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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BULGARIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE EU MEMBERSHIP IN CONTEXT OF MINORITY RIGHTS *

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* Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the changes in the field of minority rights in Bulgaria after it gained the status of the European Union (EU) membership. It has argued that important developments in the field of minority rights have been experienced in Bulgaria after the EU membership and the EU has played a leading role in these changes. To investigate these phenomena, this study poses the following questions: How has the EU contributed to Bulgaria in the democratization and its progress on minority rights? What are the changes in minority rights in Bulgaria after EU membership and what role did the EU play in these changes? This study utilizes Europeanization and Rational Choice Institutionalism as its theoretical framework. Hence, it is aimed to contribute to the literature of Europeanization and Rational Choice Institutionalism in general, and to the EU-Bulgaria relations and the EU's role in the democratization of Bulgaria in particular.

AZINLIK HAKLARI BAĞLAMINDA BULGARİSTAN'IN AB ÜYELİĞİ ÖNCESİ VE SONRASI KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ

Öz: Bu çalışma, Bulgaristan'ın Avrupa Birliği (AB) üyesi statüsü kazanması sonrasında ülkede azınlık hakları alanında yaşanan değişim ve dönüşümleri incelemektedir. Bulgaristan'da AB üyeliği sonrası azınlık hakları alanında önemli gelişmelerin yaşandığı ve AB'nin bu değişimlerde başat rol oynadığı tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmada, AB Bulgaristan'ın demokratikleşmesi ve azınlık haklarına dair ilerlemesi hususlarında Bulgaristan'a nasıl katkı sunmuştur? AB üyeliği sonrası Bulgaristan'da azınlık hakları alanında yaşanan değişimler nelerdir ve AB bu değişimlerde nasıl bir rol oynamıştır? sorularına cevap aranmıştır. Çalışmada Avrupalılaştırma (Europeanization) ve Akılcı Seçim Kurumsalcılığı (Rational Choice Institutionalism) yaklaşımlarından faydalanılmıştır. Böylece genel anlamda Avrupalılaştırma ile Rasyonel Seçim Kurumsalcılığı literatürüne ve özelde AB-Bulgaristan ilişkileri ile AB'nin Bulgaristan'ın demokratikleşmesindeki rolü literatürüne katkı sunması amaçlanmıştır.

Introduction

How and what type of social/political and economic changes and transformations the EU candidacy and membership processes bring about in the relevant countries has received increasing academic attention in the last two decades. The effects of EU membership on Bulgaria's social, political and economic structure have been the subject of many studies¹. In these studies, the transformative role of the EU candidacy and membership process on Bulgaria's political and economic structure is principally examined. The effects of the EU candidacy and membership process on Bulgaria's democratic structure, especially on minority rights, have been the subject of relatively limited academic studies. This study aims to contribute to the literature on Europeanization and Rational Choice Institutionalism in general and the effects of the EU on minority rights in Bulgaria particularly by examining the effects of EU on minority rights in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria became a member of the EU in 2007. It has and used to have serious problems in the field of minority right. Especially from 1971 to 1989, when Todor Zhivkov was in power, all ethnic minorities, especially Turks, lived in difficult conditions in Bulgaria. With the end of the Cold War and the end of the Jivkov government, Bulgaria has made virtual progress on minority rights². With the EU accession and membership process, however, Bulgaria had to make more serious breakthroughs to adapt to the EU *acquis communautaire*, especially in the field of human and minority rights. The oppressive policies of the Jivkov government toward minorities, especially toward Turkish minority, drew international reaction. Although there were affirmative developments in the field of minority rights as a result of Jivkov's removal from the Bulgarian administration, it could not reach the required level until Bulgaria became an EU member. With the EU accession process, relatively faster progress in the field of minority rights has been made by Bulgaria. It is argued that first, with the EU membership, Bulgaria has made progress in human rights and democratization, including the minority rights. Secondly, the EU played an important role in these developments.³

The following section presents "Europeanization" and "Rational Choice Institutionalism, in order to provide a basis for assessing the influence of the EU on the changes in the field of minority rights in Bulgaria. Then, the concepts of "minority", "ethnic identity" and "human rights" are discussed. The basic dynamics of Bulgaria and the general situation of the country in the pre-accession period, and the situation of the country in the field of minority rights are examined. Finally, the changes in the field of minority rights in Bulgaria throughout its EU accession and membership processes are elaborated. By doing so, it assesses how and to what extent, if so, the changes made have been generated by Bulgaria's EU accession and membership processes.

