

THE TURKS OF BULGARIA: THE 5TH COLUMN OF ANKARA

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The article is devoted to one of Bulgaria's national minorities, the Turks. A European analytical website characterizes the Turks of Bulgaria as «one of the comparatively successful minorities of Eastern Europe.» In the Armenian mass media one may come across reports about the activity of the Bulgarian Turks, especially in January-February 2006, when in Sofia the recognition of Armenian Genocide was the subject of Parliamentary discussions, later on put to the vote. The bill was rejected «thanks to the contribution» made by 34 deputies of Turkish origin. The Vice Speaker of the Parliament, who also leads Bulgaria's parliamentary delegation in PACE, is also an ethnic Turk by origin. The party established by the Bulgarian Turks has been in the Parliament since 1990 and for 8 years is included in the ruling coalition. All these facts are not only noteworthy by themselves, but also are actually based on the standpoint that socially and politically active Diaspora has been traditionally considered to be the «trump card» of the Armenian party in its game against Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In Armenia people got used to the «Armenian lobby» which in different countries or international organizations may further our interests, neutralize or to some extent hinder anti-Armenian initiatives. The Armenian lobby is against Azerbaijani oil or Turkish resources: such an attitude has already taken roots in Armenian political and social mentality, and created a sense of security. Bulgaria's example, as well as the activization of Turkish communities in other European countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany) reveals new realities: the advance of Turkish political figures and the making of the Turkish lobby. In European countries Azerbaijani communities are also organized at the same time. At the same time in European countries there is a growing internal resistance and a tendency of «countering» the advancement of Turkish politicians; however, these processes are much more passive in Bulgaria.

Rapid leap of the Bulgarian Turks from the status of an oppressed minority to a ruling force may be considered to be one of the most successful examples of

lobbing in the international political history and we believe the subject of a separate study.

On April 19, 1909 a treaty was signed in Istanbul between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria by which the Ottoman Empire recognized the independence of the Bulgarian kingdom and the latter guaranteed the observance of religious and civil rights of the Turks and other Muslims living in Bulgaria. Together with Bulgaria's independence, the local Turks lost their privileges granted under the Ottoman rule and turned into one of the minorities. The phenomenon that is the subject matter of this research dates back to the 1920s : the relations of the Bulgarian Turks with Turkish authorities, collaboration and propaganda, lobbyist work meeting the interests of Ankara. Already under the rule of Mustafa Kemal, when there was a confrontation between Kemalist and Islamic powers, the Turks of Bulgaria founded the organization «Turan» inspired by the new authorities of Ankara, which, being officially registered as a youth sports and culture union, was engaged in the propaganda of Kemalist ideology. At the same time the structure launched a newspaper of the same name, «Turan». The periodical called «Deliorman» was the conduit of Turkey's republican government, at the same time the more religious part of the Bulgarian Turks published the «Medeniet», carrying out counterpropaganda against Atatürk [1, p. 4].

At that time there was a widespread opinion in Bulgaria that «the Bulgarian Turks are an instrument in the hands of Ankara's authorities» [2]. Till 1923, the Bulgarian Turks lived the most liberal epoch and there were about 10 Turkish deputies in the Parliament, however, after the coup on June 9, 1923 the government of Prime Minister Aleksander Stambulski's was overthrown and under the new regime the number of Turkish deputies declined from 10 to 5, and later, to 4 [2].

The Soviet system was established in Bulgaria after the entrance of the Soviet army in 1944. The Bulgarian constitution adopted in 1947 stipulated protection of the minorities' rights. According to the «Dimitrov Constitution», the Turks and other minorities could organize teaching in their native language and develop their national culture [3, p.1]. For a certain period there were a few hundred Turkish schools, several gymnasiums, 3 newspapers, and a magazine; some Bulgarian newspapers had Turkish sections, and radio programs were organized. Consistent work carried out by the socialist regime to raise the population's literacy level resulted in considerable rise of Bulgarian Turks' educational level within a short period: if in 1939 only 15% of the Bulgarian Turks attended school, then in 1957 it was 97% [4]. It is noteworthy, that in the beginning of the century, in 1905, the level of literacy among the Bulgarian Turks did not exceed 4%. In terms of this indicator they were only ahead of the Gypsies. The most educated commu-

nity in Bulgaria, according to Bulgarian and Turkish sources, was the Armenian community, 54.3%. The corresponding indicator for the Jews was 53.6%, for the Greeks, 35.2%, and Bulgarians, 32.3% [5, p. 585].

