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# MEMORANDUM

## 1. Introduction

The Bulgarian national minority in Yugoslavia was created by the clauses of the 1919 Neuilly Peace Treaty in Paris. Then the Great powers - winners in WW1 of purely military and strategic considerations submit to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians part of Western Bulgaria with an area of 1545 square kilometres and populated with about 80 000 ethnically pure Bulgarians. The American and Italian representatives in Paris object this. They propose the lands in the Tzaribrod and Bosilegrad regions to remain within Bulgarian territory as they are closely linked with their natural markets – Sofia and Kyustendil.

This territory, known as the Western Neighbourhoods, at present includes the counties of Surdulitsa, Babushnits and Pirot. Today larger Bulgarian communities live also in the towns of Vranja, Nis, Belgrade and Novi Sad as well as in other localities, including the Bulgarian colonies formed by Bulgarian gardeners who came to Serbia back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to official Serbian data the Western Bulgarian Neighbourhoods in 1960 were populated by 63 000 and in 2001 by only 20 500.

Serbia takes over these territories in 1920, even before the international border commission statement is pronounced. Since then until present, Serbia has been conducting intensive policy of national assimilation, i.e. Serbization of this population. Until WW2, this policy has been conducted by closing down of Bulgarian and opening of Serbian schools, expelling of the Bulgarian intelligentsia, changing Bulgarian personal and family names, imposing the Serbian language as a mother tongue, economic pressure, complete isolation from Bulgaria and terrorising the population around the border.

Due to the unbearable living conditions, by WW2 about 30 000 Bulgarians have immigrated to Bulgaria, some 5 000 of whom have later immigrated to Western Europe and USA. Since 1923, the first organised resistance has been emerging by which the Bulgarian minority opposes violence with terrorist actions and cultural and information propaganda for liberation and accession to Bulgaria. In this struggle, the organisations “Internal Western Neighbourhood Organisation” and “Vurtop”, together with other Bulgarian patriotic organisations, have carried out a number of international events with the aim to oppose the Great Serbian nationalistic policy.

They have also had a number of fights with the Serbian authorities, in which only until WW2 more than 300 people have lost their lives.

During WW2, the Western Neighbourhoods again fall within Bulgarian borders and experience short lived economic and cultural revival.

After WW2, the Western Neighbourhoods again fall within Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav and Serbian constitutions between 1946 and 1974 formally recognise the national rights of the Bulgarian minority, but their civil rights and freedoms however are seriously limited. During the period of socialist Yugoslavia, the Bulgarian minority holds the second place in number of political prisoners per capita, coming immediately next after the Montenegrins.

Since 1960, with the deterioration of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations on the Macedonian issue and the raising of Great Serbian nationalism, the policy of national assimilation of the Bulgarian minority intensifies again. A complex mechanism is created to form Serbian national consciousness among the Bulgarians thanks to various educational, economic, administrative and repressive measures.

## **2. Assimilation mechanisms for the Bulgarian minority in the Western Neighbourhoods**

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the expansion of the Great Serbian nationalism, the situation of the Bulgarian minority drastically deteriorates. The government wants to bring to an end the assimilation of the Bulgarians and encounters their increasingly stronger resistance. They ever more insistently require their rights to be observed and to have normal living conditions.

By well-developed actions in the field of territorial division, education, religion, information, cultural and historical heritage and in the political sphere, the Serbian government has developed the following mechanisms for the Bulgarian population assimilation:

### **2.1. Territorial division**

In the early 1960ies, about 1/3 of the territories of the Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad countries are taken over and added to the neighbouring counties of Surdulitsa, Babushnitsa and Pirot. Thus, by dividing the Bulgarian population into five parts, its compactness is broken down. Artificial internal confrontation among it is created by ensuring better living conditions for the population in the neighbouring Serbian counties and thus the attitude is formed that “it is better the Serbs to govern us”. The remnants from the Bosilegrad and Tsaribrod counties remain economically the most backward in the whole of Serbia with exceptionally bad road network and primitive living conditions.

