

WHAT IS THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT TRYING TO PROVE BY DENYING THE HISTORICAL FACTS?

Doç. Dr. MEHMET SARAY

The move of the Bulgarian Communist Government to liquidate the Muslim Turks in Bulgaria, initiated at the end of 1984 and completed in the beginning of 1985, by forcing the Turks in Bulgaria to exchange their Turkish names for Bulgarian ones, is a crime against the most elementary principles of human rights, of world civilization and culture. By this act the Bulgarian government has committed itself to a policy of an ethnic, cultural and political genocide. Though this term has been initially used to mean physical destruction of one or another nation, in a broader sense it signifies a cultural and political extinction of a national minority.

This policy has been unveiled and most vigorously defended by Grisha Filipov, Prime-Minister of Bulgaria and member of the Politbureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Aitos, on March 2, 1985¹; by the former Prime-Minister and present President of the National Assembly, Stanko Todorov in Sliven District, on March 9, 1985²; by Milko Balev, member of the Politbureau and Central Committee of Bulgarian Communist Party in Haskova, on March 6, 1985³; by Dimitar Stoyanov, the Minister of Interior, in Veliko Turnovo, on March 6, 1985⁴; by Dimitar Stanishev, the Secretary of General Committee of Bulgarian Communist Party in the District of Blagoevgrad, on March 6, 1985⁵; and by other members of the Communist Party and the Government in Bulgaria.

Word by word, the most prominent representatives of the Bulgarian Government and the Bulgarian Communist Party, have repeated the following declaration-apparently a copy of official theses, adopted by the

¹ *Chernomorski Front*, Burgas, 3/9/1985.

² *Slivensko Delo*, Sliven, 3/12/1985.

³ *Haskovska Tribuna*, Haskova, 3/9/1985.

⁴ *Borba*, V. Turnovo, 3/9/1985.

⁵ *Prinsko Delo*, Blagoevgrad, 3/9/1985. For further information see, S.T. Raikin, "Problems of Communism in Bulgaria" *Suobodno Zemedelsko Zname*, No: 45/46. Avgust 1985, p. 18.

highest organ of the government in Bulgaria, the Politbureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and promulgated as an official policy of the Bulgarian Government. I quote the programme of the Bulgarian Communist Party in full as I regard the contents of high importance:

“The elevation of the moral-political unity and the national solidarity of the Bulgarian people to a new qualitative level is an enormous historical conquest of the April Line of the Bulgarian Communist Party⁶.

“People’s Republic of Bulgaria is a one-nation (homogeneous) state, it does not include in its territories foreign lands; the Bulgarian nation does not include parts of other peoples and nations.

“However, due to well known circumstances, our people has had a bitter historical destiny. It is best illustrated by the attempts of foreign slave-masters to cut out living parts of our national body. Throughout the Ottoman yoke, with varying force, but uninterruptedly, entire regions of strategic importance have been forcibly Turkicised, young Bulgarian girls have been raped in their homes, young Bulgarian boys have been forced into the Janissary corps and group or individual conversions to Islam have been carried out. The science of history has at its disposal an enormous amount of material testifying for the Islamizations which have been taking place throughout a long period of five centuries. The chronicles, the legends and the folksongs tell heartbreaking stories. The assimilation has been a permanent state policy of the Ottoman Empire, which has been carried out consistently and uninterruptedly; its purpose has been to extinguish the national selfconsciousness of our people. This history had been raging over the entire territory where Bulgarians had lived, and has led to the Turkicization of part of them. Numerous foreign scholars, travellers and diplomats who have visited the country in those days have left us direct testimony as to the tragic fate of our nation. Even to this day, the way of life, the folklore, the language and the dress of this population still show the signs that their ancestors had been Christians and possessed a Bulgarian national conscienceness.

“During the 1960’s, and especially during the 1970’s, the process of regeneration was unfolded in a number of districts in the Rodopi region. In accord with the historical truth, a large portion of the descendents of the forcibly Islamized Bulgarians in the Smolyan, Pazardzhik and Blagoevgrad

⁶ *The April Line* of the Bulgarian Communist Party was adopted when Mr. T. Zhivkov and his comrades came to power in 1956.

districts resumed (restored) their Bulgarian names. The beneficial results of this process are well known to all of us. They are recognized even by the biased observer. The economy of these districts developed rapidly, their culture and the education of the people were significantly elevated, and so also grew their cadres to lead them in the future. The working people are rapidly shaking off the Muslim fanaticism, are being liberated from the traditional conservatism and their Bulgarian patriotism is being strengthened.

