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## THE STATE OF ISLAM IN POST-COMMUNIST BULGARIA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *This paper doesn't seek to provide a scholarly analysis on Islam in Bulgaria after 1989. Rather, its intention is to provide useful insights on a number of questions, pertaining to Bulgaria's Muslim population and its relationship to Islam: How pervasive has the "Islamic revival" been in Bulgaria since 1990? What has been the state of the Muslim religious authorities in the country? How successful have foreign influences been in aiding not only the "Islamic revival", but also in spreading a different, "radical" version of Islam? And what are the public perceptions on Islam in Bulgaria, particularly among the Christian, ethnic Bulgarians?*

**Key words:** *Islam, religious revival, ethnic Turks, Pomaks, religious authorities, foreign influences.*

### Introduction

Islam, whether as religion, culture, factor for political change or even violence, has attracted growing attention since the end of the Cold War and the events of 9/11 in the United States<sup>2</sup>. In the Balkans too, following the collapse of Communism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Islam acquired new importance as the region contains not only significant Muslim minorities, but states whose majorities have, or claimed by others to have, a "Muslim identity", as in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, not to mention Kosovo.

When seeking to study Islam in Bulgaria, three factors, in particular, stand out: a) the special character of Islam in Bulgaria, its "specificity" as a Balkan form of Islam. As scholars of Islam in the Balkans point out, Balkan Islam is of a syncretic form, having "adapted" itself to the region, incorporating elements of Christianity, even "pagan remnants" that were still present at the time of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire<sup>3</sup>. That makes Islam as practiced in the Balkans, different from the Islam practiced, for instance in the Middle East, where a more "authentic Islam" is in place. In that respect, as another scholar of Islam in the region has noticed: "Unlike many Muslims worldwide, those of Eastern Europe do not normally regard Islam as an all-pervasive system of norms that

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1 The following paper was presented, with minor alterations, as "Islam in post-communist Bulgaria" in the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual International Seminar of the Institute of International Relations on *Islam in Europe*, organized in Hydra, Greece, in July 2-6, 2007.

2 For an outstanding example of the scholarly literature that has been produced over the last few years over Islam see Oliver Roy, *Globalised Islam. The Search for a New Umma* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004).

3 Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Bulgaria in Transition: the Muslim minorities", in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol.12, No.3, July 2001, pp.283-286.

should transform and regulate society"<sup>4</sup>; b) the treatment of Islam and of the Muslim minorities by the modern Bulgarian state from its establishment till today. The treatment of Islam and of the various Muslim minority groups in Bulgaria has fluctuated: periods of tolerance and state neglect have given way to hostility and even outright suppression; and c) Bulgaria's post 1989 developments. Bulgaria's democratization process has allowed for the re-establishment of religious freedoms and has provided the opportunity for the ethnic Turks to get organized politically in order to defend their rights. At the same time, Bulgaria's transition to a market economy has been accompanied by rising unemployment and hardship, particularly for its Muslim minority groups. Furthermore, Bulgaria's opening to the outside world has subjected its Muslim population to a variety of outside influences, some of which seek to reshape the way Islam is practiced.

Islam is the religion of a significant part of Bulgaria's population: Ethnic Turks, Pomaks<sup>5</sup> or Bulgarian Muslims<sup>6</sup>, and Muslim Roma. The total Muslim population in Bulgaria, according to the 1992 census was 1,110,295 or 13.1 percent of the total population<sup>7</sup>, of which 800,092 were ethnic Turks<sup>8</sup>. According to the 2001 census, the total number of Muslims had fallen to 966,978 or 12.2 percent of the total population<sup>9</sup>, of which 746,644 were ethnic Turks<sup>10</sup>. The vast majority of Bulgaria's Muslims are Sunni, around 99 per cent, while there is one per cent Shiite, called *Aliani* or *Kizilbash*, almost all of them Bulgarian Turks.

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4 Gyorgy Lederer, *Countering Islamist Radicals in Eastern Europe*, CRSC discussion paper 05/42, September 2005, p.6, [www.defac.ac.uk/colleges/csrc/document-listings/special/Special/scrc-mfp](http://www.defac.ac.uk/colleges/csrc/document-listings/special/Special/scrc-mfp), accessed 8/05/2007. Where as in another study Lederer declares that "I just want to point out that East Europe is the place where Islam is as the West would like it to be everywhere: secular, "non-fundamentalist", loyal to the government, western-minded... ". Gyorgy Lederer, *Contemporary Islam in East Europe*, May 1999, p.25, available at [www.nato.int/acad/fellow/97-99/lederer.pdf](http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/97-99/lederer.pdf) accessed 23/04/2007.

5 The identity of the Pomaks has become the bone of contention among many Balkan nations. At one time or another, the Pomaks have been claimed as being Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish, Serb or even Albanian and (Slav) Macedonian. Western European scholars that have dealt extensively with issues of Pomak identity and history, like Ulf Brunnbauer, have asserted that "most scholars would agree on the definition of Pomaks as Bulgarian-speaking Muslims of South Slav ethnic background". Ulf Brunnbauer, "The Perception of Muslims in Bulgaria and Greece: Between the 'Self' and the 'Other'", in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.21, No.1, 2001, p.42.

6 The term Bulgarian Muslims or "Bulgaro-Mohammedans" is attributed to a renowned Bulgarian ethnographer of the early twentieth century, Stoyu Shishkov. It was Shishkov who, seeking to establish the "Bulgarianness" of the Pomaks, began to advocate and to consistently replace the term "Pomak" with "Bulgaro-Mohammedan", "a term that would assume a dominant role in the Bulgarian discussions of the Pomaks by the 1930s and certainly in the post-war period". For Shishkov's role and a critical approach of the Bulgarian academic discourse on the Pomaks, see Mary Neuburger, "Pomak borderlands: Muslims on the edge of nations", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.28, No.1, 2000, pp.181-198.

7 *Natsionalen Statisticheski Institut. Prebrojavane 2001. Struktura na naselenieto po veroizpovedanie*. Cited in Veselin Bosakov, *Identichnost I mnogoobrazie na isljama v Balgaria* (Sofia: Virtualen Tsender, 2006), p.227.

8 Ivan Ilchev, Duncan Perry, "The Muslims of Bulgaria", in Gerd Nonneman, Tim Niblock, Bogdan Szajkowski (edit.), *Muslim Communities in the New Europe* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996), p.116.

9 *Natsionalen Statisticheski Institut. Prebrojavane 2001. Struktura na naselenieto po veroizpovedanie*. Cited in Bosakov, op.cit., p.227.

