

## THE ROLE OF THE MUSLIM MINORITIES IN INTERSTATE RELATIONS IN THE BALKANS

İLHAN UZGEL

### I. Introduction:

The beginning of the 1990s has witnessed enormous changes and upheavals in the structure of Balkan politics, comparable with that of the first two decades of the 1900s. Socialist regimes collapsed, nationalism is on the rise in its most fervent form, new states emerged, ethnic wars are underway, new relationships are set up, and so on. Within a very short span of time, there have taken place great changes, making it difficult even for observers to catch up with developments. Yet, some characteristics peculiar to the region are still prevalent such as the problems concerning ethnicity and minority issues, and disputes in the Aegean Sea. These questions still play an important role in determining the policies of the Balkan states.

It has long been a commonplace to commence an interpretation of the Balkans by saying that it is a very complicated area which is prone to ardent nationalism and ethnic tension due to its special geographical character and historical background. The area is complicated, not only in terms of ethnic, national, and religious diversity, but it is also politically very complex. Turkey and Greece, both members of NATO and other Western organizations, have problems in their bilateral relations, particularly the long-standing Cyprus question and minority issues. Bulgaria was the closest ally of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia had been a leading member of the Non-Alignment Movement. Albania was a self-isolated country, once the only European country outside CSCE, and also the only country that declared itself to be atheist.

Apart from this political diversity, all of these states have minorities in their neighbouring countries. There are Turkish minorities living in Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia; a Greek minority in Turkey and Albania; Macedonians, albeit they are not recognized either by Greece or Bulgaria, live in these two countries; Albanians in Serbia (Kosovo), Greece and Macedonia; a small number of Bulgarians in Macedonia; Hungarians in Romania and Serbia; and Serbs in Macedonia. There are also other ethnic or religious groups like Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece, Jews, Romanies (Gypsies), and Vlachs in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Serbia. Even this rough picture shows the complexity of the minority issues in this part of the world and explains the root of the term "balkanization". Obviously, the multi-ethnic character of these states on many occasions has exacerbated the relations among them and prepared the ground for suspicion and misperception on the part of the countries that include the minority of the neighbouring state.

It should be made clear from the outset that this is an article that aims to analyse a certain aspect of the foreign policies of the Balkan states. I will, therefore, not enter a discussion about the definition of ethnic, ethnicity, or even minority. The purpose of this article is not to investigate the ethnic or religious origins of the peoples who live in the Balkans, but taking this for granted, to understand and explain the role of minorities (whether recognized or nonrecognized by the respective governments) in affecting the foreign policies of the Balkan states. It may be argued that nowhere in the world do minority issues influence the relations of a handful of states situated in a relatively small geographical area. In this study I will focus on the problems revolving around the Muslim minorities and will touch upon other minority issues only when necessary.

Within the framework of this study, it is necessary to point out some of the characteristic features of the Balkans in order to grasp the minority questions.

## **II. The Burden of the Past:**

The first characteristic feature of the Balkans is that the nations in this region still heavily carry what may be called the "burden of the past". That is, peoples of this area (perhaps in some other parts of the world as well) have vivid memories of past events to the extent that the agonies of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, World War I and World War II, the Greek Civil War, occupations and atrocities committed by either side continue to affect their perceptions of the others. This may be explained by the complexity and closeness of the diverse ethnic and religious groups. What is more, the nearly five centuries-old Ottoman domination of the Balkans is so carved into the minds of the Balkan peoples that even modern Turkey's initiatives in the 1990s are viewed as an attempt to revive this Empire. The terms and definitions such as "Greater Albania", "Greater Bulgaria", "Greater Serbia",

"the Megali Idea", "Uniting of Macedonia", "Kosovo, the cradle of Serbian nationhood" are still in daily use on the verge of the twenty-first century. So is the resurfacing of IMRO as a political party in the Republic of Macedonia. When it is considered that the history of the Balkans is full of wars, occupations, great power rivalry, riots and raids, exoduses, struggles for nationhood, assassinations, komitacis, maltreatment of minorities, and enmity among peoples, the picture of the past is nothing but a bleak one. So, that background in mind, one cannot be astonished to see the Balkans as a conflict-ridden region.

The Ottoman rule has had an unforgettable impact on the history of the region. While most of the Christian peoples of the Balkans regard this long period as the darkest era of their history, Turks take pride in their just and tolerant rule, especially when they consider the ongoing bloody conflict in the Balkans today. It is an historical fact that the Christian subjects of the Sultan were free to maintain and to practice their religious beliefs, and in that sense Ottoman rule was not assimilationist. The clear evidence for this fact is that, after five centuries, the churches spearheaded the struggles for national independence from the Ottoman Empire. Since they could preserve their religious, cultural, and linguistic identities under the Ottoman rule, nationalist movements had grown in this region. But, on the other hand, Christian peoples of the Balkans blamed Ottoman rule for their backwardness.<sup>1</sup>

All the countries of the Balkans gained their independence by fighting against the Turks. And ironically enough, Turkish people had to fight for their liberation against their former subjects, that is, the Greeks in 1919-1922, to build their own modern nation-state.

Ottoman domination and the settlement of Turks in these lands brought another legacy to the region. The Turkish people left in Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, compelled Turkey to be concerned with developments in these countries. In the neighbouring countries the rights and status of the Turkish minorities are guaranteed by international treaties as are those of the Greek minority in Turkey. Besides, the modern Turkish state has not been totally indifferent to the Muslims who were converted to Islam in the Balkans (such as Bosnian Muslims and Pomaks in Bulgaria). Their cultural affinity and their immigration in large numbers to Turkey strengthened the contact between Turkey and the Balkan Muslim populations. Turkey has been regarded as a protector by these Muslim peoples. In times of crisis some peoples of non-Turkish origin declared themselves to be Turks as happened in Bulgaria and Macedonia.

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Balkans*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 33.

The second characteristic feature of the Balkans within the scope of this study is that minority questions are intermingled with other deep-rooted problems. For instance, minority problems are only one aspect of the existing problems between Turkey and Greece. Albania and Yugoslavia had ideological frictions, among others.

Security issues, ideological frictions, and border disputes, have all contributed to the intricate relations of the Balkans states. The partition of the lands of the decaying Ottoman Empire beginning from the 19th century created grave problems for the peoples of this region who strove to form their own national states. This led to the claims of the new states over the others' territories which culminated in the Macedonian question and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. The two World Wars had a strong impact on the Balkans. Yugoslavia and Greece were invaded by Italy and Germany; two other Balkan states, Bulgaria and Romania participated in World War II on the side of the Nazis leaving bitter memories with the Balkan peoples.

The Macedonian question in this regard deserves special attention. It is almost impossible to separate the Macedonian question from any crisis occurring in the Balkans. It is a deep-rooted question now involving five countries of the region: Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Albania, and the Macedonian Republic. The trouble over the name of the newly-independent Republic of Macedonia is the latest example. The creation of Greater Bulgaria in the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 which gave most of Macedonia to Bulgaria and, in the Berlin Congress the same year, its restoration to the Ottoman Empire caused such a resentment in this country that this event determined the future course of Bulgarian foreign policy at least until the end of World War II. The Macedonian question left an ineradicable trace in the history of Bulgaria. Bulgaria was under Ottoman domination politically but it was also under Greek cultural control, at least until the formation of an autonomous Bulgarian Church (The Exarchate) in 1870. Therefore, they had to wage a war for their political independence against the Ottomans as well as for their independence from Greek cultural and spiritual hegemony.

A distinction is necessary between the Muslim minorities of Turkish origin and those of non-Turkish origin, such as the Albanians, Pomaks and Muslims in the Sandzak region and some section of the Romanies. This distinction is quite important as their status represents different cases both politically and legally. By and large, the Turkish and the Albanian minorities constitute the two biggest and most important minorities both numerically and politically. Although the Turkish minorities in Greece and Bulgaria have caused great friction, the most sensitive of the minority issues in the Balkans in the 1990s have been the Albanians in Kosovo. The common fear is that the war in Bosnia could spread to Kosovo where the Albanians have been ruled under the firm hand of Milosevic since 1990.

Generally, the attitudes of the Balkan states towards their respective Muslim minorities follow two ways. The Muslims of any stock in the Balkans are regarded as the remnants of Ottoman domination, something that reminds them of the vestiges of an alien rule, that is the reason for at least some of the evils and problems they face in their lives. Although it is now not easy to distinguish between them, basically the Muslims in the Balkans are the descendants of either the Turks settled there after the Ottoman conquests such as the Turks in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece, or the indigenous peoples such as Albanians, Bosnians and Pomaks who converted to Islam for various reasons. The problem with the non-Turkish peoples is that, notwithstanding their ethnic and linguistic sameness with their co-nationals, they are considered to be renegades who sold out their beliefs, obtained privileges, and served the Sultan to gain economic advantages or for other reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, religion has played a great role in reinforcing the national identity in the Balkans, and Muslims of non-Turkish origin have developed a distinct culture and life styles throughout these years, and are mostly affected by Islam and to some extent, by Turkish culture. Since the non-Muslim Balkan peoples view the long Ottoman rule in the Balkans somewhat negatively, they view the existence of the Muslims in the same manner. As the war in Bosnia has shown quite clearly, the Serbs are trying to cleanse the Bosnian Muslims even as they eradicate the physical reminders of a distant past.

As far as the Turkish minorities are concerned, they are seen as the descendants of the once superior nation of the Ottoman Empire. Their status has changed from ruler to ruled, from majority to minority. Certainly, the issues and problems related to the Muslim minorities in the Balkans cannot be explained merely by psychological attitudes. They have roots in history. The daily political developments, environmental factors, economic conditions, political changes, and demographic patterns all influence the situation of the minorities and the relations of the concerned states.

### III. Minorities and Foreign Policies:

The role of minorities in interstate relations has been a neglected subject in the literature of foreign policy studies. Although the treatment of minorities attracts attention to some extent, attempts at theorizing on the ways minorities influence foreign policy has not received the attention it

---

<sup>2</sup>George Arnakis, "The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism," Charles and Barbara Jelavich, ed., *The Balkans in Transition*, Hamden, Archon Books, 1974, pp. 120-123.

deserves when the existing conflicts caused by the minority problems in the world are taken into account.

The most common case is that minorities are usually located in the border areas of neighbouring countries which hold each other's nationals as minorities. This is a fact conditioned by the events of the past. In most of the cases "nation" and "state" do not coincide and leave some parts of a nation in the neighbouring countries.

