THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF THE TURKISH MINORITY IN BULGARIA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Parallel trends in minority treatment in Greece and Turkey

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1 Zhelyazkova, Antonina: The Social and Cultural Adaptation of Bulgarian Immigrants in Turkey. In: Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey. In: http://www.omda.bg/imir/studies_fr.htm 1997, p. 4.

2 Lütem, Ömer: The Past and Present State of the Turkish-Bulgarian Relations. In: The Foreign Policy Quarterly. Vol. 23 (1999), p. 6 (Turkish Foreign Policy Institute). Also in: http://www.foreignpolicy.org.tr/ing/articles/olutem_v23.htm. Date posted: Feb. 10, 1999. Date accessed: March 14, 2001.

3 Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 4.

4 Lütem 1999, p. 8.

5 Dimitrova, Donka: Bulgarian Turkish Immigrants of 1989 in the Republic of Turkey (Adaptation and Changes in the Cultural Model). In: Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey. Sofia: Intern. Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations. http://www.omda.bg/imir/studies_fr.htm, p. 2.

6 Lütem 1999, p. 9.

Introduction

During the Post-Cold War era, international attention to Southeast Europe has been directed primarily to areas of perennial conflict, providing ample »evidence« for clash of civilization theories. At the same time, cases of conflicts that have been resolved and had become a thing of the past went largely unnoticed by the international media. The numerous conflicts accompanying the disintegration of former Yugoslavia have received extensive media coverage and, wrongly enough, became emblematic for the entire region. Labeling the conflicts in former Yugoslavia a »Balkan War« is as erroneous as labeling the disintegration of the former Soviet Union »an Asian implosion«. Unfortunately, this error has been repeated thousands of times by various media, producing a distorted image of the region. A recent example is an article in the *Washington Post* dealing with ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and offering an »ethnic map of the Balkans«. Both the map and the story actually refer to former Yugoslavia. Distorted labels of Southeast Europe are common, and there is a disparity between the number of positive and negative reports on the region in favour of the latter. In order to counteract these trends it is important to study and popularize the success stories in inter-ethnic relations that are also present in the region. This is the only way to demonstrate that the conflicts taking place in former Yugoslavia are not at all typical for all of Southeast Europe, where positive developments in ethnic relations generally prevail upon the negative ones. The developments concerning the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is but one of these success stories. Just across the border of war-torn former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria has achieved remarkable improvement in both the treatment of its largest minority: the Bulgarian Turks and inter-state relations with its kin state – the Republic of Turkey. The case of the Bulgarian-Turkish relations in the post-Cold war period provides an example of success in maintaining peaceful ethnic relations and thus contributing to good – neighbourly relations between a Muslim and a Christian country in the Balkans. Analyzing the history of the bilateral relations of Bulgaria and Turkey parallel to the developments in minorities' issues would yield valuable insights as to the factors that influence the success of both inter-ethnic and inter-state relations in the region. It will also highlight important opportunities and positive trends in inter-ethnic relations regionwide, thus disclaiming the »ancient hatred« theories that have provided the most convenient explanation for the conflicts that took place in former Yugoslavia.

I. The Turkish minority in Bulgaria 1990-present
The heritage of the totalitarian period

The process of integration of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria at the beginning of the democratic transition was burdened by a heritage of systematic discrimination that reached its peak in the decade before the fall of totalitarianism. An infamous name-changing campaign of 1984-1985 drew the attention of the international community. The formal procedure employed in the campaign forced all people to fill out an application for changing their own names. State »incentives« included measures ranging from economic sanctions to overt violence. Thousands of people who resisted were sent to prison or labor camps. This »program«, carried out in secrecy was completed in several months. Consequently, it was forbidden to use Turkish; the traditional Muslim dress and rituals, and even Turkish folk music, were banned. This policy went as far as destroying Muslim graveyards and changing the names of dead people in the municipal registries.[1] The state succeeded in curbing all resistance very quickly, as nobody was allowed to visit banks, hospitals etc. without an identity card bearing a Bulgarian name.[2]

The propaganda accompanying the campaign aimed to portray Turkey as an imminent threat to the territorial integrity of the Bulgarian state. The terminology used by the press while describing the Turkish minority included terms such as »the fifth column of an enemy state«, »terrorists«, »separatists«. Distrust and fear of Turkey and its »aggressive plans« were instilled.[3] In the spring and summer of 1989, some Bulgarian Turks engaged in protest actions demanding the recovery of their names. A clash in the village of Todor Ikonomovo resulted in seven deaths after the police had fired at villagers.[4] On May 27 the Bulgarian Head of State Todor Zhivkov had promised all its citizens worldwide valid tourist passports and asked Turkey to open its borders.[5]

7 Dimitrova 1997, p. 2.

This »request« was strange in the light of the fact that it was the Bulgarian government that refused to sign an emigration agreement with Turkey. The Turkish Prime Minister Ozal replied that the Turkish borders were open and had never been closed.[6] This statement proved also somewhat far-fetched, as Turkey would close its borders three months after attempting to stop the tide of refugees. As a result of this new policy direction by Bulgaria from June 3 through August 21, 1989 (when Turkey sealed its frontier), 311 862 ethnic Turks managed to leave.[7] This development marked a high point in a consistent policy of discrimination that was to influence the subsequent behaviour of the ethnic Turkish-based party *Movement of Rights and Freedoms* (MRF) after the regime change.

The Turkish minority in Bulgaria in the post Cold War era
Policies adopted in the beginning of transition

8 Koinova, Maria: »Muslims of Bulgaria«. Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe, Southeast Europe 1999, p. 13. In: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/

Reinstating the rights of the Turks and the Pomaks were among the first democratic acts after the fall of the regime. After the ousting of Zhivkov on November 10, 1989, the former foreign minister Petur Mladenov replaced him as leader. On December 29, 1989 the government recommended that the Turks be given the rights to choose their own names, practice Islam and use their language in public.[8] As a foreign minister since 1971, Mladenov had to confront the criticism of the international community concerning the treatment of the Turkish minority and was aware of the detrimental effect the treatment of the Bulgarian Turks had caused to the image of the country.

The constitutional framework

9 Bell 1997, p. 373.

10 Cf. US Department of State. »Bulgaria: Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2000«, March15, 2001. In: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/200/eur/index.cfm?docid=705; Human Rights Watch. World Report 2001. Bulgaria Human Rights Developments, March 17, 2001. In: http://www.hrw.org/wr2kl/europe/bulgaria.html.

11 Bulgarian Helsinki Committee 2000, p. 7f.

12 Karasimeonov, Georgi [1999]: The Constitutional Rights of Minorities in Bulgaria, March 15, 2001. In: http://www.cecl.gr/RigasNetwork/databank/REPORTS/r9/BU_9_Konstantinov.html, p. 1.

