

**RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG THE BALKAN  
MUSLIMS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON GREECE, BULGARIA,  
MACEDONIA AND KOSOVO\***

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Today two intermingled concepts haunt the Balkans: **religion** and **nationalism**. I will first attempt a theoretical approach to these two concepts.

In the context of the history of western Europe, nationalism is a cohesion ideology that chronologically came **after** the religion and therefore fought it to take its place. Unlike the ideology of religion which corresponded to Feudalism with "**God**" as its focus of societal loyalty, the ideology of nationalism corresponded to Capitalism with "**nation**" at this focus. The antagonism was obvious indeed and the French Revolution of 1789 confiscated the church property, Napoléon subdued the Church to the state and anticlerical laws in France followed one another well until the beginning of the 20th century.

Interestingly, the Kemalist nationalism that followed the Western and, in particular, the French model reduced orthodox Islam (i.e., organized official religion) to the level of a "general directorate" of the government machinery and closed and banned the institutions of heterodox Islam (i.e. religion as understood and practiced by the people) such as *tekkes* and *zaviyes*. Moreover, Kemalist nationalism fought this war against religion in a social medium incomparably less convenient than the one in 1789 both in terms of mode of production and people's loyalty to religion.

However, in contrast to this basic historical conflict between religion and nationalism, one can detect a number of cases in which religion and nationalism marry, religion supporting nationalism or the national identity at least. The main ones can be cited as follows :

1. When there is a third cohesion ideology that threatens both (e.g., Marxism);
2. In case of the existence of the "Chosen People" concept, as in the case of Jews and even Arabs;

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3. When the elements making a nation (language, national market, etc.) are weak, in which case religion plays the role of social paste to make up for them;

4. Emergency situations like war;

5. When there is a "National Church";

6. In cases where the religion of the dominant nation is different than that of the dominated one, the religion of the latter supports its nationalism or its national identity at least.

This last case is the one I'll try to discuss here in the context of Balkans today.

I said "today" but one must begin by noting that this phenomenon is nothing new. On the contrary, it was very common in the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman "**millet**" system assigned legal personality to non-Muslim minorities in a manner unknown even today. In this system, the heads of *millets* had the authority to rule their communities, to represent them at the Royal Court, and to collect taxes.

In the beginning of 19th century, the Balkan bourgeoisies became strong enough to attempt to draw their own territorial boundaries. When the ideas of the French Revolution reached the area at this period, this class had already had a strong trump-card : The Orthodox Churches. The "national" Orthodox churches had maintained their power during the Ottoman period thanks to the role assigned to them in the *millet* system and became number one supporter of the nationalist movements that began under foreign, especially Russian influence. This was how all the Balkan peoples won their autonomy or independence from the Ottoman Empire between 1820 and 1878.

After this theoretical introduction, I should note some striking examples of the interaction between religion and nationalism in the era of Ottoman Empire before I proceed to discuss contemporary developments :

1. Russia which in practice was the most influential country in this independence process was Orthodox as most of the Balkan peoples.

2. Albanians, who won their independence as late as 1912 although they were known for their nationalistic behavior, were Muslims like the Ottomans.

3. The Bosnians, who were "more Turkish than the Turks" and who wanted to take up the arms against the "infidels" when Greeks revolted in

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1821<sup>1</sup>, were also Muslims. There had never been a nationalist movement in Bosnia against the Ottomans.

4. To cite an example from the eastern part of the Empire: The Armenian people was called by the Ottomans "*Millet-i Sadika*" (The Loyal Community) since they caused no problem whatsoever until the nationalist groups in eastern Anatolia took up the arms as late as in 1894 and under Russian influence. These nationalist groups were solely Gregorian, i.e., Orthodox. Armenians who were Catholic or Protestant did not develop any nationalism, nor did they fight against the Ottomans in the ranks of Russian army in the First World War. It is also interesting to remember that Catholic or Protestant Armenians were not included in the 1915 deportation ordered by the Young Turk government.