Minorities in a neighbouring state, especially if located in the border areas, create a feeling of insecurity for the host state. This perception of threat or insecurity is enhanced in the case of problems in the relations of the neighbouring countries. They are usually regarded as a "fifth" column, an entity which is alien or at least different from the majority, having different religious, linguistic, and cultural traits. Indeed, it is true that there are many examples of the conduct of minorities acting as a fifth column. The Kurds in Iraq and Iran, some sections of the Croats and Crimean Tartars in the Second World War, Macedonians in the Greek Civil War, and the like.

The existence of minorities in some cases enables other countries to interfere in the internal affairs of a country and sometimes to manipulate this minority. Minorities could be used as a foreign policy tool. A state that has unfriendly relations with another state can manipulate the minority whether they are co-nationals or not, in order to weaken its rival. This may take the form of provoking this minority, providing material support and serving as a safe haven for their armed bands.

Minorities sometimes influence foreign policy in a way that affects relations profoundly. For many years Bulgaria and Greece, though in rival military camps, have shared a common opposition against Yugoslavia and Turkey. The existence of Macedonian and Turkish minorities in Bulgaria and Greece has led to their rapprochement and a covert cooperation against Turkey and Yugoslavia.

A state which holds the minority from a neighbouring country usually follows one or the other of the following policies:

- The first policy option is to pursue an assimilationist policy towards that particular minority. This option covers measures such as the ban on the use of the native language, suspension of education in the minority language, severing contacts with the mother country, forced change of names, prohibition of religious rituals and practices, conniving at the atrocities committed by paramilitary groups, etc. It also includes attempts to uproot minority links with the mother country, and mass propaganda about their ethnic and religious backgrounds.

- The second policy option is to force as many of the minority as possible to leave the country. This can be called forced expulsion. This could be done indirectly by oppressing them in various ways, or directly in the form of outright deportation.

- The policy of denial is the third option states implement towards their minorities. The states in some cases deny the existence or distinctiveness of a minority in their territories in order to i) pursue an assimilationist policy; or ii) to prevent the mother country and international institutions from interfering in the exercise of their minority rights.

States can pursue either the first, second or third option or even all of them at the same or different times. This, of course, creates tensions and frustrations between the minority and the state and, in many cases, results in the involvement of the neighbouring country to defend the rights of the minority. So, the conditions of the minority remain a destabilising factor in the relations of the two countries.

The most frequent case occurs when a dominant group in one state is separated from its co-nationals who make up a minority group in one or more other states. Such a situation can give rise to irredentism and cause aggressive and expansionist foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> The Balkans provide an apt case both for empirical and theoretical studies of this sort. Albanians, Macedonians, Serbs, Turks, Greeks - all are spread over the neighbouring states, although not all of them cause irredentism. The existence of a minority group in a neighbouring country may give rise to intentions of annexing that part of the territory by the mother country. The Sudeten Germans in the late 1930s or the Bulgarian invasion of Northern Greece in World War II represent appropriate historical examples in this context. This affects the policy of the state both towards the minority and towards the neighbouring country.

In some other cases, each one of the states may have the other's minority in its territory, hence relations become more complicated. When there is an allegation that minority rights are violated by one state, the other minority in the neighbouring country also suffers from maltreatment as a retaliatory action. The minorities, obviously in a delicate position and subject to oppression, fall victim to disputes between the states, disputes that are most of the time beyond their control and outside their responsibility. In other words, minorities may be the victims of political or other kinds of problems and they may cause problems per se. It is in times of crisis that the conditions of the minorities become really troubled. When the relations of the two states deteriorate or when the problems turn into open conflict, the

---

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*, Aldershot, Dartmouth Pub., 1990, Introduction.

situation of the minorities become very sensitive. In these cases, they may be deprived of their rights or even incarcerated during the crisis or conflict.

A nation-state is considered to consist of a homogeneous people with a common past, common language, common national consciousness, common interests and so on. In general, it may be argued that states tend to be homogeneous in order to cope with the threats, economic problems and uncertainties of a still anarchical world. Since the loyalty of a minority group is considered to be towards their origin country, they are regarded to have different goals than the majority. Thus, the common perception is that the national minorities have different national consciousness and goals, and that they do not strive for the well-being of their country of residence, but selfishly try to secure and promote their own living conditions. Therefore, minorities are viewed as a factor not contributing to the general well-being and development of their country of residence but rather as a factor that weakens its strength, may be the soft under belly of the country.

Furthermore, the existence of a minority means that, in the last instance, it always carries the danger of national struggle, ultimately aiming at the separation or annexation to the country where they comprise the majority. For a region like the Balkans, where nation-states are still in the process of being established, the existence of the minorities creates severe problems. Having minorities, at the least, requires some responsibilities on the part of the host state. If the minorities' rights are not satisfied, this discontent generates other problems, putting this state in a guilty position and making it subject to criticism before the world. If this minority has any connections with the neighbouring country, relations with that country are usually adversely affected.

Therefore, states sometimes try to ignore their minorities and tend to deny the existence of minorities whose status is not recognized by treaties. Macedonians in Bulgaria and Greece, and the Albanian minority in Greece fall into this category. As for the ones whose existence and rights are recognized, they usually have to be content with the minimum of their legal rights. There is, indeed, no need to exemplify this case which is common both in the Balkans and other parts of the world.

Minorities, albeit rarely, can also play a positive role in interstate relations. They create a link and serve as a common point between the two countries. But for minorities to play a constructive role depends on a number of conditions. First of all, the country that holds the minority should provide them with their basic minority rights. This minority should be satisfied with their treatment by the state, and there should not be any big problems which cause tensions between the minority and the state. Secondly, the state that holds the minority should be confident that the neighbouring state has no pretension to its territory, nor any intention to use the minority as a pretext

to interfere in the internal affairs of the other state. Third, there should not be other significant questions between the two states. It is, of course, not a very common situation that all of these conditions are met and particularly within the Balkans, generally speaking, minorities pose more problems than their contributions to interstate relations.

It is true that the minorities benefit from an atmosphere of mutual trust and good relations. It is only in these conditions that minorities can contribute to the strengthening of good relations among states and that is why they generally face problems and oppression rather than receiving humanitarian treatment.

#### **IV. The Muslim-Turkish Minority in Greece: The Minority in the Midst of Historical Enmity:**

The Muslim-Turkish minority in Greece lives exclusively in Western Thrace, an area in Northern Greece and along the Turkish border. There are three provinces in that region: Alexandropolis (Dedeğaç), Rhodope, and Xanthi (İskeçe). Although statistics are not very accurate, there are approximately 120,000 Muslim Turks living in this area. Western Thrace remained under Turkish rule until the end of the Balkan War of 1912 and was ceded to Greece according to the Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923. It was stipulated in this Treaty that the Greeks of Istanbul and the Muslim Turks of Western Thrace were exempted from the exchange.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace has always been a controversial issue between Turkey and Greece and contributed to the already existing deep political and juridical issues. To give a general picture of the relations between these two countries, the problems can be summarized: The Cyprus question; problems over the territorial waters and continental shelves in the Aegean Sea; de-militarization of the East Aegean Islands; mutual complaints about the treatment of the minorities; division of the air control mechanism in the Aegean (the FIR issue-Flight Information Region); most recently, Turkey's allegations to the effect that Greece provides logistical support to the Kurdish guerrillas, though the latter officially denies such allegations.

The minority problems between Greece and Turkey have two dimensions. While there is a Turkish minority group in Greece, a Greek minority (about 3,500) lives in Istanbul. The status of the two minorities has been determined by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 and they constitute the remaining part of the minority exchanges between Turkey and Greece. Before

---

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed account of the exchange of minorities, see: Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact upon Greece*, Paris, Mouton and Co., 1962.

going into the details of the relations and minority problems, the social composition of the two minorities should be noted. The Muslim-Turks of Western Thrace are mostly peasants living in the rural and backward part of Northern Greece and many of them speak poor Greek, are illiterate, and have lower standards of living compared with the Greeks. The Greeks of Istanbul are mostly involved in trade and composed the merchant class of late Ottoman times. Although their number diminished in later years due to immigration to their homeland, they still had the advantage of living in a metropolis, speaking Turkish well, having valuable real estate, and doing business at the heart of the country.

It is possible to say from the start that the conditions of both Turkish and Greek minorities have been heavily dependent on the level of relations between the two countries. In other words, it is the deep-rooted problems between Turkey and Greece that have affected the situation and the treatment of the minorities. The Cyprus problem in particular has almost been the main determining factor in the handling of the minorities in both countries.<sup>5</sup>

The first contentious matter is over the name and identity of the Turkish minority. The Greek government denies the existence of a Turkish minority in Western Thrace. It refers to the ethnic Turks as "Greek Muslims", or "Hellenic Muslims", or simply "the Muslim minority". It views the Turks as a religious minority, rather than as an ethnic or national minority.<sup>6</sup>

The Greek authorities try to explain this attitude in the wording of the Lausanne Treaty which speaks of "the Muslims of Greece" and "non-Muslim minorities of Turkey". The subjects of the Ottoman Empire had been divided along religious lines, that is Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore, these definitions were also used in describing the minorities in the Treaty. It is apparent that the "Muslims" in Greece are Turks and no one in Turkey could ever dispute the Greek origin of the Greeks in Istanbul. The Turkish minority members in Western Thrace speak Turkish, many of them have relatives in Turkey and so on. Even some practices of the Greek government in the past acknowledged the definition "Turkish". There is plenty of evidence and

---

<sup>5</sup>This view is shared by both sides. Baskın Oran, *Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Batı-Trakya Sorunu* (The Problem of Western Thrace in Turkish-Greek Relations), Revised 2nd ed., Ankara, Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991, p. 277; Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, "The Lausanne Treaty Minorities in Greece and Turkey and the Cyprus Question, 1954-9," *Balkan Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991).

<sup>6</sup>*Destroying Ethnic Identity, The Turks of Greece, A Helsinki Watch Report*, August 1990, p. 15.

documents concerning the use of the term "Turkish" exist in official papers, in school signboards and in other connections.<sup>7</sup>

With a policy shift in 1977 the Greek government began to change the Turkish names into Greek ones and those who insisted on using Turkish names in public places were fined and imprisoned.<sup>8</sup> This policy was exacerbated after the unilateral declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.<sup>9</sup> The Greek government's behavior has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it has tried to deprive the Turks of their Turkish identity, thus paving the way for their assimilation. On the other hand, Greece, in so doing, tried to sever their links with Turkey. Turkey, after all, is the only power that might protect the rights of this minority. In cases of crises or intensification of pressures, the Muslim-Turks look to the Turkish Council in Komotini and to Turkey as a protector of their rights.

