

A Mother's Experience in Bulgaria

Description

The ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria had faced discrimination throughout Bulgaria's history. In May 1989, throughout the Turkish areas of Bulgaria, there were a series of peaceful demonstrations staged by the Turkish minority; in some cases, entire villages joined the protests. They protested for the rights to have their Turkish names restored, or to be able to receive an education free from discrimination. While each of these protests was quickly ended with police force and promises of improved rights, in the weeks that followed thousands of Turks were arrested and expelled from Bulgaria. In this account, a mother of two recounts her story of being forced to abandon her children in Bulgaria as a result of her expulsion. By October 1989, more than 300,000 Bulgarian Turks were forced to leave their country, bringing increasing international pressure on the Bulgarian government for its ongoing human rights' violations.

Source

Emine Erkan, interview by Ted Zang, Istanbul (June 8, 1989), "Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks," Helsinki Watch Report, October 1989, Human Rights Watch, HRW (accessed June 25, 2008).

Primary Source—Excerpt

Testimony of Emine Erkan

Emine Erkan, a middle-aged widow with two children and a member of the Society for the Protection of Human Rights, was expelled on June 5 after she refused to spy on fellow Turks for the police. At the end of May, she was summoned to the police station in Harmanli and was accused of organizing demonstrations. The police asked her to be a spy for them. They wanted her to go to ethnic Turks' homes, drink coffee or tea with them, and gather information. Mrs. Erkan refused, so the police took her to another room where a large man wearing a mask punched her. Then the police told her that she would be expelled. She had never applied to emigrate. She asked whether her two children could go with her. The police said they could not. On June 5, at 5 p.m., Mrs. Erkan was given a passport and was told that she had two hours to board a train for Turkey. She quickly threw some belongings into a small duffel bag, took her purse and went to the station. She has no relatives in Turkey. (Interview in Istanbul, June 6, 1989).

How to Cite this Source

Ted Zang, "A Mother's Experience in Bulgaria," Making the History of 1989, Item #321, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/321> (accessed December 16 2014, 8:28 am).

Associated Files

Emine Erkan.pdf