10 According to the 2001 census, 746,664 claimed to be ethnic Turks and 370,000 Roma in a population of 7,928,901. "Ethnicheski Sastav na Naselenieto na Balgaria" (Ethnic Composition of Bulgaria's Population), *Natsionalen Statisticheski Institut* (National Statistical Institute), 01.03.2001, available at [www.nsi.bg/census/ethnos-final.htm](http://www.nsi.bg/census/ethnos-final.htm), accessed 12/12/2003.

### The position and treatment of Islam in Bulgaria up to 1989

Following the establishment of modern Bulgaria, in 1878, the identity and life of Muslims that chose to remain in the new state continued to be based on religion, a state of affairs that wasn't challenged in any fundamental way by the Bulgarian state. Their rights and position were regulated by a number of bilateral and international agreements, according to which the Muslim population in Bulgaria was granted considerable religious and educational autonomy: "In spiritual, administrative and judicial matters, the Muslims in Bulgaria were governed by the Chief Mufti's office, the Mufti Vicarage and the Spiritual Courts. Ownership issues were... settled by the Sharia. The state allocated funds to maintain the mosques, and the Muslim spiritual leaders received salaries as civil servants"<sup>11</sup>.

Religion continued to be the prime focus for the identity of Bulgaria's Muslim population, even among the ethnic Turks, during the inter-war period. Turkish nationalism and secularism, that became the dominant ideological currents in neighbouring Turkey, following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, made slow inroads among Bulgaria's conservative and religiously oriented Muslim population. And in any case, the Bulgarian state did not have any interest in undermining religious attachment, as the prime focus of identification for its Muslim population, in favour of an ethnic Turkish identity. It is indicative that religious law, the *Sharia*, was retained in Bulgaria until 1938, while an attempt in the late 1920s to replace the Arabic alphabet with the Latin one met with resistance among the religious community, only to be finally accepted in the late 1930s<sup>12</sup>.

In September 1944, as Soviet forces invaded Bulgaria initiating dramatic political changes, Bulgaria's Muslim population found itself in a state of economic, political and cultural marginalisation<sup>13</sup>. The *Bulgarian Communist Party*, that within a couple of years would have consolidated its hold over power, faced religion with intense ideological hostility, seeking to undermine the religious affiliation of the population and to control the clergy. Islam was no exception, as it was viewed as a "special target"<sup>14</sup>: it was attacked as

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11 Zhelyazkova, op.cit., pp.286-287.

12 Wolfgang Hopken, "From religious identity to ethnic mobilization: the Turks of Bulgaria before, under and since Communism", in Hugh Poulton, Suha Taji-Farouki (edit.) *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp.61-62.

13 Describing the position of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria Wolfgang Hopken has remarked that, "Up to the Second World War the Turkish community lived as a closed ethnic and religious group, mainly agrarian with only about 15 per cent living in urban centers. By all social criteria the community was under-developed: illiteracy was almost the norm, reaching in the 1930s 81 per cent among men and 91 percent among women. The community's schools were 'private', (set up at the mosques) governed and mostly financed by the community itself. Except for very few urban '*rusdiye*' they were almost exclusively religious schools with little secular education, and before 1918 there were no secondary schools at all... State policy towards the Turkish population was characterized more by social ignorance than by interference in the minority's internal affairs or suppression". Hopken, op.cit., pp.56-57. For the Pomaks however, it cannot be said that state policy was "characterized more by social ignorance than by interference in the minority's internal affairs or suppression", as the Pomaks became the focus of two official campaigns, in 1912-1913 and in 1942-1944, aiming at suppressing their Muslim identity: changing their Arab-Turkish names, and forbidding items of clothing, such as the fez and the veil and replacing them with "Bulgarian national hats and clothes". For details of these campaigns see Neuberger, op.cit., pp.185-190.

14 "It was an 'alien' religion brought to Bulgaria by the Ottomans, who were said to have imposed it on segments of the Bulgarian Orthodox population by force; Islam was seen as a serious obstacle to the integration of Turks and other Muslims into Bulgarian society; the loyalty of Turkish and other

"backward" and "degenerate"; Islamic Institutions were purged of "disloyal and suspect personnel", and their financial position was undermined, by nationalizing for instance the properties of the pious foundations (*vakif*); the number of Muslim clerics was drastically reduced, from 15,000 before 1944 it had reached to a mere 2,400 at the end of the 1950s; and in 1952 the teaching of Koran was banned<sup>15</sup>.

As far as the ethnic Turks were concerned, the communist regime wanted to create a "socialist Turkish minority", a goal that in practice entailed recognizing and supporting the ethnic identity of the Turkish minority, at the expense of its religious identity. The regime improved during the first few years after 1944 the educational and cultural conditions for the Turkish minority while it sought "to create a secular elite among the ethnic Turks, which would work towards the achievement of the party's ideological and social goals"<sup>16</sup>. The post-war treatment of the Pomaks is a separate case, as the Pomaks were not considered a minority population and the new regime officially embraced them as an integral part of the Bulgarian nation<sup>17</sup>.

By the late 1950s, however, state policy towards the Turkish minority was shifted. It was now directed at undermining "not merely... religious affiliation but also... the separate ethnic identity of the Turks"<sup>18</sup>. This policy first implemented in the 1960s, gathered momentum and purpose during the 1970s. As part of this policy, anti-religious propaganda was intensified and the number of *hodzhas* further reduced, leaving only some 460 in the early 1960s<sup>19</sup>. "Considerable efforts were made in an attempt to change the Turkish community's everyday customs and rites based on Islamic religious and cultural traditions. (In particular) Women wearing traditional clothes were the object of special campaigns"<sup>20</sup>. The results of this policy have been described as "ambivalent": inevitably, "the modernizing dimension of the Communist project"<sup>21</sup> had a certain impact on the Turkish minority's religious affiliation as "clothing, housing and customs to some extent lost their traditional affinity to the Islamic religion and culture, which themselves lost ground"<sup>22</sup>. However, even surveys conducted in the 1970s and 1980s confirmed that

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Muslims was suspect and the perpetuation of Muslim identity a danger to Bulgarian society". Ali Eminov, "Turks and Tatars in Bulgaria and the Balkans", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.28, No.1, 2000, p.143.

15 *ibid*, p.143, also Hopken, *op.cit.*, p.65.

