

# The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion Of Turks From Communist Bulgaria: A Tragic Incident Revisited

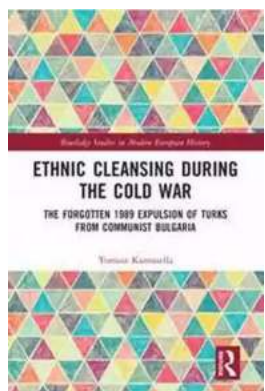


The year 1989 marked a turning point in the history of Bulgaria, particularly for the Turkish minority living within the borders of the communist regime. This

forgotten chapter in history, known as the expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria, reshaped the lives of thousands of individuals and families, leaving a lasting socio-political impact on the country. In this article, we will delve into the historical context, events leading up to the expulsion, its aftermath, and the current state of remembrance and reconciliation.

## The Historical Context: Tensions and Discrimination

To understand the expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria, we must first explore the historical context that led to such a tragic incident. The relationship between the Bulgarian government and the Turkish minority had been tense for years, with discriminatory policies becoming more prominent from the late 1800s.



### Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria (Routledge Studies in Modern European History Book 57)

by Esther Girsberger(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

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The Bulgarian government aimed to assimilate the Turkish minority and suppress their cultural and religious identity, resulting in restricted access to education, employment opportunities, and rights to practice their faith freely. The tension

reached its peak in the late 20th century, exacerbated by political shifts and increasing nationalism.

## **The Expulsion: Triggers and Mass Departures**

In 1989, the Bulgarian government implemented a new policy requiring all Turkish citizens to adopt Bulgarian names, effectively erasing their Turkish heritage. This act sparked widespread protests within the Turkish community and ignited a series of violent clashes between the authorities and the protesters.

As tensions escalated, the Bulgarian government authorized a forced expulsion of Turks from the country. Under the guise of voluntary departure, thousands of Turks were forcefully expelled or coerced to leave Bulgaria, leaving behind their homes, possessions, and even family members.

The mass departures were chaotic and heartbreaking. Families were torn apart, as parents were forced to leave their children behind or separate from them due to age restrictions. Turkish houses were looted and destroyed, and entire villages were left desolate as the population was forcibly removed.

## **The Aftermath: Human Rights Advocacy and Shifting Politics**

The expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria sparked international outrage and condemnation. Human rights organizations and foreign governments criticized the Bulgarian government's actions, emphasizing the violation of basic human rights and ethnic discrimination.

The incident triggered a series of diplomatic consequences, with many countries imposing economic sanctions and travel restrictions on Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government, under mounting international pressure, gradually started to review

its policies regarding the Turkish minority and promised reforms to address the injustices committed.

Over time, Bulgaria transitioned from communism to democracy, and the plight of the expelled Turks gained more acknowledgment within the country. The Bulgarian authorities introduced legal measures to compensate the affected individuals and facilitate their return. Today, many Turkish-Bulgarians have reclaimed their citizenship and rebuilt their lives in Bulgaria.

## **Remembering and Reconciliation: Challenges and Progress**

However, the expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria remains a contentious topic in the country's collective memory. While some acknowledge the historical injustices and aim for reconciliation, others downplay or question the significance of this tragic event.

The younger generation, who have grown up in a democratic Bulgaria, have limited knowledge about the expulsion and its consequences. Education and formal remembrance efforts have been lacking, leaving many unaware or misinformed about this chapter in their history.

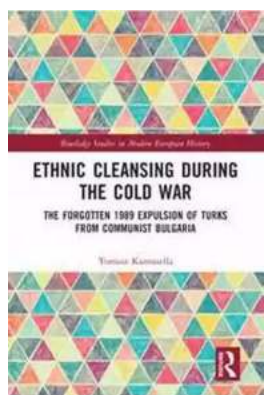
Nonetheless, there have been significant initiatives aimed at remembrance and reconciliation. Civil society organizations advocating for human rights have pushed for public debates, exhibitions, and educational programs to raise awareness about the expulsion. These efforts aim to foster dialogue and inclusion, ensuring that the tragic incident does not fade into oblivion but serves as a lesson for the future.

## **: A Step Towards Healing**

The 1989 expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria stands as a testament to the injustices committed against the Turkish minority during the communist regime. It serves as a painful reminder of the consequences of discrimination and oppressive policies.

While the country has made progress in acknowledging and addressing this tragic event, there is still much work to be done. Remembering the past and actively working towards reconciliation will ensure that the victims of the expulsion are not forgotten and that similar injustices are prevented in the future.

By shedding light on this forgotten chapter in Bulgarian history, we hope to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and recognition of the suffering endured by the Turkish minority. Only through education, remembrance, and empathy can we truly move towards healing and a more inclusive society for all.



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In mid-1989, the Bulgarian communist regime seeking to prop up its legitimacy played the ethnonational card by expelling 360,000 Turks and Muslims across the Iron Curtain to neighboring Turkey. It was the single largest ethnic cleansing during the Cold War in Europe after the wrapping up of the postwar expulsions ('population transfers') of ethnic Germans from Central Europe in the latter half of the 1940s. Furthermore, this expulsion of Turks and Muslims from Bulgaria was the sole unilateral act of ethnic cleansing that breached the Iron Curtain. The 1989 ethnic cleansing was followed by an unprecedented return of almost half of the expellees, after the collapse of the Bulgarian communist regime. The return, which partially reversed the effects of this ethnic cleansing, was the first-ever of its kind in history. Despite the unprecedented character of this 1989 expulsion and the subsequent return, not a single research article, let alone a monograph, has been devoted to these momentous developments yet. However, the tragic events shape today's Bulgaria, while the persisting attempts to suppress the remembrance of the 1989 expulsion continue sharply dividing the country's inhabitants. Without remembering about this ethnic cleansing it is impossible to explain the fall of the communist system in Bulgaria and the origins of ethnic cleansing during the Yugoslav wars. Faltering Yugoslavia's future ethnic cleansers took a good note that neither Moscow nor Washington intervened in neighboring Bulgaria to stop the 1989 expulsion, which in light of international law was then still the legal instrument of 'population transfer.' The as yet unhealed wound of the 1989 ethnic cleansing negatively affects the Bulgaria's relations with Turkey and the European Union. It seems that the only way out of this debilitating conundrum is establishing a truth and reconciliation commission that at long last would ensure transitional justice for all Bulgarians irrespective of language, religion or ethnicity.



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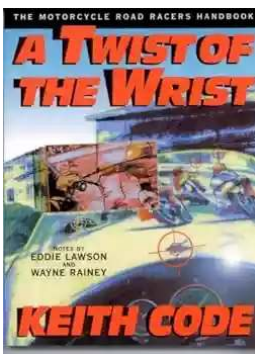
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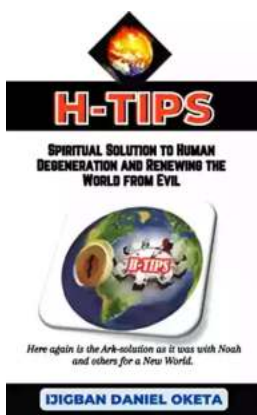
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