### **2.2. Education**

Between 1960 and 1987, the Bulgarian language is gradually excluded from the Bulgarian schools. At present, it is taught as “a foreign language” only 2-3 hours per week while the Serbian language is taught as a “mother language” 4-5 hours weekly depending on classes. All other subjects are taught in the Serbian language. Textbooks are also in Serbian. Bulgarian national history and culture is not taught. The pupils are educated in the spirit of Great Serbian nationalism and national dislike of Bulgaria. The Bulgarians in the inland areas of Serbia (Surdulitsa, Vranja, Pirot, Nis, Belgrade etc.) do not have any possibilities to study Bulgarian language and culture.

The Yugoslav Constitution and legislation allows minorities to be taught in their mother language if at least 15 parents are willing. However in an environment of national intolerance and xenophobia, in the absence of rule of law and serious protection of human and minorities rights, it was almost impossible to express such willingness. A separate problem is that in Serbia still there are not any textbooks in the Bulgarian language. Even greater problem is that the return of Bulgarian language at schools after the changes of October 5, 2000 and the fall of Milosevic’s regime still encounters strong opposition both from the government as well as from the parents

and teachers. This means that the yearlong applying of the so-called “bilingual” model has managed to create certain type of dual personalities who hardly cope with the new requirements for full observation of minorities’ rights.

In the beginning of the 2006/2007 school year, with the joint efforts of the Bulgarian organisations in the Western Neighbourhoods and a group of parents, with the support of the Bulgarian diplomacy, a school class was formed up in Bosilegrad. In it, 11 first-grade pupils are fully taught in Bulgarian with textbooks, imported from Bulgaria. All other pupils are taught in the Serbian language. In practice, this class serves the interests of the Serbian foreign policy before the international community, by proclaiming that Serbia is a democratic country, which observes the minorities’ rights. However locally it endangers to divide and oppose the children as “pro-Bulgarian” and “pro-Serbian” oriented.

With Decree No. 103 of 1993, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria covers the scholarship of 32-34 students from Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad counties. Moreover, the academic councils of the Sofia, South West and Veliko Turnovo Universities provide scholarships for more students from the Western Neighbourhoods so that the majority of those who are willing to study go to Bulgarian universities. Separately, the professional secondary schools in Kyustendil and Dupnitsa find ways to educate children from Bosilegrad.

### **2.3. Information**

The weekly newspaper “Bratstvo” (Brotherhood), the magazine “Most” (Bridge) and the children newspaper “Drugarče” (Little friend) are published. The radio and TV broadcasts in Bulgarian on Radio Television Serbia are shortened. There is a local radio in Bosilegrad, Surdulitsa and Tzaribrod counties, which is partly broadcasting in the Bulgarian language. These are financed by the Serbian Skupshtina (Parliament) and represent transmission of the state media’s official policy. There are other printed media. Among these during the past few years the magazine “Bulletin” of the Cultural and Information Centre of the Bulgarian minority “Tzaribrod” in Bosilegrad has been gaining popularity with its criticism of the Serbian government.

The Bulgarian TV programmes are increasingly reaching the Bulgarian minority in Serbia thanks to the emergence of satellite and private cable TVs, but in general terms information provided to the Bulgarian minority is inadequate, insufficient, one-sided and biased.

After the changes of October 5 still there is not readiness the media professionally to inform in the Bulgarian language. Particular problem is that there is no professional information, which is an essential prerequisite for the democratisation of counties with Bulgarian population.

### **2.4. Cultural life**

The county community cultural centres are the major bearers of cultural life in Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad. Until October 5, they were exclusively dealing with representing and spreading Serbian culture among the Bulgarians. Thus the Serbian culture was used as an instrument for building Serbian national self-esteem among the Bulgarians. As a form of resistance, with the support of the Bulgarian government of Ivan Kostov, the citizens association Cultural and Information Centre “Tzaribrod” was established in 1997-98 in Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad. Its main activity is to represent and develop Bulgarian culture among the Bulgarian minority. This association faced great difficulties, created by the Serbian authorities, but the Bulgarian cultural programmes that it offers enjoy the population’s warm reception. Thus gradually the CIC “Tzaribrod” is establishing itself as the cultural centre of the Bulgarians in Tzaribrod and Bosilegrad thanks to the support of Sofia City Municipality, partially of the State Agency for the Bulgarians Living Abroad and a number of cultural activists and figures in Bulgaria. In order to create cultural prerequisites for the democratisation and liberation of the Bulgarian minority from the ideological and nationalistic paradigms, it is necessary the cultural life of the Bulgarian minority to be elevated at a qualitatively higher level.

