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## ISLAM AND POLITICS: THE CASE OF BULGARIA

Scholarly interest in the Muslim peoples in Europe is growing.<sup>1</sup> The debate continues on whether Muslims should be granted special privileges in European countries due to their faith while their national identity and culture are depreciated, or whether followers of Islam should be allowed to live according to their own rules and that society at large should accept it in accordance with the Western principle of tolerance. And if so, what would be the consequences of this?

This article presents the status and history of Muslims in Bulgaria after the Second World War and the policy of the Bulgarian state after it joined the European Union.<sup>2</sup> It examines a post-communist state which is adjusting its legal norms to European standards.

While the predominant religion in Bulgaria is that of the Orthodox Church, there is a small Catholic population and also national minorities who are Muslims: Turks, Roma, Pomaks, and Tartars who settled in Bulgaria after a few centuries of the Ottoman Empire. Turks mainly inhabit the southern parts of the country close to the Turkish border (Eastern Rhodopy, Stranga, where – in the region of Kardzhali – they are in the majority) and north-east Ludogoria, southern Dobrich, Silistra, Shumen, Razgrad. Some Turks also live in the bigger cities such as Sofia, Varna, and Ruse.

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<sup>1</sup> In Polish literature the most well known work is A. Parzymies (ed.), *Muzułmanie w Europie*, Warszawa 2005. See also: M. Żmigrodzki, *Przeobrażenia polityczno-ustrojowe i Sąd Konstytucyjny w Bułgarii*, Lublin 1997, pp. 86–113; E. Znamierowska-Rakk, *Sprawa przesiedlenia obywateli bułgarskich tureckiego pochodzenia do Turcji po drugiej wojnie światowej*, in: *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-radzieckich. Materiały i dokumenty*, Warszawa 1977, Vol. XV; J. Byczkowski, *Mniejszości narodowe w Europie 1945–1974*, Opole 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Szersze ujęcie zagadnienia przedstawione zostało w monografii: S. Kiselinowski, I. Stavovi-Kavka (I. Stawowy-Kawka), *Malcinstva na Balkanot (XX vek)*, Skopje 2004.

The Turkish population at the beginning of the 20th century comprised 9.7% of Bulgaria's inhabitants. It has not changed much since then, despite waves of migration to Turkey. In 1946 there were 675,500 Turks in Bulgaria (9.6 % of the population), in 1956 there were 656,025, in 1965 there were 780,928, in 1975 there were 730,728, and in 1992 there were 800,052 (9.4%).<sup>3</sup>

Some legislative acts that dealt with Muslims' rights were passed at the turn of the 20th century. Under the Congress of Berlin (1878) Bulgaria had to grant national minorities religious freedom and equality. After Bulgaria regained its sovereignty this policy was followed by a protocol with Turkey signed in April 1909 by which Sofia committed itself to guaranteeing religious freedom to minorities and to treating national minorities on an equal basis with Bulgarians. The 1913 convention on muftis that contained regulations concerning the religious administration of the Muslim minority is to a large extent still applied today. The Mufti, who acts as head of the Church and is elected by his followers, needs to acquire the permission of the Bulgarian government before his appointment. Similar regulations were applied after the Balkan wars on 20 August 1913 and also included in the Treaty of Neuilly and Lausanne.

Turkey was particularly interested in guaranteeing Muslims' rights in Bulgaria. In 1925<sup>4</sup> it signed a convention which caused the mass migration of Turks and Pomaks in the years 1927, 1933, and 1935.<sup>5</sup> The treaty of friendship between Bulgaria and Turkey that was signed in October 1925 secured assistance and protection for Turks living in Bulgaria. It has not always been profitable, since a bigger influence on the Turkish minority was exerted by Kemal's state, not only in religious matters but also in administrative and legal ones.

While analyzing the situation of the status and the rights of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria after the Second World War, we usually present several reasons for the Bulgarian authorities' policy. Bulgarian researchers most often emphasise the following facts:

1. Islam was an alien religion, imposed on Bulgarians by force;

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<sup>3</sup> Nacionalen statistički institut, *Prebrojavane na naselenieto, rziliszcznija fond i zemedelskite stopanstva prez 2001, Izvadkovi izsledvanija*, Sofija 2002, Vol. 6, kniga 1, s. 55, 56.

