeananness of Bulgaria was never questioned. Rather, the objective was to find evidence about the ancient Bulgarian presence in the European cultural and political space – to demonstrate that Bulgaria had been European much before Europe itself became European (Андreeва, 1998, pp. 56-58; Еленков, Даскалов, 1994).

The pro-European orientation of the Bulgarians was clearly expressed even before the Liberation, as can be seen from the materials, featured on the pages of the Bulgarian newspaper Напредук (Progress), published from 1874 to 1877 in Istanbul. In interesting contrast to the press published by the Bulgarians, who lived outside the Ottoman Empire, which featured a very ambivalent attitude towards Europe (quite often presented as a despotic, heartless and narcissistic observer of the suffering of small nations), the Bulgarian press published in the Ottoman Empire saw in Europe a model and inspiration. The study conducted by D. Andreeva came up with some interesting findings. Reflecting the popular moods among the Bulgarians in the years before the establishment of the Bulgarian state, the newspaper Напредук featured editorials and articles, which referred to the “common European household” and to the Bulgarian place in “the European family.” Many of its issues published
in 1876 talked with the language not entirely unrelated to the phrases typical for the contemporary EU vocabulary: “common agreements,” “international law”, “common European interest.” Europe was often seen as a symbol of modernity and progress. European countries were described as “constantly developing and aspiring to improve the life of its citizens.” News about European technological or scientific achievements were enthusiastically presented to the readers of the newspaper. At the same time, despite being painfully aware and quite critical (to the point of self-irony) of the underdevelopment of the Bulgarian society, the Napreduk editors did not tolerate European criticism of Bulgarians and of Bulgarian national interests. Each publication in the foreign press highlighting Bulgarian flaws or underestimating Bulgarian importance was refuted in a pedant and thorough manner (Андърева, 2007).

T. Stoycheva has analysed different European models Bulgarians used in order to reconstruct their (self)image in the years before and after the Liberation from the Ottoman rule. These models ranged from political (import of political discourses and ideologies) through architectural (construction and reconstruction of Bulgarian towns on the western and central European example) to cultural (especially the popular culture like cabarets and urban “schlager” songs). Analysing the lyrics of a schlager called “I’ve Decided to Get Married,” Stoycheva looked at another important change – gender relations and female emancipation. In addition to the traditional qualities like honour and morality, which were required from a Bulgarian woman, she was now expected to acquire proper education so that she could better serve her man and the newly established country. The problem was that from a male perspective, women always had either too little or too much education. The male character in the said schlager thus complained that his Europeanised wife knew “who Schiller is and who Goethe is;” but that did not matter as she was “a real Satan.” Stoycheva concluded that through the presentation of such relations in the popular culture, the Bulgarians tried to rationalise the sometimes painful social transformations – like women crossing from the seclusion of private space into the public one (Стойчева, 2007, pp. 279-285).
As marked by T. Boneva, “in addition to the sustainable and stable identity, we can also observe the situational identity, expressed under certain circumstances, and the multiple identities, through which the group adapts to various political and social conditions” (Бонева, 2006, p. 284). N. Aretov adds that “the net of identities represents a complex structure with its own hierarchy, where ethnic and religious belonging forms the base of the pyramid” (Аретов, 2001, p. 12). For this reason, throughout the 19th and at the beginning of 20th century, the Bulgarians perceived and presented themselves as Slavs, Orthodox Christians, Balkanians, and Europeans. To claim their place in Europe, they looked back to their historical roots as one of the oldest states on the continent.

Despite this rich historical background, the modern nation-building processes in the country started very late compared to Western Europe and even to some Balkan neighbours (like Greece, Romania and Serbia). The Bulgarian intellectuals from various scientific fields therefore had an important task at the turn of the 20th century: to define the Bulgarian identity as a part of the Slavic, Orthodox Christian and Balkan identities, and to defend its Europeanness. At the same time, they also had to look for the features that made the Bulgarian identity unique and ancient in the spirit of the nationalist theories of the time. The aspiration for a precise definition of the Bulgarian identity was also linked to the question of the Bulgarian territories, which remained outside the borders of the Bulgarian state. The fact that certain identity segments sometimes had desired and sometimes undesired effects presented an additional problem. Orthodox Christianity thus separated Bulgarians from the Muslim Turks, but it also divided them from Catholic and Protestant Europe. The Slavic identity also drove Bulgarians away from “Europe” and strengthened the Russian influence in Bulgaria; at the same time it complicated the search for features distinguishing the Bulgarians from the neighbouring Serbs (Даскалов, 1994, p. 45).

D. Mishkova writes about the importance of the Slavic and Orthodox components of the Bulgarian identity – especially as a cultural and ci-
ivilisational opposite of “Europeanism.” Many Bulgarians viewed Europe as something different from and quite often antagonistic to both Slavdom and Orthodox Christianity. The mistrust towards (Western) Europe in some circles of the Bulgarian society was further intensified by the rather paradoxical fact that the most pro-western Bulgarians were at the same time also Turkophiles. Before 1878, this group believed that the Bulgarian society can progress only within the Ottoman political frame and the western cultural frame. The newspaper *Turcia* (Turkey), the main forum of the pro-western Bulgarian Turkophiles, thus wrote in 1873 that “our nation needs an example for its economic and intellectual perfection, it needs to imitate some more enlightened nation (...), Russia cannot be such an example.” The true civilisation, the true guiding light could be found only in Western Europe and there lied the civilisational salvation of Bulgaria. The fact that the Turkophiles were the most outspoken supporters of the Bulgarian western orientation did little to improve the image of Europe in the eyes of the early Bulgarian Euro-sceptics. For them, the overzealous and non-critical admiration of the West became synonymous with national betrayal (Мишкова, 2005).

In that period, Russia viewed its cultural and educational activities among the Balkan Slavic population as exceptionally important. In the 1860s, the Russian government developed an extensive political programme with the aim of blocking the cultural, political and ideological western penetration into the Balkan area. Panslavism and Orthodox Christian unity were the main “weapons” Russia used to counter the modern western influences like nationalism, liberalism and enlightenment. Education was seen as the most appropriate way of implementing the political agenda. The Bulgarian youths who were awarded scholarships for Russian universities were expected not only to be educated in the spirit of Orthodox Christianity and panslavism, but to actively spread these ideas after their return to Bulgaria. They were also expected to be loyal to Russia and to actively work in defence of its political interests on the Balkans. Before 1878, 220 young Bulgarians received their education in Russian universities. In comparison, 149 graduated from universities in Istanbul, 156 in the Habsburg Em-
pire, 71 in Romania, 69 in France, 45 in Germany, and 28 in Greece (Прешленова, 2007).

The Western-Russian rivalry over Bulgaria intensified after the Bulgarian separation from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. Initially, Russia continued to have an advantage, as it was rightfully seen by many Bulgarians at the liberator. In just a few years, however, the tables had turned, and in 1886 Russia cut the diplomatic ties with Bulgaria (mainly in reaction to the Bulgarian annexation of Eastern Rumelia, which was not sanctioned by Russia), which turned its eyes firmly to the West.

The Bulgarian students had to consider these political developments. Austria-Hungary became the most popular destination among the Bulgarian students and between 1879 and 1918, 487 Bulgarians studied in Vienna, and additional 192 in Graz. Another popular destination was France, which was traditionally active in attracting foreign students (before the WWI it was the country with the highest number of foreign university students). At the beginning of the 20th century, Germany also purposefully invited many foreign students and established a number of Bulgarian-German societies with the goal of spreading its influence in Bulgaria. Around 1910, the Bulgarians represented the second largest group of foreign students in Germany after the Russians (Зидарова, 1996, p. 61). Understandably, the cultural preferences and personal biographies of these students later transformed into political and ideological inclinations for the countries they had studied in (Даккало, 2005, p. 425). At the same time, the fact that many Bulgarians received education and worked all over the continent strengthened their self-perception as Europeans.

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6 France remained popular among the Bulgarian students also after the World War II. In 1926–1927, of the 1,247 Bulgarians studying abroad, 537 were based in France (Колев, 2005, pp. 265–269).
It is interesting to note that about one fifth of the Bulgarian students abroad were women. They most often studied medicine, pedagogy or foreign languages and worked as teachers after returning to Bulgaria. Among them were also many women belonging to minority communities – mostly Catholics, Armenians and Jews. The selection of the country where they studied depended on the foreign political orientation of Bulgaria. After 1913, the main educational centres of the Bulgarian female students naturally became the countries from the Triple Alliance and after 1918, the countries that – like Bulgaria – had suffered from the post-WWI peace treaties (Назърска, 2003, pp. 121-127).

In general, the period up to the end of the WWI can be considered as the period of the most active and enthusiastic adoption of the European models. At the time, Bulgarians most strongly felt that they belonged to Europe, although this was manifested mostly through the architecture, fashion and lifestyle, and very rarely through the public-political practices (Даскалов, 1994, p. 46).

2. “To arm ourselves with their arms” – the identity search between the two World Wars

As the losing side in the Second Balkan War and the First World War, Bulgaria was forced to conclude humiliating peace treaties, which were perceived in the country as a national catastrophe. This resulted in reconsideration of the Bulgarian attitude towards “Europe” (or better said – towards that embodiment of Europe, which emerged victorious from the war), which (from a Bulgarian perspective) treated the country in an exceptionally arrogant and unfair manner.

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7 The most important was the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, signed on 27 November 1919 at Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. According to it, Bulgaria had to cede Western Thrace to Greece (thereby losing its direct outlet to the Aegean Sea), substantial areas on its western border to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the region of Southern Dobruja to Romania. Bulgaria was also required to reduce its army to 20,000 men and pay reparations exceeding $400 million (1919, Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Bulgaria)
The quick endorsement of the European models started to be viewed as suspicious. A turn back to Russia was no longer a possibility, as the huge Slavic and Orthodox “brother” in the meantime experienced the October Revolution and transformed into the Soviet Union. Therefore all national-psychological analyses and studies turned their attention to the search for “the uniquely Bulgarian” features of the national identity and character (Славейков, 1923; Кръстев, 1898, pp. 3-13; Михайлоски, 1940; Казанджиев, 1935; Шейтанов, 1925, 1933, 1940; Янеv, 1930; Христoв, 1929; Йоцов, 1934). The actions of the pro-European Bulgarian intelligentsia from the pre-WWI period were scrutinised with the intention of determining its responsibility for the failure. The prevailing opinion was that the premature and superficial adoption of the European models at the expense of the Bulgarian traditions, which had been neglected and abandoned, had significantly contributed to such an outcome (See Даскалов, 1998; Еленков, 1998). The pre-war period was seen as the time, when the foreign “became strong as a hurricane, which shook the foundations of our life and identity. That was the time when we stood by doing nothing, while all that was foreign became our master and cult” (Тричков, 1921, p. 53).

An influential Bulgarian historian P. Mutafchiev believes that throughout history the problems of the Bulgarian development had been a consequence of the untimely and inadequate adoption of foreign cultural models – from the ties with the Byzantine Empire to the pre-WWI Europe. According to Mutafchiev, Bulgarians were thrown into a “spiritual and political muddle” as a result of the crushing defeats in the 1912-1913 and 1914-1918 wars, and were additionally shaken by “internal antagonisms.” He wrote that “with shattered ideals and humiliated morality, we lost all of our internal support and faith in ourselves, and started to wander without any goal or direction, turning into a promised land for foreign influences, denying all that is ours, even our existence as a nation” (Мутафчиев, 1987, pp. 160-161; Мутафчиев, 1993).

In the inter-war period, the discussions on the Bulgarian identity and its place in Europe thus focused on the opposition between “our” and
“foreign,” and between tradition and modernity. Despite the attempts to try to find a balance between these positions, the theories about the Bulgarian uniqueness prevailed. Even the majority of those who still believed that the Western Europe was a model Bulgaria should follow suggested that Bulgarians needed to take from the West (usually “West” was a synonym for Germany, France and UK) everything that made it superior to Bulgaria, and then “plant it into the Bulgarian soil.” The only way for Bulgaria to catch up with the West was, as proposed by A. Zlatarov, “to arm ourselves with their arms” and use them to answer “the call of the motherland” (Златаров, 1926).

The debates published in the Bulgarian periodical press in the 1920s about the place of the West (or Europe) in the Bulgarian cultural context have been analysed by A. Bacheva. Examining the relationships between “native” (taken as cultural traditions) and “European” (understood as “high norms” and criteria for commensurability), her study discusses the parameters of the abovementioned debate, which played an important role in the Bulgarian cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s and became an important issue for the Bulgarian national self-vision and self-perception (Бачева, 2005).

The political developments in the country followed the dilemma between distancing from and affiliation to Europe. As a result, both the ultra-right and authoritarian, and the leftist ideas gained popularity. The former were linked with the gradual orientation of Bulgaria towards Germany – another country which suffered a failure in the WWI and was seeking a retribution for the European punitive measures. In contrast, the leftist ideas spread among that part of the society, which turned again to Russia (Soviet Union) and Slavdom as a counterweight to Europe. On the whole, the interwar period was marked by a significant political instability – with frequent government changes, coup d’etats, and even political assassinations. After the military coup on 19 May 1934, the political parties were banned and under Tsar Boris’ authoritarian rule, Bulgaria began to gravitate towards the alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.
Amidst all the political, economic and even spiritual and cultural confusion, something remarkable happened in Bulgaria in the years just before and during the WWII. The rising wave of anti-Semitism, which spread over most European countries in the late 1930s, completely by-passed Bulgaria. In 1937, the most important public figures of the country (former and active premiers, ministers, members of the parliament, bankers, intellectuals, writers, journalists and artists) were asked three questions: 1) What is your opinion on racism as a theory and a practice? 2) How do you explain anti-Semitism? and 3) What is your opinion on Jews in general and Jews in Bulgaria in particular? Their answers, published in a book, showed that the most important Bulgarian policy and opinion makers of the time completely rejected racism and anti-Semitism, explained why there was no ground for them in the country, and gave nothing but the highest praise for the Bulgarian Jews, who were seen as an indivisible part of the Bulgarian nation (Пити, 1937). Confirmation that this were not just empty words came in 1943, when the entire Bulgarian society rose up in defence of the Bulgarian Jews, when the order came from Berlin that they should be arrested and sent to the concentration camps. As a result, none of the 50,000 Bulgarian Jews ended up in death camps, in sharp contrast to the majority of the continent. For once, the Bulgarian “handicap” of never being “European” enough, served a noble and praise-worthy cause.

3. Europe abandoned – identity construction and maintenance in the communist Bulgaria

3.1. Bulgarian identity metamorphoses in the period of early socialism (1948-1968)

After the WWII, the Communist Party came to power in Bulgaria, turning the country into a Soviet Union satellite dominated by the Soviet communist ideology. On 9 September 1944 the Fatherland Front (backed by the Red Army) committed a coup d’état and Bulgaria switched sides, declaring war on Germany and the other Axis nations.
The Fatherland Front was a political resistance movement during the WWII. It consisted of several political groups with widely contrasting ideologies, but united in their opposition to the pro-German dictatorship in the country. The Fatherland Front was dominated by the communist Bulgarian Workers Party. In 1946 a referendum was held, on which the monarchy was abolished and Bulgaria was declared a people’s republic. The period from 1944 to 1947 can be considered a transition period and the crucial rupture year was actually 1948. On December 4, 1947 a new Constitution was passed and the country entered the year 1948 with both feet firmly in the communist camp.

Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (the new name of the Bulgarian Workers Party since 1948) and Prime Minister from 1946 to 1949, addressed the nation on 1 January 1948, proclaiming that Bulgaria had become a member “of the growing forces of the mighty anti-imperialistic camp, led by the great Soviet Union,” thus pointing out the ideal Bulgaria was to follow for the next four decades. The Soviet political, economic and social models were copied and mechanically transferred and employed in Bulgaria without any consideration for the national psyche and for the specifically Bulgarian historical, cultural and geographic features. 1948 also brought a new law on education, which was based on the Marxist-Leninist principles. The state took full control over the printed media and radio, cinema and book publishing. The factories and so-called “large urban property” were nationalised, while in agriculture collectivisation of land began. The same year also saw an intensification of the communist purges and police terror, with increasing number of people put on trial for “treason, spying, harmful activities and encroachment upon the socialist property.” In general, 1948 was the year of the Great Mobilisation, when slogans were bombarding people from all sides, promoting the message of the communist regime that unlike in capitalism, in Bulgaria everything was done in the interest of the nation and the working class (Деянова, 2005).

The old identities were discarded and the process of formation and consolidation of new ones began. Although this process of social and
political engineering affected all Bulgarian citizens, it had certain specific features among the various ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Demonstrating one’s national, ethnic, religious, civic or social identity was prohibited and instead a new identity was imposed – that of “a socialist man,” “a harmoniously developed communist personality,” of an atheist and a Marxist. The socialist way of life was supposed to demonstrate the triumph of the communist ideology in all spheres of life. U. Brunnbauer analysed the propaganda campaigns, lobbying efforts, and the peculiar institution of “Comrade Courts,” which were employed by the communist regime in its struggle for rendering everyday life socialist. The analysis, which is based on archival records and published texts, brings light to some of the state’s strategies to establish cultural hegemony (Brunnbauer, 2008, pp. 44-79).

The first victims of the communist regime were the religious communities. As religion was a very important identity marker, many churches and other places of worship were closed and through various forms of repression, people were diverted away from religion. Radical changes swept also through the educational system. The communist ideology and Marxist theory became the backbone of the education process, aimed at raising the children in the spirit and with the identity of “a new socialist man.” The textbooks were rewritten and purged of any reference to Bulgarian ties with Western European and other capitalist states (Йелавич, 2003, pp. 351-352; Манчев, 2003, pp. 176-177).

In a sharp contrast with the post-Liberation period, when Bulgaria was struggling to “return to Europe” and when its European identity and heritage was strongly emphasised, the political discourse, literature and social sciences of the post-WWII Bulgaria completely lacked any reference to European identity and European orientation. Instead, the Bulgarian “Slavic identity” was emphasised, demonstrating the closeness in origin and culture of Bulgarians with the “brotherly Soviet/Russian nation.” Unlike in other Central and Eastern European countries, which were occupied by the Red Army in 1944-1945, the Bulgarian national identity and nationalism were not in contradiction with the increasing
Soviet influence in the country. The Soviet presence was integrated into the historical myth about the Liberation – just like the Tsarist Army had liberated Bulgarians from the Ottoman Empire in 1877/1878, so did the Red Army liberate them from Fascism/Nazism in 1944. These circumstances enabled a thorough cultural brainwashing of the Bulgarian nation in the 1950s and the shift in the national identity away from (Western) Europe and towards Slavdom and the Soviet Union (Лори, 2005, p. 57).

Everything western, including the culture, was defined as artificial and hollow, and as such as bad at the very outset. The sporadic contacts of the Bulgarian artists and intellectuals with those from the non-communist countries were not based on dialogue and exchange, but took on the form of a competition with the ultimate goal of demonstrating the supremacy of the communist idea and spreading the glory of the country (Ландри, 1997, p. 26).

E. Kalinova has studied in detail the cultural relations between Bulgaria and the (Western) European countries. According to her, between 1944 and the early 1960s, these relations went through several phases – from a period when the western cultural influences were relatively tolerated to periods when they were completely denied. For most of the time, the contacts with the western culture were undesired, although not officially forbidden. The Bulgarian intellectuals were free to communicate with their Western European colleagues, as long as they remembered that such communication represented a “special type of class struggle.” Their duty was to spread the communist influence in the West and not to succumb to the capitalist propaganda (Калинова, 1999, p. 237; see also Калинова, 1997, pp. 239-266).

Celebrating the nation’s history and past achievements was suppressed, as was any rationalisation of national, ethnic or religious identity. Instead, the Bulgarian citizens were supposed to “blend” into the international working class of the world and identify with the oppressed and enslaved peoples of Africa and Asia, and with the persecuted
members of the communist parties in Western Europe and the USA. This oppressive ideological identity transformation had one sole positive result within the Bulgarian society – racism and the perception of national superiority towards people from African, Latin American and Asian countries were almost completely neutralised.

Somewhat paradoxically, various ethnic communities in the country were given a larger freedom for expression of their distinctive ethnic culture. The most striking was the tolerant attitude towards the biggest Bulgarian minority – the Turks. This policy was in fact a result of the absurd idea about the “export of the revolution” – the communist authorities (under the pressure from the Soviet secret services) tried to win over the trust of the Bulgarian Turkish community with the intention of using them to “export” the communist ideology to Turkey through the regular waves of immigration of Bulgarian Turks. In the 1950s, thousands of Turks became members of the Communist Party, while tens of thousands worked in the state administration and state-owned enterprises (Zhelyazkova, 1998, pp. 11-45).

The tolerant attitude towards the ethnic minorities lasted until 1958, when a special plenum of the Communist Party Politburo decided to limit the rights of the minorities and to impose a new concept of ethnic/national structure of the Bulgarian citizens. This was the start of periodic repressive assimilation campaigns, aimed at complete uniformity of all Bulgarian citizens. The ultimate goal was to turn Bulgaria into a mono-national country, and to turn its people into an ideologically and ethnically homogeneous nation (Желязкова, 1998, pp. 386-390).

3.2. Ideologisation of identities, nationalism and policies towards minorities in the period of mature socialism (1968-1989)

The period of “proletarian internationalism” was at its apogee in Stalin’s times. In a way, it was a necessity for overcoming the Bulgarian nationalism, chauvinism and irredentism, which were characteristic for
the first half of the 20th century. After the destalinisation period, the communist regime realised that the socialist ideology was not enough to provide it with the needed legitimacy and thus turned to the field of patriotism. B. Lory describes the 1970s and the early 1980s in Bulgaria as a period of “national triumphalism.” The economy was stable and the society completely subdued to the ruling political order. The 1970s and early 1980s were also a very appropriate time for raising the patriotic spirits in the society due to several important historical anniversaries – the hundredth anniversaries of the April Uprising of 1876 and of the Russian-Turkish war and Bulgarian Liberation (1877/1878), and the thousand and three hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the first Bulgarian state in 681 (Лори, 2005, p. 88).

In the 1980s, the communist regime felt that it was increasingly losing ground under its feet. A good example were the May Day celebrations, described in detail by L. Deyanova. In 1948, the May Day festival was “a shining manifestation of the national unity,” a grand event marked by slogans like “what other nations have done in a century, we will achieve in five years,” “protect the national independence like your own eyes” and “stay alert – uncover the spies.” In 1968, the celebration was “inspiring” – “a noble festival of work and international solidarity.” Ten years later, the media coverage of the event cooled down additionally – “a celebration of peaceful, productive labour.” In 1988, there was no May Day manifestation – only a small heading in the press: “Happy May Day, Comrades” (Деянова, 2005). In the meantime, the Communist Party turned to nationalism with an even greater vigour. B. Lory writes that in this period “communism was hardly more than phraseology; the triumphant official ideology securing the national unity was nationalism. Nationalism strongly contributed to the survival of the regime” (Лори, 2005, p. 129).

The turn to nationalism had a strong impact on the Bulgarian minorities, and above all on the Turkish community. The Bulgarian Turks were victims of an exceptionally repressive assimilation campaign in the 1980s. Its aim was the complete annihilation of the separate Turkish
ethnic and religious identity. As a result, the Turkish community reacted by withdrawal and self-isolation in the confines of the extended family. Here the Turks began to reconstruct the traditions, customs, family legends, language and folklore, which had almost been lost during the previous decades. The younger generations, who were most affected by the assimilation processes of the communist educational system, were especially eager to re-establish and rebuilt their own ethnic, religious and cultural identity (Zhelyazkova, 1998, pp. 381-382).

U. Büchsenschütz has conducted a comprehensive study of the policies of the Bulgarian Communist Party towards the minorities and in particular towards Jews, Roma, Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians) and Turks. His conclusion is that the mixture of nationalist and Leninist elements in the Bulgarian policies towards minorities failed to produce the desired effect – the overcoming of social and ethnic differences within the Bulgarian society. On the contrary, the undertaken assimilation measures further strengthened the divisions, significantly increased the inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and alienated the minorities (Бюксеншютц, 2000).

In the last few years before the collapse of the Bulgarian communist system, a small circle of reformers within the Communist Party distanced itself from the nationalist rhetoric. Seeking support among the intelligentsia and students, they instead started to talk about “the road to Europe” for the first time in the post-WWII Bulgaria. This signalled the start of the public debates on the European identity of Bulgarians, which dominated the next decade (Хьош, 1998, p. 321).

With the fall of the communist government in 1989 and the start of the slow and painful transition process, Bulgarians found themselves on the crossroads. They had been driven to the edge of the ethnic conflict by the ruthless assimilation policies of the communist regime and were deeply confused over the nature of their identity as a result of decades of social and political experiments and engineering. Thus in 1989 the Bulgarian society faced a number of significant challenges.
In addition to thorough social-economic transformation of the country and a transition from authoritarian to a democratic political system, the Bulgarian citizens also had to redefine and rediscover their identity.


Somewhat similarly to the post-Liberation period, the Bulgarian society again turned towards Europe after the fall of the communist regime. The dominating public-political slogan thus again became “back to Europe,” from which Bulgaria was seen as forcibly separated. The long years of isolation from Europe and the western world in general have influenced the way Bulgarians perceived the outside world after the fall of communism. On the one hand, many Bulgarians returned to the myths about the glorious past and the strong need to preserve the Bulgarian identity and the Bulgarian ways. At the same time, there was also a strong desire for Bulgaria to again become a part of “Europe,” which was usually used as a synonym for Western Europe and the institutions of the EU and the Council of Europe (Ландру, 1997, pp. 31-33).

M. Mineva analyses the Bulgarian identity (re)construction in the process of European integration through production of “European” images of Bulgaria, i.e. images intended to present Bulgaria as a European country. These images largely reflect conflicting and sometimes contradicting notions about Europe among the Bulgarian public. The images are analysed by the author on three different levels: Europe, Europe in the Bulgarian public sphere, and self-representations of Bulgaria (Минева, 2000, pp. 128-139).

The dilemmas of the identity changing processes have been analysed also by E. Krasteva-Blagoeva, who uses the materials from a field research to compare different aspects of the collective identity of Bulgarians. The research does not compare only the national and the Euro-
pean identity of Bulgarians, but adds a third one – the Balkan identity component. All three identities do not contradict each other, but coexist and overlap. For Bulgarians, belonging to the Balkans is not a criterion excluding them from the European space. Being part of the Balkans is a cultural specificity and does not carry the negative connotation “the Balkans” are usually burdened with in the western discourse. Nevertheless, the European identity of Bulgarians is determined as ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand, this is a result of clear and significant differences in the living standards and on the other, it arises due to certain cultural differences (especially Orthodox Christianity and the Cyrillic script) (Кръстева-Благоева, 2003, pp. 129-148).

A consequence of these differences is an often encountered opinion that Bulgarians are not “European enough.” The whole process of the EU accession was seen in Bulgaria as a set of directives that had to be fulfilled, chapters that needed to be closed, values that were expected to be adopted. Even policies and values which were still debated and questioned within the EU were often accepted without any reservation in the Bulgarian political and public space – almost as a new ideological dogma. What was questioned and criticised was the ability of the Bulgarian political circles to implement the EU requirements, and rarely the requirements themselves (Костова-Панцирова, 2004).

A research conducted in 2008 (a year after Bulgaria became an EU member) among the students of the New Bulgarian University in Sofia examined the prevailing images of Europe and (non)European Bulgaria (Кръстева, 2008). The opinions of students can roughly be divided in three groups: sceptics, pragmatics and enthusiasts. The sceptics expressed their opinions in very emotional way – they had great expectations regarding the country’s EU membership and now largely share great disappointment, saying that they do not see and feel any change. They believe that Bulgaria is an equal EU member on paper only, while in fact it has a second class status in the Union. After the accession, Bulgaria lost its sovereignty, while the brain drain of the young and most capable intensified. In economic sense, Bulgaria is also losing
much more than it is gaining from the membership. The sceptics are also highly critical of Bulgaria – they describe it as corrupt, poor, disorganised, non-functional, underdeveloped, unjust, crime-ridden and thus essentially non-European. Two forms of scepticism can be observed: one in which Europe is rejected, and the second in which Europe is a model Bulgaria is compared with, but which can never be caught up with. Both forms, however, share the same conclusion – there is no such thing as European Bulgaria.

The pragmatics are much less emotional and for them Europe represents opportunities, investments, a huge market and Euro-funds. Above all, for them Europe means security. They have no feelings for the EU, which they see as a huge bureaucratic machine, but believe that the Bulgarian membership is useful for the country. They describe Europe and the EU with the following terms: prosperity, competition, trade, freedom of movement. Like sceptics, the pragmatics also see Bulgaria as somewhat asymmetric to the rest of the Union, but evaluate this in a positive light, as the EU membership will force the country to respect the laws and rules. The forced introduction of the European norms and values will increase the standard of living and decrease corruption and crime. Bulgaria has still a long way to go to become “European,” but pragmatics believe this is something which can realistically be achieved.

The third group are the enthusiasts, who are happy and proud regarding the Bulgaria’s EU accession. For them, the EU is not capitalism, but culture; not a market but a community; not control, but authority; not a union but a family; and not about investments, but about identity. For this group, the EU above all represents hope. They are thrilled for being a part of a huge community of nations, cultures, languages. People from this group most often say that they feel as Europeans. Some say there is no contradiction between the Bulgarian and European identity as Bulgaria has always been a part of Europe. Others see the European identity as “added value.” They see no dilemma – for them the EU membership is the only possible choice, a dream come true, an absolutely positive and necessary step.
As described by D. Dinkov in his analysis of the Bulgarian foreign policy, all post-1989 Bulgarian governments placed the relations with the EU and the full integration into all its structures at the very top of the country’s foreign policy priorities. Despite that, these relations remained ambivalent, as was the case for the larger part of the 20th century. The pro-European orientation was soon expanded into the Euro-Atlantic orientation and gradually a strongly expressed pro-American position took the upper hand. There were two main reasons for this. The NATO membership of Bulgaria seemed in the 1990s a much more realistic and easier to achieve goal than the EU membership. In addition, the USA were also more supportive and enthusiastic about the EU eastward expansion than most of the old EU member-states (Динков, 1999, pp. 993-995). The Bulgarian governments thus strongly leaned towards the USA and became a faithful supporter of the USA policies and interests, sometimes in clear contradiction to the EU preferences. By sticking to its tradition of being a faithful satellite of the strongman of the day, Bulgaria on numerous occasions confirmed its place in what became referred to as the “New Europe” in the times of the sharpest disagreements between the USA and most of the EU members prior to the US invasion of Iraq.

Despite these political preferences of some (mainly right-wing) Bulgarian governments for the USA, the public support for the EU membership was always very high (and as a rule higher than the support for NATO membership). In a poll conducted in September 2004, 74.3% of the respondents approved of Bulgaria’s EU membership, while 13.4% disapproved. The approval rates were similar in May 2006 (73.6%), although the negative responses visibly increased (18.2%) at the expense of the undecided. According to Gallup Bulgaria, pro-NATO public attitudes fluctuated between 49 and 55 per cent in 2002 (Bulgaria became a NATO member in March 2004).8

A significant majority of the respondents in the public opinion polls linked the EU accession with the improvement of the economic and

8 http://www.gallup-bbss.com/pidx/natod.html

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financial situation in Bulgaria (86%), which would in turn improve their own social-economic position and provide them with personal security. At the same time, the majority were afraid that strong external competition would harm Bulgarian producers and push them out of the market (81%). Almost a third of the respondents also feared that the EU accession was a threat to the national identity (31%) (Йорданова, 2006, pp 9-25).

The importance of (improved) social-economic situation for the Bulgarian society is pretty much in line with the process of building of the “common European identity.” According to N. Tilkidzhiev, the precondition for the common European identity is the establishment of the common social-structural identity. The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century witnessed the appearance of a new type of social convergence in the European societies. The values and priorities defining the quality of life in the surveys conducted in various European countries show that the most significant differences do not occur horizontally – from country to country, but vertically between the different social-economic structures. In practice, the intellectuals and agricultural workers from one country have much less in common than the intellectuals from a south-eastern and a north-western European country. The younger, better educated, better-off materially, with richer cultural life, good professional realisation, with full-valued social life and actively involved in the political processes from different European countries are becoming increasingly similar, sharing continuously expanding and deepening set of values, principles and priorities, thus forming the basis for the “common European identity.” Tilkidzhiev concludes that the social-structural similarities and differences are much more important for the creation of common identity than the national similarities and differences, as the historical destinies and current social-economic realities of the European countries are too unique (Тилкиджиев, 2006, pp. 77-97).

Analysing the data from a number of sociological studies, conducted by the Institute of Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
between 1991 and 2004, V. Topalova also concludes that the European identity was the most strongly expressed among those Bulgarians with better education, higher income, higher social status and among the young. The share of those who felt “Europeans” was steadily increasing through the years, especially among the young generations of Bulgarians, who demonstrated their ability to quickly and radically change their values and social identities. Although their transnational identity is still much less developed than among their peers in most other European countries (Topalova compares the Bulgarian data with studies in France and Poland), the Bulgarian youth identifies with Europe and with the Europeans in a much stronger manner than other generations of Bulgarian citizens (Топалова, 2006, pp. 237-247).

Bulgarians are, according to numerous studies and surveys on the quality of life, the poorest, the most pessimistic and the most dissatisfied of all the EU nations. As such they represent quite a specific case. M. Zaharieva writes about the dominating influence of the social-economic situation in the country on the modelling of value orientation of Bulgarians. Significantly diverging from the principles of the post-materialism characteristic for the Western European countries, the Bulgarian society still sees the economic well-being, the control over the price increases and the protection of law and order as the most important tasks of the state (compared to the protection of the freedom of speech and press, and the citizens’ influence on the government decisions in countries like Austria, Italy and Sweden) (Захарияева, 2006). When asked to name the most important European values, the Bulgarian students named the following: market economy

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9 See for example European Quality of Life survey – index of life satisfaction shows Bulgaria is a country with by far the lowest result with only 37% of people saying they were very or fairly satisfied with the life they lead: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eurlife/index.php?template=3&radioindic=155&idDomain=12&firstDifferentiator=419. The index on optimism – Bulgaria is among the five most pessimistic countries, with only 43.2% of people saying they were optimistic about the future: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eurlife/index.php?template=3&radioindic=154&idDomain=12. The index on happiness – Bulgaria has the lowest result with 5.8 on the scale of 10: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eurlife/index.php?template=3&radioindic=156&idDomain=12.
(48%), democracy (41%), liberty (36%), and free enterprise (35%). Solidarity (15%) and tolerance (12%) are much less important for the economic-orientated Bulgarian youth (Mumeš, 2005, pp. 365-377; see also Mitev, 1999). The prevailing patterns and values in Bulgaria will inevitably have to change if the country wants to fully integrate into the economic, political and cultural space of the EU, but this process will most likely take a very long time (Захариева, 2006, pp 185-203). In addition, the fact that the European awareness and European values are prominent only in high-status and young groups of the society is also very problematic. Significant and purposeful social-political effort will be needed to influence and change the perceptions of the other, larger sections of the society as well.

Analysing the data from the 2008-2009 European Values Survey, P. Kabakchieva comes to an interesting observation regarding the sharp division between identity and citizenship in Bulgaria. The strongly expressed national identity in the country is understood in predominantly ethnic sense, while the political-civic identity is almost completely absent. In other words, over three quarters of (ethnic) Bulgarians are very proud of their origin and their belonging to the Bulgarian nation, but are largely disinterested or even dissatisfied with the state of Bulgaria. They do not trust the institutions, feel little or no empathy and understanding for the problems of their co-citizens, they are disappointed with the democratic developments in the country and have little interest in political life. Kabakchieva concludes that the nation-state has split into the (ethnically defined) nation and the (disrespected and distrusted) state. On the other hand, there is a strongly expressed yearning for the European citizenship and pride for being a part of the EU, while the European identity and European civic awareness are almost completely absent. Kabakchieva hopes that the Bulgarian membership in the EU will gradually lead to the cultivation of civic values and practices in the country, which would in turn contribute to development of European civic awareness alongside the national cultural identity (Кабакчиева, 2009, pp. 257-278).
Part II: Bulgarian paths to modernity – catching up with the uncatchable

Throughout its modern history, the Bulgarian state seems to have always been on an endless journey to get somewhere and become something else. The perception has been that Bulgaria has never been quite modern enough. The combination of unfavourable geo-political position on the European periphery and the endless streak of historical “misfortunes” (from five centuries of Ottoman dominance through defeats in one Balkan and two World Wars to communism) have usually been blamed for the relative backwardness of the country and for putting it into a position of an eternal laggard. After the liberation from the Ottoman Empire, the country tried to “catch up with Europe.” Following the WWII, the country set sails towards the communist utopia, but ran out of wind before coming even close. The collapse of the Berlin wall and the subsequent changes in Europe again pushed Bulgaria onto a new, completely different path towards (post)modernity. Although many in Bulgaria (especially the political circles) view the successful EU accession as the ultimate certificate and proof that “the transition to modernity” was over and that the country finally arrived at the finish line, Bulgaria is today still a long way from the modernity its citizens desire.

The scholars who have studied the process of formation of the Bulgarian national identity in the 19th century have most often linked it with the topics of modernity and of the geo-political place of Bulgaria and the Balkans on the European periphery. A popular thesis is that up to the WWI the Balkans “were a society on its way to Europe – a society which once represented a source of the European modernisation, but later turned into its periphery” (Парушева, 1996, p. 21). The analysis of the modernisation processes depends to a large extent on the researcher’s own standpoint: those studying the political processes write about the active modernisation, while those interested in the economic development believe that at the end of the 19th century there was hardly any modernisation to speak of (Парушева, p. 19).
Until the Liberation, the search for the Bulgarian identity was based on the historical reconstruction of the glorious past and on the idealised traditional national culture. After the Liberation, the modernisation necessitated a break from the folkloristic traditions. It instead shifted towards “development within the frames of the Europe-centrist perspectives, which opened as a result of integration of the Bulgarian culture into the spiritual horizons of modern Europe” (Еленков, 1994, p. 12). The separation from tradition and the efforts to catch up with the modernisation placed numerous challenges before the Bulgarian intellectuals who were trying to define the Bulgarian identity. The period of the social-economic advance strengthened the perception about the European essence of Bulgarians, but at the same time it also raised fears about how to preserve the national, folk side of their identity. These tendencies and dilemmas did not influence only the analyses of philosophers and historians, but also the literature and arts of the period (see Боев, 1900, p. 469; Щишманов, 1966, p. 9; Драганов, 1984; Генчев, 1988, pp. 275 – 291). The advocates of the modern European values were grouped around the literature and philosophical circle “Thought,” united by the common goal of finding a balance between the Bulgarian and European identity (see Пенев, 1941 – 1942).

