

## ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG ADOLESCENTS OF TURKISH, ROMANY AND BULGARIAN ORIGIN

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*Like most countries in Europe, Bulgaria has a population that is characterised by significant ethnocultural variety. Bulgaria is an example of tolerant co-existence among the representatives of 30 ethnic and religious groups on the Balkan Peninsula. As of 2002, the share of the Bulgarian citizens with minority ethnicity exceeded 16%. The focus in the present study is on ethnic identity as a general phenomenon that is relevant across groups. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) consists of 14 items assessing three aspects of ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging (5 items); ethnic identity achievement, including both exploration and commitment of identity issues (7 items); ethnic behaviours or practices (2 items) and Other-group orientation measure (6 items). 168 high school students (89 Bulgarians, 47 Turks, and 32 Roma; 81 boys and 87 girls; average age 17) participated in the study and completed the questionnaire. The relationship of ethnic identity to various demographic variables and to self-esteem was examined. The ethnic identity components were analysed separately for the three ethnic groups. Further analyses were made to investigate the homogeneity of the three ethnic groups.*

### INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria, as a part of the old continent of Europe, and because of its crossroad situation on the Balkan Peninsula, is a variegated, multi-coloured mosaic of various ethnic groups, languages and cultures. These groups are interdependent and in constant interaction. Phenomena, events, conflicts on ethnic bases, which take place in a given territory, exert increasingly great influence on close and distant countries. The mutual influence and the dependence among the nations in the world are an increasingly obvious and indisputable fact. In the world we live in,

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ethnic diversity becomes increasingly a norm, a rule, and not an exception. It is a natural and legislatively legitimised reality. We live in a society of “the different,” and it is necessary that people different in their ideas, religions, ethnicities, languages, cultures co-exist, sharing one and the same territory.

### **The context of the study. Minorities in Bulgaria: The Roma and the Turks**

The problem of ethnic identity formation takes an important position in the development of society in a country where the memory of the 5 centuries of Ottoman rule is irrevocably present in the collective ideas; where the Turkish minority is numerous and there is some importance in the social life; where the composition of the population changes often by various waves of emigrants, immigrants and refugees. According to final data of the census in 2002, the share of the ethnic Turks in the total number of the Bulgarian population is about 9,4%, of the Roma, about 4,6%, of the remaining ethnic minorities, about 1,5%. Bearing in mind that a considerable part of the Roma identify themselves as Bulgarians (or Turks), altogether the share of the Bulgarian citizens with minority ethnicity exceeds 16%.

The greater part of Roma in Bulgaria, like Roma in Central and Eastern Europe live in poverty and isolation. To them, the period of transition from communism to a market economy and democracy is especially difficult. Most of them are poorly educated and have insufficient skills, which leads to widespread permanent unemployment and deteriorated living conditions. In the last 15 years, the Government, the civil society and the international community actively support initiatives to keep Romany children in school, to extend the access to jobs and to surmount the discrimination. Their aim is to achieve a higher degree of incorporation and inclusion of Roma.

The biggest ethnic group in Bulgaria is the Turks. The Turks have preserved to a considerable degree their cultural identity, with the main reason for this being their concentration in rural areas, the traditional occupation and the family traditions, predetermined to a great extent by the Islamic religion professed by them. Characteristic of that community is still the relatively poor educational structure, which hinders the optimum realisation of its members. At present, the children study Turkish language at school, there is news in Turkish language on the radio and TV, and printed editions are published.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Two distinct theoretical approaches have been used in most research on ethnic identity: social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the developmental theory of Erikson (1968).

The theory of social identity (TSI) (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) posits that individuals belong to different social groups (sex, age, ethnic group, nation, etc.). If the belonging to a social group is internalised as a part of the self-concept, individuals try to enhance the self-esteem of their social identity.