After this brief glance at this intermingled relationship between religion (and even, sect) and nationalism in the history of the Balkans, we can now discuss the situation today.

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans*, XIV-XXe siècle, Paris, Fayard, 1991, p. 316.

## GREECE

The only sizable minority of Greece lives in Western Thrace, close to the Turkish border. I will not discuss the conflicts between Greece and Turkey about this minority. However, I would like to underline that while Greece calls it "Muslim minority", Turkey identifies it as "Turkish minority". Before going into any sociological considerations, I must point out that both countries are **legally** right :

1. Greece is right, because Article 45 of the *Lausanne Peace Treaty* of 24 July 1923 protecting the rights of this minority identifies it as "*Muslim Minority*". (In this treaty, "*Non-Muslim*" is the term used to identify those minorities to be protected in Turkey.) It is also a fact that the minority is not solely made up of Turks only.

2. Turkey is right, because the *Convention and Protocol on the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations* of 30 January 1923 that regulated the compulsory exchange of the said minorities in these two countries and allowed the existence of respective minorities in Istanbul and Western Thrace (*établis*), makes mention of "*Turks*" and not of "Muslims". Moreover, the official *établi* documents in French delivered at the period identify the Istanbul minority as "Greek" and the Western Thrace minority as "Turk", a term also used by all Greek governments until the *coup d'Etat* of 1967 in this country.

The most difficult cases are those where **everybody** is right. Therefore, we better leave discussing the legal situation and proceed to study this identity problem sociologically. I will first throw an eye on the ethnic composition of the Western Thrace minority and then study how the non-Turkish members of this minority identify themselves.

The ethnic composition of the minority seems to support the official claims of Greece. Among approximately 120,000 Muslims some 30.000 are Pomak, some 5000 are Gypsy, the rest being Turkish.

Pomaks are considered to be of Bulgarian descent by Bulgaria, of Greek descent by Greece, and of Turkish descent by Turkey. Dutch scientist Fred de Jong, well known for his works on Western Thrace, identifies the Pomaks as "...a people whose ethnic origins are not known precisely; they usually speak a dialect of Bulgarian language, and Turkish as a second language; they are a Turkified Muslim people"<sup>2</sup>.

Pomaks are devout Muslims; they live in mountainous regions and learn Turkish as they go to school and establish contacts with the Turks. Gypsies are also Muslim.

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<sup>2</sup> Fred de Jong, "The Muslim Minority in Western Thrace", in Georgina Ashworth (ed.), *Muslim Minorities in the Eighties*, Sunbury, Quartermaine House Ltd., 1980, p.95.

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As for the question of self-identification among the minority, the Turks have always aimed at living as "Greek citizens of Turkish descent and of Muslim religion" on their lands and did not develop so far any nationalistic claims so far, such as annexation of Western Thrace to Turkey. One reason for this is that Greece is economically a better place than the other side of the frontier. On the other hand, they very strongly emphasize their Turkish identity as shown in their dresses, various associations, clubs, and political parties, and in many other ways. To make any concession whatsoever in this matter seems to be out of question for them.

This situation is very natural for a number of reasons. The Turks had outnumbered the total of all other nationalities in the region when Western Thrace was left to Greece in 1920; the region is at the Turkish border; it has not been long since it was separated from Turkey; this community is Muslim, i.e., the "*millet-i hakime*" (sovereign nationality) in the Ottoman system while Greeks are Christians, i.e., the "*millet-i muhakkime*" (dominated nationality); ever since the beginning of this identity argument between the minority and Greek officials in early 70s the *miiftis* (who have always had temporal powers also in the semi-theocratic Greece) are no more religious leaders only but national symbols as well.