## **2.5. Religion**

The Bulgarian minority has 45 churches and two Bulgarian priests. There is certain positive development in church services in the Bulgarian language in Bosilegrad. The Serbian Orthodox Church didn't permit two young Bulgarian priests from Dimitrovgrad, who graduated in Bulgaria, to serve in their native town. Another young Bulgarian from Bosilegrad left the Sofia Theological Seminary and went to study in Serbia. Compared to other minorities in Serbia, the position of the Bulgarian minority in the field of religion is much worse.

## **2.6. Cultural monuments**

All monuments of the times of the Bulgarian national history prior to 1920 are either destroyed or ruined by time. Some churches and monasteries were demolished, others have been lime-coated to make Bulgarian inscriptions invisible, and third, by scientific forgery, are represented as Serbian. In Dimitrovgrad, the Bulgarian military cemetery, together with the Monument of the Bulgarian Soldier, were demolished. The shrine monument of 1887, erected in commemoration of the victims of the Serbian-Bulgarian war of 1885, is also in ruins. This monument was partially rebuilt in 2005, but its initial look was changed. The monument of Kunyo Doshev, the Bulgarian soldier, who defended Bosilegrad against the Serbs in 1913, has disappeared. The newer tombstones are bearing exclusively Serbian inscriptions. Thanks to CIC "Tzaribrod's" efforts and Bulgarian NGO support the first Bulgarian monument of Vassil Levski was erected in 2004 in Bosilegrad – symbol of Bulgaria's Liberation from the Turkish yoke. The church "St. Spas" in the village of Dolna Lyubata was partially reconstructed in 2006. One of the biggest and most beautiful churches, "St. Trinity" in the village of Izvor, Bosilegrad county, and the first cell school dating back from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are collapsing, and so are the churches from the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the villages of Bozhitsa and Palya.

## **2.7. Health care**

The counties of Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad have only first aid hospitals and do not have maternity clinics. Gravely ill, women in childbirth and patients in need of specialised medical help in Bosilegrad have to be transported across the mountain Vlasina to the nearest town of Surdulitsa, which is 70 kilometres away. In wintertime this is often fatal for the ill. The children are born in the neighbouring counties of Surdulitsa and Pirot where they are registered in the books as "Serbians". Irregular suffix is added to the women's names, "-v" and not "-va", which creates conditions for easier suffixing of "-ich", thus differentiating the Bulgarian women in Serbia and these in Bulgaria.

## **2.8. Administrative usage of the Bulgarian language**

The Bulgarian language is not used in government bodies and authorities. Cases of dismantling of bilingual company names become random, as well as changing the Bulgarian names of streets, towns, settlements and localities. Bilingual documents, certificates, diplomas, subpoenas etc. are not issued.

The first precedence of court jurisdiction procedures in Bosilegrad and Sudulitsa in the Bulgarian language took place in 2005-2006.

## **2.9. Economy**

In economic respect, the Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad counties are among the last five of the most backward counties in Serbia. There are two main reasons for this. The first one is that these regions are geographically directed towards the Bulgarian roads and markets and the border terminates all opportunities for normal economic cooperation. The second one is that Serbia

intentionally has not made any investments in these counties. This has encouraged migration towards Serbian inland territory where migrants were more easily assimilated. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the economic position of the Bulgarian minority drastically worsened. Unemployment reaches 80% and salaries are among the lowest in Serbia. Unemployed and elderly people's position is exceptionally hard.