Those representatives of the intelligentsia who perceived themselves as the driving force of the public processes had to deal with the sometimes slow, superficial and distorted modernisation, and with the significant contrast between the developed European society and the Bulgarian reality. This period saw the beginning of the disputes about a mechanical introduction of modern norms and practices and about finding a balance between “national and foreign” (see Даскалов, 2005; Генчев, 1987, pp. 147 – 149).

In his extensive and thoughtful study on the economic development of Bulgaria in the 20th century, R. Avramov notes that the initial modernisation drive of the country after the Liberation was strongly marked by the understandable desire “to be like the others.” Virtually all issues of the Journal of the Bulgarian Economic Society from the early 20th
century were full of articles, expressing almost childish enthusiasm and pride over anything which brought Bulgaria, in material or spiritual sense, even a step closer to the western “dream world.” On the other hand, the modern, developed and industrialised “Europe” Bulgaria was trying to catch up with represented also a threat. The Bulgarian economy – underdeveloped and peripheral as it was – entered the 20th century almost completely opened to the outside world and as such, it was extremely vulnerable. The state trade policy therefore aimed at closing the Bulgarian market to the outside competition and protecting the national industry and agriculture. The National Assembly received volumes of petitions sent by small entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens, demanding the state to protect them against foreign competitors and in 1927 the Bulgarian government passed a law on protection of domestic industry (Аврамов, 1999, pp. 243-245).10

The Bulgarian debate on modernisation was in general marked with sharp contradictions – in addition to the contradiction between “protecting the national” and “adopting the foreign,” there were debates on what represented the true potential for a successful economic development of the country: agriculture versus industry and production versus finances. In the Bulgarian understanding of modernity, production occupied a much more prominent place than financial markets, and progress was equalled with the development of the material productive forces of the nation. Under the communist rule, the traditional Bulgarian preference for the “real” production received theoretical and ideological backing in the Marxist theory. Not surprisingly, even today the Bulgarian financial sector is still relatively underdeveloped and suffered a virtual collapse in the 1990s (Аврамов, 1999).

The modernisation of Bulgaria was almost never driven by an original, internal vision of the economic development of the country, but rather followed various external matrixes of modernity, which changed according to the preferences of the intellectual and political leaders of

10 For an exhaustive overview of the history of Bulgarian economic development, see also: Аврамов, 2007.
Bulgaria. B. Penev identified the most important Bulgarian role models. Russia was a traditionally important and influential model Bulgarians periodically turned to. In the 1930s, the German totalitarian economic doctrine, which placed the state above the needs of the society, became the guiding light on the Bulgarian path towards modernity. The third model Bulgarians occasionally tried to assume as their own was the French one, although the arrogant French attitude towards Bulgaria after its defeat in the WWI significantly decreased the number of Francophiles in the country. According to Penev, the British influence on Bulgaria was by far the weakest. In 1924, he wrote that one day Bulgarians would realise how much they had lost by being so distant from the spirit of freedom and activity, which was so characteristic for the English (Пенев, 1924, quoted in Avramov, 1999, p. 255). Avramov believes that this distance still troubles Bulgaria today, when the Bulgarian economic mentality painfully tries to adapt to the global world, dominated by the Anglo-Saxon economic doctrine (Аврамов, 1999, pp. 255-256).

The most striking and comprehensive change of direction on the Bulgarian road to modernity occurred after the WWII. Simultaneously with the processes of identity transformation, the new communist authorities also conducted a politically motivated and harshly enforced modernisation of the Bulgarian society through rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and agricultural collectivisation.

Located on the European periphery and geopolitically and culturally detached from the Western European modernisation processes, the communist Bulgaria inherited both the genuine need and the symbolic perception that it needs to “catch up” with the Western European modernity. For ideological reasons, such perception was a taboo and the new model of modernity Bulgaria was to follow became the Soviet Union. The Bulgarian Communist Party undertook a massive agrarian reform through land collectivisation and a simultaneous rapid development of heavy industry with the zeal of the newly converted.
Some authors describe the land collectivisation as “the most significant economic and social catastrophe the Bulgarian villagers have ever experienced” (Груев, 2009, pp. 121-123; see also Creed, 1998). At the same time, these authors do not deny the enormous modernisation effects of the forced land collectivisation and of the accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation. The 1950s were thus also the decade in which numerous Bulgarian villages were reached for the very first time by electricity, paved roads, agricultural machines, and first cars and buses. Many Bulgarian villagers felt that through these changes they were becoming a part of a modern European, or even global, world (Груев, 2009). Similarly, the fast industrialisation also narrowed the gap between Bulgaria and the industrially developed world. Understandably, the results of this rapid industrialisation were presented as achievements of communism – the superior political and economic system. The communist propaganda machine also praised the valuable help provided by the Soviet Union, which entirely replaced Western Europe as the Bulgarian role model.

The industrialisation and land collectivisation had contributed to the modernisation of Bulgaria in another, very significant aspect – gender relations. The agricultural cooperatives took women out of the secluded family farms. For the first time, many women received access to universal health care, and all children regardless of gender, social standing or ethnic origin obtained equal rights to education. Women were encouraged to work in a number of professions, which had previously been considered an exclusive male domain and many were promoted to managing posts (Воџеничаров, 1999, pp. 229-273).

Some authors point out that the policies of the communist regime aimed above all at achieving industrial and economic modernisation had some paradoxical results. Instead of progressing, the Bulgarian society actually regressed as the regime brought back to life and legitimised pre-modern kinship and clan structures and mentality. The kinship and clan networks started to play an increasingly important role in the management of the state. The established system of cast privileges
and a total social control thus completely discredited the idea about a modern social state based on freedom and equality (Воденичаров, 2004).

The fast and imposed modernisation had also numerous other negative side-effects. The economy was largely ineffective due to the centralised management, as economic rationale was regularly sidelined by politically motivated decision-making. The mass migration from rural areas to the cities (very often involuntary) overstretched their infrastructure, seriously decreasing the quality of housing, services, transport and environment. Parallel with these processes, the middle class was virtually eliminated and the civil society was all but destroyed, which was a seriously unfavourable heritage the post-communist Bulgaria had to struggle with when it embarked on its transition to democracy and market economy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Bulgaria had a very painful and sobering impact with the economic reality. The communist command economy with its overwhelming emphasis on “real” production and heavy industry proved to be incapable of competing on the international free market. In the first half of the decade, a huge majority of factories and enterprises, which used to be the pride of the communist Bulgaria, went bankrupt and were closed down. Some like Kremikovtsi, Bulgaria’s largest metalworking company, struggled on, heavily subsidised by the state, as the authorities feared uncontrollable social unrest if they stopped supporting the factory. Kremikovtsi was perhaps the best metaphor for the state of modernity of Bulgaria in the 1990s. The country was in a significant dissonance with the developed world.

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11 According to the census data, the share of Bulgarian urban population was 24.7% in 1946, 46.5% in 1965 and 67.2% in 1992 (НСИ, 1996, p. 27).

12 Overburdened by enormous debt, the company changed several owners since privatisation in 1999 and finally ran out of steam in 2008. All negotiations to attract new investors failed and since December 2008, the factory has been virtually non-functioning. In 2009, the coke production plant – one of the most controversial symbols of the company – was shut down forever and the gas supply to the factory was cut off due to unpaid bills. The fate of the company is unknown, but the prospects are very pessimistic.
While Bulgaria was still clinging to the perception that heavy industry was the symbol of modernisation, the “West” was already deep in the post-material, post-industrial information age. While Bulgaria was in pains discovering how uncompetitive and vulnerable its whole economy was, the “West” was experiencing unprecedentedly long economic growth (Аврамов, 1999, p. 261).

One of the most difficult tasks was setting up a sound and working financial sector. Several successive Bulgarian governments between 1990 and 1997 proved unwilling to give up the state ownership and administrative control over the banking sector. The state-owned banks continued to fund and bail out a number of inefficient and loss-producing companies. The few private banks, which appeared at the time, were attracting the clients with pyramid-style high interest rate schemes, but largely functioned as a source of finances for the narrow circle of their stockholders and people around them. Not surprisingly, in 1996 the Bulgarian economy virtually collapsed, the hyperinflation (2,916% in February 1997) depleted the savings of the population and numerous companies, while many banks were stripped clean of their reserves by the so-called “credit millionaires.”

The government, which took office after the April 1997 elections, started with sweeping economic reforms. In July the Bulgarian currency Lev was tied to the German Mark (and later to the Euro). A currency board was introduced, forcing fiscal discipline and producing positive monetary and budgetary results. Since then, Bulgaria has been experiencing stable currency, controlled inflation and steady economic growth. The GDP, budget revenues and foreign currency reserves have been increasing each year, as have the confidence in the financial

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13 “Credit millionaires” were people very close to the management and stockholders of various banks, who obtained huge loans from the banks without the necessary guarantees, which they never paid back. According to the report of the Bulgarian National Bank, in 2005 there were still 112 people, who had received loans larger than half a million BGN (roughly 250,000 EUR), which they never paid back. All together, these 112 individuals own over 105 million BGN to the national bank system (Дневник, 2006).
and banking sectors (especially after the successful privatisation of all Bulgarian banks) (Jotev, 2001, pp. 73-76).

Some analysts believe that Bulgaria is still relatively far from the modernity levels of other EU countries because of its peripheral position. The notions of “borderland” and “periphery” have been constantly present in the Bulgarian debates on modernity. The unfavourable geopolitical position of the country was often used as an excuse justifying its weak performance in a number of areas – from economy to the fight against corruption and organised crime. However, being on the periphery is not always a hindrance, but can also be an asset. G. Delanty believes that Europe is not taking only a post-national form, but also a post-western one, and as a consequence the relations between the periphery and the core are also changing significantly. The different civilisational heritage of the borderlands (like for example the Balkans) is adding to and enriching Europe and its cultural and political identity. The European gravity is shifting from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean as the borders of the EU have moved eastwards to the Black Sea. The notion of a post-western Europe thus stands for a multiple Europe, consisting of many heritages and experiences with modernity (Delanty, 2007, pp. 58-68). Some of these heritages (the Bulgarian one included) are older than the western tradition and could play a much more significant and active role in the making of Europe today if they only stopped trying to become the West rather than contributing to it.

According to I. Dichev, the Euro-integration is the third wave of modernisation-imitation in Bulgarian modern history. The imitation refers to “the legitimacy which the political elites are exploiting in the process of catching up with the forerunners on the path of the universal progress.” The first wave was the creation of a nation-state, marked by accelerated “import” of know-how for the establishment of state institutions, when Bulgaria tried to catch up with “the civilised nations.” The second wave started in the 1930 and reached its apogee under the communism, when the goal was to catch up with “the developed nations” and especially with their level of industrial productivity. In the
third wave, “the civilised” and “the developed nations” were substituted by “the normal nations.” The goal is no longer to imitate their historical subjectivity or compete with their industrial achievements, because both the nation state and the classical modern economy have been significantly questioned by the globalisation process. The priority of the third imitation wave is consumerism – to be able to consume like “the normal people.” The Euro-integration became the magical instrument expected to fulfil this goal. For the Bulgarian political elite, Euro-integration represented also the “civilisational choice” without any alternative and virtually their only source of legitimacy as it was giving a sense of direction and purpose to the often chaotic political events in the country (Дичев, 2000).

It seems that for the time being, the modernisation processes in Bulgaria continue to be (as always in the past) marked by dependency and imitation, which is also the reason for the ever-present inferiority complex of the Bulgarian people when comparing themselves with the “advanced (western) societies”. G. Gornev outlines four phases of the Bulgarian interactions with Europe. The first was distant curiosity. The second was admiration and esteem, mixed with shame and awareness of own imperfection. The third phase was marked with growing self-confidence, although the ambivalence between admiration and alienation was preserved. The fourth phase would be a successful synthesis between the national identity and the European self-awareness. This fourth phase can be achieved only through intensified mobility of the citizens, their more active involvement in the information processes in the globalised world, and through innovative political leadership, orientated towards overcoming the historical complexes (Горнев, 2002).

**Conclusion**

More than twenty years after the fall of communism and five years after the country became an EU member, Bulgarians are still uncertain about the Europeanness of their national identity and the level of their modernity. The first Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 67)
conducted after the Bulgarian EU accession (Spring 2007) showed that among the 27 EU members, Bulgarians felt the most involved in the European affairs (37% compared to 24% for the EU average) (European Commission, 2007, p. 106).

The Eurobarometer surveys show that Bulgarians trust the EU institutions much more than they trust the political and state institutions in their own country. According to the Eurobarometer 73 (Spring 2010), 61% of Bulgarians trust the EU, compared to 42% on the average for the 27 EU members. 62% of Bulgarians trust the European Parliament compared to 48% for average result of 27 EU member states, and 58% of Bulgarians trust the European Commission (the EU average is 45%) (European Commission, 2010, p. 167-185).

In comparison (Eurobarometer 71 - Spring 2009), only 17% of Bulgarians trust their own government, while for the EU the result is 32%. The trust in the Bulgarian Parliament is even lower – at 10% (compared to 32% for the EU27). The most shocking is the difference in the trust in the national legal and judicial system. While almost every second EU citizen trusts the national judiciary (48%), in Bulgaria the trust is alarmingly low – 14% (Европейска комисия, 2009, p. 20).

As seen from the results of the Eurobarometer 69 (Spring 2008), Bulgarians view the EU predominantly in the light of the benefits the EU could bring to their country and rarely see how Bulgaria could contribute to the European family. Most often, Bulgarians stated that their country had gained from its EU membership in the following ways:
- New work and employment opportunities (41%);
- EU’s contribution to the economic growth of Bulgaria (36%)
- EU’s contribution to the strengthening of the national democracy (34%) – Bulgaria ranks second only to Romania (40%) in this criterion.

Unlike Bulgarians, the average EU citizen holds the opinion that the most important benefit from the EU membership is co-operation with other countries (37%) (Европейска комисия, 2008, p. 47).
One of the conclusions of the Eurobarometer 67 (Spring 2007) was that Bulgarians did not yet have a well-shaped public opinion regarding the EU. The percentage of “don’t know” answers was the highest in the EU as they preferred to give a “don’t know” response instead of an outspoken negative one. This shows that although they appear as enthusiastic and dedicated Europeans, they still largely lack self-confidence as EU citizens.

The Bulgarian uneasiness and ambiguity regarding their Europeanness and European identity surfaced also during the research conducted by IMIR in 2005-2006. The objective of the research project was to assess the impact of the European regional policy and the European integration of Bulgaria on the political mobilisation, the social-economic status and the identity perceptions of the population residing in the ethnically and religiously diverse regions of southern Bulgaria. When asked if and how much they viewed themselves as “Europeans,” the respondents were at first offended, as they understood the question as if it was excluding Bulgaria from the European historical and cultural community. After some consideration, the majority of respondents said that it is not possible for them to fell truly “European.” For them, “Europe” meant norms, laws, freedom of choice, better career possibilities, tolerance, responsibility, order, and high quality of work – all features and qualities which in Bulgaria still did not reach the desired level. Although some respondents believed that Bulgarians themselves needed to invest the necessary effort to change their country for the better (“we should go towards Europe, and not wait for Europe to come to us”), most were pessimistic and believed that Bulgaria can change only from the outside – by being “forced” to become “European” by Brussels (Lozanova, Alexiev, Nazarska, Troeva-Grigorova, Kyurkchieva, 2006).

Bulgaria is today again – like so many times in its history – on the crossroads. The EU membership, which many in the country considered

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a panacea to cure all of Bulgaria’s problems, is an accomplished fact, yet little has changed. If anything, the dissatisfaction and pessimism of its citizens have only increased. The populist and nationalist parties are riding high on the wave of popular discontent and disgust over the corruption and incompetence of the traditional political parties. The inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions are on the rise, while only a few years ago, the country was seen as an island of multi-cultural coexistence on the volatile Balkans. The emigration from the country remains high.\textsuperscript{15} Much needs to be changed and accomplished before the country truly integrates into the economic, political and cultural space of the EU, and this process will most likely take a very long time.

The process is further complicated by the fact that there is no single Bulgaria. Rather, there are several Bulgaria, each with a different identity and a very different level of modernity. The differences within the country are truly striking. While Sofia is – to a smaller or larger extent – gradually turning into a “European” capital, the countryside and especially the highland villages seem a world apart. The social-economic, cultural and educational gap between the majority population and certain minorities, especially the Roma, is already enormous and growing ever larger. Even within the majority population, the social differences are huge. On the one side, there are those with good professions, high income, good education and higher social status, who have the European awareness and truly feel they are part of Europe. On the other side, there are all the others – uncertain, confused, angry, pessimistic, poor. The most important question is actually not how to integrate Bulgaria in the EU – the question is how to integrate a majority of its citizens back into Bulgaria.

The complexities, differences and contradictions within the Bulgarian society outlined above form the backbone of the research IMIR conducted for the IME project and which is presented in detail in the

\textsuperscript{15} According to the data of the National Statistical Institute, 192,663 people emigrated from the country between 2001 and 2011. In 1992-2001 period, 217,809 persons left Bulgaria (НСИ, 2011, p. 5).
following chapters of this book. The overview of the existing literature on the issues of the European identity of the Bulgarian citizens and their paths to (post)modernity has revealed that most of the studies to date have focused on the majority population or have treated Bulgaria as a unitary state, neglecting its regional, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The research presented in the following chapters thus devotes special attention to the local/regional dimensions of the issues of identity and modernity and especially to the complex interplay of multiple identities among some of the Bulgarian minority communities.

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Annex 1: Chronology of Bulgaria’s Political Relations with the EU

- 8 August 1988: Diplomatic relations established between Bulgaria and the European Economic Community.

- 8 May 1990: Bulgaria and the European Economic Community signed the Convention on Trade, Business and Economic Relations. The PHARE Programme was opened for Bulgaria.

- 22 December 1990: The Bulgarian Grand National Assembly passed a resolution expressing the desire of the Republic of Bulgaria to become a full member of the European Community.

- 1 October 1991: The European Council decided to open preliminary talks with Bulgaria on signing a Europe Agreement.

- 8 March 1993: The Europe Agreement for Bulgaria and the Provisional Agreement on Trade and Related Matters are signed.

- 21 – 22 June 1993: The European Council in Copenhagen concluded: “The associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union…”

- 14 April 1994: The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted a declaration confirming the willingness of the country to become a member of the European Union.

• 29 May 1995: The first meeting of the Bulgaria – EU Association Council took place.

• 14 December 1995: The Bulgarian National Assembly passed a resolution for official application of Bulgaria for EU membership.

• 16 July 1997: The opinion on Bulgaria’s application for membership was published in Agenda 2000. The Republic of Bulgaria was described as a candidate country, which was not sufficiently prepared to start accession negotiations.

• 10 December 1999: The European Council in Helsinki decided to start negotiations with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Malta.

• 9 October 2002: The European Commission regular reports were published recommending the admission of ten countries to membership. Bulgaria was recognized as a “functioning market economy.” The European Commission said it supported Bulgaria’s desire to join the EU in 2007.

• 20 June 2003: The European Council in Thessaloniki supported Bulgaria’s and Romania’s intention to complete their accession negotiations in 2004 and to join the EU in 2007.

• 15 June 2004: Bulgaria provisionally closed the negotiations with the EU on all 31 chapters of the acquis communautaire.

• 17 December 2004: The European Council confirmed the completion of the accession negotiations with Bulgaria.


• 1 January 2007: Bulgaria officially acquired the status of full member of the EU.
Annex 2: Public opinion surveys

**Eurobarometer 73 – Public Opinion in the European Union (Spring 2010)**
Fieldwork: May 2010
Publication: November 2010

**Eurobarometer 74 – Public Opinion in the European Union (Autumn 2010)**
Fieldwork: November 2010
Publication: February 2011

In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a positive, neutral or negative image? (Autumn 2010):

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In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a positive, neutral or negative image?

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Trust in the European Union (Autumn 2010)

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Trust in the European Union institutions (Spring 2010):

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<tr>
<td>EU 27</td>
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Trust in the European Union institutions (Bulgaria):

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Generally speaking, do you think that Bulgaria’s membership of the European Union is...?

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<th>Neither good nor bad</th>
<th>A bad thing</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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Taking everything into account, would you say that Bulgaria has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?

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<th>Has not benefited / Would not benefit</th>
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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH EDUCATION, STATE PROMOTION AND DIASPORA POLICIES IN BULGARIA

Antonina Zhelyazkova, Maya Kosseva, Marko Hajdinjak

The following chapter investigates the role and influence of the state and the EU institutions as actors in the process of identity construction – both a national and a European one. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first examines the policies and projects the EU institutions have employed in Bulgaria with the aim to develop the European identity and strengthen the European awareness among the citizens of the country. The second part, dealing with the Bulgarian state policies regarding the national and European identity formation, is divided into two sub-sections. One analyses the externally oriented (promotion of the state abroad and the policies regarding the Bulgarian diaspora), and the other the internally oriented identity construction programmes (education policies).

Despite the widespread perception that the quality of education in post-1989 Bulgaria has significantly decreased (along with its nation-building and identity construction mission), education is still seen (like in many other countries) as a central pillar supporting the state’s identity construction efforts. This is above all true for the primary and secondary education in general and for subjects like history and Bulgarian language and literature in particular, as they aim to construct and consolidate the civic and national identity among the pupils. In recent years, the curriculum has been revised to incorporate also the European dimension – establishing the place of Bulgaria in the European cultural, political and economic space and creating a sense of European identity among the pupils.

Two important identity construction programmes aimed at the audiences beyond the borders of Bulgaria and studied here are the promotion of the Bulgarian state abroad and the policies towards the diaspora. The
efforts to present the country as a modern, valuable and reliable (first potential and later actual) EU member were a necessity the successive Bulgarian governments had to engage with in order to counter the damaging and predominantly negative image Bulgaria had inherited from the past and which further intensified during the difficult transition period (especially in the 1990s). A special interest in the Bulgarian communities abroad has also occurred as a result of a combination of past and recent circumstances – in addition to the numerous historical diaspora communities, which emigrated from the Bulgarian lands during the Ottoman rule (1396 – 1878), approximately 1.5 million people have left the country since 1989 because of the economic and financial hardships.

**Description of the research**

The research was based on the discourse analysis of a wide selection of policy documents, existing studies and on a number of public speeches and interviews made by relevant public figures. An interview with an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working on the implementation of the Communication Strategy, was also conducted. The materials regarding the activities and programmes of the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria and the European Parliament’s Office in Bulgaria were obtained from their respective websites and their press releases.

The documents of the EU actors (European Commission, European Parliament) outline the policies aimed at assisting the construction of European identity among the Bulgarian citizens – both those belonging to the majority population and those from various minority communities.\(^1\) Although this is not an explicitly declared goal, the promotion and strengthening of the European identity can be traced through a number

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1 In recent years, the European Commission has funded or organised several minority-orientated projects in Bulgaria (“No to Discrimination in United Europe: Let us Talk about the Different!”; “National Campaign and Debates: Discrimination is Crime”; essay competition on the topic “Spring Day in Europe 2010” dedicated to 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion).
of activities implemented by the EU institutions in the country. The most significant are those related to the issues of monitoring of the human and minority rights, legal reform, education, and bringing the economic and social standards in Bulgaria in line with the European ones.

The main problem with the EU related corpus was the scarcity of materials dealing specifically with Bulgaria. The large majority of materials are intended for general European-wide audiences and merely present diverse information on a number of EU related matters in Bulgarian language.² Thus, when trying to get their message across they rarely take into consideration the Bulgarian historical, social, economic and cultural specific features.

The main policy and legal documents used to analyse the discourse of the Bulgarian politicians and other relevant representatives of the state institutions include:

• the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria
• Conception about the Bulgarian Cultural Institutions Abroad
• Communication Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for the European Union
• Decree № 2 for the Education Content: State Education Requirements for the Education Content
• Law on Public Education (with all its amendments made up to 2009)
• Law for the Bulgarian Citizenship and the various Regulations for its implementation (especially those sections of the law, which concern the integration of minority and immigrant communities in Bulgaria, and those regarding the care for the Bulgarians living outside the country)

Additional documents, which were analysed, were obtained from the web sites of various ministries (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science), the office of the President of Bulgaria, the National Assembly, several state agencies (State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, State Tourism Agency), and different media (public speeches, statements, interviews). These sources provided additional insight into how various Bulgarian governments formed their policies aimed at building and strengthening the national and European identity through education; how they tried to change the largely negative image Bulgaria had abroad, and what was their political agenda regarding the Bulgarian communities in other countries.

The EU’s identity construction programmes

The principal EU institution in Bulgaria is the Representation of the European Commission in Sofia.\(^3\) Its main task is to facilitate the communication between Bulgaria and the European Commission. This communication is not limited only to the contacts and liaison with the Bulgarian political institutions, but is also directly orientated towards the Bulgarian civil society and the media. The communication flow is not aimed only in one direction and the Representation also informs the European Commission about the processes and events in Bulgaria.

The web site of the Representation is well structured and provides a good coverage of the activities of the European Commission in the country. Additionally, the web site provides rich and varied information on the EU and its institutions, as well as on the individual member-states.

Most of the materials available on the Representation’s web site try to present the EU as a multi-faced and diverse, yet united community. Many of the materials and activities seem to be directed towards young people and children. The site even has separate sections entitled “Citizens” (with subsections on “Democracy, Dialogue and Debate,” “Information Services,” “Information Materials,” “Info Centre Services,” “Mobility and Free Movement,” and “Training and Careers”) and “Youth” (with subsections on “Education and Training Programmes,” “National Association of Bulgarian Students’ European Clubs,” “European Youth Portal” and “Games”). The youth policies intend to increase the education levels and encourage contacts with young people from various European countries.

The National Association of Bulgarian Students’ European Clubs (NABEC) is a non-profit association involved with the education of young people. The Bulgarian students’ European Clubs represent an extracurricular activity in the form of voluntary associations of students and teachers from secondary and high schools. NABEC helps the young people to develop European spirit and European consciousness and promotes tolerance and mutual respect on the European and global level. It also assists the young people to develop communication skills by way of establishing contacts with students from other European states.

The “Games” section, which is targeting the youngest Europeans, is trying to spread information and knowledge about the EU, its member-states and various important topics, such as the protection of the environment and the significance of active civil society. For the time being, this section of the Representation’s web site unfortunately seems to overestimate the Europeanness and above all the language skills of its target audience since less than half of the games are available also in Bulgarian.

The main goals of the section for citizens are to stimulate the civil society and to encourage its interactions with the national and European
institutions. Different useful information regarding the policies and goals of the EU is also provided, along with information on the projects the Bulgarian civic organisations have implemented with the financial support from the European Commission. More specifically, these are the projects linked with the “Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate.” Its main objective is to stimulate the debates on the future of Europe at European and national level and seek recognition for the added value that the European Union can provide. A call for proposals for the organization of national and regional initiatives for civil organizations in the context of Plan D was published by the Directorate-General “Communication” of the European Commission. Most of the projects implemented in Bulgaria were designed to encourage the gender equality, the integration of young people and minorities, the dialogue between citizens and institutions, and the prevention of discrimination.4

The Information Office of the European Parliament in Sofia is primarily occupied with organisation and participation in various information activities like briefings, seminars, exhibitions, and facilitation of contacts with Members of the European Parliament. Its target audience are the media, the government, regional agencies, the business community and the general public. One of its most important and the publicly visible activities is the annual organisation of various events marking the May 9 – the Europe Day.5

The information provided by the European Parliament’s Information Office is as a rule wrapped in a highly politically correct, almost politically sterile language, carefully stripped of any potentially controversial form and content. The Office reports almost exclusively on positive events and steers clear from any critical remarks or negative reporting.

4 For more on “Plan D – Democracy, Debate and Dialogue” and the projects implemented in Bulgaria, see http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/citizens/plan_d/index_en.htm

on EU or Bulgaria related topics. The European identity of Bulgarians is taken for granted and the press releases highlight various events confirming the place of Bulgarians and Bulgaria in Europe. Such examples are the news that the Bulgarian project “Best Engineering Competition BEC” won a third place in the Charlemagne Youth Prize 2010 competition (Информационно бюро на Европейски парламент в България, 2010); that the Bulgarian film “Eastern Plays” was nominated for the European Parliament 2009 LUX Prize (Информационно бюро на Европейски парламент в България, 2009a) or that an increasing number of people intends to vote on the elections for the European Parliament (Информационно бюро на Европейски парламент в България, 2009b). A large majority of the press releases merely inform the public about various events, forums, seminars and other activities organised by or involving the EU institutions in Bulgaria – especially those events involving visits by European Parliament representatives to Bulgaria.

The officials from the Representation of the European Commission and from the Information Office of the European Parliament only sporadically appear in the media or other public forums. Their appearances are usually linked with certain events like the EP elections or the celebration of the Europe Day. Their public appearances always avoid any potential controversy and often overflow with optimism to the point that their evaluation of the real situation could be called into question. A good example are the conclusions made by Zinaida Zlatanova, Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria, regarding the inquiry conducted on the occasion of Europe Day 2010 about the most important tasks of the EU in 2010. In her opinion, the majority of Bulgarians support the EU membership not because of the EU funds and other financial and economic possibilities, but because of values like freedom, democratic rights, protection of environment and security (Bulgaria News, 2010).
The state’s identity construction programmes

1. Externally oriented identity construction programmes

*The state-sponsored promotion of the country*

For the better part of its modern history, Bulgaria has had its fair share of difficulties with its image abroad and especially in the majority of countries from the western part of Europe. For most of the time, the country was either relatively unknown or associated with negative images like poverty and backwardness. During the Cold War, Bulgaria was widely seen as the most loyal and servile Soviet satellite in Eastern Europe. In that period, the most notorious Bulgarian claims to international fame were the alleged (and later refuted) Bulgarian involvement in the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II and the assassination of the Bulgarian dissident writer Georgi Markov in London with the aid of the so-called “Bulgarian umbrella.” In the late 1980s, the Bulgarian international image suffered additionally due to the communist regime’s oppression of Bulgarian Muslim minorities and the 1989 exodus of the Bulgarian Turkish community (in the summer of 1989 over 350,000 Turks left the country and moved to Turkey to escape repression).

Of course, not all of the reasons for the unfavourable western perceptions of Bulgaria were of its own making. Bulgaria (together with the majority of other countries on the Balkan peninsula) was often used as a depot of negative characteristics and stereotypes against which a positive image of the “European” was constructed. The Balkans played the role of a cultural symbol – the peninsula was perceived in the West as part of the continent which was not entirely “European,” as it differed from the majority of the European countries because of the religious and ethnic composition of its population, and because of the lower level of its economic and political development.

This model, established centuries ago, continued to be applied after 1989. A research conducted in 2006 analysed the image of Bulgaria as
seen and presented by the media in over 70 countries in the period from June 2005 to June 2006. The strongest media interest regarding Bulgaria was observed in Romania, Germany, Turkey, Greece, UK, Serbia and Macedonia. The Romanian, German and British media were on average the most critical of Bulgaria, while the media in the Balkan countries and Russia presented Bulgaria in predominantly positive light. Almost a quarter of all media materials on Bulgaria dealt with the country’s EU accession process – these publications were usually quite contradictory and ranged from positive to highly critical. Other topics on which Bulgaria received predominantly negative media coverage were corruption, organised crime, arms trade, nationalism, treatment of minorities, human rights, and its ability to safeguard the future border of the EU (after Bulgaria’s accession). The positive coverage was usually linked with the issues of tourism in Bulgaria, its cultural and scientific exchange with other countries, and the participation of the Bulgarian armed forces in international missions (Българска медийна коалиция, 2006).

In general, the Bulgarian image abroad is constituted in two main aspects. One is marked with an overwhelmingly negative bias and stresses the allegedly widespread corruption, criminality and poverty. The themes which are reported in the foreign media with the pronounced negative attitude are thus minority lifestyle, education, violations in the export of weapons, corruption, nationalism and crime. The other aspect centres on the trio sport-culture-tourism, and usually carries a positive connotation (although negative images are not uncommon – for example related to corruption and illegal substance abuse in sport and unsatisfactory quality of tourist services). The themes with the pronounced positive attitude include tourism, cultural and scientific exchange, bilateral relations, foreign policy and Bulgarian lifestyle (Market Links, Bulgarian Media Coalition, 2005).

Parallel to the process of Bulgaria’s EU accession and the corresponding political and economic reforms in the country, the Bulgarian government undertook a campaign to improve the image of Bulgaria abroad and especially in the EU member states. Thus in January 2002
the government presented its Communication Strategy (Министерски съвет, 2002), which had two main goals – national and international. While the national objective was to bring the Bulgarian citizens closer to the European idea, the international plan targeted the citizens of the 15 EU member states (as of 2002) and of the 10 candidate states from the 2004 enlargement wave with the goal of increasing the support for the Bulgarian EU membership. As we here examine only the externally orientated efforts of the Bulgarian state actors to improve the image of the country, only the international plan of the Strategy will be analysed here.

The authors of the Strategy made the following conclusions regarding the pre-2002 situation:

- the communication efforts of the Bulgarian state had previously targeted exclusively the political institutions of the EU and the member states while completely neglecting the citizens and the civic organisations;
- there were virtually no materials on Bulgarian candidacy available in foreign languages;
- the attempts to attract the foreign media to present Bulgaria in a more balanced and positive manner were highly insufficient;
- events popularising Bulgaria abroad were few and far apart.

The Strategy was thus designed to target various audiences – from general public through social and political institutions to the media and other opinion-makers. The message it attempted to deliver to these target groups had the following main points:

- Bulgaria is a modern and democratic country, which deserves to be accepted as an EU member
- it represents a good investment environment and it enjoys a stable political and economic system
- it is a rich and welcoming cultural and tourist destination.

In order to get this message across, a number of government institutions and civil society organisations engaged in various public aware-
ness campaigns like discussions, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and conferences. Books, brochures, information packages and documentary films presenting the Bulgarian EU candidacy were made, and articles presenting Bulgaria were featured in prestigious European media.

The concrete actions and activities for implementation of the strategy were foreseen in the Action Plan 2002-2006 (МВнР, ИЕИИ, 2002) and in the annual Work Programmes approved by the government. The theme, which came up over and over again in each Work Programme, was the need to present abroad an “up to date,” “correct” and “appropriate” image about the country. The underlying presumption was that the public across the EU simply did not know what the situation in Bulgaria “really was” and for the lack of the information clung on to the old and outdated clichés and stereotypes.

Despite that presumption, the first Work Programme in 2002 (МВнР, ИЕИИ, 2002) strongly accentuated on popularisation of Bulgarian history and Bulgarian contribution to the European and world culture. The key phrase connecting a large number of public events, press conferences, publications and other activities was “the cultural heritage,” quite clearly demonstrating that the Bulgarian government aimed at presenting the country abroad through its past, rather than its present.

The Bulgarian contribution to the European cultural heritage remained among the most strongly emphasised topics in the discourse of the Bulgarian politicians throughout the decade – not just in their communication with the European audiences, but also in the country itself. During the presidential election campaign of 2006, the President Georgi Parvanov (2001-2011) thus highlighted that “Bulgarians have good reason to be self-confident as a nation whose culture is one of the mainstays of European civilization” (Първанов, 2006a). In his address on the 2008 New Year’s Eve, Parvanov reflected on the first year of the Bulgarian EU membership. He named as one of the country’s largest achievements the fact that “we managed to impose the writing of the name of the European common currency with the Cyrillic alphabet and
in the Bulgarian way. Thus one of the greatest treasures of the world culture – our script – has entered into the official EU practice through us. In this way Bulgaria has laid out the path towards the preservation of their national identity for other countries as well” (Дневник, 2007).

On the occasion of one of the most important Bulgarian national holidays, May 24 (the Day of Bulgarian Education and Culture, and of the Slavonic Script), President Parvanov again praised the Cyrillic script as the Bulgarian contribution to the world culture and civilisation. Apart from its overwhelming importance for the formation and preservation of the Bulgarian nation, the Cyrillic script “marked a very important stage in the development of the whole Slavic community – the beginning of the Slavic literature.” Above all, according to President Parvanov, the Cyrillic script and the Slavonic liturgy, which originated in and spread from the capital of Medieval Bulgaria, had a “universal, humanistic and democratic importance because they threw aside the centuries-old dogmatic limitations, causing a true cultural revolution in Christian Europe of the time.” Parvanov concluded that just like “the Bulgarian state under Tsar Boris I defended and fulfilled the work of the Holy Brothers St. St. Cyril and Methodius, contemporary Bulgaria has made the Cyrillic script one of the official EU alphabets” (Президент на Република България, 2009).

It is rather symptomatic that even a couple of years after the Bulgarian EU accession, something that occurred in the 9th century still dominates the discourse of the Bulgarian politicians when outlining the Bulgarian contributions to the common European home. In the Middle Ages, the Bulgarian state (as highlighted by the former President Zhelyu Zhelev) was “a match for the Empire of Charlemagne and the Byzantine Empire and was shaping the European cultural and political traditions”

6 Despite the strong opposition from the European Central Bank, which insisted that euro should be spelled in the same way in all EU languages, Bulgaria has negotiated an exception: in all official documents euro is spelled in the Cyrillic alphabet as евро (евро) and not уро (евро).

7 Such discourses in Bulgaria typically overlook or neglect the fact that quite a few Slavic nations have never used the Cyrillic but Latin script.
Returning time and again to the glorious past when Bulgaria was a modern and progressive force defying the old dogmas and changing the shape of Christian Europe, the Bulgarian politicians inevitably display their awareness that contemporary Bulgaria is a far cry from such a position.

Coming back to the Communication Strategy and its 2003 Action Plan, we can see that in that year the government focused almost entirely on the international aspect of the communication campaign. While the integration process enjoyed an extremely high support among Bulgarians, the support for the Bulgarian EU membership was less enthusiastic in many EU member states. The Bulgarian government believed that the Bulgarian communities and their organizations abroad in cooperation with the diplomatic missions could play an important role for the promotion of the country. They were engaged in the organisation and implementation of various information campaigns. The Bulgarian political leaders visiting various countries almost always included in their agendas meetings with the diaspora organisations and societies. Numerous cultural events (like celebrations of national holidays, art exhibitions, concerts and film screenings) were also organised in many EU countries with the cooperation of the local authorities and organizations, especially in various twin towns and sister cities across Europe (Public Diplomacy, 2007).

With the successful conclusion of the accession negotiations in 2004, the annual Work Programme focused on the national campaign regarding the approaching EU membership (Public Diplomacy, 2007). Evaluating the results of the Bulgarian promotion and diplomatic efforts,

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8 For example, the Flash Eurobarometer 132/2 showed that when asked to name three candidate countries that are applying to join the European Union, only 4% of the respondents from EU 15 named Bulgaria. By far the highest was the result in neighbouring Greece (14%), while the lowest (1%) was in Finland and Sweden. Overall Bulgaria was the fifth least known among 13 candidate countries (European Commission, 2002, p.11).

