

correlate ethnic structures throughout the entire period, regardless of the different methodological approaches used in the censuses, and enabling us to analyze the processes of change in these structures on a strict scientific basis.

Correct assessment of the different stages, which the formation and the development of the different ethnic groups in Bulgaria has passed through, is the first step in conducting a modern state policy toward those groups, which will also contribute to a natural and full integration, in particular of the Roma, into the composition of the Bulgarian nation, as a distinctive ethnic community, with equal rights, with its own specific ethno-cultural group characteristics.

Clarification of the conceptual-terminological apparatus is one of the important methodological problems related to the study of ethnic groups. For the purposes of the current study, the main attention is devoted to the concepts of "ethnic group" and "national minority", as well as to the particularities in the formation, development and the characteristic signs of the Roma ethnic group.

The term „ethnic group" denotes part of a given ethnicity, which lives in the territory of another state, surrounded by other ethnicities or lives dispersed among them, featuring a lot of specific elements of the culture, language, unitary ethnic consciousness of the individuals. The people, who form ethnic groups, are usually bilingual and even multilingual. An ethnic group should be studied historically because of the dynamics of its development.

As of today, there is no definition for „national minority" adopted in the international and Bulgarian legislation. However, that term is used in various international documents, such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. In Bulgaria the constitutional court came with a decision, that the term is conventional, i.e. not a legal term, hence lacking a clear legal definition and scope of application.

In the current study, major signs of ethnicity (such as culture, language, religion, common origin, common territory, ethnic consciousness, etc.) are taken into consideration and analyzed, refracted through the specific nature of the Roma ethnicity. Nevertheless, it has been noted in conclusion, that none of the features should be absolutized, for there is no exact rule of defining an ethnic group. Therefore, the implementation of an integrated approach towards exploring problems of this kind seems most logical. This means that when characterizing an ethnos, its features should be regarded as a complex. It should be noted that each of the ethnic features taken into consideration in the study, is not specific to just one ethnicity only. Furthermore, the nature of each ethnos is formed not by some single component, but is composed as a combination of inherent objective characteristics. That does not mean that the ethnos is represented by some mechanical assembly of features; it is a whole entity, where certain components play the role of system-creating elements. In some cases, such role is played by the language, in others - by cultural characteristics, etc. In the investigated Roma ethnicity, a leading, unifying element is the nature of behavior, culture, the common historical destiny, the attitude of surrounding society toward Roma groups. These elements played the role of a strong consolidating factor, regardless of the lack of some of the basic features of the ethnic communities. Ethnic features are not permanent