

Emigration From Bulgaria To Turkey (1983-1989)

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Introduction

Before falling of communist regimes and appearance of the new democracies in the former communist bloc , important effects of Bulgarian Communist Party were seen in the Bulgaria. Following the Bulgarian Government`s Assimilation Policies, Turkish Minorities were subjected to massive emigration. This study examines assimilation campaign of Bulgarian Government. How the totalitarian regime violate human rights of ethnic Turks in the Bulgaria during the 1980`s?. In this context, variant of the historic reasons and political incidents of ethnic Turks migrating from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989 is explained.

Since 1878, a mass of Turks have emigrated from Bulgaria to Turkey. The biggest wave of Turkish Emigration occured in 29 May 1989. With the result of Zhivkov¹ Regime`s Assimilation campaign, Turkish-Islamic Minorities was exposed to forced migration. From June to August, 369.839 Turks² were sent to Turkey who was deprived of all own property and moral presence.

Writings of ambassadors, professors, academicians state that the ethnic Turks were subjected to assimilation policies which Turks` language, customs and religion is wanted to change. The existence of Turkish minorities in Bulgaria was based on the loss of Balkans by the Ottoman Empire. Beginning from this date and through the 1980`s, migrating movements uninterruptedly continued. The last effort about

¹ Ömer E. Lütem , *Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri 1983-1989*, cilt 1, 1983-1985 (Ankara: ASAM, 2000), 28.

² Zeynep Zafer , "Bulgarian Turks` Resistance Against 1984-1989 Melting Pot Policy", *Gazi Akademik Bakış dergisi*, Summer 2010, 42, www.ataum.gazi.edu.tr/.../bulgaristan-turklerinin-1984-1989-eritme-politikasina-karsi-direnisi-1278449659.pdf (accessed January 1, 2011).

decreasing Turkish Population in the Bulgaria was put into practise by the Bulgarian Government. When 1982, the People's Republic of Bulgaria had a total population of 8,917,457 and Ethnic Turks constituted the most numerous minority by numbering 900,000, or roughly 10% of the whole population in the country.³ These data was important reason behind the assimilation campaign.

In the light of Amnesty International Report, Bulgarian authorities have been responsible for major human right abuses . “Under the international law the Turks of Bulgaria have a minority status.”⁴World reacted for Bulgaria while continuing policy of assimilation. Condemnation in international arena,some enforcements of Turkey and public demonstrations in Bulgaria prompted Bulgarian government to try to solve its “Turkish Problem”.⁵At last (29 May 1989), Todor Zhivkov announced that the ethnic Turks were free to leave from Bulgaria .⁶

Historical Background of Turkish Minorities in Bulgaria

Historical backgrounds have effect on states.This affection is so powerful in Bulgaria which make feel Bulgarian Nationalism in every sphere of life. Therefore,this study will briefly examine the history of Bulgaria .

Bulgarian is consisted of various Turk Tribes who were seen in North of Black Sea Region nearly at V.centuries. Some of these Tribes migrated from Black Sea to today`s lands of Bulgaria.At that time,there were Southern Slav.Contrast to the Slav people, Bulgarian have a low population and then they adopted Christianity. Today`s Bulgarian origins are based on after the adopting of Christianity.⁷ At 1018 Kingdom of Bulgarian was annihilated by Byzantium. After,They established again kingdom

³ Bozhidar Zahariev ,*The Treatment of Ethnic Turks by the Bulgarian Communist Party and Their Status Quo*(New York.:Ithaca College Catalogs,2004.),11[data base online] quoted in Amnesty International. “*Bulgaria: Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks: Human Rights Abuses During the Forced Assimilation of the Ethnic Turkish Minority*”(New York: Amnesty International USA. April, 1986.)

⁴ Bilal N. Şimşir ,*The Turks of Bulgaria in International Fora Documents*,vol. 2,1986(Ankara:Atatürk Supreme Council for Culture,Language and History Publications of Turkish Historical Society,1990),1.

