

**GREEK POLICIES CONCERNING THE MUSLIMS
IN WESTERN THRACE AS REFLECTED IN
PAUL HIDIROGLOU'S *WESTERN THRACE IN THE
LIGHT OF THE NATIONAL IDEAL OF THE TURKS***

Frederick DE JONG*

Greek policies concerning the Turkish and Pomak populations in Western Thrace have been amply documented over the past two or three decades in numerous publications in Turkish. These include the books by authors such as Ahmet Aydınli, Abdurrahim Dede, Baskın Oran, Nadir Yaz, and Ümit Kurtuluş¹. For monitoring the day to day events the importance of the periodicals *Bati Trakya*, *Yeni Bati Trakya Dergisi* and *Bati Trakya'nın Sesi*² can hardly be underestimated. These periodicals and the Turkish press in Western Thrace itself contain an often explicit record of events illustrative of the problems confronting the Muslim inhabitants, and provide evidence for the correctness of the widely held view: that Greek policies concerning the Turkish minority are aimed at inducing migration and/or assimilation.

Information on the predicament of the Turks in Western Thrace, is also provided in a number of publications in European languages and in Arabic published in Turkey. These publications point at a considerable effort on the Turkish side to make the facts widely known in order to elicit action by third parties, states or international agencies, resulting in an improvement of the conditions affecting the minority³.

On the Greek side, however, response to such publications has been mainly confined to the Greek press aimed at a Greek public⁴. Few indeed are publications aimed at

* Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

a non-Greek speaking public⁴. Thus, the publication of a booklet in English with the title *Western Thrace in the Light of the National Ideal of the Turks*, written by Paul (Pavlos) Hidioglou published in Athens by Herodotos in 1991, would seem to be an exception. At the time of its publication⁵, the author was a senior official in the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Presently, he is a professor in the University of Korfou. The press, Herodotos, which published the booklet is owned by Dimitris Stamoulis, an active member of PASOK and a former press attaché in the Greek Embassy in Algiers. It is translated from the Greek original with the title *Η Δυτική Θρακη υπο το φως της εθνικης ιδεας των Τοιφκων*, which was published by the Institute of Balkan Studies in Thessalonica in 1988. Originally it was presented as a paper at a congress on "Historical, Archaeological and Folklore Research on Thrace" held in Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupolis in December 1985.

This publication seems to have been virtually unnoticed outside the small group of scholars and politicians inside and outside Turkey, concerned with the Turks in Western Thrace. In view of this fact, and in view of the position of the author of the booklet, it seems worthwhile to take a closer look at its contents. The following text first summarises then discusses these contents in conjunction with Greek policy, and ends with some general observations concerning this tract.

The contents of the tract in summation

Panturkist ideology aims at the political union of all the Turkish groups that have a common Turkish culture. This ideology, although not officially promoted by the State, is nevertheless an important element of the Turkish political universe, since it is carried and cultivated by many Turks in "key positions", such as university professors, intellectuals, military men and others. These persons write books and contribute articles to some eighty Panturkist periodicals and are members of numerous associations which promote Panturkism. Panturkism is an expansionist ideology and since it is also focused on the Turks living in Western Thrace, it constitutes a danger for Greece. That this danger is real is demonstrated by the fact that the Turkish State consents to every anti-Hellenic article "with an expansionist mentality" published in the periodicals *Bati Trakya* and *Yeni Bati Trakya Dergisi*: these periodicals, which systematically promote a Turkish expansionist policy and Turkish secessionist movements in Western Thrace are distributed in units of the Turkish army and are deemed fit for use in Turkish schools.

The associations of Muslims from Western Thrace in Germany (fourteen associations), Holland (one association), and Australia (one association), assist in the promotion of Turanism among the Muslims of Western Thrace. These organisations also aim to internationalise the minority problem by means of contacts with members of the European Parliament, publication and circulation of printed material, and television programs.