The new constitution, adopted in July 1991 by the *Grand National Assembly* (GNA), reflected marked concern for the preservation of national unity. The document states that Bulgaria is »an integral state«, its »territorial integrity is inviolable« and that no »autonomous territorial formations« may exist. During the debates, the example of Cyprus was frequently cited to emphasize the possible danger of separation along ethnic lines. Thus these provisions reflected a fear of potential separatism among the country's ethnic Turks.[9] Since the name-changing campaign and the related propaganda was not very far behind, one could not fail to notice that the totalitarian regime's dominant views regarding the Turkish question was shared by an influential section of the political elite in the *Grand National Assembly*. In the GNA, the *Socialists* (the recently renamed *Communist Party*) had a majority (211 out of 400 seats), sufficient to formulate the provisions and have them passed without consideration of the opinion of the opposition, which tried in vain to block the passing of the constitution in this form. The constitution also bans political parties founded on an »ethnic, racial or religious« base.

In reality, however, the treatment of the Turkish community in Bulgaria has improved steadily over the decade after the fall of the totalitarian regime. The latest (2000-2001) human rights reports on Bulgaria prepared by international organizations such as *Human Rights Watch* and the *US Department of State*, either do not mention the Bulgarian Turks at all, or point to the situation of the Bulgarian Turks as an example of successful integration. Currently in Bulgaria the situation of the Roma is deemed problematic, rather than the Turkish ethnic group.[10]

In addition, the above-mentioned provisions of the constitution are subject to different interpretations. Some authors say they are restrictive, others point out that the situation *de facto* concerning the rights of the Turkish minority has improved a great deal and the current constitutional framework is suitable within the Bulgarian context.

Thus, for instance, a recent (2000) *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee* report on the implementation of the framework *Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* states that a dispute continues on whether the convention is applicable to the situation in Bulgaria; provided the constitution does not use the term ›national minority‹. The report indicates, however, that there seems to be an agreement (although not explicitly stated) that the provisions of the convention will be applied to Bulgarian citizens »whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian«, a definition present in the Constitution, Art. 36 (2).[11]

By contrast, Karasimeonov[12] argues that the Bulgarian domestic legal framework has been able to establish an optimal balance between minority and national interests in a situation of a radical social transition conducted under extremely difficult economic, political and international conditions. The report of the *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee* acknowledged the fact that the

minorities in Bulgaria are protected directly by the international instruments concerning them, as the constitution (Art. 5 [4]) establishes the precedence of international law over Bulgarian national law. Bulgaria is a party to every important international instrument with a bearing on the regulation of the rights of minorities.[13]

What appeared to be a major concern of the *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee Report* – the fact that the constitution does not use the term ›national minority‹ – is explained by Karasimeonov as a logical consequence of the fact that Bulgaria is a unitary state. The Bulgarian constitution follows the doctrine of the so-called »one nation-state«, recognized by all Bulgarian parties, including the representatives of the Bulgarian Turks. The concept of ›national minority‹ could not be established in Bulgarian law for two main reasons: first, it does not conform to the principle of unity of the Bulgarian nation enshrined in the Constitution. Secondly, the application of this concept could give rise to misunderstandings, because it is not defined exactly in international law. Not one of the many scientific definitions that exist is universally recognized in international law. The *Bulgarian Constitution* excludes granting collective political rights to the different religious and ethnic groups. The rights of the minority representatives are protected through the provisions guaranteeing protection of their individual human rights. This option was selected, since the Bulgarian state has the sovereign right to substantiate the extent to which human rights are granted by international law in accordance with the specific Bulgarian conditions and geopolitical situation.[14]

Human rights organizations' conclusions on the current status of the Turkish minority

Latest reports on human rights developments in Bulgaria, prepared by the *US Department of State and Human Rights Watch*, do not criticize the treatment of Bulgarian Turks. Religious and ethnic groups reported to be suffering discrimination include the Roma and some non-traditional religious communities such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The general human rights situation is burdened by the economic problems associated with the transition. Antiquated procedures, low salaries and corruption obstruct the work of the judiciary. The *US State Department 1999 Report* noted that the *Observation Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe* recommended its own dissolution in December 1998 when it announced that Bulgaria had made sufficient progress in the fields of democracy and human rights to no longer require monitoring.[15] The *US State Department 2000 Report* notes that although the Constitution forbids the formation of political parties along religious, ethnic or racial lines, the mainly ethnic Turkish *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (MRF) is represented in the parliament; and the other major parties accept its right to participate in the political process. By contrast, on February 29, 2000, the *Constitutional Court* ruled that the political party *United Macedonian Organization* (OMO) under Ilinden Pirin is unconstitutional on separatist grounds.[16] In terms of religious freedom, the same report notes that the Muslim religious community is among those perceived as holding a historic place in society and benefiting from a high degree of government and public tolerance. Furthermore, no religious group was discriminated against in the granting of restitution of properties nationalized during the Communist regime. The Bulgarian Muslims are said to have complained that the procedure for restoring their original names in the beginning of transition was excessively burdensome. Some ethnic Turkish politicians have stated that the ethnic Turks are underrepresented in appointed positions in the state, police agencies and the military.

In 1992-1996, both the *Union of Democratic Forces* and the *Bulgarian Socialist Party* had replaced leading figures from both the Orthodox Christian and the Muslim denominations. There were attempts to substitute the leadership of both denominations with priests supported by one or another government. These attempts resulted in divisions of both religious communities in factions supporting one or another religious leader. The split in the Muslim denomination was overcome in October 1997 at a conference when the overwhelming majority of Muslims elected a new leadership, recognized by the government. The split in the *Bulgarian Orthodox Church* has not yet been resolved, which lead to a very strange situation: currently the *Bulgarian Orthodox Church* has two legitimate leaderships (›synods‹) and two patriarchs.[17]

In terms of education, Bulgarian Turks are provided the opportunity to study their mother tongue and religion in public schools. The *US State Department 2000 Report* notes that voluntary Turkish language classes continue, funded by the government. The *Ministry of Education* estimates that 40 000 children currently study Turkish in Bulgaria. In addition, a school for Imams,

18 US Department of State 2000.

19 Holley, David: Bulgaria's Ethnic Calm is a Sharp Contrast to Region's Troubles. In: Los Angeles Times. February 12, 2001.

20 Mehmed, Selim, qtd. in Holley, 2001.

21 Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 5.

22 Gheorgieva, Tsvetana [1997]: The Motivation of the Bulgarian Turks to Migration. In: Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey. March 17, 2001. In: http://www.omda.bg/ imir/studies/nostalgia.htm/.

23 RFE/RL Balkan Report, 5, 4, Jan. 16, 2001. In: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/countries/bulgaria/rferl_16_01_01.html.

a Muslim cultural center, university-level theological facilities and religious primary schools operate freely. Classes on Islam in regions with a significant Muslim minority began in 80 schools from January 2001.