<sup>4</sup> This was a consequence of the treaty of friendship signed between the two countries in October 1925. See M. Żmigrodzki, *Mniejszości narodowe...*, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Muzułmanie w Europie...*, *op. cit.*, s. 58.

2. Before Bulgaria regained independence<sup>6</sup> in 1878, Islam played a negative role, hindering the development of Bulgarian culture for centuries;
3. Since Bulgaria's independence foreign, reactionary factors from outside (that is, from Turkey) used Islam in Bulgaria to promote nationalism and religious fanaticism among Muslims in the country;
4. Islam was an obstacle in the process of integrating the Muslims and Bulgarians into one socialist nation.<sup>7</sup>

According to the nationalist idea, a nation can thrive only within an independent state that comprises all its members. The term "Bulgaria" was used as a synonym of the Bulgarian nation or the state's territory. The continuation of the historic tradition that goes back to medieval times when Bulgaria achieved its highest growth was used as an argument to support the creation of natural borders of the Bulgarian national state. The decision of the San Stefano treaty that ended the Russo-Turkish war (3 March 1878) and the fact that the borders of "Greater Bulgaria" had been erased created a feeling of great injustice among the Bulgarians. This feeling of discontent can be noticed within the works of historians and political scientists. This defensive nationalism based on "an attitude like martyrdom that this nation expressed, isolated and that failed to gain the attention of the world",<sup>8</sup> was a characteristic feature of the whole post-war period. And, as Todorova says, "a large number of texts that were published focused on the problem of a national ideal for which national romanticism was a central point... that looked for a correlation between the nation and the territory; in other words, between the nation and the state".<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after the Second World War, atheistic education and anti-Islamic propaganda were implemented; at the same time, the authorities tried to gain influence in that community, using coercion when necessary. The potential world of Islam was to be replaced by a scientific-atheistic model. It was assumed that such a scenario could be pursued with the help of young intellectuals who were sometimes lost among the Muslim people, and who were supposed to play a historic role in replacing the "superstitions" of the old Muslim ideologists with the scientific ideology

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<sup>6</sup> Formally Bulgaria regained independence in 1908. A Bulgarian Principality dependent on Turkey was created. The southern part of the country, Eastern Rumelia, became an autonomous province within the Ottoman state.

<sup>7</sup> Petya Nitzova, *Islam in Bulgaria: a historical reappraisal*, "Religion, State and Society" 1994, No. 1, Vol. 22, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Todorova, *Language in the Construction of Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Case of Bulgaria*, Berkeley, University of California, Center for German and European Studies, Working Paper 5.5, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

of Marxism-Leninism – the ideology of the Communist Party.<sup>10</sup> At the same time it was emphasized that Turkish national aspirations had to be condemned.

This new situation led to the emigration of Muslims, mainly to Turkey, which was typical of the post-war period. Fear of new political changes<sup>11</sup> led to many Turks deciding to move in order to avoid repression and to improve their situation. The emigration movement increased in 1950, when as many as 250,000 people wanted to leave the country. Ankara ended the mass migration and admitted very few people. Sofia accused Turkey of racism and corruption when it came to deciding who should be granted asylum. The press reported that there were thousands of emigrants waiting at the border. In 1950 the number of expelled Turks was 55,746. Ankara, on the other hand, accused Sofia of sending agents and Roma with the Turks. An agreement was reached in December 1950. Emigrating Turks could keep their property and leave the country using an exit visa. Misunderstandings regarding these issues were, however, still common in the following years. The state border was closed and then reopened again. In the years 1950 and 1951 alone, 150,000 Muslims<sup>12</sup> left Bulgaria for Turkey.

The Bulgarian policy towards the migrants was not stable. In 1948 and 1949 the authorities tried to stop the mass emigration. From July 1949 the Political Bureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) decided not to end the emigration and force the Bulgarians to settle on the territories left by Turks. As early as April 1951, however, a “multination state” became the predominant policy and new attempts were made to reduce migration. This situation lasted until 1956. The 1947 constitution which was then in force guaranteed all national minorities basic rights and freedoms. It was modelled on the Soviet constitution and it enacted the rules of the USSR policy towards national minorities. Besides the constitutional regulations, Bulgaria was obliged to follow the terms of the peace treaty of 10 February 1947 regarding the protection of minorities’ rights on its territory, which included basic rights and freedoms of citizens no matter what their race, language or religion was. Bulgaria also signed the 1948 UN Gen-

<sup>10</sup> Ali Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, London 1997, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Evgenija Kalinova and Iska Baeva, in: *Bylgarskite prehodi 1939–2002*, Sofija 2002, p. 113, emphasize that “Deep socio-economic changes frightened the conservatively minded masses, which viewed with disbelief the alien propaganda about cooperation in agriculture, equality between men and women, atheism and the abandonment of ‘religious fanaticism’ through the ban on reading the Koran”.