1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The concept of Europeanization has been increasingly employed to analyze the European integration throughout the EU. Europeanization concept provides new tools, methods, and mechanism to examine the effects of European integration throughout the EU on associated states. With the Single European Act of 1986 and the Maastricht Agreement of 1993, the integration process has accelerated, and new approaches have gained importance in relation to this situation. Europeanization has also found its place as a new research topic at this point.⁴ In this regard, since the 2000s, the Europeanization studies have increasingly focused on whether the local policies, institutional and political functioning of the member and candidate states are affected by the polity, political and policies of the EU, and if so, to what extent and how.

¹ Coşkun, 2001; Özlem, 2020;2015;2008.

² However, these improvements are still far away from the EU norms and calls.

³ Özlem, 2008: 350-367.

⁴ Uğur & Aksoy, 2015: 164-165.

The concept of Europeanization is broadly explained as a political development that specializes in the emergence of a set of political institutions that formalize and perpetuate the interaction between a political system and actors, which is clearly visible at the European level and the development of European rules. Thus, the effect of the EU is not limited to the associated states and their policies, but also it includes norm and value construction at domestic and EU levels.⁵ Thus, different definitions of Europeanization have been made by different scholars in different fields in different periods. Different points are touched upon in each of these definitions. In this context, one of the definitions of the concept belonged to Robert Ladrech.⁶ Ladrech referred to Europeanization as a process in which the EU's political and economic structures and local policies and policy-making processes become an integral variable of the organizational logic. For this reason, Europeanization has also been seen by Ladrech as the integration of national actors and institutions with the policies emerging at the European level, within the framework of the developments brought by the integration process of the EU accession and/or membership process.⁷

According to Tanja Börzel, Europeanization is a process in which local policy areas become the subject of policy making at the European level. Rather, Börzel has focused on the transformation of some of the sovereignty of EU member states to the EU level and has tended to limit the concept to changes in policy practices at the local level.⁸ According to Bulmer and Burch, Europeanization is a process in which member states are influenced by EU norms and values both in policy making and in their implementation. In this regard, Europeanization requires the internalization of the EU norms and values by the member states.⁹ Radaelli, on the other hand, expanded the content of the concept and stated that the Europeanization has turned into an approach that can be used not only for EU members, but also for candidate and even non-EU countries. According to Radaelli, Europeanization is a process in which economic, political and socio-cultural variables are part of the logic that dominates local policies and policy-making mechanisms, institutions and identities. At the same time, Radaelli claimed that Europeanization is still an ongoing process and that it expands itself in scope by adding different levels day by day.¹⁰ Featherstone, on the other hand, analyzed the period between 1981 and 2001 and classified the definitions of Europeanization. According to Featherstone, four main areas are discussed in Europeanization. These areas can be identified as *historical process*, *institutional adaptation*, *cultural spread* and *political adaptation processes*.¹¹

Although the concept of Europeanization is increasingly associated with the EU, there are also those who want to explain the concept by taking it out of the EU context and extending it to the European institutions and organization. According to this setting, the Europeanization studies have ignored the influence of other European-based institutions and organizations. Europeanization should, therefore, also include the non-EU countries. Europeanization should not be reduced to the EU alone due to the relations between European-based institutions and organizations such as the Council of Europe (EC), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the EU's institutions.¹² The concept can be defined as the implementation of EU legislation by the member and candidate countries in a narrow sense, and the adoption of European norms and values and changes at the domestic level in a broad sense.¹³ For this study, we define it as the adaptation

⁵ Cowles & Risse, 2001: 127

⁶ Doğan, 2018: 288-289.

⁷ Ladrech, 1994: 69.

⁸ Börzel, 1999: 574.

⁹ Bulmer & Burch, 1998: 602-603.

¹⁰ Uğur & Aksoy, 2015: 166.

¹¹ Özçelik, 2015: 37.

¹² Vink & Graziano, 2007: 10-12.

¹³ Yazgan, 2012: 124.

to the EU acquis by the member and candidates states as a result of the EU calls and adaptation pressure.