For the benefit of the Turkish minority, *Bulgarian National Television* launched Turkish language newscasts for the first time on Oct. 2, 2000. The *Local Bulgarian National Radio Network* broadcast Turkish language programs in regions with an ethnic Turkish population.[18]

A recent (February 2001) *LA Times* article has concluded that Bulgaria exhibits »one of the past decade's greatest successes of ethnic relations in the troubled Balkans«.[19] Perhaps the current situation of the Bulgarian Turks is best described by the chief Mufti (the highest Muslim religious leader) of Bulgaria, Mr. Selim Mumun Mehmet: »Bulgaria is going in the right direction and we are very happy for that«.[20]

Electoral performance of the main ethnic Turkish-based party 1991-present

Bulgaria's success in maintaining peaceful ethnic relations could be explained by a number of factors. One of the most important factors would be the fact that the Turkish ethnic group has been represented in Parliament since the first elections (in 1990) after the fall of the Communist regime. Initially there have been several unsuccessful attempts on the part of the *Socialist* (former *Communist*) *Party* to challenge the Muslim-based *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (MRF) before the court. In the period 1990-1996 Socialists once approached the *Constitutional Court* with questions about MRF's legitimacy and twice made petitions demanding the same.[21] However, the choice of proportional representation created a situation in which the MRF provided the swing vote in the first elections (1990-1994). Hence, both major parties: the *Bulgarian Socialist Party* and the *Union of Democratic Forces* had followed policies designed to make them a plausible coalition partner of the MRF.

MRF's Participation in the elections 1990-2000:
/NB--the next parliamentary elections in Bulgaria are scheduled for June 2001/

1990: 6.02% of the vote; 23 seats in Parliament (GNA) out of 400
1991: 7.55% of the vote; 24 seats in Parliament out of 240
1994: 5.44% of the vote; 15 seats
1997: 7.6 % of the vote; 19 seats (In the 1997 elections the MRF participated in a coalition called *Alliance for National Salvation*)

Source: Koinova, Maria: Muslims of Bulgaria. Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe, Southeast Europe, 1999. In: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr, p. 13

Distribution of seats in the parliament in the elections 1990-1994

1990: BSP 211 seats,	UDF 144 seats, BANU 16 seats,	MRF 23 seats
1991: BSP 106	UDF 110	MRF 24
1994: BSP 125	UDF 69, *People's Union* 18,	MRF 15, *Bulgarian Business Bloc* 13

Source: Holmes, Leslie: Postcommunism, an Introduction. Durham: Duke UP 1997, pp. 157-158

There are several reasons to question weather the MRF is truly guided by the interests of the Bulgarian Turks rather than party interests. Throughout the 1990s, it formed a coalition with BSP; during the forthcoming election the MRF will again participate in a coalition with the BSP. This choice for a coalition partner is strange for a number of reasons: First, BSP representatives attempted to challenge the legitimacy of MRF before the court. Second, one of the frequently often-stated reasons for emigration of the Bulgarian Turks in the early 1990s was their fear that the *Socialist Party* would win the elections in Bulgaria.[22] Third, after the release in January 2001 of a documentary on the assimilation of ethnic Turks during the communist regime, the leader of the MRF – the party claims to represent the Bulgarian Turks – criticized the film, stating that the documentary was an attempt to undermine relations between his party and the former Communists in the renamed *Socialist Party*.[23] In addition, after the confidential files were opened in

24 Atanassova [1999]: Political Organization of the Ethnic Minorities and Their Evolution, March 10, 2001. In: http://www.nato.int/ acad/fellow/97-99/atanassova.pdf.

25 Dimitrova 1997, p. 2.

26 Gheorgieva 1997, p. 5.

1997, it became clear that a number of the leaders of the MRF, including its chairman Akhmet Dogan, were agents of the former secret police.[24]

Nevertheless, the MRF did play a crucial role in the process of improving ethnic relations in Bulgaria. It provided the Bulgarian Turks with a chance of participating in decision-making and it facilitated confidence building between ethnic Turks and ethnic Bulgarians in that it never called for territorial autonomy.

Perhaps for the first time the major parties' strategy for the 2001 elections included a degree of »diversification« along ethnic lines. In all prior elections the Turkish vote went to the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms*. In 2001 both the UDF and the NMSS competed for the votes of the Turkish community while the MRF attempted to compete for Roma and Bulgarian votes along with its traditional electorate. This is a favourable signal for the inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria: the only Muslim-based party attempted to open up to all ethnic groups major national political forces competed effectively for the support of minority groups. This may lay the foundation of a positive trend, although the people do not seem to be ready for such a change in traditional voting patterns yet. It is only natural that a change in the electoral behaviour of an ethnic group that is used to vote for »its« party can only occur gradually. This especially considering the fact that the population in question is primarily rural, as is the case with the Bulgarian Turks. On the other hand, the attempt of MRF to attract the Roma vote also did not work, as the Roma, at variance with the Turks, always voted for the major national parties according to their preferences. Nevertheless, a change in these patterns is possible and should not be ruled out in the long run. The results of the 2001 elections have demonstrated a stable support for the MRF within the percentage range of its past performance. The increased electoral activity of the immigrants in Turkey was the cause of some controversies because it was not expected. The votes of the immigrants were counted in a district where the Turkish population does not exceed 5% as it was expected that votes from Turkey would be around 4 000 (as in the 1997 elections). However, this time 36 000 people in Turkey turned out. Since 36 000 votes from Turkey were counted there the district winded up electing mostly MRF MPs and no BSP representative. Consequently, BSP contested the election result and said it would appeal in Strasbourg if its contestation were not honoured in Bulgaria. Apart from this irregularity the percentage won by the MRF was within the range of its usual performance (always between 15 and 24 places in parliament).

[PRIVATE]	NMSS	UDF	Coalition for Bulgaria/BSP	MRF
Number of votes cast	1 951 859	830 059	783 107	340 510
% Of votes	42,73%	18,17%	17,14%	7,45%
Places in Parliament	120	51	48	21

Source: Central Electoral Commission [2001]. Detailed Results nationwide, 2001. In: http://212.50.5.11/Final2001/res/2001/kpe00.htm, June 26, 2001.

At present the Bulgarian Turks face a wider spectrum of political options in contrast to the scant economic opportunities. They are not yet ready to give up »ethnic« vote in favour of the national parties but this development may occur in the future, as most major parties will continue attempts to »diversify« their appeal along ethnic lines. For the first time the party representing the majority of the Bulgarian Turks participates in forming the government by heading ministries. Hopefully this advance in the state hierarchy will allow the representatives of the Bulgarian Turks to tackle the problems of high unemployment and poverty. The future privatization of the *Bulgartabac* holding company, a monopolist in the tobacco industry is likely to affect the predominantly rural Bulgarian Turks. For many of them tobacco processing, a heavy and low-paid work is a principal source of income.

To sum up, the Turkish ethnic group in Bulgaria currently enjoys extensive rights in terms of education, practicing Islam and participation in decision-making. Ironically, the improvement in the treatment of the Bulgarian Turks has coincided with a deterioration of the economic situation in Bulgaria. The current economic conditions stand as a major incentive for them to leave to Turkey. Thus, from June 1989 till the beginning of 1997 some 400-450 individuals had settled in Turkey.[25] It is interesting to note that many young people planned to settle in Western Europe instead; some of them had new passports issued; again adopted Bulgarian names and addressed the Bulgarian-based labor recruitment agencies for Western Europe.[26] Since the mid 1990s

27 Gheorgieva 1997, p. 7.

28 Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 7.