It is normal that Turks identify themselves as Turks, but what is interesting is the fact that the non-Turkish members of the minority, Pomaks and Gypsies, identify themselves even more strongly as Turks, as shown by my research in the region<sup>3</sup>:

**1. Education** : Pomaks are very sensitive on the issue of education in Turkish. Although they speak Pomak language at home, it is very important for them that their children attend Turkish minority schools. Since early 1970's, Greek authorities have given scholarships to Pomak youngsters who cannot find jobs in their hometowns to go and study at the Saloniki Academy of Pedagogy (founded in 1966). The Pomak teachers educated there are appointed to the minority schools in their hometowns and they are required to teach in Greek. The parents do not allow their children to attend such schools that close down because of the boycotts. The Pomak minority has severely reacted against this policy. For instance, in 1972, the Pomak women of the village of Galini (Yalanca) attacked the gendarmes who put down the signboard of the village school reading "*Turkish* Minority School" and who replaced it with the one reading "*Muslim* Minority School". These boycotts continued intermittently throughout the 1980s and 90s, and even at the time of my translating this article into English (April 1994).

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<sup>3</sup> For further information on the Muslim minority in Greece, see Baskin Oran, *Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Batı Trakya Sorunu* (The Western Thrace Question in Turco-Greek Relations), 2nd ed., Ankara, Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991.

**2. Minority organization :** After a long struggle since 1972, the three main organizations of the minority were banned by the court in 1987, on the grounds that they maintained the word "Turkish" in their names, while "they were not Turkish". At the following mass demonstrations on 29 January 1988 largest participation came from the Pomaks living in the northern mountainous region. It might be instructive to note that Mustafa Hilmi Effendi (1901-1990), the mufti of Xanthi (Turkish name: Iskeçe) who became the symbol of this minority's struggle for identity, was a Pomak who could not speak Turkish fluently.

Gypsies, on the other hand, are even more radical than Pomaks in this matter. Indeed, when a false news broadcast by a Greek local radio resulted in an attack of fanatic Greek groups against the minority on 29 January 1990, the worst fights took place in Kalkanca, the Gypsy quarter of Komotini (Turkish name: Gümülcüne).

**3. Self-Identification :** To call a Gypsy "Gypsy" is taken as an insult in Western Thrace. What is more interesting is that Pomaks also take it as an insult when they are called "Pomak". Since the Ottoman times this people have always considered Muslim consciousness and Turkish consciousness identical, they identified themselves as "Turkish," and wanted to be called as such.

There is more than one reason for this interesting situation :

1. In cases where a rigid and repressive ideology is unable to satisfy the basic needs of people, the continual ideological bombardment may result in strong reaction. This reaction may vary from ideological apathy to active rejection of the ideas that the ideology intends to inject. It may also hasten the drive for opposite ideologies. This is the situation experienced in Turkey by Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin.

This mechanism of "the negative function of ideology" is also the case for Pomaks (and also Gypsies) in Western Thrace. These people live in conditions of poverty in mountainous regions and the Greek State discriminates against them<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> To illustrate some aspects of this discrimination, two Greek laws may be brought to attention. Firstly, as a result of the application of the Greek law numbered 1366/1938 (this law was condemned by the European Community Court of Justice on 30 May 1989, case no.309/87), members of the Muslim minority in Greece cannot acquire immovable property in Western Thrace. A surprisingly low number of Greeks, except those living in Western Thrace, are aware of this situation. Secondly, Art. 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law (no.3370/1938) stipulates that "When a person of non-Greek ethnic origin" goes abroad "without the intention of returning, this person may be removed from Greek citizenship" by administrative decree, as a result of which thousands of Western Thracians have lost their citizenship. The US State Department, on its 1990 Human Rights Report-Greece has had this to say about Art.19 (In Greece)

In such conditions, the Greek State propagandizes that Pomaks are "forcefully converted grandsons of Alexander the Great"<sup>5</sup>, Greek academicians interpret the Pomak traditions of cutting the round bread into four pieces and of putting cross-shaped iron bars to windows as reminiscent of their Christian times. Furthermore, some scientists make tests to prove that Pomaks carry Greek and not Turkish blood<sup>6</sup>.