<sup>12</sup> These data compare with those cited by Ali Eminov’a, *Turkish...*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

eral Declaration of Human Rights, which regulates the status of national minorities.

At that time a chain of Turkish schools was developing in Bulgaria. In 1952 there were 1020 primary schools with Turkish as their language of instruction, and by 1956 there were already 1149 schools and four Turkish institutes. The Faculty of Oriental Languages at the University of St. Kliment Ochridski in Sofia taught Turkish to provide teachers for these schools. There were Turkish libraries, reading rooms, folk groups; Turks had their own theatres, newspapers and magazines, such as *New Life*, *New Light*, *National Youth*, *The Flag of Communism*, *Fatherland*, *Light*, *Friendship*, *Little Villager*, *Pioneer* and others.<sup>13</sup>

Party ideologists believed that the class interests of workers would overcome their national identity and that they would willingly become Bulgarian socialists. This did not happen. Encouraged to develop their own cultural institutions, even in a socialist context, national minorities managed to strengthen, not weaken, their national identity. The problem became visible in the mid-1950s. The number of Turks was increasing rather than decreasing for Pomaks, Roma, Tartars (followers of Islam) who regarded themselves as being Turks. The authorities realized that a radical change in policy was necessary in order to make Bulgaria a one-nation state.

After 1956 the rights of national minorities became increasingly limited. In October 1958 the Central Committee of the BCP accepted a plan that involved not only intensified ideological work among the Muslim population, but also some changes in the official policy towards the Turkish minority. In the 1958/59 academic year a rule was applied that the language of instruction in all secondary schools had to be solely Bulgarian. This decision was put into practice in the period 1960–1972, when all schools taught only in the Bulgarian language. The publishing of both newspapers and books in Turkish was limited, and in 1960 the Turkish minority was called “Turkish-language Bulgarians”<sup>14</sup> After 1958 Turks were regarded not only as “different” but also as “dangerous”, for the official propaganda claimed that they wanted the land they inhabited to become part of Turkey.

In 1962 the government took steps to prevent the “Turkishisation” of Roma, Pomaks and Tartars. A document was prepared entitled *Putting*

<sup>13</sup> S. Kiselinovski, I. Stavovi-Kavka (I. Stawowy-Kawka), *Malcinstva...*, *op. cit.*, p. 145, 146.

<sup>14</sup> S. Kiselinovski, *Mniejszości narodowe w Bułgarii*, in: “Prace Komisji Środkowo-europejskiej PAU”, J. Machnik, I. Stawowy-Kawka (eds.), Kraków 2005, Vol. XIII, p. 114, 115.

*into practice measures against the Turkish identification of Roma, Pomaks and Tartars,*<sup>15</sup> which presented the methods that would help to eliminate the Turks' influence over these groups. Public pressure was recommended, rather than the use of force. In practice it looked rather different. From 1962 the process of translating names and surnames into Bulgarian among these communities began. Despite the fact that the Politburo of the BCP condemned the use of coercion when implementing this policy, during the period 1971–1973 all Pomaks and Roma were forced to change their names. This action found was confirmed in the new constitution of 1971, which did not mention national minorities. After 1971 the only term used was “Bulgarian citizens (of non-Bulgarian origin)” instead of such terms as “national” or “ethnic minority”. The application of a new constitution meant that the government and party leaders undertook the task of building a nation state with one language, culture and tradition. The concept of a “united socialist nation” appeared in newspapers and the media, and Todor Zhivkov himself declared that the national problem was definitely solved by society itself and that Bulgaria had no internal conflicts that were derived from national minorities. However, these were only declarations.

