

Balkans

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The appearance of Muslim populations in the Balkans dates back to the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the region (14th century – beginning of the 20th century) and is due to the conversion of local populations to Islam (essentially Albanians and Slavs) or to the settlement of Turkic-speaking Muslim populations from Anatolia.

In the early 1990s, the number of Muslims in the Balkans was estimated at 8,250,000, or approximately 13% of the total Balkan population. Muslims represented the main religious community in Albania (approximately 70%) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (45%), an important minority in Macedonia (30%), in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (20%, concentrated in Kosovo and in the Sandjak) and in Bulgaria (12.5%), and a small minority in Greece (1.5%) and in Rumania (0.2%). They were divided into three main groups, namely the Albanian Muslims (4,350,000, in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia), the Bosnian Muslims (2,350,000, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the Sandjak and in Kosovo) and the Turks (1,050,000 in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece et Rumania), to which other smaller groups can be added: Muslim Romas spread all over the Peninsula, Slavic-speaking Muslims in Bulgaria (Pomak) and Macedonia (Torbeshe), and Turkish-speaking Tatars in the Dobrudja (Rumania).

From the Turks of Bulgaria in 1989 to the Albanians of Kosovo ten years later, not to mention the Bosnian Muslims between 1992 and 1995, Balkan Muslims figure amongst the main victims of the forced deportations and the massacres that have marked the region in the last decade. These dramatic events were presented in a rather simplified manner: whereas some raised the menace of a 'green diagonal' linking fanatized Muslim populations, others presented Balkan Islam as a haven of tolerance threatened by an orthodox Crusade. In both cases, the internal diversity and the recent transformations of Balkan Islam were neglected, even denied. These two points are thus insisted upon here by demonstrating that the Muslim populations are not only victims, but also actors in the current Balkan crisis.

The New Balkan Islam

The political awakening of Balkan Muslims

Indeed, the emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is one of the most important developments of the last decade. In the interwar period, these populations remained withdrawn into their religious identity and their religious institutions, and maintained a clientelistic and obedient relationship to the new Balkan states. Only the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina had their own political party. Communist modernization allowed for a crystallization of Albanian, Bosnian Muslim or Turkish national identities as well as the emergence of new secularized Muslim elites (teachers, physicians, etc.), but it was not until the 1980s that the first mass mobilizations of Muslim populations were to occur in favour of a 'Republic of Kosovo' (in 1981 and then in 1989-90) or against the brutal assimilation campaign of the Bulgarian communist party between 1984 and 1989.

After the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989-90, the mobilization of the Muslim populations resulted not only in the constituting of political parties in all Balkan states, but also in the formulation of national claims – going as far as demands for an independent state (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo) or an autonomous territory (Macedonia, Sandjak). It should, however, be noted that this wave of national claims amongst the Muslim Balkan populations is for the most part reactive: the awakening of an intolerant and aggressive Serb nationalism, in particular, has largely contributed to the desires for independence of the Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovo Albanians. Inversely, the end of the forced assimilation of Turks in Bulgaria and the recognition of their political and cul-

tural rights explain the moderation of their political leaders and their progressive integration into Bulgarian political life.

Likewise, throughout the Balkan countries, this political mobilization of the Muslim populations was accompanied by the reshaping of the relationship between national identity and religious identity. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) constituted itself around a pan-Islamist movement that had appeared at the end of the 1930s, and of which the main figure is Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic himself. Elsewhere, the parties representing the Muslim populations were created by members of the new secularized elites which had appeared during the communist period. In general, however, national identity and religious identity tended to come closer together. This tendency is most clear in Bosnia-Herzegovina where, paradoxically enough, the replacement of the national term 'Muslim' by that of 'Bosniak' was coupled with an increased insistence upon Islam as a founding factor of national Muslim/Bosniak identity, and a bringing to the fore of the religious dimensions of the war (cult of *chehids* – martyrs of faith, evocations of jihad – holy war – and creation of re-Islamized 'Muslim brigades' within the Bosnian army).

Amongst the Turks (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece) and the Albanians (Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia), the re-Islamization of national identity remains more limited and discrete. In the Turkish case, the transformations of identity currently taking place reflect the debate which, in Turkey itself, occurs between the partisans of Kemalist secularism and those of a 'Turko-Islamic synthesis'. In the Albanian case, the classical nationalist ideology of the 19th century, incarnated today by

such intellectuals as Ismail Kadare or Ibrahim Rugova, is characterized by its rejection of Islam and the Turko-Ottoman heritage. Nowadays, however, it has to compete with a new 'Islamist-nationalist' ideology that seeks to associate national Albanian identity and Muslim religious identity, by presenting the conversion of Albanians to Islam as a defence mechanism in the face of assimilation efforts of the orthodox Greeks and Serbs.

The paradoxes of re-Islamization

Nevertheless, this re-Islamization of Balkan Muslim national identities should in no case be conceived as linear and based on consensus: on the contrary, it is accompanied by virulent conflicts within each community and appears to be paradoxical in several ways. First of all, this re-Islamization of collective identities does not really reverse the results of a half century of authoritarian modernization and secularization. Following the re-establishment of religious freedoms, the Islamic religious institutions were of course able to resume some religious activities (opening of mosques and religious schools, resumption of Sufi pilgrimages, etc.), but nowhere they were able to recuperate legal competencies (sharia courts) or real estate (*waqfs*) which had been taken away after the war. Even in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the tight collaboration between the state apparatus and religious Islamic institutions did not result in a true religious revival, but on the contrary in a strong resistance to the attempts of the SDA at re-Islamizing everyday life.

The Bosnian example also shows that the arrival in the Balkans of *mudjahidin* and Islamic humanitarian organizations did not lead to an 'Iranization' or a 'Saudization' of society, but rather to a widespread incomprehension and multiple incidents between the local population and foreign preachers. More generally, the development of new links between Balkan Islam and the rest of the Muslim world has favoured the renewal of religious activities (translation and edition of religious literature, opening of mosques or religious schools, sending of students to Islamic universities in the Muslim world, etc.), but also has confronted official religious institutions with new competitors supported by various Muslim states (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc.) or re-Islamization movements. It has thus contributed to the internal pluralization of Balkan Islam and compelled the Balkan Muslim populations to better define the features of an 'European Islam' which is largely yet to be invented.

Although Islam remains at the foundations of the Muslim collective identities, faith itself is thus becoming increasingly individualized, and the renewal of certain collective and ostentatious forms of religious practice should not mask a strong tendency towards secularization shared with all other European populations. ◆

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