16 Hopken, *op.cit.*, p.64.

17 Thus, in the first post-war years, Pomak-specific institutions were established and the name-change campaign that had been conducted during the war was reversed. By the beginning of the 1950s, however, a change in state policy towards the Pomaks takes place. In the 1950s the attire of Pomak women like the scarf or baggy Turkish style pants (*shalvari*) became the target of ridicule by the regime. In the 1960s, "unsystematic measures" were introduced by the authorities for the change of the Pomak names. These measures were systematized in the beginning of the 1970s. In 1970, the Bulgarian Communist Party passed a resolution that called for the total mass name change of Pomaks. The campaign for forceful change of the Pomaks names was carried out between 1970 and 1974. For a critical review of state policy towards the Pomaks in the 1944-1989 period see Neuburger, *op.cit.*, pp.190-194.

18 Hopken, *op.cit.*, p.67.

19 *ibid*, p.68.

20 *ibid*, p.68.

21 Xavier Bougarel, *The role of Balkan Muslims in building a European Islam*, European Policy Centre, Issue Paper No. 43, 22 November 2005, p.9, available at [www.kbs-frb.be/files/db/EN/EPC\\_Documents\\_The\\_role\\_of\\_Balkan\\_Muslims\\_in\\_building\\_a\\_European\\_Islam.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/files/db/EN/EPC_Documents_The_role_of_Balkan_Muslims_in_building_a_European_Islam.pdf) accessed 25/04/2007, p.11.

22 Hopken, *op.cit.*, p.69.

religious affiliation among Turks was twice as high as that among Bulgarians. In 1985 only 23 percent of ethnic Bulgarians declared that they were religious, in contrast with 55 percent of Turks<sup>23</sup>.

Anti-Islamic measures were intensified with the launch of the so-called "rebirth" or "revival" process against the Turkish minority at the end of 1984<sup>24</sup>. Islamic rituals were banned; many mosques ceased to function as places of worship; while the names of the Turkish minority were forcefully changed, a measure that had been tried earlier on the Pomaks<sup>25</sup>.

### **Islam in Bulgaria after the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1989**

#### ***The post-socialist religious revival; how pervasive has it been?***

The collapse of communism and the subsequent democratization of political life opened the way for the re-establishment of religious freedoms and rights in Bulgaria. All restrictions on religious life - such as the ban on religious classes in public schools, the call to prayer, circumcision, funerary ritual, fasting, distribution of the Koran, celebration of religious holidays - were lifted. At the same time, a sustained effort began for the reinvigoration of religious life. Mosques multiplied: from about 300 in 1989 they had reached 1,000 at the end of 1992. Steps were taken for the strengthening of religious education: In 1990, an Islamic Theological Institute was inaugurated in Sofia, while an Islamic secondary school began to operate in Shumen, and another religious school was established in Momchilgrad<sup>26</sup>. Religious sentiments and activities among ethnic Turks and Pomaks became much more visible after 1989. According to an early survey from 1992, 73% of ethnic Turks and 66% of Pomaks had religious feelings compared with 37% of Christians<sup>27</sup>.

This reinvigoration of religious feelings among Bulgaria's Muslim population, ethnic Turks and Pomaks, was to large extent a natural response, following the violent suppression of Islam by the previous regime. At the same time, Bulgaria's difficult transition has inadvertently aided the religious appeal in the country. Bulgaria's transition has been accompanied by a deep recession with "devastating effects" on the standards of living of both ethnic Turks and Pomaks. In particular, the closure of the collective farms, the complications caused for private farming by the process of land restitution, and the collapse of the tobacco industry, left many ethnic Turks and Pomaks unemployed<sup>28</sup>. While

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23 *ibid*, p.69.

24 The "rebirth" or "revival" process has become the object of extensive scholarly analysis. For one of the best known examples see Hough Poulton, *The Balkans. Minorities and States in Conflict* (London: Minority Rights Publication, 1993), pp. 131-138.

25 A particularly traumatic experience for any practicing Muslim: "The encroachment upon the Muslims' names contains a dramatic element of desecration, of sacrilege, since, according to Islam, a person's name has a particular role in the Muslim's life and culture. Without his proper name, a Muslim cannot present himself upon his death before Allah, who summons people by their name in order to judge whether they have lived well or badly, and to take them to Paradise. In short, the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks considered themselves as doomed to eternal damnation, both in their lifetime and after death". Zhelyazkova, *op.cit.*, p.289.

26 Eminov, *op.cit.*, p.145.

27 Cited in Hopken, *op. cit.*, p.75.

28 In post-communist Bulgaria, the Pomaks have suffered from consistently high levels of unemployment and extensive poverty, with the state having failed to formulate a policy for addressing

many of them have sought to escape economic hardship by emigrating either to big cities or to Turkey, many others have sought refuge to religion. Among the Pomaks, there is another factor that seems to have encouraged a "turn towards religion": since 1990 "a sizeable part of the community" is at a stage of forming a specific ethnic identity, neither Bulgarian nor Turkish. Among this group, "religion has become the main ethnic distinguishing factor"<sup>29</sup>.

However, sociological surveys conducted in Bulgaria after 1989 show that religious practices among Bulgaria's Muslims are not strictly followed: only about a third of those claiming to be 'believers' among the Turkish population pray five times a day; 15 per cent do so only on religious holidays, and 16 per cent never. Only 40 per cent of ethnic Turks adhere to Quranic injunctions on drinking and eating<sup>30</sup>. According to another survey published in 1994, only 15 per cent - mostly elderly people - frequent the mosques and only 30 per cent pray more or less regularly. Furthermore, there is an "apparent secularization" particularly among the young and middle-aged ethnic Turks: "For them, religion is becoming increasingly less attractive and important. Just 30 per cent of the ethnic Turks responded that "Atheism is a sin", the remaining 70 percent can tolerate and accept atheism in general"<sup>31</sup>. The level of religious feeling appears to correlate also with the level of education: "on the whole, those with a university education are the least religious"<sup>32</sup>.

There has also been an indication that recourse to Islam after 1989, as a means of providing comfort from the uncertainties and hardship of life has reached its limits. As has been observed about the Pomaks, "the reaffirmation of religious expression, manifested in the building and renovation of mosques, the resurrection of religious schooling, the teaching of Turkish at school and the re-adoption of Turkic-Arabic names... has provided progressively less consolation"<sup>33</sup>.

