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**CHANGING ASPECTS OF MINORITY POLICY IN
BULGARIA AFTER 1989: THE CASE OF THE MUSLIM-
TURKISH MINORITY**

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Introduction

Along with human rights, the subject of minority rights, which first appeared with the beginning of the Reformation Movement and the emergence of religious minorities and absolutist monarchies in the sixteenth century, today has become one of the most important factors in international relations. This development has become a vital issue for Bulgaria, which has a large minority population, mainly consisting of Muslim Turks. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc at the end of 1989, Bulgaria has wanted to become a member of Western international organisations and integrate with the Western world.

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Apart from the periods between 1919 and 1923, and 1944 and 1947, when the Bulgarian Agrarian Party and Fatherland Front were, respectively, in power, Bulgaria perpetrated a systematic and repressive state policy against minorities and particularly against the Muslim-Turkish minority which was (and is still) the largest one in the country. It did so from 1878 when the Bulgarian Principality was founded, until 1989 when the 'real socialist' regime collapsed, in an attempt to create a linguistically, culturally and racially homogenous nation-state.. This policy was implemented either in the form of assimilation practices to dissolve the minorities within the majority, or by forcing them to leave the country. This policy, which was carried out against minorities in general, and against the Muslim-Turkish minority in particular, reached its peak during the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) reign (1947-1989). A systematic campaign, whose intensity changed from time to time, was carried out to assimilate the minorities. Various pressures were imposed especially on the Turkish minority during the period between 1984 and 1989, which could be defined as 'Harsh Assimilation Period', as well as the policy of Bulgarianizing the Turkish minority by means of changing their names during the 1984/85, under the name of 'Revival/Rebirth Process'. This policies drew a strong reaction from international public opinion, which, until then had not shown much interest in the problems of the minorities in Bulgaria, and the international prestige of Bulgaria, whose image had already been dented in the 1980s because of the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II and arms smuggling, was heavily damaged. The development to change this situation was the beginning of a new era in Bulgaria after BCP General Secretary and President of State Council Todor Živkov, who was faced with difficulties both at home and abroad, as a result of forcing the Turkish minority to leave the country, had to step down on November 10, 1989.

At this stage, Bulgaria put forward its intention to radically change its foreign policy, which could be summarised as becoming a member of Western international organisations and to integrate with the Western world. In order to realise this goal, Bulgaria remained aware that embracing certain values such as

pluralist and liberal democracy and respecting human and minority rights was a prerequisite. Therefore, Bulgaria put aside its systematic and repressive state policies aimed at its minorities in general and at the Muslim-Turkish minority in particular and began to reinstate the minority rights recognised by international. With the help of Turkey and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the most prominent representative of the Muslim-Turkish minority, the transition period from the collapse of the real socialist regime in Bulgaria to the establishment of a Western type pluralist parliamentary system did not involve any bloodshed or acts of violence among ethnic groups, unlike in other former Eastern Bloc countries. The main reason why Bulgaria managed to realise such a radical change in a short time without any bloodshed was that, by carrying out its responsibilities in terms of human and minority rights, it wanted to solve the minority problem which was its ‘weak spot’ in the international arena and to become a member of Western international organisations, mainly the European Union (EU).¹

This study is an attempt to analyze Bulgaria’s rapidly changing minority policy after 1989, focusing on the Muslim-Turkish minority. To this end, the issue of restitution of names that were changed by force during the harsh assimilation period between 1984 and 1989 was absolutely vital to the minority. Developments in education, religion and conscience and freedom of press will be covered.² In addition, I will discuss the difficulties faced by the Bulgarian governments in overcoming the nationalist circles’ reactions to the new policy about minorities.

I) Bulgaria’s First Steps to Change its Policy against the Muslim-Turkish Minority during the Post-1989 Pluralist Democracy Period

¹ Regarding the practices within the Muslim-Turkish minority in Bulgaria between 1878 and 2005, see Ali Dayıođlu, **Toplama Kampından Meclis’e, Bulgaristan’da Türk ve Müslüman Azınlığı**, İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2005.

² Because it is impossible to discuss all aspects regarding the minority in this paper, where the main points of the post-1989 developments are concerned, I will only mention these areas.