As a result of all this, Turkish consciousness among the Pomaks becomes stronger. Indeed, during my interviews with them in Western Thrace in 1985, Pomaks had this to say about being former Christians : "If it's the Ottomans who forcefully converted us to Islam, may them rest in holy peace (in Turkish : *Nur içinde yatsınlar*); but otherwise if we became Muslims voluntarily, we are proud of ourselves! (in Turkish : *Aferin bize*)".

2. Unlike the Turks in Western Thrace, Pomaks and Gypsies do not have a kin-state who defends the internationally guaranteed rights of the Muslim minority and Turkey does it for all of them.

3. Numerically, Turks make up the main element of the minority and are much better off economically. They also have, as the ruling ethnic group in the Ottoman Empire, a more brilliant past in terms of language, culture and history. Therefore, the Turkish identity definitely represents an element of prestige, and even of upward mobility among the minority.

4. In such a setting, the Greek policy of identifying the minority as "Muslim", instead of "Turkish," results in abolishing any possible trace identity differences between Turks, Pomaks and Gypsies. From this point that appears to be the basic problem of Greek authorities, we can go back to our main subject matter :

The fundamental reason why Pomaks identify themselves as Turkish is the fact that this oppressed minority is Muslim while the oppressing majority is

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exile is unconstitutional and does not occur, except in the form of an administrative decree on the loss of citizenship by non-ethnic Greeks" (pp.18-20). For numerous other cases of Greek discriminatory policy, see *ibid.*, pp. 113-276.

<sup>5</sup> It seems that this theme of "Alexander the Great" has been abandoned by Greek official ideology since Macedonia became an independent state in 1991.

<sup>6</sup> See Dr. N.I. Xirotiri, Findings on the Classification of the Frequency of Blood Groups Among Pomaks, Ph.D. Thesis in Greek, Thessaloniki, 1971, in Pavlos Hidiroglou, *Hellenic Pomaks and their Relations with Turkey* (in Greek), 2nd ed., Athens, Hrodotos Publications, 1989, p. 15-16 (I am grateful to my ex-student Mr. Halim Çavusoglu for bringing those publications to my attention and translating the relevant sections for me).

Orthodox Christian. The other reasons are only secondary. As suggested at the beginning of this paper, the religion of the oppressed minority supports its "national" identity, and even becomes identified with the latter when the oppressing majority is of a different religion. Of course, this situation here is all the more accentuated by :

a) The historical hostility between the Turks and the Greeks. As Hercules Millas, a member of Istanbul Greek (*Rum*) minority now living in Athens and an important specialist on human problems in Turco-Greek relations reminds us in his book on the subject<sup>7</sup>, one must not forget that the Greeks won their national consciousness by fighting against the Turks in the 1820s and the Turks won theirs by fighting against the Greeks exactly a century after;

b) The fact that there is a class problem in Western Thrace. Economically, the minority members are incomparably weaker than the majority (Greeks).

In conclusion, because of the mentioned reasons the Turkish consciousness among the ethnically non-Turkish minority members in Western Thrace is perhaps much stronger than the same consciousness among ethnic Turks.

## **BULGARIA**

In Bulgaria (population: about 10 million), there is a significant Muslim minority. The Turks are about 800-900.000, the Pomaks about 300-400.000 and the Gypsies about the same figure.

Until recently, Turkish identity among this minority was not very strong. Perhaps the main reason behind this was the extreme difficulty to resist assimilation policies in a rigid communist regime. The Bulgarian regime first gradually decreased the Turkish courses, and then finally abolished them in 1971. This policy may have been welcome by some in the face of the fact that in Bulgarian schools the minority students have had to wrestle with Bulgarian and Russian in Cyrillic and with English, French and Turkish in Latin alphabet, also the Arabic if the student attended private religious classes as well. These students soon began answering their parents in Bulgarian. Some mixed marriages occurred. In the meanwhile, the regime identified the Turkish minority first as "Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin", then as "Bulgarian Turks," and finally as "Bulgarian Muslims" in the period 1982-84.