29 Gheorghieva, Tsvetana: Coexistence as a system in the everyday life of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria. In: Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria. Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations foundation 1998, p. 163.

30 Ibid., p. 207.

31 The actual size of these structures was revealed only recently. In spring 2001 the government commission investigating secret files revealed that an astonishing number of public figures have served as informers. The ranks of ex-informers include many former and present deputies, government members, even the first Bulgarian astronaut.

the new tide of emigration is practically illegal. Many young people have decided that no barriers on the part of either the Bulgarian or the Turkish government can prevent them from leaving. On the other hand, many people in Turkey want their children to be educated in Bulgaria since they deem the state education in Bulgaria better than that in Turkey and they cannot afford private universities.[27] It is interesting to note that the immigrants in Turkey do not hate the Bulgarian people as a result of the name-changing campaign; they blame the communist regime alone. Furthermore, a number of people interviewed by Bulgarian scholars express their pity for the economic hardships the Bulgarian people currently endure: »We have already managed, may you, poor things, soon be all right too.«[28] In any case, there is currently a sizeable community of Bulgarian Turks living in Turkey who have retained specific cultural features inherited from their unique background of Bulgarian local customs, communism/post communism and Islam.

Principle reasons behind maintaining peaceful inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria

There are several inter-related factors that allowed a peaceful, West European type of solution of the ethnic problems the country inherited from the totalitarian regime. Since these same factors account for the continuing ethnic calm in Bulgaria, an analysis of their development can form the basis of a prognosis for the future development of ethnic relations there as well as point at opportunities for their improvement elsewhere in the region.

1. Tradition of genuine good-neighborliness between Bulgarians and Turks is one of four inter-related factors that can answer the question why a strategy of violent protests was not adopted in pursuit of restoring the rights that have been annulled by the communist government. The Muslims in Bulgaria – primarily Turks, but also Pomaks and Roma, are not concentrated in one or two districts in a way that may result in isolation and centrifugal tendencies. They form a (simple) majority in only one district (of a total of 28), in 3 others they are between 20 and 36%, in 4 between 8 and 10%, in 12 between 2 and 6% and in 8 less than 2%. This situation is conducive to inter-ethnic communication. People from different communities have had the chance to understand the others' distinct cultural and religious tradition and accept diversity as a natural part of their environment.

Georgieva has described the model that emerged from continuous interaction among ethnic groups as a »system of coexistence [...] a necessity imposed by reality of establishing links which overcome the closed nature of religious and ethnic communities in their everyday life.«[29] Maintaining good relations in the immediate neighbourhood/workplace has been achieved through participation in the other group's religious festivities and developing personal friendships. Ethnic division is even less pronounced among the young people of the two communities and religiosity is declining for the young people of all ethnic groups while the share of people under 30 who have friends in both ethnic groups is in both cases that of elders. There are greater differences in views among the different generations than among the different ethnic groups.[30] These trends have contributed to a favourable climate for the development of inter-ethnic relations in the informal sphere.

2. The heritage of the preceding communist regime is another, institutional level factor that has also contributed to good neighbourly relations today. The strategy pursued by the whole party and state apparatus during the communist regime aimed at creating a homogeneous Bulgarian nation, both ideologically and culturally. The communist ideology upheld by education and the media has influenced several generations of people by instilling allegiance to state and party and barring expressions of religiosity or ethnicity from public life. The influence of the totalitarian system in Bulgaria was profound in confining behaviour to the limits prescribed by the party doctrine. As a communist state, Bulgaria had virtually limitless power to impose any arrangement on its people, the name-changing campaigns directed against Pomaks and Turks are among the most infamous examples. One of the institutions used to »engineer« desirable behaviour, the former *National Security Service*, had at its disposal a large network of agents in all social strata. Nationalism (both Bulgarian and Turkish) was accorded special attention as it conflicted the international communist ideology. In the 6th bureau of the former secret service (for combating ideological diversion), two of ten departments dealt with nationalism: »Religion and nationalism« and »Turkish nationalism«. Since one could go to prison or labour camp for suspected »ideological diversion« and the existence of a web of informers was a public secret,[31] ex-

32 Sayari, Sabri: Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold war era. In: Journal of International Affairs, Fall 2000. Vol. 54, iss. 1, pp. 169-183.

33 Internaional Center 1998.

pressions of religiosity or commitment to an ethnic agenda was suppressed effectively. In both Bulgaria and Albania harsh ideological controls during the totalitarian regime contributed to low inter-ethnic tensions after the regime change.

3. The policy pursued by the party representing the Bulgarian Muslims in parliament (MRF) was also indispensable to the positive development of ethnic relations in the context of the young democracy in Bulgaria. Since its formation in 1990 it had contributed a great deal to maintaining ethnic calm and the participation of the country's Muslim and Turkish population in parliament and the higher levels of state administration. After the 2001 elections Turks obtained positions of cabinet ministers for the first time. The policy adopted by the MRF laid the foundations for successful political dialogue involved a moderate vision of working within the framework of state institutions. The MRF leadership never called for territorial autonomy or used violence as a means for achieving political goals. The official policy of the movement always endorsed preserving peaceful ethnic relations and participation in established institutional channels. This strategy proved to be a successful one. First, it dispelled the fears of the Bulgarian population that the Turkish community presents a »fifth column« threat to the territorial integrity of Bulgaria. Hence, sociological research has shown a clear trend of reduction of negative stereotypes for both major ethnic groups. Secondly, people of Turkish origin were appointed to important positions in the state hierarchy, some appointments were unprecedented (such as deputy *Minister of Defense*). As has already been mentioned, further advances are underway: after the 2001 parliamentary elections were won by the *National Movement for Simeon the Second* the MRF participates in forming the cabinet for the first time and obtains the positions *Minister of Agriculture* and *Minister Without Portfolio*. MRF also obtained the post of district governor of the capital Sofia despite the fact that the Turks form very small part of the population there. The governor of the Kurdjali district where they are a majority will be a Bulgarian. Increased participation in government has occurred both through the structures of the MRF and as part of other major parties' policies seeking to attract the support of the Turkish community. In the course of the 2001 pre-election campaign some MRF candidates stated that if the MRF would not overcome the 4% barrier ethnic peace in Bulgaria might be in danger. These threats were used to mobilize additional support for the MRF candidates as the party had performed poorly at the last local elections of 1999. Alarming as these allegations were, they were not part of the official position of the MRF and there is no reason to doubt it would continue to play a constructive role on the Bulgarian political scene.