The extension of this approach is the aim of the Greek government to divide the Muslim-Turkish minority. The Greeks have for a long time contended that the Muslim-Turkish minority is composed of Pomaks and Gypsies as well as those coming from Turkish origin. It is also claimed that the Pomaks are ethnically Greeks and this allegation is vehemently denied by the Pomaks who consider themselves Turks.<sup>10</sup>

The Muslim-Turkish minority in Western Thrace face problems in almost every aspect of their daily lives. Space does not permit me to detail all the complaints and problems of the Muslim-Turks there. For this reason, these problems will be mentioned briefly. They may be classified in four sections: i) social and political rights; ii) basic human rights violations; iii) economic problems; iv) educational problems.

i) The Muslim-Turkish minority of Western Thrace have complaints about the violations of the Lausanne Treaty and Greek law Number 2345 concerning their right to select their Muftis (the religious leaders of the Muslims). By an open violation of this law, the Greek governments have never allowed the Turkish minority to select their Muftis and they are instead appointed by the government.

Various associations the Muslim-Turks set up like "Turkish Teachers' Association" or "Komotini Turkish Youth Association" have also been under

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, (Turkish translation) Istanbul, Sarmal Yayinevi, 1993, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> Oran, *op.cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Oran, *op. cit.*, p. 137. Hatzivassiliou claims that ethnic Turks formed half of the Thracian minority, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

heavy oppression. The use of the word "Turkish" in these associations created another problem. The Greek courts have outlawed them on the grounds that the word "Turkish" refers to citizens of Turkey and there are no Turks in Western Thrace.<sup>11</sup> The Greek authorities, as shown in this case, try to accentuate and legitimize their policy of denial by the court decisions.

Although the Turks of Western Thrace have the right to vote as other Greek citizens, they face difficulties in using their right to vote or to stand as a candidate in elections. The violations vary from closure of the Turkish-Greek border to the rejection of applications of candidates just before election day and so on.

ii) Greece, a member of the European Union, is a party to many international conventions concerning human rights as well the Lausanne Convention and other bilateral agreements with Turkey. Despite this fact, the Muslim-Turks in that country have complaints about human rights violations. They claim that their lives are threatened either by extremist groups or even in some cases by the Greek police; they are called for interrogation and are sometimes beaten by the security forces. On January 29, 1990, around a thousand Greek extremists beat Turks and attacked Turkish shops, smashing their windows, while Greek shops were untouched.<sup>12</sup>

Their freedom of movement is restricted, their passports are seized by the police. There is also a restricted military area which covers most of Western Thrace and borders on Bulgaria. This area was set up in 1953 in order to prevent communist infiltration from Bulgaria, but now it serves to separate the Pomaks from the other Muslim-Turks and thus to facilitate their assimilation.<sup>13</sup> An important measure that Greek authorities implement is the deprivation of the Muslim-Turks from citizenship. The Greek Nationality Law No. 3370, Article 19, stipulates that "a person of non-Greek ethnic origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared as having lost Greek nationality." Many Turks who left Greece lost their citizenship and were barred at the borders when they tried to return. The total number of such cases is between several hundreds and several thousands. Certainly, this law prevents the freedom of movement of the Muslim-Turks.

iii) As it was stated before, the Muslim-Turks of Western Thrace are mostly peasants and economically much poorer than the Greeks. The

---

<sup>11</sup>Türkaya Ataöv, "The Ethnic Minorities in Greece," *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* (Review of the Faculty of Political Science), vol. 46, no. 3-4 (June-December 1991), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup>Helsinki Watch, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup>Batı Trakya Azınlığı, *İnsan Hakları ve Belgeler*, (Western Thrace Minority, Human Rights and the Documents), Batı Trakyalılar Derneği, Ankara, 1987, p. 8.

Helsinki Watch Report is illuminating in this context. It states that "the differences between the Turkish and non-Turkish areas were striking; whether one is in a Turkish or non-Turkish area is readily apparent".<sup>14</sup>

Beside this general poverty of the Turks, there are restrictions on business, ownership of lands and houses, and particularly the expropriation of lands belonging the Turks is widespread. Since the Turks are mostly farmers the land is of utmost importance for them, and once deprived of land they have no choice other than to leave Greece for Turkey. They are not permitted to buy houses and lands.

The Muslim-Turks also complain that they are not permitted to obtain driving licenses and do not have equal opportunities in getting civil service jobs.

iv) In the educational field too problems and complaints are grave. The Muslim-Turks assert that they are not allowed to build new schools and repair old ones. Greece has pursued a policy of replacing the Turkish teachers with Greek ones. The schoolbooks are also a matter of controversy between the minority (in addition to Turkey) and Greece since they are old and outmoded.

The conditions of the Muslim-Turkish minority in Western Thrace has largely depended on the relations between Turkey and Greece. It is even possible to apply the ups and downs of the Turkish-Greek relations to the state of the Turkish minority. For instance, during the 1930s, when relations between these two countries were very good due to the rapprochement by Atatürk and Venizelos, the Greek government's attitude towards the Turkish minority was also relatively good. With the deterioration of the events in Cyprus, beginning from 1963-64, the oppression of the Turkish minority and human rights violations culminated in the Turkish military intervention in the island. From that time on, the complaints of the Muslim-Turkish minority have increased consistently. The Turkish intervention in Cyprus has created an impression that Turkey might resort to the use of force to defend the Turks living outside of its borders, the already prevalent perception on the part of the Greeks, and this sort of perception has definitely influenced the behaviour of the Greek governments in their handling of the Turkish minority. The consequence was the worsening of the gradual oppression, most probably, with the aim of forcing them to leave Greece. The statistics clearly show this case. According to the data submitted by the Turkish delegation to the Lausanne Conference in 1922-23, the overall population of this region was 191,699. Of this population 129,120 were Turks, 33,910 were Greeks, 26,266 were Bulgarians, 1,480 were Jewish and 923 were

---

<sup>14</sup>Helsinki Watch, p. 33.

Armenians. The Turks also owned 84 % of the lands at that time.<sup>15</sup> With their high birth rate of 2.8 per cent and considering that their number is around 120,000 today, that means nearly 400,000 Turks left Greece during this time. Today, Muslim-Turks own only 20-40 % of the land.<sup>16</sup>

The Turkish minority does not play an important role in the relations between Turkey and Greece. This stems from the complexity of the relations and age old problems between the two countries. If we compare the role that Cyprus plays in their relations, the problems that the Turks of Western Thrace face have never had priority over other issues, a fact that the Turkish minority resents.

The main problem between Turkey and Greece is the long-standing insecurity, whose roots goes back many years, even centuries. In other words, they bear the burden of the past. So long as Greece perceives Turkey as a threat shown by the strategic doctrine of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu who claimed that the threat to Greece is coming not from the North (Bulgaria), but from the East (Turkey), there is indeed little hope to the solution of the existing problems, including the problems of the Muslim-Turkish minority.

It is necessary to state the Greek governments' general attitude towards the other minorities living in Greece. There are, or used to be, Albanians (both Orthodox and Muslims), Macedonians, Vlachs, and Gypsies whose existence was not regulated by international treaties like those which concerned the Muslim-Turkish minority. The Muslim Albanians were in due time expelled from the country where the Orthodox Albanians were assimilated mostly by education and other oppressive measures.<sup>17</sup> In general, Greece declares that it is a Hellenised state, in which all but a few of the people are of Greek origin. In that fashion, Macedonians are classified as the "Slavo-speaking Greeks", "Pomaks" are "Turkified Greeks".

The Muslim-Turkish minority of Greece remains one of the sources of tension in the relations between Turkey and Greece, especially after the bloody ethnic conflict and friction in the Balkans. Recently, another factor has exacerbated the situation: the advent to power of Papandreu whose stance towards Turkey is much harsher than that of other Greek politicians.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ümit Haluk Bayülken, "Turkish Minorities in Greece," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, no. IV (1963), p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> *Helsinki Watch*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ataöv*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

#### V. The Turks of Bulgaria: Swinging between Recognition and Annihilation:

The largest Turkish minority lives in Bulgaria. Although Bulgarians give the number as 900,000 and some Turks claim that their number is two million, it is estimated that there are around 1.5 million Turks living in that country, a number ten times greater than the number of Turks of Western Thrace.

Unlike Greece, the presence of this huge Turkish minority in Bulgaria (nearly 10 % of the Bulgarian population) is the main area of contention and trouble spot in the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria. Although Bulgaria and Turkey have been in opposite alliances throughout the Cold War years, their relations have generally been stable except at times of crisis created by the treatment of the Muslim Turks in that country. It may be argued that, in general, it is the existence of the Turkish minority that weighs heavy on the relations of the two countries.

The other important feature of the minority issues between Turkey and Bulgaria is the fact that, unlike Greece, there is no significant Bulgarian minority in Turkey. Therefore, the principle of reciprocity cannot be applied in the treatment of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria was established as a Principality in 1878 after the Berlin Treaty. Since the lands on which Bulgaria was established were the closest Balkan parts of the Ottoman Empire, it was heavily populated by Turks. According to a Bulgarian source, in 1883 in North-East Bulgaria, Muslim Turks accounted for 51 % of the population, while Bulgarians numbered less than 48 %, while the rest was a small number of Greeks and Armenians.<sup>18</sup> The end of the Ottoman domination in Bulgaria resulted in waves of migrations since then.

It is interesting to note that even before the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic, the Turkish minority was an issue between the Ottoman State and newly-founded Bulgarian state. The first high-level official contact between the Ottoman State and Bulgaria was held in 1879 concerning the rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria whose status had been regulated by the Berlin Treaty.<sup>19</sup> After that meeting, the Turkish minority has been the major issue between Turkey and Bulgaria. The history

<sup>18</sup>Borislav Tafrajiski, Detelin Radoeva and Douhomir Minev, "The Ethnic Conflict in Bulgaria: History and Current Problems," Kumar Rupesinghe, Peter King and Olga Vorkunova, *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup>Bilar Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri* (The Turks of Bulgaria), Ankara, Bilgi Yayınevi, 1986, p. 43.

of the Turkish minority and of the Turkish-Bulgarian relations have revolved around their treatment and their migration to Turkey.