In an environment of market economy and economic reform substantiated by the common strive towards integration with the EU, the Western Neighbourhoods fall in even more difficult position, mostly because of the fact that market logic requires economic cooperation with Bulgaria. However, there is no political will for this. Moreover, Serbian investors lose economic interest to invest in the Western Neighbourhoods because of their distance from the Serbian market centres, main highways and railroads. Another problem is that the customs office close to Bosilegrad has not been registered for heavy truck traffic.

### **2.10. Election system**

The Bulgarian minority is divided into two election colleges. In these colleges, the Bulgarians represent only 4% and 7% from the voters respectively. In this way, they cannot elect their own representative at free democratic elections to protect and defend their interests in Parliament. After the new Constitution was voted, the number of applications for registration of political parties of the national minorities, requiring court legalisation, dropped to 3 000. This, taking into consideration the present distribution of forces, will again be insufficient to elect an MP at the Serbian Parliament.

During the past few years a sharp change in the national composition of police and border police in the counties with Bulgarian population could be noticed. More than 90% are Serbs.

After voting the Law on National Minorities in the ex-Union Republic of Yugoslavia, the so-called national Council of the Bulgarian Minority was created. It was elected by persons appointed among the staff of the Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad municipal councillors, representatives of public and political parties and candidate representatives against 100 signatures. Thus this Council was again composed from the old communist nomenclature. The representatives of the young nationally thinking intelligentsia preferred to remain outside this Council. The chairpersons of the National councils of all minorities in Serbia comprise the so-called National Minorities Union Council. It is headed by the Serbian Prime Minister. Thus the National council of minorities, instead of representing minorities' interests before the Serbian government, turned into its body through which it conducts its policy towards the minorities. An evidence for this is the considerable funding that the Serbian government allocates for the work of the National councils' offices. In this way it creates strong minority bureaucracy, subordinated to Belgrade.

The Minority councils alone have only consultative rights in the Serbian administration, but nevertheless try to play the leading role at all levels inside the minorities themselves.

### **2.11. Scientific forgery**

Since mid-1990ies, the "scientific" thesis has been launched among the Serbian academic circles that there are no Bulgarians in Serbia but rather "shoppes" and "gorlaks" who live in Stara Planina (the Balkan mountain range) area and Sichevats in Serbia somewhere behind Sofia in Bulgaria. Several books were published on the topic and the creation of "shoppe" dictionary began. The purpose was by the combination of Serbian and Bulgarian Southwest dialects to create an artificial language with Serbian grammar for this artificially created "nation". Moreover, even books by some Bulgarian writers were translated into this "language". This had to be the final phase of the Bulgarian minority assimilation and pretending for a "Serbian minority" in Bulgaria and conquering new Bulgarian territories. It was only the overall crisis of the Serbian nationalism and the sharp reaction of the Bulgarian diplomacy and public that prevented this

undertaking. Otherwise, the official Serbian history states that the Western Neighbourhoods were “liberated” in 1920.

### **2.12. Political life**

The Bulgarian counties in the Western Neighbourhoods have always been ruled by the political parties in power in Belgrade. There has been some opposition, but it has never been able to threaten the ruling party’s monopoly. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the first heralds of democratisation, the Bulgarian minority created its political organisation: Democratic Union of Bulgarians in Yugoslavia (DUBY). This party’s political programme was based upon the Yugoslavian and Serbian Constitution and on the international documents on human and minorities rights. The programme was fully targeted towards preservation of the national and cultural identity and creating conditions for comprehensive material, cultural and democratic development. This caused both the authorities’ and the Serbian opposition’s furious reaction. DUBY was attacked as a separatist organisation that wants to annex this area to Bulgaria. This party’s activists have constantly been subjected to prosecution and the party’s leader Marko Shukarev was among the few who were arrested and imprisoned during Milosevic’s regime. Since then until present, DUBY has always been on the defence, forced to fight for its right to existence and constantly threatened by coups and banning. There was not a single Serbian party to support it even on purely principle considerations in the struggle for elementary human rights.