The emigration of Bulgarian Muslims increased at that time; this was facilitated by Todor Zhivkov's visit to Ankara and the agreement that was reached on 22 March 1968 concerning the relocation of Turks from Bulgaria. In the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s a rise in Muslim fundamentalism could be observed in Bulgaria as in other parts of the world, facilitated by contacts with Turkey and the Islamic world. Nationalist-religious excitement and hostility towards others were especially visible in the country, where Turks possessed financial resources from some ambiguous source that were to be spent mainly on religious activity. The authorities in Sofia responded harshly to this situation. Religious practice had a private character. In spite of actions against religion the state retained about 1400 mosques as well as imams and muezzins. Muslims were led by the great Mufti and twenty-six local muftis.<sup>16</sup> One of the most important commitments of Sofia regarding policy towards minorities was the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and other agreements of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that imposed on the government signatories the obligation to respect fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of consciousness, religion, speech and emigration.

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<sup>15</sup> Ali Eminov, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Muzułmanie w Europie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

By 1973 Pomaks, Roma and Tartars were forced to acquire Bulgarian identity. The Tartars resisted longer than the others; they went through the most difficult period in 1984–1989, when Todor Zhivkov decided that the greatest problem that Bulgaria faced was with the Muslims (who represented 10% of the whole population). 25 December 1984 witnessed the beginning of the process of forced Bulgarization of the Muslim population, who were of mainly Turkish origin. It involved the changing of names and surnames into Bulgarian, a ban on religious practice, the use of Turkish and the cultivation of tradition. The authorities assumed that Turks would react to these practices in a similar way as the Roma and Pomaks, who had not vigorously opposed it,<sup>17</sup> and they therefore undertook a policy of promoting the Bulgarian “national revival”. In the end the use of the Turkish language in public life was banned; there was no Turkish broadcasting on the radio, Turkish newspapers and books were banned, and a prohibition was placed on Turkish being spoken in the street. Zhivkov explained this in the following way: “the annual birth-rate is about 15–16 thousand. If it stays like this in 20 years Bulgaria will turn into another Cyprus. We would welcome the emigration of 200–300,000, even 500,000, but you must understand that in practice we cannot allow this to happen. Turkey is not able to and will not admit these people. This is why a new approach is necessary... I want to, however, express clearly our position: by no means will we regard them as Turks.”<sup>18</sup> According to Iskra Baeva, Mikhail Gorbachev participated in the mediation between the Turkish government of Turguta Özal and Todor Zhivkov. Özal agreed to admit 30,000 Bulgarian Turks every year.<sup>19</sup>

In response to the repressions, the Turks formed illegal organizations. The most well known was the Turkish National Liberation Movement in Bulgaria, led by a philosopher, Medim Doganov (Tur. Ahmed Dogan). In 1990 its name was changed to the Movement for Rights and Freedoms – the DPS (Dvi`enie za prava i svobodi). In 1988 the Association for the Protection of Human Rights was created, whose main goal was the protection of Turks’ rights and freedoms. From 1984–1989 another 28 illegal organizations were discovered by the authorities. Turks also engaged in terrorist attacks, mainly on the railway line between Burgas and Sofia and against railway stations, e.g. in Varna. Innocent people were killed, includ-

<sup>17</sup> Pomaks used double names and surnames, different at home and different in the office.

<sup>18</sup> Iskra Baeva, *Ostatni rok: Bułgaria i kraje bloku sowieckiego w 1989 roku*, “Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2009, Vol. XLIV, p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 209.

ing children. As the daily *Sega* reported<sup>20</sup>, the repressions affected about 10,000 people.

In 1989, when a conference on human rights was taking place in Paris, numerous demonstrations were organized in the country. Attempts were made to suppress them through the use of force, which resulted in casualties and people being injured.<sup>21</sup> On 29 May, in an address on national television, Todor Zhivkov requested that the Turkish government open its borders to their own compatriots, so that every Bulgarian Muslim could leave the country.<sup>22</sup> The politics of forced assimilation and religious intolerance resulted in an exodus of the Turkish population. Within just two to three months 350,000 Bulgarian Turks moved to Turkey, and this mass migration was called “the great excursion”. Turks would sell their land below the market price and emigrate. The relationship between Bulgaria and Ankara became increasingly difficult.<sup>23</sup> On 21 August 1989 Ankara closed Turkish borders, unable to cope with such a huge number of emigrants. About 150,000 people had to return to Bulgaria, and 200,000 stayed in Turkey permanently.<sup>24</sup> The most visible result of the policy of forced Bulgarianization was a growing sense of national and religious separateness as well as a deep economic crisis, especially in agriculture. The government had to call on a “civil mobilization” in June 1989, which involved a twelve-hour working day, mainly in agriculture. Despite these difficulties Sofia did not change its official position, that in Bulgaria there had never been and still was no Turkish national minority. The countries of the Eastern Bloc respected this statement, and the organization in Sofia of the Ecological Forum (15 October–3 November) were regarded as the greatest success of contemporary foreign policy.