One of the most difficult times for the Bulgarian Turks was the fascist regime which toppled the relatively tolerant Stamboliski government in 1934. The Turks were deprived of their minority rights, they were forced to adopt Bulgarian names, and Bulgarian authorities of that time claimed that they were indeed ethnically Bulgarian who had been Turkified and converted to Islam forcibly by the Ottoman Turks.

The Communist regime which seized power in September 1944 severely condemned the practices of the previous order, and declared that the Muslim Turkish minority would be given their minority rights. The Communists, most probably in search of national support, tried to rally the Turks around them by recognizing their rights; Turkish names were restored, a new Turkish newspaper began to be published, Turkish schools were opened, and the like.

But this policy did not last long. Soon after the changes, mosques and schools were nationalized and lands were confiscated.<sup>20</sup> In 1950, the most interesting development took place, and the Bulgarian government overtly used the Turkish minority as a foreign policy tool in its relations with Turkey in the strained atmosphere of Cold War politics. In May 1950, the newly elected Democrat Party in Turkey (a liberal and pro-American party) came to power and sent a brigade to the Korean War in June. Bulgaria, in August of that same year, sent a Note to Turkey, accusing it of provoking the Turkish minority to emigrate to Turkey and called on Turkey to accept 250,000 Turks within three months. The Turkish Consulates in Bulgaria began to issue entry visas but they were unable to cope with the vast number of Turks willing to emigrate. Turkey, in its reply to the Bulgarian Note, criticized this country as violating the 1925 Ankara Agreement which stipulates that the immigrants are allowed to sell their property freely and bring their valuables with them. Later on, Turkey, claiming that Bulgaria was sending the Gypsies and communist agents among the Bulgarian Turks, declared that it would close the border until a settlement with Bulgaria was reached. Bulgarian authorities accepted the return of some of the Gypsies and, in December 1950, an agreement was signed between the two countries. They also agreed not to issue exit visas for Turks.

One American author attributes the Bulgarian attitude of sending 250,000 Turks from Bulgaria to the Soviet interest in evacuating the Turks from the strategically important Dobrudja region which was given to

---

<sup>20</sup>Halit Mollahuseyin, "Muslims in Bulgaria: A Status Report," *Journal, Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. V. No 1 (January 1984), pp. 136-144.

Bulgaria in 1940 by the Treaty of Craiova with Romania.<sup>21</sup> But the question why Bulgaria insisted that Turkey accept 250,000 Turkish people **within a limited time** (which is at least technically and practically impossible) remains unanswered in this line of argument. It seems that Bulgaria, the staunchest ally of the then Soviet Union, tried to punish and weaken Turkey for its stance in the Cold War or to threaten the new government by sending that many people in three months. But still, during this short span of time, 154,393 Turkish people did emigrate to Turkey.<sup>22</sup>

In 1984, the Bulgarian government adopted a policy of reducing the rights of the Turkish minority in line with the decision taken in the 1958 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party.<sup>23</sup> From that time on, the Bulgarian authorities followed a policy of assimilation of the minorities, but because of their numerical strength and international and mutual protection by various treaties and conventions since 1878, it took a longer time to realize the assimilation of the Turks. In 1968, although an agreement was signed between Turkey and Bulgaria to enable divided families to reunite by emigrating to Turkey, after 1970 the Bulgarization policy became more systematic and persistent.<sup>24</sup> The agreement encompassed the dividend families whose members migrated to Turkey before 1952. During the ten years that the agreement was in force nearly 130,000 Turkish people migrated to Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

The Bulgarian government opened up a new brutal policy of oppressing the Turks comparable only to that of the fascist regime in the 1930s. All the Turks were forced to change their names to Bulgarian ones. The Turkish villages were surrounded by soldiers and tanks, and according to eye-witnesses and some concerned international reports, those who resisted the change of their name were either killed promptly or incarcerated in certain places, the most notorious one of them being the Belene Island.

The use of Turkish is prohibited, the Turkish publication of the newspaper *Yeni Işık* (New Light) stopped, Turkish books from the bookstores were banned, all Turkish schools, and cultural centres closed down. Circumcision was prohibited, tombstones were destroyed. No

---

<sup>21</sup>Robert L. Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 477.

<sup>22</sup>Şimşir, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Tafradjiski, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>24</sup>*Oppression and Discrimination in Bulgaria: The Case of the Muslim Turkish Minority, Facts and Documents*, London, Nicosia, K. Rustem and Brother, 1986, p. 14-18.

<sup>25</sup>Şimşir, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

foreigners, either observers or journalists, are allowed to visit these places.<sup>26</sup> Even fines were imposed on wearing traditional Turkish clothes. The testimony of Halil İbişoğlu, a former member of the Bulgarian Parliament (whose name was also changed to Lubomir Alekseev Avdjiev) speaking before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, gives a first hand, detailed account of the Bulgarian conduct of the massive brutal campaign.<sup>27</sup>

When news about the fierce oppression of the Turks reached Turkey and to a lesser extent the international mass media, the Bulgarian government chose an interesting way of defending itself. It declared that there are no Turks living in Bulgaria, and it criticized Turkey for interfering in its internal affairs. They claimed that the Bulgarian people were actually Turkified during the Ottoman time, and at the end of the 20th century, all of a sudden they all realized that they were ethnically Bulgarians and were now voluntarily changing their names. The Bulgarian scholars undertook an intense and passionate task to prove the "true" ethnic origin of the Turks in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian newspapers declared that after a close examination of more than 6000 people they concluded that all the people living in that particular region were of Bulgarian origin.<sup>28</sup>

But even Bulgarian sources, which were published long before the assimilation campaign, had indicated that the Turks of Bulgaria were the descendants of the Ottoman Turks who settled in these areas. Todor Zhivkov, the then leader of Bulgaria, himself had stated the existence of the Turks in Bulgaria and boasted of his policy of respect for their rights, in an interview with the editor of the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>29</sup>

During this flagrant and bloody campaign, Turkey several times declared its intention to accept Turks from Bulgaria but the Bulgarian government refused such calls until 1989. Facing some resistance on the part of the Turks and international criticism, Bulgaria changed its policy and initiated a process of deportation of the Turks en masse. Beginning from May 1989, more than 300,000 people left Bulgaria for Turkey, and in August Turkey declared that it could no longer bear the burden of so many

---

<sup>26</sup>The Repression of the Turkish and Islamic Minority in Bulgaria, (Turkish translation), The Helsinki Committee of Norway, Ankara, 1988, pp. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup>Hearing Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Part I, National Minorities in Eastern Europe, The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, Washington, 1987, pp. 20-25.

<sup>28</sup>Poulton, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>29</sup>Türkaya Ataöv, "The Turks of Bulgaria", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, (Review of the Faculty of Political Science) Vol. XLIV, No. 1-2 (January-June 1989), pp. 136-141.

people. In November 1989, after the fall of the socialist regime, profound changes had taken place in Bulgarian political and social structure. The new government condemned the attitude of the former regime, and about 130,000 of them returned to Bulgaria.<sup>30</sup>

But, like their migration, their return to Bulgaria was also problematic. This time they faced new problems such as getting back their properties and regaining their jobs. When the government decided to restore their Turkish names if they so wished, and their other minority rights, some nationalist sections of the Bulgarian population regarded that decision as against the national interest of their country, and an outcry was caused especially in the predominantly Turkish-populated areas. The main reason for this outrage was that many Bulgarians were settled in the houses which Turks had left and held their other properties. Now, in the face of the return of the Turkish people, they were reluctant to give them back. The importance of this event was the difficult task of the new government to maintain a delicate balance between the Turkish minority (and of course Turkey) and its nationalistic elements.

As surveyed briefly above, the Turks of Bulgaria were the most important factor in the relations of Bulgaria and Turkey. Sometimes it is difficult to understand what determined the Bulgarian minority policy. An overall assessment suggests that it consistently pursued a policy of step by step assimilation beginning with the Macedonians, Gypsies, Pomaks, and most recently the Turks. But in this process, one comes across policies which are in contradiction to this general pattern. Bulgarian censuses showed the number of Macedonians until 1956 and Turks until 1981 and thereafter they numbered "zero", a fact that caused cynical interpretations such as "statistical genocide". As stated above, they recognized and declared the existence of the Turks in many of their publications and at the highest level pronouncements and interviews. After all, to claim that more than one million people one day decided to change their names voluntarily is not at all convincing and damaged the prestige of this country from which today's authorities are trying to recover. It also caused enormous damage to relations with Turkey. Despite the fact that Bulgaria and Turkey had been in hostile camps, apart from the crisis caused by the treatment of the Turkish minority, their relations have generally been stable.

Bulgaria has always been discontented with its huge Turkish minority. It had not been possible to assimilate them through repressive or non-repressive policies following the postwar years. The first reason was that they were and are still numerically quite big. Secondly, and more importantly, they are rural people (just like the Turks of Greece) with strong religious attachments, family-kinship relations, living in a closed societal

---

<sup>30</sup>Poulton, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

milieu. They have different religion, customs, language and rituals in every aspect of life. The Turks there accused the Bulgarian authorities of not giving them equal opportunities to integrate into the social, economic and political life in their resident country. Thirdly, the closeness of Turkey might possibly create a feeling of confidence on the part of the Turkish minority so that in case of troubles Turkey could react and protect their kinsmen or they could emigrate to their neighboring country where they would be well received.

The situation of the Bulgarian Turks today is definitely much more relaxed than in the former system. The Turkish minority still plays a role in their relations. Because Bulgaria tries to transform its socialist economy to a liberal economy, it needs Turkey's support and therefore has to maintain good relations with Turkey. It is possible to say that their relations have not been good so far. The Bulgarian Government tries to provide all rights to the Turks and thus contributes positively to the course of relations. The Turks have now founded a political party which they say is not exclusively an ethnic party. The Party of Movement for Rights and Freedoms has Bulgarian, Jewish, Gypsy as well as Turkish members and does not follow an ethnically oriented approach. The post-socialist developments created two main political forces in Bulgaria, one is the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the former Communists) and the other is the Coalition of Democratic Forces. It is ironic that the Turkish minority, once oppressed by the former Bulgarian regimes, now plays a key role in the political scene of Bulgaria in the 1990s.

#### VI. Kosovo: Trigger of Another Balkan War?:

Kosovo is one of the regions in the Balkans to which observers point as the next potential war zone. This small region, like many others in the Balkans, has been a matter of contention between the Serbs and the Albanians. Historically, the region has been claimed to be the cradle of both the Serbs and Albanians. For the Serbs it symbolizes the glorious days of the medieval Serbian state dating back to the 14th century; for the Albanians it is the land where their national awakening began in the late 1870s. Therefore, it has an historical symbolic meaning for both sides, and at a time of nationalistic revival this symbolism becomes more important.