In the euphoria after October 5, 2001, municipal councils of tens of Serbian political parties were established. They displaced DUBY from its natural environment and temporarily imposed their “democratic”, “civil”, “liberal” and other concepts for resolving the Bulgarian minority issues. The local councils of the Serbian democratic parties in Bosilegrad and Tzaribrod in the very beginning positioned themselves as Serbian parties among the Serbian population. Many Bulgarians, tempted by new sinecure posts in the power system, began to join Serbian parties. DUBY again was left alone to defend the interests of the minority, but this time from the assaults of the still not yet finally defined Serbian democracy. DUBY was again isolated as a “nationalistic” and “extremist” party and other political concepts, coming from Belgrade, were imposed on the minority. Under their influence, the so-called Liberal concept on minority rights was imposed, according to which the right to national self-identification is a personal right as are for instance the religious and political rights and freedoms. Thus the collective concept for observing collective rights and freedoms with view of specific historic, geographic, economic, cultural and other particularities of the Western Neighbourhoods were neglected. This could be materialised only in an environment of political autonomy and decentralisation of power, as is the practice in the developed European countries. Five years later results show that the democratic Serbian authorities in fact have continued old politics with new tools.

### **2.13. Bulgarian citizenship**

After 1990, the interest among the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods to acquire Bulgarian citizenship has been constantly growing. According to the State Agency for the Bulgarians Abroad, 141 Serbian citizens have been granted Bulgarian citizenship during the past six years. The Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods are indignant because of the slow procedure for acquiring certificates for Bulgarian origin, which are issued by the SABA as well as because of the slow procedure for granting Bulgarian citizenship that can take more than two years.

We consider that with respect to the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods the practice of regaining Bulgarian citizenship should be applied, because this matter concerns territories that have been ripped apart from Bulgaria’s territory and citizens who have not been deprived of Bulgarian citizenship by any law.

### 3.1. CONCLUSION

Considering all the above, the conclusion could be drawn up that the problems of the Bulgarian minority are rather serious and are part of the state crisis that has brought to Yugoslavia's disintegration. At the time of the all-round nationalistic hysteria and civil war in Yugoslavia, the Bulgarian minority succeeded to preserve peace in this region. This also contributed to facilitate Bulgarian transition period and the country's accession to the EU. We expect this to be appreciated by the factors, responsible for the solution of the Yugoslav crisis. It could be too dangerous if contrary to the other minorities who used violence as an instrument of political struggle to achieve their goals and we who used civilised instruments do not achieve anything. This would mean promotion of violence as an instrument for reaching political goals.

The status of the Bulgarian minority civil rights should be a factor to determine the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relationships. Regrettably, the Bulgarian governments do not give up ideological slogans such as "Bulgarian minority as a bridge for cooperation" in both countries. In practice, this leads to sacrificing the minority's interests for the sake of good Bulgaria-Serbian relationships.

The Bulgarian minority is among the most oppressed in Yugoslavia. Thus far it has been stating minimum political requirements, related to preserving its national and cultural identity and normal economic, cultural and democratic development.

The Bulgarians have been insisting only on democratic solution of their problems with democratic means, but this doesn't depend only on them. In Serbia, they couldn't find interlocutors to discuss this theme. Both the ruling parties as well as the majority of the Serbian nationalistic opposition have the same intolerant attitude towards minorities and most probably it will take still longer time until the Serbian people overcome chauvinism that for many years has been developed among them.

After the fall of the Milosevic regime, some worrying tendencies could be noticed among the democratic Serbian governments continuing his policy. Unfortunately there are not any signs of rethinking the Serbian national doctrine, whose victims are also the Bulgarians from the Western Neighbourhoods.

Under such conditions and environment, Montenegro separated as an independent state. The Kosovo region is outlining as an independent state too, and the Sandjak and Voyvodina regions – as autonomous regions.

The expectations that sooner or later Belgrade will be forced to take into account the international standards for human and minority rights are very probable, but still not realistic with view of the strong Great Serbian nationalistic attitudes.

What is the future of the Bulgarian minority in the Western Neighbourhoods in present-day conditions?