According to Rational Choice Institutionalism, which constitutes the theoretical framework of the study, national and international actors make cost-benefit calculation in their preferences and act strategically¹⁴ to maximize their interests. In this regard, institutions and organizations are established by actors in line with their rational goals. Actors' behavior and choices are shaped and to some extent be constrained by institutional frameworks. Actors, therefore, also try to shape and change the institutional framework as well.¹⁵ The concept of institution, on the other hand, can be named as variables that provide foresight and tend to encourage cooperation to ensure the optimum benefit of national and international communities in uncertain conditions, instead of directly determining the preferences of the actors.¹⁶ Institutions can also be viewed as a formal structure, an informal agreement or set of expectations. According to Peter A. Hall, institutions are defined as "*regulated patterns of behavior that reflect pareto-optimal equilibria or subgame-perfect solutions to collective behavioral dilemmas*".¹⁷ From this point of view, institutions are also seen as a behavioral pattern that is important in coordinating the relations between the actors, shaping the preferences of the actors to a certain extent and thus providing stability and balance on social relations.¹⁸ As a result, it is seen that one of the distinguishing points of this approach is in terms of defining institutions. In general terms, according to Rational Choice Institutionalism, institutions matter, and they are the arrangements that keep the relations between the actors trying to maximize their benefits in balance.¹⁹

Rational Choice Institutionalism proposes a set of assumptions about politics and actors. There is a presupposition that actors are rational, have their own interests and clear preferences and in the light of these preferences, they try to maximize their interests by making a strategic calculation. However, in an environment where there are no institutions, the work of each actor to maximize his own self-interest greatly reduces the possibility of producing an optimum result for the community. Institutions growth the collective benefit and reduce the behavioral uncertainties between the actors by giving guarantees about the behavior of other actors and by identifying the alternatives related to the preferences of the actors. As such, the institutional framework does not only try to limit the behavior of the actors, but also ensures that the behaviors are channeled in a certain direction by providing predictability.²⁰ In this regard, rational choice institutionalism tries to explain the formation process of institutions with a functionalist approach through the benefits of institutions. The existence of institutions on behalf of the actors is based on their values and efficiency. institutions are largely formed by the actors on a voluntary basis to maximize their benefit raising from cooperation.²¹ As such, it has emphasized that institutions stabilize the interaction between the actors, encourage the formation of cooperative association among self-interested individuals and provide information to prevent possible uncertainties. In short, institutions are mechanisms that undertake the task of coordination to maintain political and social balances.²²

There is also need to evaluate the concepts of "minority", "ethnic identity" and "human rights to critically assess, conceptualize and delimit the existing definitions used in the study. From a sociological perspective, a minority is a group that is few in number in any community and

¹⁴ Hall & Taylor, 1996: 948; Immergut, 1988: 12.

¹⁵ Bell, 2002: 366-370.

¹⁶ Rakner, 1996: 1-2.

¹⁷ Hall, 2009: 204-205; Fiorina, 1995: 113.

¹⁸ Rakner, 1996: 8.

¹⁹ Thelen, 1999: 381.

²⁰ Hall & Taylor, 1996: 946-949.

²¹ Hall & Taylor, 1996: 949.

²² Rakner, 1996: 10; Thelen, 1999: 381-382.

has different characteristics from the majority group.²³ In the context of international law, it is possible to talk about the lack of definition. Francesco Capotorti, who rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's Subcommittee on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, made a proposal on the definition of the concept of minority. The definition of minority in the report he prepared in 1978 is as follows: "A *minority* is a group that is numerically less than the rest of the population of a country, is not in the administration of the country, but is a citizen of that country, has different linguistic, religious and ethnic characteristics from the rest of the country's population and has the motive to preserve their own traditions."²⁴ This definition of Capotorti has been accepted by many international organizations. While defining minorities, the UN and OSCE suggest religion, language, culture, being less than the rest of the country's population and not being in government as objective variables. As the subjective variables, the desire for the preservation of religion, language, culture and traditions was mentioned.²⁵ As it can be understood, many criteria can be used in order to put the concept of minority on a more suitable ground. However, none of these criteria alone is competent to define the concept of minority. For this reason, it is important to evaluate all the criteria together to define the concept of minority correctly.²⁶