The Muslim identity of the minority is exploited for the sake of consolidating Panturkism in Western Thrace. The muftis of Komotini and Xanthi are instrumental to this effect. The publication of articles concerning the predicament of the Muslims in Western Thrace in Islamic newspapers and magazines, and also statements by Islamic organisations referring to the living conditions of these Muslims equal subversive activities against the region of Western Thrace. Participation of Muslim clerics in Islamic conferences is suspect.

Turkish propaganda material on Western Thrace comes in a variety of forms: articles, magazines, special propaganda newspapers, calendars, greeting cards memoranda, letters, declarations and school textbooks as well as other books. It is also aimed at the Turkish awakening and the consolidation of the Muslim element in the region. Authors singled out for particular criticism are Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi⁶ and Abdürrahim Dede⁷. According to Hidiroglou, the aim of Ayverdi's scholarly work is "to prove the allegedly indelible seal of Turkish civilisation on the Balkans", whereas Abdurrahim Dede emphasises "the supposedly Turkish character of Western Thrace". In Dede's case, special mention is made of "his collaboration with foreign researchers who support the Turkish propaganda views on Western Thrace by their studies. Here, the author of the present paper, and Machiel Kiel⁸, professor of the history of Turkish architecture in the University of Utrecht, are explicitly mentioned. Kiel's views on the Pomaks are presented as having triggered off "a systematic Turcification of the Pomaks"⁹. Kiel's publications as well as my own, receive particular attention in a chapter entitled "Mobilisation of foreign literary activity for the minority of Western Thrace". Kiel's work on the Ottoman monuments of Western Thrace¹⁰ is being characterised as evidence of a co-ordinated Turkish attempt to utilise the presence of remnants of Turkish cultural monuments for political purposes. My own publications on Western Thrace are being characterised as "serving dear political aims", and as containing "slanderous accusations against the Greek authorities"¹¹. Moreover, Hidiroglou maintains that "De Jong distorts the facts, defames the Greek Administration, and underestimates the care shown by the Greek side for the Muslims of Western Thrace up to our days".

The views of Atatürk on Western Thrace, expressed in 1920, are cited in Turkish publications and thus encourage the presentation of similar views, aiming at the development of an expansionist policy. Cassettes, videotapes and a film are produced and distributed in Western Thrace with the aim to stir fanaticism and to prepare for the projection of irredentist Turkish claims in the region.

Hidiroglou's major conclusion is that we are witnessing a transformation of the Turkish accusations of violation of human rights in Western Thrace into a question of claiming this region for the creation of an independent state of Western Thrace. This transformation, Hidiroglou argues, is inconceivable without the consent of the centre, i.e.

at the highest levels of the Turkish State, and implies the existence of long-range plans aiming at the replacement of the Treaty of Lausanne by another Treaty doing justice to Panturkist ideology.

The tract speaks repeatedly about "the alleged Greek oppression of the minority", points at the care shown by the Greek side for the Muslims in Western Thrace and by means of negative comparison refers to the treatment of minorities in Turkey. It essentially discards all criticism levelled at Greece, not by providing evidence to the contrary but by presenting criticism of Greece as part of a Panturkist conspiracy aiming at dismembering Western Thrace from Greece.

Qualifications, interpretations and explanations

From this summary of the contents of Hidiroglou's tract, it may be clear that it is not a scholarly paper. It is not scholarly for a number of reasons, which in themselves do not necessarily follow from its likely objectives. These reasons are the inadequate references to sources, errors and inconsistencies in English translations from Turkish terms, names and titles mentioned, the presentation of (presumed) facts without relating these to a theoretical framework. What we have here is an enumeration of tendentious observations. The author seems to take the position that critical writing on Greek policies concerning the Turks in Western Thrace, and even writing about the Turks in Western Thrace at all, is suspect, and even dangerous and subversive. So are periodicals publishing articles concerning Western Thrace wherever published (the tract mentions articles published all over the world). Participation by Muslim leaders from Western Thrace in international Islamic congresses is highly suspect. Also dangerous are the organisations of Turks from Western Thrace in Germany and in Holland. Hidiroglu mentions that one published even a wall Calendar bearing messages for "dedication to the struggle for gaining our rights".