In the 1981 census the Albanians in Kosovo numbered 1,226,736 and comprised 77,4 % of the population there.<sup>31</sup> Since the Albanians boycotted the 1991 census, it is not possible to give an exact figure now. The Albanians claim that the figure is around 2 million, and most probably they amount to 90 % of the population in Kosovo (the rest is Serbian and Montenegrin), given their very high birth rate and Serbian migration from this region to Serbia proper. Kosovar Albanians are mostly Muslims except

---

<sup>31</sup>Koca Joncic, *Nationalities in Yugoslavia*, Studies, Beograd, 1982, p. 124.

some 50,000 Catholics living around Binac and Prizren.<sup>32</sup> Albanians, in general, live in the Balkans adjacent to each other. It is the poorest area of Yugoslavia and after the suspension of autonomy, and the economic embargo on Serbia, economic difficulties have become more severe.

During the Communist period, the Albanians in Yugoslavia were for the first time recognized as a nationality. But for the reasons discussed below, they were never given a federative republic status in the republic. The 1974 Constitution granted an autonomous region status (along with Vojvodina) to the Kosova Albanians which gave them indeed a *de facto* republic status, only the right to self-determination lacking. The Kosovar Albanians have enjoyed many rights in this period including TV and radio broadcastings and publication of several Albanian newspapers. Many Albanians occupied high-level posts in the bureaucracy, in law and police organization. They had an university in Pristina -the capital of the autonomous region- where instruction was in Albanian with 20,000 Albanian students.<sup>33</sup> The Albanians who make up the third biggest nationality in Yugoslavia (after the Serbs and Croats) have always resented that the Serbs deprived them of republican status and revolted against Belgrade on several occasions since 1968. Actually, the 1981 riots which came after the death of Tito gave the first signs of the coming break-up. But especially the events of 1989 that erupted in Kosovo as a general strike of the miners shook the internal balances among the republics. Slovenia and Croatia supported the Albanian demands in Kosovo against Serbia and this brought the eventual crackdown of the Yugoslav state.

Ironically, the Albanian demands for further rights and indeed for recognition as a "nation" in turn brought what they feared most - harsher Serbian rule. The rise of Serbian nationalism that is embodied in Slobadan Milosevic's personality in the late 1980s has altered the fate of Kosovar Albanians. In July, 1990, the Serbian National Assembly dissolved the Kosovo government and provincial assembly, after Kosovo declared its political independence from Serbia.<sup>34</sup> Thereafter, Kosovo began to be ruled by the Serbs assigned by the Belgrade government; that meant the removal of its autonomous status, and the rights of the Kosovo Albanians were curtailed to a very low level, and heavy police control followed such measures. Albanian cultural and political rights have been virtually suspended, the Albanian language school system was shut down, many Albanian teachers,

---

<sup>32</sup>Poulton, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>33</sup>Hajradin Hodza, "Working Paper no. 22," *The Ohrid Seminar on Minorities*, Skopje, Macedonian Review Editions, 1977, p. 241.

<sup>34</sup>Stephen Larrabee, *Long Memories and Short Fuses, Change and Instability in the Balkans*, *International Security*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Winter 1990/91), p. 70.

policemen and civil servants were dismissed. The figure of the Albanians who lost their jobs amounts to 90,000. An intensive campaign has started to Serbianize the region, and even the Albanian street names have been changed to Serbian ones.

In September 1990 the former members of the defunct Kosovo parliament declared the "Kosovo Republic" and approved the constitution. It was recognized by Albania but not surprisingly this move was severely rejected by Belgrade and announced as illegal. But despite the repression by the Serbian security forces, the Kosovo Albanians could manage to hold a referendum concerning the independence of Kosovo and the 99.7 % of the voters supported an independent and sovereign Kosovo.<sup>35</sup> They also held elections in May 1992, but Serbian authorities subsequently blocked its attempt to convene on 23 June 1992.<sup>36</sup>

The Kosovo Albanians meanwhile organized politically and established their political parties. The biggest of them is the Kosovo Democratic Alliance headed by Ibrahim Rugova who was elected as president in the May 1992 clandestine elections. He claims to have 700,000 members throughout Kosovo showing the social basis of this movement. The Parliamentary Party headed by Veto Surroi and the Social Democratic Party led by Shklezin Maliqi are the other parties in Kosovo with a remarkable social base.<sup>37</sup> It seems quite strange that amid the rising tension and repression by the Serbs and antagonism between the Muslim Albanians and the Serbians, the Albanians are indeed flourishing through a sort of social solidarity and underground organization that enabled them to arrange elections, referendum, their own private school and health system, and even a parliament.

Kosovo Albanians who make up over 90 % of the population are ruled by the Serbs dispatched from Belgrade by imposing a heavy police oppression and denying their basic rights. They also claim that the Serbs are implementing a sort of "ethnic cleansing" there by leaving the Albanians jobless and intimidating them. In order to change the demographic structure of the region, the Serbian authorities bring Serbian refugees from Croatia and Bosnia.<sup>38</sup> But in the short run this measure had little effect on the

---

<sup>35</sup>Patrick Moore, "The Albanian Question in the Former Yugoslavia, *Radio Free Europe Research Report* (Hereafter RFE), vol. 1, no. 14, (3 April 1992), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup>Patrick Moore, "Islamic Aspects of the Yugoslav Crisis", *RFE Research Report*, (10 July 1992), p. 39.

<sup>37</sup>Moore, "The Albanian Question in Former Yugoslavia," *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup>Partick Moore, "Kosovo Could Spark Another Balkan War", *RFE Research Report*, (18 December 1992), p. 19.

demographic structure when the existing population and birth rates are taken into consideration.

The problem in Kosovo is that it is almost homogeneously inhabited by the Albanians, and is adjacent to both Albania and the Albanian populated areas of Macedonia. Thus, it has always created a feeling of insecurity on the part of Yugoslav authorities, a phenomenon quite familiar and common in the minority issues in the Balkans. However, during the Communist regime in Yugoslavia the prospects for a possible separation and union with Albania seemed very weak given the more backward situation of Albania, especially after self-rule was granted to Kosovo allowing them to practice their religion even more freely than their fellow Albanians in Albania. But in the time of redrawing of the borders, conditions represent a historical opportunity for them to create "Greater Albania". They simply contend that since Yugoslavia does not exist any more and given their large population, they do not need to stay under the oppressive minority rule of the Serbs. Nevertheless, the evidence so far does not show any armed resistance or violent action committed by the Kosovo Albanians to accomplish the secession. The only exception was the general strike and the riots of 1981 and 1989 and in this case, too, most of the casualties and human loss were suffered by the Albanians.

Ibrahim Rugova, in an interview, declared their strategy which envisaged three steps. First, the establishment of an independent Kosovo. Second, the establishment of an Albanian Republic based on Albanian ethnicity which covers the Albanians of Macedonia, if the internal borders of the former Yugoslavia change. Third, unification with Albania, if the external borders of the former Yugoslavia change. Rugova also stressed in this interview that they do not intend to resort to any armed activities and they will refrain from violent actions.<sup>39</sup> The Albanian-Yugoslavian relations until late 1980s have been determined by many factors and variables, the most important of them being ideological factions. Just as the Serbian fear of annexation of Kosovo with Albania, the Albanian leaders feared Yugoslav domination following the post-war years. Therefore, the situation of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia had not been the central issue in the relations of the two countries. During Enver Hoxa's rule in Albania, particularly after the Spring 1981 events, Yugoslavia was sometimes criticized for not giving republican status to Kosovo. But it was the break up of Yugoslavia that made the Kosovo issue more critical and acute.

Since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, especially observers in the Western media and research institutes are preoccupied with producing war scenarios over the Kosovo issue. Although it is not possible to tell for how long the Kosovo Albanians can stand the iron fist rule of the Serbs, the first

---

<sup>39</sup>Interview with Florance Hartman, *Le Monde*, 8 November 1993.

prerequisite for such a conflict is a general, organized and military uprising instigated by the Kosovo Albanians (and concurrently by the Macedonia Albanians) backed by Albania. Nonetheless, neither the Kosovo Albanians nor Albania has the physical strength to wage a war to unite Kosovo and Western Macedonia. Albania is economically and potentially in a very weak situation in the face of a military confrontation against the experienced Serbian and Montenegrin military forces that have been involved in armed conflict for three years.

Serbia at this moment cannot open another front in the South while the conflict over Bosnia is still under way and the UN imposed sanctions are still hitting the already shaky Serbian economy. The fact is that Kosovo since 1990 is a part of Serbia more closely than it was before. But this assessment in no way rules out the likelihood of any armed conflict between the Albanians and Serbs when the internal and external developments bring about favorable conditions for the Albanians. If there is no armed conflict in Kosovo this is not because of Serbian rule but because the Kosovars think that the time is not ripe for them to undertake it.

The relations between Albania and the new Yugoslavia are strained due to the Kosovo problem. While Albania insists on the right of self-determination of the Kosovo Albanians, Serbia has accused Albania of interfering in its internal affairs. The Albanian government has endorsed the independence of Kosovo and of the Albanians of Macedonia. Albanian President Ramiz Alia met a delegation from "the Republic of Kosovo" and he said that since Yugoslavia ceased to exist, Albania is interfering in nobody's affairs.<sup>40</sup> However, Albania also expressed its commitment to solve the Kosovo problem by peaceful means.

It seems that the Kosovo problem plays an important role in post-communist Albanian foreign policy. In a likely confrontation with the new Yugoslavia, Albania is searching for new relationships in the Balkans. Although Albania has made overtures to improve its relations with Greece, its relations with that country are strained due to the treatment of mutual minorities and the exodus of Albanian immigrants to Greece which the Greek government uses as a political bargain to send them back. Given the fact that Greece is the staunchest ally of Serbia in the Balkans, Albania's hopes to gain its friendship seems very weak so long as the Kosovo problem drags on.

Relations with Macedonia, on the other hand, are more complex. Although the new Macedonian state has not been on good terms with the nationalists of the Yugoslav government, Albania and Macedonia cannot forge an alliance against their enemy, Serbia, due to the problem over the fate of the Albanians in Macedonia. Macedonia's stance in a possible Slav-

---

<sup>40</sup>Moore, "The Albanian Question in Former Yugoslavia," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Albanian conflict is rather a difficult one. Kosovo Albanians' leader Rugova met Kiro Gligorov and suggested a common stance against Serbia. And in the case of an actual conflict between Albania and the new Yugoslavia, it is not certain on which side Macedonia will take part.

