

TURKISH-BULGARIAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: THE EXEMPLARY RELATIONSHIP IN THE BALKANS

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ABSTRACT

Turkish-Bulgarian relations have been full of fluctuations throughout the history, and they reached lowest point in the second part of 1980s. The assimilation campaign against Turkish minority in Bulgaria, which peaked in 1989 when Bulgaria forced hundreds of thousands of Turks to migrate to Turkey, caused a serious crisis in relations with Ankara. The assimilation process led to isolation of Bulgaria in the international arena, thus leading to overthrow of the Zhivkov regime. This was the turning point both in the modern history of Bulgaria and also Turkish-Bulgarian relations. The country entered a new era both in its domestic and foreign policies. With the end of the Cold War, it turned its face toward West and began to take steps to establish democratic political system and free market economic model. Similarly, its foreign policy priorities became integration to Western institutions, especially NATO and the EU. All these changes in domestic and foreign policies have reflected in Turco-Bulgarian ties: The bilateral relations experienced an unexpected boost and the two countries become partners in many areas. Accordingly, this article tries to shed light on the changing state of Turkish-Bulgarian relations after the collapse of the bipolar world order. It argues that the changes in Turco-Bulgarian relations prove the falsity of the ethnic-hatred theory often attributed to the Balkans. The improvement in ties between Ankara and Sofia shows that when there is an appropriate state of international affairs and rational leaders, Balkan countries can also achieve friendly relations.

KEYWORDS

Turkey; Bulgaria; Turkish Minority; Assimilation; Soviet Union; Movement for Rights and Freedoms; Bulgarian Socialist Party; Union of Democratic Forces, Balkans; Cold War; Post-Cold War Era; NATO; European Union.

1. Introduction: Turco-Bulgarian Relations Until 1989

The Turks and Bulgarians have common history of approximately 500 years under the Ottoman Empire. After the Bulgarian declaration of independence in 1908, the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria became tense. They fought against each other in the two Balkan Wars, and then became allies in the First World War. During the Turkish War of Independence, Bulgaria supported the Turkish forces, and Bulgarians living close to the border formed 30 armed gangs together with Turks living in Adrianople. In 1920 the Turkish soldiers who lost the war in Thrace went over to the Bulgarian side to fight against Greece.¹ However, after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, particularly in the late 1920s and much of 1930s, the relations were far from being perfect because of revisionist policies of Bulgaria.

During the Cold War, Turkey and Bulgaria were members of the opposing alliances. While Bulgaria became the most loyal ally of the Soviet communist regime, Turkey joined NATO in 1952. From then on their relations were shadowed by the bipolar structure of the world politics, and bilateral contacts were dependent upon the state of relations between the two superpowers, as well as Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union. There were short periods of cooperation, though every time, each side looked to the other with apprehension.

1950-51 witnessed the first important confrontation between the two countries. In 1950 Bulgarian government gave a diplomatic note stating that 250,000 people would be sent to Turkey within three months. The flow of refugees lasted for two months and 150,000-155,000 Bulgarian Turks emigrated to Turkey.²

¹Pars Tuğlacı, *Bulgaristan ve Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri* (Bulgaria and Turkish-Bulgarian Relations), İstanbul, Cem Yayınevi, 1984, p.120; and Stefan Velikov, *Kemalist İhtilal ve Bulgaristan, 1918-1922* (Kemalist Revolution and Bulgaria), Trans. Naime Yılmaer, İstanbul, Hüsniyatı Matbaası, Nisan 1969.

²Tuğlacı, *Bulgaristan ve Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri*, pp. 133-134.

In early 1980s, Turkish-Bulgarian relations were relatively friendly and there were official visits by the heads of states, Kenan Evren and Todor Zhivkov. However, the rapprochement did not last long as Bulgaria began the assimilation campaign against Turkish minority with a ban on wearing traditional Turkish dresses and speaking Turkish in public places. Then the Turks were forced, sometimes at gunpoint, to sign forms that stated they had acquired new Bulgarian names voluntarily.³ There were reports of violence and rape during the campaign.⁴

The name-changing campaign lasted between December 1984 and March 1985. Bulgarian authorities argued that the Turks had, in fact, been Slav-Bulgarians who were forcibly converted to Islam during the Ottoman Empire. The restrictions implemented on Turks remained in place until late 1989.⁵

There were mass demonstrations by Turks against the mounting pressure. But the authorities remained adamant. They used violence to stop the demonstrations. Some demonstrators were killed, some imprisoned, and some sent to notorious Belene Forced Labor Camp. The situation became extremely tense.

In early 1989 Bulgarian government began to deport some activists to Turkey. In February 1989, Bulgaria allowed anyone in Bulgaria to emigrate to any country if he or she chooses to do so. Travelling to foreign countries was legalized in May. Then a general exodus of Turkish minority to Turkey took place between June-August 1989. Bulgaria's deportation of Turks meant admission of the fact that there had been a Turkish minority in the country and the attempt to Bulgarize them did not succeed. In all, more than 300,000 Turks were forced to emigrate to Turkey in this period.

The unexpected deportation of thousands of Turks pushed the bilateral relations to a crisis point. During the crisis, Turkey offered Bulgaria to sign a comprehensive emigration agreement

³Kemal Kirişçi, 'Refugees of Turkish Origin: Coerced Immigrants to Turkey Since 1945', *International Migration*, 1996, Vol. 34 (3), p. 392.

⁴Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, London, Minority Rights Publications, 1991, pp. 130-131.

⁵Poulton, *The Balkans*, pp. 129-130.

many times, but Bulgaria refused it. Out of 300,000 deportees, 154,000 returned to Bulgaria later.⁶ This was the biggest migration movement not only in the history of Turkish emigration from Bulgaria to Turkey, but also in the post-Second World War period in the world.⁷

The reactions to Bulgarian assimilation campaign began as early as in 1985. The 1985 report of the Council of Europe called on Bulgaria to put an immediate end to its repressive policies and to restore their rightful names to all members of the Turkish minority.⁸ The 16th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in 1987, stated its concern as regards to reports of assimilation campaign and sent a delegation to examine the situation.⁹

The then Turkish Prime Minister Özal asked for help at NATO Summit in May 1989 and criticized member countries for not showing sensitivity towards Bulgarian pressure.¹⁰ Özal's appeal did not go unheeded. The US postponed trade negotiations with Sofia. In addition, the Council of Europe repeated its concern for Bulgarian campaign against Turkish minority and asked Bulgaria to stop her policy and to begin negotiations with Turkey with the aim of signing an emigration agreement.¹¹ Meanwhile, as a result of Turkey's efforts, the European Community (EC) cancelled the

⁶Wolfgang Höpken, 'Zwischen Kulturkonflikt und Repression: Die Türkische Minderheit in Bulgarien, 1944-1991', in Valeria Heuberger, Othmar Kolar, Arnold Suppan and Elisabeth Vyslonzi (eds.), *Nationen, Nationalitäten, Minderheiten Probleme des Nationalismus in Jugoslawien, Ungarn, Rumänien, der Tschechoslowakei, Bulgarien, Polen, der Ukraine, Italien und Österreich: 1945-1990*, Wien, Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, R. Idenbourg, Verlag München, 1994, p. 79.

⁷Darina Vasileva, 'Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 26 (2), 1992, p. 342 and *Reuters*, 9 August 1989.

⁸Türkkaya Ataöv, *The Inquisition of the Late 1980s: The Turks of Bulgaria*, U.S., International Organization For the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1990, p. 18. For reports on Bulgarian assimilation campaign by the foreign media, see *World Press on the Plight of Turkish Minority in Bulgaria*, Ankara, Kurtuluş Yayıncılık, 1989. For reports of Turkish press on the issue, see Bilal Şimşir, *Türk Basınında Bulgaristan Türkleri: Ocak-Nisan 1985*, Ankara, Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1985.

⁹Ataöv, *The Inquisition of the Late 1980s*, p. 18.

¹⁰*Cumhuriyet*, 14 June 1989.

¹¹*Cumhuriyet*, 16 June 1989 and 8 July 1989.

economic and trade cooperation agreement to be signed with Bulgaria.¹²

In the end, Bulgarian campaign against the Turkish minority brought about the downfall of Zhivkov regime. He was dismissed from leadership as Communist Party Secretary General by a party group led by his foreign minister and member of Politburo, Petar Mladenov, on 10 November 1989, only a day after the Berlin Wall fell down. Unlike the other East and Central European countries, Bulgarian communist regime was not overthrown by people's demonstrations, but through the reformist wing of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

When the communist regime of Bulgaria was toppled in late 1989, the country entered a new period in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. The rights of Turkish minority were restored and mosques re-opened. Although Bulgaria was governed by Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) between 1990 and February 1997, with the exception of eight-months, Bulgarian governments pursued different policies from its communist predecessors. In this new era, Bulgaria tried to be a member of the Western bloc. To reach this aim it tried to repair its relations with Turkey. Bulgarian leaders have even apologized publicly on several occasions for what was done to the Turkish minority during the Todor Zhivkov regime.