⁵ R.J. Crampton,*A Concise History of Bulgaria*,(Great Britian:Cambridge University Press,1997),215.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ömer E. Lütem ,*Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri 1983-1989,1983-1985*,(Ankara:ASAM,2000),14.

at 1185. When coming at 1393, Kingdom of Bulgarian was abolished by Ottomans. Bulgarians lived from 1878 under the control of Ottoman Empire.

Widespread settlement of Turks from Asia Minor and Anatolia to Balkans dates to the middle of the fourteenth century. Such activity continued throughout the Ottoman period, a demographic balance between Christians and Muslims was achieved within this period and region. This demographic equilibrium started to change during and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.⁸

With the proclamation of Bulgaria independences, Turkish Emigrations started which were encompassed since after the collapse of Ottoman Rule on the Balkans in 1878. This situation led to decreasing of population of Turks in Bulgaria and also Balkan wars led it. After that, another decreasing of Turkish Minorities was occurred with First World War. Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey concluded an agreement about compulsory exchange of population. Moreover, arriving at period of Second World War, bilateral agreements between Turkey and Bulgaria can be provided emigrations of Turkish Minorities until the 1978.

As a result of these migrations the percentage of Turks in Bulgaria was reduced from more than one-third of the population immediately after the Russo-Turkish War to less than 15 percent in 1900. It fell under 10 percent in 1934 and continued to fall fractionally during the subsequent decades but started to climb again during late 1960s and 1970s. According to the results of the 1992 census, 822,253 Bulgarian citizens identified their ethnic affiliation as Turks.⁹

After the some chronological examinations and numerical knowledge of emigrations, status of Turkish Minorities in Bulgaria is more important composition in historical backgrounds. According to regional distribution of population as majority of Turk populations lived in villages rather than urban population was consisted of Bulgarians who lived in towns. Another point, fertility rate of Turks is higher than

⁸ Ali Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Book Series, ed. Saleha S. Mahmood, no. 6 (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81

Bulgarian. Also population of Turks increased in 1960-1970. These factors lead to dominant character of assimilation campaigns and waves of forced migration. The first one of forced migration occurred in 1950, and last but not least one is in 1989s

Assimilation Campaign: Assimilation of Bulgaria`s Ethnic Turks

Bulgarians felt need to create an “absolute ethnic-national homogeneity”¹⁰. Existence of ethnic and religious mosaic (includes Muslims, Christians-Orthodox, Turks, Gypsies, Pomaks, Tatars and so on) in the Bulgaria made difficult to achieving of homogeneity. Therefore, Bulgarian government`s initiated assimilation policies towards the minorities beginning from 1950s. With installing socialist regime in Bulgaria, idea of ethnic unification was coming important role for their purpose. The word assimilation was never used. They used instead of integration of the Bulgarian Turks and others with Bulgarian Culture. These ideas was shaped by a small group of Politburo members that including Zhivkov, felt that stronger measures were needed to assimilate the Turks into mainstream Bulgarian Culture, including replacement of Turkish names with Bulgarian ones.¹¹ That is explaining how Turkish minorities forced to assimilate starting from 1984. Zhivkov was a Communist Party leader who was seen creator of new Bulgarian nation.¹²

Assimilation Policy of the Communist Party in 1980s is a major focus of this study that explain why and how Turkish population in the Bulgaria are forced to migration. Assimilation campaign was “well-planned campaign”¹³. This campaign was creation and the exaggeration of an ethnic problem that could keep the focus away from the real problems.¹⁴

¹⁰ *The Turks of Bulgaria: The history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H.Karpat, *Introduction: Bulgaria`s Methods of Nation Building and the Turkish Minority*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), 2.

¹¹ Eminov, p.85

¹² Eminov, P.86

¹³ *The Turks of Bulgaria: The history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H.Karpat, *Introduction: Bulgaria`s Methods of Nation Building and the Turkish Minority*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), 1.

¹⁴ Bozhidar Zahariev, *The Treatment of Ethnic Turks by the Bulgarian Communist Party and Their Status Quo* (New York: Ithaca College Catalogs, 2004.), 11.