However, a policy that President Jivkov declared late 1984 ended this slow assimilation process. Jivkov, probably frightened by the high birth rate of the Turkish population, had started the unbelievable "name changing campaign" during which both the first and the last names of the minority were forcible

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<sup>7</sup> *Tencere Dibin Kara* (Nobody is sinless), Istanbul, Amaç Publishing House, 1989, p. 21.

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replaced by Bulgarian ones. This policy that only ended with the fall of Jivkov (and of the regime) in late 1989 forced the Turks to initiate organized resistance within the framework of "National Liberation Movement of Turks of Bulgaria" during the summer of 1985<sup>8</sup>. This organization started violent resistance, exploding bombs here and there. During mass demonstrations in May 1989, some Turks were shot dead by security forces (2 in Varna, 2 in Rasgrad, 5 in Sumnu). After 2500 minority intellectuals were expelled in June 1989, the government began sending convoys of people to Turkey.

How did this passive minority oppose such an unexpected resistance? First, the role of dialectics strikes one's attention. The minority, who had not reacted when he had to pay 20 levas (a very heavy fine) per Turkish word because he feared the regime before 1985, exploded when this policy of assimilation went so far as to change the names of people.

However, this explanation is insufficient. The underlining reason might be the fact that their names (Ali, Osman, Ömer, etc.) were at the same time Islamic names while the new names given to them were Orthodox Christian names. The fact that this crazy campaign went so far as to change the names on the tomb stones no doubt intensified the religious reaction. That is to say, when we speak of ethnic conflict in Bulgaria, what we witness is a religious conflict deep inside. This is also illustrated by the fact that, after the fall of Jivkov on 10 November 1989, everybody began sending their children to the Coranic courses and started ordering religious books from Turkey. The first publication to arrive from this country was the "Calendar of Prayer Times Abroad" published by the Turkish Directory of Religious Affairs.

Now let us consider the Pomaks in Bulgaria. The Turkish identity among them is much weaker when compared with the Pomaks in Greece. It is significant that being called "Pomak" is not an insult here. Some of the Pomaks in Bulgaria do not identify themselves as Turks. A great number of them can't tell who they are and some identify themselves as "Bulgarian Muslims".

One reason for this difference is probably the fact that Pomak language is a dialect of the Bulgarian. However, since Pomaks are devout Muslims, the fact that the Muslim religious institution in Bulgaria (*Basmüftülik*) lost most of

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<sup>8</sup> The Rights and Liberties Party that holds a key position in the Bulgarian Parliament because of the precarious numeric balance, is an extension of this organization. This party, far from being nationalistic, pursues a policy of large front and claims to represent not only Turks but all the minorities and even Bulgarians as well. Indeed, the party is represented by 24 deputies in the parliament, of which 3 are Pomaks and 4 Bulgarians. The leaders of the party that was founded on March 1990 gathered an extraordinary congress whereby they "eliminated nationalist elements who wanted to deploy Turkish flag".

its power over the Muslim community during the communist regime is also very important indeed.

The name changing campaign affected Pomaks also. It is even reported that the first reaction to the campaign came from the Pomak youth. In an interview, Mr. Kazim Memis, consultant to the Bulgarian Ministry of Education for Turkish courses, told me that the Pomaks struggled very much during the last two years for learning Turkish. They thought that two hours per week of Turkish was insufficient and protested against it. They asked for private Turkish courses and threatened the authorities of the Rights and Liberties Party, the "Party of the Turks" that holds to-date a key position in Parliament, saying: "If you don't solve this question, we will not vote for you!" A common saying among the Pomaks is: "Bulgarians took our language, but we didn't give our religion". I think this saying sums up the situation.