New leader Mladenov expressed his commitment to democratic principles, albeit within the limits of socialism.¹³ He claimed to respect the rights of 'Muslim' minority¹⁴ and relaxed official policy towards the Turks. The returning Turks were allowed to go back to their homes. About 50 Turks who were put into prison because of criticizing government policies were freed.

The assimilation campaign was formally stopped with a decree of 29 December 1989,¹⁵ which signalled the beginning of a new era in Turkish-Bulgarian relations. Accordingly, this study

¹²*Cumhuriyet*, 27 June 1989.

¹³*Cumhuriyet*, 12 November 1989.

¹⁴*Cumhuriyet*, 6 December 1989.

¹⁵Richard Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 217.

aims to describe the changing state of Turkish-Bulgarian relations in the post-Cold War era. After the crisis years of 1980s, Bulgaria has now become one of the closest neighbors of Turkey. Especially, it has become one of the most cooperative partners for Turkey in the Balkan affairs. Bulgaria in turn seeks Turkish support for its admission to NATO. Looking from this angle, the article argues that the substantial change in Turkish-Bulgarian relations prove the falsity of the ethnic-hatred theory attributed to the Balkans. When there is an appropriate state of international affairs and rational and good-intentioned leaders, Balkan countries can also have friendly relations.

2. Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

Bulgarian Foreign Policy in the New Period

After the overthrow of the communist leader Zhivkov, Bulgaria recognized the existence of Turkish minority, its rights to have Turkish names, to practice Islam freely and to have education in its mother language. After taking power, new leader Mladenov immediately apologized for, and repudiated, the assimilation campaign.¹⁶

During the Cold War it was impossible for Bulgaria to act independently of the Moscow regime. But now while all eastern and central European communist governments were falling down one by one, Bulgaria felt alone and sought to regain the trust of its neighbors, independently from Moscow. Another factor that led Bulgaria to change its policies radically was the damage that was caused by the assimilation process. Besides alienating part of its society within the country, the assimilation policies had resulted in the isolation of the country in the international arena.

Moreover, in the new period, Bulgaria found itself in a security vacuum. Especially after the disbandment of military institutions of the Warsaw Pact on March 31, 1991 and dissolution of the Pact on July 1 the same year, it had to follow a new path in its foreign policy in compliance with the new state of affairs in world politics. In August 1990, Dobri Jurov, the then Bulgarian

¹⁶Ibid.

Defense Minister, declared for the first time that there was a possibility of Bulgaria joining NATO, and on August 30, the Bulgarian Ambassador to Belgium, Atanas Ginev, was accredited to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. In June 1991, NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner paid an official visit to Bulgaria, which was acknowledged as a great success by both sides. During the visit, he repeated several times that NATO considered Bulgaria an important part of Europe, politically and culturally, and assured that its borders were not to be violated.¹⁷ A few weeks before his visit, more than a third of deputies in the Bulgarian National Assembly had issued a statement asking the government for making an official application for NATO membership.¹⁸ Bulgaria soon realized that its alliance with the West was dependent on Sofia's readiness to reverse the assimilation policies against Turkish minority and solve its problems with the neighboring countries, especially with Turkey. At that stage, Bulgaria's President Zhelev came out in support of good relations with Turkey.¹⁹

Moreover, as a part of its efforts to forge close ties with the West and to show its readiness for cooperation with Western countries, Bulgaria sent troops to Cambodia as part of a UN peacekeeping mission; offered assistance to the US and its allies during the Gulf War, giving up at the same time a multi-billion dollar contract with Iraq; and even observed embargo against Libya and Yugoslavia at a substantial cost to its economy.²⁰

Bulgaria's rapprochement with Turkey in the 1990s can only be understood within the framework of Bulgaria's westernization attempts. It must also be noted that in the same period Bulgaria tried to improve her relations with Greece as well, and pursued a balanced policy between the two rival countries.²¹ The post-Cold War foreign policy of Bulgaria can best be summarized with the

¹⁷Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 4-8.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰Duncan M. Perry, 'Bulgaria: Security Concerns and Foreign Policy Considerations', in Stephen Larrabee (ed.), *The Volatile Powder Keg: Balkan Security After the Cold War*, RAND Study, Santa Monica, American University Press, pp. 58-59.

²¹Sabine Riedel, 'Bulgariens außenpolitische Optionen', *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, 33. Jahrgang, Heft 4, 1993, pp. 301-303.

words of the former foreign minister of Bulgaria, Stanislav Daskalov:

I think that the purpose of foreign policy is a simple one: to protect the country's national interests acting in compliance with the internationally accepted standards. There are different means of achieving this purpose. Be it through integration with the European structures or by expanding the country's relations with its neighbors, being a European country situated in the Balkans, Bulgaria has interests in this aspect, too.²²

The contemporary Bulgarian foreign policy is thus based on four pillars: a) the end of the implementation of communist ideology; b) European orientation (implementation of western European approaches to international problems; c) democratization of foreign policy based on consensus and transparency; and d) pragmatism and rationality in the decision-making process.

In considering the Balkan policy of Bulgaria, we can add two more pillars: a) multi-lateralism (avoiding alliances with a regional power); and b) equidistance (no participation in regional conflicts).²³

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey's foreign policy has been based upon maintenance of independence and preservation of secularism and modernism.²⁴ Its basic principle has been its western orientation.²⁵

²²Stéphane Lefebvre, 'Bulgaria's Foreign Relations in the Post-Communist Era: A General Overview and Assessment', *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (4), January 1995, p. 454.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 454-455.

²⁴Kemal H. Karpaz (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: Some Introductory Remarks in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1996, p. 1.

²⁵Oral Sander, 'Turkish Foreign Policy: Forces of Continuity and of Change', *Turkish Review Quarterly Digest*, Vol. 7 (3-4), Winter 1993, p. 31.

As the Cold War was about to end, Turkish foreign policy faced a major crisis with regard to Bulgaria: the "regeneration process" in Bulgaria and following exodus of Turks from Bulgaria to Turkey. During the conflict that hurt Turkey's interests considerably, Turkey pursued a rational policy of condemning Bulgarian attitude and trying to generate a common international reaction. Although Turkey did pursue an activist policy during the crisis, it did not advocate military intervention neither by itself, nor by other countries. This careful policy showed to the Bulgarian establishment that Ankara did not constitute a threat, and it did provide an appropriate ground for the improvement of bilateral relations in the new era.²⁶ Furthermore, Turkey did not try to take revenge of what Bulgaria has done, and welcomed her attempts for reconciliation and rapprochement.²⁷

For a number of reasons, the Balkans play an important role in Turkish foreign policy of the post-Cold War era. First of all, it is a Balkan country, and a strategically important part of it, (i.e. Eastern Thrace) is situated in the Balkans. Second, the Ottoman Empire ruled significant part of the Balkans for more than four hundred years. Therefore, it is inevitable that today's Turkey should have some undeniable cultural, economic, and political connections to the region. Third, about 2 million Turks or related Muslim communities live in other Balkan countries. Whether Turkey likes it or not, they are cultural heritage of the late Ottoman Empire, and as such gravitate towards Turkey whenever they find themselves in trouble. Fourth, because of the population movements since 19th century, 1/5 of Turkey's population is of Balkan origin. Fifth, for all of these reasons, any instability in the Balkans would certainly have effect on Turkey. "New Balkan war" scenarios often include Turkey and in case of a crisis in the Balkans, there is always the possibility of further mass migration to Turkey. Sixth, the Balkans is on Turkey's way to Europe.²⁸ Two

²⁶Kemal Kirişçi, 'The End of the Cold War and Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy Behaviour', *Foreign Policy*, Vol. XVII (3-4), 1993, pp. 15-16.

²⁷Presentation by Şule Kut on "Latest Developments in the Balkans" at the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, Ankara, 28 October 2000.