In addition to the concept of minority, we see that the concepts of "national minority" and "ethnic minority" are also used. The concept of *national minority* is used to describe minority groups living within the borders of another country outside the country with which they have ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical and cultural ties. The concept of *ethnic minority* is generally associated with the emphasis on identity and the characteristics of living in the same geography for a certain period of time. In this context, immigrant groups and indigenous peoples can be included in the concept. Because the phenomenon of solidarity between immigrant groups highlights the identity, which is one of the basic features of the concept of ethnic minority. Likewise, if there is an emphasis on identity, the indigenous peoples who have been settled in a region for a certain period of time are also included in the ethnic minority class. The difference between a national minority and an ethnic minority is that, in addition to the characteristics of the ethnic minority, the national minority has the chance to participate in the decision-making mechanisms of the country in which it is located.²⁷

Another concept to be used in the study is the *ethnic identity*. Ethnic identity is the characteristics that a community has almost as given, without necessarily having the organizational ability to organize themselves within a state structure. This concept emerges as a unifying factor in times of crisis. It can be said that this concept plays a role in increasing the solidarity between groups in the first period of nation-state formation processes and in the co-existence of multiple identities in nation-states. It, thus, presents a political, cultural and social unification that makes sense in the name of "groups of people who can organize themselves around the common religion, language, belief, norms and values".²⁸ On the other hand, it also presents a negative meaning at the point when it deepens the distinctions. In this case, blood and lineage ties of groups can trigger a process of marginalization and thus social and/or political chaos in a multi-ethnic society. This can result in the division or even extinction of the society and/or the country. In addition to that, ethnic identities are structures that change, develop, and transform over time in line with the conjunctures of the periods. As a result, it has a variable structure and ethnic groups cannot be expected to be a homogeneous whole.²⁹

²³ Oran, 2010: 26.

²⁴ Çavuşoğlu, 2001: 35.

²⁵ Girasoli, 1995: 88.

²⁶ Tendre, 2000: 577-578; Okutan, 2004: 62.

²⁷ Çavuşoğlu, 2001: 41; Arsava, 1993: 55-64; Okutan, 2004: 65; Girasoli, 1995: 102.

²⁸ Göka, 2006: 261-311.

²⁹ Yanık, 2013: 231-232.

The last concept to be used in the study is the *human rights*. Rights and freedoms granted to individuals in democratic societies are referred to with different definitions. In this context, it is seen that the concepts of individual rights, individual liberties, fundamental rights, public liberties and human rights are used.³⁰ Although there are slight differences between these words, which are used to define the concept of human rights in today's sense, they are used interchangeably because they generally have the same meaning. However, the most comprehensive of these words in terms of meaning was definitely human rights. In fact, there is no generally accepted definition of human rights. But in general, it is possible to make a definition as "the inalienable rights that people are entitled to have as human beings at birth and that they are equal before the law, regardless of their religion, language, race, gender and opinion". Today human rights are briefly introduced as rights that should be granted to all people.³¹ Johan Galtung, on the other hand, made a unique definition and conveyed human rights as an important parameter of the peace project, which aims to reduce the suffering people are exposed to.³²

Especially in the 20th century, there has been a period of serious developments in human rights. Human rights, which were seen as a part of the internal affairs of states until World War II, ceased to be related to individual states after this war and gained an international identity. At the same time, human rights violations are also counted as the violations of international law. The states signed the UN Founding Agreement to prevent attacks against humanity and human rights. As a result of this initiative, the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" was declared by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on 10 December 1948. Another European-based organization, the EC, like the UN, gave importance to the protection of human rights and the "European Convention on Human Rights" was announced on 4 November 1950. With these efforts, human rights and the protection of human rights have gained a stronger position on the legal ground.³³

2. Minority Rights in Bulgaria in the Pre-EU Membership Process

Since its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1908, Bulgaria did (to some extent, does) not tolerant of people who are not of their own religious or ethnic identity. Bulgaria, therefore, has experienced Turkish migration to the Anatolia at different times. the first wave of immigration started after the Balkan Wars and was followed by the First World War. According to Justin McCarthy, approximately 400,000 immigrants came to Anatolia between 1912 and 1920.³⁴ With the Neuilly Agreement signed on November 27, 1919, issues such as Bulgaria's non-discrimination between minorities and Bulgarians living in its country, the ability of minorities to work at state levels like Bulgarians and even to have a say in the administration and that minorities should not be deprived of their right to education, were settled for the first time. The agreement is a very progressive text on minority rights. In 1925, with the Friendship Agreement signed between Bulgaria and Turkey, the rights of the Bulgarian Turks were guaranteed. However, with the formation of a fascist-oriented administration in Bulgaria, this positive atmosphere began to disappear. As a result of this situation, approximately 200,000 Turks migrated from Bulgaria to Turkey in the period between 1923 and 1939. As of 1944, the transition to the communist regime in Bulgaria made the situation of minorities in the country more difficult. The migration wave called 1951 Migration took place in such an environment and 150,000 Turks had to migrate to Turkey.³⁵ With the communist revolution, Bulgarian Governments' pressures on minorities further increased. The movable and immovable properties of minority schools were nationalized. the courses taught in minority languages were reduced