A) The First Tangible Result of the Bulgarian Administration's Changing Policy against the Muslim-Turkish Minority: 29 December 1989 Resolutions

By the end of 1989, Bulgaria's failure to keep in step with USSR leader Michail Gorbačov's 'openness' (*Glasnost*) and 'restructuring' (*Perestroika*) policies and the developments in Eastern Europe, the major economic distress in the country, the attempts to assimilate the Muslim-Turkish minority by force, and the subjection of hundreds of thousands of Turks to forced emigration after May 1989, as well as other developments left the country in a difficult position in the international arena and, thus, weakened Živkov's position. Even though Živkov promised that Gorbačov's policies would also be adopted in Bulgaria and that the party and state would be separated, this attempt was not enough to save Živkov. Faced with pressure from within the Party and Gorbačov, following the BCP Central Committee's meeting on 9 November, on November 10, 1989, Živkov was forced to resign from his posts as BCP General Secretary, which he had held since 1954, and as the President of State Council, which he had held since 1971.³ Consequently, a new era began for both Bulgaria and the Muslim-Turkish minority.

At the meeting on 9 November, after which Živkov was forced to resign, Petar Mladenov, who had held the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1971 and who had more moderate political views in comparison to Živkov, was elected General Secretary of the BCP.⁴ As soon as the new government under the leadership of Mladenov, who had also assumed the Presidency, came to power it concentrated on changing minority policies.

³ Živkov's resignation demanded by the politburo of the BCP on 9 November 1989 appears, on account of the meeting held between the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov and Gorbachev in Moscow only a day earlier, to have been demanded by the USSR as well. See Richard Crampton, **A Concise History of Bulgaria**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 214-216; Fahir Armaoğlu, **20. Yüzyıl Siyasî Tarihi (1914-1990)**, Vol. II, 3rd ed., Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1991, p. 163; "Bulgar Dönüşü", **Milliyet**, 1 January 1990.

⁴ "Komşuda Yeni Dönem", **Cumhuriyet**, 11 November 1989.

Encouraged by the winds of change in the country, Turks and Pomaks held a widely participated demonstration on 11 December in Sofia, for the restitution of their names and recognition of their religious rights. Following this demonstration, until the end of the year minority members continued to voice these demands at demonstrations held in various places in the country. On December 29, 1989, while the minority members were holding a sitting protest for the restitution of their rights in front of the Parliament building in Sofia, the BCP Central Committee adopted the expected resolution on the issue. Parliament Chairman Stank Todorov, described as “the best Christmas present the Turks could have”, who announced these resolutions to the minority members waiting outside the Parliament building. He said that from now on everyone in Bulgaria could freely choose their name, religion and language. The BCP Central Committee’s resolution, which was also approved by the Council of Ministers and the State Council, meant that minority members whose names had been changed by force could have their names back, could worship freely and could speak Turkish. Although the Bulgarian nationalists exhibited a serious reaction to this resolution, the Bulgarian administration did not retreat and the 29 December resolutions were approved by the Parliament on October 10, 1990.

B) The First Application of the 29 December 1989 Resolutions: Restitution of Names

Following the 29 December resolutions and beginning with the restitution of names forcefully changed during the harsh assimilation period, the Bulgarian government took concrete steps to restore the rights of the Muslim-Turkish minority. Within this framework, on March 5, 1990, the Parliament unanimously adopted the “Act on Bulgarian Citizens’ Names”.⁵ The act included Pomaks together with Turks and envisaged a simplified court process by 31 December in order to restore names. Those who applied for the restoration of their names after

⁵ “Azınlıklar İçin Önemli Gün”, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 March 1990.

this date had to go through a complicated and costly procedure. Another striking point in the act was that suffixes such as -ov, -ev, -ova and -eva, which are characteristic of Bulgarian and are added to the end of the names, were made compulsory.

The subject of the restitution of names was brought to the Parliament's agenda in November 1990 by MRF, who had gained seats in Parliament following the elections on June 17, 1990. Speaking on the subject in Parliament, Ahmet Doğan, the leader of MRF, said that he would not be responsible for the events that could occur if Bulgarian suffixes were not abolished with an amendment to the Act on Bulgarian Citizens' Names. Following the discussions on the subject, on November 16, 1990, with an amendment to the act, removal of Bulgarian suffixes from Turkish names and restitution of names through an administrative act, not by court decision, was accepted.⁶ Bulgarian authorities announced that minority members had time until October 1993 to reclaim their former names and that once the deadline had passed the procedure of changing names could only be done through a court order.⁷

The amendment to the act led to a strong reaction by the Bulgarian nationalists. Despite these reactions, the Bulgarian government held its ground and continued its efforts to ease the tension among the ethnic groups.

