

## BOOK REVIEW

**Tomasz Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria*. London & New York: Routledge, 2019, xxvii + 274 pages.**

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The year 1989 is the eve of “the great transformation” for both in Europe and the whole world. Just before the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, particularly an ethnic community in the southeast Europe, the Turks of Bulgaria had encountered the ethnic cleansing. The idea of the expulsion of non-Bulgarians was rooted back in the late nineteenth century, just after the April Uprising in 1876 and the following incidents to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the Treaty of Berlin. The “Turkish/Muslim Question” of newly formed Bulgaria occurred after the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano in 3 March 1878, which is still celebrated as the Liberation and the national day of Bulgaria. The envision of enlargement, ethnically mixed population and the state of minority of the Bulgarians than the other ethnic groups of the brand-new state alarmed both the neighboring states and France and the Great Britain. As a result, the Treaty of San Stefano was never implemented and superseded by the Treaty of Berlin in July 1878. The

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latter of the treaties recognized the autonomous Bulgarian principality, which lacked of Macedonia and Eastern Rumelia. Since the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria, the notion of absolute ethnic-national homogeneity was adopted as the principle for the formation of Bulgarian nation. The Bulgarian politicians and statesmen followed this ideal throughout the years. A century later, Turkish and Muslim question in Bulgaria would be solved firstly by assimilation and then the mass deportations.

The Reader in Modern History at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, and the author of many monographs on the nationalism, politics and political history of the central and the southeastern Europe, Tomasz Kamusella in his last book, titled *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria* focuses on the expulsion of Turks and Muslims from Bulgaria in 1989. Kamusella's work reveals and tells to the reader the events little known before and indicates the mostly internationally ignored huge mass atrocity, which was committed in the heart of Europe. Starting from the Spring, during the "long" summer of 1989, approximately 360,000 Muslim and Turkish citizens of People's Republic of Bulgaria were expelled from Bulgaria to Turkey.

About twenty years after the socialists came to power in Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, then the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, sends a congratulatory message to the Turkish-language monthly, *Yeni Hayat* [New Life], on its tenth anniversary in 1964. A quote from Zhivkov's message is as follows:

All possible opportunities have been created for the Turkish population to develop their culture and language freely. (...) The children of the Turkish population must learn their [mother] tongue and perfect it. To this end, it is necessary that the teaching [of the Turkish language] be improved in schools. Now and in the future the Turkish population will speak their mother tongue; they will develop their progressive traditions in this language; they will write their contemporary literary works [in Turkish]; they will sing their wonderfully beautiful songs [in Turkish]. (...) Many more books must be published in this country in Turkish, including the best works of progressive writers in Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ali Eminov, "There Are No Turks in Bulgaria: Rewriting History by Administrative Fiat" in *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), p. 213.

Ironically, thirty years later of Zhivkov's encouraging letter addressing the Turkish-speaking citizens of Bulgaria, a new era, named Revival Process [*Vazroditelen protses* / Възродителен процес, which can also be rendered in English as "Rebirth Process"] of discrimination, oppression and assimilation starts. Kamusella's elaborative work aims to scrutinize the conversion of policies of the Bulgarian authorities against their citizens of Turkish origin and Muslim faith.

The book consists of seven main chapters, besides the Introduction and Conclusion. Fourteen maps are included in the book. The maps show the places, where the Turkish, Roma, Pomak and Muslim population are inhabited; changes and transformations of Bulgaria since the establishment of the First Bulgarian Empire to-day, the "Greater Bulgaria", and the areas, where the Bulgarian language is spoken. The one and only photograph<sup>2</sup> in the book shows the expellees between the Kapitan Andreevo [Checkpoint Ali] (p. 78-79) – Kapıkule, the only land border crossing for pedestrian, motorized, and train traffic between communist Bulgaria and Turkey.

Kamusella begins his book by depicting the world and international politics in 1989. While the communist regimes were on the eve of the collapsing across the Soviet bloc, the importance of his depiction is to point out how the Bulgarian authorities to some extent were successful at hiding the assimilation and Bulgarization of non-Bulgarian citizens. As the western politicians and public opinion were "busy" with forming the post-Soviet world, thousands of Turks and other Muslim minorities of the country were forced to abandon their Turkish or Islamic-sounding names and adopt Bulgarian ones, thus, Bulgaria could be a mono-ethnic state, in which consolidated Bulgarian nation inhabit. Since the formation of the Bulgarian principality, Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox has never been vast majority among the other ethnic groups in Bulgaria. The reason behind implementing the "Revival Process" was the fear of the extinction of Bulgarians in years. The 1983 declaration of the independence of the Northern Cyprus stimulated the so-called the Bulgarian anxiety to be intervened by Turkey. Kamusella's book clearly shows both the historical process that ended up with the expulsion of Turks and the political background of the events in the summer of 1989.