The Standard Eurobarometer 58 showed that Bulgaria was the fourth least desired among the 13 candidate countries (40% of the respondents were against its EU membership and 39% supported it). The only candidates with less favourable results were Slovenia, Romania and Turkey (European Commission, 2003, p. 95).
the Bulgarian Media Coalition conducted the described above survey on the image of Bulgaria in foreign media. The results were not very positive and showed that in many EU member states, the media coverage of Bulgaria tended to be ambiguous or negative, with issues like corruption, organised crime and poverty still dominating the picture.

In 2005, when Bulgaria signed the EU Accession Treaty, the Communication Strategy abroad aimed at accelerating the process of Accession Treaty ratification by EU member states. For this reason, the information campaigns focused on the potential positive contribution that the country would provide as an EU member in all spheres of the economic and public life (Public Diplomacy, 2007). These efforts can be evaluated as reasonably successful. The Eurobarometer surveys from May and June 2005 showed that Bulgaria was improving its positions abroad – 50% of the respondents were in favour of Bulgaria joining the European Union (36% were against). In comparison, 45% were in favour and 41% were against Romania becoming an EU member (European Commission, 2005, p. 29).

After the parliamentary elections in 2005, the new government was formed and with it came the new Communication Strategy for EU 2007-2009 (МВнР, 2007). In 2008, the second year of Bulgaria’s EU membership, the two main international aims of the Strategy were to consolidate the positive image of Bulgaria as a stable and reliable political and economic partner in the EU framework and to popularise its contribution to the European cultural diversity. The key message aimed at the audiences abroad in 2007 and 2008 was that Bulgaria was “a foreseeable ally other countries could count on and a good, stable neighbour in a troublesome region” (Дневник, 2007).

In 2008, 158 events were organised in 38 countries. The majority of them were linked to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Europe Day (May 9), the Open Door Day of the European Institutions, the priorities of the Slovenian and French rotation of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and events and debates concomitant with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon.
The main underlying messages Bulgarian authorities attempted to communicate through these events were the following:

1. Bulgaria is a trustworthy EU member, which implements its obligations effectively and transparently and in full compliance with the general European policies, strategies and initiatives.
2. Bulgaria has a key regional importance and as an EU member plays a crucial role in the bilateral and multilateral relations in the Balkans and the Black Sea regions.
3. Multi-ethnic and multi-religious Bulgaria can play an important and active role in the European communication and information campaigns on intercultural dialogue.
4. Bulgaria is a country with a rich and diverse cultural-historical heritage and thus it is a valuable contribution to the European cultural diversity.

The main problem with these messages was that they could at best be described as wishful thinking. How trustworthy EU member Bulgaria was and how effectively and transparently it was implementing its obligations was highlighted by the ever more critical reports from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on progress in Bulgaria under the co-operation and verification mechanism. For example, the 2008 Report on the Management of EU-funds in Bulgaria stated that:

“Bulgaria is experiencing difficulties in many of these programmes and has to demonstrate that sound financial management structures are in place and operating effectively. Administrative capacity is weak. Beyond that, there have been serious allegations of irregularities as well as suspicions of fraud and conflicts of interest in the award of contracts. Investigations by the EU anti-fraud office, OLAF, into the management of EU funds by the Bulgarian authorities have led to the temporary suspension of pre-accession funds and the freezing of payments under various other financial instruments” (Commission of the European Communities, 2008, p. 3).

The culmination of this trend came in July 2008, when the Commission withdrew the accreditation of two main agencies implementing the EU funds in Bulgaria, and suspended payments under three pre-accession programmes (PHARE / Transition Facility, ISPA and SAPARD) because
of numerous weaknesses and irregularities in the management of these funds (Budgetary Control Committee of the EP, 2009). In September 2008, the payments within the EEA Grants were also suspended (EEA and Norway Grants, 2008). As a result, Bulgaria was temporarily denied access to nearly one billion Euros of aid. The funds were made available again after the new government of Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria party (decisive winner of July 2009 elections) initiated the necessary reforms and improved the management of the EU funds.

Bulgaria’s regional importance and its “crucial role” in the Balkan and Black Sea regions should also not be overemphasized. None of the important regional infrastructural projects (Transport Corridor No. 8,9 the railway line between Sofia and Skopje, the Vidin – Calafat bridge across Danube, the Burgas–Alexandroupoli oil pipeline), which have been in the planning since the 1990s, has been implemented yet. The political relations with Macedonia remain highly complicated and controversial.

Lastly, Bulgaria is no longer a multi-ethnic and multi-religious island of stability on the volatile Balkans, as it used to be in the 1990s. Racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia have been on the constant rise over the recent years.10 This is especially the case since 2005, when the extreme political views received their face and political legitimacy with the appearance and electoral success of the ultra-right political party Attack.

It is thus hardly surprising that the continuous efforts made through a number of public awareness campaigns and events foreseen and implemented through the government’s Communication Strategy accomplished little. The unresolved problems with corruption and ineffective and fraudulent management of European funds continued to stain the

9 West-East Transport Corridor on the axis Italy - Albania - Macedonia - Bulgaria and with a further connection with the countries from the Caucasian Region and the Middle East. The initiative for its construction was launched in 1990, but has hardly moved on from the planning stage.

10 To be explained in more detail in the following chapters.
image of Bulgaria abroad. Instead of engaging in a genuine reform efforts and intensifying the fight against corruption and organised crime, the government of Sergey Stanishev (2005-2009) tried to counteract this negative publicity by turning to various lobbying companies. The Austrian company Hochegger Kommunikationsberatung was given a contract worth almost one million Euros to carry out a campaign for strengthening the positive image of Bulgaria across the European Union. In the course of this campaign, Hochegger company organized and in some cases financed the visits of European journalists to Sofia, where they interviewed the Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev and other government officials. The US-based PR consultancy Burson-Marsteller also performed certain PR duties for the Bulgarian government – for example writing articles about how the European Commission unfairly treated Bulgaria (Deutsche Welle, 2008).

One of the government agencies directly involved in the promotion of the country abroad was the State Tourism Agency. It was closed down in July 2009, when it was incorporated into the newly established mega-ministry – the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism. Its efforts were directed at presenting Bulgaria as an attractive tourist destination both on the international and internal market. The three main messages the state-organised promotion activities attempted to communicate were:

- “Bulgaria – a new EU member”
- “Bulgaria – waters of health”
- “Bulgaria – land of ancient civilisations”

The main idea was to present the country as a new member of the European family – a new neighbour and partner, and an attractive tourist destination (at the same time modern and dynamic, yet offering a wealth of natural and cultural-historical attractions) (Държавна агенция по туризъм, 2009, p. 24). The slogan in the TV ads, played on CNN, Euronews and other TV channels, presented Bulgaria as “Easy to Find.” A combination of modern and traditional, the ads simulated an internet search through various Bulgarian cultural, historical and natural attrac-
tions. It is interesting to note that according to several studies conducted among foreign tourists in Bulgaria, the tourist ads and other promotional activities aimed at foreign tourists were among the least important reasons why they chose to come to the country. In a research conducted in 2007, only 2.1% of respondents named promotional ads for Bulgaria as a factor influencing their decision, while in a 2009 inquiry, only about a third (37.2%) of respondents confirmed that they had seen at all an ad for Bulgaria before visiting the country (Държавна агенция по туризъм, 2007; МБМД и Държавна агенция по туризъм, 2009). Like in the case of the government’s Communication Strategy, it seems that the efforts of the State Tourism Agency also largely failed to reach or to significantly influence its target audiences abroad.

**The state’s policies towards Bulgarians abroad**

The Bulgarian diaspora around the world can be divided in three main groups: the communities living outside the borders of Bulgaria due to historical circumstances, the political emigrants from the period before 1989, and the economic emigrants since 1989. According to Bozhidar Dimitrov, a former Minister without portfolio (July 2009 – February 2011), the group of the pre-1989 political emigrants is the smallest. In addition, many of them have returned to the country after the fall of the communist regime. For this reason, he divides the Bulgarian communities abroad into two main groups – post-1989 emigrants and historical communities. In his opinion, the emigrants are between one million and a million and a half. This is a very fluctuating group and it is not possible to estimate how many have emigrated permanently and how many will in time return to Bulgaria. The historical communities number around 2.5 million people, who have been assimilated to various degrees in the countries they live in (mainly Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova and Ukraine) (БИГ.БГ, 2010).

The two groups significantly differ regarding their perception of their national identity, which necessitates a very different approach of the state in its effort to preserve it. Dimitrov believes that the state should take special care for the historical communities and especially for
those of their representatives who are turning to Bulgaria to help them preserve their national identity. The state needs to be receptive and cooperative towards the numerous Bulgarian societies, churches, cultural centres, libraries and other organisations of the Bulgarian diaspora communities. Such patriotic organisations usually have good social positions within the communities and enjoy trust and respect. That is why, Dimitrov believes, the state needs to provide them with full support so that the national identity of Bulgarians in diaspora could be preserved (БИГ.БГ, 2010). Dimitrov, a historian well known for his nationalistic views, has stressed on numerous occasions that the policies of the Bulgarian state towards the Bulgarians abroad have to be based on two priorities: preservation of the national identity of all Bulgarians who live outside the country and granting of citizenship to all those who want it.

The crucial element in the efforts for the preservation of the national identity of Bulgarians abroad is education. The state is thus obliged to improve and intensify its support for the Bulgarian schools in various countries (including Austria, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine and Serbia). The Bulgarian schools abroad follow a curriculum approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. The schools receive financial support from the state in addition to textbooks and other education materials (Агенция Фокус, 2010).

According to estimates, there are Bulgarian communities (historical, emigrant, student) in over 70 countries around the globe. The majority of these communities have set up various organisations with different goals – cultural centres, libraries, educational organisations and schools. While most of them are national or even local in character, some are also connected across state borders. For example, the International Union of Bulgarians Residing in Central Europe was established in 2000 and has a seat in Prague. Its members are the Bulgarian societies from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Romania.11

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The attitude of the Bulgarian public and the policies of the state towards these communities have been marked by the aspiration to preserve and develop their Bulgarian identity. However, these aspirations have been rarely backed by particular concrete and effective actions. This has started to change only in the recent years. The continuing decline of the active labour force in Bulgaria has lead to intensification of the debates on the need for a national policy on attracting the émigrés to return to the country and on the integration of the historical diaspora communities. The debate on the national strategy for the Bulgarians abroad started in 2006 on the initiative of the President Georgi Parvanov. In response, the Economic and Social Council\(^\text{12}\) put forward its position that the state should prepare a package of economic stimuli for the return of the economic emigrants. In the end of 2007, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs prepared a special report on the state policy for the Bulgarians abroad. The government proposed the introduction of green cards for access to the labour market to which the Bulgarians from the diaspora would have a preferential access (Танев, 2008).

The institution in charge with the implementation of the policies of the Bulgarian state regarding the Bulgarian diaspora is the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad. It was established in 1992 as a coordinating body of the government, but has existed in its present form and under the current name since 2000. The main goal of the agency is the preservation of the spiritual heritage of the nation (its language, culture, traditions and history) among the Bulgarians across the world. The Agency supports and stimulates the activities of societies, associations, church communes, the media and schools of the Bulgarian communities in dozens of countries and encourages the establishment of such organizations in places where there are none. It also advocates their association into territorial or specialized networks. In line with the

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\(^{12}\) The Economic and Social Council (ESC) is “the civil parliament” of Bulgaria. It unites a variety of Bulgarian civil society organisations of similar interests. Its mission is to facilitate the communication between the society and the government. The ESC is a “consultative body expressing the will of civil society organisations regarding the economic and social development” (Economic and Social Council Act, 2001). See http://www.esc.bg/
government’s Communication Strategy, the Agency also drew diaspora organisations into state activities aimed at enhancing the positive Bulgarian image abroad (ДАБЧ, 2009; ДАБЧ, 2010).

Numerous other state institutions are also concerned in various ways with the Bulgarians living outside the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a role in outlining the general foreign policy of the state, including certain policies dealing with the Bulgarians abroad. The Ministry of Justice provides legal aid and is involved in the process of granting Bulgarian citizenships. The Ministry of Culture supports the Bulgarian cultural and information centres in various countries. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science provides assistance to the Bulgarian schools in other countries, coordinates the activities regarding the education on Bulgarian language, literature, geography and history at the diplomatic missions of the country, and finances the education activities of Bulgarians abroad. The President’s Office (the vice-president signs the decrees on granting citizenships) and the State Agency on National Security (investigates the applicants for the Bulgarian citizenship who do not reside in the country) are involved in the process of granting Bulgarian citizenship.

A special attention towards Bulgarians around the world was given also in the National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006 – 2020, prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (МТСП, 2007). The Strategy has foreseen the following measures and activities directed towards ethnic Bulgarians living abroad:

- Facilitating the procedures for obtaining Bulgarian citizenship;
- Providing scholarships for children of ethnic Bulgarian origin from other countries who wish to study in Bulgaria;
- Activating and expanding the spheres of cooperation with Bulgarian emigrants;
- Elaborating a policy for returning of ethnic Bulgarians and encouraging their entrepreneurship within Bulgaria.

Despite the declared principal goal of preserving the national identity of the Bulgarians abroad, the concrete actions undertaken by the Bulgarian
state institutions since 1989 show that the Bulgarian émigrés were often seen as a tool rather than a goal of certain policies. For example, the measures planned and implemented under the National Demographic Strategy are aimed above all at counteracting the consequences of the deepening demographic crisis in the country – including the aging of the population and the shortage of qualified workforce in numerous areas. The importance of the fears spread by extreme nationalists that in a few decades the ethnic Bulgarians would be a minority in “their” own country due to the higher birth rate of certain minorities (especially the Roma) should also not be underestimated, especially in the light of the growing popularity of populist and nationalistic political parties.

The two principal laws dealing with the status of the Bulgarians abroad are the Law for the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria (Prom. SG. 30/11 Apr 2000) and the Law for the Bulgarian Citizenship (Prom. SG. 136/18 Nov 1998, last amend. SG. 33/30 Apr 2010). The Law for the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria has remained more or less on paper only. The critics have noted that although the law foresees certain measures and activities for the preservation of the Bulgarian ethno-cultural space, they are very vague and insufficient, and do not cover all ethno-specific factors like language, culture, traditional religion and others in equal measure.

Ivaylo Kalfin (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2005-2009) described the Law for the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria as “not particularly good compilation of three proposals.” Significant parts of the Law cannot be implemented because they contradict other laws. According to Kalfin, the Law has flaws and needs amendments and supplements, although a better solution would be if an entirely new law was prepared. It should be accompanied by several bylaws that would regulate interactions between state institutions, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, academic communities, the media and representatives of the Bulgarian diaspora. Until this happens, the regulation of these social interactions will remain fragmented by numerous laws, bylaws and decrees (Калфин, 2007).
The most problematic aspect of the implementation of the Law has been its institutional backup. The Law foresees the establishment of a National Council of the Bulgarians Living outside the Republic of Bulgaria. The National Council should consist of nine members, five of whom being elected among the Bulgarians living outside Bulgaria. In practice, the procedure for the selection of its members is very unclear and creates conditions for setting the Bulgarian communities from different countries against each other on one hand, and for setting them against the Bulgarian state institutions on the other hand. The political and party preferences and personal interests for occupying a place in the National Council can also play a role. For all the above reasons the National Council of the Bulgarians Living outside the Republic of Bulgaria has not been formed yet. As a consequence, the majority of provisions of the Law for the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria are not implemented at all (Александров, 2003; Временни Обществени съвети на българите в чужбина, 2011).

In 2011, the organisation Social Councils of Bulgarians Living Abroad sent an open letter to the Vice Prime Minister Simeon Dyankov and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolai Mladenov. The letter included a conceptual design for amendments and supplements to the Law for the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria, including a proposal for establishment of the National Council of the Bulgarians Living outside Bulgaria. More concretely, the proposed concept foresees the goals, functions, structure and composition of the National Council. While the existing law states that the Council has nine members, the proposal suggests 80 members – of which 70 should be selected by the Bulgarian citizens permanently residing abroad and 10 should be appointed by the Bulgarian state institutions (Временни Обществени съвети на българите в чужбина, 2011).

The Law for the Bulgarian Citizenship was last amended in 2010. The amendments eased and accelerated the procedure for citizenship acquisition for the Bulgarian diaspora. According to Bozhidar Dimitrov (who was still minister at the time when the parliament passed the
amendments), these changes are especially important for the historical Bulgarian communities, which are under the threat of assimilation and consequent loss of their national identity. He believes that the Bulgarian citizenship would offer them a significant protection against this danger (БИ Г. БГ, 2010).

It is very interesting to compare the data on number of people who have acquired the Bulgarian Citizenship in years before and after the Law was amended. In 2008, 7,113 persons received the Bulgarian citizenship, while in 2009 this number was 9,400. However, in 2010, when the amended Law for the Bulgarian Citizenship entered into force, the increase was substantial – 14,979 people obtained Bulgarian citizenship. The numbers continued to grow in 2011, with 18,473 new citizens. Almost all of them (18,319) obtained citizenship because of their ethnic Bulgarian descent. According to Dimitrov, this is still insufficient. In his opinion, up to 30,000 people per year (mostly ethnic Bulgarians from other countries) should obtain Bulgarian passports to solve the demographic crisis, as the annual difference between natality and mortality in the country is around 32,000 (Агенция Фокус, 2010).

2. Internally oriented identity construction programmes

**Education**

There is a general understanding in Bulgaria that education is a traditional Bulgarian value. Various studies conducted in the country have shown that the desire to obtain education above the level of secondary school is based on traditional cultural values and not so much on pragmatic stimuli. They also show that university education is widely seen more as a means to obtain a secure employment and a stable but modest income, than as a path to a high salary and business career (ПРООН, 1999, pp. 48-49).

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13 See Acquisition of Bulgarian citizenship, http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?mtype=8&type=110
Over the last 20 years, the Bulgarian education system has faced several fundamental problems. Some have a demographic or administrative character and will not be subject of this report. Others – the most crucial ones – are conceptual. The conceptual problems are linked to the rethinking of history, rewriting of history textbooks in a way which would leave out the prejudices and stereotypes about the neighbouring Balkan countries, and to the finding and recognizing the place of the minority communities in the history of Bulgaria. These issues are also connected with the need for consolidation of the common European values and introduction of multiculturalism into the Bulgarian system of education. The latter includes a whole system of steps – from guaranteeing the right for studying the mother language to desegregation of the so-called Roma schools. These are the principal problems the Bulgarian education system has had to overcome after 1989 and the process of rethinking is today still far from being complete.

In Bulgaria, historians are key figures not just as opinion-makers – many have become active politicians. The popular historical notions about the “Turkish yoke,” about the hostile neighbours annexing historical Bulgarian lands, and about Macedonia, which is continuously falsifying and appropriating Bulgarian history, have thus became part and parcel of the Bulgarian political life and education system. For Bulgarians, the national mobilisation is therefore based on the facts and myths about the Ottoman rule, the aggressive neighbours Greeks and Serbs, and on the irredentist aspirations towards Macedonia.

In the global and multicultural world of today, the modern international tendencies in the education are gradually overcoming the traditional educational policies based on nationalism and cultural separation. The schools are becoming multicultural. An increasing number of school classes in Europe consist of children belonging to different ethnic, racial and religious communities, and Bulgaria is no exception to this trend. These changes have a direct impact on the Bulgarian system of education and the intercultural education has no alternative. Despite the considerable delay (such debates began in Western Europe
and the USA 30 to 40 years ago), the discussions on how to reform the education in Bulgaria and make it truly intercultural have been on the agenda since the late 1990s. The demographic analyses show that in the next 20 years, the Bulgarian schools will be predominantly multiethnic. It is thus essential to find a way to introduce pedagogical practices which would transform the schools into places where teachers and students could overcome the borders of their own cultures, enter into dialogue with other cultures and develop their new multiple cultural identities (Иванов, 2002, p. 15).

Despite the changes, the primary and secondary education have largely retained their national identity construction importance. This is especially true for several crucial subjects, which are designed in a way to induce and strengthen the sense of national identity and belonging among the pupils. Thus for example one of the main goals of the subject “Bulgarian Language and Literature” in the first four grades is to help the pupils to recognize the main features of the national identity through the study of works of literature as “Bulgarian language and literature are among the most important means through which the national identity is constructed and consolidated” (МОМН, 2000a, p.2). Most often, the national identity is still understood in a narrow sense – as mono-ethnic community, and not as a civic nation, composed of people belonging to different ethno-religious communities.

In the upper grades, a wider European identity is superimposed on the national one. Thus by the 12th grade pupils should see the Bulgarian literature not just as a pillar of the national social and cultural history, but understand its development as an inseparable part of the common European literary process. Apart from being aware of the distinctive features of their own national and cultural identity, pupils are also expected to comprehend the role of the Christianity for the formation of the European cultural model, understand the significance of Renaissance for the development of humanitarian values and become familiar with the main periods in the development of the European culture and literature.
The debate about the place and role of Europe in the Bulgarian education process, and about the place of Bulgaria in the European education has intensified among the experts on education in recent years. The problem with the integration of Bulgarian and European education is also linked to the clear formulation of the overall education goals and priorities. Since 1989, these goals and priorities have been changed many times, but often remained unfulfilled or not understandable for the majority of participants in the education process. The formulated goals are often too general, sometimes they do not correspond to the social-political realities in the country, while in other cases they are not compatible with education policies of the European Union.

A wide range of issues, which have been launched and often chaotically introduced into education since 1989, include topics like democratisation, Europeanization, tolerance, multicultural education, civic education, life-long learning, etc. At the same time, the Bulgarian students and their families live in the situation of virtual or not-really-real democracy, marked by high level of corruption and non-transparency, hostile inter-ethnic environment, and lack of genuine possibilities for professional, economic and social realisation. When faced with these realities, all that sometimes remains from the well-formulated European educational goals in the field of humanities are empty shells without content.

The civic education has been incorporated into the subjects “Homeland” (first grade), “World Around Us” (second grade), “Human and Society” (third and fourth grade), “History and Civilisation” and “Geography and Economy” (fifth to eight grades), “Philosophy” and “World and Personality” (ninth to twelfth grades). One of the goals of “History and Civilisation” is to contribute to the formation of the civic identity of the pupils. According to the subject description, this is possible only by understanding the past – the national memory and the civilisational heritage (MOMH, 2000b, p. 45). The main problem with this discourse is that in many cases, the national memory can be in contradiction with the contemporary civic identity– especially in multi-ethnic coun-
tries like Bulgaria, where ethnic and religious minorities still have not received a proper place in the national education. Although this is by far not the only reason, it has also significantly contributed to an ever growing problem – the drop-out of minority children from the education system. This is especially the case with Roma children. Over the last two decades, the Roma community has been pushed from almost all spheres of public life, including employment, health care and education. The actions and measures of consecutive governments were not systematic, sustainable and well thought out and much remains to be accomplished.

The subject “Geography and Economy” has been significantly revised after 1989 and has obtained a clear European orientation. Thus pupils learn about the geographic preconditions for the European integration and about the process through which Bulgaria has become a part of the European economic, political and cultural space (МОМН, 2000b, p. 46).

Bulgarians in general and the employees in the education system in particular are usually reluctant to accept outside influences and experiences. They perceive education as a conservative and closed system. The conventional wisdom among Bulgarians is that their education is on a very high level. However, the notions about the current state of the education in Bulgaria strongly differ from generation to generation. The larger part of the middle and older generations believe that the education in Bulgaria was very good before 1989 and that after the start of the transition, the administrative organisation, the financial endowment and the educative function of the education system have significantly deteriorated. In contrast, the generations enrolled in the education process after 1989 feel no nostalgia for the communist system of education (Муше, 2008, pp. 57-58).

The views differ also among the politicians. The President Parvanov (2001-2011) thus believes that throughout history, Bulgaria has always reached the apogee of its might and development not through military
strength, but through education and art. Through the centuries, the Bulgarian education has established excellent traditions – above all the general accessibility and high quality. During the years of transition, the state has gradually abdicated from its obligations towards education. The consequences have been the continuously decreasing share of finances for science and education and the lowering social status of teachers, researchers and scholars. This has logically resulted in the deterioration of the previously high quality standards of the Bulgarian education (Първанов, 2006b).

Despite acknowledging the valuable traditions and achievements of the Bulgarian education, the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov believes that education needs to be developed and modernised. When presenting the programme of his party (GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) during the 2009 election campaign, Borisov said that in order to overcome the crisis and develop rapidly, the Bulgarian education needs to be reformed and modernised so as to be able to shape active personalities with modern skills and high professional knowledge which will make them competitive on the European labour market (GERB, 2009).

Regardless of its numerous shortcomings and questionable educational goals, the advantage of the communist education system was its sound and well-working administrative system. In contrast, the education system in Bulgaria today is based on viable and progressive ideas, but suffers from inefficient and flawed administration. Paradoxically, the new democratic and multicultural paradigm is being introduced as the new dogma. All too often the “European idea” is forced into the education process like propaganda, bringing out the bad memories from the past and invoking suspicions regarding the future.

For example, some of the new education projects are encouraging contacts between Bulgarian schoolchildren and their peers from different European countries. The children make postcards in different languages, and learn how various historic and contemporary holidays
are celebrated all over the EU. They participate in projects entitled “Children learn about Europe” or “I am a citizen of Europe.” Various facts and features of the EU countries are studied – geography, folklore, official holidays, flags and other symbols. The children are often photographed under the EU flag. “Euro museums” are set up in schools (Mikoe, 2008, pp. 58-59). All these initiatives have one main purpose – to popularise Europe and the European identity among the schoolchildren. Of course, all these changes and additions to the curriculum are more than welcome and they help the children to see beyond the borders of their home country. They make them feel that Bulgaria truly has its place in the European community. The problem is in the way these messages are delivered.

The parallels with the past are countless. Before 1989, the Bulgarian schoolchildren had pen-friends in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Instead of the blue EU flag, they had their pictures taken under the red flag of the Soviet Union. Geography and history classes provided knowledge about the geography, folklore and holidays of the socialist countries from all over the world. While history lessons today are highlighting the Bulgarian contributions to the historical development of Europe and the EU, pre-1989 history highlighted the Bulgarian merits for the international communist cause. Even the old cliché about the great socialist family has been reborn through slogans like “Bulgaria has become a member of the great family called the European Union.” Other slogans like “Worthy citizens of our country, of Europe and of the world,” “Bulgaria – an inseparable part of the EU,” “Let us draw on the international and European experience” also have almost identical parallels in the totalitarian past (Mikoe, 2008, pp. 59-60).

A similar observation can be made regarding the contents of the school subject “World and Personality.” The textbooks for this subject published since 2002, and the textbook for the subject “Social Studies” from the period before 1989 are very similar in style and in the way they try to get the message across. The terminology related to the Marxist-Leninist methodology and ideology has been substituted with
the pro-European discourse. The appraisal of the communist East has given way to the Western apologetics. The propaganda clichés typical of the period before 1989 have been redesigned and in their new form have been widely used in the textbooks in the name of the European integration after 2007.

Despite this sometimes clumsy and inappropriate approach, the fact is that today the educational themes and programmes are permeated with European topics, which is not only inevitable, but beneficial and meaningful. The children are made aware of the fact that their freedoms and liberties are protected by European and international documents and treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Programme for Human Rights Education and others. The children are provided with the information that they can turn for protection to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Even when it comes to topics like ecology, security or various social issues, a positive reference to “Europe” and “European” is indispensable.

In conclusion, it can be said that the primary and secondary education in Bulgaria are still counted among the main pillars on which the national identity is constructed and consolidated. Although attempts have been made to make the education more multicultural and above all to find and recognise the place of various ethnic and religious minorities in the national education system, the result has been the establishment of a “parallel” system rather than a change of the system itself. The children from minorities can thus study their language and culture through a number of elective subjects, while the children from the majority population remain vaguely, if at all, aware of the culture, history and language of their peers from other ethno-religious communities. The need for a genuine multiculturalism in the Bulgarian education system will in coming years only intensify because of the increasing number of immigrants settling in the country.
One positive change in the Bulgarian education that took place is the introduction of the European dimension into the school system. The Bulgarian national identity is now largely presented as being an inseparable part of the common European identity.

Conclusion

The main focus in the activities of the EU actors in Bulgaria (above all the Representation of the European Commission) is to increase the level of information regarding the EU among Bulgarians and to stimulate the balanced development of the European identity alongside the national one. These goals are implemented through a number of cultural-informative campaigns, projects and other activities. Despite the attempts to provide for a balanced approach, the activities aimed at popularising Europe in Bulgaria have an upper hand over the popularisation of Bulgaria in Europe. Another noticeable feature of the EU activities is their focus on the young people and children, who are perceived as promising target groups and appropriate “soil” for the cultivation of European self-awareness and identity.

The main criticism regarding the work of the EU actors is that the messages they communicate to the public tend to be unrealistically optimistic and strictly informative by nature. Steering clear from any controversial issues and hardly ever expressing critical or negative views can call their credibility and objectivity into question. Without taking a more critical and active role in the evaluation of the social processes, they are in danger of being seen by the society as no more than propaganda-information services rather than genuine agents of change and development.

The Bulgarian state actors have made repeated attempts to deliver their message equally to the audiences in the country and abroad. However, their policies and actions have suffered from poor coordination and low effectiveness.
How successful and effective has been the Bulgarian EU Communication Strategy (both in Bulgaria and in other EU countries) remains a question. The high support for the EU and the high approval rates of the EU institutions among Bulgarians (from 10 to 20% higher than the EU average)\(^\text{14}\) are a result of numerous other factors rather than the Communication Strategy. Actually, the fact that the majority of Bulgarians are rarely familiar with the most basic facts about the EU institutions (which they nevertheless strongly trust) and often have difficulties even to tell them apart shows that the Strategy failed in one of its principal goals – to inform the Bulgarian citizens about all aspects of the EU membership and about their rights and duties as EU citizens. How successful was the Strategy abroad is also very questionable, as there is no reliable way to verify if the actions that have been implemented succeeded in changing the image of the country for the better.

The Bulgarians who live abroad have been in the focus of lively public debates for years, especially in regard to their status and their demographic potential from which Bulgaria could benefit. Despite the numerous discussions and the resulting legislation which concerns them, the actions of the state regarding the diaspora have been ineffective and poorly coordinated. Until recently, the procedure for acquisition of citizenship was not only complicated, but often not implemented well and prone to corrupt practices. It is still too early to properly evaluate the effects of the amendments to the Law for Bulgarian Citizenship, introduced by the government of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, but the expectations are that they should significantly improve the state policies in this field. One of the main problems with the amendments is the reasoning provided to justify them, as the discourse shows that the current government sees the nation in predominantly ethnic terms, rather than as a civic and multicultural community of citizens. The “fresh blood” brought by the ethnic Bulgarians from abroad is expected to overcome the demographic crisis and reverse the “percentage battle” – the increasing share of ethnic and religious minority communities among the population of Bulgaria.

\(^{14}\) See Григорова, Вълковски. 2009, pp. 6-11.
Regarding the education, it is still perceived (especially the primary and secondary levels) as the backbone of the state’s national identity construction programme. The education reform, which began after the change of the political system in 1989, is still ongoing and will probably continue for a decade or more. Despite the numerous attempts to turn the education from monocultural to multicultural and thus recognize the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the country, the results are still unsatisfactory and much remains to be accomplished. This is true not just in regard with the traditional Bulgarian minorities, but even more so in connection with the children from various immigrant communities (from China, various Arab states, Iran, Afghanistan, African countries, etc.). One substantial and successful reform has been the Europeanization of certain subjects and placement of the Bulgarian national identity into the context of the common European identity.

An observation which makes a strong impression in the analysis of the efforts of the Representation of the European Commission and the Bulgarian government, is that their goals and activities coincide to a very significant extent. At the same time however, almost no common actions and projects can be observed. It seems as if there is almost no coordination and interaction between them – neither on organisational, nor on informational, nor on practical level.

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Bulgaria has been a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country since the reestablishment of its statehood in 1878. Since its independence from the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarian society and state institutions have been involved in recurring efforts to find a balance between maintaining a unitary nation-state and accommodating the ethnic and religious diversity in the country. For the larger part of the 20th century and especially under the authoritarian regimes (the rule of Tsar Boris between 1934 and 1943, and the communist era from 1947 to 1989), the mono-national state was perceived as the desired ideal. The state policies, especially those related to the formation and maintenance of national identity, were designed and implemented to uphold the (mono)national unity, often at the expense of various ethnic and religious minorities. Their rights were violated and in the most extreme cases, the minorities were victims of ruthless assimilation policies.

This has largely changed after 1989. The process of recognition of multiculturalism and diversity in the country has been an inseparable part of the democratic changes. The consensus that minorities have rights which must be guaranteed by the state, had preceded the Bulgarian aspirations for joining the EU by several years. During the 1990s, when most of the Southeast Europe was engulfed by the flames of ethnic nationalism and conflict, Bulgaria was establishing its own model of multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence, based on the traditional grass-root respect and acceptance of otherness.

1 Tsar Boris ruled from 1918 to 1943, but it is considered that his rule was authoritarian only after the coup in 1934, when the political parties were banned and he assumed full control of the country.
The 1990s were thus the decade of the “Bulgarian ethnic model.” It was also a decade marked by the deeply entrenched auto-stereotype about “tolerant Bulgarians” and the widespread belief that education in Bulgaria was on a very high level. The late 1990s were also the time of great expectations and hopes linked with the EU accession process – the EU membership was widely perceived as a universal solution to all problems the country experienced during the first decade of the democratic transition.

In the recent years, these notions, which used to be seen as self-evident dogmas by the political circles, media, numerous scholars and a significant part of the wider society, have been seriously questioned and reconsidered. Recent studies and scholarly debates have challenged the nature (or indeed the existence) of the “Bulgarian ethnic model,” showing that multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence in Bulgaria was far from being a result of deliberate and conscious tolerance and respect of diversity and otherness (see Kavalski, 2007; Rechel, 2007; Тодорова, Мизов, 2010). Instead, the willingness of the majority population to respect and accept the minority communities as equals has been progressively decreasing.

Despite becoming an EU member state in 2007, Bulgaria is still struggling to integrate into the economic, political and cultural space of the EU. The EU membership has not miraculously solved all the problems that have accumulated in the country during the transition period. The traditionally widespread dissatisfaction and pessimism of Bulgarians only increased when the promised EU Messiah failed to materialise. The result of the popular discontent was that on the 2009 parliamentary elections, populist and nationalist political parties, promising easy and fast solutions, and quick at finger-pointing convenient scapegoats, carried the day.

The diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic landscape is among the numerous challenges the Bulgarian education has had to face over the past 20 years. Education is one of the most significant identity con-
struction programmes in almost every country. Historically, education was the pillar on which the national identity was based, and today it is still among the most important means states have at their disposal to influence or change the way citizens perceive their identity.

The education system went through a number of administrative and conceptual reforms, which are today still far from conclusion. Among the most important conceptual issues was the need to find a proper balance between the traditional role of education as a tool forming and sustaining the national identity and its modern task of overcoming the divides in the multicultural realities of today. In addition to these challenges, the Bulgarian education system had to incorporate also the European dimension – apart from fostering national identity, the education today is expected to raise also the civic and European identities. The curriculum was thus revised to establish the place of Bulgaria in the European cultural, political and economic space and to create a sense of European identity among the pupils.

The main aim of this chapter is to investigate how civil society actors and private citizens see their identity and how they position Bulgaria in relation to EU/Europe and modernity. Respondents belonging to different ethnic and religious groups and residing in different parts of the country (the capital, smaller towns, villages) were asked to answer a number of questions about the way they perceive themselves and the society as Bulgarian, European and modern subjects.

Given the above-mentioned significance of education for the formation of personal and group identities, education was chosen as the focus of the current study. In addition, education also serves as a catalyst for a number of other social processes, which play a role in the formation of identities. The chapter thus examines how respondents view the roles of religion, history, globalisation and multiculturalism through education. Analysis of these perceptions leads to a better understanding of the tensions between national and European, between majority and minority, and between traditional and modern in Bulgaria.
Leaving aside the crucial administrative and decentralizing reforms aimed above all at establishing greater school autonomy and more efficient spending and financial policies, the current study concentrates on the conceptual reforms. The three most important multicultural challenges the Bulgarian education system had to react to were:

1. Reform of history education and rethinking of history curriculum in a way which would overcome the traditional stereotypes about the neighbouring Balkan countries, and would recognize a place of the minority communities in the history of Bulgaria

2. Religious education vs. education about religions, and the place of religion in schools

3. Education of children from minority communities and in particular the issues of mother tongue education and the desegregation of the so-called Roma schools

A fourth challenge with international dimension can be added to these three challenges, which have predominantly national character despite being an inseparable part of the wider European and global debates:

4. Influence of liberalisation and globalisation on the Bulgarian education, connected with the need for consolidation of the common European norms and values and expressed most clearly through the Bologna process.

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2 The most important such reform was the introduction of the Delegated School Budget System (DSBS). It began in 1998 as a pilot introduction of the system to 100 schools in four municipalities and expanded in 2000 to include all municipalities and schools. The introduction of the DSBS was slow and in 2006, only 46 out of 264 municipalities had adopted the system.