If the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia has remained intact, the Bulgarian minority would need autonomous political status to guarantee its national and cultural identity and normal conditions for its comprehensive spiritual, political and economic development. It is well known that the Western Neighbourhoods and particularly the Bosilegrad district have been artificially acceded to Serbia because of asynchronous military-political and military-strategic considerations. In a normal environment of democracy and market economy they are doomed to inevitable economic perishing, if again no conditions are created for free economic ties with Bulgaria towards which the Western Neighbourhoods are turned due to their geographical position. They are naturally directed towards the Bulgarian market centres and roads. Moreover, market laws do not accept artificial political borders. In the market economy that Serbia is developing, Serbia already is losing and will continue to lose economic interest to invest in our regions because of the great distance from the Serbian market centres and highways. In such case

it could be expected the Bulgarian minority either to perish completely or to turn into a new crisis point on the Balkans.

That is why today, when it is obvious that Yugoslavia has completely disintegrated and that the Great Serbian concepts for the creation of Great Serbia by occupation of foreign territories and assimilation of foreign population have suffered historical defeat, the issue with the future of the Bulgarian population in the Western Neighbourhoods becomes again very pressing and urgent.

On the grounds of the historical principles that the forcedly created countries on foreign territories and with foreign population in an environment of freedom and democracy collapse and disintegrate, as well as that the forcedly divided people insist to unite, and also having into consideration the new realities resulting from Bulgaria's membership in the EU and the need for Serbia's integration with the EU, the following possible solutions could be outlined:

1.If the Great Powers and most of all Bulgaria decide that the Bulgarian minority should remain in Serbia, then it should be guaranteed broad political autonomy with three level authority bodies over which Belgrade to transfer part of the legislative and executive power. Thus the Bulgarian minority with the support of Bulgaria, Serbia and the international community and with the relevant constitutional and legislative mechanisms will be able to assume responsibility for its economic, political and cultural development.

2.With view of the fact that after the separation of Montenegro, Yugoslavia, as a country-signatory of the Neuilly treaty, already doesn't exist, the Neuilly Peace Treaty should be revised and the Bulgarian government may request to return the Western Neighbourhoods.

3.After Yugoslavia's disintegration, Serbia cannot be the only heir of the Western Neighbourhoods, because the other countries, created on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia also have such rights. The Bulgarian government may require a special statute (condominium), i.e. joint governance of the Western Neighbourhoods by the governments of the ex-Yugoslav republics, which are the lawful heirs of Yugoslavia. This is also one of the ways for permanent solution and improvement of the position and status of the Bulgarian minority in the Western Neighbourhoods.

The protection of the rights of the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods is not only an issue of national interest. This is also a matter of national honour and moral obligation for Bulgaria. The Western Neighbourhoods are the dear price paid for Bulgaria's independence in 1919 in Neuilly. Bulgaria must not forget that the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods have made their contribution for building free and independent Bulgaria. The citizens of Bosilegrad alone within Thirteenth Rila Infantry Squad gave more than 410 victims for Bulgaria's freedom during WW1 and the Inter-Allies War. For eight decades now the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods are the hostages for Bulgaria's freedom and independence.

If Serbia was ready to face the challenges of democracy and recognise in practice the minority rights, it wouldn't form Serbian parties in Bosilegrad and Tzaribrod by which to dilute the problems with cheap rhetoric. Rather, Serbia would leave the Bulgarian minority alone to define its goals and interests within the system's framework and alone to perform them. But instead of respecting the minority's authentic political will, the Serbian authorities use the form of democracy to impose their will.

The Bulgarian minority issues within Yugoslavia can be resolved only if it is guaranteed autonomous political status, within which frameworks, the minority itself to assume responsibilities for the execution of its rights and simultaneously to have its own government body (ombudsman) to monitor their application. This means that it is not enough the minority rights to be recognised only declaratively, but also to create efficient political and legal mechanism for their implementation.