As for the Bulgarian authorities, all the official decisions related to the expulsion were legal, although the process must be defined as ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> The photograph was taken on 3 July 1989 by Zhivko Angelov, a photographer of the BTA [Българска телеграфна агенция *Balgarska telegrafna agentsiya*, Bulgarian News Agency].

cleansing. Nevertheless, both then and now Bulgarian state officials were “lucky” to be ignored for their anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim sentiments by the international public opinion. The Bulgarian expulsions of 1989, furthermore, may well have served as a model for Slobodan Milošević in mid 1990s. Yet, the ignorance on the conducting a “successful” ethnic cleansing and getting clean away with it, was an encouraging attitude for possible offenders. Moreover, even the leader of Soviet Union, Gorbachev apparently expressed an interest in the forced name changing of Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria, supposing the Bulgarian experience as a testing ground for a policy, later to be applied for the Muslims in the Soviet Union.

Although the expulsion of Turks was the biggest one in Europe since the population transfers –the expulsions of ethnic Germans from Central Europe in 1945-1950, at the end of the Second World War, the Turkish victims of the process were disregarded even in scholarship or European public memory. Kamusella, after stating and defining the concept of ethnic cleansing, actually breaks the silence over the 1989 ethnic cleansing of Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria and over the tragic event’s political and international ramifications. Moreover, Bulgarian authorities denominated the expulsion as the “Great Excursion” euphemistically and even in a cynical manner. Because, except the state officials and high ranking sportsmen, “the common people” of socialist Bulgaria had passports for the first time. Turkish and Muslim expellees were regarded as “tourists”, who would return back to Bulgaria after “three-month excursion” in Turkey. Interestingly enough, the formal legal status of the expellees was “tourists”, until they would gain Turkish citizenship in 1990s. However, it was not a “big excursion”, but forced migration, and when its extent is considered –that over 360,000 people were forced to leave their homelands– as Kamusella stated, it was an ethnic cleaning. The expectation was the return of the “loyal” and “newly converted Bulgarians” in a short time. Nevertheless, really small amount of expellees came back. Therefore, on 29 December 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party reversed the policy of forced assimilation of Turks and Muslims. The party officials feared that the expellees would soon be joined by a further 400,000 Turks (Muslims) wishing to leave Bulgaria, which in turn would deepen the already acute economic and demographic crisis in the country. This statement also indicates and emphasizes the amount of the expellees and their crucial role in the Bulgarian economy. Because the expulsion took place shortly before and during the harvest, the agricultural sector of Bulgaria’s economy took a hit, given that the country had already been heavily indebted to the west.

After reading Kamusella’s work, one could understand the ethnic

combination of Bulgaria since its foundation, the tensions between the Bulgarian majority and the Turks, and other Muslim minorities (including Roma people, Tatars and Pomaks); the concept of the unitary (or homogeneous) Bulgarian socialist nation and how this concept became the ideological foundation of the 1984-1985 forced assimilation campaign, and eventually of the 1989 ethnic cleansing as well. In order to conduct his study, Kamusella uses selection of articles on the subject from international press (including German, Polish, and Yugoslav press) as well as Bulgarian, Turkish sources and documents. Yet, he states his will to use the archives of Bulgarian Communist Party. However, due to the entire archive of the party went up in a mysterious fire on 27 August 1990, he could not reach the primary sources, which could shed light on the expulsion. Besides the detailed documentation of largely ignored events of 1989, Kamusella both raises many new questions for further events, as well. Another important aspect of this study is to show how the Bulgarian expulsions are related to the "Kurdish Question" in Turkey in late 1980s. On the Bulgarian side, Turkey's policy against the Kurds in the eastern Anatolia was useful apparatus for Zhivkov regime to reciprocate the criticism from Ankara related to the oppression and assimilation of Turks in Bulgaria. In summer of 1989, when Turkish emigrants crossed the border Ankara government aimed to settle them in eastern Anatolia, after the Kurds left for migration to the west. However, Turkish emigrants rejected the proposal and never went beyond the east of Ankara to settle.

Another considerable aspect of Kamusella's book is giving detailed information about Turkish political and resistance organizations against the "Revival Process". The leaders of these organizations were the first victims of the expulsion to Austria and Yugoslavia. However, after the fall of Zhivkov regime and the democratic transition in Bulgaria, former members of Turkish organizations have formed their political parties and become essential parts of politics of Bulgaria. The well-known of all, the Movement for Rights and Freedom (Dvizhenie za prava i svabodi, DPS) was founded in January 1990 and it emerged as the third major political formation in post-socialist Bulgaria. Although, Turkish and Muslim minority are represented by a powerful political formation, still not a single state official of politician of Zhivkov regime has been brought to justice for the assimilation policies and the forced emigration of Turks and Muslims. Even during Bulgaria's accession negotiations with the EU the issue of mass deportations were not added to agenda of the EU negotiators. Solely, in 2012 the deputies of 41<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian National Assembly adopted "The Declaration Condemning the Attempted Forced Assimilation of Bulgarian Muslims". Although the Declaration falls short of a straight-forward

apology, the deputies condemned vociferously the assimilation policy of the [Bulgarian] totalitarian communist regime against the Muslim minority in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the so called “Revival Process”, and the expulsion of more than 360.000 Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin [from Bulgaria to Turkey] in 1989 as an act of ethnic cleansing committed by the [Bulgarian] totalitarian regime (pp. 115-116).

All in all, despite the killing of Turkish and Muslim civilians, who were the opponents of the assimilation policies in mass protests or in the notorious concentration camp on Belene, luckily Bulgaria did not head for a civil war. Hopefully, any people will never face discrimination, oppression, and assimilation due to belonging to an ethnic group or religion.