### ***The state of the Muslim religious authorities; the emergence of serious divisions at the top***

The re-establishment of religious freedoms however, has been accompanied by the development of serious divisions in the ranks of the Muslim clergy, as has been the case

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their problems. For some analysts, that failure is a direct consequence of Bulgaria's refusal to recognize the Pomaks as an ethnic minority. In post-Communist Bulgaria the official view on the Pomaks as far as their ethnic identity is concerned hasn't changed: they continue to be regarded as Bulgarian Muslims, something that is reflected in the national censuses carried out since 1990, where there is no mention of the Pomaks. Carolina Ramos, "Bulgaria: Raw Deal for the Pomaks", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR, No. 555, 11 May 2005, [www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr3/bcr3\\_200505\\_555\\_5\\_eng.txt](http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr3/bcr3_200505_555_5_eng.txt), accessed 18/5/2005

29Ivaylo Grouev, *Why Bulgaria did not explode? The post-1989 ethnic deal* (Ottawa: Hermes Publishing, 1996, 2004), p.75.

30 Surveys conducted between 1991 and 1994: I. Tomova, "Etnicheski stereotipi i predrazsudutsi u bulgarite", *Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatsia v Balgaria*, Vol.1, Sofia, 1992; *Sotsiologicheski Pregled*, No.3, 1993; "Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria", *International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations*, Sofia, 1994. Cited in Hopken, op.cit., p.75.

31Peter-Emil Mitev, "Vruzki na suvmestimost i nesuvmestimost vuv vsekidnevieto mezhdu Hristijani i Miisulmani v Bulgarija", *Sotsiologicheskoto Izsledvane*, Sofia, 1994. Cited in Ilchev, Perry, op.cit., p.116, and also in Grouev, op.cit., p.154.

32 Ilchev, Perry, op.cit., p.116.

33 Yulian Konstantinov, "Strategies for sustaining a vulnerable identity: the case of the Bulgarian Pomaks", in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, p.52.

with the Orthodox Bulgarian Church<sup>34</sup>. The *Chief Mufti* and the *Supreme Muslim Council* have remained the leading religious institutions for the Muslim population in Bulgaria; both institutions however have become the bone of contention among rival groups of Muslim clerics, while certain political forces have become involved in the whole affair. Nedim Gendzhev who had been appointed as Chief Mufti, and was also head of the Supreme Muslim Council, by the communist regime back in 1988 remained in his place immediately after the re-establishment of democracy<sup>35</sup>. For many Muslims however Gendzhev's position was untenable, as he was seen compromised by his relationship with the previous regime, plus the fact that Gendzhev did not enjoy the support of the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (MRF). In 1992 a rival Muslim council, the *Supreme Spiritual Council*, selected Fikri Sali, a man close to the MRF as the new Chief Mufti. The then Bulgarian government however refused to recognize the selection of F. Sali, while in 1996 a new conference elected N. Gendzhev as Chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council. In August 1997, a compromise solution appeared to have been reached among the divided Muslim clerics: N. Gendzhev, and F. Sali signed a declaration agreeing to hold a joint conference to unify the two councils and to elect a new Chief Mufti. At the "unification conference", held in October 1997 a new Supreme Muslim Council was formed, and a new Chief Mufti, Mustafa Alish Hadzhi was elected<sup>36</sup>. It was a temporary truce however. N. Gendzhev and people close to him continued to challenge M. Hadzhi, alleging that he was supported by the MRF and had connections with *Al Kaida* and the *Muslim Brotherhood*<sup>37</sup>. More national conferences followed: in 2000 a new national conference elected Selim Mehmed, as the new Chief Mufti. Both however the 1997 and the 2000 conferences were legally challenged by Gendzhev who was vindicated by the courts<sup>38</sup>. In December 2003 a new national

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34 The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was divided into two factions in 1992; one under the leadership of Patriarch Maxim that had been appointed into his post by the previous communist regime; and one under the leadership of Metropolitan Inokenty, who in 1992 established the so-called "alternative synod". In the 1990s the *Bulgarian Socialist Party* (BSP) supported Maxim, while the *Union of Democratic Forces* (UDF) was favourably disposed towards Inokenty. In July 2004, in a major development, the then government under the premiership of Simeon Saxcobourgotski gave the go-ahead for a police operation against Inokenty's faction. Police forces forcefully burst into at least 94 churches and other buildings occupied by Inokenty's supporters, threw out the priests serving in them and installed priests appointed by Maxim's synod.

35 At a time of heightened political tensions in Bulgaria, following the government decision on 29 December 1989 to allow ethnic Turks and other Muslims to take back their initial names, N. Gendzhev adopted a highly conciliatory stance declaring "that the Muslim clergy were opposed to extremist demands for regional autonomy or territorial partition, and supported the current status of Bulgarian as the only official language". Cited in Rossen V. Vassilev, "Post-Communist Bulgaria's Ethnopolitics", *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol.1, No.2, December 2001, p.41.

36 Eminov, op.cit., p.145.

37 Thus, Asim Hadzi Asam, leader of the foundation "The right path for Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin" and a close associate of Genchev, claimed that Ahmed Dogan, the leader of MRF had given half a million dollars to make sure Hadzhi's election in 1997. Not only that, but according to Asam the money had been sent by Sheih Abdul Kemal, uncle of Osama bin Laden and had been given to A. Dogan by one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Abdul Rahman Taha. Ruslan Iordanov, "Hodene po vazheto", *TEMA*, Issue 12(180), 28 March-3 April 2005, pp.27-28.

38 In 2004, the Supreme Appellate Court ruled on Gendzhev's complaints that "those forums had been illegitimate and their decisions invalid". While on 16 December 2004, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, found Bulgaria in violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and ordered the Bulgarian government to pay compensation to Gendzhev. "Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2004", *Report of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee*, April 2005, pp.7-10,

conference was held and Fikri Sali was elected as Chief Mufti. Soon afterwards however a rival Muslim conference elected Ali Hadjisaduk as Chief Mufti<sup>39</sup>. The last national conference took place in March 2005. 1,400 of 1,461 delegates of the conference elected again M. Hadzhi as Chief Mufti, while Basri Pehlivan was elected president of the Supreme Muslim Council. Despite the overwhelming support for M. Hadzhi, his election was accompanied by accusations against the MRF's involvement and manipulation of the conference and a number of mainly Pomak Muftis, abandoned the conference in protest<sup>40</sup>.