⁶ "Türklere Ad Özgürlüğü", *Cumhuriyet*, 17 November 1990; Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, 2nd ed., London: Minority Rights Publication, 1994, p. 169.

⁷ Baskın Oran, "Balkan Türkleri Üzerine İncelemeler (Bulgaristan, Makedonya, Kosova)", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1-4, (January-December 1993), p. 126; "Türk Azınlığa 4 Ay Süre", *Cumhuriyet*, 6 July 1993.

II) The Bulgarian Government's Practices against the Muslim-Turkish Minority Regarding Education, Religion and Conscience, and Freedom of Press in the Post-1989 Era

A) Practices in the Field of Education

As education plays a vital role in minorities' protecting their identity as a minority group, the Muslim-Turkish minority's rights to establish and administer its own schools and receive education in its own tongue have been guaranteed in all the international conventions on minority rights which Bulgaria has signed since the establishment of the Bulgarian Principality.⁸ In spite of these international assurances, Bulgarian administrations have, from time to time, carried out practices violating minority's rights. In particular during the BCP reign these practices reached a peak. As a result, Turkish minority schools were closed down, and education in these schools was provided in Bulgarian language in this period.⁹

Following the difficulties experienced in education during the BCP reign, with the beginning of a pluralist democratic era after 1989, some important developments were achieved in education, besides other areas. In order to observe these developments, it is appropriate to analyze the issues related to education separately, as I will do in the following two sections.

1) The Problems of Turkish Education in Public Schools

Having reclaimed their former names and rights regarding various issues through the 29 December resolutions drawn up by the Bulgarian government, the minority turned its attention to demanding the inclusion of Turkish lessons in the curriculum of public schools. Within this framework, the MRF and the Ministry of

⁸ See Dayioğlu, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-184, 229-232 and 312-315.

⁹ For implementations regarding the educational field during the BCP period see *ibid.*, pp. 315-323.

Education officials came together at the end of 1990 to discuss the issue and prepare a programme. At the meeting it was decided that beginning with the 2nd term of the 1990/91 academic year Turkish would be taught at public schools in areas where minorities predominantly lived. According to the agreement, all Turkish primary students would have four hours of Turkish lessons a week. However, there had to be at least ten Turkish students in each class for the course to be taught. Following this agreement on February 14, 1991, the Minister of Education, Matev Mateev, announced that as of March Turkish courses would be piloted in some primary schools and that starting from the following academic year Turkish would be taught at all primary schools.¹⁰

After this announcement by the Minister of Education, Turkish began to be taught at public schools, but the Bulgarian nationalists in areas where Turks were predominant showed a strong reaction. As reactions escalated, the government was forced to retreat on the issue of teaching Turkish at schools, and eventually Turkish lessons were dropped. Despite the MRF's persistent stance on this issue, Turkish was not included in the curriculum for the 1991/92 academic year. As a result, on September 16, 1991, the Turks, starting with Kărdžali (Kırçali), in many parts of the country, started to boycott classes and did not send their children to school.¹¹

In the general elections held on October 13, 1991 the number of seats won by each party was: Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) 110, Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP-the former Bulgarian Communist Party) 106 and MRF 24. With Parliament having been reduced to 240 seats, the chances of passing the act seemed small. One of the conditions put forward by the key party MRF in return for supporting UDF to form the government, was to allow Turkish students to be educated at public schools in areas where the minority lived. As a result of this agreement, the

¹⁰ Poulton, *op. cit.*, p. 171. For minority views on the subject see "Bulgaristan Okullarında Türk Dili Eğitimi", *Hak ve Özgürlük*, (weekly, published in Bulgaria), 25 February-3 March 1991.

¹¹ "Türk Çocukları Okula Gitmedi", *Cumhuriyet*, 17 September 1991.