Albania has developed relations with Turkey in virtually every aspect, and now it is the country with which Albania has the best links. High-level visits including the Turkish Prime Minister and the President to Albania and cooperation on military, economic, educational matters show the level of contacts between them. They signed an agreement on security in Ankara in June 1992, which envisages Turkey's help in case fighting starts in the regions populated predominantly by Albanians.<sup>41</sup>

Albania is now too wary to get involved in any kind of military conflict with Serbia. Even Tirana's initial euphoria over Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence has evaporated. The international reactions to the proclamation of independence also affected the Albanian government's cautious policy that no country including the European Union recognized it.<sup>42</sup> It seems that Albania suggested moderation and patience to its fellow Albanians in Kosovo, at least for the time being. But they also have not withdrawn totally their attachment to the lot of Albanians in Kosovo and in Macedonia, leaving the file open. Albania and the Albanians in the former Yugoslavia are, most probably, waiting for a better situation in which they can realize their long-standing ambition, that is, the reunification of the three parts, and this is perceived as a unique historical opportunity since the beginning of Albanian independence in 1912.

#### **VII. Albanians in Macedonia: Strong Minority in a Fragile Country:**

The Macedonian question is itself much more well-known in Balkan history. This is not a place to re-examine this complicated problem which involved many of the Balkan countries. In this article only the Muslim Albanian and Turkish minorities and their impact on the complex relationships of the Balkan states will be analysed. The existence of an Albanian minority in the newly independent Republic of Macedonia affects its relations with Albania, Serbia and *de facto* entity of the Kosovar Albanians.

---

<sup>41</sup>Radovan Vukadinovic, "The End of Yugoslavia and New Balkan Perspectives," *Bulgarian Quarterly*, (Autumn-Winter 1992), p. 22; Louis Zanga, "Albania and Turkey Forge Closer Ties," *RFE Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 11 (12 March 1992), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup>Louis Zanga, "Albania Afraid of War over Kosovo," *RFE Research Report*, vol. 1, no 46 (20 November 1992), p. 21.

Although there are no clearly defined statistical data, it is known that the majority of the Albanians in Macedonia are Muslims.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the Tito years, the Albanians in Macedonia lived peacefully without big problems at least until 1980 and no ethnic or religious frictions appeared.

One point that should be borne in mind when considering the Albanians in Macedonia is that their position is highly dependent on the developments in Kosovo. In other words, the situation in Kosovo has greatly influenced the course of events in Macedonia with regard to the Albanians.

According to the 1991 census, there are 441,987 Albanians in Macedonia, constituting 21 % of the whole population, although the Albanians insist that the real figure is closer to 35 %. The Macedonians number 1,328,187 with 65 %, and the rest are Turks, Romanies, Muslims and Serbs.<sup>44</sup> They mostly inhabit the Western part of Macedonia on the borderline with Albania, and they constitute the majority in Gotsivar, Tetovo, and Debar, and some of them live in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.

The main problem in Macedonia after independence is survival for this weak country that is ethnically fragile and externally surrounded by hostile neighbours. Macedonia has been the poorest republic of the former Yugoslavia. The imposition of UN sanctions on the new Yugoslavia and the economic blockade by Greece have brought the already weak and vulnerable economic situation to the level of bankruptcy. Because of the Greek veto on the recognition of Macedonia by the European Union, it was deprived of financial aid from the E.U.<sup>45</sup> Macedonia feels quite insecure after independence, since Serbia considers it "Southern Serbia" while Albanians are seeking ways to create "Greater Albania". But despite these unfavorable conditions it is the only country that was able to secede from the rump Yugoslavia without any bloodshed.

---

<sup>43</sup>It is interesting to note by passing that many of the Albanians had adopted Islam voluntarily. It was the most important centre of the sufism in Balkans, a Muslim sect that envisages religious tolerance and humanitarian brotherhood which is very much needed in the time of bloody ethnic and religious wars and strifes.

<sup>44</sup>Republic of Macedonia Statistical Office of Macedonia, Second Supplamented and Revised Edition, Skopje, December 1992, p. 12; Duncan Perry, "The Republic of Macedonia and the Odds for Survival", RFE Research Report, vol. 1, no. 20 (20 Nov. 1992), s. 17.

<sup>45</sup>Since it is not my intention to discuss the Greek governments' irrational and artificial storm over the name of this newly independent country, I will not elaborate on it. But it should be indicated that the historical names are not in the confinement of any country or people.

The social structure of the Albanians in Macedonia is similar to that of the Turks of Greece and Bulgaria. They populate mostly rural areas, they have closely knit-family kinship relations, they are conservative, and most significantly they have little contact with the majority. This situation makes things more difficult in solving or easing ethnic tension, since fewer contacts lead to polarization at times of crisis and contribute to misunderstandings and mutual suspicions.

The Albanians in Macedonia have enjoyed many rights that allowed them instruction in the Albanian language in primary and secondary schools, they have had an Albanian newspaper (*Flake e Vellazeremit*), television and radio broadcasting in Albanian and their cultural organizations.<sup>46</sup> But most probably affected by the events in Kosovo in 1981, the late 1980s saw a diminution of the rights enjoyed by the Albanians in Macedonia.

With the break up of Yugoslavia, Macedonia declared its independence on 8 September 1991. And the first rift between the Albanians and the Macedonian authorities occurred at the very beginning of independence. The Albanians boycotted the referendum which called for the independence of Macedonia. They also boycotted the census in that same year both in Macedonia and Kosovo. This unpleasant beginning worsened the already suspicious and somewhat precarious relations between the two communities. Thereafter the question of the drafting of the new constitution came. The new state was referred to "the national state of the Macedonian people" although the Macedonian authorities amended the final version of the constitution by replacing "the national state of the Macedonian nation" with the more neutral formula of a "civil state" but this did not satisfy most of the Albanians.<sup>47</sup> The Albanians called for an equality of their status and a definition of their specific rights in the constitution.

The Albanians in Macedonia have their own political parties: the Party of Democratic Prosperity chaired by Nevzad Halili and the smaller National Democratic Party chaired by Iljaz Halimi. Both parties have nationalistic tendencies, a phenomenon not very unfamiliar in the Balkans, and some of their members were accused of being involved in clandestine activities.<sup>48</sup>

As was stated above, the Albanians in Macedonia usually follow the path of their cousins in Kosovo as evidenced in the case of a referendum

---

<sup>46</sup>Population, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>47</sup>Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje 1991, p. 3; Moore, "The Albanian Question in Former Yugoslavia," *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup>Stefan Troebest, "Macedonia: Powder Keg Defused?", *RFE Research Report*, vol. 3, no. 4 (28 January 1994), p. 38.

called by them on the "territorial and political autonomy" which was declared illegal and unconstitutional by the Macedonian government. They called their self-proclaimed republic the "Republic of Ilirida" -the name refers to the ancient Illyria, a wise choice when it is remembered how the historic name "Macedonia" caused trouble.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the complaints by the Albanians concerning their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and educational rights, the Albanian parties were allowed to participate in the first multi-party elections held in November 1990. They won 23 seats out of 120-seat *Sobranie* (The Parliament) and in the Summer of 1992 both Albanian parties joined a coalition government holding five out of 27 cabinet posts.<sup>50</sup> This could be assessed as a gesture by the able leader of the new republic -Kiro Gligarov- and the Albanian leaders in Macedonia to ease the ethnic tension. Especially after the war in Bosnia, all observers, leaders, media, etc. focused their attention on Kosovo and Macedonia anticipating the spillover of the conflict into another conflagration which might draw in Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Albania, and maybe even Turkey. So far, the turn of events has followed a different path but it also seems unwise to jump to easy conclusions for the moment.

The Macedonians seem to have only one instrument to cement their feeble republic, that is the Macedonian national identity. Some open proclamations designed to unite three parts of the Albanian lands (that is, Albania, Kosovo, and the Albanian inhabited part of Macedonia) by the ethnic Albanian leaders caused fear on the part of the Macedonians and thus contributed to the rise of Macedonian nationalism. For instance, Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the Albanians in Kosovo, has demanded that Macedonia, either allow its Albanians to seek annexation by Kosovo or grant them wide internal autonomy.<sup>51</sup> The possible secession of the Albanian populated areas of Macedonia may trigger the partition of this country and in that sense it is not difficult to understand the sensitivity of the Macedonians in handling the minority issues. There were even rumors to the effect that conditions of the partition of Macedonia were discussed between Greece and Serbia several times, the last one being in November 1993.<sup>52</sup>

The Albanians have some problems in realizing their minority rights. But unlike the Turkish minority in this country or in Greece and Bulgaria,

---

<sup>49</sup>Duncan Perry, "Macedonia: A Balkan Problem and a European Dilemma", *RFE Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 25 (June 1992), p. 38.

<sup>50</sup>Duncan Perry, "The Republic of Macedonia and the Odds for Survival," *RFE Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 46 (20 November 1992), p. 16.

<sup>51</sup>Sabrina P. Ramet, "War in the Balkans," *Foreign Affairs*, (Fall 1992), p. 87.

<sup>52</sup>*Milliyet*, (A Turkish Daily) 15 March 1993; Troebst, *op.cit.*, s. 36.

they have apparently intentions to secede from Macedonia and ultimately to unite three Albanian territories. The Leader of the Party of Democratic Prosperity, Halili, stated that all Albanians must live in one state.<sup>53</sup> This fact and the developments in Kosovo have a direct influence on their status. Still, their status is much better than the Kosovar Albanians economically and politically considering their minority rights. Although they are under-represented in lower level posts, it is an important sign that they have five ministerial posts and deputies, and this gives them a strong hand to increase their rights and improve their living conditions.

The important point is the role of the Albanian minority in Macedonia's relations with Albania. The evidence does not suggest any uneasiness of the kind prevalent in Albanian-Serbian relations. Although the Albanian government criticizes the treatment of the Albanian minority in Macedonia and claims that they are "discriminated against and have no political rights", the formation of the new Macedonian state has been welcomed.<sup>54</sup> Albania views the independence of Macedonia as a counterweight to Serbia and tries to be moderate in its relations with that new country.