The main objective was to optimize the management and financial efficiency by linking the school budgets to the number of students and by giving the school principals greater discretion in spending funds. Schools were also allowed to reallocate budgets across categories, to retain budget savings, manage their property, rent unused facilities for revenue and perform fee-based services to external clients. The main shortcoming of the reform was the absence of measures to improve accountability and as a result, they had a very limited impact on school quality (The World Bank, 2010).
The main contestations, ruptures, events and debates
2000 – 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>• the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>• news programme in Turkish language on the Bulgarian National TV</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>• elections; government of National Movement Simeon II (liberal) and Movement for Rights and Freedoms (liberal, representing mainly Turkish minority interests)</td>
</tr>
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| 2004 | • the European Council confirms the completion of the accession negotiations with Bulgaria  
• Law for Protection against Discrimination  
• Strategy for educational integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities (Ministry of Education) |
| 2005 | • elections; government of Bulgarian Socialist Party, National Movement Simeon II and Movement for Rights and Freedoms  
• European Parliament approves the signing of the Treaty of Accession of Bulgaria  
• establishment of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD)  
• National Action Plan – Decade of Roma Inclusion  
• position of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Regarding the Concept for Introduction of the School Subject ‘Religion’ into the Bulgarian Schools |
<p>| 2006 | • complaint to the CPD by a Muslim organisation from the town of Smolyan regarding obligatory schools uniforms at the local high school, preventing Muslim girls from coming to schools wearing headscarves |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
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| 2007: | • Bulgaria joins the EU  
• closure of the Islamic school in the town of Sarnica  
• “Batak massacre” conference |
| 2008: | • Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe presents a common Balkan history textbook  
• the Commission for Protection against Discrimination and the case of two high school students from the town of Devin, who were not allowed to wear headscarves in school |
| 2009: | • elections; government of GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (conservative-populist)  
• detention of the religion teacher in Ribnovo village on suspicion of spreading radical Islam  
• the new draft of the Law on School Education – ban of religious symbols aggressively or obtrusively demonstrating religious or ideological preferences |
| 2010: | • expulsions of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma from France  
• the Minister of Interior Tsvetan Tsvetanov: “Roma communities are an incubator for generating crime.”  
• amendments to the Law on Bulgarian Citizenship  
• protest of parents and teachers in a school in Pazardzhik over too many Roma children in classes  
• publication of Justin McCarthy’s book *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims*  
• petition of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for introduction of the compulsory subject “Religion – Orthodox Christianity” |

The 2000-2010 decade started on an optimistic note in Bulgaria. By adopting a Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society, the government expressed its awareness regarding the increasingly marginalised position of the Roma minority and...
demonstrated its commitment to finding ways to (re)integrate this community into the society. Despite limiting it to 15 minutes in a less popular afternoon timeslot, the Bulgarian National TV for the first time in its history started to air a daily programme in Turkish language, sending out a strong symbolic message to the Turkish community. The parliamentary elections in 2001 finally cut the decade long ideological duel between the “left” (Bulgarian Socialist Party) and the “right” (Union of Democratic Forces), which had been succeeding each other in governing the country since 1989. The winner of the elections was the newly formed National Movement Simeon II (NMSS) – a (neo) liberal-democratic party headed by the last Bulgarian Tsar Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. NMSS formed a coalition with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), also a liberal party, representing mainly the interests of the Turkish and other minorities in the country. With the MRF in the government, ethnic Turks became ministers and deputy ministers for the first time in Bulgarian history.

A number of positive developments had occurred before the parliamentary elections in 2005, which were an important rupture point for multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria. The country had concluded its negotiations with the EU and although it failed to enter the Union with the majority of former communist countries in 2004, the optimism and expectations regarding the Bulgarian EU membership remained high. The government passed the Law for Protection against Discrimination – probably the most important and efficient piece of legislation passed in Bulgaria in relation to the protection of human and minority rights. The Law provided the legal ground for the establishment of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, which has been very active in upholding toleration and preventing discriminative practices.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education prepared its Strategy for educational integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities, while the government upgraded its Programme for Equal Integration of Roma by adopting the National Action Plan – Decade of Roma Inclusion.
Disappointed and disillusioned over the inability of the last two governments to significantly increase the standard of living and fight the endemic corruption and organised crime, the largest share of voters gave their support to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) on 2005 elections. BSP gave the impression that it had reformed and learned from the mistakes made during its last stay in power (1994-1997), when its government brought the country to financial and economic collapse. Lacking the needed majority, BSP formed a coalition with NMSS and MRF. However, what really shook the political scene in Bulgaria in 2005 was not the return of the Socialists, but the appearance of extreme-right and openly anti-Turkish, anti-Roma and anti-Semitic party Attack (Ataka), which grabbed 8.1% of the votes.

The success of Attack surprised many, as it went against the popular perceptions about tolerant and non-nationalistic Bulgarians and about the Bulgarian ethnic model of coexistence. However, Attack’s inflammatory political war cry (Let’s give Bulgaria back to Bulgarians!) signalled a rapid deterioration of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country.

Generally speaking, Bulgaria was not affected by the events like 11 September 2001 and other terrorist acts around the world in the same way as most of the European countries – with growing anti-Islamic sentiments and suspicions towards the European Muslim population. The prevailing opinion, backed by scholars, the media and political actors, remained that Bulgarian Muslims could not be compared to the Muslim immigrant communities in Western Europe. Moderately religious, used to living in a secular environment and demonstrating a high degree of religious syncretism, Bulgarian Muslims are strangers to all forms of radicalism and far from those manifestations of Islam usually considered as fundamentalist.

However, after 2005, anti-Muslim sentiments entered the public space and only intensified over the next years. Provoked by the anti-Islamic discourse of nationalistic political parties (Attack and Order, Law and Justice), the agents of the State Agency for National Security began
harassing the Muslim community, investigating the Imams and Muslim religious teachers for their alleged links with radical Islam. The cases that grabbed most media attention included the closure of the Islamic school in the town of Sarnica in 2007, and the arrests of the mayor of Carmen municipality and of an (Islamic) religion teacher from the secondary school in Ribnovo village. All cases were based on suspicions regarding the teaching of radical Islam.

The increasingly intolerant attitude towards the Muslims might be one of the principal reasons why the number of schools where Islamic religious education is provided has decreased from above 100 in 2000 to around 35 today (information from an interview with an official from the Chief Mufti office). The public and media debate about the right of Muslim girls to wear headscarves in schools also acquired an openly anti-Islamic tone. In 2006, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) examined a case involving two students from a secondary school in the town of Smolyan. They were not allowed to wear Muslim attire (headscarf and long robe) in their school. The CPD issued a recommendation to the Ministry of Education and Science that it should prepare a comprehensive analysis on the state of the Bulgarian education in the context of respect of anti-discrimination legislation and the freedom of religion.

For some politicians (above all the Order, Law and Justice Party) even the traditional headscarves and dresses worn by Bulgarian Muslims (especially in rural areas) became an “evidence” that radical Islam took root in Bulgaria and that the country was full of terrorist “sleeping cells.”

3 Order, Law and Justice’s web page features numerous articles about “Islamisation of Bulgaria.” Some typical titles are: “Yanev: Ahmed Bashev will set the Rhodopes on fire” (http://www.rzs.bg/index.php?t=4162); “Yane Yanev presents new evidence on Islamisation in Ribnovo” (http://www.rzs.bg/index.php?t=3207); “Headscarves should be prohibited by law” (http://www.rzs.bg/index.php?t=3011); “State institutions pay no attention to the process of imposition of radical Islam in different forms, says Dimitar Abadzhiev” (http://www.rzs.bg/index.php?t=2272); “MPs presented to Minister Valchev evidence for radical Islam in Blagoevgrad region” (http://www.rzs.bg/index.php?t=1540).
This perception shaped the draft of the new Law on School Education prepared in 2009.\textsuperscript{4} One of the novelties the draft law tried to introduce was the regulation of the wearing of religious symbols in schools. It contained articles banning both school students and teachers from “wearing religious symbols aggressively or obtrusively demonstrating their religious or ideological preferences, or symbols inciting ethnic or racial hatred” (respectively, art. 161 (3.6) and 183 (2.13)). The draft has been a cause for heated public debates over the last two years. In the end, the parliament failed to approve the Law and the draft was put on hold. In February 2012, a new draft law was prepared – it does not contain the controversial articles on religious symbols.

The prelude to 2009 general elections was an increasingly intolerant and aggressive campaign. The nationalistic forerunners Attack and Order, Law and Justice relied heavily on anti-Turkish and anti-Roma cards, which (in addition to their anti-corruption and anti-status quo platform) brought them considerable returns. Attack won 9.36\% and Order, Law and Justice 4.13\% of the votes. GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, which won the elections with 39.72\%, also attracted voters with their promise to remove MRF from power once and for all (see Арапджиева, 2008). Falling just short of the necessary majority, GERB formed a minority government with the support of Attack.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} Закон за училищното образование и предучилищното възпитание и подготовка (Law on School Education and Pre-school Education and Preparation). http://www.sbulbg.info/files/proekt_zakon_obrazovanie.pdf

\textsuperscript{5} Initially, GERB also enjoyed the support of two other parties (Union of the Democratic Forces – UDF and Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria – DSB), which are – like GERB – members of the European People’s Party – European Democrats. Due to conflicting views on a number of issues, UDF and DSB distanced themselves from the GERB government. Attack supported GERB during the first two years of its government, after which it radically changed its position and became very critical of GERB government.
**General overview of the four research themes**

**Theme 1: Multiculturalism and citizenship**

Unlike in many of the older EU member-states, where the main contestations linked to the issues of identity and multiculturalism happened as a consequence to the immigration to those countries, the debates and conflicts dealing with this theme in Bulgaria concern the relations between the majority population and the native minorities. In particular, the main problematic areas are the unsuccessful attempts to integrate the largely marginalised Roma community and the increasingly intolerant attitude towards the active presence of Muslim minorities (Turks and Muslim Bulgarians) in the public space.

In contrast to the stereotypical self-perception that the Bulgarian society is remarkably tolerant towards other ethnic and religious communities, the reality is abundant with evidence and testimonies of rejection, discrimination and even aggression against “others.” At the same time, the inability and/or unwillingness of the state institutions to protect the various religious/ethnic communities is also evident, as are the difficulties experienced by the judicial system to prevent and combat discrimination and rejection. In the recent years, the only exception to this unsatisfactory performance of the state institutions has been the work of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination.

The most hotly disputed public debates in the recent years occurred in relation to the passing of the Law for Protection against Discrimination (2004) and the establishment of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (2005); the unsuccessful attempt to organise a referendum to ban the Turkish language news programme on the Bulgarian National TV; the policies for desegregation of Roma schools and other policies for integration of the Roma community; and the ever increasing number of incidents involving hate speech in the media and in politics.
The Bulgarian media space is almost saturated with examples of hate speech regarding those who are different – this is especially true for media reporting on Roma. The society, daily exposed to such media vocabulary, has grown accustomed and indifferent to it and words of protest are rarely heard. The media are always watchful and never fail to (repeatedly) reproduce any examples of hate or intolerant speech made by political figures.

One of the most notorious such examples is a statement by the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, who described Roma, Turks and pensioners as an obstacle his party had to overcome. In his words, these three groups accounted for more than half of the population of Bulgaria, and there was a shortage of decent “human material” he could work with (Божков, 2009). The Commission for Protection against Discrimination was approached over Borisov’s comment, but ruled that there was no discrimination involved. However, it did instruct Borisov to refrain from making similar remarks (Орлинов, 2009).

In September 2010, the Minister of Interior Tsvetan Tsvetanov stated in an interview that “a very serious analysis needs to be made of Roma problems, because these communities are an incubator for generating crime.” This again caused lively debates in the society, but provoked also very harsh reaction from the European Commission. Its spokesperson Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen said that such statements were unacceptable (EurActiv, 2010).

Similar hate speech and racist statements are rarely punished in Bulgaria. One of the very few exceptions was the case of the mayor of Ovcha Kupel municipality in Sofia. He stated on air on Darik radio that “cows in Ovcha Kupel would be a much lesser problem than is the local Gypsy neighbourhood” and that “such Roma settlements, lo-

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6 Several months before winning the June 2009 elections and becoming Prime Minister, Borisov said: “One million Gypsies, 700-800,000 Turks, 2.5 million pensioners. This is what is against GERB. … The material we can count on is not large at all” (Божков, 2009).
cated close to residential areas, represent a danger 10 times larger than a waste disposal site.” The mayor was sanctioned by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) to pay a fine and make a public apology for “harassing and offending the dignity of all Roma” (Димитрова, 2009).

The widespread prejudice and rejection of Roma community in Bulgaria is only one of the many faces of the complex problem of Roma marginalisation and exclusion. Roma have always been the victims of unequal treatment and strongly negative attitude in the society, but the situation has really deteriorated after 1989, when Roma have been gradually pushed out of all areas of social life – employment market, education, health care.

The first attempt to reverse this trend was the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society adopted by the Bulgarian government in 1999. The Framework Programme offered a comprehensive state strategy for the accomplishment of real equality of the Roma people in Bulgaria. It served as a base for various strategies, plans and programmes prepared and implemented by consecutive governments and individual ministries. The government tried to upgrade its efforts through a National Action Plan – Decade of Roma Inclusion, passed in 2005.

Regardless of all the programmes and action plans of the government and various state institutions, the situation of the Bulgarian Roma has not changed substantially yet. If anything, the situation has changed for worse. The general public still perceives them in overwhelmingly negative terms and continues to reject and exclude them (Grekova et al, 2010, p.16). Acceptance and toleration of Roma are a precondition for their successful inclusion into the society, but at the same time, only their participation in all spheres of public life can reduce the distances and rejection.

One of the most crucial problems regarding the Roma integration is the question of education. On the one hand, the state institutions and
especially the school system are trying to take in all Roma children and prevent their dropout from schools at an early stage by various measures – including lower requirements for passing onto the next grade. On the other hand, the low level of education in the majority of Roma schools strengthens the vicious circle in which many Roma are captured (lack of proper education – unemployment – poverty).

Numerous attempts have been made to integrate Roma children into desegregated, mixed schools. Very often, some parents (and in some cases even teachers) belonging to the Bulgarian majority population, oppose and protest against such measures. At the beginning of almost each school year, the media feature stories about conflicts in particular schools and about Bulgarian parents moving their children to other schools because “too many” Roma children have been included in a given class or school (Начев, 2010). Sometimes even the teachers are against the inclusion of more than a few Roma children into a class. In their opinion, a large number of Roma children in one class would immediately form “a group and impose their model of behaviour on others,” which is counterproductive for their integration (Fokus News, 2010; Сега, 2010).

The education of minority children and especially Roma is among the most significant and problematic issues in Bulgaria today, and a source of numerous tensions and conflicts in the society. The advocates of various viewpoints all believe that they have logical and indisputable arguments to back their claims and rarely have any will to look for a compromise. The questions regarding the minority education (from the education in mother tongue to the issue of desegregation of Roma schools) therefore occupied a prominent place in our fieldwork.

**Theme 2: Liberalisation / globalisation**

Bulgaria committed to the process of construction and development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 1999 by signing the Bologna Declaration. The Bologna process and the related education
reforms have been understood in Bulgaria as an inseparable part of the EU integration process. As such, they are most often seen (especially by the government officials) as a “sacred cow” – a reform that needs to be passed without being questioned. The reform process in education has been presented as a necessity for the successful adaptation of the entire Bulgarian society to the new social and political realities and the only chance the society has for a long-term successful development.

In contrast, the general public and the media seem to pay very modest attention to the reform and the Bologna process. Public conflicts and cleavages over the issue are rare and far less emotional and heated compared to debates over the other three topics investigated in this chapter.

The main concerns of several NGOs and student organisations (some of which have organised several modestly successful protests and demonstrations) are that the Bologna initiated reform is moving the education away from the interests of the students and is putting the interests of the market ahead of them. The main fear is commercialisation of the national education, tailored to serve the international markets and not protecting the national interests. Another concern is related to fears that the reformed system of higher education would give advantage to those with better financial possibilities instead favouring those who are most talented. Some fear that less popular and non-profitable social sciences (e.g. Balkan and Ottoman studies) could disappear.

According to one analyst of the Bologna initiated reform in Bulgaria, the process is characterized by questionable efficiency, peculiarities and contradictions. Regulations and administrative measures rarely affect the transformation process of high education in depth. They most often attempt to impose standardization, evaluation and control over the educational process and are less concerned with the expected results, the quality of education and the social effects (Ivanova, 2010, p.16).
The most important positive developments are:

- the legal framework for recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications in Bulgarian universities has been updated
- new relevant legislation has been passed (or is in process of development): Law on Academic Autonomy, High Education Act, Law on Student Lending, Strategy for High Education.

Unfortunately, the negative outcomes seem to outweigh the positive ones. The reform has led to a multiplication of the number of universities, without providing the required number of qualified academic staff; corruption at universities; devaluation of diplomas; demotivation of teachers and students, and a drop in the quality of academic education. In addition, the high education in Bulgaria is troubled by a number of other negative trends: habilitated staff is aging, international exchange of teachers is insufficient, the funding available for research is below the minimum level and continues to decrease, new technologies are advancing slowly into the universities. The increasing gaps and lack of coordination on the axis schools – universities – labour market is another sign that at the moment, the Bologna initiated reforms in Bulgaria are not on the right track (Ivanova, 2010, pp. 18-20).

**Theme 3: History education reform as an indicator of national identity construction debates**

The efforts to reconsider history and rewrite the history textbooks started in the early 1990s and have continued to the present day. In the initial years of this process, the German-French reconciliation and their common textbooks on history were often used as a model. In order to draw from the Western European experience, a number of international conferences were organised in the first years of democratic rule, often with the participation of scholars from other Balkan countries, which were also interested in similar processes.

The most ambitious and comprehensive attempt to produce history textbooks, which would be accepted and used across the Balkan
peninsula, was undertaken by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe. In 2005, a series of four books under the common title *Teaching Modern Southeast European History: Alternative Educational Materials* was printed in English, Greek, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish languages (Koulouri, 2005).\(^7\)

The books were based on history sources from all Balkan countries and were written and edited by a group of regional academic historians. Although the books were not published in Bulgarian, they provoked significant interest, including various conflicting comments among the Bulgarian historians and in the media.

In Bulgaria, a number of new history textbooks for primary and secondary schools and for universities have been written over the years. The problem came from the teachers, who often rejected the new approach to factological presentation and rationalisation of history. The teachers most often hold on to the established historical stereotypes, which are usually nationalistic and hostile towards the neighbouring states, and marked by the tendency to blame the large European states (the Great Powers) for the historical injustices suffered by Bulgaria.

Thus, the majority of bilateral or multilateral projects initiated and supported by various European institutions failed to achieve a lasting result. The deeply entrenched stereotypes in the Bulgarian society regarding its place in Europe, its national identity and the negative attitude towards most of the neighbouring states and some national minorities continue to prevail in the society.

The issue of reconsideration of how national history is presented in the school curriculum therefore played an important role in our fieldwork. It is a very sensitive subject in Bulgaria, especially in the current time of deep economic crisis, when a large part of the population feels deeply unsatisfied regarding the present and uncertain about

\(^7\) The titles of the four books are: The Ottoman Empire; Nations and States in Southeast Europe; The Balkan Wars; and The Second World War.
their future. Under such circumstances, the attempts to question the “golden past” and especially the most crucial period of the 19th century nation- and state-building can cause very emotional and negative reactions.

The “Batak affair” is perhaps the best illustration of this situation. In May 2007, Bulgaria witnessed a burst of nation-wide outrage, expressed by the widest possible spectrum of actors (from ordinary citizens to the president), over the organisation of Bulgarian-German scientific conference on the formation of national memory and historical myths on the example of Batak massacre (massacre of Bulgarians in Batak village by Ottoman auxiliary units composed of local Muslim population in 1876). The media reported that the aim of the conference was to deny the massacre, which gave rise to a substantial controversy. Several eminent Bulgarian historians accused the organisers of falsifying history and of being agents of the Turkish state, while others defended the principle of academic freedom. Finally, the conference was cancelled due to enormous pressure and opposition, which included threats and media persecution of the (potential) conference participants.

**Theme 4: Representation of the ‘religious’ / religion - secularisation debate**

During the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s, the debates and especially the conflicts regarding the place of religion in the education process were relatively rare. Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism are all considered (in addition to the majority religion – Orthodox Christianity) traditional religions for Bulgaria and the problems, when they arose, were usually linked to the small, non-traditional religions like various Evangelical churches, Mormons and Bahais. In the recent years, tensions have periodically arisen over the alleged presence of radical Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria. The most important events from the recent years related to this issue were the closure of the Islamic school in the town of Sarnica (2007), the detention of the religion teacher (a Muslim) from the Ribnovo village (2009), the
Luzhnica incident (2010), and the prolonged and heated debate about the wearing of headscarves in classroom.

The debate about the obligatory religious education in schools was initiated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) in the mid-1990s and is continuing today. The BOC insists that religious education should be based on Orthodox Christianity. The children belonging to the majority population should receive proper confessional education in schools. Minority children from traditional religious communities (Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Armenian Apostolic Church) should receive appropriate confessional education in their own faith on condition that there are at least 10 children per class who do not wish to attend the course “Religion – Orthodoxy.” If parents of more than 10 children per class submit a written statement that they do not want their children to study religion, they could attend the course on ethics instead. The BOC believes that the introduction of an obligatory course “Religion – Orthodoxy” would preserve the identity of the Bulgarian nation in the community of the European nations (Holy Synod of BOC, 2007).

The views of the Chief Mufti office are similar. Children of Orthodox faith should be provided with confessional education about Orthodox Christianity, while Muslim children should learn about Islam in schools. The opinion of the majority of experts is that a comparative study of religions, through which students would get familiar with all religions practised in Bulgaria, should be the preferred solution, as this would be in line with the secular character of Bulgarian schools. In their opinion, confessional education belongs to religious temples, not to school environment.

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8 The agents of the State Agency for National Security came to search the home of the Luzhnica village Imam Mohammed Kamber after receiving a signal that he was in possession of a large number of books and other materials on radical Islam. While in the process of confiscating the Imam’s books, personal computer and mobile phone, his house was surrounded by over 300 angry residents, who held the agents blocked in the house for more than 4 hours (Tpyg, 2010).
Religious education is currently provided in a number of specialised schools. Orthodox religion is studied at the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University, at the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Veliko Tarnovo, at Seminaries in Sofia and Plovdiv, and in a number of Parish and Sunday schools across the country.

The Islamic faith is studied at the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia and at three secondary schools in the towns of Ruse, Shumen and Momchilgrad. The nationalistic organisations and political parties are periodically raising claims that radical Islam is taught in these schools. None of the numerous investigations conducted there has presented any evidence to back these claims. The official representatives of the Muslim faith in Bulgaria (the Chief Mufti office) themselves are very strict in their efforts to prevent such possibility.

In 2007, the Islamic school for the training of Muslim clergymen in Sarnica was closed down on suspicion that radical Islam was advocated there. The school was a private institution not registered by the Ministry of Education. After its closure, on several occasions claims were made that the teaching of radical Islam continued in the Sarnica secondary school, but the resulting investigations found no evidence to support them.

Another topic dealing with the place of religion in the school environment is the dress code of Muslim girls. The traditional dress of female Muslims in Bulgaria has certain specific features, which are quite different from the way female Muslim immigrants dress in Western European countries. After 2000, an increasing number of girls and young women started to endorse a new dress code, stressing their Muslim identity: classic-style veils and long robes. This process is largely a consequence of the education numerous Bulgarian Muslims obtained abroad in countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan. After returning to

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9 According to the Bulgarian tradition, the headscarf does not fully cover the hair and the ears. More often, it is tied in a fashion typical for the respective village thus indicating the belonging to a specific ethnic or religious group.
Bulgaria, they brought the new models of behaviour into their families. The public display of the new dress code has provoked a reaction of the state institutions and the society.

In 2006, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) issued a recommendation to the Ministry of Education and Science that it should prepare a comprehensive analysis on the state of the Bulgarian education in the context of respect of anti-discrimination legislation and the freedom of religion. This recommendation was an outcome of the complaint by a Muslim organisation from Smolyan regarding the Muslim girls, who were not allowed to visit their school wearing Muslim attire – headscarves and long robes.

The new draft of the Law on School Education was prepared in 2009. One of the novelties the draft law was supposed to introduce was the regulation of the wearing of religious symbols in schools. The law would prohibit both school students and teachers to “wear religious symbols aggressively or obtrusively demonstrating their religious or ideological preferences, or symbols inciting ethnic or racial hatred” (respectively, art. 161 (3.6) and 183 (2.13)).

The draft has been a cause for heated public debates. In addition to several other disputed issues, these two articles were among the main reasons why the law was not passed. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (the political party representing the interests of the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria), which was a part of the government coalition at the time, voted in the parliament together with the opposition parties against the law. Although it was highlighted in almost all public discussions that these articles concern mainly the headscarves of the Muslim girls, some representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, nationalistic organisations and journalists expressed the opinion that the aim of the articles was also to prohibit jewellery with Christian crosses. The text, as it currently stands, is unclear enough, and it is open to interpretation what actually “aggressive or obtrusive demonstration” means.
The above cases have shown that the state’s ability to react (either on the central or local level) is rather limited. The issues as wearing of religious symbols at schools are still not regulated by the Law on Education and the state institutions react arbitrarily on a case to case basis. The society does not demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance regarding these cases. The cases were extensively covered by the national and local media, driven by the heated debates between the representatives of the nationalistic organisations and activists from the organisations for protection of human rights. When a particular problem is solved or the media attention moves elsewhere, the case is soon forgotten. Yet at the same time, these examples are an indication that the issue of Islamic dress code in the public space is a source of permanent tension and conflict in the Bulgarian society. The study and analysis of this issue is therefore especially important for the goals of the project.

Fieldwork – part one: Civil society actors

1. Methodology

Our fieldwork was based on 15 semi-standardised interviews, conducted between October 2010 and January 2011. The interviews were on average about 60 minutes long. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

Nine interviews were taken in Sofia, while six were made during fieldtrips across Bulgaria – they were taken in the city of Plovdiv and towns Asenovgrad, Samokov, Dospat and Sarnica. The wider geographical coverage enabled the researchers to capture diverse views on a number of issues, as the opinions in smaller towns often substantially differed from the positions expressed in the capital. In addition, the people residing outside the capital often feel that they are isolated from the main decision-making processes and that their opinion does not count (as much). At the same time, small town residents often have a developed sense of regional belonging and have more efficient mechanisms for finding local solutions to national problems – includ-
ing the organisation of the educational process and the coexistence of ethnically and religiously diverse communities.

The opinions on the main research topics of our project – national identity, Europeanization and modernity – also significantly differ in the capital and across the country. In order to capture these diverse views, we conducted four interviews in towns with significant Roma population (Plovdiv, Samokov and Asenovgrad) and two interviews in small towns (Dospat and Sarnica) in Central Rhodopa Region, where the Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks) represent the majority population.

Our sample includes four Muslims – 2 Turks and two Bulgarians (Pomaks). The respondents who identify themselves as traditionally adherent to the Eastern Orthodox confession often indicate that they are not overly religious. The sample includes 10 men and 5 women aged between 31 and 74 years.

Three of the respondents are members of the clergy – one Eastern Orthodox Priest, one Imam and one Mufti. Three respondents are experts on education and culture with the municipal administration (Sofia, Samokov, Dospat). There is one school headmaster from a small town, where almost all students are of minority origin, and a deputy headmistress of an elite secondary school in Sofia. One respondent is a representative of a local NGO working with the Roma community. Five respondents are professional historians from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Sofia University and the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies. Three of them are authors of history textbooks, while two are active in educational trade unions. One respondent (also a historian) is a deputy director of the Central State Archives.

All respondents were cooperative and in the preliminary conversations, they stated that they considered the discussed topics to be very pressing and socially significant for Bulgaria and also in the larger European context.
The interviews were based on a questionnaire and covered all topics. However, while conducting each interview, the interviewers concentrated on the topics which were more relevant to the professional and social profile of each respondent, thus receiving more nuanced and sincere responses allowing deeper context analysis.

All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the respondents and were fully transcribed. At the start of the interviews, the respondents were informed that their anonymity in the analysis was guaranteed and their statements would be used only for the purposes of the project.

The data analysis is based on the discourse analysis theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). In the first part of the report, we used the identification of the macro discourse to examine the press and web resources, and the secondary literature. In the second part, the analysis of the interviews was based on establishing the specific contents and topics, and investigation of the argumentative strategies was applied. The main goal was to analyse how the respondents perceive and discuss various topics, influenced by the public discourse, and how they interpret them based on their own understanding and experience.

2. Discourses on education, identity and modernity – fieldwork data analysis

2.1. Education of minority communities

The thematic cycle of questions dealing with the education of minorities was divided into two main sets of questions: desegregation of Roma education and education in mother tongue.

The respondents analysed the issue of desegregation from the point of view of the work of state institutions, NGOs and local institutions (municipalities and school authorities). The social stereotypes among the majority population and the attitudes and practices of the Roma community were also considered.
When sharing their views on the second topic, the respondents discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the education in mother tongue. The main dilemma was whether such education stimulates or hinders the integration of minority children into the society and their prospects on the employment market.

*Roma education and desegregation*

Practically all respondents stated that the situation of the Roma minority is essential for the Bulgarian society. Many highlighted the data about the increasing share of Roma community as a percentage of the Bulgarian population and the growing problem of Roma marginalisation. The marginal position of the Roma has deteriorated further in the recent years due to the general economic crisis and the related social-economic problems in the society.

“...the problem is much more serious and deep than just the issue of education. However, the education problem is the one where the state should concretely try to make a change. This community has to be a part of the Bulgarian system of general education.” (I/14)

Roma education is a field, where “recession was most obvious, complete and definite” (I/5). The desegregation and integration of Roma will be a long and complicated process. In order to make it successful, the state institutions, which have the major responsibility in this process, need the active support of the NGO sector. At this point of time, the state policies are evaluated as “ineffective and without content” (I/15).

One respondent described the state policies for Roma integration in the following way:

“Despite the existence of documents, strategies and policies, they are not implemented because nobody knows who is responsible for particular measures and there is no proper budget. There is some minimal funding for 20-30 projects per year, which is ridiculously insufficient. There is no political will at the state level and no desire to truly solve this problem.” (I/13)
One of the respondents believes that at the moment, the state has completely abandoned purposeful policies for Roma integration. Instead, they try to control the community using “only repressive police methods” (I/5).

The existing policies can be effective only if proper institutions are established and begin to operate.

“If we want to implement the minority policies, we need relevant institutions in the municipalities, on the local level there is a need for the so-called minority officers. There is also a need for a central institution, which would provide good practices and would be also responsible for the financing.” (I/13)

The current mechanisms for financing Roma programmes were criticised in several interviews. Some respondents expressed doubts that the money envisaged for Roma integration projects is properly spent (I/11).

“I believe that if politicians had not been playing with these people over the past 20 years, the effect of all these funds, for which it is said that they have disappeared without a trace, could have been real. Now, 20 years after the question of education and integration of Roma children was placed on the table for the first time, 20 years later we still talk as if this integration is just about to start today. On paper, in various reports, all seems perfect. The reality is different.” (I/7)

The widespread public opinion that too much money is given to Roma was reflected in several interviews. The opinion that Roma enjoy a privileged position – they have rights, but no obligations – was also expressed.

“The state has the right to pour money there, to give money away, but it is a mistake to give them social benefits without any obligations attached, because they just wait to receive.” (I/2)

“The state does not treat Roma equally; it doesn’t oblige them to respect the common rules. Education is a citizens’ obligation, there can’t be any privileges based on ethnic or religious grounds.” (I/9)

The desegregation policies can be successful only if a significant change for the better occurs in the way the majority population and the
Roma minority perceive each other. At the moment, both communities are exceptionally distrustful. The negative perceptions of the majority are further solidified by the media coverage, which regularly presents Roma in negative terms and stresses their alleged predisposition towards crime.

“The society should, in the first place, accept that they are normal people, with normal problems.” (I/6)

The respondents compared the social and educational integration of Roma to the “chicken or egg” dilemma. They provided examples of Roma families, who are completely integrated into the society – they support and encourage their children to attend school and on the whole, such families have little trouble with prejudices of the local environment, which has accepted them (I/11, I/12, I/15). On the contrary, the school attendance of children from marginalised Roma communities from urban ghettos or rural hamlets is disastrously low. A vicious circle is thus formed where poverty, low level of education and marginalisation reinforce each other. It seems that the most important factor, on which the ability to break out of the circle depends, are the motivation and willingness of an individual Roma family to go against the negative social attitude and often even the resistance of their own community, and step across the divide separating Roma and non-Roma population.

Some responses show that Roma are not distrusted and rejected only by the majority Bulgarian population, but by Turks as well. In contrast, interviews with Muslim Bulgarians show that the social distances between them and Roma are much smaller. Muslim Bulgarian interviewees say that in their towns, Roma are completely integrated in the community, and that their children regularly visit schools (I/8, I/10). According to I/8, the main reason for this is that in small towns, morality and tolerant attitudes have been preserved.

Trying to distribute responsibility equally on both sides, some respondents noted that not only the hostile social environment was to blame. The Roma community has on its own part also built up enduring
mechanisms of self-isolation and prefers to set up a parallel existence, rather than confront the rules and values of the majority population (I/6, I/7, I/12, I/14, I/15). One of the respondents pointed out that the border between integration and assimilation can be sometimes quite thin in Bulgaria, which also complicates the process and can lead to intentional resistance against integration (I/15).

The integration policies of the state are further hindered by the mistaken understanding shared by the society and the state institutions that Roma are a uniform community. This is far from the truth. Roma are the most heterogeneous community in Bulgaria. They profess different religions (Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Muslims) and speak a number of languages – Bulgarian, Turkish, and Romany (numerous forms and dialects). Some differ according to their lifestyle – they can be either “settled” or “nomads.” Divided into numerous sub-groups, Roma rarely perceive themselves as a united and unified “Roma community” and the differences, distances and conflicts among various Roma sub-groups are often larger than between Roma and other ethnic groups. Some groups are much more inclined towards integration than others, while some intentionally resist all the attempts of the state to force them to “abandon their ways.” The state policies for Roma integration usually completely disregard these differences and neglect the features of different Roma sub-groups, on which the level of their integration depends (I/15).

The majority of interviewees believe that education is not recognised as a value by the Roma community and that it is not seen as a precondition for making a living. The Roma parents see no reason and motivation for stimulating their children to attend school.

“Education is not important for them, what matters is making money. They say money is more important, what does it matter if you are educated if you have no money, this is how the majority of children I have talked with think.” (I/6)

Good practices and especially the work of Roma NGOs and personal examples of Roma leaders can be indispensable to change such views.
The respondents from Samokov, a town with a significant Roma community, shared:

“The majority of parents of the children [we worked with] have built houses in the town, outside the ghetto, they have adapted long ago. Their children are with high standard of living, competitive, after school they went to universities. They work, we have at least 10 people who were from the ghetto and have set up foundations. I believe this is highly infectious, that they, as informal leaders, will pull out in an interesting way, not by force, the people who are around them, people from the community.” (V/7)

Desegregation cannot happen through a mechanical removal of Roma children from ghetto schools and transfer into integrated schools. The results of such action can be only confrontation and negative reaction among the majority population. It can also demotivate Roma children, who will inevitably experience rejection and most likely will not be able to perform on the equal level with other children. Despite this clearly expressed pessimism, most respondents believe that desegregation policies have no alternative and that the process has to continue.

Occasionally, an optimistic view was also shared (again an example of good practice from Samokov):

“We succeeded, and at the moment we have more than 800 children, who were taken out of the ghetto and now attend the general schools; they stand relatively well, they have interest. These are people who accept education as some kind of a value; that is, they are really interested in school.” (V/7)

In conclusion, it can be said that at this point in time neither the state nor the society have a clear vision about desegregation and know how to continue this process. The general opinion is that, overall, the process is a positive one, and that it should continue regardless of the difficulties. However, for now the problems by far exceed the successful achievements. Overcoming the stereotypes of the majority population has proven to be especially difficult, but the self-isolation of Roma is also a formidable obstacle.
The second topic our research covered was the education in the mother language. This issue is most often limited to the question of Turkish language education, as the majority of respondents believe that the Roma community is not interested in having Romani classes at school, nor they believe that such education would improve the Roma position. The official data confirm the exceptionally low interest of Roma children in studying the Romani language. In 2010/2011 school year, 13,343 children from first to eight grade were attending Turkish language classes, 111 have enlisted for classes of Armenian language, and only 28 children in entire Bulgaria have opted to study Romani language (Петрова, 2011).

The official curriculum for primary schools, prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science, includes mother tongue education as a compulsory selective subject. Turkish, Armenian and Hebrew are offered from the first to the eighth grade, while Roma mother tongue is available from the second to the eighth grade.

A Turkish respondent said that the mother tongue education was not the most important problem concerning the Turkish community (I/2). Much more problematic is the general low quality of education provided in distant rural areas, where most of the Bulgarian Turks live. Turkish and Roma children, visiting schools where the majority or all children are of minority origin have actually problems with learning Bulgarian at a satisfactory level, as they live in Turkish or Romany speaking environment and are rarely exposed to Bulgarian language outside the classroom. This turns out to be an important obstacle for finding a better employment later.

“If the village is entirely Turkish, they watch Turkish TV at home, the teacher in the kindergarten speaks with them in Turkish, if they speak Turkish at home – where can they learn Bulgarian? They have to learn it at an older age, when it gets more difficult – writing, speaking, you always remain with an accent.
And this puts you in a different position on the labour market, they are aware of this. Only low-paid work is available, less prestigious employment...” (I/12)

A Turkish respondent confirms this opinion:

“We live in Bulgaria and we all need to know to write, read and speak Bulgarian language in order to participate actively in the society.” (I/2)

In general, all respondents evaluated positively the possibility for studying the mother tongue and it does not seem that this issue is considered problematic by the society. However, quite often the opinion that studying the mother tongue should not come at the expense of Bulgarian language is added. Although the symbolic importance of having minority languages in school curriculum is recognised and appreciated, the respondents questioned its practical value. The official data about the low numbers of students enrolled in classes in mother tongue confirm that most of the minority children prefer to enrol in other selective courses, which they perceive as more important for a future professional career.

2.2. Globalisation, liberalisation, modernity and identities

The study showed that the issues of liberalisation and globalisation are rarely discussed in the Bulgarian society and that when they do appear in the public discourse, they are approached superficially and by a limited number of public actors. The discussions on liberalisation, globalisation and modernity often overlap and are commonly linked to the issues of European integration and development of a European identity.

Globalisation is defined in various ways. Some describe it as a “natural and logical historical process” (I/10, I/11). For others, globalisation is above all an opportunity for free movement of people and free information-communication flows (I/6, I/7). Globalisation also means unification of norms and standards, “development of uniform opinions among the young on a certain level and use of positive practices in education” (I/9).
The interviews showed that the Bologna Process is not well known in Bulgaria. Even those respondents who stated that they had heard about it, demonstrated insufficient knowledge regarding its essence or its implementation in Bulgaria. Only the university professors (I/13, I/14, I/15) had a clearer idea and established opinions.

“The society doesn’t know about the Bologna Process. I think that even the university community is not well-informed, apart from hearing here and there about some kind of invisible Bologna threat, there is a fear of general restructuring… Nobody is explaining it clearly, it is not clear that the restructuring is not connected only with practical problems, financial problems, personnel issues and so on…” (I/14)

The common opinion is that the Bologna Process has no alternative and that it has been imposed as a part of the EU accession. One of the most significant problems regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process in Bulgaria is the harmonisation of high education qualification systems. For example, colleges (formerly known as semi-higher institutes) do not correspond to the Bologna scale. Another problems are the syllabuses, which have also not been standardised yet.

The respondents’ opinions on the Bologna process ranged from cautious to critical.