Ministry of Education began working on a regulation, which was prepared by late November. According to this new regulation, different from the agreement that had been reached between the MRF and the Ministry of Education, Turkish would be an elective subject and taught four hours a week outside normal school hours. Moreover, in order for the students to be able to take Turkish lessons, their parents had to hand in a written application, whereas in the previous agreement all Turkish students were eligible to take Turkish lessons. Although the regulation was far from meeting the minority's expectations with regard to Turkish education, since it was the first step the minority had to be content with these achievements.¹² After the regulation was accepted, the minority members ended the boycott and from 25 November 1991 onwards started to send their children to school again.¹³

As a result, after about twenty years the minority regained the opportunity to learn its mother tongue. Even though nationalist circles reacted strongly to the Ministry of Education's decision regarding Turkish lessons,¹⁴ the government did not retreat and four hours of Turkish lessons continued to be taught as an elective course at public schools.

Immediately after the Ministry of Education's decision in November 1991 to teach Turkish at the public schools in the areas where the minority lived, problems arose. Most of these problems resulted from the Ministry of Education's failure to set up a control mechanism that would ensure the implementation of the decisions and check whether these decisions were being implemented or not. The implementation of the decision to provide Turkish lessons was left to the local officials, most of whom had been appointed during the Živkov era. As a reaction to the Turkish lessons being taught at schools, certain school officials and teachers

¹² Ali Eminov, **Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria**, London: Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, Hurst and Company, 1997, pp. 140-141.

¹³ "Sofya'da Türkçe Krizi Çözüldü", **Cumhuriyet**, 24 November 1991.

¹⁴ **Milliyet**, 6 February 1992.

tried to prevent these lessons as much as they could. Moreover, since they were perceived to be ethnic Bulgarians by the Bulgarian government, attempts were made to prevent Pomak students from taking Turkish lessons.¹⁵

While discussions on education in the mother tongue continued, on September 5, 1994, the Council of Ministers issued a new regulation. According to regulation No. 183, students whose mother tongue was not Bulgarian could take their mother tongue as an elective course from first to eighth year at public schools.¹⁶ The funds for these courses were to be provided by municipality budgets. In spite of these regulations, which were intended to set certain standards for the education in the mother tongue, in practice, the problems mentioned above continued.

Following BSP's victory in the elections on December 18, 1994, Jan Videnov, who formed the government, appointed Ilčo Dimitrov, one of the most fervent supporters of Živkov's assimilation policy, as Minister of Education, and the problems regarding the issue further increased.¹⁷ The problems continued throughout the BSP reign until 1997 and decreased to a certain extent later, when in 1997 the UDF and in 2001 the National Movement Simoen II (NMS) and MRF formed a coalition and came to power. However, complaints that authorities were trying to dissuade Turkish students from attending the Turkish elective course

¹⁵ Ömer Turan, "Bulgaristan Türklerinin Bugünkü Durumu", **Yeni Türkiye**, No. 3 (March-April 1995), p. 299. Especially in the statements issued by the BSP, it was made clear that to extend the Turkish lessons to the Pomaks was unconstitutional and, therefore, it was imperative to take effective measures. Poulton, **op. cit.**, p. 170.

¹⁶ Elif Özerman, **Avrupa'da Dil Hakları: Genel Bir Çerçeve**, transl. Burcu Toksabay, Helsinki Yurttaşlar Derneği / Helsinki Citizens' Association, 2003], http://www.hyd.org.tr/tr/rapor.asp?rapor_id=14, 06.07.2005.

¹⁷ Dimitrov, who was also the Minister of Education during the harsh assimilation period, in an article published in the *Duma* newspaper, a publication of the BSP, defended the 'revival/rebirth process' from the historical point of view as very correct, but went on to state that the MRF was founded against the Bulgarian nation and that, therefore, it ought to be closed down. Turan, **op. cit.**, p. 298.

continued from time to time.¹⁸ After the coalition government was formed among BSP, NMS, and MRF on August 15, 2005, no changes occurred, and Turkish remained as an elective course in public schools.

2) Developments and Problems Regarding Schools, Teachers and Course Books

Today, in Bulgaria the minority does not have a single school where Turkish language education is offered. Nevertheless, the minority has four education institutions which teach in Bulgarian and hold a public status, but which operate under the chief mufti's office. Three of these institutions are vocational religious high schools and one a Higher Institute of Islam. The vocational religious high schools are in Šumen (Şumnu), Ruse (Ruşçuk) and Momčilgrad (Mestanlı), and the Higher Institute of Islam is in Sofia. While the vocational religious high schools in Šumen and Ruse are co-ed, the one in Momčilgrad is a boys' school. In addition to these schools, there is a girls' vocational religious high school, affiliated to the school in Momčilgrad, in the village of Rogozče (Hasarcık). The Higher Institute of Islam in Sofia is also co-ed. These schools are partly funded by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs.¹⁹ Although the medium of education at these schools is Bulgarian, Turkish is also offered as an elective course. If they are successful in the university entrance exams, the graduates of vocational religious high schools have the opportunity to study in any department at the university. Although the Higher Institute of Islam is not currently accepted as a higher education institution equivalent to a university, graduates of the institute are accepted as graduates of the New Bulgaria University, which is a private university recognised by the state, if they take the extra courses and fulfil their requirements.