The situation of the Muslim minority improved after the collapse of the Zhivkov government. Gradually old names and surnames were restored, religious freedom was guaranteed, the Turkish language could be used in public and it returned to schools.

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<sup>20</sup> *Sega*, 25 May 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Centkowska, *Jesień ludów '89. Kalendarium wydarzeń*, Biuletyn Specjalny PAP of 23 May 1989, Warszawa 1992, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Turgut Özal was ready to admit about 30,000 Turkish emigrants from Bulgaria every year. Gorbachev participated in those negotiations, see I. Baeva, *Ostatni rok...*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> J. Baev, N. Kotev, *Izselinczeskijat wypros w bylgarsko-turskite odnoszenija sled Wtorata swetowna wojna*, in: „Meždunarodni odnoszenija”, Sofija 1994, kn. 2, pp. 50–61.

<sup>24</sup> Darina Vasileva, *Bulgarian Turkish emigration and return*, “International Migration Review” 1992, Vol. 2, No. 26, p. 348.



These positive changes did not improve relations between Turks and Bulgarians in the country. Among the Turks nationalism and religious fanaticism increased. In towns inhabited by Turks, Bulgarian flags were taken down and burned and replaced with Turkish ones, monuments were built that commemorated the terrorists of the previous period, and slogans such as "Death to Christians"; "Allah is great"; and "Jihad" continued to spread. These actions, as well as demands that all Christians should leave Rhodopy, or that purely Turkish ministries should be created,<sup>25</sup> were opposed by Bulgarian society. Some intellectuals involved in promoting democratic political change demanded a referendum to prevent the territories inhabited by Turks in Bulgaria being granted autonomy. The authorities in Bulgaria tried to placate such sentiments and gave an assurance that Bulgaria "would remain an independent country with Bulgarian as its official language".<sup>26</sup>

The situation improved gradually after a conference that addressed national issues was organized in Sofia on 12 January 1990. As a result of the conference a document was released that was supposed to placate both the Bulgarian and Turkish sides. The document condemned the rescinding of Muslim rights under Zhivkov's regime, including the right to preach Islam and to practise the religion, the use of the Turkish language and their own names and surnames. The documents' content was also supposed to assuage Bulgarian nationalists' concerns. It confirmed that the only official language in the country was Bulgarian, and condemned the actions of separatist groups which demanded separation or autonomy for the territories inhabited by Turks.

The new constitution of Bulgaria in 1991 supported these pronouncements. The second article (par. 1) stated: (1) *The Republic of Bulgaria shall be a unitary state with self-government. No autonomous territorial formations shall be allowed to exist therein.* (2) *The territorial integrity of the Republic of Bulgaria shall be inviolable.*<sup>27</sup> Of great importance for the political existence of minorities was article 11 par. 4 of the Constitution, which stated: *There shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines, nor parties which seek the violent seizure of state power.* It limits the rights of minorities to the establishment of political organizations and contradicts article 6 of the same Constitution, which proclaims the principle of non-discrimination.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> S. Kiselinivski, *Mniejszości narodowe...*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> M. Żmigrodzki, *Mniejszość turecka...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Konstitucija na Republika Bylgarija* Obh., DW, br. 56 ot 13 juli 1991, Sofija 1997, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

Such a statement in the Constitution resulted in the municipal court in Sofia on 28 August 1991 denying the registration of the movement led by Dogan as a political party. Over 90% of all members of the DPS and its voters were ethnic Turks.<sup>29</sup> The decision was upheld by the Highest Court on 11 September 1991, even though the Central Voting Commission had allowed the DPS to stand for election because the DPS had been registered in the spring of 1990, before the new constitution had been proclaimed. Thus Bulgarian nationalists failed to eliminate the party from the Bulgarian political scene.<sup>30</sup>