The *Basmüftülük* will probably get stronger under the new regime and gain more power over the minority. Furthermore, there are more than 300 real estates that will return to the Muslim religious foundations as a result of re-privatizations and this should make the *Basmüftülük* stronger. At the end of 1992, this religious institution didn't even have a vehicle of its own and the deputy *Basmüftü* told me : "If even we had one, we could not pay for the fuel".

In this process, not only official Islam, but also heterodox Islam might get stronger in the short run for the following reasons :

1. Communism as an ideology cohesion is dead, and the masses will go back to their previous ideology of cohesion that they had never forgotten anyway. This process of the "Revenge of the God" is already what all the Balkans experience today.

2. An upsurge of Orthodox religion among Bulgarians will hasten the same process among Bulgarian Muslims.

3. The development of capitalism will inevitably disturb the income distribution and will hit the lower middle class. The rising inflation will worsen the situation and push the impoverished masses towards the religion.

## **MACEDONIA**

The situation in Macedonia is completely different concerning the relationship between Turkish and Muslim identities.

The population of Macedonia is 2.240.000. According to 1991 official figures, 1.315.000 are Orthodox Macedonians, and the Muslims are composed of 430.000 Albanians, 98.000 Turks and 35.000 Gypsies five to ten thousand of which can speak Turkish and identify themselves as Turkish. However, the third largest Muslim minority is not the Gypsy community but the Torbesh population, a devout Muslim community registered as Macedonian because their mother tongue is the Macedonian.

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The estimated figure of the Torbesh population is between 35.000 and 100.000. According to one opinion, "Torbesh" is the name given to Macedonian Pomaks, according to another opinion it's the name given to the Slavic Muslims in Macedonia, and according to a third thesis the Torbesh are the descendants of Turks who came to the region before the Ottoman period. Before studying this little known people, I want first to discuss the relationship between national identities and Islam in Macedonia.

As will be seen from the population figures given above, the most important minority in this Balkan country are not the Turks as is the case in Greece and Bulgaria, but the Albanians. This people who boycotted the population census in 1991 and who claim to be about 700.000 held in Macedonia a position similar to the Turks in Bulgaria and especially in Greece : They are identified with Islam. Indeed, Turks live under the shadow of Albanians who proclaimed in the last election campaign that Turks were the common enemy of both Albanians and Macedonians. Turks are subject to assimilation by the Albanians and this threat is particularly valid for those who intermarry with the Albanians.

"I can kill ten Turks for one Macedonian, because it is the Ottomans who left us underdeveloped!" What is the idea behind this Albanian saying quoted by the Macedonian Turks from the high school memories of the 1960s?

According to Macedonian Turks, this saying reveals the desire to completely eliminate the Ottoman identity in order to develop the Albanian identity among the Albanians. This explanation seems to be the correct one, because in this country Muslim and Ottoman identities are identical among the middle aged Albanians, at least. For instance, many Albanians still use the following phrase to take an oath : "I swear by the faith of my Turkish religion..."

Macedonian Turks, who have always experienced a lively national culture and always maintained a close cultural relationship with Turkey, are highly aware of this situation, as witnessed in an article by Mr. Sabit Yusuf published immediately before the census of 1991 : "We are Turkish, we are Muslim. All is well. However, in official occasions like this, one should not mix religious matters to our national identity. Because, our national identity is above everything. Individuals from other peoples say : 'Well, I am a Muslim but first of all my identity is this or that'. I think we should defend the same position. (...) One thing is obvious. Every man determines his own fate. Nothing can change this, neither the religious relations, nor the marriage relations"<sup>9</sup>.

Albanians also dominate the Macedonian Islamic Union, the religious organization of Macedonian Muslims. The Assembly of the organization

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<sup>9</sup> *Birlik* (newspaper in Turkish published three times a week in Skopje), 23 March 1991.

comprises 26 Albanians, 4 Turks, 3 Torbesh and 1 Gypsy. The *Meshihat*, the executive body of the organization is composed of 12 Albanians, 2 Torbesh, and 1 Turk.