²⁸Şule Kut, 'Turkey in the Post Communist Balkans: Between Activism and Self-Restraint', *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, OBIV, Annual 1996-97, No. 3, 1997, pp. 41-42; Ali Karaosmanoğlu, 'Die neue regionale Rolle der Türkei', *Europa Archiv*, 48. Jahr, Folge 15, 10 August 1993, p. 425.

additional factors have influenced Turkey's Balkan policy in the new era: A growing affection among Muslims in the Balkan countries for Turkey and determination not to give an image of irredentism and adventurism.²⁹

Post-Zhivkov Developments in Turkish-Bulgarian Relations

On December 6, 1989, Mladenov stated that Bulgaria would respect the rights of "Muslim minority".³⁰ Bulgarian former Consul General to İstanbul, Slavi Slavov, further said that they would like to give back all rights of the Turkish speaking "Muslim minority".³¹ He also assured that those Turks who would return to Bulgaria would be able to reclaim their former jobs and property.³² The Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, too, condemned the assimilation campaign as "grave political error".³³

Turkey, while welcoming Bulgaria's decision of abandoning its policy of assimilation of Turkish minority remained cautious. The fact that there were demonstrations by Bulgarian nationalists against the restoration of the rights of Turkish minority and Bulgaria's reluctance to use the word "Turkish minority" instead of "Muslim", created doubts on the Turkish side about Bulgaria's real intentions. Nevertheless, it made clear that the only barrier to the bilateral relations was Bulgaria's attitude towards Turks in the country. If they were really to change, Turkey would, by all means, be ready to cooperate.³⁴

The meeting between the then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mesut Yılmaz and his Bulgarian counterpart in Kuwait early 1990 bore some fruit. Bulgarian Foreign Minister Boiko Dimitrov, saying that they "want to turn a page between Bulgaria and

²⁹Shireen Hunter, 'Bridge or Frontier? Turkey's Post-Cold War Geopolitical Posture', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 34 (1), January-March 1999, p. 73.

³⁰*Cumhuriyet*, 6 December 1989.

³¹*Milliyet*, 3 January 1990.

³²*Reuters*, 3 January 1990.

³³*Reuters*, 29 December 1989.

³⁴*Milliyet*, 9 January 1990.

Turkey", suggested that the two countries should make a joint declaration on human rights to overcome years of annoyance over the treatment of Bulgaria's Turkish minority. Yılmaz declared that "for the first time" the two countries used a common language. In the meeting, Bulgarian Foreign Minister also proposed confidence building measures between the two countries in the military sphere. This proposal, which could only be achieved between two allies took Turkey by surprise. After the meeting Turkish diplomats admitted that Bulgarian policy had changed much more than what they had previously expected.³⁵ Yılmaz underlined the possibility that a new era in bilateral relations could begin "after the new decisions of Bulgaria".

1990 witnessed the first steps towards democratization taken by the Bulgarian government. On 15 January, the Bulgarian Communist Party gave up its decade-long monopoly of power. In March, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted unanimously the law that allowed ethnic Turks, and other Muslim peoples to use their own names again. In April, the Bulgarian Communist Party renamed itself as the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). It is important to note that in December 1989, a liberal and democracy-oriented party had been formed, named the Union of Democratic Forces, consisting of different dissident groups. Bulgaria held its first free elections in June 1990. But it was the BSP that won the elections and was able to form the government alone. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), whose members consisted mainly of Turks, got 23 seats in the Parliament. The new government continued to follow the policy of rapprochement with Turkey.

There were four main reasons that caused Bulgaria to seek rapprochement with Turkey after Zhivkov: First, Bulgaria chose to move closer to Western world after the end of the Cold War. In the emerging new international arena, to assure the country's security, Bulgaria sought admission to NATO. Therefore, she needed to get Turkey's full support to become a member of NATO. Second, without the Soviet support, Bulgaria was vulnerable to the Turkish military power, which had second biggest army in NATO after the US.³⁶ It appeared more rational for Bulgaria to have good

³⁵Reuters, 10 January 1990.

³⁶Kjell Engelbrekt, 'Movement for Rights and Freedoms to Compete in Elections', *Report on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 2 (40), 4 October 1991, p. 2.

relations with Turkey to feel more secure. Third, the existence of Turkish minority within the borders of Bulgaria does make the contacts between two countries vital. The assimilation campaign of 1980s did not only damage bilateral relations, but also Bulgaria's relations with the Western world and Islamic countries. Therefore, to get out of isolation, Bulgaria needed to restore the rights of Turks and also improve its relations with Turkey. Fourth, Bulgarian economy declined throughout 1980s and got a fatal blow by the mass migration to Turkey. To improve economically, it had to get foreign investment, credits and also increase foreign trade. Because of geographical proximity and its successful liberalization program of 1980s, Turkey could have been an appropriate trade partner for Bulgaria.

In 1990s military relations between Ankara and Sofia have also improved. Before the elections of June 1990 in Bulgaria, President Özal stated that Turkey wanted to have friendly relations with Bulgaria irrespective of the outcome of the elections. After the elections, relations improved considerably. In July 1990, a Turkish army inspection team visited Bulgaria. Shortly, thereafter, Chief of Bulgarian General Staff, Lieutenant General Radnyu Minchev, paid an official visit to Turkey, first of its kind since the beginning of communist era in Bulgaria.³⁷ A few months later, on September 7, Bulgarian Prime Minister Andrey Lukanov paid an official visit to Turkey. He discussed the normalization of relations with Özal and other officials.

The presidential elections of August 1990 should be seen as a turning point with regard to Turkish Bulgarian bilateral relations. The former dissident Zhelu Zhelev, who had earlier condemned Zhivkov's assimilation policies, became President as a result of these elections. The beginning of his term of presidency appeared to reduce doubts in Turkey with regard to Bulgarian attempts for rapprochement.

In December 1990, the two sides concluded a confidence building agreement. In addition, Turkish officers visited troops and installations in Harmanlı, Bulgaria in May 1991.³⁸ In the same

³⁷Duncan M. Perry, 'New Directions for Turkish Bulgarian Relations', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 16 October 1992, Vol. 1 (41), pp. 33-39.

³⁸*Ibid.*

month Bulgarian Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Viktor Valkov visited Ankara. Meanwhile, Zhelev's proposal in November for forging closer ties was realized by the conclusion of a military agreement the following month and the two countries signed an important pact in December 1991, agreeing to give each other advance notice of major military activities taking place between 60 kms of their common border and to permit military observers from either side to monitor manoeuvres in that area, if they involved more than 12,000 troops, 300 tanks and 250 artillery pieces.³⁹

In March 1992, the then Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin went to Sofia, the first visit by a Turkish Foreign Minister to Bulgaria in 10 years. Turkish Defence Minister Nevzat Ayaz's visit to Sofia in 11 March, the first by a Turkish defence minister in 100 years, was a clear proof of the improvement of military relations between Turkey and Bulgaria. During this visit the Agreement for Military and Technical Cooperation was signed, according to which the two countries would buy jointly designed or produced equipment and sell jointly produced articles to third countries.⁴⁰ Then, on 6 May 1992, the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness, Cooperation and Security.

The close military relationship was later strengthened by joint manoeuvres,⁴¹ exchange of personnel and training of each other's staff, cooperation against drug and other kind of smuggling, terrorism, and organized crime, and exchange of information and documents.⁴²

It is worth noting that within two years Bulgarian-Turkish relations had improved so much that it was considered as a model for other countries. The former Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin, after his visit to Sofia stated that "Bulgarian-Turkish relations today could serve as an example of cooperation between two neighboring countries which have left behind those events [that] cast a shadow on them in the years preceding 1989".⁴³

³⁹*Reuters*, 20 December 1991.

⁴⁰*Reuters*, 24 May 1993.

⁴¹*FBIS*, 'Joint Exercises with Bulgaria in Black Sea', 6 July 1994.

⁴²*Reuters*, 3 February 1993.

⁴³*Reuters*, 11 December 1993.

In return for the support of Turkey for Bulgarian membership of NATO, one of the things that Turkey wanted from Bulgaria was the prohibition of PKK activities in that country. At the beginning of 1994, Bulgarian Anti-Terror Department Director Feodor Vladiminov said that they had met with Turkish officials in July 1993 and concluded a cooperation protocol against international terrorist organizations.⁴⁴

Both countries stressed the fact that their improving relations were not directed against any third country, namely Greece. During his visit to Sofia in July 1995, President Demirel pointed out that the rapprochement between the two countries was not against any third country.⁴⁵ Bulgarian President Zhelev also said that they insisted on having equally good relations with Greece and Turkey. Any attempt to disturb this balance of Bulgaria's Balkan policy to the detriment of one of the two countries for partisan considerations would be disastrous for Bulgaria's foreign policy.⁴⁶

Conflicts in the Balkans opened new opportunities for cooperation between Turkey and Bulgaria. When Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence in April 1992, Serbian aggression turned towards Muslims and Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina after attacks waged against Croatia and Slovenia,⁴⁷ which continued until US-brokered Dayton Peace Accord in 1995. Even though Yugoslav trade had accounted for 10-12% of Bulgaria's entire foreign trade, Sofia implemented the UN sanctions against Yugoslavia from July 1992 onward.⁴⁸ The embargo cost Bulgaria 40 million US dollars per month, hurting its connection to the west, therefore its tourism and foreign investment.⁴⁹

At the beginning of the crisis in Yugoslavia, both Bulgaria and Turkey supported the territorial integrity of the country,

⁴⁴Reuters, 18 January 1994.