“A process of voluntary restoration of the Bulgarian names of our compatriots who had Turkic-Arabic names unfolded spontaneously, massively and with a new strength throughout the country at the end of 1984 and in the beginning of 1985. This process, in the true sense of the word was an avalanche movement, it enveloped the entire country in two or three months, and in some villages just in a few days.

“Why did this occur so spontaneously and took such a massive character?”

“First of all, because this process is an impressive manifestation of a re-thinking and giving a new meaning to one’s own past. It represents a facing of the historical truth by this population, its maturing awareness of its Bulgarian native roots, of its Bulgarian ethnic belonging. The people made prudently and farsightedly their historical choice. They restored their Bulgarian names because they believe deeply in the Bulgarian Communist Party, because they are convinced that it has no other concern but the concern for the welfare of the workingmen and because its policy corresponds to the interests of the broad masses of the people in our country. Every one will understand that the change of names is a historic act, a new birth of man which reveals new and unfathomable perspectives for his all-around growth, for his full manifestation and realization in our society. It opens the way for the happiness and the well-being of his children and grand-children. Clearly and categorically, comrade Stanishev pointed out there isn’t and there will not be any emigration to Turkey; there aren’t and there will be no Bulgarian-Turkish negotiations on this question. There is no state with which we could talk because there is no part of our people which is a part of another nation. This should be understood by all. This is a firm and unchangeable position of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, of our Party and State leadership.

With regard to the restoration of the names of our fellow citizens he continued, who until now had Turko-Arabic names there could be no

question of any assimilation. The question is neither a forcible association of foreign ethnic groups to the Bulgarian nation, nor of foreign lands, it is but a question of legitimate return of what has been taken away from us, extricated by blood and violence from the heart of our people. Our native brothers and sisters, whose national consciousness had been clouded for centuries by enslavers, are returning to our Bulgarian common family. This population is blood out of its blood and flesh out of its flesh. People's Republic of Bulgaria will never make an exchange coin out of its citizens for some kind of negotiations and bargaining. People's Republic of Bulgaria is our common native land, it is our land. Here we are born, here we live, here our children and grand-children will live. All of us together, nine million Bulgarians, will continue building our developed socialist society, together we will march towards communism.

“Our way is the right way. The development of our country confirmed the strength and the vitality of the communist ideology, the prudence and the beneficence of the Leninist April Line of the Party.

“Now we are faced by new historical tasks, stated in conclusion by Dimitar Stanishev. Their resolution will elevate our society much higher, will fortify the strength and the power of our state, the unity of the Bulgarian people.

“Firmly unified around the Central Committee, led by the great son of the Party and the people, comrade Todor Zhivkov, heads forward greater victories. No storms, whatsoever, and no wind will derial us. We will continue marching in the coming years from victory to victory for the happiness of the people, for the future of our children, for the booming of Mother Bulgaria”⁷.

The statement of the Bulgarian Communist Party contains full of false information about what is happening in Bulgaria today, and what did happen in Bulgaria in the past, in particular during the Ottoman administration. This statement also denys the principles of Leninist policy towards-non Russian people and works of Bulgarian historians. Furthermore, it denys the origin of muslim Turks in Bulgaria and their human rights.

First, it is appropriate to draw the attention of the Bulgarian authorities to the principles of Turkish administration of the past, or to describe the

⁷ This statement of the Bulgarian Communist Party is taken from the article of Prof. Raikin, pp. 19-23, which is mentioned above.

general attitude of the Turkish authorities towards the non-Muslim people of the Ottoman Empire.

The Principles (or the Character) of Turkish administration in history.