Before I conclude the discussion regarding the relationship between Albanian consciousness and Islam and go onto the case of the Torbesh, I should also note that Orthodox Albanians in former Yugoslavia are assimilated by the Macedonians, Catholic Albanians by the Croats and that only Muslim Albanians are nationalists.

The Torbesh are devout Muslims distinguished by their remarkable adaptation capability, just like the Pomaks in Greece and Bulgaria. However, this is not a "capability of being assimilated" by **anyone**. At present time, the Macedonian state does its best to prevent them from joining the ranks of the Albanians or the Turks. For instance, in the post-communist era where thousands of workers are being dismissed because of the economic crisis, the Macedonian authorities require from the Torbesh who re-apply for employment a signed document stating that their identity is Muslim and nothing else. Moreover, the state has established an organization under the name of "The Culture and Science Center of Macedonian Muslims". The motto of the Center is reminiscent of the Greek policy concerning the Pomaks: "Torbesh are local people, i.e., Macedonians; but the Ottomans converted them forcefully". The Center has only 50 members. Its chairman, Mr. Niyazi Limanovski cannot go out without police protection since the Torbesh beat him once for being a traitor.

Therefore, one should interpret this "capability of being assimilated" as a propensity to be assimilated by the largest Muslim community. It is claimed that the Torbesh identified themselves without exception as Turkish until the time the Ottomans left the region as a result of the First Balkan War in 1912. Some of this people now identify themselves as Muslims only, while some describe themselves more and more as Albanians, and some say they are Turks.

I interviewed some important members of this last group in Kitchevo (Turkish name : Kircaova). It is noteworthy that although they cannot speak Turkish, they claim that their ancestors came from Konya before the Ottoman period. Their mother tongue is Macedonian. I asked them why they cannot speak Turkish if they are Turks. They replied : "Our schools were closed down after the Ottomans withdrew, and 600 of us who resisted this policy were killed. Therefore, we began to speak Macedonian to avoid oppression and to find employment."

However, this people are struggling hard to learn Turkish. Through the Kitchevo branch of the Turkish Democratic Party (TDP), the political organization of the Turks in Macedonia<sup>10</sup>, they demanded that the education

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<sup>10</sup> TDP was formed in 1990 and found ready support among the Torbesh. At the first gathering in Kitchevo it is reported that the congress hall that seats 600 was full. The

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language of their children be Turkish instead of Macedonian. The authorities suggested three hours a week of elective Turkish course and reportedly asked them why they want the courses to be in Turkish since they cannot speak that language. The Torbesh replied : "The children of the Macedonians who emigrated to Australia cannot speak Macedonian either, but nevertheless they go to a Macedonian school!"

The Torbesh that I interviewed told me that if the authorities don't open Turkish classes they will start a hunger strike. After my return to Turkey, they actually did start one. I saw a petition form signed by 262 parents:

"I, undersigned, who live at (the address), voluntarily declare that I demand my child (the name) to learn Turkish together with classes in Macedonian."

I asked them the following question : "If you had the choice, which would you prefer to get from Turkey, an imam who would teach you the religion or a teacher to teach you Turkish?". They said they would want both. Upon my insistence, they said their first preference would be a teacher : "Our children should be educated. There are lots of religious books, we can learn it by ourselves but we cannot learn Turkish by ourselves."

### **KOSOVO**

There are only 12.000 Turks in Kosovo while 90% of the population are Albanian. The reciprocal position of the Turks and the Albanians vis-à-vis the Islam in Macedonia is even more accentuated here :

1. The Albanian manipulation of Islam to assimilate the Turks naturally has a much bigger dimension in Kosovo.

The Family Name Law of 1946 is a turning point in this regard. At this period, annexation of Albania to Yugoslavia was still on the agenda, so the state authorities considered Turks as Albanians. National identity was not much developed among Turks yet. Albanians were in control of the situation in the area. In such an atmosphere, the Turkish family names that took a Serbian suffix before (-ievitch), begun to take an Albanian suffix (-i) after the promulgation of the law.