The idea of assimilation of minorities was developing step by step. In December 1984 Turks were told to replace their Turkish-Muslim names with new Bulgarian names by the Bulgarian Governments. The change of names was followed by new prohibitions like outlawing of circumcision, prohibition of Turkish language and so on.

The assimilation process was confronted with resistance of Turkish population. As a result of resistance, hundreds of Turkish Muslims were killed, thousands were arrested and sent to hard labor camps, and scores were banished to different parts of Bulgaria, far away from their home communities.¹⁵

The Turkish and the West European press condemned the assimilation of Turkish minority. While Turkish government have been seeking for solution, International organizations have continued their disapproval until the 1989.

In this context, assimilation campaign is expressed two subtitle for easy understanding of process. These are underlying reasons of assimilation campaign and assimilation campaign from 1985 until the 1989.

1. Underlying Reasons of Assimilation Campaign :

This part was defined “ reasons for the ‘Bulgarization’ of the Turks” in article of Eminov.¹⁶ He also referred to idea of “ unified Bulgarian nation ”¹⁷ which came from Bulgarian Communist Party. These discourses was reached in 1985 in the categorical statement : “There are no Turks in Bulgaria”¹⁸. In this context the reasons behind assimilation campaign is explainable. Why did they change names? Why did they start “Bulgarization”? There are several answer and reasons but most plausible reasons have been mentioned in this study.

For Eminov, There were three reasons which were most general. First one was about demographic growth. Demographers had projected that by the 1990s the Bulgarian

¹⁵ *The Turks of Bulgaria: The history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H. Karpat, Ali Eminov: *There are No Turks in Bulgaria*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), 203

¹⁶ *The Turks of Bulgaria: The history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H. Karpat, Ali Eminov: *There are No Turks in Bulgaria*, (İstanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), 216.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 217.

population would experience a zero or negative population growth. Turks have registered much higher rates than the ethnic Bulgarian population. Turkish citizens of Bulgaria are in position to supply the future labor needs of Bulgaria. Moreover, A substantial rise in the number of Turks in Bulgaria could lead to demands for some sort of autonomy. On the other hand, Turkey would be likely to ask for a “comprehensive emigration agreement”.¹⁹ As a result of it, Bulgaria might lose close to one million people²⁰ unless Turks are quickly assimilated. Second reason was explained by Eminov that is:

The census planned for December 1985 may have been another factor in decision of the Bulgarian authorities to complete the Bulgarization of Turks during the winter of 1984-85. Yugoslav commentators looking back at what happened in the 1965 census, when most Macedonians were counted as Bulgarians and the teaching of the Macedonian language was abolished by decree, have called this procedure “administrative genocide”.²¹

The last reason is growing influence of Turkish/Muslim propaganda among the Turks in Bulgaria during recent years. Turks in Bulgaria listen to the Turkish language broadcasts. Bulgarian authorities started to think religious interaction between the Fundamentalist programs and Turks in Bulgaria. The forced Bulgarization of Turks is supposed to undercut the influence of Islam.²²

Crampton added different and important reason Eminov's reasons. According to him, “regime believed that beating the nationalist drum would increase popular support or at least mask some of economic difficulties which were being encountered.”²³

¹⁹ *The Turks of Bulgaria: The history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H. Karpat, Ali Eminov: *There are No Turks in Bulgaria*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), 216.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Eminov, p.95.

²² Eminov, p.96.

²³ Crampton, p.210.