4. The position adopted by the Republic of Turkey is the fourth key factor that has had a determinant role for the development of ethnic relations in Bulgaria in the Post-Cold War period. The constructive and balanced position of Turkey both in the critical events of 1989 and afterwards had contributed greatly to avoiding escalation of ethnic tension in Bulgaria. Only several months before the fall of the Berlin wall the Turkish government decided to accept nearly 300 000 refugees from the infamous forced name-changing campaign. This decision has reduced the potential for ethnic problems in the process of regime change that began only several months later. Furthermore, Turkey's commitment to inviolability of borders and non-interference in the affairs of the other state as expressed in a 1992 basic treaty created a framework in which the new regime in Bulgaria could approach minorities' issues without the confines of threat perceptions. The remarkable advances in bilateral relations that followed were made possible by the responsible behaviour on the part of both countries upholding the principles of the territorial integrity and denouncing separatism. This policy benefits both countries through not allowing separatist groups to act from a neighbouring territory.

»Turkey's opposition to separatist movements by Turkic and other Muslim groups in the Balkans and the Caucasus has been largely the product of its concern for the PKK's challenge to Turkey's territorial integrity.«[32] The two countries shared interests in this respect form a stable foundation for cooperation and development of bilateral relations. The two countries must also confront a common threat: Islamic fundamentalism. It is much less pronounced in Bulgaria so far although emissaries of Islamic fundamentalist organizations are said to operate on the territory of the country.[33]

34 Nation, R. Craig: The Turkic and
other Muslim peoples of Central Asia,
the Caucasus and the Balkans. In:
Mastny, V./ Nation, R. Craig (Eds.):
Turkey Between East and West.
Boulder: Westview Pr. 1997, p. 122.

35 Ibid.

36 Sayari 2000.

37 NATO and Bulgaria Brave Gamble.
In: The Economist May 29, 1999. Vol.
351, iss. 8121, p. 47.

38 Atanassova 2001.

The Bulgarian Turks as part of a »Muslim factor« in Southeast Europe

The conflicts that stormed former Yugoslavia after the fall of the communist regime involved in most cases a confrontation of Christian and Muslim ethnic groups. This fact has led to the emergence of sweeping generalizations dividing the region into Christian and Muslim »axes« and warning of a »real threat« of general regional conflicts stemming from this division. »The Belgrade-Athens and Istanbul-Sarajevo axes cross in Macedonia and Ankara has hinted that should the Yugoslav conflict extend into this region it would be difficult for Turkey to become uninvolved.«[34]

In fact, during the last decade Southeast Europe provides abundant evidence that foreign policy of the countries in the region were driven by priorities that rarely implied an alignment based on religion. The same holds for group and individual-level strategies. Across the board socio-political factors matter a lot more than religious affiliation in directing both ethnic group behaviour and state policy.

As far as state policy is concerned, Turkey presents perhaps the best example. Its policy for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus and Kosovo differs, reflecting its foreign policy priorities and national interests although Muslims are involved in all three cases. In the Cyprus dispute Turkey has always backed a solution based on collective community rights. As regards Bosnia it had shown support for a solution based on preserving an integral state structure.[35] Still, it acted as an advocate of the Bosnian Muslims, welcomed the *Dayton Peace Agreement* and participated in multilateral UN peacekeeping initiatives. In the case of the Kosovo crisis its response was more restrained. The (30 000) ethnic Turkish community in Kosovo had concerns about being dominated by the Albanian majority.[36] In addition, one of Turkey's biggest internal problems involves a Muslim minority, including terrorist groups, asserting its identity and pursuing political goals against the regime. Political Islam within Turkey has also been in confrontation with its powerful military elite. The biggest »Islamist« party *Rifah* (*Welfare*) has been outlawed as well as its successor *Fazilet* (*Virtue*).

In addition, Turkey's Post-Cold War policy has involved an improvement in relations with a number of Christian states such as Bulgaria and Romania, a strategic alignment with Israel and a thaw in Greek-Turkish relations. Thus the Turkish foreign policy reflected clearly its national interests, that is, developing relations with the West, rather than an Islamic agenda.

Bulgaria is another case in point. Despite its shared attachment to the Orthodox church, the country's center-right government allowed the NATO aircraft to fly through Bulgaria's airspace to attack targets in Yugoslavia back in 1999. This move, labeled »brave gamble« by the *Economist* at the time,[37] was undertaken by the government on the premises that it would improve the countries' chances to join the NATO and the EU. The decision was made despite the fact that the public opinion and the leftist opposition were overwhelmingly against Bulgaria's involvement. Two years later, though, all political forces including the center-left agree in retrospective that it was the right thing to do. Regarding the 2001 crisis in Macedonia today there is a political consensus of all parliamentary forces that Bulgaria should not unilaterally support either side. The unrest in Macedonia coincided with a pre-election campaign in Bulgaria in which no party had a »Macedonian« agenda. Bulgaria's position regarding this conflict was one of the minor points in the campaign, which centered on economic policy, corruption and scandals disclosing top politicians' ties to the former secret service. Thus despite the historic, religious and linguistic kinship of the Macedonians, the Bulgarian statesmen had chosen the prudent policy of non-involvement as the one that serves best the national interests of the country.

The positions of Greece and FYROM regarding the Kosovo crisis are also explicable in terms of pressing domestic considerations rather than religious solidarity. It is only logical that FYROM elected not to let the NATO troops move through its territory to attack the Serbs. Its Albanian minority problems have made fears for eventual Kosovization of the situation there justified even back in 1999.[38] In Greece, like in Bulgaria, the public opinion was against the involvement of the NATO. Since Greece is a member country of both the EU and NATO its government could afford to reflect the public opinion more freely in its official position. The international status of Greece allows the government the freedom to follow popular sentiment rather than pay the political price for going against it without taking a significant risk.

The behaviour of all these Southeast European countries concerning the crisis in Kosovo confirms a broader conclusion that there could be no generalization as to a kind of »religious solidarity« that governs their foreign policy. This, in turn, defies the thesis that religion is of utmost

39 Turkish scholars maintain that the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in Bulgaria are Turks, Bulgarian scholars maintain that they are Bulgarians. Serbs and Croats both have claims on the Bosnian Muslims' ethnic identity.

40 General Ratko Mladic and Mustafa Efendi Ceric, qtd. in Mojzes, Paul: Religious Topography of Eastern Europe. In: Journal of Ecumenical Studies. Vol. 36, iss. 1, January 1, 1999, pp. 7-44.

41 Ibid.

42 Berth, Ariane: Das Geschäft ist alles: Wie sich Albaner-Clans mit der italienischen Mafia arrangieren [Business is everything: How Albanian clans came to terms with the Italian Mafia]. In: Der Spiegel. No. 3 (1999); Bamber, David/ Hastings, Chris: KLA Raises Money in Britain for Arms. In: Daily Telegraph, Apr. 23, 2000, qtd. in Macgregor, Douglas: The Balkan Limits to Power and Principle. In: Orbis. Vol. 45, iss. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 93-111.

43 Khan, Mujeeb R.: [Review Articles] From the Balkans: Two Books, Two Reviews and Different Views. In: Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs. Vol. 19, iss. 2, Oct. 1999, pp. 329-332.

importance for designing the foreign policy of the Balkan countries. Certainly religion does have an indirect influence on government decision-making through influencing public opinion. However, when public opinion has been in conflict with national interests or strategic concerns it has been disregarded. Thus, religious solidarity in the form of either »Muslim« or »Christian« factor is playing rather a secondary role in the inter-state relations of the Balkan countries.

