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ATTITUDES AND DISTANCES OF THE ETHNIC BULGARIANS OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE TOWARDS MIXED MARRIAGES WITH BULGARIAN NATIONALS OF TURKISH DESCENT

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Abstract: *Data from a representative sociological survey with persons of reproductive age in the Republic of Bulgaria are analysed and discussed in the article. The focus is on the attitudes and distances of ethnic Bulgarians towards the Bulgarian nationals of Turkish origin. Fifteen key attitudes towards the Bulgarian nationals of Turkish descent are analysed in addition to an age-related interpretation of the attitudes towards the mixed marriages between ethnic Turks and ethnic Bulgarians. From a social integration perspective, the analysis and interpretation take into account important characteristics of the ethnic Bulgarians such as their education, gender, place of residence, etc. The results show that among the Bulgarian community, the negative attitudes towards mixed marriages dominate, although among the different subgroups the attitudes are nuanced and ambiguous.*

Keywords: Bulgarian nationals of Turkish origin; social attitudes and social distances; mixed marriages.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this paper is to present and discuss the results of a sociological survey prepared and conducted in the first half of 2018 under the project “Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria.” The survey results disclosing the attitudes and distances of ethnic Bulgarians towards mixed marriages, presented and analysed from age perspective, are a few but nevertheless are a very significant part of the whole survey. The purpose of this analysis is to expose maximum information with value added on the topic in the most compact form possible so those who would be interested in this agenda could find it useful.

The subject of this study is interdisciplinary. Interpretations on the topic thereof (and some other similar to it) may be made from a number of different sociological, statistical and demographic, psychological and ethnological paradigms, where the agenda associated with the attitudes and distances between the individual social groups is among the major topics of research. However, the interpretations of a number of different paradigms would go beyond the limits of this study. The interdisciplinarity makes the exhaustive review and the critical analysis of research works from different disciplines associated with the reported attitudes and distances versus the Turkish ethnic group in the Republic of Bulgaria an objective that would be practically impossible in one paper alone. Therefore, while analysing and providing explanations to the results we have restricted ourselves to several (quantitative) studies that are quite similar in terms of the data that are analysed hereinafter. The other limitation imposed by the goal set and the specific limitations of a research article is that in the present exposition we partially abstract (without ignoring) the stereotypes and mechanisms by which the reported attitudes and distances are built and shaped.

The Bulgarian society faces a number of challenges related to the integration of the different. Living together and marriage (formal or informal) are both key tools for bridging the gap between ethnic groups and perhaps the best indicator of how far the integration process has gone to: mutual acceptance and respect for differences. The presence of negative attitudes and large distances, respectively, presupposes great inequalities, inequities and serious challenges for the institutions, whose main mission is to consolidate and unite the different groups in today’s Bulgarian society. We hope that this paper will contribute in practice to facilitate and improve the work of the institutions in charge.

METHODOLOGY

The results describing the distances and attitudes of ethnic Bulgarians towards Bulgarian nationals of Turkish descent called hereinafter Turks or Bulgarian Turks in this study are based on data from the survey entitled *Attitudes to fertility, family policies and vulnerable communities*. The survey is representative at national level for people in reproductive age. The sample included 1506 adult respondents, 1287 (85%) of whom self-identified as ethnic Bulgarians. The discussion below is an analysis of their attitudes.

The paper discusses solely on the attitudes of the ethnic Bulgarian majority towards the Turkish community. Only 92 persons in the sample identified themselves as Turks. Thus, from a statistics point of view, it was impossible to reliably study facts and patterns about the attitudes and distances of Bulgaria's Turks towards ethnic Bulgarians in structural terms.

Via a standardised face-to-face interview, the reported opinions of men of reproductive aged 18–55, and women of reproductive aged 18-50 who permanently reside in the Republic of Bulgaria were collected and tabulated. Pensioners and persons of pre-retirement age were completely excluded from the survey, with the exception of a few respondents who because of their specific status (former military and MoI employees) are pensioners and fall into the above age bands. In general, these respondents do not significantly affect the results, but the exclusion of persons over 55 does not allow conclusions about the macro-society as a whole. The relative share of persons excluded from the survey represents about one third of Bulgaria's population according to Eurostat data for 2018. Following this line of thought, we should keep in mind that people aged 55 and over are among the nationals who are actively exercising their right to vote and their opinion has political weight on all issues, including integration policies, for which attitudes and distances between ethnic groups are crucial. These specifics of the data analysed below cannot be overcome or ignored. This is due to the fact that the current analysis is based on data that was designed and collected with a priority different from clarifying attitudes and distances between the different ethnic groups. However, the usefulness of the data is significant because it allows to achieve goals beyond the designed. Furthermore, the results are representative for a population of more than 3 million people and includes age groups that are key for the demographic and economic development of Bulgaria. The representativeness of the results and the relatively small stochastic error was achieved through a multilevel nested random sample, stratified by NUTS-2 regions, districts and type of settlement: capital, large city, medium-sized city and small settlement. The field work was conducted between 26th of February, 2018 and 30th of March 30, 2018 (Market Links, 2018).

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All in all, the survey results disclose a familiar situation concerning the attitudes and distances of the ethnic Bulgarians towards the Bulgarian nationals of Turkish descent, a situation known from in previous surveys over the past thirty years (Tomova & Bogoev, 1991; Tomova, 1992; Georgiev, Tomova, Grekova and Kanev, 1993; Mitev, 1995; Mitev, 1998; Tomova, 2000; Tomova and Yanakiev, 2001; Tomova, 2005; Kanev, Cohen and Simeonova, 2005; Tomova, 2009; Pamporov, 2009). The percentage differences and deviations reported below are mainly due to the fact that the survey is designed to represent only part of the population, the persons of reproductive age, while the cited papers examine the total adult population.