The tract is also not scholarly because it is full of apodictic statements: it presents interpretations as fact, without arguments in support of the interpretations. Its denial, implicit and explicit, of criticism levelled against Greek policies in Western Thrace is not substantiated by evidence but by negative reference: i.e. by stating that human rights are more infringed upon in Turkey than in Greece, that Turkey is guilty of a planned long-range destruction of demolition of Hellenic monuments (in response to accusations of neglect and intentional destruction of Ottoman monuments in Greece), that Turkish historians are guilty of a "historical Turcification of Asia Minor" (in response to criticism of the Greeks stressing the Greek past of Western Thrace), and by stressing that Islamic (family) Law applies for the Muslims in Western Thrace, and that therefore the Turks as a Muslim community are actually better off than are their co-religionists in Turkey.

Thus, the tract is clearly not a contribution to scholarship, but rather a political statement. This raises the question of why it was presented, at what seems to have been a

scholarly congress, in 1985, was subsequently published in the original Greek in 1988, and in the English translation I am presently discussing in 1991. The relatively long lapse of time between presentation, and publication of the translation is rather striking.

My explanation for all this is the following: If one assumes that planning a large congress of five days in three different locations (Xanthi, Komotini, and Alexandroupolis) normally takes about one year, this means that the initiative to held such a congress must date from 1983 or 1984. These are the years immediately following the admission of Greece to the European Economic Community, when the Community countries took an active interest in human rights and minority issues in Greece. Concern with the living conditions of the Turkish population in Western Thrace was growing and drawing increased attention from the European news media. Thus it would seem not too farfetched to postulate a connection between this development and the timing of the Congress. Or, to put it differently: the increased attention from EEC countries may not have been the only factor decisive for the congress initiative, but, considering the absence of any similar congress in the past, is likely to have been one of the factors contributing to its materialisation, and some of the results of the Congress are likely to have been projected as potentially correcting the negative public opinion of Greek policies in Western Thrace as this was gradually building up in Western Europe at the time. By the time the Congress convened, in 1985, the focus of public attention had shifted from the Turks in Western Thrace to the Turks in Bulgaria and their predicament. This greatly reduced the need for the dissipation of the papers presented at the Congress, and thus they were published only in 1988, without having been used as an element in a public relations campaign. Their eventual publication by the Institute of Balkan Studies does not carry the mark of serving political aims. In 1989 and 1990, however, following the changes in Bulgaria, the public opinion in the EEC returned to the Turks in Western Thrace. In particular the publication of the Helsinki Watch Report entitled *Destroying Ethnic Identity. The Turks of Greece*, in August 1990 had a considerable impact. Thus, it became apposite, and perhaps even imperative, to publish a text countering at least part of its contents. Thus Hidiroglou's paper presented at the Congress in 1985 was translated into English and published in 1991 with the obvious aim to reach a non-Greek English speaking public in Europe. At the time, another dimension of the tract seems to have become instrumental in relation to what had by then become an overwhelming Greek concern: to keep Turkey out of the European Community.

Here, the end of the tract is particularly revealing: "... how can any Greek government trust the good intentions and the Turkish friendship proposed to Greece when Turkey has put into action such schemes (i.e. expansionist' Turanist; FDJ) against Western Thrace? Such plans are destructive for the EEC, for the future union of Europe, and for the Western military alliance...". Thus, what we seem to have here is a semi-official piece of Greek propaganda aiming at influencing public opinion in Europe concerning

future Turkish membership of the EU, by exploiting the issue of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace to this effect. Hidiroglou's tract, which casts defence of human rights, concern with the living conditions of a minority, results of scholarly interest, and monitoring the treatment of the minority, as elements of a Panturkist conspiracy against the integrity of the Greek State, would seem to confront us with a relatively new dimension of Greek policy concerning its Turkish minority. Its stress on conspiracy would imply a shift of emphasis, from denial and neglect of complaints and criticism concerning the minority, to conspiracy theory. If such is the case, it does not augur well for the future.