Bulgaria committed itself to the requirements included in the *Framework Convention on the Protection of Minorities* of 1 February 1995. The interpretation of the principles of the convention was quite remarkable, since the Bulgarian parliament on 5 March 1990 issued a declaration stating that Bulgaria was a unitary state in respect to nationality and therefore had no obligations of that kind. The Parliamentary declaration stated: *Bulgaria is committed to the politics of toleration and the protection of human rights of the people who belong to minorities and is responsible for their integration into Bulgarian society.*<sup>31</sup> But, as B. Najgulov has noted, the legislators had in mind language, religious and ethnic minorities and not national minorities (there is no definition of such in international law).<sup>32</sup>

Articles 6, 29, 36 and 37 include a catalogue of minority rights. Art. 36 par. 2 says that *Citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language.*<sup>33</sup> Art. 13 formulates such principles as the unrestricted practising of religion and separation of religious institutions from the state, and emphasizes that religious institutions and communities, and religious beliefs should not be used for political purposes.

In Bulgaria, freedom to worship is respected, and the state does not interfere in religious publishing. In 1994 the Chief Office of the Mufti was reestablished as well as the postgraduate Islamic Institute, and four new religious schools were opened in Shumen, Ruse, Momchilgrad and

<sup>29</sup> The remaining 10% consists of the Muslims' electorate – Pomaks and some Roma.

<sup>30</sup> See Jerzy Jackowicz, *Bułgaria od rządów komunistycznych do demokracji parlamentarnej 1988–1991*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 72, 73.

<sup>31</sup> B. Najgulov, *Ewropejskata zasztita na malcinstwa i Byłgarija – sywremenni aspekti*, "Istoriczeski Pregled", 5–6/2000, pp. 293, 294.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Glodzhevo. Eight new mosques were opened and applications for forty new ones were submitted. In total, there were 920 mosques in Bulgaria in 1992.

The Turkish press and magazines, such as *Rights and Freedoms, Hope, Trust, Flag* and others, are now permitted to be published. Since 2003 a Turkish newspaper, *New Life*, has been published in Kardjali. Radio and television broadcasting in Turkish is also available. The democratization and liberalization of life, active contacts with compatriots in Turkey, but also with the Arab world strengthened the role of Islamic organizations and foundations in the 1990s. The deputy governor of the Pazardhik, Radgeb Malaahmed, publicly appealed to the authorities to repatriate Christian Roma from this territory. That forced the authorities to prohibit some of the actions of Muslim organizations in order to stop the spread of Turkish nationalism and religious fanaticism. Each year, however, young people would go abroad for training, which caused some concern. Bulgarians for their part established anti-Turkish committees and organizations under the slogan "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians". This is how the Nationwide Committee to Protect National Interests – the OKNI (Op{tonarodniot komitet za za{tita na nacionalnite interesi), the Nationwide Labour Party (Ote~estvenata parti® na trud, OPT) were established. The biggest surprise was the appearance of the political party Ataka, led by Volen Siderov, just before the 2005 parliamentary election.<sup>34</sup> It won as much as 8.93% of the vote (that is, 21 seats), despite the fact that it was established just two months earlier. It was not officially registered in court before the election, and together with a few smaller parties it created the ATAKA Coalition. Its programme proclaimed Bulgaria to be a one-nation and one-ethnic country, and postulated that the rights of other nations, especially the right to use their own language and preach their own religion, should be limited. In the 2009 election the party again won 21 seats.

Many Turks decided to emigrate because of the difficult economic situation. In 1992 alone 70,000 Turks left Bulgaria. Altogether, over 1,100,000 Turks have left Bulgaria since the beginning of the post-communist transformation.

<sup>34</sup> The ATAKA coalition was formed by nationalist parties: the National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland, (Nacionalno dvi`enie za spasenie na Ote~estvoto), the Bulgarian National Patriotic Party (BÍlgarska nacionalno-patrioti~na partia), Ataka (Ataka), New Dawn (Nova Zora), Union of Patriotic Forces "Defence" (SÍŷz na patrioti~nite sili „ ZaËita”).