Albania seems to be more preoccupied by the developments in Kosovo. In 1992, they opened their border with Macedonia three times, and Albania's president Sali Berisha and Macedonian leader Kiro Gligorov met on June 3, 1992, declaring their intention to create a "model" relationship between their two countries.<sup>55</sup> The Albanian question in former Yugoslavia is, in fact, a very complicated one. The interests of Macedonia and Serbia coincide when the Albanian problem is considered. But on the other hand, Macedonia feels threatened by Serbia which does not recognize its ethnic identity and views this part as "Southern Serbia" - a definition used by the fascist régime during the interwar period. Macedonia, surrounded internally and externally by hostile forces and deprived of any big power backing or alliances, is trying to overcome the difficulties it has been through since its independence. It has developed its relations with Turkey politically and economically and has been able to maintain its territorial integrity to date, given the fact that both ethnically and officially its recognition has been very complicated.

---

<sup>53</sup>Moore, "The Albanian Question in Former Yugoslavia," *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup>James Pettifer, "The New Macedonian Question," *International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 3 (1992), p. 480

<sup>55</sup>Perry, "Macedonia, a Balkan Problem", *op. cit.*, p. 39.

### VIII. The Turks of Macedonia: Silent Minority in a Turbulent Area:

Of all the Muslim Turkish minorities in the Balkans, the Turkish minority in Macedonia is the least problematic. Furthermore, particularly in recent years, an exception in the Balkans, it played a positive role in the relations between Turkey and Macedonia.

The Turks of Macedonia are the descendants of the Turks settled there after the Ottoman conquests. According to the 1991 census, their number amounts to 77,080, 4.8 % of the whole population.<sup>56</sup> No remarkable development has taken place during the postwar years concerning the status and rights of the Turks in Macedonia. Following 1953 many Turks emigrated to Turkey. The number is estimated at about between 80,000 and 150,000. The Turks could attend the Turkish schools, they have their own cultural organizations and TV broadcasting in Turkish and a newspaper in Turkish - *Birlik*.<sup>57</sup> The existence of Macedonian migrants in Turkey stirred Turkey's growing attention to developments in that country for the reason that they created an organic link between the two countries.

Two main factors influenced the situation of the Muslim Turkish minority in Macedonia after independence. The new state faced a threat from Serbia and Greece at the outset of its independence. The embargo imposed on Serbia and Montenegro by the UN and Greece's economic blockade over the name of the state put the existence of this small landlocked country in jeopardy. In search of a back-up by the strong powers, Macedonia has developed its relations with Turkey and in order to contribute to the wellbeing of its relations with Turkey the situation of the Turks in Macedonia has been taken care of. But on the other hand, the rise of Albanian nationalism and the common denominator of Islam between the Albanian and Turkish minority, have made the attitude of the Macedonians to minorities in general more sensitive. It is necessary to note that Macedonian nationalism is on the rise and nationalist sentiments are usually against other nationalities. The Balkans in general proved to be a fertile ground for the growing of nationalist sentiments with concomitant hostility toward other nations and ethnic or religious groups. The new Macedonian constitution which declared Macedonia the national state of the Macedonians is an example of this nationalist point of view, and the Turkish minority has been indirectly affected by these developments. In other instances, the Turks were accused of producing "pan-Turkish ideas" and spreading Islamic faith. To put the matter

---

<sup>56</sup>Statistical Office of Macedonia, p. 12; however, Duncan Perry gives that number as 97,416. "Macedonia and Odds for Survival", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup>Poulton, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

in another way, the delicate ethnic balance in the new republic affects the situation of the Turks, though they have proved their loyalty for many years.

The Turks of Macedonia, unlike the Albanians in Macedonia and in Kosovo, supported the referendum on Macedonia's sovereignty held in September 1991, a crucial point that distinguishes them from the other Muslim nationality, the Albanians. They are organized politically in the Party of Turkish Democratic Alliance headed by Avni Engullu. One of the Cabinet members Güner Ismail, the Minister of Culture, is Turkish, a member of the party of Social Democratic League of Macedonia. However, they do not seek any autonomy or secession. Numerically too weak to call for autonomy, they are scattered around the country in small numbers and Macedonia has no common border to enable them to unite with Turkey.

Turkey is the strong partner of the new Macedonia which is squeezed between Albania, Serbia, and Greece. Turkey is also one of the countries that recognized the Republic of Macedonia immediately after its declaration. Diplomatic links have also grown and high level visits took place between them. The Turks of Macedonia have played no part in any of the secessionist plans and proved an exception in a region where minorities create problems and strain relations.

Beside the Muslim Turks, there are 31,356 Muslims living in Macedonia and some of the Romanies are known to be Muslims as well.<sup>58</sup> They are descendants of the converted Slavs and speak little or no Turkish. There were no problems with that minority for many years. But recently they asked for schooling in Turkish and their demand was rejected by authorities. Nevertheless, this small minority has little effect on either internal or external relations of the country.

#### **IX. The Sandzak Region:**

The Sandzak region, with its predominantly Muslim populated capital Novi Pazar, is not indeed an officially recognized area like Kosovo or Vojvodina but was an historical administrative site during the Ottoman rule. This region remained under Ottoman domination until 1912 and was partitioned between Serbia and Montenegro. Except for the short period between 1943-1945, it has never gained an autonomous status in any way, and it is still divided between these two republics.

The Sandzak region is located between Serbia and Montenegro and borders Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, it has great strategic importance for Serbia since its secession or annexation with Bosnia would make Serbia a landlocked country cut off from the Adriatic Sea.

---

<sup>58</sup>Statistical Office of Macedonia, p. 12.

The recent statistical data, like elsewhere in the Balkans, is quite complicated and not very reliable. Yet, a comparison with previous censuses gives some idea about the population breakdown in the region. According to the federal census of April 1991, the population of the Sandzak totals 352,937 of which 186,084 (52.7 %) are Muslims.<sup>59</sup>

Both parts of the Sandzak were relatively peaceful and stable until the rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic and the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even today, tension in the Montenegrin part of the Sandzak is low considering the enduring war and ethnic strife surrounding that region. Many observers consider that region as the next battlefield, and scenarios are produced similar to those of Kosovo and Macedonia.

Indeed problems in the Sandzak represent a similarity with Kosovo, since, in both cases Muslims constitute the majority, and Serbs and Montenegrins are minorities. The situation of the Serbs as a minority in these regions makes the minority issues interesting in that, while the Serbs are oppressing the Muslim Kosovar Albanians and Muslims in the Sandzak, they are at the same time complaining about the treatment of their fellow Serbians in these territories. As it was stated above, while the Belgrade government accused the Kosovo Albanians of purging the Serbians from Kosovo, similar allegations by the Serbs were put forward regarding the Sandzak Muslims.

Serbia, in support of its claim that the Serbs in the Sandzak are being oppressed by the Muslims, uses the census statistics as evidence. Actually, according to the official censuses conducted in 1978 and 1988, the Serbian portion of the population dropped from 38 % to 29.5 %, while that of the Muslims rose from 58 % to 67 %. In the 1991 census the Muslims accounted for 52.7 %.<sup>60</sup> But this change in the population structure is due to the emigration of Serbs for economic reasons and the high birth rate of the Muslims. Nevertheless, the Serbian authorities are using the statistical data in a misleading way to rally the support of the Serbs and to justify possible military actions in this Muslim populated region.

Emigration from the Sandzak has been an important aspect of the history of the region. Between 1927-1936, 19,287 Muslims emigrated to Turkey and, according to an Agreement signed between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Turkey in 1938, 40,000 Muslims emigrated to Turkey. Later on, during the Tito régime in 1954, 16,000 Muslims left Sandzak for

---

<sup>59</sup>Milan Andrejevich, "The Sandzak: The Next Balkan Theater of War?" RFE Research Report, No. 47 (27 November 1992), p. 33.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

Turkey.<sup>61</sup> Although the exact figures are not available, many Muslims have left the Sandzak for Turkey since the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Muslim migrations from the Balkans to Turkey has been a common occurrence in these areas since the late 1870s. While most of them emigrate to Turkey to escape from oppressions, some of the emigrants leave the Balkans for better chances in Turkey or elsewhere in the world.

Since the break up of Yugoslavia, the Muslims of the Sandzak have been seeking independence, most probably a step to eventual integration with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like the Kosovo Albanians' endeavour to gain a republican status that will pave the way for integration with Albania, the Sandzak Muslims intend first to form an autonomous region and then reunification with Bosnia. The problem in their search for autonomy is that it requires the secession of the two parts of the Sandzak. However, as will be discussed below, the chances for a prospective secession from Serbia and Montenegro seem very low.

The Sandzak Muslims have set up their own political and cultural organizations. The Party of Democratic Action (SDA) led by Suleyman Ugljanin is the biggest of such organizations. They have formed a supreme organization, the Muslim National Council, which includes the SDA, the Muslim Bosnian Organization, Merhamet, a charitable organization and the Sandzak Writers' League.

In keeping with widespread practice in the former Yugoslavia, the Sandzak Muslims also held a referendum on increased political and cultural autonomy in October 1991. In the Serbian part of the Sandzak 70.2 % of the population took part in the referendum and 98 % of them voted for autonomy. However, the referendum did not work in the Montenegrin part of the Sandzak.<sup>62</sup> As expected, both Serbian and Montenegrin authorities denounced the referendum as illegal and unconstitutional. Although the Sandzak Muslims could not establish an underground network like the Kosovo Albanians, the referendum showed their aspirations.

Relations between the Orthodox Serbs and Montenegrins and the Sandzak Muslims have become strained particularly after the referendum. Although it is not as intense as in Kosovo, there are some incidents of limited armed attacks mostly committed by the Serbian nationalist paramilitary bands. The Serbs accused the Muslims of increasing their wealth at the expense of the Serbs and, since the outbreak of war in Bosnia and

---

<sup>61</sup>Kosova ve Sancak Raporu, (Report on Kosovo and Sandzak) Istanbul, 1993, p. 14-15.

<sup>62</sup>Fabian Schmidt, "The Sandzak: Muslims between Serbia and Montenegro," RFE Research Report, vo. 3, no. 6 (11 February 1994), p. 31.

Herzegovina, Serbian deployment of military forces has grown.<sup>63</sup> Some incidents such as kidnapping of Muslims, burning down of Muslim houses, and other acts have aimed at terrorizing the Muslims to expel them. The Party of Democratic Action was also subjected to repression and some of its members and leaders were arrested on the grounds that they were involved in planning armed uprising, assembling arms, and so on.