The Turkish administration and political life was deminated and controlled by "TÖRE" before Islam. Here, I have to explain what "Töre" is or what it meant to the Turkish people in the past. Töre was justice, knowledge and wisdom. Töre was a sensible head. The Töre meant the organizer of the necessary principles of Turkish life. According to the Orkhun Inscriptions, Divan-ı Lûgati't-Türk, the famous work of Mahmud Kashghari, and Kutadgu-Bilig, the famous work of Yusuf Has Hacıp, Töre provided the main principles for social and administrative life of the Turkish people. These principles were explained in a more detailed way by Yusuf Has Hacıp. As he wrote: "The principles of Töre should be as follows: 1. Kônîlik (Justice), 2. Uzluk and Kîşîlik (Kindness and humanity), 3. Tüzlük (equality). If an object stands on three feet, it can not slip to one side. To keep this object standing, the feet must stand straight. If one of the feet is crooked or false the other two can not stand straight, they will slip. One of the feet is justice, the other one is equality, and the last one is kindness and helpfulness. If a ruler or a government, or a country is not standing on these three principles, that country or administration can decline easily. When Töre is applied to politics personal inclinations are ruled out. It considers humans as a whole, therefore, it shines upon the world like a sun and moon. In short, Töre's light is equal everywhere. It considers everybody with complete equality... Töre solves every problem with justice. It makes no distinction between an ordinary man and a monarch. Everybody is equal in the eyes of Töre, a monarch, a relative, a strange traveller, a guest or anybody"⁸.

These principles of social and political life of the Turkish people were used in an increasing way after the Turks converted into Islam. If we examine the history of Seljuks and Ottomans we can see how Turkish rulers tried to follow these principles in their administration of the countries which they ruled. As a result of this Turkish attitude, Turks or non-Turks, muslims or non-muslims who lived under Turkish administration, found themselves in an equal world. This also created an equal chance and freedom in the

⁸ Yusuf Has Hacıp, *Kutadgu-Bilig*, Ed. by R.R. Arat, Ankara, 1959, Beyits: 805-822 ve 453-461.

usage of mother tongues and religion for every nationality. The tolerance of this Turkish administration was immediately noticed by other nationalities, in particular by the Armenians, who became the neighbours of Turkish people during the Seljuks in the 11th century. It was during these days, the Armenians were living under the pressure of Byzantians who wanted them to exchange their religion, in fact was not a religion but sect in Christianity, Gregorianism and converted into ortodoks. According to the sources of that period, after the Turkish victory over the Byzantians in Malazgirt (in 1071) the Armenians welcomed the Turkish administration which provided to them freedom and right to practice their religion and mother tongue. Thus, the Armenians lived such a happy life for centuries. As a result of this Turkish tolerans, the Armenians were able to preserve their culture and religion. For this, it is obvious, they owe so much to the Turks. As today, it is so sad to see what our Armenian friends are doing to the Turks in return.

The attitude of the Ottoman rulers and Muslim Turks towards the non-Muslim peoples was even more tolerated one comparing with the Seljuks. All the citizens of Ottoman Empire were completely free in practicing their religion and national languages, and had their own churches and schools. Furthermore, the economic and social welfare of the non-Muslim people became better than the Muslims in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries as a result of the pressures of foreign powers.

The Ottoman Empire came to an end after the World War I. The Turkish Empire had existed for almost VI (six) hundred years. Now, there are 24 independent states, including the Republic of Turkey, on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. One has to ask this question: How did this happen? As it has been already explained before, the Turks never forced the non-Muslim and non-Turkish people in order to change their religion and language. On the contrary, they showed a great tolerans to the ether nationalities in the practice of their religion and culture. The existence of 24 independent states are the best and undeniable evidence about the Turkish policy and humanitarian attitude of Turkish people towards the non-Muslim and non-Turkish people in the past.

More than seventy years past since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Nobody came out and said that the Turks forced the non-Muslim people in order to change their religion, language or names. Now, suddenly the Bulgarian authorities have come out and accused the Turkish rulers by forceful Islamization and Turkicization of the Bulgarian people. On what evidence the Bulgars accuse the Turkish rulers of the past nobody knows. If

they have any evidence they must show to the world. But, what I know as a historian, the Bulgars don't have such evidence. Because the Ottoman rulers never forced the Christian Bulgar people for the purpose of Islamizing or Turkicizing them. The Ottomans, as it has been already explained before, could not force people, because it would be against the principles of Töre and Kur'an which dominated the political and social life of the Turkish people throughout centuries. There, one can call the Bulgars nothing but bloody liars.