¹⁸ U. S. Department of State, **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1999: Bulgaria**, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/human-rights/1999-hrp-report/bulgaria.html>, 16.04.2001.

¹⁹ Apart from contributions received from the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, contributions are also received, with the knowledge of Turkey, from the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia.

In this way, a middle way has been found for the graduates of the Higher Institute of Islam. Apart from these schools, there are two five-year pedagogy institutes in Kărdžali and Šumen, set up to train teachers, and the universities in Sofia and Šumen have opened Departments of Turkish Language.

Despite these positive steps taken during the post-1989 era, certain problems persisted particularly in the field of education. The biggest problem faced after Turkish language began to be taught at public schools was the insufficient number of qualified teachers to teach the course. Many teachers who had become unemployed as a result of the gradual decrease in the number of hours of Turkish language teaching in Bulgaria since 1958, and the abolishment of Turkish in 1974 had to leave Bulgaria. More importantly, many Turkish teachers migrated to Turkey during the forced migration in 1989. Most of them who stayed in Bulgaria were retired and had not been teaching Turkish for about twenty years. The younger ones' Turkish and training education was not up to the standard. Although a lot of Turkish books had been imported from Turkey during the post-1989 era, the teachers did not know how to make use of these books effectively, because they did not know any educational methodology.²⁰ Therefore, the available teachers had to undergo training, and it was necessary to educate new teachers. In this respect, in addition to the Departments of Turkish Language opened at the universities in Sofia and Šumen, institutes of pedagogy were opened in Šumen and Kărdžali. Furthermore, students started to be sent to universities in Turkey in order to be trained as teachers.²¹ Also, Turkish language teachers were sent to courses in Turkey to learn methodology. The expenses were met by the Turkish government.²² However, after Ilčo Dimitrov became Minister of Education in

²⁰ Oran, **op. cit.**, p. 129. On this subject also see Yasemin Çongar, "Bağımsız, Bağlantısız Bulgaristan", **Cumhuriyet**, 24 October 1991.

²¹ Ali Piroğlu, "Türkiye'ye Giden Gençlerimize Uğurlar Olsun", **Hak ve Özgürlük**, 9 July 1993.

²² Oran, **op. cit.**, p. 129.

1995, the ministry did not permit any teachers to receive training in Turkey.²³ Following BSP's defeat in 1997, all the problems regarding teachers were gradually eased.

Another problem regarding education was the issue of course books. During the harsh assimilation period, the Turkish books published in the 1950s and 1960s were confiscated and destroyed. Consequently, there was not a single Turkish book available in the post-1989 period. Upon these developments, in September 1990, Turkish language experts and teachers formed a committee and started preparing readers in Turkish.²⁴ The readers prepared by the committee were written in both Turkish and Bulgarian, which led to a reaction from the minority,²⁵ and because of this, the Turkish Ministry of Education was asked to help with the preparation of the books. Following this cooperation, all of the course books necessary for the years 1 through 5 of education were supplied from Turkey and approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education in 1992. With the distribution of these books to the schools where Turkish was being taught, in the 1992/93 academic year, the problem about Turkish course books was partially solved.²⁶ Nevertheless, the MRF continued its efforts to solve the problem of Turkish course books once and for all.

B) Practices Regarding in the Field of Freedom of Religion and Conscience

Since the establishment of the Bulgarian Principality, with the various international agreements it has signed, and the documents pertaining to domestic law, Bulgaria has guaranteed the freedom of religion and conscience of the

²³ Eminov, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

²⁴ "Komşuda Türkçe Eğitimi", *Cumhuriyet*, 2 December 1990.

²⁵ Oran, *op. cit.*, p. 128. In the statement made by the components of MRF, it was announced that the reason why the books for teaching Turkish were prepared in two languages, namely Turkish and Bulgarian, was attributed to the desire of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, like English and French. For the announcement made by Talat Çoban, Secretary General of Kardzhali Branch of MRF, see *Cumhuriyet*, 17 September 1991.