“The Bologna convention can be many things. It can be a good frame, but it can also be a very bad one. It is a matter of how the principles are applied, of selectivity, of one’s own context – both institutional and national.” (I/14)

“This is a foreign frame, which has been imposed here without much thought and which has put many people in a difficult situation.” (I/13)

“It is about the increasing gap between the universal education, the education linked to practical goals, and the elite education.” (I/14)

Some believe that the Bologna Process hides significant dangers for Bulgaria. Certain scientific areas, which are not seen as profitable and practical, can disappear altogether – for example the Ottoman studies.
There is also a social danger. The restructuring can leave numerous scholars and scientists out of work without a chance for new employment. There was also an opinion that there was no vision about the practical implementation in Bulgaria and that the financial resources were insufficient (I/14).

**Modernisation of education**

The respondents perceive modernisation in ways that are more diverse. For some, modernisation represents rationalisation and liberation from dogmas in the education process (I/11), for others the most important features of modernisation are cosmopolitanism of the young and their ability to adapt to different environments and changing conditions (I/9). In some interviews, modernisation was perceived very narrowly – as technical improvement of the material base of schools (I/7, I/10).

Several respondents had suspicions whether the modernisation of Bulgaria was a genuine and real process. They expressed apprehensions that like many other processes, it was more about the form rather than the content.

“It is hard for me to say that Bulgaria is becoming modern, it is hard because modernity does not mean only material modernity, the real modernity is a spiritual one. If there is modernity in the spirit, than material modernity can also be achieved, but unfortunately, I’m not optimistic in this respect.” (I/1)

“Modernity in Bulgaria was always imposed institutionally from the outside and this is happening again now. Both Bulgaria and Europe are changing, but we cannot always speak about modernity, there are also tendencies of retraditionalisation.” (I/12)

One respondent stated that Europe as a whole is not becoming more modern. The dominating tendency was to make it more unified and to consolidate the common values – a path not necessarily taking the European societies towards modernity, as often the desire to preserve or return to tradition is underlined. (I/9)
European and national identity

When thinking about the Bulgarian and European identity, the respondents said that Bulgaria always belonged to Europe, although this relationship had been very dynamic over time. “Europe” had meant different things at different times in history and as Europe was changing, so was the Bulgarian place in it. Despite that, “Bulgarian” and “European” were always inseparably connected.

“Bulgaria is a part of Europe, but it was a part of different Europes, or of different virtual Europes… I don’t see any doubt regarding Bulgaria and Europe in the society.” (I/14)

Europeanization, understood as a process of formation of a common identity, is considered a very long and strenuous process, as it will be very difficult to overcome national differences. While well disposed towards the process of creation of a common European identity, the respondents believe that this should not happen at the expense of the Bulgarian identity – this would be neither possible nor it is necessary.

“There is a definite difference between the Bulgarian and the European, for a simple reason that our national characteristics are still stronger than the common European ones. More or less, certain common features are characteristic for the rest of Europe, but we still pay great attention to the difference, to the fact that we are different, that we are Bulgarians and not someone else.” (I/9)

Reservations regarding the possibility of developing a common European identity are accompanied by suspicions related to all-European regulations and norms. The respondents have no doubt that certain common frames are necessary, but think that regional distinctions should have the dominance.

“Europe is one unity, but still in this Europe there is huge differentiation, huge difference between various parts and various countries, and applying one and the same measures to these different situations would be unjust.” (I/9)
Apart from understanding Europe as a symbol of democratic values, the respondents associate Europe with high standard of living, mobility of people, goods and information, and “not feeling out of place” when visiting a different European country (I/6, I/7, I/9, I/11, I/12). Bulgaria is among the less developed European countries in these respects, but the most important difference between Bulgaria and most other EU countries is that the values and behaviour models which are considered “European” have not been widely applied in Bulgaria yet.

“I always try to think of myself as a European. I would very much like to work by their rules and see these rules becoming a part of me.” (I/6)

“…in some way we should all contribute to be Europeans, not just virtually, but for real.” (I/15)

“First we need to get acquainted with the European values, and then we need to turn them into our values.” (I/1)

It can be concluded that while topics like modernisation, liberalisation and globalisation do not capture significant share of public attention in Bulgaria today, the discussions regarding the European idea and European identity provoke interest. Similarly to other times in their historical development, Bulgarians today see themselves as Europeans by default, but recognise significant differences in mentality, culture, religion and above all in the social-economic development.

2.3. History education – formation of national, European and civic identity in the context of globalisation and modernisation

The interest in history in Bulgaria serves two main goals. On the one hand, history is used as a tool for constructing and maintaining the national identity; on the other hand, it tries to explain the current situation through the past events. As a consequence, historical arguments are often used in contemporary debates about problems of the present-day Bulgarian society. In this, there are two approaches. Certain historical events are given a heroic aura and certain historical periods are designated as a national Golden Age – for example the achievements of
the medieval Bulgarian state before the Ottoman period and the later period of the National Revival and the subsequent independence from the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, special attention is given also to traumatic events and periods, representing the Bulgarian nation as a victim of unfortunate historical circumstances – the Ottoman period or the human and material losses suffered during the wars of the 20th century.

The historical narrative is ethnocentric in both cases. It is interested solely in the faith of ethnic Bulgarians both in and outside the borders of the Bulgarian state. In this way a significant part of the society (various ethnic and religious minorities) are left outside this narrative. They are either neglected in the representation of the Bulgarian history, or (as is the case with Turks and Pomaks) play a highly unfavourable role of the (former) enemies of the nation. As such, they continue to be viewed with scepticism and distrust. The social discourse perceives history as the backbone of national identity, and the enduring historical myths as its pillars.

According to our respondents, regardless of their social, professional, ethnic and religious background, history science is the most important and necessary factor for the national identity construction.

“No nation can exist without history, no nation can build up national self-confidence and chauvinism, in the best meaning of this term, without history, but it also cannot build only on history.” (I/9)

Respondent I/9 is not a professional historian and her use of the term “chauvinism” in a positive context clearly expressed the social aspiration for sustaining the national pride and belonging through history. All respondents expressed this perception in different ways. A liberal-minded history professor from Sofia University formulated this view in the following way:

“Each identity needs solid reference points.” (I/14)

The main problem is finding a proper balance between the formation of national self-confidence and the tolerance towards various groups in the society and towards other nations. The interviewees belonging to minority communities are especially sensitive regarding this issue:
“…a person who does not know his history has no roots. History has to be studied; it has to be objective and to describe events as they were. Of course, all people carry patriotism inside of them, they find joy in this and prefer to see these things from their own viewpoint.” (I/2)

Another Turkish respondent added:

“It is very important for the construction of person’s identity that all aspects of history teaching are very precisely defined, because a distorted history education can lead to different problems, like chauvinism, like xenophobia.” (I/1)

History education could be used to enhance tolerant attitudes in the society if it concentrated more on the positive examples from the past. Several respondents shared that if the culture and traditions of various minorities were incorporated into the history curriculum, the society would become more tolerant of otherness (I/2, I/7).

On the other pole, there is an opinion of the Orthodox Priest. His view is indicative of a quite wide social perception.

“That is why much care should be taken regarding who teaches history and how, because if it is the truth, nobody should be offended by it. We cannot hide all the slaughters and atrocities … If in some ways minorities [Turks] are affected by this, nobody is blaming them for the violence committed by their ancestors. But we should be careful not to create hate through these memories – hate that would later explode like a powder keg.” (I/3)

Another important problem is how the historical narrative presented at schools is compared with the enduring collective myths of the society. One of the respondents (researcher at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and a secondary school teacher) formulated this issue in a very clear way:

“There is an opinion that historians hold the key to the historical knowledge and correspondingly they also control it – how much and how it should be presented to the society, how and what the society as a whole and school children in particular are inclined to accept. Therefore, historians are on the one hand in control, they are the guardians of the knowledge, but on the
other hand, they are also afraid of the reaction. This social reaction they are afraid of forms a vicious circle because in practice, they have created this reaction.” (I/12)

The history curriculum, as planned in the programmes of the Ministry of Education and Science, aims at presenting the Bulgarian history in the global and European context, educating and promoting the spirit of tolerance and respect of others, and learning civic values. The traditionally positivistic approach of the Bulgarian education presumes that historical narrative has to be backed by a large amount of information. Such approach often limits the possibilities for adequate presentation of discussed topics and for offering various interpretations. The sheer amount of facts included in the study materials is beyond the children’s capacity, and in most cases, they find the history lessons boring and unattractive.

The combination of pedagogic norms and expectations, which arise from the strong social fervour regarding the Bulgarian history, makes the teaching of history especially problematic. The main problems are related to the textbook contents and the attitude of the teachers. The textbooks do not present history in ideological and dogmatic manner as was the case before 1989, but due to conservative and inert procedures the narratives and texts in the books have been changing very slowly.

The biggest change is that a number of textbooks are now available for each grade, giving the teachers the autonomy to select the textbook they prefer. The new textbooks also provide good opportunities for discussion on various topics, but the extent to which this is utilised depends on the teachers. Since 1989, the Ministry of Education has been periodically organising contests for writing history textbooks, where numerous teams of authors have participated. At the moment, there are around 20 history textbooks on the market. The interviewees have highly diverse opinions on this variety.
The historians (some of them are authors of history textbooks, and at different times in their careers were also history teachers in secondary schools) welcome the diversity and believe that it leads to the presentation and discussion of different viewpoints. They are aware that the transformation of historical science into understandable education material is a complex task. History is a dynamic discipline and is permanently reconsidered and rewritten on the expert level – new viewpoints and new studies are frequently presented.

Most respondents, who are not directly involved with history, perceive the history material provided in schools to be too complicated and massive. The presentation of different views only confuses the students. These respondents (as a rule, residents of smaller towns) want to have a uniform and clear narrative of the past and are convinced that history can be presented in a simple and objective manner. The diversity of viewpoints and the questioning of certain established narratives are in their opinion a result of certain political goals.

“Nobody has the right to rewrite the history of Bulgaria. There is only one history and specialists should come to a consensus for one interpretation, which truly fits the history of Bulgaria.” (I/8)

“We don’t need five, six or more textbooks, but only one… the best teachers, with experience, should get together and write the textbook.” (I/10)

Such extremely explicit opinions that there is only one proper way of teaching history are a very clear demonstration of the pressure minority children are often exposed to in class, especially during lessons devoted to the periods of Ottoman rule and the National Revival. The Muslim respondents avoided the open discussion of this topic in the interviews and preferred not to share any personal experiences (either their own or of their children). Only one Turkish respondent, who had previous experience as a history teacher, delicately said:

“When I spoke about the Ottoman rule over the Bulgarian lands in class, children did not want to accept these things… I tried to present this part of history in a softer way; not to falsify history, not to distort it, but only to put it in a softer language. In a kinder, friendlier way.” (I/2)
Those respondents, who are historians by profession, stated categorically that one of the main goals of history classes should be the civic education (I/11, I/13, I/14 and I/15). Despite the potentials and existence of such ideas and projects, this is still not actually happening in history classes. A significant obstacle is the public discourse, strengthened by the media, in which the main Bulgarian history myths are considered sacred and cannot be questioned.

“The main material for identity formation is the media interpretation of history…This is especially important from the viewpoint of solidifying the traumatised identity, solidifying the deeply traumatising clichés, and the trauma itself, naturally, becomes even deeper because of the current situation.” (I/14)

The majority of respondents looked at history through the prism of liberalisation and globalisation. In their opinion, liberalisation was expressed through the deideologisation of history teaching, in the presentation of different viewpoints and in the multi-layered interpretation of facts and events.

According to one university professor, modernisation in education is an ambivalent process.

“On the one hand, education became more democratic, liberal, which is beautiful, this is excellent. But on the other, this has also led to simplification, or even worse – to oversimplification. (I/14)

Batak affair

In May 2007, the public opinion in Bulgaria virtually exploded over the attempt to organise a conference and an exhibition, dedicated to one especially dramatic event from the Bulgarian history – the mass killing of Christians in the town of Batak during the Bulgarian uprising against the Ottomans in 1876. Virtually all public and state institutions participated in the discussion. The President Georgi Parvanov (historian by education) was especially active in the debate (see Дневник, 2007; Първанов, 2007). The media and the public reacted heatedly and aggressively. For this reasons, we included a specific question dealing
with the “Batak affair” into the questionnaire as it is among the best illustrations of the function and importance of history in the social consciousness. This case also raised the question about the limits and freedom of history as a science. For the professional historians from our sample, the politicization of the event and the resulting prohibition of the conference were a testimony that

“the Bulgarian scholar is in a way still forced to conform to the factors which are outside science.” (I/15)

“It became completely clear to what extent history was and still is institutionalised. There is an aspiration to protect the main narrative in an exactly determined way, to silence the alternative voices. This is an institutional aspiration, which works automatically…” (I/14)

Reactionary nationalism, which came to the front during the scandal, showed that certain important cornerstones of national memory, on which the identity is constructed, cannot be touched, let alone questioned.

“Actually everyone was intoxicated – from the higher institutional level to the general public, they were intoxicated by this self-experience of national unity and national identity in a mythologized past. The whole campaign resembled an irrational ritual.” (I/12)

The reaction of our Muslim respondents was also very intriguing and revealed they were very sensitive regarding the subject. According to the nationally accepted historical interpretation of the event, the local Muslim Bulgarians are blamed for the killings and the burden of imposed guilt is still strong among them today. One of the Muslim Bulgarian respondents flatly refused any comment on the subject (I/8). Another Muslim Bulgarian respondent said that history should be narrated accurately, with all its good and bad sides, and that the problems should be left in the past (I/10). A Turkish respondent offered his views of the event – he believes that the account of the Batak killings has been transformed into a highly exaggerated myth (I/2).

10 Sarnica and Dospat, where part of the fieldwork was conducted, are located in the same region as Batak – about 50 km away.
In contrast, the Orthodox Priest summarised the most typical arguments, popular in the society:

“When we speak about the Batak slaughter, there can be no doubts. There is plenty of evidence and the events were described well by the people who survived the ordeal. There are the bones, and blood in the Batak church, and there is the well mothers dug with bare hands to give water to their children...” (I/3)

The Batak affair is a good example of traditionalist perception of history and history education in Bulgaria. Modernisation has entered the classroom in the form of modern equipment, interactive learning and information technologies, but the way history is narrated and taught remains conservative and traditionalist. Teachers are reluctant to challenge the traditional and deeply entrenched perceptions about the national history, and especially the most crucial period of nation and state formation (19th and early 20th century), afraid of the negative social reaction. The society, in its turn, clings to the traditional interpretations, which are periodically reinforced by the media, politicians, the Orthodox Church and – most importantly – history teachers themselves. History teachers thus reproduce the traditionalist narratives, afraid of the public opinion they are shaping and directing themselves. This vicious circle for now seems impenetrable. Modernisation and Europeanization have not been able to significantly affect history education in Bulgaria yet. In the words of a university professor:

“Batak case showed to what extent is our society a historical one. To what extent it comprehends its identity through history, through the past, and above all through the most traumatic period of its past. At the same time, this is the period the society knows the least about.” (I/14)

### 2.4. Religion in education

The questions from this section tried to examine what is the place of religion in general and Islam in particular in the Bulgarian education. In the beginning, the study tried to establish whether and if yes, in which form religion should be studied at schools. How can religious
education benefit the education of children? Does religion belong at all to schools, which are secular institutions? The representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have been periodically raising the issue of compulsory religious education since 1989 and the topic has been discussed in the public space since then. Most of the discussions have occurred on institutional level. Although the media have periodically tried to provoke and engage the public opinion, the reaction of the society can be described as lukewarm at best. The main reason for this is the rather peripheral role religion plays in Bulgaria.

Our attention then turned to the relationship Islam – education. The public reaction to this topic has been much different. The apprehensions regarding the spread of Islam, and especially of what has been perceived as radical Islam after 9/11, have not bypassed Bulgaria. Although Muslims are a traditional and important community in Bulgaria, their relation with the majority population has been a troublesome one throughout history. This has influenced also the issue of education of Muslim children.

In recent years, the situation has been further complicated, as the new global realities and the growing suspicions regarding Islam in the Western world have been reflected also in Bulgaria. The increased attention given to Islam in the media and public debates has put Muslim minorities in the spotlight. Many people in the country for the first time tried to comprehend the situation of the Muslims in Bulgaria, their needs and demands. The issue of Islamic education has been actively exploited by the nationalistic political parties and public figures.

The debate about the place of religion in schools includes also the question about the presence of religious symbols. Traditionally (with the exception of the communist period), the presence of religious symbols, including Muslim headscarves, in schools was not considered a problem. The topic hardly appeared in the public discourse in the 1990s. The debate started only recently, provoked by similar developments on the European scale. The personification of the abstract debate about the
place of religious symbols in the classroom became Muslim girls wearing headscarves in school. They provoked a media debate and the headscarf issue became the topic of a wide public discussion. The issue was further exacerbated by the restrictions on wearing religious symbols included in the draft of the Law on School Education proposed in 2009.

The questionnaire included also a question about the faith schools, where students belonging to the two main religions – Orthodox Christianity and Islam – are educated. This question examined also the attitude towards religion in general and Islam in particular.

Religious education

With the exception of the respondents from the clergy ranks, the remaining interviews represented a consensus that religion cannot be imposed in schools as a compulsory subject. There were two main arguments. The first was that the Bulgarian society is secular and the interest in and the need for such education are low.

“Bulgaria is secular and is with the lowest percent of religiosity of people.” (I/13)
“In Bulgaria not many people are truly religious.” (I/12)

The second argument took into consideration the religious diversity of the country:

“20% of population is not Orthodox.” (I/13)
“It is not desirable to study religion in schools, as this would discriminate various groups, since it is not possible to provide education for all denominations.” (I/11)
“Children with different religious belonging would be in a disadvantaged position.” (I/4)
“This would deepen the divisions in the Bulgarian society.” (I/5)

In some opinions, compulsory religious education would provoke negative reaction and rejection.

“In Bulgarian conditions, this could turn into a forced and unwanted form of education.” (I/14)
“Children would boycott such classes, a rational and material thinking dominates among them, the clash would be unbelievable.” (I/12)

Although expressing it from a very different viewpoint, the Orthodox Priest also agrees with such an opinion:

“Because for someone who does not take religious education to heart, the result would be reverse – alienation from the church and from God.” (I/3)

The arguments in favour of the secular character of education were supported by the opinion that religious belonging is an intimate personal choice. It is influenced by the family environment, and the school as an institution should not interfere in any way (I/2, I/6, I/10). The religious education is primarily the task of religious institutions. Such classes should be organised around religious temples and attendance should be based on the voluntary decision of parents and children.

Despite stressing the secular character of the Bulgarian society, many respondents note that religion is important for developing the moral values of a society. The respondents representing the religious institutions underlined this argument very strongly (I/1, I/2, I/3). A respondent from Samokov noted that part of their success with Roma integration was due to the very good influence of the Evangelical church among the Roma community (I/7).

In some interviews, the religious education was linked to the issue of national or ethnic identity. This was most clearly formulated by a respondent from the Chief Mufti office:

“This question is exceptionally important for Muslims, it deals with their identity, culture, it deals in general with the preservation of Muslim identity of Muslims in Bulgaria.” (I/1)

The Muslim respondents therefore believe that religion should be present in schools in some form – the best would be as a non-compulsory selective subject. If Islamic religious education is included in the school curriculum and controlled by the Ministry of Education, the society
would have no reason to be suspicious. Many Muslim respondents are aware how delicate the current situation is because they have had personal experience with suspicions, investigations and even repression over the recent years.

As noted by those respondents who have experience as teachers, religion is already well represented in the current school curriculum. Numerous humanities deal with religion in one way or another – history, literature, philosophy. Although some pupils react negatively to topics dealing with religion, most accept them, as they provide the students with a better understanding of the overall context. Topics involving religion often provoke curiosity among children (I/12).

Some respondents link the religion education with civic education.

“[Religion education should be] a part of the general education in schools, together with a well-formulated and adjusted civic education, providing orientation in the modern world, … [civic education] should be in interaction with the religion education, providing traditional values and understanding of the world.” (I/14)

Most opinions unified behind the idea that if education on religion is introduced into schools, it should be in the form of a comparative course on different religions, as levels of tolerance can be increased only if we learn about and understand those who are different.

“The children need to know about the different religions that are practiced around them and be able to compare them, so that they could understand the different identities and be more tolerant.” (I/9)

A Muslim respondent expressed a different opinion:

“People who do not know their own values, who are not bound to religious or ethical principles, can hardly be tolerant towards others.” (I/1)

Religious schools

The existence of various religious schools in the country is seen as a normal and necessary condition for the proper education of clergy for
the main Bulgarian religions. An official from the Chief Mufti office said that the Islamic secondary schools, which are under the control of the Ministry of Education, are exceptionally important for the Muslim community, as they provide them with educated and qualified personnel that attends to the needs of Muslims across Bulgaria. In his opinion, the society is in general very suspicious towards Islamic education and a new law and clearer regulations are a necessity for this to change. The unfavourable social climate is among the reasons why the number of schools offering facultative Islamic education has decreased from over 100 to between 30 and 40 in the recent years (I/1).

The Christian interviewees were less familiar with the Islamic schools, but most said that if these schools were under the control of the state, they needed to be supported in order to preserve the equality of all religious communities. Many respondents were surprised that there were Islamic secondary schools in Bulgaria and learned about their existence from our questions. One notable exception was a university professor, who was well acquainted with these schools. She said that the schools were to a large extent detached from the general system of education and that the main problem was that the secular subjects there were neglected at the expense of the religious ones. The overall quality of education offered there was low and there was much dissatisfaction among the students visiting them. Even the religious courses were allegedly of not very high quality and the students had to look for additional courses on Islam and the Quran outside the schools. In her opinion, the possibility that radical Islamic teachings were spread in these schools could not be ruled out – at any rate, the principles and teachings of these schools differ from the Islam which is traditional in Bulgaria, and this alienates some of the students (I/13).

Another respondent links the issue of Islamic schools to the general approach of the state towards the Muslim communities. The state has been neglecting the problems and needs of the Muslim minorities and has had no desire to engage in a productive dialogue with their institutions. Instead of offering a partnership and a dialogue on the level of
the central state institutions, the preferred mode of “communication” has been police and judicial interference. There is no political vision at the moment and the state prefers to control the Muslim community instead of talking with it (I/5).

*Religious symbols*

Religious symbols and their place in schools is another issue dividing the Bulgarian society. The opinions how real this problem is are also divided. One of the respondents, for example, believes that “*some of the topics, which appear important for the Bulgarian society, are discussed only because of the speed of communication technologies today.*” Isolated cases from certain parts of the country are quickly and artificially transferred into discussions on the national level and are commented against the European or global context (I/5).

Most respondents stated that they were familiar with the “European model” regarding the place of religious symbols in schools. When asked to elaborate, few could describe what the “European model” actually represented or were able to discuss different practices from various European countries. Quite often, the recent developments in France were interpreted as being valid for the entire EU.

Despite expressing quite categorical opinion for or against religious symbols, most respondents agree that this issue is not essential for Bulgaria. They recollect that it was a problem only in a particular case of Muslim girls students in Smolyan and do not remember any other similar incidents. At the same time, the issue of headscarves in classes is “*a very delicate topic. A very professional expert opinion is needed, but in my opinion, nobody is looking for such*…” (I/14)

Those respondents who defend the position that the school is a completely secular place and that religious symbols have no place there, underline that a complete prohibition would be inappropriate (I/6, I/7, I/9, I/11). Considering the issue from a distance, they believe
that wearing headscarves should be accommodated in a certain way. If headscarves were prohibited, prohibition should be very strict to include all kinds of religious symbols (I/13).

“Potential prohibition should be valid for everyone. But it has to be well explained. And it needs to be implemented very delicately.” (I/14)

Fieldwork – part two: Citizens

1. Description of the fieldwork and methodology

This part of the chapter presents the main findings of a study based on 28 semi-standardised interviews. The interviews were conducted between November 2010 and January 2011. Fifteen were made in Sofia and 13 in various towns and villages around Bulgaria. Plovdiv, Samokov and Asenovgrad have significant Roma communities, while Dospat, Sarnica, Luzhnica and Breznica are located in the Western and Central Rhodopa Mountain, where the majority population are Muslim Bulgarians.

Our respondents included 14 women and 14 men. Their age ranged from 23 to 76 years. Eight respondents work as teachers in secondary schools in different towns (Sofia, Samokov, Plovdiv, Asenovgrad), while five are university students. The basic information on the personal background of all respondents can be seen in tables 1 to 7.

Table 1: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20-29</th>
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<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60 and above</th>
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<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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Table 2: Marital status

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<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Single</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Number of children

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Education

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<th>MA</th>
<th>PhD</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Place of residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sofia</th>
<th>Plovdiv</th>
<th>Samokov</th>
<th>Asenovgrad</th>
<th>Dospat</th>
<th>Sarnica</th>
<th>Luzhnica</th>
<th>Breznica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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Table 6: Ethnicity

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Bulgarian Turk</th>
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<td>Values</td>
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<td>1</td>
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Table 7: Religion

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<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Atheist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the respondents (especially in Sofia) were contacted through the social and professional networks of the researchers, while others were recruited through snowballing method. These interviews lasted between 35 and 85 minutes. The respondents were told in advance about the main focus of the interviews (education, identities and modernity) and the time and place were agreed. All expressed initial interest in the topic and were willing to answer all the questions and share their opinions.

The interviews taken during several fieldtrips outside of Sofia were usually not pre-arranged. The researchers visited a local primary or secondary school, municipality, religious temple, or shop and looked for suitable interviewees. Understandably, not all who were approached were willing to participate in the research. Those who replied favour-
ably found the interview guide interesting and commented on those issues they had an opinion about, while skipping the topics they were not familiar with (in quite a few cases – the Bologna Process). These interviews lasted between 25 and 50 minutes.

A minor incident occurred during the fieldwork. A Mayor of a small town (in Rhodopa area), populated mostly by Muslim Bulgarians initially agreed to participate in the research, but when the concrete questions about religion and history were asked, he angrily replied that these questions were provocative and asked our researcher to leave. One interview, which was taken in a restaurant, could not be transcribed due to poor sound quality. These two interviews are not included into the corpus of 28 interviews analysed here.

All other interviews were fully transcribed in Bulgarian. They were recorded with the explicit consent of the respondents. At the beginning of each interview, they were informed about the nature and purpose of the project, and told that their anonymity would be guaranteed. The researchers tried to ask the respondents all the questions from the interview guide; however, the respondents preferred to talk more extensively about the topics they were familiar with or were interested in, while discussing only briefly or entirely skipping others.

The data analysis is based on the method of critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Each interview was analysed in order to establish the specific contents and topics, and to understand the respondents’ positions on all studied themes. After it was established how respondents perceive and interpret various topics, the interviews were compared and a matrix of commonalities and differences was set up, making it possible to come up with analytical conclusions.
2. Discourses on education, identity and modernity – fieldwork data analysis

2.1. Education of minority communities

When asked to express their opinion about the education of children belonging to minority communities, most respondents related the question exclusively to the issue of Roma education. For this reason, the education of Roma minority became the main focus of this segment of the research. Exactly half (14 out of 28) of respondents named this issue to have been the most problematic and important one for the Bulgarian education reform during the last 10 years. This is a logical result of the discourse dominating the media and the public space – usually it is communicated in alarming tone that Roma will soon become the majority population in Bulgaria, while at the same time the illiteracy rates in the community are progressively increasing. If measures were not taken, in a few decades the substantial part of the Bulgarian citizens would live in urban ghettos and would be hardly able to write their names. The frightening media image of the situation is juxtaposed to the personal experiences of the respondents. In contrast to the overall negative picture they are all very concerned with, many described cases of good practice in certain schools or small towns, or an individual success story of a Roma child from the class of their children.

All respondents believe that one of the principal ways of resolving the problem of Roma education is the inclusion of Roma children into the education system, but hardly anyone has any clear vision how this could be accomplished. The interviews sketch the vicious circle in which the marginalisation of Roma community is strengthened by the ineffective state policies, the insuperable prejudices of the majority population (fuelled by the media) and the self-isolation of Roma themselves. All respondents declared that they were tolerant towards Roma and described cases of their own personal experiences with them. However, when conversation went into a more detailed descrip-
tion of specific cases or concrete examples and related attitudes, it became clear that (consciously or not) most respondents actually reject Roma. They see them above all as a problem for the society and are extremely sceptical that a change is possible. The opinion of a respondent who used to work at the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and at the Roma NGO Human Rights Project, is especially indicative:

“This problem is unsolvable! Let us not deceive ourselves, it is unsolvable! Something can be done partially, but overall it cannot be resolved.” (II/17)

The apprehensions about the future of the country were summarised by one of the respondents in the following way:

“Without education, this large mass of Roma, which is becoming a bigger and bigger share [of population] of Bulgaria, will decrease the level of the entire society. If Roma are not educated and we come into position that 4 out of 5 people in Bulgaria are not able to write, this would mean the disintegration of the society. That is why I believe that if this expanding population, the Roma, is not educated, Bulgaria could practically cease to exist as a state.” (II/1)

Some respondents insisted on using the ethnonym “Gypsies.” In their words, there were no negative connotations associated to their use of the word “Gypsy,” as other words were used to express negative and offensive attitude towards Roma. They perceived the term “Roma” as an example of unnecessary and pretentious political correctness (II/2, II/3, II/4, II/21, II/22, II/23).

“Actually, in Bulgarian it is correct to say ‘Gypsies’ rather than ‘Roma,’ because the Roma are part of the Gypsies; indeed, only now I realise that you are asking me about the Roma, not about the Gypsies; it is a change that tries to be politically correct and some people are trying to force politically correct terms, which are indeed politically correct in other parts of the world, but they arrive here as part of the globalization; and despite the articulate academic arguments against them, these terms are more and more used by the general public.” (II/3)

11 The most typical such word is “mangal” – meaning a person, whose skin is dark as coal; “mangal” could be described as a Bulgarian equivalent to the word “nigger.”
Those respondents who are directly involved with the Roma community through their work or through different programmes and projects for bringing Roma children to schools, were more consistent when using the name “Roma.” The other respondents instead used “Gypsies” more and more often as the interviews progressed. The exception are the young respondents (aged from 23 to 27), who have accepted the term “Roma” into their vocabulary and have not made even a single reference to “Gypsies” in the course of the interviews.

Apart from the issue of Roma education, the discussions raised the subject of education in one’s mother tongue, which concerns mostly the Turkish population in Bulgaria. Optional classes in Turkish and Roma languages exist in many schools in Bulgaria. While the number of children who study Turkish is relatively high, very few children choose to study the Roma language. The experience to date has shown that the low level of literacy and the generally low interest in education within the Roma community reflect negatively on their desire to study their mother tongue.

State policy

The respondents believe that the problem of education of minorities should be tackled above all by the state.

“It is up to the state to deal with this. There are many experts in this field; if we are invited, we will send the right people, we will initiate discussions with our colleagues about what can be done.” (II/12)

The above statement, made by one of the teachers in a Roma school, shows that the experts on Roma education are aware that the state needs their expertise, and are willing to participate in the problem solving processes. Many of the teachers, who have personal experience working with Roma children, went beyond simply defining the state policy as ineffective. In their accounts, the shortcomings assume a more concrete form. This is an understandable consequence of the fact that the teachers in the Roma schools feel that certain requirements
are pressed upon them, but at the same time, they are not given any means to come up with workable solutions.

“…not only round tables, press conferences, strategies and similar. The problem is that what is said on these round tables and different forums in fact never reaches the ordinary people in the Roma community.” (II/6)

“The state only exerts pressure from above, the entire state policy is reduced to the need to keep the children at schools and make sure they don’t drop out.” (II/9)

The respondents blame the lack of consistent policy for the situation, in which “the Roma … are turned into minions of fortune and scapegoats-victims at the same time” (II/11). This opinion was expressed also in the interviews with the civil society actors (see the previous part of this chapter).

Apart from the state, the non-governmental sector and the Roma leaders are also responsible for finding effective strategies. One of the respondents shared that cooperation between the state and the NGO sector is a necessity and that the state was responsible for providing the needed conditions for such partnership:

“The state has the prerogative to define the policy, which on its part will secure the suitable working conditions for the non-governmental organizations.” (II/13)

Somewhat contradictory to the belief that it is the responsibility of the state to act, there is a widespread opinion in the society that the state devotes unnecessary huge financial resources for the solving of the Roma problems. Respondents are very sceptical regarding the effective use of these funds.

“…and money is given for this, but a very small percent goes to the proper place.” (II/19)

“The result of these programmes are the projects that exist only on paper and that money was spent, but nothing reaches the Roma.” (II/2)

An interesting observation is that most of the people who share such sceptical opinion regarding the Roma programmes and their funding
do not have any personal experience and are not directly involved in the work with the Roma community. Their opinion is largely based on the media reporting and the prevailing public discourse.

The role of informal Roma leaders, who are often expected to make a difference in the Roma community as positive role models, is rarely described positively. Respondent II/17, who worked in various NGOs (including one Roma NGO) in the 1990s, provided examples of Roma leaders who distanced themselves from the community and instead of helping it, pursued only their personal interests. One respondent shared his belief that the state should play a more active role in directing the relations within the Roma community:

“The state could take care to build, so to say, a hierarchy within the Roma society, and place on the very top of this hierarchy educated Roma with high culture, instead of criminal bosses. In other words, the state could work with the Roma elite and in this way direct the community towards development in the right direction.” (II/1)

**Attitude of the society**

The respondents share the opinion that acceptance is a two-way process. A formidable obstacle for the Roma integration are therefore the numerous prejudices and hostility of the majority population towards Roma. These attitudes are strengthened by the media reporting, where Roma are regularly presented in negative terms. The realisation that these negative perceptions have to change was present in many interviews:

“Relations between Bulgarians and Gypsies will be decisive for the fate of our nation in the near future, and we truly need to learn to live together, and to live together well.” (II/3)

Two respondents said that the role of the society for improving the situation of the Roma community is actually the most important.

“The state is in the second place, every single one of us is in the first place.” (II/20)
“So I believe that this is a task for everyone, absolutely everyone. We cannot leave it to others: this is not my responsibility and that’s it.” (II/15)

Despite saying that their knowledge of the issue was rather superficial, the youngest respondents (below 30) stressed that changing the negative stereotypes among the majority population was essential. They all believe that programmes targeting only the Roma community are not enough – working with the majority society in order to increase the levels of tolerance is equally important (II/24, II/25, II/26, II/27, II/28). The problems with the integration of minorities can be solved only through active communication and if children from majority and minority communities study together.

The negative attitude towards the presence of Roma children in schools is recognised as one of the main obstacles to the improvement of the Roma education.

“In this way all the possibilities for integration are cut off, even for those who have the willingness and who are a small number anyway. When they find themselves in a hostile environment, naturally they lose the desire to integrate quite fast, even if they really had it, so the situation is very difficult.” (II/4)

On the other hand, many respondents (some more, some less openly) believe that in numerous respects, Roma are given undeserved privileges, which irritates the majority population. Many people believe that Roma are abusing the social welfare system and that they are allowed to use utilities like electricity and water without paying, that they do not pay taxes and social insurance – all these topics are frequently featured in the media.

One respondent was very critical regarding the positive discrimination policies aimed at attracting and keeping the Roma children at schools:

“I do not think that it is the responsibility of the school [to make sure Roma children visit the school]. This is the responsibility of the Roma community. School as an institution cannot make gestures, which give the impression that a Roma child is more valuable than a Bulgarian child. This is not positive as a
A teacher from a Roma school supports this opinion:

“There is a need for strict rules, and they [the Roma] have to respect them, just like everyone else does.” (II/11)

One respondent believes that the society has given up on Roma. Most people dislike, reject and avoid them rather than make an effort to work with them.

“The society has to be stricter and more demanding towards Roma. There is this attitude towards Roma in Bulgaria – these are Gypsies, they can do whatever they want.” (II/1)

The Roma marginalisation – self-isolation or rejection?

The interviews with the civil society actors and experts showed that many believed that an important reason for the marginalisation of Roma was their self-isolation and their deliberate withdrawal from the society. This explanation was supported by several interviews with private citizens.

“The issue is that Gypsies are placing themselves outside of the society on their own.” (II/12)

Two respondents shared their own observations about Roma who live outside of the ghetto, but nevertheless spend most of the time there and limit their social contacts to people in the ghetto (II/7, II/23). This entirely logical behaviour, based on maintaining everyday contacts with the family, relatives and friends, is thus interpreted as an inability to disengage from the social milieu and an obstacle to the successful integration. Such thinking is also a manifestation of the immanent notion of Roma as alien to “us.” Consequently, in order to integrate successfully, they need to be like us and to live the way we do.
Almost all respondents also share the perception that education does not represent a value for the Roma community and that considerable efforts needed to be made to change this. One of the measures proposed is to work with the entire Roma families, not just with the children. The Roma parents are seldom motivated to send their children to schools (II/5, II/11, II/13). This is above all a result of their social status. Poor, illiterate, unemployed and marginalised Roma families have other priorities in life than the education of their children.

“The initiative cannot come from the Roma, because the larger part of them is illiterate and they are just trying to survive – literally to survive.” (II/6)

The teachers, working at the Roma schools, have shared numerous problems they encounter at their work.

“It is not at all easy to work with Roma. I go to the Roma ‘hamlet’ every other day with my colleagues, we talk to the parents, try to court them and so on. And then I hear from the Roma leaders that we are throwing children from our schools because we do not want to teach them.” (II/11)

One respondent mentioned that there was a deliberate obstruction and resistance from Roma:

“I told you, the problem comes from the parents, because they, de facto, they say one thing to us, but then they treat their children in an entirely different way. And then there is the separate issue of what the children learn at home... They [the children] are told that even if the teacher is right [in what s/he said], that has no meaning for them because the teacher is a Bulgarian.” (II/12)

Desegregation

All respondents support the desegregation as an idea, but none is sure how to implement it in practice. The opinion of the teachers working with Roma children is especially important. Considering numerous aspects of the desegregation process, they all declare that it is a good thing and that it is a necessity in the long term. But if desegregation is limited just to a transfer of children from Roma schools into integrated schools, like is the case now, this will only intensify the problems in
the Roma community and increase the drop-out rates among the children (II/6, II/7, II/8, II/9, II/11, II/12).

“We can’t just say generally, this or that has to be done, without getting in touch with the concrete person, concrete case, concrete child. It is easy to say, yes, like this, like that… But when you work with these children, you see how many problems they have, and how differently they will feel if you send them to different schools by force.” (II/6)

Respondent II/6, a teacher from Roma school in Samokov, believes (this is also the opinion of her colleagues) that if they are sent to other schools, most children would stop going to school altogether. A teacher from Sofia adds:

“Are these children prepared to be integrated at all? Because it is not easy at all for them. What is their level? Also if they are artificially over-tolerated by the teachers, the other children will be annoyed by that.” (II/5)

The lower quality of education in the so-called Roma schools is explained by the fact that the majority of children will not be able to cope with the higher requirements. This opinion shows that the priority is not to provide the Roma children with proper education, but to see them through the obligatory elementary education (or at least through as many grades as possible). A psychologist and the teachers from Roma schools claim that many Roma children who have been transferred to integrated schools soon return to Roma schools because they find the material in the “normal” ones too difficult for them. They believe the reluctance of Roma children to attend integrated schools is not a consequence of racism and prejudices, but occurs because they feel uncomfortable among other children who perform much better (II/7, II/8, II/9, II/12).