At the group level there could not be a common Muslim factor because the Muslim population of Southeast Europe itself is not homogeneous. In terms of ethnic belonging it comprises Albanian, Turk, Pomak and Roma component. The Pomaks are Slavic-speaking Muslims who speak a dialect of the language of the country in which they live (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, FYROM). They consider themselves either ethnic Turks or belonging to the ethnicity of the country in which they live. The Bosnian Muslims present an exception in this respect as they have developed a separate identity, which is neither Turkish nor Yugoslav. Often two countries contend that the same group of Pomaks belongs to each ethnic kin.[39] Albania and Turkey are the only European countries that are predominantly Muslim. The Muslims of the former communist Balkan states were highly secularized. Only 17% of Yugoslavia's Muslims described themselves as believers in polls conducted during the 1980s. Albania's communist government had formally abolished religion and proclaimed an atheist state in 1967. Consequently, there is a very low level of antagonism between the different religious communities today. Radicalization of ethnic politics in some parts of former Yugoslavia has led certain leaders of opposing factions to claim that, for instance, »the war in Bosnia is a global conspiracy against Muslims« or an »infernal plot between Muslims and the West to disunite and destroy the Orthodox world with the next target Russia«[40]. Clearly statements of this type target attracting international support for their conflicting war aims. The atrocities committed in Bosnia have led to a situation that is an exception in the Balkans.

> One finds in Bosnia and Herzegovina an oddity in the Muslim world. Muslims elsewhere tend to neglect their ethnicity/nationality but stress their adherence to the right path of Prophet Muhammad, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina Muslim became a »narod«, a people. It was a new designation for people who had largely even forgotten the religious precepts of Islam [...] Only an extremely small segment of Bosnian Muslims could be considered at the outbreak of the war as possessing a militant, radical, fundamentalist mentality and intentions. However, since it is evident that the Muslims were the greatest losers in the war and that in certain areas they faced physical annihilation, it is not surprising that a small percentage of them were pushed into extremism and radicalism and that a somewhat larger group will allow themselves to be led by such self-styled militant Muslim leaders, some of whom were under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists from other parts of the Muslim world.[41]

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates the only aspect of the Balkans that is a cause for concern: the one imported from outside the region in the form of support for a political cause coupled with fundamentalist ideas. Hopefully Bosnia will remain the only instance of Islamic fundamentalism imported in Southeast Europe. Unfortunately, currently in the Kosovo there is a situation that may also invite the economic support of Islamic fundamentalists for radicals in the Albanian community. In addition to links to organized crime, current funding for the KLA is said to center on the *International Islamic Front* founded by the Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden.[42]

Again, religion is not the core of the Kosovo conflict, which centers on political rights and separatist ambitions. Renowned authors such as Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers contend that the antipathy of the Serbs toward Kosovo Albanians is ethnic in basis and not religious; Kosovo Albanians view ties with the Christian Albanians as more important than those with the broader Islamic world.[43] If instances of Islamic fundamentalism occur, they could come only as a result of an ideological »import« made possible by the lack of opportunities for minority members to reach their political goals using the institutional channels that are available. A situation of this type may result in a fundraising campaign using remittances from the Diaspora as well as activities such as drug trafficking and financing from fundamentalist groups. As long as unrest and disorder prevail in some areas of former Yugoslavia a rise of criminal activities and fundamentalism cannot be excluded.

However, it is worth noting once again that the indigenous base for Islamic fundamentalism in Southeast Europe is very week. Prerequisites for peaceful coexistence and tolerance exist. Positive developments concerning the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria and Greece as well as peaceful coexistence of the different religious groups in Albania provide ample evidence defying the

44 Norris, H.T., qtd in Nation 1997.

45 Georgieva 1997, pp. 158-166.

46 Informants from the South Bulgaria Rhodopes region stated that »you cannot have a Bayram without rakiya, but it should be drunk after the prayers in the mosque.« Ibid., p. 164.

47 International Center 1998, pp. 197-205.

48 Ibid., p. 154, p. 194.

49 Ibid., pp. 195-196.

»ancient hatred« theories that are often used to stigmatize Southeast Europe as a region. In all neighbour-countries of former Yugoslavia the Post-Cold War era has not seen an intensification of inter-ethnic tensions. On the contrary, in varying degrees there has been an improvement in minority treatment across the board over the 1990s. The process of improvement has evolved as expeditiously as the particular circumstances of the countries permit. Despite differences in the extent of improvement a clear trend exists in all of them. Even the war-torn areas in former Yugoslavia where ethnic tensions currently prevail as a result of the atrocities committed should not be regarded as completely lost in terms of improving ethnic relations. Indeed at present Bosnia and the Kosovo continue to be the scenes of ethnic violence. However, a historic opportunity exists that may be used to build on existing success stories as well as form the basis for the solution of present controversies. »Dreams of integration with Greater Europe are shared by both Muslim Bosnians as well as Albanians who see no inherent conflict between this wish and their own Muslim identity.«[44] The shared aspiration for European integration provides the international community with the opportunity to offer a formula for peace as a prerequisite for integration. This formula should be perceived as just by the communities involved in order to bring about stability to the region. What matters is that once this formula is reached there are no »inherent« ethnic or religious hatreds that could present a constant threat to peace. Developments observed among the Bulgarian Turks over the last decade prove that in a stable environment the social trends lead to improvement in relations between Muslims and Christians and a substantial decline in importance of religion as a factor in inter-personal relations altogether.

Ethnological research on the Turkish community in Bulgaria reveals the favourable trend of mounting prerequisites for understanding and recognition between Muslims and Christians. This trend was observed throughout the post-Communist period, starting with the end of the discrimination policies adopted by the old regime. The trends observed among the Muslims of Bulgaria warrant the conclusion that once a stable framework is created at the macro-level that can claim the support of the majority of all ethnic groups as well as assure their participation, at the micro-level inter-ethnic interaction will lead to steadily improving relations between Christians and Muslims. In addition, ongoing processes such as globalization and concluding the transition to a fully-fledged market economy also contribute to a greater openness and tolerance as well as a lower level of impact of religion on everyday life and thinking of both Christians and Muslims.

A 1998 study conducted by the *International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations Foundation* indicates low level of religious activities of Turks and Bulgarians. At the same time religious activities that do occur are often used to enhance friendly relations in the immediate neighbourhood. Often this takes place through the process of exchanging sacred gifts during the most important religious holidays (such as Easter eggs or kurban) and participation in family celebrations such as weddings. It is interesting to note that participation in the burial rites of the other community is also common although both religions formally exclude people from another faith from being granted life after death. Visiting holy places or temples of the other faith is also presented by informants as natural.[45] Many Bulgarian Muslims do not observe the strict food taboos such as avoiding pork and alcohol.[46] Religion is not a factor determining the attitude of Muslims and Christians to one another, the attitude of Bulgarians and Turks has been reduced to an ethnic attitude. An essential prejudice of both ethnic groups is that the other is economically privileged. It subsides visibly among Turks upon visiting a Bulgarian household. In fact economic differences are statistically insignifficant.[47] An important fact established by the study is that young generations of both ethnic groups open up to each other, especially the young people of Turkish origin. The study indicates that back in 1998 for the first time young Turks have expressed a conviction that it is not important for spouses to have the same religion. Young Muslims do not wear specific clothing and do not differ from their Christian peers.[48] In this context it comes as no surprise that the two communities' opinions on ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia are not religiously motivated. The 1998 study mentions the Muslims' views on responsibility for Bosnia in which the majority (between 4/5 and 9/10) of the respondents find that responsibility should be apportioned equally between Christians and Muslims.[49] Today a number of press reports and interviews reveal similar attitudes with regard to the Kosovo and Macedonia.