It has been pointed out earlier that the policy of Bulgarian authorities are denying the facts which has been brought up by the Bulgarian historians. Here is a short paragraph, which is taken from a book published by the Bulgarian Government in 1951. It follows:

“In People's Republic of Bulgaria exist several national minorities and ethnic groups. Turks are the most crowded of them and are Muslims in faith.

“The Turks were settled in Bulgaria, as of the end of XIVth century, after having conquered the country, concentrating in the first place, in the regions close to roads which had strategic importance. In the course of following centuries, and particularly in XVIIIth century, the Turks continued to come in great numbers to Bulgaria. Also for strategic reasons, Turkish state strengthened, during the period of Turco- Russian wars. the colonization of Bulgaria from the East and Northeast. After the liberation of the country from the Turkish yoke (1877-1878), a reverse process starts: migration of Turks, which continued, up to now, with a different tempo...”⁹.

In a report in May 1868, which is prepared by the Russians, the elder brother of the Bulgars, and mentioned in another Bulgar source, is stated that there were 2,582, 385 Bulgars and 3,913,354 non-Bulgars or Muslims¹⁰. Lets assume that 1/3 of this Muslim population was non-Turkish elements, but still there would be two and half millions of Turkish people, which is almost the same number with the Bulgar population of that time. There is no exact figure how many of them emigrated to Turkey. But according to the

⁹ *La Minorité Turque en République Populaire de Bulgarie*, Published by the directorate of Press of Bulgarian Government, Sofia, 1951, p. 3.

¹⁰ B.N. Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (Turkish Emigrations from the Balkans)*, *Belgeler- Documents*, Ankara, 1970, II, p. CLXVII-CLXVIII.

modern researchers, most of them stayed in Bulgaria, and are numbering over two million at present.

The present Bulgarian policy is also denying what the Bulgarian authorities said in the previous years about the position of the Muslim Turkish people. Here is a statement which is given to a journalist by Mr. Todor Zhivkov, Head of State of Bulgaria in 1981. After giving some information about the position of christian people in Bulgaria, Mr. Zhivkov said: "Muslim believers in Bulgaria (Bulgarian Turks and a small number of Bulgarian Mohammedans) form the second biggest part. They are considered absolutely equal with all remaining citizens of the Republic and are free to profess their faith. There are more than 1300 mosques, 8 district Müfti Offices with a Chief Müfti Office and 570 district Imams in Bulgaria. The State grants a regular annual subsidy to the Chief Müfti Office to add to its budget the clergy's support. Apart from this, the State takes care of the conservation restoration of all monumants left from Ottoman times of architectural and historical value. This religious domination, under the Şeriyat Law, continues to possess and manage its own properties today, the income of which goes for religious purposes.

"The prayer homes -the mosques- are open at any time and visited by believers to pray without any restrictions. Besides, the "Yeni Işık" newspaper is published with a 20,000 circulation both in Bulgarian and Turkish in Bulgaria, and there is also the "Yeni Hayat" magazine, also in Bulgarian and Turkish, with a circulation of 10.000. There are regular daily 4-hour broadcasts in the Turkish language on the Bulgarian Radio. There are artistic ensembles with the State Theatres in the twons of Shoumen, Kirdjali and Razgard, which perform special "Turkish Programmes", dances and so on. Classics works of Turkish literature and by contemporary Turkish authors are brought out here in Bulgarian and Turkish"¹¹.

Today, as a result of recent Bulgarian mass assimilation campaign the figure of publications in Turkish and naturally circulation is "zero". The Bulgarian Government has now prohibited speaking of Turkish in public places. The Bulgarian authorities have also destroyed the above mentioned Mosques and historical monuments left by the Ottomans, except very few of the biggest and famous of them.

¹¹ Interview with H.E. Mr. Todor Zhivkov, Head of State of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, by Mr. Robert Maxwell, President of the Pergamon Press, on the occasion of the book entitled "Todor Jivkov Statesman and Founder of New Bulgaria" published by Pergamon Press in 1981.

The Bulgarian authorities are also denying what Bulgaria as a State has signed official documents and international agreements on human rights and the minority rights of Turkish community in Bulgaria.

At the end of the First World War, the Kingdom of Bulgaria signed the Treaty of Neuilly of November 27, 1919.