The proposed solutions range from administrative measures (including financial sanctions) (II/6, II/12) to the introduction of special syllabus with reduced workload.

“The state could improve the education of Roma by changing the education process in a way that would attract Roma to the classroom, by emphasizing the natural abilities and qualities they posses.” (II/14)
“The standard school programme, suitable for standard schools, is not appropriate for Roma schools. The children also need to be classified, because some are able to progress quite fast, while the majority of Roma pupils have difficulties, they do not understand the study material.” (II/11)

“At least the ones, who go to schools regularly, who want to learn, should have some easier, simpler textbooks.” (II/6)

One respondent stated that, although practical, such solutions would not be politically correct:

“But this, you understand how this would sound like, like segregation.” (II/9)

The conclusion that can be made is that the majority of people somewhat mechanically accept (most likely influenced by the prolonged public debates on the issue) that desegregation is a necessity. At the same time, when asked to propose concrete steps, most continue to search for solutions through segregation. An argument that is usually added is that separate schools and simplified programmes would be best for the Roma children and that segregation is actually in the interest of the Roma community. Those who are directly involved with the Roma education list the practical obstacles, which hinder the inclusion of Roma children into integrated schools. They also stress that the most important obstacle is the discomfort desegregation measures would create among the Roma children and the Roma community in general.

Integration or assimilation – solutions from the past

All respondents claim that with a better standard of living and some necessary efforts made by the Roma, they would have no problem to integrate into the society. The widespread perception is that in the socialist period, the Roma problem had been resolved. Quite a few respondents were categorical that under the socialist rule, the state policies for integration were successful. Employment for Roma was ensured, they lived in mixed neighbourhoods and settlements, and control over the school attendance was strict (II/2, II/17). Some of these
examples were based on the personal experience of the respondents, who said that they had Roma neighbours and that Roma children, who studied together with them in the same class, visited schools regularly. In time, neighbourhoods divided into those populated by Bulgarians and those where Roma lived, and this also led to the present segregation of schools (II/1, II/6, II/11, II/21).

“Twenty years ago, the grandmothers of these children worked in factories that existed in Samokov. They communicated predominantly with Bulgarian families, and the priorities of a Bulgarian family became also their own priorities, while now they are confined to their hamlets, they don’t go anywhere to work or to study, they are simply cut off from the outside world.” (II/8)

The parents mentioned that today, there are only one or two Roma children in the classes of their children (II/5, II/20), while teachers (not counting the Roma school in Samokov) said they rarely have more than one Roma pupil in their class (II/4, II/5). All believe that these children have no problems with integration and that they are accepted well by the other schoolchildren (despite some initial distrust). However, not all is so perfect in reality. A teacher from Sofia (II/5) thus recalled an incident, involving periodical disappearances of various items in the class attended by her son. Although nothing was proven and the perpetrator was not found, everyone in the class suspected that the Roma girl was responsible. A similar attitude can be encountered quite frequently – a well-disposed attitude towards minorities is declared, but suspicions remain and are manifested at the very first instance when a problem occurs.

The respondents from small towns, where a very small number of Roma live and where they are socially integrated into the society, say that they have no problems with Roma and that Roma children regularly go to school alongside all other children (II/10, II/15, II/19).

“Roma here are different for the city Roma. They have two children, there are people with university degrees among them, doctors, dentists, you can see them in positions we are not able to reach yet.” (II/18)
Many respondents do not see a clear line between desegregation, integration and assimilation. Often, when speaking about integration, they seem to perceive assimilation as the desired result.

“A Roma person, if he receives a proper education, will become a Bulgarian, that is why it is very important that they receive also secondary education. Education will turn them into Bulgarians and we will be proud of that achievement.” (II/2)

Comparing the opinions of the private citizens to the perceptions of experts and civil society actors, no major differences can be observed regarding their content. The main contrast comes from the way these opinions are articulated. The ordinary citizens express their views more categorically and directly and formulate them in a way, which is less politically correct.

Mother tongue education

The education in mother tongue was not perceived as an important problem by the respondents. None objected to the possibility to study minority languages at schools on non-compulsory level. However, a number of concerns were raised regarding possible problems with the adaptation into the society and the labour market.

“I do not say that they should not learn their mother language, of course, but above all they should learn the language of the country they live in, so that it will be easier for them later on.” (II/20)

“It is nice to have minority mother languages in schools, but not as compulsory subject, the official language should be the Bulgarian one.” (II/11)

Some say that minorities in general are not interested in studying their mother tongues.12 One respondent described an example from the school he works at, where children who enlisted to the class in Turkish

12 A fact confirmed by the official data of the Ministry of Education about the small number of children from minority communities attending their mother tongue classes. See Petrova, 2011.
language lost interest after several days, claiming that this was not the language they spoke at home.

“Colleagues told me about a teacher in Turkish language that was hired several years ago. A Bulgarian Turk, who graduated in Turkish Philology in Istanbul, so a well-educated person, a perfect teacher. She came here, and on the third day, the pupils said that this was not Turkish language and they stopped coming.” (II/12)

The problem is even more clearly expressed among the Roma community. The abundance of dialects, significantly different from each other, makes it very difficult to introduce a uniform Romany language school programme. This has nevertheless been achieved, and a number of textbooks were prepared, including Romany grammar and dictionaries. However, the interest of Roma children in attending such courses has been almost non-existent.

Those respondents who work at Roma schools believe that Romany language classes are senseless, given the enormous levels of illiteracy among Roma. The absolute priority is to teach them to speak and read the Bulgarian language. The fact that Romany language is written in Roman alphabet (unlike the Bulgarian, where Cyrillic script is used) further complicates matters (II/6, II/7, II/8, II/9, II/12). There was only one opinion, which was explicitly in favour of Romany language classes. The support for such classes was based on the presumption that this would make schools more attractive for the Roma and would enhance their possibilities to obtain education (II/24).

The social attitudes towards the presence of minority languages in schools, as formulated in our fieldwork, are moderately liberal. The minorities are welcome to learn their mother tongues and cultural traditions, but this should not come at the expense of the Bulgarian language and the dominating national discourse. The rationale is that such arrangement is for the benefit of the minority communities, as their successful integration (assimilation?) into the society depends on their ability to live and work in the Bulgarian-speaking environment.
2.2. Globalisation, modernisation, liberalisation and the European idea

The majority of Bulgarians share the opinion that the education in the country was on a very high level in the socialist period. This view is backed by numerous personal examples, which often sound like a cliché – about children performing outstandingly at international tests and competitions, and about Bulgarian students enrolled in the most prestigious universities worldwide.

In the recent years, this image has been shattered and the trend has visibly reversed. At the latest PISA evaluation, Bulgarian students (together with the Romanian ones) scored the lowest result among the EU states (OECD, 2010). The information that Bulgarian pupils are at the bottom of the EU literacy scale rang the alarm bell in the society. All media reported that half of the children attending Bulgarian secondary schools were illiterate, prompting the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov to comment:

“Having illiterate students in Bulgaria means that something in the system is not right, because much money is spent on education…. teachers have to think about their professional development and about the production they offer [to the society] in exchange for the money they receive.” (Georgiev, 2010; 24 chasa, 2010)

These public perceptions about the rapid deterioration of the previously high quality of education provided in Bulgarian schools were manifested also in our fieldwork. All respondents stated firmly, although in different ways, that the general quality of education has been decreasing from year to year since 1989. A very interesting observation is that the opinion about the decreasing quality of education and the oversimplified education programmes is shared also by the youngest respondents, who do not have a base to compare, as their entire education occurred after 1989.

The education in the socialist period was better
“because it was giving [the students] a very broad knowledge on a high quality level, while now the number of those who are illiterate is growing, which shows that contemporary education is losing its hold on a very big portion of the population.” (II/1)

“The problem comes from, so to say, the quality level of education, because unfortunately it has decreased drastically and to a large extent modernisation will have to try to overcome this decline.” (II/4)

The main observation shared by all respondents was that the Bulgarian education has been profoundly affected by the transition period. Over the past 20 years, globalisation, modernisation, liberalisation and the introduction of EU norms have all left their mark, reforming not just the curriculum and the school syllabuses, but also changing the way education is perceived in the society and especially among the young. The process has been very diverse and the differences in implementation have been huge across the country.

Some respondents believe that modernisation is actually among the reasons for the poorer performance of the schoolchildren.

“Overuse of internet... The result is a kind of uniform thinking among the children.” (II/11)

Others believe the reasons are more traditional – “the lack of comprehensive political platform” (II/13). One respondent goes even further in the search of political responsibility. In his opinion, the ineffective and inapplicable education policies are not a result of political incompetence, but of intentional sabotage:

“Bulgarian education was intentionally destroyed. They, the politicians, they do not want educated people, they want thugs, servants, they want a mass which can be easily manipulated. They don’t need knowledgeable people. We used to be a European country, at least as far as the level of our education was concerned. If only the ideological matters were removed and the new technologies introduced, the result would be much better; we would be in the first place in Europe in education. Instead, we just destroyed the old system, and the new one, in no way, we did not make it right.” (II/14)
Very often, the respondents do not make a clear distinction between the terms globalisation, modernisation and liberalisation, and use them almost interchangeably. Due to the persistency of the researchers, most interviewees shared their opinion on modernisation, but were troubled to put it into concrete words and explain it.

Most often, modernisation is understood as improvement of the material-technical base and introduction of computers into schools. This perception is typical for small towns and villages (II/6, II/7, II/8, II/10, II/11). In the words of a respondent:

“We cannot have modern education, if we still use chalk and blackboards, if we have no technical means. A child is much more computer-literate than a teacher, children can use internet to find all necessary information and read about things that interest them, if they interest them… How can we possibly speak about modern education?” (II/6)

For some, modernisation is expressed through the introduction of new methods and ways of teaching (II/4, II/11). One of the parents on the other hand believes that schools have not been modernised enough in this respect – the way teaching is conducted has to change more:

“A child should be motivated to go to school, motivated to learn. Now they can learn much more while they play and have fun, than in the way information is presented to them at schools.” (II/20)

In some interviews, modernity was directly linked to the notion of European. Modernisation was described as introduction of the European norms and values (II/1).

“For us, all that is European and not Bulgarian is modern. This is how I see it.” (II/7)

“To have modern education would mean that our education was recognised as having the same quality as the one in the European countries; if it respected European requirements and criteria.” (II/11)

A number of respondents believe that modernisation is only on the surface. Certain forms and models of behaviour are mechanically copied, without being filled with meaningful content.
“It is so artificial, how should I put it, in some ways we prepare all these documents. We present ourselves to the people through them, but in the end the result is zero, there is no result and no point.” (II/6)

“I definitely do not think that our education is getting more modern. Actually in some ways we are becoming ridiculous.” (II/15)

For some, modernity is relative and depends on the point of view. Uncertain regarding their own perception, some respondents trust the external evaluation. However, although acknowledging that education might be more modern today, they share the general critical opinion that the quality has decreased.

“Probably they [the reforms] have made the education more modern, because this methodology of teaching is borrowed from outside. Maybe from the European perspective, in the eyes of the people who watch us from the distance, maybe we are more modern. But I don’t think our education has become better. As much as we try to be Europeans and modern, our Bulgarian features shine through, I guess.” (II/8)

For numerous respondents, who are not employed in the education system, the question about modernity and education was practically not understandable. They had never considered it and had problems providing an opinion.

Globalisation as unification

The majority of respondents who shared their views on globalisation often tied it to liberalisation and the border between the two notions was often blurred. For some respondents, globalisation meant above all unification and their opinions were predominantly negative.

“My understanding of globalisation in [regard to] education is that they simply take someone else’s experience… I have the feeling that people, who are making decisions, do not think seriously through this. This globalisation, liberalisation, what good does it lead to? If there are no results, we should not introduce it.” (II/12)
“I’m against globalisation in principle, and in education in particular. Humanity still hasn’t matured spiritually and one and the same model can’t be introduced everywhere.” (II/14)

“This globalisation is unnecessary, it is very artificial, identity is disappearing.” (II/5)

“In a certain way, the motive behind the changes in the education system is the attempt to liberalise it and in a way make it commensurable with the European and global standards, but I have a feeling it is done only formally… In this sense, I feel, the foundations of education are undermined.” (II/13)

All the above opinions were expressed by secondary school teachers. Their attitudes and opinions are significantly different from the attitudes of university professors and secondary school directors, who are considerably more positively disposed towards the globalisation-induced changes in the Bulgarian education (see the previous part of this chapter). On the one hand, unlike the professors and directors, who spoke not just in their own name, but also as representatives of the institutions and as such tried to stress positive outcomes, the teachers expressed their own positions, unavoidably influenced by the public opinion and debates. On the other hand, as teachers, they are positioned right in the centre of the reform process and have felt on their back all the positive and all the negative changes introduced into the education over the recent years.

**Bologna Process**

The respondents who were familiar with the Bologna Process were very rare. The impression is that the interest of the society in this issue is very limited. More specifically, the harmonisation of university education and degrees, and the possibility to study abroad are evaluated positively. A significant amount of scepticism is also present, as the respondents underline the fact that the opportunities offered by the Bologna Process will be meaningless if people have no money to take advantage of them.

A respondent from Sofia University was one of the few who were familiar with the Bologna reforms. She had an exceptionally nega-
tive opinion, and said that her colleagues felt the same way. The main objection was that the study period was shortened and that the knowledge and science were subordinated to the laws and needs of the market.

“The tendency is to cut and limit the humanities under the pretext that they are not practical, that they are inapplicable, but they are the ones creating the national essence, the awareness.” (II/2)

The European identity

The respondents were unanimous: Bulgaria belongs to Europe due to its history and traditions.

“We are Europeans. Let’s be clear, we had been European long before the others. At least this is what I have learned.” (II/20)
“We are a part of the European culture.” (II/4)

Such opinion is very typical for the Bulgarian society. It is a product of the education system, especially history and literature, but is also frequently reconfirmed by the politicians and the media. Despite being located on the European periphery, the sense of geographical belonging to Europe is also unmistakable.

“Geographically we are Europeans, culturally we are Europeans.” (II/3)
“Our region [the Balkans], this is actually the centre of Europe… Here is the cradle of the European civilisation.” (II/5)
“Here on the Balkans we are Europeans and I actually believe that in many respects, we surpass the average Europeans.” (II/26)

The self-perception of Bulgarians as Europeans in civilisational and historical aspects has thus been clearly expressed in the field research. The opinions about the Europeanness of Bulgaria today were more diverse. Many respondents questioned the extent to which Bulgaria has succeeded in adopting European (Europe and European have been persistently used as synonyms for the EU) values, norms and achievements. The differences in the standard of living were often mentioned as one of the most important contrasts between Bulgaria and “Europe.”
When speaking about Europe as a bearer of certain values and norms, most respondents acknowledged that a process to adopt them in Bulgaria was underway. However, much work still lied ahead. The European model – consolidation of democratic rules and norms – was a desire of most Bulgarians, but has not become a reality yet.

“Many European ideas and norms have entered. On the whole in a very superficial manner, but at least they have entered.” (II/4)

Accessible Europe?

The feeling of belonging to Europe has been strongly enhanced by the possibility for free travel and communication. There is a widespread opinion that the elimination of the internal EU borders and the lift of travel restrictions are among the most essential contributions to the formation of European self-awareness.

“Removal of the borders, this cannot be described, this experience of passing the borders without being stopped.” (II/21)

Some of the respondents, who are students, have spent some time abroad, doing courses or attending universities in different countries. They evaluate this experience exceptionally positively. In their words, the possibility to study abroad gives them a sense of belonging to Europe and a sense of freedom (II/27, II/28).

People from smaller towns and villages, however, are much more sceptical.

“Each point in the world has become accessible to everyone, but not many people from Bulgaria can afford to do this, and from our town even fewer.” (II/8)

“I don’t consider myself a European, simply because I don’t have the access and possibility to travel abroad and get to know other countries.” (II/7)

All respondents, explicitly or implicitly, link the issue of belonging to Europe to the standard of living. For some, this is the main factor of the European identity.
“I have never thought of myself as a European. I listen to this stuff on the TV – we are Europeans, we are in the EU… But I can’t… I have problems each month – will the salary be enough to get me through the month?” (II/6) “I would feel European in the full sense of the word if standard of living in Bulgaria increased.” (II/11)

Euroscepticism

The fieldwork has established significant levels of Euroscepticism among citizens (quite unlike the research among the civil society actors). There are apprehensions that the unification and the introduction of similar or identical regulations across Europe will inevitably lead to the disappearance of national specific features.

“I’m outraged by the persistent exaggeration with this European thing. With the very idea of the European Union and the diversity of values. By erasing our own values, how do we contribute to this diversity – with nothing.” (II/12) “Europeanization is overexposed. The European values, these are artificially imposed values. We are constantly flooded with this – this is how it is in Europe and this is how it should be also here… Nothing can be done, the mentality is too different, the qualities of people, the temperament is different.” (II/5)

To a large extent, Euroscepticism is a consequence of the fact that the public opinion evaluates the European orientation from a practical point of view. The low standard of living, which has been aggravated by the current economic crisis, is for many Bulgarians a much more important marker of the European identity than are the common European values and heritage.

2.3. History education

The large majority of respondents provided very brief, but nevertheless very emotional and highly categorical answers on this topic. It is interesting to note that almost all marked the fundamental importance
of history for the formation of national identity, but only two respondents said that the reform of history education was the most important among the four themes investigated in this research. The predominant opinion was that there was no need to change the way history is presented at schools and that there was only one historical narrative, which cannot and should not be revised. The respondents therefore perceive history as exceptionally important, while the reform of history education is neither necessary nor desired.

Our sample included four history teachers (two from Sofia secondary schools and two from small-town schools where Roma children study) and two historians-researchers (from Sofia University and from the National Library). The other interviewees based their answers on personal observations, connected with either their own education or with the education of their children or grandchildren. Their answers were highly influenced by the popular social perceptions, formed above all by the mass media reporting.

Identity formation:

“It is very important to have history, to feel that you belong to your own nation.” (II/11)

Without exception, all respondents expressly stated that history has a defining role for the formation of identity. History creates a sense of pride, which is essential for the formation of national identity. In addition to school education, which has a pivotal role in this process, the family upbringing is also highly important.

The opinion that children have to be brought up in patriotic spirit is widely shared. Although expressing it in different ways, the respondents united behind the idea that patriotic feelings need to be based on positive and not on aggressive perceptions. One of the Muslim respondents shared the following:
“Patriotism yes, but it should not cross the lines, there is a difference. Patriotism is everything that is around you, the nature and everything, especially the population and the development of the country. Patriotism is something very beautiful; I would say that it is the finest thing in a human.” (II/17)

In addition to schools and families, other factors with significant contribution to the identity formation through history are the media and the public opinion. The importance of the media and public discourses on history was specifically underlined by the Muslim respondents. They have often been affected by the attitudes of the majority population, formed on the basis of these popular interpretations of history. One of the history teachers shared that it was very difficult to change the attitudes and predispositions the children have picked up in their family environment.

“It is very easy to notice the family background, how they [the children] are prepared at home, how matters are discussed at home, what is the attitude towards minorities, towards other ethnoses in our country… Some children are irreconcilable, they are literally chauvinistic, others are exceptionally tolerant and cosmopolitan.” (II/5)

The respondent II/5 (a history teacher) said that there are several stages of national identity formation. Primary schools focus on the construction of patriotic feelings and national identity. For this reason, the school programme concentrates on the national narrative. In secondary schools, European and world histories are added, and the issue of national identity is presented in a more complex way – pupils learn that people of different national, ethnic and religious backgrounds are all part of one civic nation. The respondent II/2 (a university professor in history) stated that both primary and secondary schools have the obligation above all to form the national awareness, and for this, the use of history and historical myths is inevitable. These myths can be analysed and deconstructed only at university level – this, however, is in the domain of professional historians and is rarely taken out into the public space. The analytical historical knowledge is thus perceived as reserved only for the hermeneutic scientific circles, which are “called upon” to form the public attitudes.
National and European identity

Some respondents noted that it was important to place the Bulgarian history into the European and global context.

“History, linked to the events occurring in the world, and the behaviour of the Bulgarian nation in the course of history. This is the only way to form a sense of nationality, of national belonging.” (II/1)

“In the secondary school, when the range is expanded to include the European and world history, the comparisons begin and this also helps with the formation of national identity, but through the prism of other nationalities as well.” (II/5)

Although the main focus in secondary schools remains the formation of national identity, the nation is no longer presented as an isolated island, but as a part of the larger (European) community. The Bulgarian past and present are examined through their position in the more comprehensive European frame.

“The national is still prevailing, but the European identity is imposing itself more and more, and that is happening for good reasons.” (II/3)

Finding a proper balance between the national and European context is a difficult task and the opinions about which should have an upper hand are varied. A respondent, who believes that the national identity is formed above all through comparison with other nations in different contexts and through different relationships, is convinced that the current curriculum does not pay enough attention to the comparative aspect.

“The Bulgarian history has been somehow pulled out of the context of the European history. Yes, we learn about our wars with the Byzantine Empire, or who was Charlemagne, or who Kaloyan made a treaty with, and so on, but they are just mentioned as some names, without making it clear what was the connection. Because after all, history is about connections,…, and these connections are absent, and their absence does not give us the opportunity to compare ourselves [with Europe]. Establishing one’s identity occurs through making parallels and connections.” (II/13)
In the opposing view, the European dimension has been overexposed and is actually pushing the national one too far into the background.

“And now we see this tendency to bring up [the children] in [the spirit of] cosmopolitanism, and in this way the national identity is neglected.” (II/1)

When talking about the Bulgarian identity in the European context, numerous respondents implicitly linked the feeling of national belonging and pride to the current state of affairs in the country. There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the situation in Bulgaria today, and under such circumstances, it is not easy to maintain patriotic feelings.

“A sense of patriotism does not come only from education, from history, but also from the way we live today.” (II/23)

History education is perceived by the Bulgarian society as fundamental for the formation of the national identity and the feeling of pride for belonging to the Bulgarian nation. Looking at the Bulgarian nation and its history as a part of the larger European context does not diminish the sense of national awareness inasmuch as the European identity is not in contradiction with the Bulgarian one, but is rather perceived as its enhancement.

**National myths**

The prevailing opinion is that national historical myths are necessary for the formation of national identity. Given their essential role, myths should not be deconstructed and challenged outside the strictly academic circles.

“It cannot be done without myths, there is no country without its national mythology, this is how the human thinking works.” (II/2)

The national myths in the Bulgarian history can be grouped into two main types: myths encouraging the sense of pride (the medieval Bulgarian state until the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, and the 19\textsuperscript{th} century National Revival period), and myths underlining the sense of martyrdom and trauma. The large majority of respondents are absolutely against any kind of compromises regarding the presentation of medieval Bulgaria and especially of the National Revival and its heroes. One of the respondents expressed this in the following way:
“I wish we could leave some heroes be, without disgracing them. Even if some things (they did) were facts, honestly speaking, I’m not interested. Botev and Levski are not to be touched, that is enough for me.” (II/20)

The opinions about how the Ottoman period should be presented are very diverse, and the topic is highly sensitive. The five centuries of Ottoman rule have been for a very long time presented in the Bulgarian historiography and in the public discourse as exceptionally dark and traumatic period for the Bulgarian nation. It comes as no surprise that the attempts undertaken over the past 20 years to present this period in a more balanced and objective way have encountered significant resistance.

“Slaughtering pregnant women… this is what Turks were doing in Bulgaria… we need to call things with their real names. … This is not about teaching or not teaching hatred.” (II/12)

“We can’t just bury 500 years, these are five centuries, this is an awfully long time.” (II/10)

The topic of the “Turkish yoke” is not merely a crucial element of the national memory. Its most problematic aspect is the fact that it strongly influences the attitude towards the traditional Muslim minorities in the country.

“Yes, I like Turks very much, but when I mention this to some Bulgarian man, he says—nonsense, they had been slaughtering us for so many years… Who was slaughtering whom, what are you talking about, it was ages ago! It is so miserable to think in such a way…” (II/20)

Despite acknowledging that the past events and especially the period of the Ottoman rule must not influence the attitude of the state and the majority population towards the minorities and especially

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13 Vasil Levski (18 July 1837 – 18 February 1873) was a Bulgarian revolutionary and the founder of the Internal Revolutionary Organisation. Hristo Botev (6 January 1848 – 2 June 1876) was a poet and national revolutionary. Both are widely considered as the two most important Bulgarian national heroes.
towards the Turkish community, most respondents say that the traumatic events have to be remembered and the memories preserved. “The perceptions are built on certain stereotypes. When you say that we were under the Turkish yoke for 500 years, this means that Turks were against Bulgarians, and Bulgarians were against Turks.” (II/14)

“We are actually substituting one mythologem with another. The mythologem about our suffering and the Turkish atrocities, with the mythologem about the Turkish suffering and our atrocities. While actually neither version is correct, and both are correct at the same time, because in a war, everyone suffers.” (II/13)

The fact that the interest in the Ottoman period and the National Revival is not very strong among the young respondents is very indicative. In their opinion, the history curriculum devotes too much time to these periods. They believe that more attention should be paid to the more recent history – the 20th century and especially the post-1989 events (II/24, II/27).

_Batak: “6000 people murdered – what more is there to say?” (II/12)_

The unwillingness to leave the traumatic memories behind and to stop using them as a source of contemporary identity was especially visible in the comments about the Batak affair. Not all respondents had a clear memory of the 2007 event and the unsuccessful attempt to organise a conference on Batak killings, but almost all had an opinion about it. Their stance was practically unanimous: Batak, as a place of national memory, cannot be disputed or questioned.

“This is cynicism of the neo-liberal approach, to destroy the national consciousness, which is constructed upon myths or upon similar events – mostly tragic events and not on happiness. We are united by our tragedy, as much as we try to deny it.” (II/2)

Many respondents tried to demonstrate that they do not let their emotions cloud their judgement. They supported their positions by quoting different facts and figures, forgetting that these facts were an insep-
rable part of the mythologized account of the historical event rather than independent and objective evidence supporting it.

“Bulgarian bones are there, the bones of Bulgarian families.” (II/2)

“There are so many testimonies, proofs and materials... everything is there.” (II/6)

“It was definitely not a myth, the ossuary is there, and other signs...” (II/9)

Some respondents said that they in principle support critical discussion and reconsideration of historical events – even those events, which are as important for the national historical narrative as Batak. However, they object to the 2007 conference because, in their opinion, the goal of the authors was to manipulate and provoke the Bulgarian public opinion. If the intentions of the authors had really been purely scientific, they could have chosen a less provocative approach (II/3, II/4, II/22).

The reactions of our Muslim respondents were in general very cautious. Most were reluctant to offer concrete comments on the issue, although they said that they remembered the scandal well. In their opinion, there were many interpretations about what had happened. Some shared the accounts popular among the Muslims, who live in the area where Batak is located. According to these stories, the Batak killings happened as a revenge for previous killings, committed by Christian brigands from Batak village (II/16, II/17, II/18, II/19).

“They were passing through Batak, and the local population, some bandits, captured them and killed them,... and then, the relatives of those who were murdered, they attacked Batak to take revenge. Truly, many people were killed, I don’t know what exactly happened, but there was a reason for everything, it did not happen just like that.” (II/19)

The opinions and views shared on the Batak topic show that history is exceptionally important for the Bulgarian society. This is especially the case with the most traumatic events from the past, which are regularly commemorated and relived again and again. Often, there is a strong perception that the current generations are indebted to the ancestors
because of their sacrifice and therefore the protection of the memories and the preservation of the traditional historical narrative is considered a duty.

*Changes in history curriculum: “Only the truth!” (II/19)*

As already mentioned, the widespread opinion is that one of the main tasks of history education is to build and sustain the national identity and self-confidence. The logical consequence of such opinion is the desire to have a very clear, well-structured and uniform narrative about the past, which would be above all subordinated to its identity-building task. Most respondents believe that it is not only possible to have such a precise and “true” presentation of history in schools – it is essential and necessary.

“One version should be presented at schools – a socially accepted version, which would serve the national ideals.” (II/1)

“I believe that history has to be absolutely open and everything should be called by its proper names.” (II/11)

Various viewpoints and different interpretations create only confusion – not only among the children, but also among the adults. For this reason, history classes should be straightforward – variety can only blur the picture and the children will not be able to comprehend which reference points from their past are important for their present and future.

“To put it simply, things were like that and they remain that way, and to change them... I’m against such meddling, because it confuses people, it discourages them.” (II/6)

Despite this conservative position, many respondents acknowledge that there is a certain need for revision and that different viewpoints of history should be presented in a certain way. However, they are uncertain which the proper way to achieve this is.

“It can be mentioned that there are also other views and interpretations, but the facts should be presented the way they happened and the children should know about it, and from then on, when they grow up, they can learn more and decide for themselves what really happened and what did not.” (II/8)
An opinion that history should be presented in accordance with the expectations and understanding of the society was expressed in quite a few interviews. Such approach would prevent tensions and conflicts over the different interpretations of historical events.

"Before putting the facts and information into the textbooks, they should be published by the media so that we would see how people react to them, to see if they approve them or not." (II/15)

Some history teachers spoke about the pressure they experience. If they want to present different views and engage the pupils to question and discuss the established narratives, they often encounter social resistance.

"It’s very difficult to present a different thesis, something different from the traditional interpretation. There is a tendency among the pupils to reject it, it only confuses them and they take is as a burden. A lot of effort is needed to convince them that such activities make sense, especially when it comes to different interpretations of complicated issues." (II/4)

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a clear tendency in the Bulgarian society to preserve the positivist historical narrative. The main task of the historians and of history as a school subject is to present facts about the past and arrange them into one precise and objective historical account. Various interpretations, questioning the established version, are unnecessary if not even harmful. The desire to have one “true” historical narrative is tightly connected to the perception that history is the pillar of the national identity. For this reason, the society is not prepared to give up the romanticised interpretation of the history.

This conservative stand does not mean that the changes, brought by liberalisation, globalisation, EU accession process, fast development of communication technologies and other factors, are not recognised. On the contrary, the family, the media, and the new information technologies are relied upon to provide additional information and to question the traditional narrative presented at schools. Unfortunately, it seems that this model is largely theoretical for now. While the school
hangs on to its task of setting up a matrix of the national narrative and reinforcing the national identity, the information children receive from their families, media and other sources very rarely provides the needed alternative views. Most often, the traditional interpretations are reconfirmed and solidified. In this way, the Bulgarian society spins in a closed circle of permanently reproduced mutual dependency of history interpretation and social consciousness.

2.4. Religion and education

The fieldwork has shown that the topic of religion in schools is not considered as very important by the society. Only 3 out of 28 respondents stated that this was the most important issue among the four themes covered by this study (a teacher, a priest and a Muslim respondent). Religion in general does not play a significant role in Bulgaria. Respondents believe that the Bulgarian society is rather secular and religion is perceived mainly as an identity marker and a bearer of traditional cultural values.

Recently, the interest in religion and its role in the public space has been mostly generated by the global processes involving Islam. The negative images associated with Islam in the post-9/11 global environment have placed also the traditional Bulgarian Muslim minorities in the line of fire of the public opinion, which has set an increasingly suspicious eye on them.

Certain, albeit modest, interest in the question about the place of religion in schools was recently raised by the latest initiative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for the introduction of religious education into schools. Some respondents were motivated by this initiative to form their own opinion regarding the place of religious education in a secular institution like school. Some have also considered the issue of such education among the Muslim communities.

Attempts of nationalistic political parties (mainly Attack and Order, Law and Justice) to score political points by raising alarm that radical Islam
was on the rise in Bulgaria also attracted the public attention. Although the majority of people in Bulgaria were not convinced by the arguments presented by the nationalists, and the subsequent police investigations revealed no evidence to back the allegations, the “radical Islam” scenario resonated well among those Bulgarians, who are in principle distrustful of Turks and other Muslim minorities. The distrust is a result of old stereotypes and above all of the Communist-era policies, when the Bulgarian Turks were considered a potential fifth column in the service of Turkey.

One of the more recent scandals, widely covered by the media, was the investigation of the State Agency for National Security in September 2010. The agents searched the homes and offices of Imams in several villages populated by Muslim Bulgarians. The property of Imams, including religious literature, personal computers and mobile phones, were confiscated. During the fieldwork, our team visited three such villages – Breznica, Luzhnica and Sarnica. In all three places, our researchers were cordially met and the people were very enthusiastic to share their opinion and discuss their troubles.

Another thematic circle of questions dealt with the place of religious symbols at schools. Again, this issue emerged in the public space only recently under the influence of the wider European processes, and the pro and contra debate is still rather moderate. School is a secular institution according to the Bulgarian legislation and the state has no policy to impose official religious symbols in schools. In the recent years, the media have highlighted several cases of Muslim girls, who have had problems when visiting their schools wearing headscarves. The cases were investigated by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. The public attention was also captured by the proposed new Law on School Education (2009). Most of our respondents knew little about it, but were eager to comment on the positive and negative sides of one of the most controversial aspects of the draft law – a ban on religious symbols in schools.
Religion in schools

The majority of respondents say that religion has no place in the secular schools. They support their opinion with the additional argument that the Bulgarian citizens belong to numerous religious groups, and there are also many atheists among them. This means that organising religious education for all would be practically impossible. Religious education belongs to the respective temples of each religious community and should be organised by the religious communities and their institutions.

"Religion’s place is in the temple, be it an Orthodox church, a synagogue, a mosque, but its place is there and in the family, while school is a secular space and there is no room for religious talk in the secular space." (II/13)

The opinion that religious belonging and upbringing is a private affair of each family was strongly underlined. “Grandmothers are in charge of the religion,” said a Muslim Bulgarian respondent (II/18). Those respondents who were most vocal in limiting religion to the private sphere most strongly objected to any form of compulsive religious education, saying that unlike the general education, the classes on religion could be attended only as a result of free individual choice. However, even the non-compulsory courses on religion need to be supervised by the state, and not left to the discretion of the religious institutions.

In contrast, those respondents who perceive religion as the main bearer of moral values and norms believe that religious education in schools must be compulsory. In addition to the Orthodox priest (II/14), this view was shared by the majority of the Muslim Bulgarian interviewees (II/10, II/15, II/16, II/17, II/19).

“Because a believer, regardless of the religion, will always try to avoid becoming a bad person. Personally, I am not afraid of any believer. Neither a Christian, nor a Jew nor a Muslim. I’m afraid of non-believers.” (II/19)

“All religions stimulate people towards a better life, a better way of living, better relations between people. If a person is brought up religiously, he will be tolerant also towards other religions, towards those who do not follow
his Lord…. Religious education has to be compulsory, because this would motivate the pupils additionally.” (II/14)

The Muslim respondents, fully aware of the persistent suspicions on the side of the majority population and troubled by the intensification of such distrust in the recent years, have one additional argument in support of the religious education in schools:
“…it will be controlled by the Ministry of Education. There will be no place for speculations that some Sunday or Saturday schools in mosques are teaching the children something non-traditional and different.” (II/19)

The respondents do not question the necessity of learning about the history of different religions as part of the process of learning about the world and broadening the general culture. Such lessons would also be compatible with the civic education.
“…some general historical facts and concepts all Europeans should be familiar with, and only then the national history should be stressed. So perhaps the place of such general education about religions would be together with the general civic education.” (II/3)
“This is very important… for understanding ourselves and for understanding others that are around us, but I believe that we really need to distinguish between religion as faith and religion as a cultural phenomenon.” (II/13)

The teachers of history and literature shared that information about various religions is already included in the programmes of the subjects they teach. In their opinion, this is more than sufficient, as the interest of pupils in the topic of religion is very moderate (II/4, II/5, II/7, II/10, II/11, II/12).

Three respondents were categorically against the comparative course on religions – each for own reasons. A respondent, who is strongly atheistic, said:
“Alltogether the idea to present to a child not just one, but many religions is frankly absurd. And even more so to force them to learn about it.” (II/22)
The other two opponents are believers. They think that a course on comparative religion would only confuse the children and disperse their interest. The priority should be to learn about and to understand one’s own religion. A Muslim Bulgarian said:

“If they learn about all religions, nothing will remain in their heads. So they should choose which religion they want to learn about, and then study it in detail according to the programme defined by the specialists.” (II/15)

An Orthodox Christian stressed that many Christian believers actually know quite little about their own faith, unlike the people professing other religions:

“We are Orthodox Christians. Let us bring our children up in this religion. You need to understand that all other religions, the Catholics, the Muslims, the Protestants, have their Sunday schools, the children go there and they are brought up in their religion. Given the fact that we are an Orthodox country, in a historical sense, everyone who wishes so should be able to learn about religion, about the true Orthodox Christian religion, in the Bulgarian schools.” (II/12)

Religious schools

The existence of religious schools of the two main denominations – Orthodox Christianity and Islam – is not perceived as a problem. The main argument is that both religious communities are in need of qualified clergy. Quite often, it is also underlined that such schools, especially the Muslim ones, need to be under strict state control. This is a result of latent suspicions that various foreign influences could be spread through these schools (II/2, II/7, II/9, II/14, II/22).

“I’m talking about the control over the programme so that they receive some kind of normal secondary schools education, because at the Seminary they study all subjects plus their religious courses, and if it is the same in the Islamic secondary schools, then all is well.” (II/2)

“If they don’t radicalise people who study there, they should continue to exist.” (II/9)
Demonstrating that they are fully aware that similar suspicions are quite widespread among the majority population, the Muslim respondents (II/16, II/17) underlined that such perceptions actually show how essential the existence of Islamic schools in Bulgaria is:

“Let it [religious education] be in Bulgaria, in Bulgaria it will be supervised. If they suspect that in other countries students are taught something bad, let it [the education] not happen in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt. At the moment, they go to study to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt. Why should all these boys go through all these expenses and not study in Bulgaria instead?” (II/16)

In conclusion, it can be said that the prevailing opinion in the Bulgarian society is that religious education does not belong to the secular school. Religion is understood as a personal issue of individuals and their families. At the same time, the existence of different religions in the country is accepted without problem and there is a common understanding that in order to function normally, the religious communities need proper schools, where clergy and other personnel can obtain the necessary education. It is noted, however, that such education has to be under the supervision of the state and of the relevant religious institutions.