²⁶ Eminov, *op. cit.*, pp 141-142.

country's Muslim-Turkish minority.²⁷ In spite of these arrangements, particularly during the BCP reign, in order to weaken the effect of Islam, which was seen as one of the biggest obstacles to the aim of assimilation of the Muslim minority within the socialist Bulgarian community, Bulgaria carried out practices violating the minority's freedom of religion and conscience. These practices reached a peak during the harsh assimilation period. This period witnessed the closing down of mosques, obstructing worship, prohibiting Qur'an courses and pilgrimage to Mecca, forbidding circumcision, fasting, wearing baggy trousers (a traditional costume), sacrifices during the Festival of Sacrifice and burials performed according to Islamic rites.²⁸

After Todor Živkov fell from power on November 10, 1989, as in other fields, a new period began with regard to the freedom of religion and conscience. Following the BCP Central Committee's resolution dated 29 December 1989, which stated that everyone living in Bulgaria could freely choose their name, religion and language, significant progress was made. Many practices restricting freedom of religion and conscience, which had been put into effect during the BCP reign, were abolished. With the state pressure on religion now lifted, construction and renovation of mosques and *medreses* started. In spite of these positive developments, occasional attacks on mosques were witnessed.

Even though most obstacles to the construction of new mosques were lifted in the post-1989 period, in reality permission for the construction of new mosques was proportionate to the population. For example, if the majority of the population in an area is Turkish, constructing a mosque is easy. If the Turks are minority, then it is difficult. From time to time, mosque constructions in the Pomak and Roma areas are also obstructed. Particularly the Muslim Roma face difficulties in receiving permits.

²⁷ About this subject see Dayioğlu, *op. cit.*, pp 182-184, 229-232 and 312-315.

²⁸ For detailed information see *ibid.*, pp 348-357.

MINORITY POLICY IN BULGARIA AFTER 1989

In addition to permitting the opening of mosques for worship and the construction of new ones, the mufti offices and Community Administrative Councils were permitted to offer Qur'an courses. Religious courses were also offered now as an elective course at public schools. When the practice first started in 1997, the course included only information about Christianity, but in 1999 Islam was also included in the curriculum.²⁹ During the BCP reign, all restrictions imposed on Qur'an and other religious books were lifted. As a result, all restrictions on the importation and publication of religious books were also lifted. On the other hand, again during the BCP reign all restrictions on celebrating religious days, burials according to Islamic traditions, religious marriages and circumcision were removed.³⁰

Even though various restrictions regarding freedom of religion and conscience were lifted, as in previous periods, pressure and activities targeting minority members to accept Christianity continued during the post-1989 era. The article 13/3 of the 1991 Constitution, stating that Eastern Orthodox Christianity is Bulgaria's traditional religion, in a way opened the path for discrimination between Orthodoxy and other religious beliefs. While Bulgarian governments and the Orthodox Church prevented the spread of missionary activities among Orthodox Christians,³¹ some governments and the Church supported activities aimed at Christianizing Muslims. It is noteworthy that during the post-1989 era Orthodox clergymen set out to spread Christianity, particularly among Pomaks and Muslim Roma. In addition to the Orthodox Church, the Protestant, Evangelist and Catholic

²⁹ U. S. Department of State, **International Religious Freedom Report 2005: Bulgaria**, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51545.htm>, 17.04.2007.

³⁰ Yonca Özkaya, "Demokrasinin Ucunu Gördük", **Cumhuriyet**, 15 April 1991.

³¹ On this subject see U. S. Department of State, **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1994: Bulgaria**, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/human-rights/1994-hrp-report/bulgaria.html>, 16.04.2002. Also see Human Rights Watch, **World Report 1998: Bulgaria**, <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/worldreport98/europe/bulgaria.html>, 17.04.2002; Human Rights Watch, **World Report 1999: Bulgaria**, <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/worldreport99/europe/bulgaria.html>, 17.04.2002.

Churches also started intensive missionary activities, particularly among Muslim Roma.³² While Bulgarian governments prevented the conversion of Orthodox Roma to Protestantism, under the table they supported the Protestant missionaries' activities targeting the Muslim Roma.