³⁰ Kapani, 1993: 13.

³¹ Kuyaksil, 2012: 21-22.

³² Galtung, 1999: 10.

³³ Canikoğlu, 2001: 464-465.

³⁴ McCarthy, 2014: 182-185.

³⁵ Özlem, 2008: 349-351.

and minority school was abolished. As a result, Turkey and Bulgaria signed an immigration agreement in 1968 and approximately 130,000 Turks migrated Turkey between 1969 and 1978. Todor Zhivkov became the head of Bulgaria in 1971. The Zhivkov era was seen as a "black period" for the minorities in the country. In this period, the policy called "Bulgarianization" was first implemented on minorities. With this policy, minority names were changed with Bulgarian names and developments such as ignoring non-Christian religions and their freedoms, the Bulgarian Government's failure to invest in the regions where minorities live, economic isolation and torture of those who oppose these practices were experienced within this policy.³⁶

By the end of 1984, tensions peaked in Bulgaria. The continuation of the Bulgarianization process by the government led to the start of protests, especially in Deliorman and Rhodope regions, where the Turkish minority live intensely. In this process, the Bulgarian security forces took drastic measures and tens of people lost their lives and thousands of people were exiled. Belene Camp, located on Belene Island, which is known throughout the world and has a very bad reputation, was chosen as the place of exile. During the exile period, many people lost their lives due to bad conditions and torture. As a result of the developing conjuncture, the protests intensified in 1989 and death-fast strikes started. Bulgaria, which could not stand the reactions from the outside world, especially Turkey, started to take a step back. Speaking to the Bulgarian media on May 29, 1989, Jivkov stated that "Bulgarian Muslims" in Bulgaria are free to go wherever they want. "*We will give your passports, Turkey will open its doors, those who do not want to stay, leave.*" In this way, Zhivkov publicly called on Turkey to open its borders. In fact, Jivkov made this call as a bluff. According to Jivkov, at that time it was not possible for Turkey to accept hundreds of thousands of immigrants into its country and Turkey was not prepared for this issue. However, Turgut Özal, who is President of Turkey at the time, responded positively to the call and approximately 350,000 Turks emigrated to Turkey from 1989 to 1990. At the same time, this migration was the largest migration movement in Europe after World War II.³⁷

The Glasnost (Openness) and Perestroika (Reconstruction) policies put forward by the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980's were also felt in Bulgaria and a change took place in the country. At the end of 1989, Zhivkov administration collapsed, and Petar Mladenov came to power. With this change, Bulgaria started to make improvements in minority policies, especially Turks.³⁸ The Mladenov Government released those sentenced to prison for leading the above-mentioned protests. In addition, meetings were held with Turkish intellectuals, the largest minority group in the country and it was stated that the position of all minorities, including Turks, in Bulgaria would be strengthened. In this regard, it has been explained that minorities can use their old names and live their religious life as they wish. Some steps have also been taken by Bulgaria in the field of education. First, minorities were allowed to open courses in their mother tongue. It was decided to teach Turkish for four hours a week in public schools³⁹. The communist party was closed, and The Mladenov administration allowed to the establishment of new political parties.⁴⁰ In addition, with the new constitution issued in 1991, the rights of minorities were guaranteed in the legal context. According to the Article 6 of the constitution: "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. All citizens are equal before the law. There shall be no privileges or restrictions on rights based on race, social origin, ethnic identity, gender, religion,

³⁶ Özlem, 2008: 351-352; Poulton, 1993: 146-184; Korkud, 1986: 29-36; Özlem, 2015: 89.

³⁷ Özlem, 2008: 352-353; Atasoy, 2011: 106-116; Çağlayan, 2009: 29; Şimşir, 2012: 440.

³⁸ Özlem, 2015: 89-90.