⁴⁵Reuters, 6 July 1995.

⁴⁶Reuters, 7 July 1995.

⁴⁷Roger East and Jolyon Pontin, *Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, London, Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1997, pp. 233-240.

⁴⁸Reuters, 25 June 1992.

⁴⁹For negative effects of UN embargo on Bulgaria, see Veneta Montscheva, 'Bulgarien und das UN-Embargo gegen Serbien und Montenegro', *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, 33. Jahrgang, Heft 4, 1993, pp. 314-317.

fearing possible consequences that the disintegration of Yugoslavia might cause in the Balkan peninsula. But, since keeping Yugoslavia intact turned out to be an impossible task, both countries did not hesitate to recognize new entities, although Bulgaria continued to criticise Turkey's and other Balkan countries' decision to send soldiers to the peacekeeping force in Bosnia.⁵⁰ Bosnia was not the only area in former Yugoslavia where Turkey and Bulgaria collaborated. Bulgaria was the first country that recognized the independence of Macedonia, with the reservation that it did not recognize Macedonian nation and Macedonian language.⁵¹ Turkey, too, extended diplomatic recognition to Macedonia, but she did it without any reservation. Both countries were against Greek policy of not recognizing Macedonia diplomatically.

Bulgarian Policy Towards Turkish Minority and Its Effect Upon Turkish-Bulgarian Relations

More than 920 mosques have re-opened in Bulgaria since 1990. Religious literature, including Koran, both in Bulgarian and Turkish, is being published freely. Study of Turkish language in schools, although as extracurriculum, has been reintroduced. Publication of Turkish newspapers, magazines, national radio broadcasts, daily TV programmes in Turkish have also been allowed.⁵² Bulgaria has adopted a new constitution in 1991, which does not recognize special rights for minorities, but guarantees human rights of all individuals living in the country.⁵³

⁵⁰Nurcan Özgür, '1989 Sonrası Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri' (Post-1989 Turkish-Bulgarian Relations), in Faruk Sönmezöğlü (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi* (Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy), İstanbul, Der Yayınları, 2. ed., 1998, p. 363.

⁵¹*Reuters*, 9 September 1992.

⁵²Ivaylo Grouev, 'The Bulgarian Model, Recent Developments in the Ethnic Landscape: An Interview with Mr. Ahmed Doğan, Chairman of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms', *European Security*, Vol. 6 (2), Summer 1997, p. 85; and Ömer Turan, 'Bulgaristan Türklerinin Bugünkü Durumu' (Present Conditions of Bulgarian Turks), *Yeni Türkiye*, 1995/3, p. 299.

⁵³Petya Nitzova, 'Bulgaria: Minorities, Democratization, and National Sentiments', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 25 (4), December 1997, p. 734.

Another factor that has contributed to the promotion of minority rights and peaceful integration of Turkish minority to the Bulgarian political system has been the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which was officially registered as a political party in January 1990. It existed as an underground organization since 1985.⁵⁴ Within a period of little more than one year after its legal establishment, it became the fourth largest political organization in Bulgaria.⁵⁵ Then, it even moved up to third position. According to the new Bulgarian constitution and election law after the collapse of the communism, no political party can be formed along ethnic and religious lines. Therefore, MRF states that it does not only represent Turks, but all people living in Bulgaria, although most of its members are of Turkish origin.⁵⁶

Having gained around 7.5 % of the votes in the elections in 1991, it has since played key role in the Parliament. The party proved its effectiveness both in the formation and dissolution of governments. In 1992, when it withdrew its support, the government fell. The next technocrats government of Prof. Lyuben Berov could again be formed with the support of the MRF.⁵⁷ The then leader of the main opposition party, UDF, Ivan Kostov, stated before the upcoming early general elections of April 1997 that MRF has considerable importance in the Parliament, specially with regard to issues like constitutional change.⁵⁸

Peaceful accommodation of Turkish minority within the political system was awarded by the international community. For example, it has contributed to a considerable extent to Bulgaria's membership of the Council of Europe in 1992.⁵⁹ Bulgarian way of solving ethnic problems and the role of the MRF in this system has

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 733.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Turks make up 90 % of its members, Bulgars only 4-5%, the rest consists of other groups like Pomaks, Gypsies and Tatars, in Ali Eminov, 'There Are No Turks in Bulgaria: Rewriting History by Administrative Fiat', in *Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, İstanbul, ISIS Press, 1990, p. 174 and Engelbrekt, *The Movement for Rights and Freedoms*, p. 7.

⁵⁷Reuters, 30 December 1992; and Nitzova, *Bulgaria*, p. 734.

⁵⁸Interview with Ivan Kostov, *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 19 April 1997.

⁵⁹Nitzova, *Bulgaria*, p. 733.

become known as the "Bulgarian model" and shown as an example of solving ethnic conflicts.⁶⁰ It is this background of Bulgaria's new constructive policies towards Turkish minority that allowed close cooperation between Turkey and Bulgaria. It has also contributed to betterment of domestic political, economic, and social situation in Bulgaria as well as improving its relations with the outside world, mainly western countries and organizations.

Turkey, on the other hand, expressed its good intentions towards Bulgaria and guaranteed that it would not try to use the Turkish minority in Bulgaria as a leverage against Bulgarian government. President Demirel stated that "Turks in Bulgaria are Bulgarian citizens and law-abiding citizens of their country... We do not instigate them at all to one thing or another... Turkey has no evil designs on Bulgaria."⁶¹ This, of course, has greatly helped improve relations between Ankara and Sofia.

Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in Connection with International Organizations

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone (BSEC) was founded with the summit declaration signed by the heads of state of Turkey, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, and Republic of Moldova, in İstanbul on 25 June 1992.⁶² It has been described as "an expression of the common will and determination of the Black Sea countries to embark on a new multilateral cooperation based on the principles of a market economy."⁶³

Bulgarian President Zhelev attended the signature of the declaration, emphasizing the importance Bulgaria attached to the agreement. However, Bulgaria's initial response to BSEC was not very favorable. Although it wanted to cooperate on ecological and other issues, it hesitated to cooperate on the political level, thinking

⁶⁰Grouev, *The Bulgarian Model*, pp. 86 and 89.

⁶¹*Reuters*, 14 December 1993.

⁶²Oral Sander, 'Turkey and the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation', in Karpat, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 61-70.

⁶³Oktay Özüye, 'Black Sea Economic Cooperation', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, No. 3, Summer 1992, pp. 51-52, quoted in Sander, *ibid.*, p. 70.

that it would harm its relations with the European Community (EC) and put its membership prospect at risk.⁶⁴ But, when the EC clearly expressed that it would not admit Bulgaria to full membership in near future, Bulgaria began to look more favorably upon BSEC.⁶⁵ More so, it has viewed BSEC as a useful instrument for its membership into European organizations.⁶⁶

Since then, Bulgaria participated actively in BSEC facilities, but mostly hesitated to work in its parliamentary institutions. During armed conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Chechnya, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, Turkey tried to improve political cooperation among member countries, but Bulgaria rejected it. Still thinking that the politicization of BSEC would harm its way to the EC, it even vetoed the formation of the Black Sea Parliament.

Meanwhile, Bulgarian attempts to form a free market economy have established the ground for improvement of Turkish-Bulgarian economic relations. Turkish experience in establishing free market and introducing trade liberalization during the 1980s set an example for Bulgaria. In addition, Turkey's dynamic private sector was interested in the privatisation bids in Bulgaria. The circumstances that would help increase economic relations between Turkey and Bulgaria can be summarized as follows:

- a) geographical closeness, direct and cheaper transport facilities;
- b) economic reforms in Turkey that were carried out according to the Economic Stabilization and Structural Adjustment Programme of the 24 January 1980;
- c) favorable international and regional conditions;

⁶⁴Savash Orhan Jozioldash, 'Cooperation Between Bulgaria and Turkey from the 1980s till Today in Various Spheres', *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien*, 6. Jahrgang, Heft 3, 1993, p. 285.

⁶⁵Perry, *New Directions for Bulgarian-Turkish Relations*.