C) Practices Regarding Freedom of the Press

Even though freedom of press has been secured by domestic law and through various international agreements to which Bulgaria is a party,³³ just as with the issues of education and freedom of religion and conscience, Bulgarian governments continues certain practices that violate the minority's rights. In particular, during the harsh assimilation period, publication of Turkish newspapers and magazines was banned, and the Bulgarian radio's Turkish broadcast was terminated. Moreover, listening to radio channels of Turkey was forbidden, and Turkish books were confiscated from libraries. In fact, to speak Turkish in public places and places of work was forbidden, and those who did not abide suffered punishment ranging from fines to imprisonment and exile.³⁴

During the post-1989 pluralist parliamentary period, all restrictions on the freedom of press were lifted and in time Turkish publication-broadcast activities were allowed. In this context, newspapers and magazines like *Müslümanlar*, *Hak ve Özgürlük*, *İslam Kültürü*, *Güven*, *Zaman*, *Kaynak*, *Deli Orman*, *Balkan Aktüel*, *Filiz*, *Cır Cır* and *Balon* were published. In the 2000s, the work of Turkish internet news agencies and publication of newspapers also began. Although some of them suffered attacks by Bulgarian nationalists from time to time, most of the agencies and newspapers in the electronic medium continued publication. In addition to

³² Eminov, **op. cit.**, p. 65. On this subject also see U. S. Department of State, **International Religious Freedom Report 2005: Bulgaria**, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51545.htm>, 17.04.2007.

³³ On this subject see Dayioğlu, **op. cit.**, pp. 266-267 and 357.

³⁴ For further details on this subject see **ibid.**, pp. 297-298 and 358-359.

newspapers and magazines, Turkish books were also allowed to be published during the post-1989 era.³⁵ Moreover, in June 2004, a Turkish Book Room was opened in Sofia City Library.³⁶

In addition to allowing publication of Turkish newspapers, magazines and books, Radio Bulgaria, a state broadcast corporation, began Turkish broadcast for an hour three days a week, targeting settlement areas where predominantly Turks lived.³⁷ Gradually, time allocated to Turkish broadcast on Radio Bulgaria was increased. Hence, broadcast time was increased to 30 minutes daily, and in 2004 to three hours a day. Also, a broadcast of one hour per week in the Roma language has been initiated. Christo Botev Radio, a state broadcast corporation, has allocated 2,000 of its yearly total of 7,800 hours of broadcast to minorities, ethnic and religious issues.³⁸ In July of 1998, following the Parliament's ratification of a bill regarding amendments to the Radio and Television Law, the legal basis for broadcasting Turkish programmes on television was secured.³⁹ In this respect, from February 2000 onwards a 20-minute Turkish news, music and entertainment programme called *Beyaz Güvercin* (White Dove) started its broadcast on Sunday afternoons. In addition, Bulgarian National Television (BNT) began to broadcast from 2 October 2000 onwards an eight-minute news bulletin in Turkish every weekday on Channel 1 at 17:00, after the Bulgarian news bulletin.⁴⁰ This time was

³⁵ Turan, **op. cit.**, p. 299.

³⁶ "Sofya Kütüphanesinde Türkçe Kitaplar Bölümü Açıldı", **Bulgar-Türk Haber Ajansı**, 4 June 2004], <http://www.forums.host.sk/btha/news.php?id=562>, 20.08.2004.

³⁷ Nurcan Özgür, **Etnik Sorunların Çözümünde Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi**, Istanbul: DER Yayınları, 1999, p. 190; U. S. Department of State, **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002: Bulgaria**, <http://www.novinite.com/view.news.php?id=21169>, 08.07.2005.

³⁸ U. S. Department of State, **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004: Bulgaria**, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41674.htm>, 07.07.2005.

³⁹ "Bulgaristan'da Türkçe Yayına İzin", **Cumhuriyet**, 1 August 1998.

⁴⁰ Besides Turkish, broadcast in Armenian and Jewish has started on Bulgarian TV. "Bulgaristan, Nerden Nereye", **Hürriyet**, 25 February 2001. Also see Lilia Petkova, "The Ethnic Turks in

extended to ten minutes in 2001.⁴¹ Although the country's various nationalist circles, led by the Attack Coalition which entered Parliament in the 25 June 2005 elections and has maintained a racist policy against the ethnic minorities (mainly the Turks and Roma) in the country, reacted to the broadcast of the Turkish news bulletin and repeatedly, but ineffectively, attempted to prevent it.