³⁹ Although, these decisions were implemented at the beginning, the problems regarding the implementation of these rules keep going.

⁴⁰ Although more than a hundred parties were founded, most of them remained ineffective in Bulgarian political life. For details see Özlem, 2008: 353-359; Özgür, 1999: 86.

education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status.” At the same time, there are clauses in the constitution stating that the privacy of private life, the inviolability of personal and personal rights, freedom of communication, free movement, freedom of expression and all these rights will be protected by the state. In fact, it is clear that the new constitution is quite liberal on paper and can be seen as an important progress in the context of minority rights for Bulgaria after the communist regime.⁴¹

3. Development of Minority Rights in Bulgaria During and After EU Membership Process

After the communist era, Bulgaria wanted to steer its course towards the West, namely the EU. The act of developing relations with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1988 can be seen as the beginning of Bulgaria's relations with the EU. After a period of about two years, the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed between the EEC and Bulgaria in May 1990. With the partnership agreement signed on March 1, 1993, the works for the harmonization of Bulgarian legislation with the Community legislation were launched. On 14 December 1995, Bulgaria officially applied for EU membership, but had to wait 5 years for the negotiations to start. the National Security Concept (Kontseptsiya za Natsionalnata Sigurnost na Republika Bulgaria) were put into practice. With this concept, Bulgaria's EU membership goal has been declared more clearly and the membership goal has been placed at the center of Bulgaria's foreign policy. it has, therefore, tried to solve its problems with its neighbors, including Turkey. It has taken steps to resolve its border issues with Greece and Romania, its linguistic issues with Macedonia and the Turkish minority issue with Turkey.⁴² Due to the Turkey's role in Western organizations, Turkey was, to some extent, seen as a bridge to the West and Western organizations by The Mladenov administration. The relations with Turkey, therefore, have improved and Turkey supported Bulgaria's NATO membership in 2004.⁴³

On February 15, 2000, the negotiations between Bulgaria and the EU officially started and as a result of the negotiations, on January 1, 2007, Bulgaria officially became one of the member states of the EU.⁴⁴ During the period from 1988 to 2007, Bulgaria tried to comply with European legislation in many areas throughout the harmonization law. In this regard, democratization reforms gained momentum. the MRF, the majority of whom were Turks, was established and entered the political life of Bulgaria. This situation was received very positively by the EU. In addition to these, developments in the country have shown themselves in terms of religious freedoms. Mosques were opened and Muslims were allowed to pray as they wish. On the other hand, it has been stated in the progress reports that discrimination against especially Roman and Gypsy minorities still continues and Bulgaria has been warned in this context. In the 2002 Progress Report, the improvements made by Bulgaria for the mentioned minority groups were deemed insufficient and it was stated by the EU that the problem still endures. the 2002 Progress Report also notes that economic and social services were not provided to the regions where Turks live intensely. The socio-economic situation of the Turkish minority in the country, therefore, deteriorated gradually. In this regard, the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the Racial Equality Directive and the Labor Equality Directive were put into practice with the harmonization law in 2003.⁴⁵

It is, however, important to note that, the reforms and efforts undertaken to advance the minority rights in Bulgaria unfortunately have weakened after it guaranteed EU membership in 2007. The situation of immigrants is, therefore, not at the desired level in many areas yet. Bulgaria has not invested enough in the regions where minorities live. This has led to the

⁴¹ Yıldırım, 2006: 34.

⁴² Özlem, 2008: 358-360; Coşkun, 2001: 46-47.

⁴³ Poulton, 1993: 198-199; Özlem, 2015: 90-91.

⁴⁴ Yıldız, 2018: 7; Tezcan, 2004: 97-98; Özlem, 2020: 566.