Table 1: Migration of Turks from Bulgaria since 1878

1912–1912	350 000
1933–1933	101 507
1939–1939	97 181
1949–1949	21 353
1951–1951	154 198
1968–1968	24
1978–1978	114 356
1988–1988	0
1992–1992	321 800
Total:	1160 614

Source: Ali Eminov, *Turkish...*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Muslims participate widely in the political life of Bulgaria. The party of Ahmed Dogan Movement for Rights and Freedoms (the DPS with its slogan “Bulgaria for all”) had a decisive breakthrough in the elections and gained 5–7% support of the electorate, winning seats in parliament. Since 2001 it has been the only party which has played the role of a coalition maker, first in the National Movement of Simeon II, and after the 2005 election entering government with the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Dogan’s party won 38 seats in the 240-seat parliament in the last election on 5 July 2009. The party of Boyko Borisov, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria, in the 2009 parliamentary election won a large enough majority to allow it to create a one-party government.

The changing policy towards the Muslim community in Bulgaria was carefully examined by the European Commission before Bulgaria was permitted to join the European Union, and a Commission report was published annually. In the report of 15 July 1997 it was emphasised that “it seems that the Turkish minority is well integrated with the rest of the population.”<sup>35</sup> It also stated that this integration is facilitated by a large number of Turkish representatives in the elected assemblies (15 MPs, 25 councillors, over 1000 representatives in local self-government). The Commission, however, still highlighted a number of problems that needed to be resolved: the lack of Turkish representatives at the higher levels of public administration and in the army, the high unemployment rate

<sup>35</sup> *Commission Opinion on Bulgaria’s Application for Membership of the European Union*, DOC 97/11, 15 July 1997, [http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/bu-op-1997\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/bu-op-1997_en.pdf), p. 119, accessed 15.09.2009

among the Turkish population, and the low standards of teaching in Turkish schools.<sup>36</sup> After 2001 the Commission's assessment was even more positive. In its 2002 report it stated that *The Turkish minority is integrated into political life through elected representation at national and local levels and increasing representation in public administration.*<sup>37</sup> This positive assessment was possible due to Bulgaria's decision to allow the Turkish party DPS to stand for elections in 2001 and effectively to join the governing coalition.

Furthermore, in the 2004 Regular Report the European Commission positively assessed the national policy towards the Turkish minority, stating: *The Turkish minority continues to be integrated into political life through elected representation at national and local levels. Further attention needs to be paid to the socio-economic integration of those ethnic Turks and other minority groups who live in economically less developed regions.*<sup>38</sup>

The *Report of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights*<sup>39</sup> provides very interesting data and shows that while in Denmark as many as 42% of Turks have suffered discrimination, in Bulgaria the figure is only 9% and in Austria 10%. In Bulgaria, Luxemburg and Austria the majority of Muslim respondents said that they were not discriminated against because of their religion, while respondents from Italy, Belgium and France claim that they suffer from religious discrimination. Moreover, when moving through border and custom controls, Turks from Bulgaria do not find themselves being treated any worse than other citizens. The situation is different when it comes to Muslims who are citizens of other countries. This can be explained by the fact that Muslims from Bulgaria are Bulgarian citizens; they have inhabited the country for centuries, while Muslims from other countries are immigrants. It was noted in the report that the Muslim population inhabits mainly rural areas, which are less developed economically, and that its relations with Bulgarians were virtually non-existent.

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<sup>36</sup> 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Bulgaria, Progress towards Accession, 8 November 2000, [http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/rr-bg-2000\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/rr-bg-2000_en.pdf), p. 22, accessed 15.09.2009

<sup>37</sup> 2002 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, 9.10.2002, [http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/rr-bg-2002\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/bulgaria/documents/abc/rr-bg-2002_en.pdf), p. 33, accessed 15.09.2009

<sup>38</sup> 2004 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, [http://ec.europa.eu/Bulgaria/documents/abc/rr/bg-2004\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/Bulgaria/documents/abc/rr/bg-2004_en.pdf), p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> 2009 Report of European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), [www.fra.europa.eu](http://www.fra.europa.eu), p. 110, accessed 15.09.2009.

In spite of the positive assessment of the European Commission, Turkish people are not happy with their status in Bulgaria. Similar to the events of 1991, when the debate over the new Bulgarian constitution was taking place and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms argued that the constitution should state that *Turkish along with Bulgarian is also the official language in the country*, on 24 July 2009 Turkish parliamentarians spoke in the parliament only in their own language (which is against the law); this served as a reminder of their earlier demands. The intensity of such demands could increase, the more so after the Muslim minority in Bulgaria lost its potential for forming coalition governments. The question of the extent of the rights of Muslims and what the consequences of their implementation would be is therefore still very important.