Religious symbols

The set of questions about the place of religious symbols in schools focused on two main issues: the draft Law on School Education from 2009 and in particular its articles prohibiting the “aggressive” religious symbols, and the wearing of headscarves in schools. The study showed that only few people had a deeper knowledge about the draft Law. Nevertheless, most respondents had clearly formulated opinions about the religious symbols. These opinions were largely based on the media coverage of a few individual cases of girls wearing headscarves in class, and on reflections on the wider European debate about the clash between the secular character of schools and the demands of Muslim female students who respect the Islamic dress code.
Most respondents consider veils to be a problem of other European countries. The issue hardly exists in Bulgaria. The large majority of girls who attend their schools wearing headscarves live and go to schools in regions where the population is predominantly Muslim. Their headscarves are considered a part of the traditional outfit and hardly draw any attention at all. Covered Muslim girls attending schools in predominantly Christian (or secular) environment are exceptionally rare. The exceptionality of such cases was probably among the main reasons why the few isolated occurrences actually attracted a considerable amount of media attention. On the one hand, they were interesting as a new phenomenon. On the other hand, the comparison with other European states was made – especially France and Belgium. France is a popular example among those, who believe that religious symbols do not belong to schools in any form:

“The university is secular, so is the school, and I believe that here it should be like it is in France. No crosses, no headscarves, no nothing, our country is secular, and so is the education, while the religious choice is something intimate, there is no need for such demonstration. You can be entirely loyal to the principles of Islam without being wrapped up like a cocoon, or vice versa – you can go around completely covered, but to do it just for money, or under pressure.” (II/2)

One of the respondents predicts that this issue will agitate the Bulgarian society more and more. At the same time, a significant shift in the attitudes is occurring:

“Until recently, I was also accepting it, but now I’m slowly moving towards non-acceptance. There are differences, but overall, it can be said that those who are moderately non-accepting are in the majority. In other words, those who believe that certain measures need to be taken.” (II/4)

Some respondents believe that the entire issue should be resolved in the wider European context.

“It would be good to have some common European policy on this question, because it is quite a pressing matter and it will only become more urgent in the near future. It would be good if a common European line existed, but this
has not happened for now, and the only way is to find regional solutions.” (II/4)

“Problems here in Bulgaria… Headscarves are only a small problem. They are just an external expression, a minor issue, but it is easy to speculate with it and to make it appear as a large problem. The solution cannot be found only for Bulgaria, but on the EU and global level.” (II/21)

In contrast, some think that it is not possible to have a universal solution even within the Bulgarian frame, as regions with compact Muslim population cannot be regulated in the same way as regions where Muslim students are an exception.

There is also an opinion that matters should be left as they are and no interference is needed. On the contrary, if certain traditional practices like wearing headscarves were suddenly limited or outright prohibited, this would create problems where they have never existed before. Some respondents believe that even the increased media attention is only aggravating the situation.

“I think that trying to regulate this by force is only instigating conflicts. Through time, realistically, a way has been found, there is some internal regulation, unspoken, advertised by no one. We live together silently and peacefully, why should this be regulated by law.” (II/5)

“If we pay too much attention to this, a resistance will appear, if we say no, no headscarves will be worn, there will be resistance.” (II/9)

Only six respondents stated clearly, although in different ways, that they had nothing against the headscarves. For some, the dress code is a matter of personal choice and they do not perceive it as a religious symbol. They compare headscarves to various forms of fashion and dress-styles.

“All people can dress any way they want, and about symbols I can tell you that two years ago it was extremely fashionable among the young to go around with skulls – belts with skulls, blouses with skulls, T-shirts with skulls, everything with skulls. I tell you, this was way more aggressive and drastic.” (II/23)

“I can’t have anything against someone wearing a headscarf, because I like certain headscarves very much and I would also wear them.” (II/20; opinion shared also by II/10)
Two respondents, who perceive headscarves as purely religious symbols, are also strongly against possible prohibition (II/9, II/14).

“I’m absolutely for tolerance in the use of religious symbols, be it headscarves, be it crosses…” (II/14)

The majority of those who are in favour of prohibition believe that all religious symbols should be banned from schools, which are secular institutions.

“Religious symbols have no place in secular schools. This is a return to the stone age of the human mentality.” (II/2)

Many respondents see headscarves as a symbol of division and inequality in the classroom. For them, the proper solution would be the introduction of school uniforms (II/1, II/7, II/8, II/11, II/12, II/21).

The suspicion that headscarves are a new tendency, which has been forced from outside the country, is also present. One of the respondents described it as a manipulation and expressed anxiety over the issue (his opinion was influenced by the media footage of veiled women in regions populated by the Turkish minority).

“From the aesthetic point of view, I don’t mind how they dress. What bothers me is that this is a demonstration and imposing of religious beliefs.” (II/22)

“When wearing a headscarf in school or other public institution, this is a demonstration of religious belonging and it really makes sense to reduce this.” (II/4)

Muslims try to resist these public perceptions. One of the female Muslim respondents stated categorically that nobody was forcing them to cover their hair. Wearing headscarves was their own free choice (II/18).

“It should be clear that a headscarf, first, is not a symbol, and second, young people are not forced to wear them.” (II/19)

“A headscarf is no symbol, it is simply part of the dress, traditionally worn by this population.” (II/17)

Despite that, many Muslims are inclined to accept the ban on religious symbols in schools, but underline that the ban should be valid for all religions.
“Such religious symbols as crosses, crescent, headscarves, in my opinion it is not correct to have them in schools.” (II/16)

“If they have to be prohibited, it has to be the same for all religions. It can’t be allowed for some to wear crosses, while for others it is forbidden to wear headscarves, or vice versa. It has to be obligatory for all.” (II/15)

Asked if the ban on headscarves carried the danger of depriving certain girls of education, several respondents stated flatly that there was no ground for such fears.

“School education is still obligatory, so they have no choice… if they want to wear headscarves, they can do so at other places, but at schools, some level of standardisation, I believe, is reasonable.” (II/3)

“This is not a serious argument. Following this logic, you can come up with any kind of excuse not to go to school; there is always something that you don’t like.” (II/4)

Despite the initial impression that the headscarf issue was marginal for Bulgaria, all respondents had very categorical opinions on the topic. Two main ruptures could be identified – between the majority (Orthodox Christianity) and the minority religion (Islam), and between secularism and religion.

In the first case, headscarves are perceived as a religious symbol of something foreign and different. In this sense, headscarves generate fear and suspicion. They are seen as a sign of things to come – as a global problem, which is knocking at Bulgaria’s doors. The images and perceptions imported from the Western European countries (for example, France, Denmark and Switzerland) are projected onto the Bulgarian realities, obscuring the fact that Bulgarian native Islam has little in common with the Western European immigrant Islam and that headscarves have been an inseparable part of the traditional dress of Bulgarian Muslim women for centuries. These opinions result in the thinking that a common European regulation is needed – the preferred model would be moderately restrictive measures.
The second cleavage regards the question about the place of religion in schools. The proponents of secularism reject any kind of religious presence in schools, which are defined as secular by the Bulgarian legislation. For this reason, the demonstration of any kind of religious belonging through symbols like icons, crosses and headscarves, has no place in the classroom. An open demonstration of religious affiliation is often perceived as a sign of non-modernity.

**Conclusion: Modernity, Europe and the nation in the discourse on Bulgarian education**

This chapter tried to examine how the civil society actors, experts and ordinary citizens in Bulgaria conceive modernity and especially to establish how they perceive modernity in its relation with Europe and the nation, and with the European and national identities. The catalyst selected for this examination was education. Education is among the most significant and powerful tools each state has at its disposal not just to shape and sustain the collective identity of its citizens and to form their understanding of the past, the present and the future, but also to determine the path(s) to modernity the society should take.

Education also provides the possibility to investigate the links between identity construction and religion, and between identity construction and majority-minority relations. This approach also made it possible to examine how the respondents see the place of Bulgaria in modernity and in Europe, and how they evaluate the changes that the processes of modernization and Europeanization have triggered in the Bulgarian education system over the past two decades.

The general impression is that people in Bulgaria are very interested and often highly emotional about the state of the Bulgarian education. They believe that education is of exceptional importance for the development of the Bulgarian society and underline its historical role for the formation of the Bulgarian nation and state. They also perceive it
as an inseparable part of the process of Europeanization of the country, but there is a certain scepticism among some respondents whether education today can still be considered an agent of modernisation as was the case until recently.

The limited number of 43 respondents cannot be used to formulate a precise and undisputable conclusion. However, the sample was varied enough (different ages, professions, social-economic status, ethnic and religious belonging, and place of residence) to allow the authors to recognise and outline several tendencies, capture perceptions and offer explanations, which can be taken as valid for a large part of the Bulgarian society.

The conclusions can be summarised in three clusters:

a. **Modernity**

Very often, modernity is understood in Bulgaria as a synonym for “European.” Historically, Europe has been seen as a guiding light, a model of modernity and progress Bulgaria is to follow. Becoming more European equalled becoming more modern and vice versa. This was especially true in the period between the achievement of national independence (1878) and the end of the First World War (1918). In the communist period (1945-1989), Bulgaria had other role models and followed an alternative path to modernity. After 1989, Bulgaria again tried to modernise in the European way. The EU became at the same time the incentive for (modernisation) reforms and the ultimate goal the reforms and modernisation efforts tried to achieve.

Modernity and modernisation are today seen above all as introduction of the European laws, rules, behaviour models and values. In the discourse of the Bulgarian citizens, “Europe” and “European” are almost exclusively used as synonyms for the EU, while the EU itself is quite often reduced to the “core” EU countries (France, Germany, the Benelux countries). The policies and practices of these states are described as “European” policies and practices.
Modernity has many faces in Bulgaria. Some understand modernity in purely technical terms and for them, the difference between modern and non-modern is expressed through the quality of infrastructure, number of highways, availability of newest information technologies, quality of life and similar. In terms of education, modernity means computers, internet and multi-media equipment available at schools.

Others believe that modernity is the freedom to think, to communicate, to express, share and discuss different ideas. Modernity is free travel across borders – the opportunity to learn about new cultures and meet different people. Being modern is being able to quickly adapt to the new environments, people, challenges. Such people are firm believers in the power of human agency and claim that the precondition for all other types of modernity is spiritual modernity. No society can hope to achieve modernity if the individuals comprising it have not gone the distance themselves. However, many add that they are rather pessimistic regarding Bulgaria, as people are in general too passive and reluctant to take up the initiative upon themselves.

In education, this type of modernity means rationalisation of the education process; liberation from ideological dogmas; presentation and discussion of different, even conflicting views and opinions; and the introduction of new methods and ways of teaching. In this sense, the education in Bulgaria has indeed become more liberal and democratic. At the same time, there is also an apprehension that modernisation has its negative side effects – too much liberty, too many viewpoints, and the huge amount of information that needs to be digested, all have attributed to oversimplification of the educational process. Some respondents fear that Bulgarian schools have not modernised enough and that this is among the main reasons for the declining quality of the education in the country. The children practically live in a different world, or a different modernity, than the teachers and the gap between them is visibly widening from year to year. The way teaching is conducted has to change more to adapt to this situation, so that knowledge can be presented to the children in a way that will motivate them to learn.
The last observation does not mean that the society does not acknowledge that efforts to reform the education have been undertaken. However, the prevailing opinion is that the modernisation reforms have been only cosmetic. Modernity in Bulgaria is borrowed, copied and assembled mechanically, but rarely in a way that fits the Bulgarian realities and thus seldom produces the desired result. There are also fears that some poorly planned and implemented reforms only worsen the quality of education. A case in point, in the view of those respondents who are more familiar with it, is the Bologna Process.

Understood as an inseparable part of the EU integration process, the Bologna reform is seen (especially by the government officials) as a necessity. It needs to be implemented without being questioned, as it is the only way for the Bulgarian society to move forwards and find its place in the social, economic and educational space of the EU.

In contrast to the political actors, the general public and the media pay very modest attention to the reform and the Bologna process. Those who are familiar with it have certain reservations or even oppose it. The main concerns are that the Bologna initiated reform is moving education away from the interests of the students and is putting the interests of the market ahead of them. The main fear is a possible commercialisation of the national education, tailored to serve the international markets and not protecting the national interests. There are also worries that the reform is superficial and inefficient, and that its priority is to impose standardization, evaluation and control over the educational process, while the quality of education and the social effect of the reform are not considered important.

From a certain point of view, the post-1989 modernisation of Bulgaria can be regarded as one of the factors contributing to the constantly deteriorating situation of Roma in Bulgaria. To be more precise, the inability of the Roma community to adapt to the changing (modernising) social-economic and political reality has left them stranded at the margins of the society. Although Roma have always been the victims
of unequal treatment and strongly negative attitudes in the society, the situation has really deteriorated after 1989, when Roma have gradually been pushed out of all areas of social life – employment market, housing, health care and education. A Roma family, criss-crossing the permanently jammed Sofia boulevards on a horse-drawn cart in search of scrap materials which could be either reused or sold, has become the symbol of Roma inability to adapt to modernity.

Those Roma individuals or families, who have managed to break out of this frame – who have managed to left behind the “Roma traditions” and embrace the “Bulgarian modernity” – are considered by the majority population as Roma who have been able to integrate. Building or buying a house outside the ghetto, in the “normal” neighbourhood, having employment, sending the children to school – these are the indicators the society uses to evaluate the level of Roma integration. However, even if these requirements are met, suspicions remain. If “integrated” and “modern” Roma maintain too close ties with other Roma (their friends and relatives) who have remained in the ghetto and continue to live the “traditional” way, this is often seen by the society as an evidence that no matter how integrated, Roma will always remain with one foot in their own (pre-modern) world.

Modernity can be even more ambiguous and controversial when it comes to religion. The proponents of secularism reject any kind of religious presence in schools. They are against the religious education and do not approve if religious symbols, including Muslim headscarves, are displayed at schools (although there are considerable differences in opinion about the way and the extent to which wearing of headscarves should be regulated). In any case, the citizens with a secular worldview as a rule perceive the open demonstration of religious affiliation as a sign of non-modernity.

In the recent years, certain splits have appeared in the Muslim community. The main rupture is between older generations of Muslim believers who are used to practice Islam the traditional way, and the younger Muslims – especially the ones who obtained their religious
education abroad. The modernity paradox in the case of the Bulgarian Islam is that modern and enlightened (above all in its ability to change and adapt over the centuries) Islam practiced in the country came to be seen by its critics as backward and traditionalist, while orthodox and conservative Islamic teachings are coming into Bulgaria as (a result of) modernity. Liberalisation and globalisation did not bring only liberal democracy, market economy and the freedom to travel to the West of Bulgaria. Numerous Bulgarian Muslims in the search of their identity and of the roots of their religion went to Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries to receive religious education there, bringing back to Bulgaria a much different interpretation and practice of Islam. In recent years, this has generated fears that radical Islamic teachings might be spreading in the country.

The clash between tradition and modernity is perhaps the most obvious in the field of history education. The attempts to modernise the way history is presented and taught in the Bulgarian classrooms have resulted in some important changes in schools programmes. Numerous new textbooks have been written and at the moment, there are around 20 history textbooks for primary and secondary schools on the market. While some have welcomed the diversity and the opportunities the new contents offer for juxtaposing and discussing different perspectives, others (among them many history teachers and especially people from smaller towns and villages) believe there should be only one uniform and clear narrative of the past. There is only one history (the traditional one!) and it should be presented in a simple and objective manner.

History teachers seem especially reluctant to challenge the traditional and deeply entrenched perceptions about the national history. This is above all valid for the most crucial period of the nation and state formation – the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Bulgarian national identity is understood, sustained and rationalised through history, through past events, and above all through the most traumatic period of the nation’s past. For a very significant and influential part of the Bulgarian society, including politicians, media, intellectuals, clergy and artists, this
past cannot be questioned. Restrained by such attitude, the majority of history teachers in Bulgaria reproduce the traditionalist narratives, reinforcing this very same attitude. For now, modernisation and Europeanization have not succeeded to significantly alter the history education in Bulgaria, which remains largely traditionalist and conservative.

b. Europe and European identity

Modernity is often directly linked to the notion of being European. What is considered “European” is often described as “modern” and vice versa. Europe is a criterion for measuring modernity. For example, if the education in Bulgaria was commensurable with the education in other European countries, it could be described as modern. If the Bulgarian society lived by and respected European requirements and criteria, it would be considered a modern society.

Despite the perception that today Bulgaria is somehow outside of “Europe,” especially because of its unfavourable social-economic situation and a significantly lower standard of living, there is a strong belief that Bulgaria has always belonged to Europe in terms of history, culture and traditions. There is even a sense of regional pride – namely that the Balkans are the cradle of the European civilisation and had been “European” long before Europe actually became what is understood as Europe today. This opinion is very typical for the Bulgarian society. It is generated through the education system and reconfirmed by the political, media and public discourses.

Bulgaria was cut off from Europe in 1396 when it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The widespread perception in the country, which is supported by the majority of respondents in our fieldwork, is that the five centuries of the Ottoman rule separated Bulgaria from Europe and arrested its development and progress.

During these five centuries (to which many add also the 45 years of communist rule), Bulgaria and Europe went their separate ways.
“Europe” became something external – a lost home. In order to return there and become European again, Bulgaria needed to change, to make up for the lost time, to modernise. “Europe” and “the EU” have been largely used as synonyms since 1989 and when respondents speak about the European norms, values and rules – they always have the EU norms, values and rules in their minds. What is important is that they are almost always seen as external norms, values and rules – something foreign, which is being imposed in Bulgaria without much consideration for the Bulgarian needs and opinions. The Bologna reform is a typical example. Considered as an inseparable and unavoidable part of the EU accession process, it is described as a foreign frame and by some even as a threat.

Europe (that is, the EU) is largely seen as a symbol of democratic values, liberty, unrestricted movement of people, goods and information across borders, and (seemingly most important for Bulgarians) high standard of living. Living in the poorest EU state, Bulgarians strongly emphasise the differences in wages, purchasing power, life quality, infrastructure and similar indicators to point out that they cannot feel as true “Europeans” yet. Bulgaria is perceived as a laggard – it cannot match the European achievements and performance, nor is it able to adopt successfully the European values, norms and standards. This is also an important obstacle for the development of European self-awareness in the country.

The relation between the Bulgarian and European identity is complex. The first reaction of the respondents is that “Bulgaria is and has always been a part of Europe.” The identity interplay is thus conceptualised using Risse’s “marble cake” model of multiple identities (Risse, 2004). On the second thought, most respondents begin to underline the differences. While remaining well disposed towards the process of formation of a common European identity, they express doubts whether such a goal could be achieved, and indeed – should it be achieved at all? The European identity is welcome in the social-economic sense. Bulgarians want to enjoy the European standard of living and do not want to feel out of place when visiting other European countries. At the same time
they strongly feel that their national identity and characteristics have to be preserved. In a word, they want the European modernity while holding on to the Bulgarian tradition.

There is a widespread opinion that the elimination of the internal EU borders and the lift of travel restrictions for the Bulgarian citizens have been among the most essential contributions to the formation of European identity. Many respondents underline the symbolic importance of the fact that they can stand in the “EU Passports” line at the airports and not queue with the holders of “Other Passports.” However, this contribution to the development of the European self-awareness has its economic-financial limitations. A large number of Bulgarian citizens, especially those coming from smaller towns and villages, cannot afford to travel abroad. For them, this is an important reason why they cannot consider themselves as Europeans.

The opinion that the standard of living is the main factor encouraging or preventing the formation of European identity is supported by people of different ethnic and religious origin, place of residence, age, gender, profession, income and education. They say that they would feel European in the full sense of the word only if the standard of living in Bulgaria increased and they stopped worrying whether they would be able to make it through the month with the money they earn.

c. Nation, nationalism and national identity

The research has registered significant levels of Euroscepticism, especially among the citizens. The main apprehensions are that the unification and introduction of similar or identical regulations across Europe would inevitably lead to the disappearance of national specific features.

Finding a proper balance between the national and European context is a difficult task and the opinions about which should have the upper hand are quite diverse. While some believe that the Bulgarian society
still hangs on the national and traditional too much, and that this is an obstacle for becoming more European and modern, others fear that the European dimension has already been overexposed and that the national identity is neglected.

Those who are concerned about the preservation of the national identity and the nation itself are not troubled only by external factors like Europeanization and globalisation. Their worst fear are the predictions that Bulgarians could become a minority in their own country. Such forecasts are often made in the media and by some politicians.

Even people, who are not supporters of nationalistic or racist political agendas, are concerned about the future of the country in the light of the rising problem of Roma illiteracy. The illiteracy rates among the Roma community have been growing annually and there are apprehensions that if the trend continues, in the near future this could lead to the practical disintegration of the entire society.

The social attitudes towards the right of the minority communities to learn their mother tongues in schools are moderately liberal. The minorities are welcome to learn their mother tongues and cultural traditions, but this should not come at the expense of the Bulgarian language and the dominating national discourse. The popular opinion is that without a good command of Bulgarian, people of minority origin would not be able to live and work in the Bulgarian-speaking environment.

History education is widely perceived as having a fundamental importance for the formation of national identity. History creates a sense of pride, and the narrative about the past helps to understand the present and the future of a nation. In addition to the school education, which has a pivotal role in the process of identity formation, the family, the media and the public opinion also have a significant contribution.

The efforts to reform history textbooks have been a very sensitive issue over the past 20 years. This is especially true for the evaluation and
The presentation of the most crucial historical period – the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

The historical narrative in Bulgarian schools is clearly ethnocentric – interested only in the faith of ethnic Bulgarians. The minorities are either neglected or play a role of the (former) enemies of the nation. One of the biggest challenges the history education reform had to overcome was therefore to find the balance between the need to sustain the national self-confidence and recognise the positive achievements and contribution of the national minorities to the Bulgarian history. The topic of “the Turkish yoke” is thus not merely a crucial element of the national memory, but for some people also defines the attitude towards the traditional Muslim minorities in the country. Despite some positive developments, much remains to be done before history education ceases to stimulate chauvinism, xenophobia and similar phenomena in the country.

Many respondents believe that history should not be rewritten or changed. There is only one history, one historical narrative, one true explanation. It comes as no surprise that the attempts undertaken over the past 20 years to present the Ottoman period in a more balanced and objective way have encountered significant resistance. The prevailing opinion is that national historical myths are necessary for the formation of national identity. As such, myths should not be deconstructed and challenged outside the strictly academic circles. The large majority of respondents are absolutely against any kind of compromises regarding the presentation of the National Revival and its heroes.

The opinions and views shared on the Batak topic show how exceptionally important history is for the Bulgarian society. This is especially the case with the most traumatic events from the past, which are regularly commemorated and relived again and again. Often, there is a strong perception that the current generations are indebted to the ancestors because of their sacrifice and therefore the protection of the memories and the preservation of the traditional historical narrative is considered a duty.
Questioning the established version of the national history is thus unnecessary, if not even harmful. The logical consequence of such opinion is the desire to have a very clear, well-structured and uniform narrative about the past, which would be above all subordinated to its identity-building task. This conservative stand on history education means that the Bulgarian society continues to spin in a closed circle of permanently reproduced mutual dependency of history interpretation and social consciousness.

Unlike history education, religion plays a relatively marginal role in Bulgaria today. A large part of the population is rather secular. Even many among the believers do not feel very close to the official religious institutions. This is especially true for the Orthodox Christians, who have been driven away from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), which often seems to be interested much more in the material rather than the spiritual world.

Although the majority of respondents demonstrate their modern, humanist and enlightened worldview by defending the secular character of education and by placing the religious belonging into the sphere of private intimate choice, many of them quickly turn into traditionalist defenders of the national when it comes to the issue of minorities and their religious freedoms. There is a significant uneasiness, even opposition, to the presence of Islamic headscarves in the classroom (masked by opposition to all religious symbols). Quite often, respondents name France as an example that needs to be followed – the usual explanation is that the French way is the modern and European way for solving the headscarf issue.

* * *

Although Bulgaria is already an EU member-state, Bulgarians still perceive their country as somewhat “extraterritorial” compared to the rest of the EU. While they are convinced that Bulgaria has a history-stamped residence permit for the common European home, Bulgarians in nu-
merous respects feel that they live next door to “Europe” rather than in it.

Over the past 20 years, the education in Bulgaria has significantly changed. The respondents are practically unanimous that the quality of education has deteriorated. This is among the main reasons why many believe that the efforts to modernise and Europeanise the Bulgarian education are not always beneficial. The reforms are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, but for now the Bulgarian education remains somewhere between tradition and modernity, and between the European and national.

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## Annex 1: Profile of the respondents – civil society actors

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Collective identities are not static, but change in time. They are rebuilt, reinterpreted, rediscovered and reconstructed. This is also valid for national identities. Smith defines a national identity with the following features: historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, common legal rights and duties for all members, and a common economy with territorial mobility for the members (Smith, 1991, p. 14).

Until recently, nations were believed to be the largest groups of people to “command a person’s loyalty because of felt kinship ties” (Connor, 1994, p. 202). Today, an increasing number of scholars are turning their attention to supranational identities – above all the European identity (or identities). The question of European identity is most often raised in its connection to the legitimisation of the European project and the need to “create” loyal European citizens for the emerging European supra-state. There are other approaches as well, criticising the “top-down” dimension of the process of development of European identity, and focusing more on the aspirational element of the European idea, and above all on the centrality of the human agency in the construction and maintaining of European identity (for a critical overview of theoretical approaches to the study of European identities, see Ichijo et al, 2009).

The goal of this chapter is to present a consolidated analysis of the ways in which different types of actors in Bulgaria perceive and understand the concepts of modernity, Europe and nation. In other words, the objective is to compare how civil society actors and private individuals understand and (re)construct their identity as national, European and modern subjects and to establish how and if their understanding is influenced by the identity construction programmes of the state – in the first place the education.
The national education policies and programmes are among the most important tools nation-states have at their disposal to construct and shape the collective identities of their citizens. It is not the only device for spreading the knowledge about and for fostering the attachment to the common myths, historical memories and cultural heritage of a nation. Families, social environment, media and popular culture all play their role in this process. However, from the point of view of the state, the education remains the most significant source, because it is one of the few (if not the only) under its control. Education is the base supporting the entire national system of beliefs, morality and values. Nation-states have thus traditionally tried to monopolise the right to determine the content and the frame of the education in order to establish a strong connection between the members of the nation, and set up a border between them and the other nations.

Bulgaria is no exception to this tendency. Education has been traditionally seen as a crucial state- and nation-building device. The Bulgarian struggle for national self-awareness and independence from the Ottoman Empire was based on two main pillars. One was the establishment of the independent Bulgarian church, separated from the Greek Patriarchate in Constantinople. The other was the national education. A network of secular schools, where teaching was conducted in Bulgarian, led to the formation of the Bulgarian intellectual elite – a necessary precondition for the establishment and consolidation of the Bulgarian national identity. Only after the Bulgarian language education and the autonomous Bulgarian church became a fact (both happened while Bulgaria was still under the Ottoman rule), the Bulgarian nation was able to assert its claim to national independence and eventually (re)establish the Bulgarian state in 1878.¹

¹ It needs to be noted that the consolidation of the national identity and the claim for national independence were necessary, but insufficient preconditions for the establishment of the Bulgarian state, and that this act would most likely not be possible in that moment in time without the decisive Russian military intervention and victory in the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878.
Evaluating the role and importance of education in Bulgaria today is a much more complex task. The state education policies, as can be judged from legal and policy documents and from public statements of various political figures, continue to be based on the presumption that education is crucial for the formation and maintenance of the national identity. Each time a new government takes office, it names education as one of its priorities and pledges are made that it would work to make the Bulgarian education more modern and European.2 The interviews with the civil society actors and with citizens have also confirmed that many Bulgarians ascribe to education an exceptional importance for the development of the Bulgarian society and underline its historical role for the formation of the Bulgarian nation and state.

And yet, the general impression from the fieldwork is that the quality of the Bulgarian education is deteriorating from year to year, and that increasingly large segments of the population do not recognise education as a value anymore. There is an almost full consensus that this is valid above all for certain minority groups (especially the Roma community).

The opinion of the respondents that the quality of education in Bulgaria is worsening has been confirmed by different international studies. The results of the last two PISA evaluations have showed that the Bulgarian students are at the bottom of the EU literacy scale (OECD, 2007, 2010).

The reform process, which started after 1989 and is continuing today, has tried (among other goals) to make the Bulgarian education more modern, more European and more multi-cultural. “Modern” and “European” are inseparably linked and appear as “communicating vessels” not just in the Bulgarian discourse on education, but in a large variety

2 “Programme for European Development of Bulgaria” of the current Bulgarian government speaks about “Europeanised Bulgarian Education,” which should be “modern – based on traditions and at the same time responding to the demands of the dynamically changing environment.” Programme for European Development of Bulgaria, 2009, pp. 57-60.
of issues. Most of the reform efforts over the past two decades have been driven by the motivation to make the country more European through modernisation, and more modern through Europeanization. On the other hand, multi-culturalism largely deals with the rich Bulgarian ethno-religious mosaic and the attempts to accommodate this diversity in a number of areas, including education. However, these attempts have also often been in unison with the modernisation and Europeanization discourse.

The fieldwork has shown that there is much scepticism and pessimism regarding the success of the reform. The state actors are usually highly critical of the reform efforts undertaken by the previous governments and administrations, and cautiously optimistic regarding their own (planned or ongoing) actions. The non-state actors and private individuals to a considerable degree share the fear that instead of making the Bulgarian education modern and European, the reform is only damaging or destroying its traditions and decreasing its previously high quality.

Part I: Critical reflection on concepts and methodology

The fieldwork was conducted in three stages – each covering three different groups of actors: state actors, members of civil society organisations and other actors with a wide social influence, and private individuals. The first stage differed significantly from the other two. One large difference was the methodology used. The study of the state actors’ views was based on the critical discourse analysis of a wide selection of policy documents, and of public speeches and interviews made by relevant public figures. Several existing studies on related issues and various relevant legislative documents were also analysed.

The stages two (civil society actors) and three (private citizens) were based on semi-standardised interviews conducted between October 2010 and January 2011. Altogether 43 interviews were made – 15 with civil society actors and 28 with lay individuals. The interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes. All were recorded and fully transcribed.
The second important difference was the topic of the research. While stages two and three concentrated on education, defined as one of the most important tools for the formation and sustaining of personal and group identities, stage one covered a wider selection of issues. The research examined the (national and European) identity formation policies and programmes of the Bulgarian state. These policies were divided into two sub-sections: externally-oriented (promotion of the state abroad and the policies regarding the Bulgarian diaspora), and internally-oriented (education policies). In addition, the researchers investigated the policies and projects the EU institutions have employed in Bulgaria to develop the European identity and strengthen the European awareness among the citizens of the country.

The decision to concentrate on one single policy field during stages two and three was based on the desire to make it possible to conduct a coherent and manageable international comparison at the later period of the I-ME project. Education was selected as the most appropriate research topic due to the fact that it is on the one hand among the most significant identity construction programmes in almost every country, and on the other hand, it is a catalyst for a number of other social processes, which play a role in the formation of identities.

The context, against which the positions of state actors, civil society representatives and private citizens were analysed, was shaped by various important contestations and conflicts, which left their mark on Bulgaria in the 2000-2010 decade (for a brief overview of the most important events, which deal with the issues of national and European identity, minority rights, education and modernisation in Bulgaria, see the previous chapter). The most contentious debates in the field of education, which we used as a catalyst to assess how different actors in Bulgaria make sense of and evaluate modernity, Europe and nation, are briefly described in the following boxes:
Theme 1: Multiculturalism – the Roma minority and education
The unsuccessful attempts to integrate the largely marginalised Roma community into the Bulgarian society are among the most disputed and contentious issues in the country. One of the most crucial problems regarding the Roma integration is the question of education. The policies and concrete measures for the desegregation of Roma schools very often lead to protests from the parents (and in some cases even teachers) belonging to the Bulgarian majority population. In many cases, the desegregation efforts result in secondary segregation, as Bulgarian parents transfer their children to other schools if “too many” Roma children are admitted to a given class or school. The public debate about the “proper” number of Roma children in one class is very intense and emotional and often crosses the borders of tolerant and acceptable dispute. The advocates of various viewpoints all believe that they have logical and undeniable arguments to back their claims and rarely have any will to look for a compromise. The questions regarding the minority education (from education in mother tongue to issue of desegregation of Roma schools) have therefore occupied a prominent place in our fieldwork.

Theme 2: Liberalisation / globalisation – the Bologna Process
Bulgaria has committed to the process of construction and development of the European Higher Education Area in 1999 by signing the Bologna Declaration. In Bulgaria, the Bologna process and the related education reforms have been understood as an inseparable part of the EU integration process – a reform that needed to be passed without being questioned. The Bologna reform process failed to engage the Bulgarian society in the same way as in most other European countries and the society and the media seem to pay very modest attention to it. Public conflicts and cleavages over the issue are rare and far less emotional and heated compared to the debates over the other three themes investigated by this study. The main concern of several NGOs and student organisations is that the Bologna initiated reform is putting the interests of the market ahead of the interests of the students. They are afraid of commercialisation of the national education – that the international markets would be given a priority over the national interests, and that students with better financial possibilities would have an advantage over those who are most talented.
Theme 3: History education reform

Efforts to reconsider history and rewrite the history textbooks started in the early 1990s and have continued to the present day. A number of new history textbooks for primary and secondary schools and for universities have been written over the years. Many teachers reject the new approach to factological presentation and rationalisation of history, holding on to the established historical stereotypes, which are nationalistic and ethno-centric. A consequence of such presentation of history in schools are the deeply entrenched stereotypes in the Bulgarian society regarding its place in Europe, national identity, neighbouring states and some national minorities. The issue of reconsideration of how national history is presented in the school curriculum is a very sensitive subject in Bulgaria, often causing an emotional and negative reaction. The “Batak affair” is perhaps the best illustration of this situation. In May 2007, an attempt to organise a scientific conference on the formation of national memory and historical myths on the example of Batak massacre in 1876 led to a burst of nation-wide outrage, expressed by the widest possible spectrum of actors (from ordinary citizens to the President). Finally, the conference was cancelled due to the enormous pressure and opposition, which included threats and media persecution of the (potential) conference participants.

Theme 4: Religion and secularism – place of religion in schools

During the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s, the debates and especially conflicts regarding the place of religion in the education process were relatively rare. In the recent years, this has changed and three main debates have emerged: debate about the obligatory religious education in schools initiated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, tensions over the alleged presence of radical Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgarian schools, and the issue of the presence of religious symbols in schools. The first debate revolves around the form and content of religious education. One side (most notably the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Chief Mufti) advocates proper confessional education, where children would learn about the religion they profess, while the other side (secular experts) prefers a comparative study of religion, which would be in line with the secular character of the Bulgarian schools. The second debate has been provoked by various nationalistic political parties, claiming that religious education in Muslim populated regions has been used as a cover for the spread of the radical Islam in the country. The third debate deals with the presence of religious symbols in schools, although in its essence it is largely about the dress code of Muslim girls. In 2009, a new draft of the Law on School Education was prepared. It included an article prohibiting both school students and teachers to “wear religious symbols aggressively or obtrusively demonstrating their religious or ideological preferences.” The draft caused heated public debates and was eventually not passed by the Parliament. However, the issue of Islamic dress code in the public space remains a source of tension and conflict in the Bulgarian society.
Research stage I: state actors

The decision to examine two externally-oriented (the promotion of the state abroad and the policies regarding the Bulgarian diaspora) and one internally-oriented (education policies) identity-formation programmes was taken as a result of the agreement between researchers from all nine countries involved in the IME project in order to make it possible to compare results across countries and produce comparative reports.

The actions and programmes for promotion of the Bulgarian state abroad largely aim at presenting the country as a modern, valuable and reliable EU member with a stable political and economic system, and a rich cultural, historical and natural heritage. This is necessary in order to counter the damaging and predominantly negative image Bulgaria had inherited from the past, which further suffered during the difficult transition period (especially in the 1990s).³

The policies directed towards the Bulgarian communities abroad have two main objectives: preservation of the national identity among the numerous historical diaspora communities,⁴ and facilitation of their migration to Bulgaria in order to compensate for the negative demographic developments (approximately 1.5 million people left the country after 1989 because of the economic and financial hardships). The first objective is largely declarative as only symbolic financial resources have been devoted towards this end and consequently only a few concrete measures have been taken to date apart from a limited assistance

³ In the 18th and 19th centuries, Bulgaria was relatively unknown in the West, or associated with negative images like poverty and backwardness – in line with the western perceptions of the Balkans as a depot of negative characteristics and stereotypes against which a positive image of the “European” has been constructed. During the Cold War, Bulgaria was widely seen as the most loyal and servile Soviet satellite in Eastern Europe. In the late 1980s, the Bulgarian international image suffered additionally due to the communist regime’s oppression of Bulgarian Muslim minorities and the 1989 exodus of the Bulgarian Turkish community. Today, the Bulgarian image abroad continues to be predominantly negative and what is usually stressed in western media reports on the country are the allegedly widespread corruption, crime, poverty, bad infrastructure and similar.

⁴ Above all in Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia.
in textbooks and other materials for the Bulgarian schools abroad. The second objective has been much more actively implemented: measures range from the introduction of green cards for access to the domestic labour market for Bulgarians from the diaspora, to a facilitated procedure for obtaining a Bulgarian citizenship.5

Education is the third identity-formation programme studied in this stage of the research. In Bulgaria, education is considered a central pillar supporting the state’s identity construction efforts. This is especially valid for the primary and secondary education in general and subjects like history and Bulgarian language and literature in particular, as they aim to construct and consolidate the civic and national identity among the pupils.

The documents which we analysed included pieces of legislation; policy documents, strategies and programmes of the government and of relevant ministries; public speeches, statements and interviews of relevant Bulgarian political actors (president, prime minister, various ministers, members of parliament). These sources provided a detailed insight into how various Bulgarian governments formed their policies aimed at building and strengthening the national and European identity.

**Research stage II: civil society actors**

During the second part of the research between October 2010 and January 2011, 15 semi-standardised interviews were conducted. In order to reflect diverse views, some interviews were conducted in the capital Sofia, while others in different towns and villages across the

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5 The overwhelming majority of people who obtained a Bulgarian citizenship between 1990 and 2012 claimed to be of Bulgarian descent and were previously citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro), or Albania. Between January 2002 and January 2012, 98.37% (80,415) of all those who obtained Bulgarian passports were (or claimed to be) of Bulgarian ethnic origin, while only a tiny minority (1,334) received citizenship through non-facilitated procedure and for other reasons. (See Changes in Bulgarian Citizenship in the period 22.01.2002 - 15.01.2012, [http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?mtype=8&type=110](http://www.president.bg/v_pravo_txt.php?mtype=8&type=110)).
country (towns with significant Roma population and towns where the Muslim Bulgarians represent the majority population).