⁴⁵ Yıldız, 2018: 9-10.

emergence of the problem of unemployment among minorities. The low-price policy of Bulgarian companies for tobacco, which is mostly undertaken by the Turkish minority, has put the Turkish minority into an economic bottleneck. The EU's agricultural and regional subsidies have been deliberately misused and have not been delivered to the minority regions and people. This has further worsened the living conditions for the minorities. This resulted in the gradual increase in economic inequality, unemployment rates of minorities and the minority migration to European countries.⁴⁶ When we look at the political field, a similar picture emerges. The first problem we encounter in this political field is the efforts to reduce the influence of Turks in the Bulgarian parliament, especially for minorities. The mentioned situation is carried out indirectly, not directly. It has been realized that to reduce the number of Turkish deputies in the parliament, the voting rate of Turks should be reduced. To give an example, some procedures have been devised to make it difficult for people of Turkish origin who have Bulgarian citizenship and live in Turkey to vote. People who wanted to enter Bulgaria through the border gates were blocked by ultra-nationalist Bulgarians and a problem was created for Turks who wanted to vote in Bulgaria. On the other hand, another difficulty was that the Turks who were going to vote were required to write a petition in Cyrillic in front of the ballot box. This has made it extremely difficult for Turks who have not lived in Bulgaria for a long time to vote. Another challenge is the drastic reduction in the number of ballot boxes across Türkiye. As a result, Turks had to wait in long queues to vote. The number of Turks who voted in the elections in Bulgaria, therefore, decreased. In parallel with this, the vote rate of the MRF and the number of Turkish deputies in the parliament began to decrease as the elections progressed, and the voices of the minorities in the country were less heard.⁴⁷

In the religious field, although there are improvements compared to the past, it is seen that there are still problems in this field. The first of these problems is the salaries of clergy. Due to the fact that the salaries of the clergy are insufficient to live in the country, these people are supported by minority foundation and even the local people. At this point, it is seen that Bulgaria allocates about twenty times more budget to Christian institutions than Muslim institutions. This situation, inevitably, is met with a reaction by the Muslim minorities and makes it inevitable that the expenses and salaries of mosques and clergy are mostly covered by the local people. Another problem in the religious field is that the mosques in the country are not maintained and even the mosques that are about to be demolished are not given material and moral support for restoration. Despite the calls and legal struggles of the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, no maintenance and repair work is carried out on mosques in the country. This behavior, which is against the basic norms of the EU, has been continued by Bulgaria for years and does not face enough reaction from the outside world. Another problem in the religious field is the ban on headscarves in public places in Bulgaria. In this context, according to the Bulgarian Constitution, headscarved photos are not allowed in the official documents of the state and headscarved employees in state institutions are not allowed. Another problem in the religious context was the acceleration of anti-Islamic movements in Bulgaria, as in the rest of the European continent. In this context, violent movements have been organized through some extremist movements. In terms of violent movements, attacks on mosques are at the forefront. In this context, another point was the provocation of the Bulgarians in the country by ultra-nationalist groups against all Muslims. This situation increases the possibility of tensions not only between ethnic but also religious groups within the country and the spread of this situation throughout the country. Another problem in the religious field is that the Sofia Higher Islamic Institute is not recognized in Bulgaria. There are three imam hatip high schools providing religious education in Bulgaria. In the context of higher education, there is only Sofia Higher Islamic Institute in the country. However, since this institute is not officially affiliated with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, difficulties arise from time to time in terms of the

⁴⁶ Özlem, 2008: 365-366; Gökbel & Karakuş, 2019: 61.

⁴⁷ Gökbel & Karakuş, 2019: 65.

validity of the diplomas obtained from the institute. This affects the number of official religious posts in the country.⁴⁸

When we look at the problems of minorities in the field of education in Bulgaria, it is seen that Turkish minorities have problems in general. The most basic point here is the issue of Turkish education. According to the National Education Law adopted by Bulgaria in 1999, the fact that Turkish lessons will be given on the weekends or after the end of the school week caused the participation in the lessons to be limited. In addition, the fact that the students who took the Turkish course could not take another foreign language course caused the application to be inadequate and was met with a reaction from the Turkish minority.⁴⁹ In addition, with a new decision taken by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education in 2001, the hours of Turkish lessons were reduced. In this context, it has been reduced to two lesson hours in primary education and three lesson hours in secondary education and the benefit rate of the lesson has decreased further. In addition to all these, the school administration's efforts to direct parents to take another foreign language lesson instead of Turkish lesson, the requirement to have at least ten Turkish students in schools for Turkish lessons and the low number of teachers to teach Turkish made it difficult to give Turkish lessons, at the same time, further reduced its efficiency. As a reflection of this situation, the Turkish course, which was chosen by approximately 100,000 people in 1992, was chosen by 40,000 people in 2002, and the number of students who chose it decreased to 10,000 in 2015. The tragic decrease in the number of students choosing Turkish lessons has also caused Turkish teachers to be out of work in Bulgaria and increased unemployment among Turkish teachers.⁵⁰