⁶⁶Oleksandr Pavliuk, 'Empire of Words', *Transitions*, Vol. 5 (9), 9 September 1998, p. 60.

d) the possibility of joint access to third countries' markets.⁶⁷

During 1987-1989 period the trade balance was in favor of Turkey, however, after 1990 because of considerable increase in Turkish imports from Bulgaria it changed in favor of Sofia.⁶⁸ When the former Turkish Minister of State for Economic Affairs, Işın Çelebi, visited Bulgaria together with some Turkish businessmen in October 1990, he declared Turkey's readiness for economic cooperation with Bulgaria. Soon after the visit Ankara offered Bulgaria a loan of 100 million dollars; half of that was to be used to purchase basic consumer goods, other half for investments. Turkey also agreed to give Bulgaria 50,000 tons of crude oil to help reduce its fuel and energy crisis.⁶⁹

Moreover, Turkey helped Bulgaria through Türk-Eximbank credits. In 1991 Türk-Eximbank and Bulgarian Foreign Trade Bank signed an agreement; according to which, Turkey provided 50 million dollar trade credit to Bulgaria. Another 50 million dollars were given in November 1992. Bulgarian-Turkish Council of the Business People was established by Bulgarian and Turkish businessmen in 1991.⁷⁰ As a result of improving bilateral economic relations, Bulgarian-Turkish trade has increased from 42 million dollars in 1990 to 511 million dollars in 1996.⁷¹

After the collapse of the communist regime, membership to NATO became a priority of Bulgarian foreign policy. Former Bulgarian President Zhelev has been one of the most consistent NATO supporters among Balkan leaders. Accordingly, Bulgaria signed Partnership for Peace Programme with NATO in 1994. Zhelev stated that Bulgaria regarded this initiative merely as an intermediate goal on the way to full membership to NATO and

⁶⁷Jozioldash, *Cooperation Between Bulgaria and Turkey*, pp. 277-278.

⁶⁸Turkish Undersecretary of Foreign Trade, 'Türkiye-Bulgaristan Dış Ticareti', [www.foreigntrade.gov.tr/dunya/rapor/bulgaristan/trbldistic.htm].

⁶⁹Kjell Engelbrekt, 'Relations with Turkey: A Review of Post-Zhivkov Developments', *Report on Eastern Europe*, 26 April 1991.

⁷⁰Jozioldash, *Cooperation Between Turkey and Bulgaria*, pp. 280-281 and *Reuters*, 3 November 1992.

⁷¹Turkish Undersecretary of Foreign Trade, 'Türkiye-Bulgaristan Dış Ticareti', [www.foreigntrade.gov.tr/dunya/rapor/bulgaristan/trbldistic.htm].

Western European Union (WEU).⁷² Bulgarian government officially stated the country's desire to join NATO in 1997.⁷³ However, NATO has accepted membership of only three countries in the first wave, namely Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic. Bulgaria was left for the second wave. Therefore, Bulgaria's first foreign policy priority is still to gain membership in NATO and Turkey has already expressed support for Bulgaria's bid for NATO membership.

Bulgaria also signed association agreement with the EC in March 1993, and begun negotiations for membership in early 2000. In the short run it is not possible for Bulgaria to become a full member, mostly because it could not fulfill Copenhagen criteria, especially in the field of economy.⁷⁴ Bulgaria has been aware of the fact that EU membership would not come soon. The former president Zhelev admitted that it would take much longer than NATO membership, because of the fact that Bulgarian economy was not ready to compete with Europe.⁷⁵

The Political and Economic Crisis in Bulgaria

Bulgaria experienced a severe economic crisis during late 1996 and early 1997. The annual inflation rate reached 311% in 1996. There was also shortage of grain. The crisis resulted from

⁷²Dimitar Tzanev, 'Bulgaria's International Relations After 1989: Foreign Policy Between History and Reality', in Iliana Zloch-Christy (ed.), *Bulgaria in a Time of Change: Economic and Political Dimensions*, Aldershot, Hants, 1996, p. 183.

⁷³For a detailed information on Bulgarian security policy alternatives and its possible consequences, see Valeri Ratchev, 'Searching for the Right Solution: Bulgarian Security Policy Was Confronted With a Difficult Choice', *European Security*, Vol. 6 (2), Summer 1997, p. 70.

⁷⁴For a considerable account of Bulgaria's relations with the EU, see Ilko Ezkenazi and Krasimir Nikolov, 'Relations With the European Union: Developments to Date and Prospects', in Zloch-Christy, *Bulgaria in a Time of Change*, pp. 189-204.

⁷⁵FBIS, 'Zhelev on Caspian Pipeline, Ties to Turkey', 17 February 1995.

the delay of structural reforms, large foreign debt burden, and failure to draw foreign investment.⁷⁶

As a result of the economic crisis, Prime Minister Zhan Videnov resigned both from leadership of Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and premiership. The economic situation in the country worsened in early 1997, with monthly inflation rate reaching to 43.8% in January and 242.7% in February. Bulgarian population began daily demonstrations all over the country in January, calling for resignation of BSP government and also for early elections. In the end, the government could not resist any longer and resigned in February 1997. A caretaker government, formed with the leadership of Sofia mayor Stefa Sofijanski, signed a standby agreement with the IMF that brought the introduction of a currency board and radical economic measures, thus easing the economic crisis in the country.⁷⁷

In November 1996 there were presidential elections in Bulgaria in which Western-oriented Petar Stoyanov became the president beginning from January 1997. In addition, general elections took place in April 1997 that brought pro-Western UDF to power again with a great margin. This has been the beginning of a new period in Turkish-Bulgarian relations.

3. Kostov Government in Bulgaria and Turkish-Bulgarian Relations

Although the Turco-Bulgarian rapprochement began and continued mostly during the governments of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, United Democratic Forces' ascendance to power in 1997, together with the victory of Petar Stoyanov from the same party in

⁷⁶For information on Bulgarian economic crisis in 1996 and 1997, see Michael Wyzan, 'Renewed Economic Crisis May End Foot Dragging on Reforms', *Transition*, Vol. 2 (17), 23 August 1996, pp. 40-43; Ognian Hishov, 'Transformationskrise und Krisenbewältigung in Bulgarien', *Südosteuropa*, Heft 7-8, 1997, p. 388; Stefan Krause, 'Bulgaria Survives a Dire Year', *Transition*, Vol. 3 (2), 7 February 1997, pp. 49-51; and Stefan Krause, 'Problems Remain Unsolved As Government Stumbles Onward', *Transition*, Vol. 2 (17), 23 August 1996, pp. 36-39.

⁷⁷*Bulgaria Business Guide 98, Legal, Tax and Accounting Aspects.*

the 1996 presidential elections, led to further improvement in bilateral relations. Turkey has considered the new government as more appropriate counterpart whose belief in the European system of values is unquestionable. Accordingly, Turkish Foreign Minister Cem has stated on various occasions that Turkey's relations with Bulgaria have been at its best.⁷⁸ Similarly, Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Nadezhda Mihailova, has declared that Bulgaria currently enjoys excellent ties with Turkey, and that her country has experienced irreversible break with the past.⁷⁹

Since the formation of technocrats' government in 1997, Bulgaria has been doing everything to promote its relationship with the Western world. It tries to solve all its long-standing problems with its neighbours, like border problem with Turkey and language problem with Macedonia. Acknowledging the fact that respect for minorities is a necessary condition for uniting with European structures, it has ratified the Framework Agreement of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities in 1999.

The resolution of language dispute with Macedonia was a great asset in this regard. Bulgaria was the first country to recognize the independence of Macedonia; but it refused to accept the existence of Macedonian nation and language for a long time. In February 1999, however, Bulgaria and Macedonia solved this problem by signing an agreement in "Bulgarian in accordance with the Constitution of Bulgaria, and Macedonian in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia." The document has signalled a compromise by Bulgaria, that is a *de facto* recognition of Macedonian language.⁸⁰

⁷⁸*Reuters*, 16 May 1998

⁷⁹Nadezhda Mihailova, 'Security in Southeastern Europe and Bulgaria's Policy of NATO Integration', *NATO Review*, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 6 and 9.

⁸⁰For detailed information on the agreement between Bulgaria and Macedonia, and international responses to it, see, Ron Synovitz, 'Bulgaria, Macedonia Resolve Language Dispute', *RFE/RL Newslines, End Note*, Vol. 3 (31), Part 2, 15 February 1999; William Pfaff, 'Good News From the Balkans', *International Herald Tribune*, 9 March 1999; Matthias Rüb, 'In den offiziellen Sprachen beider Staaten', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 February 1999.

Although Bulgaria in general has good relationship with the EU, Kostov's criticism of it in early 1999 has brought some problems to the surface. In an interview with Reuters, Kostov criticized EU, saying that it has "done nothing for Bulgaria or has done negligibly little".⁸¹ He further pointed out that the EU was exercising a "meaningless diktat" by demanding closure of some reactors of Kozluduy nuclear plant as precondition to Bulgarian membership in the EU. He emphasized that a shutdown would destroy what little competitiveness Bulgaria still has after suffering severe financial crisis of early 1997. In response, the EU officials insist that they had got promises from Bulgaria for early closure of some oldest reactors at Kozluduy nuclear plant. However, Bulgaria does not want to close them for the time being, as it still obtains considerable amount of electricity from the plant.⁸²

Bulgaria-EU relations had a turning point in late 2000 when the European interior ministers agreed to give an end to visa requirements for Bulgarian citizens. Thanks to this decision, Bulgarians can travel to Schengen countries without any visa from 10 April 2001 onwards.⁸³ EU decision has caused celebrations in Bulgaria. As President Stoyanov said, "For Bulgarian citizens the Berlin Wall fell today",⁸⁴ which proved that the EU would seriously consider Bulgaria's candidacy.