Another conclusion of this study is that the tradition of peaceful coexistence in the everyday life of Christians and Muslims framed by ethnological information from Bulgaria is present all

over the Balkans. »This universal Balkan phenomenon is a joint historical merit of both Christians and Muslims, which can actually be used as a model of achieved integration and can be estimated and popularized as a value in European history.«[50] This aspect of the interaction between Muslims and Christians in Southeast Europe has been largely neglected by the international media, at variance with the conflicts in former Yugoslavia that have always received detailed coverage. The image of the region that has emerged is that of a constant ethnic conflict and strife. It is neither objective nor balanced, as it does not reflect the full spectrum of ethnic relations. Hopefully future developments will allow Southeast Europe to secure an image of cultural and religious tolerance, as a genuine fundament for peace that does exist in the region. That the international media must cover violence and ethnic strife is a fact as the public has the right to be informed, if disasters of this type should take place. However, in order to prevent the tarnishing the image of a whole region unnecessarily, it should also present the cases of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups elsewhere in the region. At present nearly everyone is familiar with the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The far-reaching improvement in Bulgarian-Turkish relations that started from zero has not been publicized that much. The recent thaw in Greek-Turkish relations receives comparatively better coverage, but again it was overshadowed by the crisis in Macedonia. That a crisis should receive greater coverage than a favourable development is natural, though not to the extent that is observed as regards the Balkans. Positive facts or developments that originated there are hardly known internationally. Few people know, for example, that Mother Theresa was a Skopie-born Roman Catholic Albanian. Little media attention goes to the positive developments that are taking place concerning the inter-relations between Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, Greece and Albania although they are symptomatic for the future of the region. The conflicts in Bosnia, the Kosovo and Macedonia represent unresolved macro-level political controversies that have eroded the basis for good inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations that existed at the micro-level. In fact the true potential for creating a multicultural environment in Southeast Europe can only be witnessed outside former Yugoslavia as in Yugoslavia the extremes of war have reversed the processes that would normally take place. The trends observable outside former Yugoslavia indicate that the future belongs to a multireligious, multicultural Southeast Europe, Westernization and increasing secularism.

II. Parallel trends in minorities issues: Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey
Collective rights vs actual improvement of inter-ethnic relations

Minority treatment in both Greece and Turkey is subject to a similar dynamics as minority treatment in Bulgaria. A decline in threat perceptions as to the state integrity is normally followed by an improvement in minority treatment. Changes in the legal framework were made possible after a sufficient reduction in threat perceptions. The fact that many Balkan countries have chosen not to grant collective rights or employ the term »minority« in their constitutions is also a reflection of a level of threat perceptions. It is possible that this situation changes at a later stage. The best scenario for such a change would be a reduction of the level of threat perceptions followed by legal changes and advances in minority integration. This scenario has transpired in a number of countries in Southeast Europe and has proven to be the most stable path to minority integration and ethnic peace in the region. If the process is reversed, that is, if there is a pressure for legal changes (from minority groups, the international community) when the level of threat perceptions is high then the above-described process is disrupted and a recipe for conflict is in place. The conflict in Macedonia is an illustration of this reversal of the minority integration process.

The fact that the concept of ›national minority‹ is not used in the legislation of some SEE states and collective rights are not granted is widely criticized by human rights NGOs. In reality, granting collective rights or using the concept of ›national minority‹ in the country's constitution is not a guarantee for either advancement in minority rights or improvement in inter-ethnic relations. That the Macedonian constitution employs the term ›national minority‹ did not prevent the crisis situation in 2001, when the Albanian rebels sought further constitutional amendments. Even if a country grants collective rights to its minorities there can always occur a pretext for unrest. This is why confidence building and reduction of threat perceptions should always take precedence over legal changes. Bulgaria is another case in point. The concept of ›national minority‹ that was used in its constitution prior to 1971 did not prevent the communist government in power at the time from curbing abruptly the cultural and educational activities of the Bulgarian Muslims. The 1991 democratic constitution of Bulgaria does not employ the concept of

›national minority‹ and at the same time the integration of the country's biggest Turkish minority has achieved unprecedented improvement over the last decade. An analysis of minority developments in any SEE country will point to one and the same trend: the minority status improves when threat perceptions as to the integrity of the state decrease. Efforts for improving the minority status on the part of local states and the international community should focus on inter-ethnic and inter-state confidence-building measures. This is the only strategy that has proven to be effective all over the region. Shifting the focus to legal changes and asserting collective rights instead of confidence-building fuels threat perceptions, which may precipitate nationalist backlash and set in motion a vicious circle creating a situation that is very difficult to reverse.

Minorities issues not influenced by parallel developments in former Yugoslavia

A positive trend is that minority-related processes in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey are not related to developments in former Yugoslavia. The processes there differ in nature from the ones of former Yugoslavia, since all three states are long-established ones. Greece is a member of the EU and EU membership is a major foreign policy goal of both Bulgaria and Turkey. The process of European integration implies relinquishing parts of these states' sovereignty and opening up, instead of creating new borders and European integration is supported by minorities in both Bulgaria and Turkey.

Bulgaria is the country that one might consider to be influenced the most by events in former Yugoslavia. Much of its 19th and 20th century history was shaped by the »Macedonian question«. Many Bulgarians are still convinced that Slav Macedonian ethnicity does not exist. However, today the majority of the Bulgarian people and political elite alike share the consensus that the priorities of Bulgaria are economic development and European integration. Interference in the internal affairs of neighbour countries is excluded. The pre-election campaign for the 2001 general elections coincided with a military escalation of the ethnic tension in Macedonia. In the course of the campaign, none of the political forces tried to gain credit using the events in FYROM. The then-PM Kostov rightly remarked that Macedonia could neither win nor lose votes for political parties in Bulgaria today. The campaign centered on economic issues, corruption and »secret files« scandals resulting from opening files of the former secret services.

As far as minorities' issues are concerned, events in former Yugoslavia are of no relevance for the development of these problems in Bulgaria. Minority rights depend exclusively upon threat perceptions; in this respect only the behaviour of minority political leaders and bilateral relations with Turkey are of importance. Currently Bulgaria enjoys excellent relations with Turkey and the Turkish minority representation is also at an all-time high. After the June 2001 elections the Turkish-based parliamentary force MRF for the first time participated directly in forming the government.