Probably in fear of outrageous Serbian nationalist acts, the SDA and Muslim National Council issued a memorandum in November 1993, and though calling for autonomy for the Sandzak, stated that the existing borders of the Sandzak could not be changed without the consent of the concerned parties.<sup>64</sup> It is obvious that the Sandzak Muslims in no way have the potential and material strength to realize their aspiration for autonomy and ultimate reunification of the two parts of Sandzak with Bosnia and Herzegovina under existing conditions. It is not reasonable to expect that Belgrade will concede to the secession of the strategically vital region while it is carrying out a war to carve out Bosnia, and ruling Kosovo with a firm hand.

The Sandzak problem was overshadowed by the ongoing war in Bosnia and high tension in Kosovo. It is not an internationalized problem yet, and it hardly plays a role in interstate relations. Serbian and Montenegrin leaders are preoccupied with the war in Bosnia. However, relations between Bosnia and the Sandzak are very close, which disturbs Belgrade. Relations are carried out at the level of political parties. The Party of Democratic Action (SDA) was set up shortly after the SDA in Bosnia was founded. The secretary-general of the Sandzak SDA, Rasim Ljajic, was also a member of the Bosnian SDA's steering committee and one of its co-founders along with Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic.<sup>65</sup>

Belgrade claimed that the October 1991 referendum was organized with the help of Bosnia. The timing of the referendum reveals some sort of link between the Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims because it came shortly after the declarations of several Serbian autonomous regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sandzak Muslims stated that if the map of Bosnia and Herzegovina is redrawn, they will declare the Sandzak an autonomous region.<sup>66</sup> Serbia also accused Albania of providing arms to the region, allegations that were not proved. Since Belgrade's relations with Albania were not on good terms especially since the outbreak of war in Bosnia, these

---

<sup>63</sup> Ali Karaosmanoğlu, *Crisis in the Balkans*, New York, UN Institute for Disarmament Research, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 32-33.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> Andrejevich, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

allegations did not affect their already strained relations. The only possibility seems that the Sandzak region may be part of a general conflagration in the Balkans, including Kosovo and Macedonia, rather than the Sandzak itself triggering an armed conflict.

Despite the charges that the Sandzak Muslims are assembling arms and setting up military units, they have not taken up arms and engaged in any kind of armed conflict with the Serbs. On the contrary, evidence suggests that the Serbs are heavily militarizing the region. Unlike other parts of Muslim-dominated areas of the former Yugoslavia, the Sandzak Muslims seem to be loosely organized and show a lower level of resistance to Serbian rule. Relations between the Montenegro and Serbian parts of the Sandzak are not as strong as the relations between the Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians. This may be attributed to the lack of an administrative structure that binds the whole area of the Sandzak.

#### X. Conclusion:

Generally speaking, almost all of the Muslim minorities have problems and complaints. The Balkan states have not been very tolerant in their treatment of minorities, except the former Yugoslavia. This may be attributed to the peculiar characteristics of the region. The eventual dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia and the collapse of the socialist regimes in itself created an atmosphere of instability and ambiguity that facilitated the rise of nationalism and ethnic tension which adversely affected minority issues.

One of the general characteristics of the Muslim minorities in the Balkans is that they are mostly peaceful and loyal subjects of the countries they are living in. For almost 70-80 years of their existence in a turbulent area they have succeeded in maintaining a distance from the bloody conflicts occurring in these years and have remained loyal to their legitimate governments. Unless they faced brutal oppression such as that pursued against the Turks in Bulgaria and the Albanians in Kosovo, they have refrained from any resistance. There has not been any serious case causing an armed conflict between the Turkish minorities and the governments of their respective countries. But in order to specify the attitudes of these minorities a distinction is necessary to denote some differences between the two main Muslim groups of the Balkans -Albanians and Turks.

The main difference between them is that the Albanians are both greater in numbers and live as compact entities all adjacent to each other and also bordering Albania. Secondly, the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia explicitly have autonomist and secessionist tendencies, and it is no secret that their ultimate aim is reunification.

The Turks, on the contrary, live in different parts of the three Balkan countries. The Turks of Bulgaria have no contact with the Turks of Macedonia or Turks of Greece and vice versa. Their number in Greece and Macedonia is not big, and they have not sought for autonomy or secession so far. The most serious problems with the Turkish minority have occurred in Bulgaria where they comprise a huge minority.

It is evident that the Muslim minorities in the Balkans have influenced and still influence interstate relations. But they are also affected by the existing relationships among these states. One author defined the position of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria "as the barometer of evolving relations between Sofia and Ankara".<sup>67</sup> In this regard, the main factors that affect their situation and interstate relations can be outlined as follows: First of all, the Muslim minorities in some countries are numerous, and their birth rate is higher than that of the majority. The Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, the Muslims in the Sandzak, and the Turks in Bulgaria provide good examples of this. The high birth rate among the Muslims is a very important and, in a sense, a neglected factor that creates fear in the majority people that they will be outnumbered by the Muslims some time in the future. This situation brings about the interaction of high birth rate and the policies of assimilation and deportation by the authorities to maintain the existing demographic structure. So far, Greece seems to be the most successful country in keeping the number of the Muslim Turkish minority almost the same for 70 years. It seems that so long as the high birth rate among Muslims, and low or zero (as in the case of the Bulgarians) birth rate among the Orthodox peoples continue, the Muslims will be perceived with suspicion, and their respective governments will try to stop this process by various means.

The biggest problem concerning the minority issues in the Balkans is that the nation-building process has not been completed yet, at least in the minds of many people in this area. Therefore, the rise of nationalism must also be added to this picture. Kosovo, Sandzak, and the Albanian populated parts of the region are still prone to the conflicts springing from the minority problems. Throughout history nation-building has proved to be quite a bloody one, and the Balkans will surely not be an exception.

The war in Bosnia and Serbian and Greek claims of the rise of Islamic movements in the Balkans have confused the minds of the world public. Such allegations were instigated by the Serbs with the aim of justifying their aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their oppression in Kosovo and the Sandzak. A history professor from Belgrade University claims that "the ambitions of Islamic movements in the Balkans ... [are] threatening not only

---

<sup>67</sup>Januz Bugajski, *Nations in Turmoil: Conflict and Cooperation in Eastern Europe*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1993, p. 170.

Serbian and Croatian people alike, but also European and even global stability".<sup>68</sup>

It should be stated that Islam in the Balkans with its five-hundred years of tradition has never assumed a fundamentalist flavour. The Muslims of the Balkans are not more religious or conservative than the Orthodox peoples of this region. Most of the Muslim population in the Balkans live in rural areas, and Islam constitutes an important part of their national identity. But to speak of the politization of Islam would be untrue even in the case of the Bosnian Muslims. Bosnians appeal for Islamic symbols and their Islamic rhetoric can be attributed to the wish to draw the attention of the Muslim world to their plight. The events of the 1990s in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Sandzak have shown that it is not Islam but aggressive nationalism that is threatening stability. Since the end of the Ottoman rule in this region, Islam has not been an assertive ideology, on the contrary, it has assumed a defensive function, one of the factors that promotes the national identity of the Muslim minorities.

One of the conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that there is no correlation between the type of government and treatment of the minorities. This finding is in dire contradiction to the argument put forward by some Bulgarian scholars. To explain the background and reasons for the ethnic crisis in Bulgaria they argue that "the totalitarian state with its bodies and mechanisms of management and social control block many of these possibilities for spontaneous regulation of ethnic contradiction".<sup>69</sup>

The historical evidence suggests quite a contrary view. The socialist Yugoslav state was much more tolerant towards the nationalities and minorities than democratic Greece, a member of the European Union. The Papandreu governments were not more tolerant than the Colonel's régime of 1967-1974. Totalitarian régimes may be harsher in their treatment of minorities than the democratic ones but the problem with them is that they are brutal, not only against minorities, but also against the majority. Democratic countries can also be ruthless in their treatment of the minorities when they perceive them as a threat to their integrity or for other reasons as explained in the preceding sections.

In an article concerning the Muslim minorities in the Balkans, it is necessary to touch upon assertions that Turkey is trying to create an "Islamic Axis" in the Balkans. Turkey's growing relations with Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania are put forward as evidence. First of all,

---

<sup>68</sup>Dragoljub Zivoljinovic, "Islam in the Balkans: Origins and Contemporary Implications," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 51.

<sup>69</sup>Tafrajiski, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

Bulgaria and Macedonia are predominantly populated by the people of the Orthodox faith. All of these countries are in dire need of economic aid and political support and are passing through a historical ordeal. And this is more so in war-ridden Bosnia. It is also not conceivable that Turkey is forming an "Islamic Axis" by using the Muslim minorities and Albania. Of the Muslim minorities in the Balkans, only the Turks of Bulgaria and the Kosovo Muslims are numerous and have strong political organizations. There is no kind of link among the Muslims minorities of the Balkans, except the Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians. Turkey fears the outbreak of a conflict in Kosovo since it will inevitably spread to Macedonia, also a close ally of Turkey. Rather, Turkey is trying to forge closer relations between Albania and Macedonia and plays a binding role between them.

Secondly, Turkey, albeit more than 95 % of its population is Muslim, is a secular country and faces the rise of Islamic movements in the late 1980s. Thus, it seems not reasonable that while Turkey is wary of Islamic fundamentalism spreading mainly from Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is also trying to foster Islamic ideas in the Balkans and opening another front in its Western borders. It is true that Turkey, too, appealed to the Islamic Conference Organization to issue declarations in order to draw the attention of the world's public and international organizations but this was due to the indifference of other organizations such as the UN and NATO. The ICO, so far, has been the only international organization to show a remarkable concern over the war and ethnic-cleansing in Bosnia. It should be borne in mind that Western ineffectiveness to the plight of the Muslims in Bosnia and Azerbaijan has strong repercussions and foments the religious sentiments of the Turkish people.

Turkey tries to be a full member of the European Union. It has obviously no interest in forging religious alliances. As a predominantly Muslim country, a polarization along religious lines in the Balkans would put Turkey in a delicate position, and it is in contradiction with its longstanding foreign policy objectives. It is quite interesting that Greece, while accusing Turkey of creating a religious alliance in the Balkans, has also developed its relations with Russia and Serbia and tries to create an alliance in this region along the lines of the Orthodox religion.

Turkey has improved its relations with Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Macedonia in recent years. Its relations with Albania have been very good for many years. These relations cover a wide area of cooperation but do not include any Islamic or religious aspect. Turkey (and of course, other countries, too) has a lot to gain from peace and stability in the Balkans. It is a country that is already surrounded by the unstable regions in the East (the Caucasus) and in the South (the Kurdish problem) and besides, as stated above, it is the minorities that are subject to maltreatment in times of crisis and war.