Stoyanov's visit to Turkey in July 1997 was the evidence of closer relationship between the two countries. During the visit, Bulgarian President apologized for the assimilation campaign of 1980s.⁸⁵ The two countries signed a military cooperation agreement, covering defense and security policies, as well as technological and scientific training.⁸⁶ Stoyanov also asked Turkey to use its influence to push for Bulgaria's removal from the Organization for Islamic Countries' list of countries that did not

⁸¹*RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 3 (42), Part 2, 2 March 1999.

⁸²Ron Synovitz, 'Kostov's Criticism of EU Highlights Threats to Reform', *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 3 (46), Part 2, 8 March 1999.

⁸³'EU Set to Lift Visas on Bulgaria Diplomat', *Reuters*, 1 December 2000.

⁸⁴'Bulgaria Jubilant Over Lifting of Visas', *Reuters*, 1 December 2000.

⁸⁵Ayşe Karabat, 'Bulgarian President's Historical Apology', *Turkish Probe*, 1 August 1997 via *Reuters*.

⁸⁶*Reuters*. 30 July 1997.

treat Muslims in a good manner.⁸⁷ Accordingly, Turkey asked Organization for Islamic Countries (OIC) in December 1997 to refrain from criticising Bulgarian assimilation campaign of 1980s any more.

In this period, it was not only Bulgaria that asked for Turkey's support for full membership to NATO, but Romania as well. In return for its support to Romania and Bulgaria for closer relations with NATO, Turkey's security concerns were diminishing in the Balkans. A trilateral meeting was held in Varna on 30 October 1997. Petar Stoyanov, Romania's Emil Constantinescu and Turkey's Demirel stressed that Bulgaria's and Romania's admission to NATO would greatly enhance the Alliance's role in Southeastern Europe. Presidents of Bulgaria and Romania expressed their deep satisfaction with Turkey's support.⁸⁸ This has been called by some analysts as "new Balkan power triangle".⁸⁹

In December 1997 Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz paid an official visit to Bulgaria . It was the first such visit by a Turkish prime minister in 18 years.⁹⁰ During the visit, a dispute lasting for 50 years about the border in the delta of the Rezovska River, which flows into the Black Sea, was resolved. According to the agreement, the borderline now passes right in the middle of the river mouth. It was also reported that the two countries agreed to form a working group that will deal with problems of separated families and work to eliminate visa problems.⁹¹

Yılmaz further offered Turkey's services as Bulgaria's intermediary in commercial contacts with Central Asian and Caucasus countries. In response, Kostov expressed his hope that Turkey would become "Bulgaria's gate into the Islamic and Arab

⁸⁷'Ties Wit Turkey Get Boost', *New Europe*, Issue No. 219, 3-9 August 1997 and *Reuters*, 1 August 1997.

⁸⁸*Reuters*, 8 October 1997

⁸⁹*Reuters*, 6 December 1997

⁹⁰Petko Bocharov, "Turkey Opens New Chapter In Relations with Neighbor", *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 December 1997, [www.rferl.org/nca/features/1997/12/F.RU.971210145649.html]; and Ergun Balcı, 'Dış Politikada Önemli Bir Atılım', *Cumhuriyet*, 8 December 1997.

⁹¹*Reuters*, 6 December 1997.

world."⁹² According to Yılmaz, there were no existing problems between Turkey and Bulgaria: "Especially the point where our bilateral relations reached in the last eight months is an example to other neighboring countries."⁹³ Kostov's visit to Turkey in November 1998 was good news for Bulgarian Turks who had emigrated to Turkey. The two parties signed an agreement, according to which the emigrants could now receive their pensions in Turkey.⁹⁴

After 1989, in the West, Bulgaria has been considered as a good example of how a Balkan country could solve its minority problem in a peaceful manner. Beginning from late 1989, Bulgaria has improved the situation of its Turkish minority so much so that in late 2000, Bulgarian state television began broadcasting news in Turkish after the afternoon daily news in Bulgarian.⁹⁵

Although Bulgaria has regranted many rights to its Turkish minority and even provided it with new rights, there still exist some problems. According to the Bulgaria Country Report on Human Rights Practices, released by the US Department of State on February 26, 1999, Bulgaria's plans for the establishment of national TV station to broadcast in Turkish has not yet been implemented. There is only limited radio broadcasting in Turkish on national radio's local affiliates in regions where there is a sizable Turkish speaking population.⁹⁶ The same criticism has been expressed by the leader of the MRF, Ahmed Doğan. According to him, the radio broadcasts in Turkish today are only one hour per day, while in Zhivkov's time it was four hours. He also argues that there are American, French and Greek high schools, but no Turkish school. Moreover, instead of present optional extracurriculum courses, he calls for compulsory Turkish classes for the Turkish minority.

⁹²Reuters, 5-6 December 1997.

⁹³Reuters, 7 March 1998

⁹⁴Reuters, 6 November 1998.

⁹⁵'Bulgaria's TV Starts Turkish-Language Programmes', Reuters, 2 October 2000.

⁹⁶US Department of State, *Bulgaria Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, 26 February 1999, US Department of State Web Page: [www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report].

Doğan also claims that the underdevelopment of Turkish populated regions have been the result of deliberate government policies of not investing in these regions. He says: "during Zhivkov's time the oppression was overt. Now, it is covert."⁹⁷

Kosovo Crisis

Problems in Kosovo started with the lifting of autonomous status of the region by Milosevic in 1989. At that time, Kosovo Albanians, which constituted 90% of the population of the province, protested. But, the fact that Kosovo issue was not addressed in the Dayton Peace Agreement signed in 1995, made it a potential flashpoint in the Balkans. The flashpoint finally exploded with resumption of Serbian aggression towards Kosova Albanians in late February 1998. The negotiations at Rambouillet in France among the parties to the dispute under international auspices did not produce any result, giving way to NATO's air intervention in late March 1999.

Both Turkey and Bulgaria have common concerns in determining policy regarding the turmoil in Kosovo. Both countries have been uncomfortable with the fact that security in the Balkans was threatened with the Serbian aggression. In addition, Bulgaria was aware of the fact that Kosovo problem has deferred potential investors in Bulgaria that urgently needs foreign investment for economic recovery. The embargo against Yugoslavia was also hurting economic situation in the country.⁹⁸

Apart from that, the case of minority problem leading to civil war in Yugoslavia has pleased neither Turkey nor Bulgaria, both of which have minorities at home. Therefore, both countries stated immediately their preference for keeping territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. Moreover, Kosovo crisis was an opportunity for both countries to show their solidarity with the Western world. Turkey, as member of NATO, has allowed two of its military bases to be

⁹⁷Interview with the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Ahmed Doğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 16 November 1998.

⁹⁸Summary of Statement of Prime Minister Ivan Kostov Before Parliament on Bulgaria's Position on Kosovo', 16 March 1999, Web Page of Bulgarian Government: [www.bulgaria.govrn.bg/kosovo_eng/parl-q-Kosovo.html].

used by NATO planes to attack Serbian targets. In addition, it was a good chance for Bulgaria to speed up its membership process in Western institutions, especially NATO and EU by supporting NATO intervention in Kosovo. It wanted to be seen as a reliable partner by the Western world.⁹⁹ In fact, Bulgarian President Stoyanov openly said that Sofia hoped for fast and early accession to NATO in return for its support of the Alliance during Kosovo campaign.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Bulgarian Prime Minister Kostov expressed his hope that the EU would begin negotiations with Bulgaria for membership sooner rather than later. He also said that NATO would offer membership to Bulgaria in 2001.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, Bulgaria has provided, first, its air corridor for NATO planes, then its territory for NATO peace-keeping troops. But, Sofia has made it clear that by granting NATO airplanes access to Bulgarian airspace, it would not consider itself to be at war with Yugoslavia.¹⁰² This policy at the end paid off and Bulgarian hopes were fulfilled by the EU that has begun membership negotiations with Bulgaria in early 2000.

During the Kosovo crisis, Turkey and Bulgaria, sometimes together with other Balkan countries, initiated proposals for solution of the problem. In Antalya Summit of 1998, seven Balkan countries (Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Macedonia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Albania) adopted a declaration that called for a peaceful solution to the conflict, based on broad autonomy within the internationally recognized borders of Yugoslavia.¹⁰³

⁹⁹*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 March 1999.

¹⁰⁰*RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 3 (80), Part 2, 26 April 1999.