Minorities' issues in *Greece and Turkey* are also exclusively shaped by threat perceptions. In the case of Turkey they are influenced by Kurdish separatism, in the case of Greece the main factor are relations with Turkey: developments in the Aegean disputes and the Cyprus problem. Improvement or deterioration of minority rights in both cases are not related with developments in former Yugoslavia.

Since 1999 there has been a thaw in Greek-Turkish relations. Thus far this process has centered on low-politics issues, providing a background preparation that may evolve in a lasting reversal in bilateral relations. One of the positive aspects of this improvement in bilateral relations is the improvement in the status of the Muslims in Greece. Greece's small Muslim community (98000 out of a total population of 10.6 mio.) has been one of the main losers from Greek-Turkish confrontation and was bound to benefit from a *détente*. The *US Department of State 2000 Report* notes a general improvement in government tolerance; Muslims are reported to note positive developments in education and living conditions in villages. In June 2000 the government allowed the construction of the first Islamic cultural center and a mosque in Athens. On the other hand, in the past there have been numerous cases of discriminatory denial of Muslim applications for business licenses, property construction, change of legal residence (important for voting purposes) and other discriminatory practices, which have ended according to the report.[51]

In Turkey the same dynamic takes place. The lengthy military campaign against the PKK (1984-1998) resulted in a very high level of casualties suffered by the Kurdish community. Rouleau[52] (2000) mentions *Turkish Ministry of Justice'* statistics for 35 000 people killed in military

51 Greece: Country Report of Human Rights Practices 2000. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US Department of State, February 2001.

52 France's ambassador to Turkey 1988-1992.

53 Rouleau, Eric: Turkey's dream of Democracy. The Rules of the Game. In: Foreign Affairs. Vol. 79, iss. 6, Nov/Dec 2000, pp. 100-114.

54 The Economist, Feb. 27, 1999: »Human Rights in Turkey: Rotten, but Getting Less So. The arrest of a Kurdish guerilla leader should not divert attention from the plight of other, less prominent Turkish prisoners.«

55 Turkey: Country Report of Human Rights Practices 2000. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US Department of State, February 2001.

campaigns and 17 500 assassinated. Rouleau contends that there is no prospect for recognizing the Kurdish rights, since in the eyes of the authorities the Kurds do not exist as a community.[53]

It is true that the atrocities committed on both sides during the PKK insurgency do not bode well for the future. Since minority treatment in general is directly related to threat perceptions it is natural that in Turkey a high level of threat perceptions would lead to a low level of liberties enjoyed by minority groups. The sheer size of the Kurdish ethnic group (12 mio. out of a total population of around 60 mio.) would continue to provoke threat perceptions. However, recent developments demonstrate that even in these extreme circumstances improvement is possible. By 1999 the PKK was totally defeated and its leader arrested. Improvement in the human rights situation followed this development. In 1999 the *Economist* described the situation as follows: »Human rights in Turkey: rotten but getting less so« in an article highlighting both the vices of the system and the positive developments. Torture, extrajudicial killings and bad treatment of prisoners we-re reported to continue. The positive trends noted included a sharp decrease of death in custody and disappearance since 1995, changes in legislation and increasing sensitivity of the public opinion caused by an ongoing debate on private television and foreign nagging.[54] In September 2000 the Turkish government adopted as a working and reference document a report outlining the constitutional, legislative and administrative reforms necessary for compliance with EU political criteria. The *US Department of State 2000 Report* notes two positive precedents related to the Kurdish minority. For the first time authorities granted permission for a major celebration of a Kurdish holiday outside of Diyarbakir; in another precedent a Turkish citizen was allowed to change registry records and give his daughter a Kurdish first name.[55] These instances, although isolated at present, allow for a moderate degree of optimism concerning Kurdish cultural rights in the long run. In order to foster a positive development in this respect, the international community should advocate a gradual increase in the field of cultural rights, but not collective minority rights. As is the case in Bulgaria and Greece, granting collective rights to minorities is believed to threaten the state's territorial integrity.

To sum up, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey are making efforts towards improving minority treatment, albeit in varying degrees. The extent of the advances achieved depends directly upon the level of perceived threat for their territorial integrity. In Turkey the cultural rights of the second-biggest ethnic group have been long denied and the overall HR situation contains the most serious problems of the three. This reflects the higher intensity of threat perceptions among both the public and part of the elite concerning the security of the state. Nevertheless, improvement in human rights and minority treatment did occur after the conflict between the government security forces and the separatist PKK slowed down and terrorist acts abated. In both Greece and Bulgaria improvement in the status of their Muslim and Turkish minorities occurred subsequent to an upsurge in bilateral relations with Turkey. In none of these three countries developments in minorities issues or bilateral relations are related to developments in former Yugoslavia.

In all three countries perceived threat to territorial integrity and the concomitant »fifth column« threat associated with minorities have shaped the legal protection of their citizens in terms of individual human rights. Collective rights are not granted as they are linked to an increased potential for separatism. Since all three states fear a »fifth column« danger for their territories minority treatment improves or declines according to threat perceptions.

This situation implies that the international community can best support improvement in minority treatment through confidence building measures at an inter-governmental and inter-ethnic level. Human rights protection should remain at an individual rather than an ethnic group level unless it is altered as part of the natural evolution of ethnic relations within the countries. Foreign pressure for asserting collective rights is likely to be misinterpreted in the local context as pressing for the interests of a foreign state/separatist groups. This could only adversely affect the minority ethnic groups involved. The late 1990s witnessed improvement in both inter-state and inter-ethnic relations in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. This is a historic opportunity on which both states involved and the international community should build upon. Enduring cooperation among these three states would provide a stable basis for regional stability and development in Southeast Europe. It is also a prerequisite for the continuation of the positive trends in minority treatment achieved so far.

In the case of Turkey two impending issues merit special attentions. The results of the current talks on the final status of Cyprus will make significant impact on both minority treatment and general human rights situation. A solution on the Cyprus issue must not leave Turkey dissatisfied to the extent that it undermines public support for European integration. Such a develop-

ment would lead to effectively postponing vital reforms in the sphere of democratization for an indefinite period and impede prospects for improvement in human rights situation. For facilitating democratization in Turkey a continuation of the status quo in Cyprus would be a better solution than adopting a scheme that could disrupt the EU-Turkey dialogue. Developments in Northern Iraq have the potential of negative consequences on inter-ethnic relations in Turkey. At present Turkey fears a war in Iraq may lead to the creation of an independent Kurdish state bordering Turkey and increase separatism among its own Kurdish population. This prospect is likely to heighten threat on perceptions in Turkey and may slow down current advancement in granting cultural rights to its Kurdish minority.

Nevertheless the improvement in minority treatment in all three countries over the late 1990s suggests that the region has a lot of potential in terms of improvement of both inter-ethnic and inter-state relations. If supported by the international community through confidence-building measures and policies accounting for individual specifics, this potential will be realized to the effect of ensuring stability and a better future for Southeast Europe.

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