The interviews were based on an interview guide, divided into four main sections, and an additional section with questions dealing with the respondent’s background and profile. The four sections, which constituted the central part of the guide, were:

1. multiculturalism in Bulgarian schools, with a particular focus on the issue of education of children from the Roma community
2. influence of liberalisation and globalisation on the Bulgarian education, and especially the role of the Bologna process
3. history education and revision of the curriculum from a mononational to a multiethnic and European perspective
4. religious education vs. education about religions, and the place of religion and religious symbols in schools

All respondents were experts in a particular field. For this reason, they usually discussed one of the four topics at length and in considerably more detail than the others. Nevertheless, in almost all cases the respondents provided their views on all four topics.

**Research stage III: private citizens**

This part of the research examined how private individuals view the roles of religion, history, globalisation and multiculturalism through the prism of education. The preliminary expectations were that an analysis of these views would lead to a better understanding of the tensions between the national and the European, between the majority and the minority(ies), and between the traditional and the modern in Bulgaria.

28 semi-standardised interviews were conducted between November 2010 and January 2011. Fifteen people were interviewed in Sofia and 13 in various towns and villages across Bulgaria. The interview guides were divided in the same four sections as the guides for the previous research stage (multiculturalism, globalisation, history and religion).
Part II: Summary of fieldwork findings

For the purpose of writing this chapter, the fieldwork data were analysed again, but this time with a different focus. Our main aim was to investigate how the respondents see and understand their national / ethnic / religious identity and how they position Bulgaria and the Bulgarian nation in relation to EU/Europe and to modernity. The interview guides included several rather direct questions about the way Bulgarian citizens belonging to different ethnic and religious groups perceive themselves and the society as Bulgarian, European and modern subjects. However, most of the conclusions in this chapter come from the analysis of the respondents’ discourse on education and in particular on the four education-related themes.

When comparing the opinions of the private citizens to the perceptions of experts and civil society actors, no major differences were observed regarding their content. The main contrast came from the way these opinions were articulated. The ordinary citizens expressed their views more categorically, directly and emotionally. Although most of the civil society respondents did not feel uncomfortable expressing even controversial or sensitive positions, they were often aware that they were not expressing only their personal views, but were speaking for larger groups and thus made a conscious effort to formulate them in a politically correct way.

1. Modernity

1.1. State actors

The last three Bulgarian governments were headed by three very different prime ministers – the former Bulgarian King Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (2001-2005; coalition of National Movement Simeon II – NMSS and Movement for Rights and Freedoms – MRF), a socialist Sergey Stanishev (2005-2009; coalition of Bulgarian Socialist Party – BSP, NMSS and MRF) and a populist-conservative Boyko Borisov
These governments differed in many respects, but what they all had in common was their unshakable position that the EU membership was the only option for Bulgaria and that in order to develop and become more modern, Bulgaria needed to become more European – and vice versa. To become a genuine European country and a worthy EU member, Bulgaria needed to modernise.

The 2009 pre-election programme of the NMSS thus offered the party’s vision for the future of “the European Bulgaria.” The document described the 2001-2005 government of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as “the most modern, transparent and successful government in the recent Bulgarian history” and promised that if given another chance, the party would continue to modernise Bulgaria (НДСВ, 2009).

The programme of the BSP, adopted in 2008, is also full of references to “modern” and “European.” For example, one of the goals of the party is to turn Bulgaria into “a European state of the 21st century” through modernisation. One of the top priorities is the modernisation of education, as young generations of Bulgarian citizens have to be competitive in the changing world and in the united Europe. The programme defined the BSP itself as a modern party of the Bulgarian and European left (БСП, 2008).

GERB⁶ and its programme follow a similar line. The principal goal of the party is the “modernisation of social, political and economic life in the country in accordance with the European norms and standards.” Modernisation and Europeanization are inseparably linked throughout the programme – Bulgaria can reply to European challenges and demands only if it modernises (ГЕРБ, 2009).

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⁶ GERB stands for Grazhdani za evropeysko razvitie na Balgariya (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), however it is not merely an abbreviation, but a part of the name of the party. “Gerb” also means “coat of arms” in Bulgarian language. For this reason, we use GERB instead of the abbreviation of the English translation of the name of the party (CEDB).
In the discourse of all three political parties, which headed the Bulgarian governments over the past decade, “EU” and “European” are synonyms for “modernity.” From the viewpoint of the state actors, Bulgaria is not modern enough in a number of areas. The administrative capacity of the state administration, the health care sector, the infrastructure and transport, the energy sector, industry and agriculture, the police and armed forces, and education and science are listed as sectors that have to be modernised. Despite the declarative complete break with the communist past and the strong dedication to doing things “the European way,” old habits die hard. This strong focus on improvement and modernisation of technical/material issues clearly shows that today, the Bulgarian state continues to understand modernity much like the communist regimes did: as industrial advancement and economic development with the ultimate goal of catching up with the Western (industrially) developed societies.

Modernity is thus essentially about appearance, not content. The introduction of the European norms and standards, and incorporation of the European legislation into the Bulgarian legal system (a process which has been underway for the past decade) aims at making the Bulgarian state look modern. An active, critical, self-reflective and thus truly modern Bulgarian society is not a priority. “Modernisation” (and not modernity) is likely to remain a key word in the discourse of Bulgarian state actors for years to come.

1.2. Civil society actors

The civil society actors largely shared the perception that Bulgaria is not yet modern enough, but many had difficulties to define “modernity” or to explain what it means to them. The interpretations were very diverse. Some actors, especially the ones who are directly involved in the education process (high school directors, university professors) evaluated modernity in a very narrow and technical manner. For them, modernity in education was manifested through improvement of the material base of the schools – availability of computers, internet, multimedia and other modern devices in the classroom.
Another group of respondents looked beyond the material and searched for modernity in spirit and mind. Having access to modern technology was not a sign of modernity. What mattered was whether this technology was used by people with a modern or with a conservative mindset. The world today is full of examples of how the most modern technologies are used for retrogressive purposes and ideas. Modernisation of education therefore entirely depends on the introduction of modern values, ideas and ways of thinking. Features of modernity are cosmopolitanism, especially among the young, the ability to adapt to different environments and changing conditions, and the desire to accept and evaluate different ideas and perspectives. Unfortunately, many respondents who described modernity in this way were very sceptical about the situation in Bulgaria. They were afraid that the country was not modernising in this sense of the word and that the society was moving in the opposite direction instead.

Another cluster of pessimistic opinions questioned the Bulgarian modernity from a different viewpoint. Modernisation of the country was seen largely as a fictional process – as an empty shell without a real content. Like many times in the past, modernity today is imposed institutionally from the outside of the country. The state institutions are trying to create an illusion and show both to the Bulgarian citizens and to the EU that things are changing, but beneath the surface, everything remains the same.

This is very visible also in education – especially on the example of one of the most conservative subjects like history. Textbooks have been reformed and revised to include the European dimension and to rethink the relations of Bulgarians with the Bulgarian minority communities and the neighbouring countries. However, many teachers are reluctant to challenge the traditional and deeply entrenched perceptions about the national history, and especially about the most crucial period of nation and state formation (19th and early 20th century). For this reason, the way history is narrated and taught remains conservative and traditionalist.
There were also more optimistic voices. A group, which identified modernity above all through rationalisation of the education process and liberation from ideological dogmas from the past, believed that significant progress had been achieved. An encouraging sign is the large number of young Bulgarians, who have become genuine citizens of the world, who speak several languages, understand and accept different cultures and are able to live and work anywhere in Europe. The important downside is that many of these young Bulgarians in fact do live and work somewhere in Europe, having emigrated from Bulgaria for good.

The majority of civil society actors, who were interviewed during the fieldwork, were thus quite critical about the Bulgarian modernity. When talking about the Bulgarian minority communities, the opinions were even more pessimistic. This was especially the case with the Roma minority. Comparing the current situation with the recent past (the communist period), the respondents shared the belief that before 1989, the state was taking measures to narrow the gap between the majority population and the Roma minority – in other words, to make them a part of the same modernity. Roma had housing and employment, and access to health care and education. This had drastically changed since the beginning of transition. If there are doubts whether Bulgaria and Bulgarians as a nation are modern, the conclusion regarding the Roma is clear – complete and definite regression.

There is no doubt that education is the most important tool, which can reverse this negative development. The Roma children living in marginalised urban ghettos or rural hamlets rarely finish even primary education, and even many who do make it through the eight grades, are often hardly able to read and write. The predominant opinion was that the state, the civil society and the Roma community itself were not doing enough to integrate Roma into the society. Despite the numerous policy documents, action plans and projects for Roma integration, little has been achieved to date.
Religion and especially the question about the place of religion in schools is another indicator of modernity of the society. The results from this particular modernity test are much more encouraging. Almost all civil society actors (with the understandable exception of the clergy) strongly supported the secular character of education and believed that religious belonging was a strictly intimate personal choice. Likewise, the religious education was considered to be primarily a task of the religious institutions and the family. School as an institution should remain strictly secular and not interfere in any way in the religious matters.

In addition, explicit demonstration of religious belonging was often perceived as a sign of traditionalism and non-modernity. Although it was rarely stated directly, the opinion that Bulgarian Muslim minorities were not modern (or not as modern as the rest of the society) was implicitly expressed. The dress code of the Muslim women and in particular their headscarves were mentioned as symbols of non-modernity.

1.3. Private citizens

Compared to the civil society actors, the private citizens were even more perplexed when asked to define and explain modernity. They rarely made a clear distinction between the terms globalisation, modernisation and liberalisation, and used them almost interchangeably. Most often, an equality sign was placed between the notions of modernisation and Europeanization. It was explained that the only way for Bulgaria to become more modern was the continuous introduction of European norms and values.

As most respondents were at pains to define modernity, it comes as no surprise that after some consideration, most linked it to improvements in infrastructure, technology, and communications. In education, modernisation was thus understood as improvement of the material-technical base and introduction of computers into schools. Such perception was especially typical of respondents residing in small towns and villages.
The technical modernisation of the Bulgarian schools was usually evaluated positively, but there were also opinions that there were certain dangers involved. One consequence of the overuse of computers and the internet was that the school children were reading less and less. The abundance of easily available information and the speed with which it can be obtained (and discarded) has somewhat paradoxically led to uniform and superficial thinking among the young, instead of making them more open and receptive to a variety of ideas.

There were also respondents who did not understand modernity as merely technical modernisation. For them, the true indicators of modernity in education were the reformed curriculum, new and revised textbooks and above all the introduction of new methods and ways of teaching. While some respondents believed that the results had been quite satisfactory (although the process was not finished yet), others were more critical and said that the Bulgarian schools did not manage to adapt to the challenges of the present day and that the way teaching was conducted still needed to change substantially.

As stated above, modernity was often directly linked to the notion of European. It needs to be noted that a distinction between different European countries was seldom made. Usually there was a general reference to “other European countries,” “European criteria” and “European models.” To become modern, Bulgaria should follow the example of “European countries” and try to become like them. The fieldwork has thus shown that the traditional model, established in the 19th century Bulgaria, continues to prevail in the Bulgarian society today. (Western) Europe is an almost idolised perfection, which Bulgaria should learn from and (try to) copy.

Europe was mentioned not just as a role model and a reference point, but also as an objective referee with the authority and competence to decide whether Bulgaria has achieved the required level of modernity or not. For example, Bulgarian education could be considered modern if other European countries recognised it as having the same quality as
their own. However, even if such recognition was granted, the deeply entrenched Bulgarian pessimism prevailed. There were opinions that even if from the European perspective Bulgarian education could be considered modern, that would not be sufficient to conclude that the quality of education was good.

The private citizens interviewed during the fieldwork almost without exception shared the opinion of the civil society actors that Roma lived in a different reality and different modernity than the rest of the Bulgarian society. Many believed that an important reason for the marginalisation of Roma was their deliberate withdrawal from the society. The widespread perception was that in the socialist period, the state policies for integration were successful and consequently the Roma problem had been practically resolved. The members of the Roma community had employment, they lived in mixed neighbourhoods and settlements, and control over the school attendance of children was strict. After 1989, the situation changed dramatically. The inability of the Roma community to adapt to the changing (modernising) social-economic and political reality has left them stranded at the margins of the society. A Roma family, criss-crossing the permanently jammed Sofia boulevards on a horse-drawn cart in a search of scrap materials, which could be either reused or sold, has become a symbol of the Roma inability to adapt to modernity.

Even the examples of Roma individuals or families, who do not live in the secluded ghettos, were used by some respondents to justify their opinion that Roma are inherently non-modern. Despite residing elsewhere and living like the “ordinary Bulgarians,” most of such Roma maintain their everyday contacts with the family, relatives and friends who live inside the ghettos. The respondents interpreted this entirely understandable behaviour as evidence that even such “modern” Roma were unable to disengage from the traditional social milieu. For this reason, they could not successfully integrate into the society and into modernity.
These biased and one-sided explanations indicate that most respondents believed that the state alone was responsible for integrating the Roma community – just like it was the case prior to 1989. Such reasoning again testifies that the belief in the strength of human agency and individual responsibility is considerably weak in Bulgaria.

In general, the lay respondents were even more critical and pessimistic about the state of the Bulgarian modernity than were the civil society actors. A number of respondents believed that modernisation was only superficial. Documents, action plans, and reforms mechanically copied certain models, but were rarely filled with a meaningful content. Numerous projects were implemented on paper, but they rarely had a genuine result. Such negative views were expressed even by people (for example some of the teachers) who were personally engaged in various projects aimed at improving (modernising) the work at a particular school.

2. Europe

2.1. State actors

For the Bulgarian state actors, Europe is the single most important reference point. Virtually everything (economy, standard of living, infrastructure, legislation, politics, culture, etc.) is compared to “Europe” and “European.” References to Europe are abundant in policy documents, public speeches and statements made by politicians, and in the discussions taking place in the political arena. Europe appeared even in the name of a political party. The party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria was established in 2006 and has governed the country since winning the July 2009 general elections.

The government’s “Programme for European Development of Bulgaria” uses the terms “Europe” and “European” as synonyms of modernity, progress, efficiency and high standard of living. The Programme thus speaks about the European living standards; European vision for the
work of the state administration; European demands and criteria; European practices. The Priority IV of the Programme is entitled “Restoring the trust of European partners in Bulgaria and defrosting the suspended European funding” (ГЕРБ, 2009).

The documents dealing with education, which have been analysed during the research, include:

- Goals of the Ministry for Education, Science and Youth for 2010
- Decree № 2 for the Education Content from May 18, 2000 (last amended in July 2006)

The first strategic priority of the Programme for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies in the Republic of Bulgaria is the achievement of the “European quality of education in Bulgaria” (MOMH, 2009). Just like in many other areas, “Europe” is the main measurement unit used to determine the quality and modernity of the Bulgarian education. The vision of the Programme confirms this – it is defined as an intention to “build a competitive European educational and scientific environment in Bulgaria.” The Programme defines the “European quality of education” as education, which teaches children to think creatively, logically and independently, to take responsibility, to state their opinions clearly, to take individual and collective decisions, and to have a tolerant attitude towards those who are different. The European education develops also the aesthetical, cultural and civic sensitivity (MOMH, 2009, p. 12).

The document entitled “Goals of the Ministry for Education, Science and Youth for 2010” follows a similar line. Achieving the European quality of education is the desired goal of virtually all activities foreseen in the document. The document contains countless references to “European standards,” “European norms,” “European quality” and “European criteria” (MOMH, 2010).
The changes that have been introduced into the general curriculum and the syllabus of specific subjects (above all Bulgarian language and literature and various subjects from the group “Social sciences and civic education”) have retained their nation-centric character. However, the reforms did introduce the European dimension into the education content, especially in the higher grades, presenting the Bulgarian national identity as an inseparable part of the common European identity. One of the main goals of the group of subjects, which constitute the civic education, is to develop the young people into citizens, who “are familiar with their rights, freedoms and responsibilities, and are aware of their spiritual unity with the Bulgarian and the European nations” (MOMH, 2000, p.47).

Europe thus plays an exceptionally visible role in the state discourse on education and education related issues. The way in which the terms “Europe” and “European” are used clearly implies that Bulgaria is considered as not quite European yet. Even the most recent policy documents on education maintain the presumption that for the time being, Bulgaria is merely a country in Europe, but not a European country. In other words, a number of steps need to be taken to move the country closer to the European ideal and ultimately to finish its complete makeover – full integration into the European political, economic and cultural space.

The strong self-criticism with an underlined inferiority complex vis-à-vis most of the European countries is a traditional trait of the Bulgarian state actors. Looking up to the large and more developed western European countries (most notably France and Germany) or to the Soviet Union (during the communist period) and trying to follow (or indeed imitate) their example has been a notable feature of the large majority of Bulgarian governments since the establishment of the state in 1878 (for more details, see the chapter Catching Up with the Uncatchable).

Finland makes a very interesting comparison in this respect. Equally peripheral and until the 1990s relatively marginal in the European geo-
political space, Finns and the Finnish state actors traditionally believed that their country needed to catch up with the developed European countries. Over the last two decades, however, it has gradually become clear that Finland has been in fact the European leader in almost any given area – a result achieved not through imitation of the alleged forerunners, but through following their own path to modernity and Europeanness (see Raisa, 2011).

2.2. Civil society actors

The fieldwork among the civil society actors has outlined two main perceptions about the place of Bulgaria in Europe. One perception has a notable historical dimension. “Bulgarian” and “European” have always been inseparably connected. Bulgaria has always belonged to Europe – even in times when it was separated from “Europe” by force (the Ottoman rule, the communist period), it remained essentially European because of its history, culture and traditions.

On the other hand, it has been widely acknowledged that Bulgaria today is not entirely European (yet). Europe is seen as a symbol of democratic values, high standard of living, rules and laws, reason and morality. Bulgaria is ranked among the less developed European countries in all these respects. The interviewees believe that the values and behaviour models, which are considered as “European,” have not been widely applied in Bulgaria yet.

A feeling of resignation was strongly expressed. Numerous respondents stated that Bulgarians could start living the European way only if the national mentality changed significantly, yet many admitted to be struggling to make a change even on the personal level and expressed strong scepticism that a change was possible on the national scale. One of the reasons is the strong Bulgarian individualism – Bulgarian citizens are rarely willing to make personal sacrifice for a common goal. Some respondents blamed the communist mentality and said that the entire generation would have to pass before the change was possible. Oth-
ers were even more pessimistic and feared that the neo-liberal social-economic model, which had dominated the Bulgarian life since 1990, distanced Bulgarians even further from the desired European values like social solidarity, tolerance and respect of the rules.

The various programmes, policies and activities of the state institutions were in most cases evaluated very critically. A prevailing opinion was that the majority of reforms, which were implemented in the course of the Bulgarian EU accession process, were only formal and did not bring any genuine and lasting change. Their main purpose was to fulfil the EU requirements and to obtain a passing grade from the EU institutions, while the interests of the Bulgarian citizens were not considered.

The changes in the Bulgarian education system, aimed at bringing the Bulgarian education in line with the EU standards, were also viewed with scepticism. The main criticism was that the overall education goals and priorities were not clearly formulated. The new topics and content aimed at promoting the European idea were often seen as being forced into the education process almost like a propaganda, not too different from the way the Soviet Union and communist ideology were promoted through education prior to 1989.

While evaluating the process of creation of a common European identity as something positive, numerous respondents believed that the specific features of the Bulgarian national identity had to be preserved. They were especially critical of the process of superimposition of a common identity over the national one. The opinions that a European identity could not be established at all were also expressed, but they were clearly a minority. They were based on a pragmatic evaluation that the EU is above all (if not only) a common market, which was far from sufficient to create a common identity.

In general, almost all respondents regardless of their ethnic, religious or social background stated that they considered themselves as Europeans. However, the justification for “feeling European” was almost always
grounded in the past and tradition. Bulgarian historical achievements, past glory and even the past suffering (sacrifice made to protect Europe from the Ottoman and other invasions from the East) were named as a source of pride and belonging to Europe. In contrast, the current situation in Bulgaria and the social, economic and political realities, which significantly differed from the European ones, were the reason why practically all respondents added a certain “but” to their European self-identification. Yes, Bulgarians have always been Europeans, but they are different Europeans – the less developed ones, poorer, with different mentality, less efficient and organised.

Most often, Europe was referred to as something monolithic and uniform – without internal differences. Only a few respondents said that in Europe, everyone was different and that Bulgarians were no exception in this respect. Eastern Europe was different from Western one, Northern Europe from Southern. Europe consisted of different nations with different features and characteristics, and Bulgaria was a unique piece in the European diversity puzzle. Taking this argument another step further, there was an opinion that there was not only one Europe. Different Europes have existed in time and space, sometimes succeeding each other and sometimes melting or splitting into each other. Bulgaria has always been a part of Europe – one or the other.

One of the most typical examples of the “Europe as a unitary actor” public discourse was the debate about the place of religious symbols in schools. Most respondents stated that they were familiar with the “European model” and supported the “European solution” for this issue in Bulgaria. However, when asked to elaborate, only a few were able to discuss different practices from various European countries. Quite often, it became clear that what respondents referred to as the “European model” actually represented the recent developments in France (the Law No. 2004-228 of March 15, 2004 concerning the wearing of symbols, which show religious affiliation in public primary and secondary schools). The French model was thus interpreted as being valid for the entire EU.
2.3. Private citizens

The fieldwork among the lay individuals produced very similar results to the research among the civil society actors, as far as the traditional Bulgarian belonging to Europe was concerned. Answers like “We are a part of the European culture,” “Geographically we are Europeans, culturally we are Europeans” and “Our region (the Balkans) is the cradle of the European civilisation” were very typical. The perception that Bulgaria belonged to Europe due to its history and tradition was clearly expressed.

The opinions about the Europeanness of Bulgaria today were much less categorical. Many respondents questioned the extent to which Bulgaria succeeded in adopting European (Europe and European have been persistently used as synonyms for the EU) values, norms and practices. The differences in the standard of living were often mentioned as one of the most important contrasts between Bulgaria and “Europe.”

The majority of respondents were clearly in favour of the Europeanization of Bulgaria – understood as consolidation of democratic rules and norms. However, Bulgaria had still much work ahead in this respect. European laws, norms, ideas and values had entered the country, but in a very superficial manner, and often existed only on paper. Overall, there was a strong belief that much time would have to pass before a genuine change took place.

The Bulgarian EU membership has not significantly enhanced the European self-awareness of the Bulgarian citizens – except in one area. The elimination of the internal EU borders and the lifting of travel restrictions for Bulgarians were among the most essential contributions for strengthening the feeling of belonging to Europe. This was especially true for the younger respondents, who took full advantage of the new possibilities to travel across the continent, or to study or work abroad. The older respondents, and especially the residents of smaller towns and villages, however, were much less enthusiastic. Faced by the pauperisation and the constant struggle to make the ends meet, they
noted that for many Bulgarians, the right to travel freely across Europe was only theoretical, as they could not afford the costs involved.

All respondents explicitly or implicitly linked the issue of belonging to Europe to the living standard. For many, having a sufficient income was a precondition, and for some it was even the main factor of the European identity. They said that they could not consider themselves Europeans while their incomes were comparable to the third world countries rather than to the European ones.

The majority of the civil society actors shared the opinion that the introduction of similar or identical regulation across Europe was a positive development. More specifically, the outside pressure (Brussels, EU institutions, IMF) on Bulgaria was seen as necessary for the modernisation and further development of Bulgaria. In contrast, the fieldwork among the private citizens established a significant resistance to externally induced reforms and changes. Even a noticeable Euroscepticism was detected, especially regarding the apprehensions that unification and efforts to establish a common European identity would inevitably lead to the disappearance of specific national features. Quite a few respondents of various profiles felt that the European concept was overexposed and a noticeable “Euro-fatigue” was detected in the interviews. The constant bombardment with messages calling on people to make things (education, infrastructure, politics, services, behaviour, media, etc) “the European way” has hardly changed anything in the country, apart from imposing an impression that for some reason, “the Bulgarian way” is inappropriate or unworthy.

To a large extent, Euroscepticism comes as a consequence of the fact that many Bulgarians evaluate their Europeanness from a practical point of view. The low standard of living, which has been aggravated by the current economic crisis, is for them a much more important marker of the European identity than are the common European values and heritage.
3. Nation

3.1. State actors

Until 1989, the Bulgarian education system and especially the contents of subjects like history and Bulgarian language and literature had a very strong emphasis on the nation and the national identity. The historical narratives about the “Turkish yoke” and about the hostile neighbours (especially Macedonia, accused of continuously appropriating the Bulgarian history) had became part and parcel of the Bulgarian education system. The nation-building character of the education had also neglected the various ethnic and religious minorities in the country.

The democratisation of Bulgaria and its EU aspirations therefore necessitated a thorough rethinking and reform of the way certain subjects – most notably history – were presented in Bulgarian schools. The historical narrative presented at schools is highly ethnocentric. It is interested solely in the faith of the ethnic Bulgarian, both in and outside the borders of the Bulgarian state. In this way a significant part of the society (various ethnic and religious minorities) are left outside this narrative. They are either neglected in the representation of the Bulgarian history, or (as is the case with Turks and Muslim Bulgarians) play a highly unfavourable role of the (former) enemies of the nation. As such, they continue to be viewed with scepticism and distrust by the majority population. The social discourse perceives history as the backbone of the national identity, and the enduring historical myths as its pillars.

The attempts to make the education more multicultural and above all to accommodate and respect the ethnic and religious diversity in the national education system have resulted in the establishment of a “parallel” system rather than in a change of the system itself. The children from minorities can thus study their language and culture through a number of elective subjects, while the children from the majority population remain vaguely, if at all, aware of the culture, history and language of their peers from other ethno-religious communities.
3.2. Civil society actors

According to our respondents, regardless of their social, professional, ethnic and religious background, history education is the most important and necessary factor in the national identity construction. History is at the same time a tool for constructing and maintaining the national identity, and for explaining the current situation through the past events.

The respondents fell into two distinct groups regarding their opinion on whether history education should be revised. The smaller group approved the changes that have been introduced over the past years. Despite sharing the belief that each nation needs the reference points from its past and that it cannot exist without its history, these respondents were convinced that this cannot and should not come at the expense of other national or minority groups. If the thin line between patriotism and nationalism is crossed, the results can be chauvinism and xenophobia. History education could be used to enhance tolerant attitudes and multicultural coexistence in the country if the emphasis was put on more positive examples and events from the past instead of highlighting the most traumatic and dark episodes from the national history. This would minimise the danger of misuse or abuse of history for stirring up nationalistic passions in order to mask the inability of the political circles to deal with the numerous social-economic problems in Bulgaria.

The larger group believed that the history textbooks and the historical narrative presented at schools should not be changed or revised. In their view, there was only one history and correspondingly there was only one way to present it. The “truth” about the past must not be changed, and the historical events, which are exceptionally important for the national identity and memory, cannot be questioned. The awareness existed that a certain balance needed to be achieved between the identity-building task of history education and the respect for the various minority communities in the country. However, it seemed that the minority communities were expected to make this “balance” work by recognizing and accepting the fact that their “ancestors” had committed crimes and atrocities against the Bulgarian
nation. This should not be a problem since the ethnic Bulgarians did not consider their Muslim co-citizens responsible for the sins of their fathers, but simply wanted “the truth” to be remembered and acknowledged.

The interviewees belonging to the Muslim minority communities demonstrated a high sensitivity regarding this issue and avoided the open discussion of this topic. Most preferred not to share any personal experiences (either their own or of their children). The subtext clearly showed that the conservative, traditionalist and nationalistic history narrative that continues to be presented in Bulgarian schools causes a range of negative emotions (from uneasiness to offence) among the children of minority origin – especially Turks and Muslim Bulgarians.

In recent years, the situation has been further complicated as the new global realities and the growing suspicions regarding Islam in the Western world are reflected also in Bulgaria. The increased attention given to Islam in the media and the public debates have put the Muslim minorities in the spotlight. In addition to the burden of history that they are forced to carry, additional suspicions have been added regarding their religious beliefs and practices and especially the alleged possibility that radical Islamic teachings are gaining popularity in the community.

In the light of such apprehensions, many respondents expressed their worries regarding the existence of the three Islamic secondary schools in the country. The issue of Islamic education in general has been in the recent years actively exploited by the nationalistic political parties and public figures, and these debates have largely shaped the public discourse on the topic. Only a few respondents actually had a deeper knowledge about the Islamic schools – their programmes, purpose, organisation, structure. Some on the other hand were not even aware of their existence, yet this did not prevent them from having an opinion based on stereotypes and prejudices regarding Islam.

The most common perception was that the Islamic secondary schools should exist, as the Muslim community needed properly educated
clergy. However, the schools should be under a strict supervision of the relevant state institutions to prevent the infiltration of non-traditional or radical Islamic teachings. For the Muslim respondents, the Islamic religious education in the primary schools and the existence of the Islamic secondary schools were of exceptional importance. They were seen as crucial for the preservation of their specific identity, culture and religion. The Muslim respondents had a very modern view on how religious education should be organised. It should not be confined to the family environment and informal groups as was traditionally the case, but should have its well-defined place in the system of education, based on the modern pedagogical methods and in accordance with the modern scientific requirements.

3.3. Private citizens

The fact that exactly one half (14 out of 28) of the respondents named the issue of Roma education to have been the most problematic and important one for the Bulgarian education reform during the last 10 years is very closely related to the issues of the nation and national identity. More precisely, it is related to the apprehensions which have dominated the media and the public space over the recent years. It is often communicated in an alarming tone that Roma will soon become the majority population in Bulgaria, while at the same time the illiteracy rates in the community are progressively rising. If measures were not taken, in a few decades the substantial part of the Bulgarian citizens would live in urban ghettos and would be hardly able to read and write. In the most pessimistic opinions, the entire society could stop functioning in the near future and Bulgaria could practically cease to exist as a state. This worst-case scenario could be avoided only if the efforts to educate the members of the Roma community became much better planned and implemented, and as a result, significantly more efficient.

Most respondents were convinced that education was the most important key for the successful integration of Roma into the society. However, it seemed that many did not make a clear difference between
integration and assimilation. Often, although they spoke about integration, they seemed to perceive assimilation as the desired result. Education was supposed to turn Roma into Bulgarians. The goal was not just to teach them to read, write and calculate, but to make them “like us.” Through education Roma were expected to learn to live as Bulgarians do (to integrate) and ultimately to become Bulgarians (to assimilate).

It is interesting to note that almost all respondents stressed the fundamental importance of history for the formation of the national identity, but only two said that the reform of the history education was the most important among the four topics investigated in this research. The respondents therefore perceived history as crucially important, as it created a sense of pride, which was essential for the formation of the national identity, while the reform of the history education was neither necessary nor desired.

The formation of national identity through education has several stages. Primary school focuses on the construction of patriotic feelings and national identity. For this reason, the school programme concentrates on the national narrative. In secondary schools, European and world histories are added, and the issue of the national identity is presented in a more complex way – pupils learn that the Bulgarian civic nation consists of different national, ethnic and religious communities. As both primary and secondary schools have the obligation above all to form the national awareness, the use of history and historical myths is inevitable. The respondents believed that these myths could be analysed and deconstructed only at university level.

The history education can build and sustain the national identity and self-confidence only if the narrative about the past is presented in schools in a very clear, well-structured and uniform manner. An objective, impartial and multifaceted interpretation of the past is thus permissible only if this does not contradict its identity-building task. Most respondents believed that it was not only possible to have such a precise and “true” presentation of history in schools – it was essential and necessary.
Different interpretations of historical events are likely to cause tensions and conflicts in the society. The most well-known such case is the Batak controversy. Firmly believing that similar incidents should be avoided, numerous respondents stated that history should be presented both in schools and in the public space in accordance with the expectations and understanding of the society.

Placing the Bulgarian nation and its history into a larger European context does not diminish the sense of national awareness. The European identity was not in contradiction with the Bulgarian one, but is rather perceived as its enhancement. What was actually threatening and undermining the patriotic feelings among the Bulgarians was not the competition of the European identity, but the current unsatisfactory state of affairs in the country (economy, corruption, disillusionment over politics, inefficient judiciary).

An overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that the Bulgarian society was quite secular. Religion did play a role of a bearer of traditional cultural values, but was much less important for sustaining the national identity than was the case in some neighbouring countries (for example Greece and Serbia).\(^7\)

In contrast, the Muslim respondents saw their religion as one of their most important identity markers. On the one hand, the Muslims,

\(^7\) According to 2007–2008 Gallup poll entitled *Lack of Importance of Religion in Europe*, 62% of people in Bulgaria answered “No” to the question “Does religion occupy an important place in your life?” Results for some other countries are as follows: Estonia – 84%, Sweden – 83%, the Czech Republic – 74%, France – 73%, the United Kingdom – 71%, Germany – 57%, Serbia – 45%, Greece – 30%, Croatia – 30%, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 29%, Poland – 23%, Macedonia – 20%, Romania – 18%, and Turkey – 9%. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Europe#cite_note-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Europe#cite_note-3). According to Special Eurobarometer “Social Values, Science and Technology” from 2005, 40% of Bulgarians stated that they believed in God, 40% believed in some sort of spirit or life force, while 13% did not believe in any sort of spirit, God or life force. In contrast, the share of those who believed in God in some other countries was the following: Malta – 95%, Turkey – 95%, Cyprus – 90%, Romania – 90%, Greece – 81%, Poland – 80%, Croatia – 67%, the United Kingdom – 38%, France – 34%. See [European Commission. 2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Europe#cite_note-3).
many of whom live in mountainous and rural areas, are in general a significantly more traditional community than the rest of Bulgarians. The opinion that family and community traditions and customs had to be preserved was thus much stronger. On the other hand, the repressive assimilation policies of the communist regime and the continuous prejudice and suspicions of the majority population have pushed many secular Turks and Muslim Bulgarians to search for their roots and turn to religion to rediscover and strengthen their identity.

One of the most visible markers of religious belonging and related ethnic identity are the headscarves. Headscarves have been an inseparable part of the traditional dress of the Bulgarian Muslim women for centuries. Despite that, a part of the society, influenced by an aggressive discourse of the nationalist politicians, came to perceive the headscarf as a religious symbol of something foreign and different. The images and perceptions imported from the Western European countries (for example France, Denmark and Switzerland) were imposed over the Bulgarian reality. A traditional headscarf suddenly became a herald of a global problem, which is knocking at Bulgaria’s doors, and in the most extreme interpretation – a threat to the national identity.

Conclusion

This chapter summarised and compared the findings from the three stages of the research, conducted between September 2009 and February 2011. More precisely, it compared how state actors, civil society actors and ordinary citizens in Bulgaria interpret modernity and especially how they perceive modernity in its relation with Europe and the nation, and with the European and national identities. In other words, the objective was to examine how Bulgarians make sense of their identity as national, European and modern subjects.

The catalyst selected for this examination was education. Education is among the most significant and powerful tools each state has at its disposal not just to shape and sustain the collective identity of its
citizens and to form their understanding of the past, the present and the future, but also to determine the path(s) to modernity the society should take. Education also provides a possibility to investigate the links between the identity construction and religion, and between the identity construction and majority-minority relations. This approach also made it possible to examine and compare how different actors see the place of Bulgaria in modernity and in Europe, and how they evaluate the changes that the processes of modernisation and Europeanization have triggered in the Bulgarian education system over the past two decades.

For the state actors, education remains the backbone of the state’s national identity construction programme. The education reform, which began after the change of the political system in 1989, is still ongoing and will probably continue for a decade or more. The proclaimed goal of turning the education from monocultural to multicultural and thus recognize the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the country remains valid, despite the fact that the governments have been changing every four years (from right-wing to liberal in 2001, then to left-liberal coalition in 2005, and finally to populist-right in 2009). However, the results are still unsatisfactory and much remains to be accomplished. This is true not just in regard to the traditional Bulgarian minorities, but even more so in connection with the children from various immigrant communities (from China, various Arab states, Iran, Afghanistan, African countries, etc.), which have been growing in size over the recent years. One substantial and successful reform has been the introduction of the European element into the school system. As a result, the Bulgarian national identity is now largely studied as an inseparable part of the common European identity.

The general impression from the interviews with the civil society representatives and private individuals is that people in Bulgaria are very interested and often highly emotional about the state of the Bulgarian education. They believe that education is of exceptional importance for the development of the Bulgarian society and underline its histori-
cal role for the formation of the Bulgarian nation and state. They also perceive it as an inseparable part of the process of Europeanization of the country, but there is a certain scepticism among some respondents whether education today can still be considered an agent of modernisation as was the case until recently.

Modernity is most often understood as a synonym for “European.” On the one hand, this carries a positive connotation. Modernisation and Europeanization are two intertwined processes with the common aim to make Bulgaria a better place to live in (indicators named by the respondents include standard of living, rule of law, freedom to travel, purchasing power, life quality, infrastructure, clean environment).

On the other hand, the same process is seen by others as institutionalised and imposed from outside. A borrowed, copied and mechanically assembled “European modernity” rarely fits the Bulgarian realities and thus seldom produces the desired result. A case in point, in view of such respondents, is the Bologna Process. Considered as an inseparable and unavoidable part of the EU accession process, it is described as a foreign frame and by some even as a threat.

The relation between the Bulgarian and the European identity is complex. The first reaction of the respondents is that “Bulgaria is and has always been a part of Europe.” There is even a sense of regional pride – namely that the Balkans are the cradle of the European civilisation and had been Europe long before the rest of the continent could be considered as such. On the second thought, most respondents begin to underline the differences and the Europeanness of today’s Bulgaria is evaluated very critically and very often questioned, if not denied. Although Bulgaria is already an EU member-state, Bulgarians still perceive their country as somewhat “exterritorial” compared to the rest of the EU.

To a large extent, this is a consequence of the fact that today, Bulgaria is still a country on the crossroads – just as it has been for the better
part of its history. Located on the European geo-political periphery, Bulgaria is a place where the Occident blends with the Orient, Christianity meets Islam, neo-liberalism clashes with post-communism and tradition waltzes with modernity. Living at the crossroads, Bulgarians often feel they are neither here nor there. They are longing for modernity, while stubbornly underlining that traditions have to be preserved. They cherish the Bulgarian national identity while disliking the country they live in. At the same time, they invest their hopes and expectations into the EU, without developing a sense of European identity. When asked about their place in Europe, the majority of Bulgarians quote one of their most popular writers Aleko Konstantinov: “We are Europeans, but still not quite” (Konstantinov, 1964, p. 132). While they are convinced that Bulgaria has a history-stamped residence permit for the common European home, Bulgarians in numerous respects feel that they live next door to “Europe” rather than in it.

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MODERNITY AND TRADITION:
EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL IN BULGARIA

English
First edition

Authors: Marko Hajdinjak, Maya Kosseva, Antonina Zhelyazkova
Language editor: Nevena Tosheva-Hajdinjak
Design of the cover: Fanika Vangelova

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