On the 18th October 1925 Turkey and Bulgaria signed in Ankara the Treaty of Friendship undertaking Eternal Peace and Friendship in their relations. The Protocol annexed to this Treaty states in Chapter A and reads as follows: "Both sides mutually agree that Bulgaria shall ensure the full enjoyment of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria from the provisions on the protection of minorities of the 1919 Treaty of Neuilly, while Turkey reciprocally shall ensure the full enjoyment of the Bulgarian minority in Turkey from the provisions of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

"All the laws enacted by the signatory States, the Treaties of Neuilly and Lausanne, concerning the minorities, shall be reciprocally recognized by Bulgaria for Turkey and by Turkey for Bulgaria.

"Notice: Turkish citizens whose language is Bulgarian, shall be considered as Bulgarian minority"¹².

On the same date, that is to say on 18 October 1925, Turkey and Bulgaria also signed the Convention of Establishment. Article 2 of this Convention reads as follows:

"Both contracting parties have agreed not to obstruct in any way optional immigration of Turks in Bulgaria and Bulgarians in Turkey".

After the Second World War Bulgaria signed on 10th February 1947 with the Allies the Paris Peace Treaty, undertaking to respect human rights and basic freedoms irrespective of "race, sex, language and religion".

After the Communist Party of Bulgaria came to power, it is to be regretted that they have not continued with the normal implementation of voluntary immigration of Turks from Bulgaria. This began to create tensions between the two countries. Suddenly in 1950 Bulgaria sent a Note to Turkey to accept within three months 250,000 immigrants. Obviously, the object of this Note was not a normal process of immigration but ousting of a quarter of

¹² The passages of these Treaty agreements is taken from "Statement by the Turkish Delegation concerning the Turkish minority in Bulgaria May 21, 1985" which is given at "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting of experts on Human Rights, 7 May-17 June 1985".

a million people from Bulgaria. After exchange of Notes between the two countries 50,000 persons were accepted in 1950 and approximately 102,000 in 1951. As it began the immigration suddenly came to an end because Bulgaria changed its policy. Pressures began to build up on the Turkish Minority. Nevertheless, in 1968, after lapse of 17 years, Bulgaria agreed and signed another immigration treaty with Turkey on 22 March 1968, about the reunification of the families. 130,000 Turks immigrated to Turkey between 1968 and 1978 under the terms of this Agreement.

Furthermore, after the two countries signed the Final Act, in Helsinki, they signed on 3 December 1975 a Declaration on the principles which would guide their bilateral relations. According to this Declaration, after referring to the implementation of the Final Act and the Principles of the United Nations, they emphasized all the principles of the Final Act and in particular respected for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

All these agreements are valid and in force.

Finally, the Bulgarian Communist Party and its leadership are saying that they follow "the prudence and the beneficence of the Leninist April Line in their country". However, their policy has nothing to do with Lenin's nationality policy and it is against the principles of Leninist policy towards the non-Russian (or Slavic) people. The present policy of the Bulgarian Government, in fact, is denying the principles of Leninist policy towards the Muslim people. If the Bulgarian Communist Party and its leaders sincerely believe and follow the principles of Leninism, they should remember the sayings of Lenin on the nationality question. Before the revolution Lenin wrote and upheld these views:

"The abolition of the system of social strata and complete equal rights for all citizens irrespective of sex, religion, race, and nationality.

"The right of the population to receive an education in its own language, a right to be secured by the setting up of the necessary schools at the expense of the state and of the organs of local government; the right of every citizen to express himself at meetings in his own language; the introduction of the native language on equal terms with the language in all local, public, and state institutions.

"The right of self-determination for all nations comprising the state"¹³.

¹³ R. Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, London, 1967, p. 16.

On November 20, 1917, shortly after the issue of the "Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia", a special appeal was addressed to "All Muslim Toilers of Russia and the East". The Declaration ran as follows:

"Muslims of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirgiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkistan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and mountaineers of the Caucasus and all you whose mosques and oratories have been destroyed, whose beliefs and customs have been trampled underfoot by the Tsars and the oppressors of Russia. Your beliefs and usages, your national and cultural institutions are henceforth free and inviolable. Organise your national life freely and without hindrance. You have a right to this. Know that your right like those of all the peoples of Russia are protected by the entire might of the Revolution and its organs..."¹⁴.

¹⁴ Conquest, p. 22.