2. Assimilation Campaign From 1985 Until The 1989:

The Assimilation campaign was based on the destruction of the customs and symbols of Turkish population. Bulgarian authorities attacked the life, heritage, education and culture of Turks. In 1985, The Bulgarian Authorities forced to change Turkish names into the Bulgarian names. They started phase of “rebirth process (which means Bulgarization of the Turks)”²⁴ with changing of names. They claimed that everybody had changed their names voluntarily. But as a part of this “rebirth process”, this was not only changing names. Speaking Turkish, Any sort of religious practice, Ancient folk costumes were forbidden. Turkish people who resisted were arrested, punished, imprisoned, even killed.²⁵

The assimilation campaign was initially started changing names of ethnic Turks. This campaign had been affected in Turkish town and villages in Bulgaria and caused internal opposition of Turkish population. Authorities tried to different way in order to hastening of Zhivkov`s rebirth project. For example, people had been imprisoned who refused to cooperate. On the other hand, people changed names voluntarily who received salaries with additional 50 leva.²⁶

During the replacement of the names, new identity was wanted to consolidate. Turkish town and villages were surrounded by army units. They checked pasaports in the street or on a bus. If the name in the pasaport was still Turkish, a pasaport would be stamped not valid. As many women was the subjected to violence, men was arrested following the pasaport checking. Finally, they might be sentenced for “violation of the pasaport regulations.”²⁷ And also, homes in the Turkish villages and the town were searched in order to eradicate all signs of Turkish identity.

²⁴ Ömer Turan , *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998), 300.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 301.

²⁶ Bozhidar Zahariev , *The Treatment of Ethnic Turks by the Bulgarian Communist Party and Their Status Quo* (New York: Ithaca College Catalogs, 2004.), 17, www.ithaca.edu/hs/depts/.../turkishminorities (accessed January 1, 2011).

²⁷ Ali Eminov , *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Book Series, ed. Saleha S. Mahmood, no. 6 (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 89.

Along the Bulgarization, Bulgarian attacked every sphere of life. They especially forbidden religious practices of Turks. In this context, circumssions of young Muslim boys was banned, mosques were closed and destroyed, celebrating of religious holiday was not allowed. According the Communist Regime in the Bulgarian ,with these prohibitions,threat of Islam hindered and the open the way of socialism. Therefore, they started to unreasonable operations. For example, they collected skeletons and they declared that their features proved that the Turkish villagers were originally Bulgarian.²⁸They even changed Turkish names` of dead people in the tombstones.

Another prohibition within the campaign was imposed on Turkish language. Speaking Turkish was forbidden despite there were any law about using of Turkish. Bulgarian army units punished people who were speaking Turkish in publics and also at homes. Every scope of the language was attacked which is included in books,newspaper,broadcasts and so on. "Radios have been confiscated so that Turks cannot listen to news programs from Radio Istanbul, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and similiar independent sources."²⁹.Furthermore, they prevented phone calls between Turks in Bulgaria and their relatives in Turkey. Turks were also forced to sign documents declaring that they had no relatives in Turkey and that they did not want to emigrate to Turkey.

One of the cornerstone of assimilation is education.It was utilized to assimilate young Turkish people by Bulgaria.In this context, Turkish childern in kindergartens and schools are required to speak only Bulgarian.³⁰ On the other side, young Turkish people was subjected to oppression and torture who resisted assimilation policies. Some of them had been imprisoned asylum (mental hospital), besides they were subjected torture in there. Other groups were intellectuals who were exposed to oppression.The statement of Balkan Türkleri Dayanışma Derneği, initially

²⁸ Ayşegül İnginar ,*Bulgaristan `dan Türk göçü(1985-1989)*,(Ph. D. Diss.,University of Marmara,2010),42.

²⁹ *The Turks of Bulgaria:The history,culture and political fate of minority*,ed. K.H.Karpat, *Ali Eminov: There are No Turks in Bulgaria*, ,(İstanbul:The Isis Press,1990),203.

³⁰ İnginar,p.45.

intellectuals got fired than did not receive any news about them.³¹ They were sent unknown place.