¹⁰¹*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 May 1999. Foreign Minister Mihailova stated that her country deserves NATO membership because of its cooperation with the Alliance over Kosovo, in *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 3 (50), Part 2, 12 March 1999.

¹⁰²Prime Minister, President, Speaker Unanimous: Bulgaria Supports NATO Because It Wants Lasting Peace in the Region', 19 April 1999, Web Page of the Bulgarian Government, [www.bulgaria.govm.bg/kosovo_eng/Kosovo_%20190499.html].

¹⁰³*BBC Monitoring Service*, 15 October 1998, in *Reuters*, 15 October 1998.

Besides supporting efforts of western world to put an end to the oppression of Albanians, Bulgaria proposed that Turkey, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria issue a joint declaration on the problem.¹⁰⁴ Upon this initiative of Bulgarian Foreign Minister, the representatives of these countries, and also of Macedonia, met in Sofia in 1998 and adopted a declaration on Kosovo in which they stated their will to join efforts of international community to prevent the conflict that would affect all peoples in Europe.¹⁰⁵ They asked for a dialogue between Serbian authorities and Kosova Albanians to be established. They underlined that a solution should be found within existing boundaries, and both sides should refrain from using force.¹⁰⁶

Sofia considered military intervention in Kosovo crisis as the worst possible option and preferred a solution that could be reached by negotiations.¹⁰⁷ Bulgarian Prime Minister Kostov said that Bulgaria would back decisions of the international community on the use of adequate means aiming to end the violence in Kosovo, should all other possibilities for a political settlement be exhausted.¹⁰⁸ When attempts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict did not produce any result, the ruling class of Bulgaria accepted the military intervention.¹⁰⁹ Turkey also preferred a peaceful solution to the problem. In fact, Turkish Foreign Minister Cem underlined that Turkey's and Bulgaria's positions on Kosovo issue have been very close,¹¹⁰ and that relations with Bulgaria are at their best ever level.¹¹¹

There were however some differences of opinion between the two countries concerning the Kosovo issue. While Bulgaria

¹⁰⁴Reuters, 27 February 1998.

¹⁰⁵Reuters, 11 March 1998.

¹⁰⁶Reuters, 11 March 1998.

¹⁰⁷SWB, 4 March 1999, EE 3474, p. B1.

¹⁰⁸SWB, 14 October 1998, EE 3357, p. B11.

¹⁰⁹Bulgarian President Stoyanov stated that "Bulgaria has no other choice, but to back the international community" regarding NATO decision to strike, in *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 3, (58), Part II, 24 March 1999.

¹¹⁰Reuters, 14 May 1988.

¹¹¹Reuters, 16 May 1998

opposed economic sanctions against Yugoslavia,¹¹² Turkey was in favor of it, as it believed sanctions would help solve the problem. Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nadezhda Mihailova claimed that economic embargo against Yugoslavia benefits only "ruling clique in Belgrad". She argued that previous embargo during the Bosnian War led to the criminilazition of the Balkans, worsened the image of the region and prevented businessmen from investing in the Balkan countries. Mihailova declared that Bulgaria has become hostage to the conflict in the Balkans.¹¹³

Another important difference between Turkey and Bulgaria regarding Kosovo was that Bulgaria has criticized positions of both Kosovo Albanians and Belgrade regime. It argued that both sides had extremist demands that could not be reconciled. Prime Minister Kostov stated that Bulgaria was against both the official policy of Belgrade, as well as those Kosovo Albanians whose extremism was making it difficult to find a solution at the negotiating table.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Turkey was against the independence demands of Albanians living in Kosovo, but did not criticize them as harshly as Bulgaria.

The potential spillover of the Kosovo problem led to the formation of a peacekeeping force among Balkan states under the guidance of the US. Defence ministers of Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Albania, Macedonia, and Romania have fomally established South-Eastern Europe Multi-National Force (SEEMNF) in Athens on 12 January 1999. It comprises 4,000 soldiers and will function as aid relief and peacekeeping force.¹¹⁵ While the discussion on where the first headquarter of the force should be based was going on, Turkey supported Bulgarian city of Plovdiv over Turkish city of Edirne. This was considered a compromise by Turkey in favor

¹¹²*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 March 1999.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴'Summary of Statement of Prime Minister Ivan Kostov Before Parliament on Bulgaria's Position on Kosovo', 16 March 1999, Web Page of Bulgarian Government: [www.bulgaria.govrn.bg/kosovo_eng/parl-q-Kosovo.html].

¹¹⁵Zoran Kusovac, 'Balkan States to Set Up Rapid Reaction Force', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 31 (3), 20 January 1999.

of Sofia.¹¹⁶ As a result, Plovdiv was chosen as the first headquarter of the military force, which would rotate every four years.

The developments in the Balkans in the last decade have led to Turkish-Bulgarian cooperation on issues of strategic importance. Bulgarian Defence minister Boyko Noev during his visit to Ankara in March 2000 stated that two countries share common strategic interests in preserving stability and security in Southeastern Europe. He said that Bulgaria, Turkey and other friendly countries in the Balkans will not allow another war in their region.¹¹⁷

PKK Issue

Bulgaria considers Turkey's Kurdish problem as an internal issue. It already declared its support for Ankara in its struggle with terrorism and stated that Bulgaria has cooperated with Turkey regarding this issue.¹¹⁸ Although Bulgaria seems to understand Turkey's sensitivities about the issue, there still exist some Kurdish organizations functioning in Bulgaria. They carry out pro-PKK activities that make Turkey suspicious. Moreover, Bulgaria has not declared PKK as a terrorist organization, and it is known that PKK members use Bulgaria as a transit country in their way to western Europe.

Turkey voiced its concerns to Sofia about the settlement of PKK members in Bulgaria as early as 1993. At the time, the Turkish Foreign Minister Çetin was in Sofia for a BSEC meeting. He stated that the PKK tried to infiltrate into Bulgaria because of harsh measures taken against it in western European countries and he got a promise from the Bulgarian side that they would struggle against terrorism. Since then, however, the PKK issue has become part of the bilateral relations.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶*Reuters*, 15 November 1998.

¹¹⁷Deniz Karahan, 'DM Noev Sees Common Strategic Interests with Turkey', *BTA*, 8 March 2000, *FBIS-EEU-2000-0309*.

¹¹⁸Personal interview with the Bulgarian Ambassador to Turkey, Dr. Stoyan Stalev, May 1999, Ankara.

¹¹⁹Özgür, *1989 Sonrası Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, p. 375.

Although Turkey appreciates Bulgaria's support for its fight against terrorism, it insists on the prohibition of pro-PKK activities on Bulgarian territory and also tries to obtain Bulgaria's declaration of PKK as a terrorist organization. In response, Bulgaria states that it does not consider the PKK as a terrorist organization, because it does not have any criminal activities in Bulgaria.¹²⁰ Sofia also claims that since other Kurdish organizations are not involved in terror or criminal activities, it can not close them down.

Turkey keeps warning Bulgaria against support or easing of facilities for PKK-related activists in the country, and calls for a ban on PKK activities in the country.¹²¹ In similar fashion, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms criticizes Bulgarian policy towards Kurdish groups, as well. It argues that the government of Bulgaria is indifferent to the PKK and calls on the government to prevent the terror organization from acting in the country.¹²²

Some of the Kurdish groups in Bulgarian territory are; Kurdish Cultural Club, Patriotic Union of Kurdish Students, Association of Kurdish Fellow Countrymen, and Bulgarian Cultural and Information Center for Kurdistan. Bulgaria argues that these are just cultural organizations and neither any PKK structure nor activity have been found in the country so far. Different attitudes displayed by the two countries may still create problems in bilateral relations in the future.

In sum, Bulgaria respects Turkish sensitivity on the Kurdish issue and tries not to irritate Turkey. But its position is far from satisfying for Turkey, mainly because it insists on not declaring the PKK a terror organization. And whenever the issue becomes internationalized, it prefers to follow the European policy closely.

It has been clear that the position of the Bulgarian Socialist Party on the Kurdish problem is different from the attitude of the Union of Democratic Forces. Some members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party do not even refrain from supporting the PKK publicly. Some parliamentarians of the Bulgarian Socialist Party

¹²⁰Personal interview with the Bulgarian Ambassador to Turkey, Dr. Stoyan Stalev, May 1999, Ankara.

¹²¹*Milliyet*, 23 March 1999.

¹²²*SWB*, 14 January 1999, EE 3432, pp. B 1-2.

have become members of 'the National Committee for Defending Öcalan'. One of those parliamentarians, Velko Vulkanov, who has been elected from the Bulgarian Socialist Party list, but is now independent MP, has stated: "Öcalan is Levski [A hero in the Bulgarian history who contributed to the Bulgarian independence movement against the Ottoman Empire] of the Kurdish people. As long as I live and have power, I will continue to support Kurdish nation". It is obvious that should the Bulgarian Socialist Party come to power, Turkey may face more problems regarding Bulgaria's attitude towards the PKK.