***The position of the MRF: religious moderation - control over the Muslim religious authorities***

The MRF was established in January 1990, as a political party aimed at defending primarily the rights of the ethnic Turks and other Muslims in Bulgaria. Its initial platform contained a number of positions concerning the restoration of religious rights for Bulgaria's Muslim population: the optional teaching of Islamic theology in Bulgarian schools to pupils who were ethnic Turks; the restoration of mosques in Razgrad, Kiustendil, Plovdiv and elsewhere; permission to construct Islamic prayer houses if Muslim congregations wished to do so; the lifting of the ban on publishing Islamic literature, including the Koran; the introduction of Ramadan and Kurban as national holidays for Muslims; the lifting of bans on religious rites; and the return of property belonging to Islamic communities that had been nationalized by the previous regime<sup>41</sup>. At the same time, the MRF distanced itself from "phenomena like Islamic fundamentalism"<sup>42</sup>. As on most issues, likewise on the issue of Islam's place in Bulgaria, the MRF moved carefully, displaying moderation. Yunal Lufti, its vice-chairman has declared:

The Movement will do all it can to secure a firm place for Islam as the second religion in Bulgaria after the Orthodox Church. At the same time we have to recognize as peaceful and friendly citizens that the Christian majority must be approached and treated with common sense and tact, because all minorities must co-exist without favouritism<sup>43</sup>.

The prospect of establishing the supremacy of religious identity over a secular identity on the Muslim population, and in particular the ethnic Turks, has not been welcomed by the MRF. As Xavier Bougarel has accurately remarked on the political parties representing Balkan Muslims that were established after 1989: "as a rule, the new political parties are headed by new elites that are the product of Communist modernization and have a secularist orientation"<sup>44</sup>. The MRF is no exception, notwithstanding the assimilation campaign waged against the ethnic Turks by the Communist regime. Commenting on the dangers of fundamentalism Ahmed Dogan, the leader of MRF, has declared:

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[www.bghelsinki.org/annual/en/2004-human%20rights.pdf](http://www.bghelsinki.org/annual/en/2004-human%20rights.pdf) accessed 5/12/2005.

39 *ibid*, p.10.

40 Ali Hairadin, Mufti of the city of Sofia commented that, "when there is an election, people enter the conference room and vote. When the election is already decided, there is no meaning to make a choice. Its better then, the Chief Mufti to be appointed... ". Where as Salih Arshinski, another protesting Mufti, asserted that, "In the conference there are no representatives of the Muslim religion, inside there are activists and mayors of the MRF". Cited in Iordanov, *op.cit.*, p.26.

41 Kjell Engelbrekt, "The Movement for Rights and Freedoms", *Report on Eastern Europe*, Vol.2, No.22, 31 May 1991, p.7.

42 *ibid*, p.7.

43 Cited in Vassilev, "Post-Communist Bulgaria's Ethnopolitics", p.46.

44 Bougarel, *op.cit.*, p.12.



We have something very valuable in this country. None of the ethnicities is very religious. As the crossroads of the Balkans, we have learned to be careful with religious systems. We have always been observers of religious processes rather than participants. So there is no place for fundamentalism in Bulgaria<sup>45</sup>.

It was exactly the Party's moderation and pragmatism, together with the tactical qualities of Ahmed Dogan, that allowed the MRF not only to overcome the considerable hostility and suspicion that has encountered since its establishment, but also to become accepted as a coalition partner: during the 1990s, the MRF was in formal or informal coalition, at different times, with both the BSP and the UDF<sup>46</sup>. Since the parliamentary elections of June 2001, the MRF has gone one step further. It has *shared power*, participating in the formation of the government: from June 2001 until June 2005, with the party of Simeon Saxecoburgotski, the *National Movement Simeon II*; and from August 2005 until now, in a three-party coalition government, together with the BSP and the National Movement. MRF's performance is even more commendable when one takes into account the political behaviour of another "Turkish minority party", the *Turkish Democratic Party*, established by Adem Kenan, in December 1990. Kenan, which apparently has links with the right-wing *Nationalist Action Party* in Turkey, has repeatedly attracted unfavourable attention by calling, for instance, for a general amendment of the Bulgarian Constitution, revoking the provisions on the unity of the State, lifting the ban on the establishment of autonomous formations, removing the Bulgarian as the only official language of the country<sup>47</sup>. More recently, on 12 September 2005, Kenan went even further by saying, in an interview for a local radio station, that Sofia would be subjected to bombing by NATO troops, as "Bulgaria was violating the rights of the Turkish minority"<sup>48</sup>. No other "ethnic Turkish party" - and one could also include the *Movement of the Democratic Wing* led by Osman Oktai, the *Party for Democracy and Justice* led by Nejim Genchev, and the *Union of the Bulgarian Turks* led by Seihan Turkan - has managed to rival MRF's influence and dominant position among the ethnic Turks. It's a dominance which, as we saw earlier, extends even in religious affairs, where the MRF has played an active role, by trying to control the Islamic religious community. MRF's dominating role over the Turkish minority however has brought about charges of "political cynicism": the *Democrats for Strong Bulgaria*, a centre-right political party established following the 2001 elections by the former prime minister Ivan Kostov, has accused the MRF as "an undemocratic ethnic party which manipulates its members under the pretext of protecting their rights", and Dogan as "a curse over Bulgaria", holding back further reform by focusing on ethnic issues<sup>49</sup>.

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45 Cited in Ivan Palchev, *Ahmed Dogan and the Bulgarian ethnic model* (Bulgarian Diplomatic Review, National Museum of Bulgarian Books and Polygraphy, 2002), p.106.

46 Rossen Vassilev, "Bulgaria's Ethnic Problems", in *East European Quarterly*, XXXVI, No.1, March 2002, pp.113-123.

47 Maria Yaneva, "System of Central and Local Government, Political Representation and Civil Participation of Minorities in Bulgaria", in Goedele De Keermaeker, Plamen Makariev (edit.) *Bulgaria - Facing Cultural Diversity* (International Peace Information Service, ACCESS Association, 1999), pp.61-62

48 "Illegal ethnic Turk Party Leader Threatens Sofia with NATO Bombs", *Novinite*, 12 September 2005, [http://novinite.com/view\\_news.php?id=52307](http://novinite.com/view_news.php?id=52307), accessed 13/09/2005.

49 Cited in Milena Borden, "Bulgaria: Turkish Party Urged to Rethink Policies", *Institute for War and Peace Policies*, BCR No 555, 11 May 2005, [www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr3/bcr3\\_200505\\_555\\_4\\_eng.txt](http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr3/bcr3_200505_555_4_eng.txt), accessed 18/05/2005.