NOTES

- 1- Ahmet Aydınli, **Batı Trakya Faciâsının İç Yüzü**, İstanbul 1971. Abdurrahim Dede, **Rumeli'nde Bırakılanlar (Batı Trakya Türkleri)**, İstanbul 1975. Baskın Oran, **Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Batı Trakya Sorunu**, Ankara 1986/İstanbul 1991. Ümit Kurtuluş, **Batı Trakyanın Dünü Bugünü** (n.p.) 1979. Nadir Yaz, **Ağlayan Batı Trakya**, İstanbul 1989.
- 2- The oldest of these periodicals is the monthly **Batı Trakya**, which appears since May 1967. The editor is Selahatin Yıldız (Editorial office: Salihpaşa Cad. No: 7) Kat. 1, Gaziosmanpaşa İstanbul). Since early 1988 issues have appeared at irregular intervals. **Yeni Batı Trakya Dergisi** is a monthly published by Süleyman Sefer Cihan (Editorial office: İncili Çavuş Sok. Karadeniz Apt. No.29/4, Sultanahmet) since April 1983. The monthly **Batı Trakyanın Sesi** is published by Batı Trakya Türkleri Dayanışma Derneği (Beşirağa Tekkesi sok. No: 7, Cağaloğlu, İstanbul) since November 1987.
- 3- Examples are the pamphlets **How the West Thrace Moslem Turks are Annihilated. A Call to Defenders of Democracy**, İstanbul, n.d.; **The Drama of the Moslem Turkish Minority in Western Thrace**, İstanbul 1983 (also published in Arabic); **Die Schwierigkeit der Westlichen Trakien Türken in der Beziehungen zwischen dem Türken und Griechen**, İstanbul 1992 (also published in Arabic); **Human Rights Violations in Western Thrace**, İstanbul 1982.
- 4- See e.g. Π. Φωτεας, **Οι Πομακοί της Δυτικής Θρακίας**, Komotini 1978; and Ν. Γονατας & Π. Κυδωνιάτης, **Η Μαυροουμανική μειαυοπιτα της Θρακίας**, Komotini 1985.
- 5- Although the ISBN (9G0-7290-194) gives the year 1990 as the year of publication, the tract was actually published in 1991, as appears from the colophon (p. 95).
- 6- Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi is the author of a monumental survey of Ottoman architecture in South-eastern Europe: **Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri**, 4 vols. İstanbul 1977-1982. He is the author of many other publications in the field of the history of Ottoman architecture.
- 7- Abdurrahim Dede was born in Xanthi. When he went to Turkey for his higher education, he

lost his Greek citizenship. He graduated from the Faculty of Law in Istanbul University and is the author of a number of books on the history and culture of the Turks in Western Thrace.

- 8- Prof. dr. dr. h.c. Machiel Kiel is professor of Ottoman architecture in Uteecht University, and one of the world's most pre-eminent authorities on Ottoman architecture in the Balkans. He is the author of many scholarly books and articles.
- 9- Whatever views professor Kiel holds on the Pomaks, he has not confined these views to writing, neither did he ever lecture on the Pomak issue, in whatever context.
- 10- His relevant publications are "Observations on the history of Northern Greece during the Thrkish rule: historical and architeetural description of the Turkish monuments of Komotini and Serres, their place in the development of Ottoman architecture, and their present condition" in **Balkan Studies** 12 (1971)/2, pp.465-462., and "Two little-known monuments of Early and Classical Ottoman Architecture in Greek Thrace. Historical and art-historical notes on the hamams of Timurtaş Paşazade Oruç Pasha (1398) and Feridun Ahmed Beg (1571) in Didymoteichon", in **Balkan Studies** 22 (1981)/2 pp. 127-146.
- 11- Reference is to my article "The Muslim Minority in Western Thrace", in G. Ashworth (ed.), **World Minorities in the Eighties**, Sunbury (Middix, U.K.): Quartermaine House Ltd.1980, pp. 95-100; and to my booklet **Names, Religious Denomination and Ethnicity of Settlements in Western Thrace. A Supplement to the "Ortsnamenkonkordanz der Balkanhalbinsel"**. Leiden: E.J. Brill 1980.