Conclusion

With the specific case of the Muslim-Turkish minority's fundamental rights, in the post-1989 era Bulgaria abandoned its policy, which it had pursued between 1878 and 1989, with the exception of a few periods, of assimilating the Muslim-Turkish minority, seen as a threat to the country's unitary structure. While establishing a libertarian order based on democracy and human rights, Bulgaria began to restore the rights recognised by international law to the country's minorities. The main reason for carrying out such a radical change without bloodshed was Bulgaria's desire to join Western international organisations, mainly the EU. Especially from the mid-1990s onwards and led by the presidency, all sectors of the community showed full determination, which enabled Bulgaria to make significant progress in human and minority rights issues in a very short time period.⁴² In this respect, Bulgaria clearly understood that adopting certain values — such as respect for pluralist and libertarian democracy, human and minority

Bulgaria: Social Integration and Impact on Bulgarian-Turkish Relations, 1947-2000", **The Global Review of Ethnopolitics**, Vol. I, No. 4, (June 2002), p. 52.

⁴¹ Can Dündar, "Türkler Kildi Çevirdi", **Milliyet**, 20 November 2001; "DPS, Okullarda Türkçe Ders Kitapları İstiyor", **Bulgar-Türk Haber Ajansı**, 23 June 2006, <http://www.bg-turk.com/index.php?act=news&id=1023>, 24.04.2007. Films criticizing the harsh assimilation period have been shown in cinemas. For instance, a film named *The Stolen Eyes*, a joint Bulgarian-Turkish venture, which depicts the compulsory replacement of Turkish names by Bulgarian ones in 1984/85 period and criticises the assimilatory practices between 1984 and 1989, was shown in Bulgarian cinemas in September 2005. "Türk-Bulgar Yapımı Film "Çalıntı Gözler" Sinemalarda...", **Bulgar-Türk Haber Ajansı**, 16 September 2005, <http://www.bg-turk.com/index.php?act=news&id=527>, 24.04.2007.

⁴² Mustafa Türkeş, "Geçiş Sürecinde Dış Politika Öncelikleri: Bulgaristan Örneği", **Türkiye'nin Komşuları**, Der. Mustafa Türkeş, İlhan Uzel, Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2002, p. 206.

MINORITY POLICY IN BULGARIA AFTER 1989

rights — was a prerequisite to join Western international organisations and integrate with the Western world. Bulgaria did not make the mistake of adopting the infrastructure of the West, whose main element is capitalism, but leave its superstructure, which respects human and minority rights. While gradually making the transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy, it began to establish this superstructure.

In addition to the determined stance adopted by the Bulgarian governments in power after 1989 and by the opposition parties, the minority's representative (MRF) also made significant contributions to Bulgaria's efforts to integrate with the Western world. Unlike the political parties representing minorities in the former Eastern Bloc countries, the MRF never followed a policy demanding secession or autonomy; always emphasised Bulgaria's national unity in its statements, and did not make extreme demands that would draw a reaction from the Bulgarian majority. Instead, it waited for the conditions to mature and eliminated the radical elements within the movement; at the same time, it carried out an active policy protecting the minority's rights, all of which made significant contributions to achieving communal peace in Bulgaria. Achieving communal peace enabled Bulgaria's membership to the EU, which adopts a policy of not accepting countries with problems.

Turkey also made important contributions to Bulgaria's efforts regarding integration with the West. By distancing itself from irredentist policy ever since the early republican era, coupled with the adoption of a policy that Turks outside of Turkey can be happy only in their host states, Turkey helped Bulgaria to satisfy, in terms of human and minority rights issue, the political criteria of the EU. In addition to ensuring the restitution of rights of the Muslim-Turkish minority in

Bulgaria after 1989, this policy also greatly improved Turkish-Bulgarian relations.⁴³

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⁴³ For Turkish-Bulgarian relations during the post-1989 period, see Birgöl Demirtaş-Coşkun, **Bulgaristan'la Yeni Dönem: Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Ankara-Sofya İlişkileri**, Ankara: Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001, pp. 41-112; Türkes, **op. cit.**, pp. 192-210; İlhan Uzgel, "Bulgaristan'da Rejim Değişikliği ve Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri", **Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar**, Ed. Baskın Oran, Vol. II, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001, pp. 484-490.