In public life, Turks encountered harmful implementation. Examples facilitated to understand dimension of campaign. For instances, Restaurant managers did not serve Turkish and Muslim women who wear traditional dress. Also, If woman or her children needed medical help, they were refused treatment to the hospital. Furthermore, there were reports of rapes, stripping of Turkish women in public. They were also subjected to public beatings.³²

Bulgarian Government tried to various method for discourage of resistances. Therefore, Labour Camps were created. Belene was well-known in these camps. Bulgarian authorities sent to Turks to Belene who resisted campaign. There were close to five thousand people and also ten thousand people were in other labour camps.³³ Ismail Hyuseinov was one of the people who was sent to Belene. He refused to accept his new name and started discussing publicly his reasons for his decision. And then, Bulgaria exiled him on there. After releasing of him, Ismail was sent to the village and had to report to the police twice daily.³⁴ Moreover, Bulgaria prolonged their policies with internal exile of families.

The names-changing campaign in Bulgaria increased the immigration of ethnic Turks to Turkey. Important information about campaign was maintained by immigrants. Halil Ahmedov Ibishev³⁵ and Naim Süleymanov³⁶ are well-known ethnic Turks who left Bulgaria during the campaign. Ramadan Hasan is another ethnic Turk who came to Turkey escape from Bulgaria. His friends was arrested as trying to escape with him. Ramadan declared his names was changing as Rumen Asenevasenev. He

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eminov, p.90.

³³ İnginar, p.44.

³⁴ Zahariev, p.26.

³⁵ İnginar, p.20.

³⁶ Zahariev, p.21.

told that many people was killed in the Turkish villages`. He also said that “ We have one chance that is choosing of new names.”³⁷

According to western estimates over one thousand people who resisted changing names have been killed.³⁸ While some of Turks executed by shooting, some of them was subjected to attacks of government troops riding in tanks. Therefore, the fate of this ethnic Turkish minority in Bulgaria was human rights problems.

Conclusion

At the begining of winter 1985, the latest phase of Bulgarization of Turkish minorities is denoted assimilation policy of Bulgaria to world public opinions who have turned a blind eye. The assimilation campaign were based on systematic extermination of Turkish minority groups. In this context, The ethnic Turks were forced ro assume Bulgarian names and a sustained with eradication of their culture. Dramatic examples were seen in this term. One of a Turkish man was subjected to name-changing operations ten times in his 80 year life.³⁹

The question of Turks in Bulgaria is not only an internal affair of Bulgaria. In International area, these campaign were human right abuses on major scale. On the other side,Turkey has duties to intervene in subject.The Turkish Government addressed notes to the Bulgarian Government in order to demanded a solution for Turkish minority.Firstly, Bulgaria considered the question an internal affair. They declared that had no intention signing a comprehensive emigratin agreement. Turkish public opinion and international organizations continued to protest against assimilation operations. Finally, Zhivkov had promised all its citizens worldwide valid tourist passports and asked Turkey to open its borders.In summer of 1989, Turks were obliged to leave their house.

³⁷ Ayşegül İnginar ,*Bulgaristan `dan Türk göçü(1985-1989)*,(Ph. D. Diss.,University of Marmara,2010),39.

³⁸ *The Turks of Bulgaria:The history,culture and political fate of minority*,ed. K.H.Karpat, *Introduction:Bulgaria`s Methods of Nation Building and the Turkish Minority*, (İstanbul:The Isis Press,1990),1.

³⁹ Turan,p.310.

After the assimilation campaign and the mass exodus, Communist Regime of Zhivkov collapsed on November 1989.⁴⁰ These issues played an important role in this collapse. The new regime put an end to the assimilation process and released the Turks who were imprisoned.

Twenty-five years have passed since Ethnic Turks were forced to assume new identity by Bulgaria. Process of re-birth Project, above-mentioned cruel operations on Turkish minority was implemented. In this point, Associate Professor Hasine Şen⁴¹ ask that can existence of a traumatic experience forget ? Author of this study also ask if Turkish minority try to forget, can really forgive? If the Bulgarian authorities had spent their energy in establishing mutual contacts and trust, instead of exchanging the hostility between the two communities, much better and widely respected results might have been achieved.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hasine Şen ,*Çalıntı Gözler`i kimin gözleriyle seyretsem?*, (İstanbul:Radikal Gazetesi e-mektup,2006), http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=5620 (accessed January 1,2011)

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