### *Foreign influences on Islam in post-1989 Bulgaria; the Turkish primacy*

Since 1990, the whole of post-communist Eastern Europe has become the focus of growing activities on the part of various Islamic charities and organizations that seek to stimulate an Islamic revival, among the region's Muslim communities. More so in the Balkans that are the home of considerable Muslim communities, and were the bloody Bosnian conflict took place in the beginning of the 1990s, attracting the attention of public opinion in the Muslim world. Islamic charities and other Islamic organizations, such as the *Muslim World League*, the *World Assembly of Muslim Youth*, the *International Islamic Relief Organisation*, became active in the region financing the building of new mosques, distributing Islamic literature and more importantly trying to spread different Islamic doctrines that challenge the dominance of Hanafi Sunni doctrine<sup>50</sup>.

As far as Bulgaria is concerned, Arab states and Arab-dominated charities and other foundations have also been present by providing financial support for the rebuilding of mosques and the establishment of religious schools; by giving scholarships to Muslim clerics who want to study Theology in Middle Eastern Universities; and even by the activities of proselytizers in the country<sup>51</sup>. Among those Arab-dominated foundations with activities in Bulgaria, that also engage in aiding the spread of radical Islam, Bulgarian sources single out three in particular, associated closely with Saudi Arabia: the *World Assembly of Muslim Youth*, the *Al Waqf-Al Islami* foundation, and the *Al Haramain* organization<sup>52</sup>. The small immigrant Arab community in Bulgaria, around twenty thousand of them, appears also to have been involved in proselytizing activities, targeting in particular Pomaks and Muslim Roma<sup>53</sup>.

Turkey remains however the main source of Islamic influences external to Bulgaria. For a variety of reasons, historical, religious, diplomatic<sup>54</sup>, or even diaspora-related<sup>55</sup>, Ankara has watched closely developments concerning the Balkans and its Muslim

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50 "Islamic NGOs often use humanitarian aid as an incentive to encourage people to fulfill their religious duties (wearing the veil, attending religious education, classes, etc.). All of them contribute to the circulation of new religious doctrines coming from the Arab world and challenge the former monopoly of Hanafi *madhhab*, as well as the religious legitimacy of the heterodox practices of Balkan Islam. These new doctrines are also spread through books and pamphlets translated from Arabic, videos and websites, and the young *ulema* returning from Islamic universities of the Persian Gulf. This new generation of imams plays an increasingly important role in local religious life through their preaching in mosques and the teaching they provide in the *madrasas* funded by the Gulf states". Bougarel, op.cit., p.18.

51 Iran has also been active, on a much smaller scale however, by providing support, through the *Tauhit* foundation to the Shiite community. Lederer, *Contemporary Islam in East Europe*, p.20.

52 Mihail Vasilev, "Svetovnata Isljamska Mrezha" (Global Islamic Network), *Geopolitika I Geostrategia*, Broi 4, 2005, pp.131-133.

53 Lederer, *Countering Islamist Radicals in Eastern Europe*, p.8. According to Lederer, "The foreigners include students, professionals, husbands of local women, legal and less legal residents. They are much fewer than but ideologically comparable to their counterparts in the West. Many try to spread Islam which is a sacred duty. Mideastern proselytizing and charitable organizations back a number of them, also because they speak Arabic and are less affected by secular and pro-Western ideas". Lederer, *Contemporary Islam in East Europe*, p.23.

54 Xavier Bougarel has commented that "Turkey's Balkan policy is based on two very concrete elements: its conflict with Greece and its bid for EU membership". Bougarel, op.cit., p.19.

55 The territorial retreat of the Ottoman Empire from South-Eastern Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century caused large numbers of Muslim refugees. Many of these refugees and their descendants settled in the territory of the Turkish republic. According to the 1935 Turkish

communities. Is there a specific Turkish "religious policy" in the Balkans since 1990? It's hard to tell. There has been however a clear interest for the Balkan Muslims that has been channeled primarily through the Secretariat or Directorate for Religious Affairs, the *Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi*: "this state body has established close links with the Islamic religious institutions in the region, and provides them with significant material support directly or indirectly (grants for students visiting Turkish universities, funding for local imams' salaries, etc.)"<sup>56</sup>. In 1995, on Ankara's initiative an *Islamic Euro-Asian Assembly* was established, bringing together Islamic religious institutions from Turkey, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, a diplomatic initiative that aimed at competing with the *Islamic Council for Eastern Europe*, established in 1990 with the support of Saudi Arabia and the *Islamic World League*<sup>57</sup>. Beyond the "official Turkish religious interest" on the Balkan Muslims, expressed through the Directorate for Religious Affairs, there has been an even stronger interest on the part of "non-state Turkish actors". Religious brotherhoods, like the *Fethullanci*, have opened religious schools, while other Turkish religious orders have established close links with their Balkan counterparts<sup>58</sup>. The presence and activities of state and non-state Turkish actors in Bulgaria's case is described by Gyorgy Lederer:

Foreign help is decisive. This means primarily Turkey which invites students for religious and other studies, provides books, curricula, teachers and financial means. The assistance of the secular Turkish Republic, mainly through the *Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) network, is different from that of Turkish Islamist institutions, as the Naksibendi and Kadirî orders, the Zaman foundation publishing a remarkable newspaper in Bulgaria too, or the "Muslims of Turkish origin" of Milli Gorus as they call themselves. By Balkan standards they are wealthy, opposed to secularism and committed to the cause of Islamic revival among their "ethnic brothers". They spent considerable amounts on building mosques<sup>59</sup>.

What has been the effect of "outside influences" on Islam in Bulgaria after 1989? A question, particularly relevant since the 9/11 and the terrorist bombing attacks in Madrid and London, is whether "radical Islam" has acquired any influence or following in Bulgaria, as according to one analyst, "the main focus of the activities carried out by Islamic radicalism in the Balkans, and in Europe at large, has been put on the recruitment and indoctrination of new followers..."<sup>60</sup>. During the last few years there have been some well publicized cases of the Bulgarian authorities clamping down on foundations associated with Islamic radicalism: in 2000, it was reported that the activities of several Islamic NGOs were

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census, 962,000 inhabitants of Turkey had been born abroad, as against 15,195,000 born within the country. Of the foreign-born, 368,000 had come from Greece, 227,000 from Bulgaria, 158,000 from Yugoslavia and 62,000 from Romania. Turkey received more refugee and immigrant waves after the Second World War. By 1980 official records showed a cumulative total of 488,000 refugees-immigrants from Bulgaria, 303,000 from Yugoslavia, 122,000 from Romania. See Andrew Mango, "Turkey: 'Outside Turks'", in Margaret Bainbridge (edit.) *The Turkic Peoples of the World* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), p.351. While according to Bougarel, "between 1878 and 1945, more than 2,500,000 *muhacirs* (refugees) left the Balkans for Istanbul and Anatolia". Bougarel, op.cit., p.23.