In ex-Yugoslavia, the Turkish identity was recognized after the possibility of annexation of Albania vanished. However, as the autonomy of Kosovo increased after 1974, the position of the Albanians became stronger and

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opening speech by Mr. Avni Engüllü, then chairman of the party, was translated into Macedonian so that the Torbesh could understand. This translation was explained as "a sign of respect for any Macedonians who might happen to be present at the congress", as if the Torbesh could understand Turkish.

"soft" assimilation of the Turks by the Albanians gained momentum. The Albanians used the present situation to suggest that the Turks should side with the Albanians : "You should send your child to an Albanian school; there is no university in Turkish but in Albanian there is. He can find employment more easily." An Islamic discourse was profusely used to create a "We" image : "We are all Muslim brothers, there is no need for separatism, for Turkish language", "When we are dead, the imam will bury us, and the infidel will be buried by the priest", or "The infidel will cut up you and me with the same knife". On the other hand, the Albanians were careful to identify the "They" image not with the "Serb" but with the "Infidel". Yet, at the time they said all this, i.e., before 1989, Albanians were anything but devout Muslims.

2. Not only the dimension of the assimilation increased but its very nature also tended to change. Together with the rise of the Albanian consciousness, violent actions replaced the soft assimilation.

Firstly, the use of violence began in the field of education. When Albanians boycotted the schools and that the Turkish Democratic Union (TDU), the political organization of the Turks in Kosovo, refused to cooperate, the Turkish students were beaten by their Albanian friends, as witnessed on Seventeen November and Ortakol schools in Prizren on 9 September 1991. When these students began to carry their books in plastic bags so that they could pretend not going to school, Albanian students started calling them "Milosh", a nickname for Milosevitch, the Serbian leader. A leader of the Turks in Kosovo, Mr. Cemal Krüezi<sup>11</sup>, told me that when he was a TDU candidate for the parliament, the parents of his daughter's school friends said to their children: "Don't play with Bahriye, her father became an infidel!" Again, the same theme : Islam.

Secondly, Albanians boycotted the 1991 census and used force against those who didn't. Some twenty Turkish census officials were intimidated and quit their jobs. TDU tried hard to find new ones.

The Albanianized Turks are generally people who "have something to lose" like doctors, lawyers and civil servants. It is reported that they don't send their children to Turkish classes, that they speak Albanian at home and prefer to lose their Turkish identity in order not to loose their jobs. Particularly, those are the Turks having marriage relationship with the Albanians.

As for the Torbesh in Kosovo, they are clearly far from considering themselves as Turks. They register "Muslim" in population census and they feel

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<sup>11</sup> This family name which doesn't sound a bit Turkish is given by the Albanians. This person introduces himself as Krüezi-Tunaligil; this last name being a typical Turkish last name.

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close to the Bosnians. One could well expect that in the near future they will increasingly identify themselves as Albanians.

### **CONCLUSION**

1. As I already pointed out, the national identity among the Turkish minorities in the Balkans finds its greatest support in Islam, as illustrated by this Macedonian proverb : "The last one to emigrate is the Imam." This is so because the religion of the majority is different. Of course, in this peninsula that underwent the influence of the Ottoman *Millet* system the national identities of the majorities are supported by their religious identity; however, because of the presence of **oppression**, the main factor in the definition of the concept "minority", this situation is especially true for the Balkan minorities.

In Greece and Bulgaria where the Turks are the main ethnic element of the Muslim minority, they use Islam to naturally assimilate and Turkify the other Muslims.

2. In Macedonia and especially Kosovo where the Turks are not the largest Muslim minority, Islam works for the dominant minority, Albanians this time. In these two cases, Albanians manipulate Islam and sometimes use force to assimilate the Turks and the Torbesh.