The fall of communism in Bosilegrad and Tzaribrod and DOS coming to power brought new problems. Minority problems were not practically touched. That is why the gap between DUBY and the other parties from DOS is widening. DUBY was included in the municipal authorities in



Bosilgrad and Tzaribrod, bribed with political compromises and posts in the municipal councils and the National council. Thus it lost its political image. It assumed the responsibility for corruption and plotting, which surprisingly spread among the new “democratic” parties as they used the civil society rhetoric for their personal goals and interests. These new parties with 10-12 members use political power to take leadership posts and to fix their personal problems. The ideals for a free and democratic society have already disappeared. Freedom turns into abuse of freedom and already nobody thinks about building society’s democratic structure, freedom of the media, human rights and democratic culture as a way of thinking and behaviour.

On the other side, resolving ethnic problems and strict observance of international minority rights standards is one of the conditions that the international community poses before Yugoslavia for the country’s reintegration in international forums. Without them, there is no way out of the present economic crisis. Minority rights observance turns into Number One national interest. This necessitates radical change of the policy towards national minorities. The policy of minorities’ national assimilation must not only be abandoned and reprimanded; rather the consequences that it left in the people’s consciousness and mentality should be healed.

Practice shows that Serbia is still relying on the ex communist officials and national traitors of the Bulgarian cause. A sharp turn is necessary as well as to decisively break apart from the past and the personalities that personalise it. This is the road to the spiritual catharsis of the Serbian nation and national appeasement with the other peoples, minorities and ethnic communities.

It is expected from Bulgaria to exhibit much more serious statesmanship attitude on the Western Neighbourhoods issue. The country must impose solution, leading to a radical change of the status of the Bulgarian population in the Western Neighbourhoods, which to guarantee its survival and creation of conditions for normal life. The timid policy during long decades and subordination of the Bulgarian minority’s interests for the sake of ideological slogans such as “fraternity”, “Slavish”, “good-neighbourliness” and “bridge of cooperation” with Serbia, which in its essence is oppressor and occupant of the Bulgarian minority, led to the Bulgarian minority’s disappointment, bitterness and hesitation towards Bulgaria as a motherland country - defender of its rights and interests.

Bulgaria’s EU membership brings new temptations for the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods. They remain on EU external border and all limitations for entering into the EU will be applied to them (visa regime, limitations on imports and exports, etc.). As the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods were able even during totalitarian regimes to freely cross the border, it is expected their position after Bulgaria’s EU accession sharply to deteriorate and further complicate. The opening of a Bulgarian Consulate in the town of Nis cannot considerably facilitate the visa procedure because Nis is 180 km away from Bosilegrad.

#### **4.1.PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTIONS**

With respect to the Bulgarian minority in the Western Neighbourhoods, the Bulgarian foreign policy must have clearly defined long-term and short-term strategic goals. The long-term goals should target the ultimate objective of the Bulgarian policy towards the Western Neighbourhoods, coordinated with the international efforts for resolving the crisis in the ex-Yugoslavian countries. The short-term goals should be directed towards preserving the national identity of the Bulgarians and creation of normal living conditions for them.

The short-term goals should target:

- A) Teaching Bulgarian language and history at schools;
- B) Preserving the Bulgarian cultural heritage and development of the Bulgarian culture;
- C) Human rights protection and particularly minority rights;

- D) Rebuilding the economy in the Bosilegrad and Tzaribrod regions in the context of the European integration processes by establishment of the so-called Euro-regions and linking them with the Bulgarian and European markets;
- E) Facilitating the procedure for granting Bulgarian citizenship (restoring);
- F) Continuation of the policy of admission of pupils and students to professional high school and universities;
- G) Development of regional cooperation with neighbouring Bulgarian counties;
- H) Financing NGO projects for democratic and civil society development.

Such short-term goals should lead to the preservation of the Bulgarian national identity of the Bulgarians in the Western Neighbourhoods, creating conditions for their overall economic, political and cultural development and the Western Neighbourhoods' natural economic integration in the region.

In the longer-term perspective, the Bulgarian diplomacy should have strategic goals for uniting the Bulgarian minority in the Western Neighbourhoods with the Bulgarian cultural, economic and stately area.