<sup>56</sup> Bougarel, op.cit., p.19.

<sup>57</sup> ibid, p.20.

<sup>58</sup> ibid, p.20.

<sup>59</sup> Lederer, *Contemporary Islam in East Europe*, p.20.

<sup>60</sup> Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova, "European Security and International Terrorism: the Balkan Connection", in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.4, No.3, September 2004, p.363.

banned in Bulgaria<sup>61</sup>; in the autumn of 2003, the Bulgarian police dismantled Islamist centers in the south, around the towns of Velingrad and Pazardzhik<sup>62</sup>; and in February 2005, Bulgarian journalists reported on three semi-legal schools that operated in the region of Razgrad, in northeastern Bulgaria, that were suspected of preaching a Wahhabi version of Islam, intolerant, anti-secular and anti-Western<sup>63</sup>.

There has also been concern over the time Bulgarian Muslim clerics spend abroad, in Middle Eastern theological schools or even in Western Europe, associating themselves with ideas of a "radical", less tolerant Islam. In November 2004, for instance, a Muslim cleric, named Ahmed Musa Ahmed, was found guilty of violating Articles 162 and 164 of the Penal Code, which define crimes against "national and racial equality", and was sentenced by the Pazardzhik Regional Court, to three years imprisonment and a 1,000 leva fine for preaching "radical Islam"<sup>64</sup>. It was alleged that Ahmed Musa Ahmed came into contact with radical Islamists in Germany, and following his return preached with "a particular fervour", speaking of *jihad* and the need to establish a Caliphate<sup>65</sup>. In 2000 a well-informed scholar of Bulgarian Muslims reported that conservative Muslim clerics have not been satisfied by the steady but gradual recovery of Islam in Bulgaria after 1989: "they want to recreate the overarching Muslim identity that existed in the past and to establish the primacy of religious principles governing the lives of Muslims in Bulgaria"<sup>66</sup>. And the new Chief Mufti of the Bulgarian Islamic Community, M. Hadzhi, who has studied Islamic law in Amman, Jordan, attracted attention with his rather ambiguous statements over the position of women in Muslim society<sup>67</sup>.

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61 A development that was actualized criticized by the European Court of Human Rights. Bougarel, op.cit., p.26.

62 Lederer, *Countering Islamist Radicals in Eastern Europe*, p.8.

63 The three schools were operating in the villages of Surnitsa, Ustina and in Delchevo. It was alleged that the *Al Waqf-Al Islami* foundation had provided financial support for the establishment and operation of the school in Surnitsa, while for the school in Delchevo, the Turkish brotherhood *Suleymanci* appeared as the financial backer. Concerning the preaching taking place in Surnitsa a local Imam described it as following: "Intolerance to people of other beliefs. Interpretation of the Koran in their own terms, as jihad - a holy war with weapons and violence... For these people anyone who is not one of them - a Wahhabi - is an infidel. This means they reject all other denominations of Islam and avoid contacts with them". Yana Buhner Tavanier, "Bulgaria: The Schools that Aren't Schools", *Transitions Online*, 3 February 2005, [www.tol.cz/look/TOL/printf.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=101](http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/printf.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=101), accessed 9/05/2007.

64 The official charges against Ahmed Musa Ahmed were that "he had preached antidemocratic ideology and the violent overthrow of the established state structure, desecrated the Bulgarian flag and preached racial and national, as well as religious, enmity and hatred". "Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2004", op.cit., p.9.

65 *ibid*, pp.9-10.

66 Eminov, op.cit., p.146.

67 In an article in the magazine *Miousioulmani*, M. Hadzhi declared that in the Islamic world women not only are not oppressed but in a privileged position, "As far as the position of woman is concerned, Islam not only treats her as equal with man, but in a privileged position". According to M. Hadzhi, a woman is (financially) safe from birth until the end of her life, she is never obliged to (financially) take care of herself. Women have also the right to participate in communal life, with prime example the Prophet himself, who regularly took advice from his wives. M. Hadzhi attracted even more attention when he avoided taking a clear position on questions, such as should a woman follow a career at the expense of family life? And who has greater authority at home: a woman or a man? "It remains to be decided how should we lead family life - through logic on the side of those who manage to put feelings under logic, that is men, or through feelings, which in woman's case are more powerful than logic? Cited in Iordanov, op.cit., p.27.

### *Perceptions of Islam among ethnic Bulgarians*

Measuring public perceptions on the issue of Islam in post-1989 Bulgaria is not an easy or straightforward task, as any evaluation is based on surveys conducted after 1989 on public perceptions concerning religious co-existence and the Muslim minorities living in Bulgaria. Thus, surveys conducted in 1994 and 1995 by ethnologists and sociologists on the issue of religious freedoms reveal a high level of tolerance<sup>68</sup>. When however one looks at surveys on attitudes towards minorities in Bulgaria, the picture that emerges is quite different. In an analysis of three surveys conducted in Bulgaria, in 1992, 1994 and 1997<sup>69</sup>, by Krassimir Kanev, varying degrees of prejudices towards ethnic Turks, Pomaks and the Roma can be found. For the ethnic Turks there is a high level of ethnic prejudice with a "marked tendency of decrease" during the five year period<sup>70</sup>; interestingly enough, a consistently high percentage of the respondents consider the ethnic Turks as "religious fanatics": 84% in 1992, 72% in 1994 and 63% in 1997<sup>71</sup>. A percentage that appears to have remained stable during the last few years: it was 62% according to a survey conducted in 2005<sup>72</sup>. Towards the Pomaks, negative prejudices are lower than the ethnic Turks, with also a "general tendency of decrease". And a smaller, but far from negligible, percentage of the respondents consider them as "religious fanatics": 50% in 1992, 37% in 1994 and 34% in 1997<sup>73</sup>. The Roma, whether Christian or Muslim, are the only group with consistently high percentages of negative prejudices against them not only by ethnic Bulgarians, but also by ethnic Turks and the Pomaks<sup>74</sup>. While in a survey conducted by the *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee* with the assistance of BBSS Gallup, two months before the 2005 parliamentary elections there were some alarming findings about ethnic coexistence and religious tolerance: 27% of the respondents answered negatively to the question "Would you agree to live in the same country with Roma people? And 18% would not like to live in the same country with ethnic Turks; 46% felt that "Christian cults should be banned", while 15% felt the same thing about Judaism and 11% about Islam<sup>75</sup>.