Another important problem regarding Turkish education is that the books of the Turkish course have not been updated. Although this problem has been mentioned many times by the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, no steps have been taken by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education for a long time. At the same time, Turkish teachers in Bulgaria complained a lot about this situation and the insistence gave results and the books were updated even at the primary level. Another problem related to education is the denigration of the Ottoman State administration during the time Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule in the textbooks and in this way a defamation of the Turks. As a result of this situation, children belonging to the Turkish minority are exposed to marginalization and exclusion from the first period of their school life. Especially in the days of Bulgaria's national independence, nationalist and anti-Ottoman discourses come to the even more. These days, allegations are emerging that many people of Bulgarian origin were killed during the independence process of the Ottoman Empire and that the Bulgarian people were persecuted during the 500-year period of Ottoman rule. In response to these claims, results such as not maintaining and restoring architectural works belonging to the Ottoman period emerge.⁵¹

As a result, Bulgaria has tried to raise the country's standards in many areas since 1990, the official start date of its bilateral relations with the EU. The main reason for this is the country's desire to be integrated into the Western camp as soon as possible. Because Bulgaria was under the domination of the USSR for many years and in this process, it fell behind in many areas and isolated itself from the world. With the end of the Jivkov era, Bulgaria has made a breakthrough in EU membership. In this context, Bulgaria, which exhibited a very willing attitude in the first place, took a passive orientation regarding minorities after being included in the community in 2007. As mentioned above, the Turks, who are the largest minority group in the country, have been most affected by this situation. Although conditions are better compared to the communist era, minorities in Bulgaria still face various difficulties in areas such as

⁴⁸ Gökbel & Karakuş, 2019: 70-74.

⁴⁹ Özlem, 2008: 366.

⁵⁰ Gökbel & Karakuş, 2019: 67-69; Çolakoğlu, 2015: 4443.

⁵¹ Gökbel & Karakuş, 2019: 67-69.

economic, political, religious and educational. The biggest problem here is that the EU does not react to Bulgaria on the mentioned issues and does not impose any sanctions. Because the EU has a great role in changing Bulgaria's approach towards minorities in a positive way.

Conclusion

Bulgaria, which officially separated from the Ottoman Empire in 1909, has been on the world political scene independently since the mentioned date. Bulgaria, which has an ethnic minority of about 15% within its borders, has experienced some problems because of this. In particular, the Turks, who have the largest population among the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, were seen as the biggest obstacle to the emergence of a homogeneous Bulgaria. For this reason, pressure was put on all minorities, especially Turks, by Bulgaria. Particularly between 1971 and 1989, when Zhivkov was the head of the country, minorities were tried to be assimilated. After eighteen years, which was very difficult for minorities, in parallel with the collapse of the USSR, the winds of democracy began to blow in Bulgaria and as a result of this situation, Jivkov was dismissed from his post. In the post-Jivkov period, Bulgaria started to turn towards the Western camp and in this process, the country tried to catch up with European standards in many areas. One of the areas mentioned was minority rights. Particularly, with the official start of the EU membership negotiations of Bulgaria on February 15, 2000, efforts have been carried out to put the regulations on minority rights on a legal basis. This situation is closely related to the "Europeanization" approach. Because adaptation to the EU acquis and calls in the field of minority rights is very important for it to be an EU member. As a result, Bulgaria tried to adapt to the EU acquis and calls in the field of minority rights until it guaranteed EU membership in 2007. The finding of the study, however, display that, first, Bulgaria started to turn its back on minorities gradually after it guaranteed EU membership in 2007 this date. There has been no economic investment in the regions where minorities live, which has led to an increase in unemployment rates among minorities. In the political field, especially the influence of Turks in the parliament has started to decrease gradually. Freedoms of religion were restricted and no maintenance or restoration was carried out on religious artifacts. Minorities did not have the chance to receive education in their mother tongue and the use of languages other than Bulgarian in public places was not welcomed. Second, it does not seem possible for Bulgaria to adapt to the positive regulations regarding the minority rights without the EU calls and adaptation pressure. Bulgaria has made virtual progress on minority rights during the period of accession negotiations. In short, as the rational institutionalists propose, Bulgaria adapted to the EU calls and norms when the costs of change are adaptation are less than the benefits and served its interests and welfare.

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