Developments in Economic Relations

In July 1998, the two countries signed a free trade agreement that has entered into force as of January 1, 1999.¹²³ The agreement foresees decreasing customs duties for industrial goods gradually and reducing it to zero in 2002. It also foresees the establishment of free trade zones between the two countries.

Turkey and Bulgaria have increased economic cooperation as well in recent years. They increased energy cooperation through signing of a five-year agreement in March 1997. That would boost cooperation in the energy field. Bulgaria exports 300-400 megawatt of electricity monthly to Turkey, getting monthly income of 10 million dollars.¹²⁴ In 1998 another agreement was signed, according to which Turkey would purchase electricity from Bulgaria for 10 years; in return, Turkey's Ceylan Holding would build 114-km-long highway between Orizovo and Kaptan Andrevo and will construct three dams within the framework of Upper Arda Project.¹²⁵ But, in March 2001 Bulgaria has cancelled the agreement stating that "the concession was cancelled as Ceylan Holding's sister firm, a shareholder in the Gorna Arda joint venture, has not proved its financial and technical abilities to do the project, due to be built by the concessionaire".¹²⁶

¹²³Reuters, 18 July 1998.

¹²⁴Reuters, 5 March 1997

¹²⁵BBC Monitoring Service, 8 October 1998, in Reuters, 8 October 1998 and Reuters, 2 April 1999.

¹²⁶Bulgaria Cancels Hydropower Deal with Turkey's Ceylan', Reuters, 23 March 2001.

Trade volume between Ankara and Sofia increased from 42 million dollars in 1990 to 529.2 million dollars in 1999. According to the figures for the first five months of 2000, bilateral trade increased 27,1% in comparison to previous year. In 1999 Turkey's import from Bulgaria amounted to 295.6 million dollars and its export was 233.6 million dollars.¹²⁷ Turkey is Bulgaria's 4th biggest trade partner in exports and 7th in imports.¹²⁸

When the geographical proximity and number of Turkish origin people in Bulgaria have been taken into account, the amount of Turkish trade and investment seems not enough. Economic situation in southeastern Bulgaria, where Turks constitute majority of the population, is much worse than other parts.¹²⁹ Therefore, Turkey should consider to encourage Turkish businessmen to invest there. This would discourage emigration of Turks of Bulgaria to Turkey because of economic difficulties and contribute to the development of these regions. It now seems that Turkish businessmen favor Romania among Balkan countries because of its bigger population, but Bulgaria must not be ignored.

4. Conclusion

Because of their membership to opposing power blocs, bilateral relations between Turkey and Bulgaria generally remained tense during the Cold War. Although they experienced some normalization periods, these were always short-lived. The assimilation campaign of 1980s and the deportation of more than 300,000 Turks by the Bulgarian government in 1989 worsened the Turkish-Bulgarian relations.

However, changes in both international and domestic dynamics of late 1980s have allowed quick rapprochement between the two countries. As regards to world system, the fall of

¹²⁷Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı, Anlaşmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, Avrupa Ülkeleri Dairesi, *Bulgaristan Ülke Profili* (Bulgaria Country Profile), September 2000: [www.foreigntrade.gov.tr/dunya/rapor/bulgaristan/trbldistic.htm].

¹²⁸The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Bulgaria Country Profile 2000*, p. 53.

¹²⁹Interview with the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Ahmed Doğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 16 November 1998.

Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War restrictions on the one hand; and concerning domestic system, overthrow of Zhivkov in Bulgaria on the other, have changed the orientation of Bulgarian domestic and foreign policy from socialist to pro-European one, like most of other east and central European countries. Thus, the post-Cold War domestic and foreign policy of Bulgaria, including its policy towards Turkey, must be analyzed within its Europeanization efforts.

As soon as Todor Zhivkov was ousted from power by the reformist wing of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the new government under Mladenov sought ways to improve relations with Turkey. The first thing it did was to restore rights to Turkish minority and put an end to the assimilation policy. The new government of Bulgaria re-allowed Turks to use their Turkish names, to have access to education in their mother language and to practice their religion free from any restriction, notwithstanding opposition from Bulgarian public at the beginning. It has also allowed participation of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, composed mostly of Turkish members, into the political system.

At the beginning of the new era in Bulgarian politics, Turkey remained cautious. It could not fully trust Bulgaria whether what the Bulgarian communist regime called the "regeneration process" against Turkish minority would not be repeated. But, as time went by, Turkey could believe in the continuation of a new period in Bulgaria. Thanks to establishment of mutual trust, they began to cooperate in different fields, including security, in a year time following the crisis of 1989. It must be noted that the cooperation between the two countries was achieved during the tenure of Bulgarian Socialist Party, that is, the successor to the Bulgarian Communist Party.

For Bulgaria, it has been vital to improve its relations with Turkey, because; first, it wants to be a member of European institutions, like NATO and EU, and Turkey's support is important especially concerning its relations with NATO; second, about 10% of its population is of Turkish origin, therefore, it can not ignore relations with Turkey; third, it should solve all its problems with neighboring countries to become part of European structures; fourth, Turkey has second biggest army within NATO, so, to assure the security of its southern border, it must have friendly relations

with its neighbor; fifth, Turkey, with a population more than 65 million people and a dynamic economy is an important market for Bulgarian goods and enthusiastic businessmen of Turkey can also be a good source of foreign investment that Bulgaria is in dire need of.

On the other hand, Bulgaria is an important ally for Turkey, first and foremost, because Ankara has uncomfortable relationship with most of its neighbors.¹³⁰ In such a neighborhood, it makes sense for Turkey to improve its relations with Bulgaria. Moreover, Bulgaria is considered as an island of stability in the Balkans, which has witnessed considerable number of bloody conflicts in the new era. Therefore, it provides a reliable ally for Turkey for cooperation in solving regional conflicts, like the Bosnian War and the Kosovo crisis. Turkey must also take the situation of Turkish minority living in Bulgaria into consideration and that is why it must closely follow Bulgaria's policy towards them. From the economic point of view, Bulgaria, especially because of its geographical proximity, is a significant market for Turkish products. In addition, Bulgarian privatization programme provides an important opportunity for Turkish businessmen.

The victory of western-oriented United Democratic Forces both in the Bulgarian presidential and general elections, in November 1996 and April 1997 respectively has paved the way for even closer relationship with Turkey. Turkish side has found a more appropriate counterpart as a result of these elections. Turkish and Bulgarian high-level officials have met often, concluding agreements from abolition of customs, facilitation of the pension payments of Turkish emigrants in Turkey, to cooperation against organized crime and drug smuggling, as well as cooperation in military affairs.¹³¹ Considering the wide area of cooperation, changes of government in either country should not be expected to reverse the pattern of relationship between them. The fact that Turkish-Bulgarian rapprochement began during the government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party is an evidence of this.

¹³⁰'Turks and Bulgars Make Up', *The Economist*, 27 February 1999, p. 30.

¹³¹*The Economist*, 27 February 1999, p. 30, notes that Kostov and Yılmaz met eight times in less than a year.

The Turkish-Bulgarian relations in the post-Cold War era would constitute a model for other Balkan countries. The two countries managed to solve significant problems, including the one about the rights of Turkish minority in Bulgaria. They have contributed to educate the culture of cohabitation in the region. This should be considered a great success in a region that is home to many minority problems.

With the beginning of the crisis in Yugoslavia, it has become very popular to explain conflicts in the Balkans in terms of "ancient hatreds" mythology. According to it, history of the region has been full of ethnic conflicts. That is why it is not possible for people of different ethnic origin to live together in the Balkans; nor is it possible for states of the region to have friendly relations with each other.¹³² The establishment of friendly relations between Sofia and Ankara and the case of Turkish minority in Bulgaria has been a good example to show that Balkan countries can manage to solve their minority problems and cooperate with each other.

As stated, the betterment of Turkish-Bulgarian relations have occurred, thanks to mainly Bulgarian Europeanization efforts. The course of Bulgarian relationship to Turkey may change, if Sofia becomes a member of NATO. In this case, the first foreign policy priority of Bulgaria will change from membership in NATO, to that of full membership to the EU. This development may cause Bulgarian foreign policy to be closer to Greece, that is already an EU member, at the expense of Turkey. Bulgaria has so far expressed a few times that as regards to problems between Turkey and the EU, it will follow the line of EU. In case of achieving NATO membership, it might adopt the approach of the EU countries that has not been always welcomed by Turkey. In sum, the future course of Turkish-Bulgarian relations is dependent on their relationship to the European institutions.

¹³²Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, New York, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 23 and Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, London, Papermac, 1994, pp. xix-xxiv.