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68 "A belief in the exclusiveness of one's own religion is not held by the majority (of either Christians or Muslims). To the question 'How do you treat people of different religious beliefs?' the overwhelming majority of respondents reply: 'People like anybody else! Intolerance is an exception; it appears among Muslims (3-5%) and among a small proportion of Bulgarians (10%). The vast majority of adherents of both religions are convinced that 'Freedom of religion should exist only in respect to non-traditional religions'. Cited in Zhelyazkova, op.cit., p.298.

69 The survey "Ethnic and Cultural Situation in Bulgaria", conducted by the *Centre for the Study of Democracy* in 1992; the survey "Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria", conducted by *Marketing-Consult, Ltd* in 1994; and the survey "Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria", conducted by *BBSS Gallup International* in 1997.

70 Krassimir Kanev, "Changing Attitudes towards ethnic minorities in Bulgaria and the Balkans 1992-1997", in Thanasis D. Sfikas, Christofer Williams (edit.) *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999), p.75

71 *ibid*, p.75.

72 Survey conducted by Petar-Emil Mitev cited in Albena Shkodrova, "Comment: Nationalism Retains Grip on Bulgaria's Youth", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, Balkan Crisis Report, No.555, 11 May 2005, [www.iwpr.net/index.pi?archive/bcr3/bcr3\\_200505\\_555\\_6\\_eng.txt](http://www.iwpr.net/index.pi?archive/bcr3/bcr3_200505_555_6_eng.txt), accessed 18/05/2005.

73 Kanev, op.cit, p.76.

74 *ibid*, p.77.

75 Cited in Emil Cohen, "The data indicate: Our society is ill from racism", *Obektiv*, Issue 123, April-July 2005, [www.bghelsinki.org/obektiv/2005/123/123-01.pdf](http://www.bghelsinki.org/obektiv/2005/123/123-01.pdf), accessed 5/12/2005.

There has certainly been a rise in nationalism in Bulgaria, during the last few years, as it was exemplified by the electoral success of the party *Ataka* in the June 2005 elections, when it gained around 8% of the vote and emerged as the fourth biggest party, a worrying development particularly for Bulgaria's minorities<sup>76</sup>. A relevant problem concerns the media and their attitude on issues like Islam: the media have more often than not followed an alarmist view of Islam and Islamist-related activities in Bulgaria. A paper on the Muslims of Bulgaria in the mid-1990s noted that, "there has been alarm by the news of Islamic preachers arriving in Bulgaria since 1993, and the contributions made by Islamic religious foundations towards the restoration of old mosques and the building of new ones... The basic fear is that those who came are but the first of a wave of religious fundamentalists who would use Bulgaria as a springboard for penetration in Europe"<sup>77</sup>. And according to a recent survey, conducted in 2006, entitled "Islam and the media", although "the relationship towards Muslims in Bulgaria is tolerant... at the same time, more and more clearly fear is being generated, related with Islam in the concept formulated abroad, whereby (Islam) is being likened as aggressive, militant, and dangerous"<sup>78</sup>.

### Conclusion

Concluding, it could be claimed that the religious revival that has taken place among Bulgaria's Muslim population since 1990 can be described as rather "moderate": Bulgarian Muslims on the whole have not become ostensibly more religious. There are no signs of a radicalization spreading either among the ethnic Turks or among the Pomaks or the Muslim Roma. Foreign sources have been instrumental in aiding the reorganization of religious life, i.e. rebuilding mosques, but even those that seek to advance new, more rigid Islamic practices, at the expense of the "local Islam", haven't been so successful. A remark valid also for the Bulgarian Muslim clergy: despite the "warnings concerning Muslim clerics having links with Al Kaida and the Muslim Brotherhood", these are more the outcome of factional fighting in the ranks of the Muslim clergy, than a reflection of any existing links. In that respect, it is not accidental that in various analyses exploring the dangers posed by the activities of Islamic radicalism in the Balkans, Bulgaria does not figure as a problem-case, with real concern centered around Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo<sup>79</sup>. Cultural, political and even economic conditions are not conducive to the spread of Islamic radicalism in Bulgaria. The dominant political party of Bulgaria's Muslim population for the last 17 years, the MRF, has in principle, no interest in facilitating or allowing the dissemination of radical Islam among its voters, as it has successfully integrated itself in the Bulgarian political scene, becoming part of the political establishment. Furthermore Bulgaria has overcome the deep economic recession of the 1990s that was so damaging for standards of living and highly demoralizing for society at large. As the benefits from the steady growth of the economy spread all over the population, irrespective of creed, it will be harder for any Islamists to gain serious influence in the country.

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76 See for example Yaha Buhrer Tavanier, "Bulgaria: Massive attack", *Transitions Online*, 8 July 2005, [www.tol.cz/look/TOL/printf.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=123](http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/printf.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=123), accessed 9/5/2007.

77 Ilchev, Perry, op.cit., p.132.

78 Survey conducted by the *Centre for Intercultural Research* with the support of the *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee*, cited in Bosakov, op.cit., p.234.

79 Thus in exploring the "terrorist phenomenon" in the Balkans, associated with the influence of radical Islam, Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova singles out the "post Yugoslav space", and more specifically Kosovo, as the area where conditions are more conducive for the emergence of a terrorist threat. See Alexandrova-Arbatova.

**Γεώργιος Χρηστίδης**

#### **Η ΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΙΣΛΑΜ ΣΤΗΝ ΜΕΤΑΚΟΜΜΟΥΝΙΣΤΙΚΗ ΒΟΥΛΓΑΡΙΑ**

Η συγκεκριμένη μελέτη επιχειρεί να συνεισφέρει στον προβληματισμό γύρω από μια σειρά σημαντικά ζητήματα-ερωτήματα που αφορούν τον μουσουλμανικό πληθυσμό και την εξέλιξη του Ισλάμ στην Βουλγαρία μετά την κατάρρευση του κομμουνιστικού συστήματος: Πόσο σημαντική είναι η "θρησκευτική αναγέννηση" που έχει σημειωθεί στον μουσουλμανικό πληθυσμό της Βουλγαρίας μετά το 1989; Σε ποια κατάσταση βρίσκονται οι μουσουλμανικές θρησκευτικές αρχές στην Βουλγαρία; Τι ρόλο έχουν παίζει ξένες επιρροές, τόσο στην αναγέννηση του Ισλάμ, όσο και στην διάδοση ενός διαφορετικού, ριζοσπαστικού Ισλάμ στην Βουλγαρία; Πως αντιλαμβάνεται η βουλγαρική κοινή γνώμη το Ισλάμ μετά το 1990, και ιδιαίτερα οι Βούλγαροι χριστιανοί;