As a result of land nationalization carried out by the Communist Regime in 1949, thousands of Turkish land owners repatriated to Turkey. At that period the Turks' emigration was also stimulated by atheism established in Bulgaria together with socialism and the restriction of religious rights of both Christians and Muslims [5, p. 3]¹. According to some sources, Bulgaria's Socialistic Regime encouraged the repatriation of Turks also because the Bulgarian Turks were to some extent carriers of communist ideas and Sofia (or more exactly Moscow) aspired to «export» the ideas of global revolution and socialism to Turkey in such a way. It was also Moscow's «revenge» for the Ankara-US alliance in the war in Korea [2].

The Turks who emigrated from Bulgaria mainly settled in the coastal regions of the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean , in Bursa, Istanbul, Eskisehir, Ankara, Kocaeli and Manisa [6]. At a special session held by the Bulgarian Communist Party it was decided to make the policy with regard to the Turks tougher [6, p.2]. In the 1960s Turkish schools were closed and almost all the Turkish newspapers and books were prohibited. The process of «Bulgarization» of the Bulgarian Turks was carried out. The matter is that the Bulgarian government considered them to be Bulgarians, who, once upon a time, were «turned into Turks» and changed their names under the Ottoman rule. It is noteworthy that the repatriated Turks from Bulgaria in their native country were called «Bulgarians» or «giaours» [7]. One publication in the «Cumhuriyet» raised the issue of the Bulgarian Turks' origin, not excluding the possibility of their Christian origin which caused the protests of the Turks who emigrated from Bulgaria [8, p. 5]. Other Turkish sources also affirm that the considerable part of the Turkish and Muslim population of Bulgaria were converted Christians. «As a result of social movements in Anatolia in the 16th century considerable groups of ethnic Turks were firmly established in Bulgaria and the whole Balkan Peninsula. Within the framework of the Ottoman state policy, many Anatolians settled Bulgaria,» state Bulgarian and Turkish researchers [2]. «As Bulgaria was the official outpost of the Ottoman Empire's capitals, first Edirne (Adrianapolis – H.N.) and then, beginning from 1453, Istanbul, much attention was granted to it. Strategic colonization of Central Asia and Anatolia carried out by Turks was accompanied by the islamization of the local Orthodox population which caused changes of demographic

¹ The Bulgarian sociologist Zhelyaskova cited the following data about the emigration of Turks from Bulgaria: in 1878-1912, 350 thousand, in 1913-34, 10-12 thousand, in 1940-1944, 15 thousand, in 1950-51, 154,397 thousand, in 1952-1988, 116,521.

structure in favor of Turks and Muslims, especially in cities,» an entry in the 6th volume of the encyclopedia «The Turks» published in Ankara [9, p. 584]. Perhaps this objective observation has an omission: Anatolian Turks are not indigenous population as well, but this is the issue of another discussion. In 1878 the sadrazam of the Ottoman Empire, the grand vizier Midhat Pasha wrote: «One million Muslims live among Bulgarians. ...These are the Bulgarians who adopted Islam at the period of conquest and the years to follow. They are the sons of the same country, and belong to the same race and have the same origin» [2].

The constitution adopted by the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov in 1971 was less tolerant to the Turkish minority than the previous one: beginning from 1971 the minorities' rights were legislatively restricted. Turks also suffered because at the given period Bulgaria was regarded as number three enemy in Turkey: the first two were Greece and the USSR. Turkey's Prime Minister of that period, Turgun Ozal said: «Ankara can do nothing to protect the Bulgarian Turks until Turkey and Bulgaria belong to hostile blocs» [10, p. 167].

In December 1984 and January 1985 hundreds of thousands of Turks were forced to change their names (following the above considerations, the Bulgarian Turks were considered to be descendants of Islamized Bulgarians.) The birth rate of the Bulgarian Turks horrified the authorities in Sofia. T. Zhivkov told the leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachov, that the number of Turks per year increased by 15-16 thousand and twenty years later they would suffer the same fate as Cyprus, that is to say, the division of the country into two under the pretext of protecting the minorities' rights. Bulgaria's government announced that it was interested in the emigration of up to 500 thousand Turks [11, pp. 1-21]. The researchers point out that at that period in Bulgaria the «Cyprus syndrome» was developed, which was aggravated as a result of rallies and hostile appeals made by the emigrated Bulgarian Turks. During these rallies the immigrated Bulgarian Turks cried out «eye for eye, tooth for tooth» or «Send the Army to Sofia!» [8]. As a rule, in Turkey such initiatives are taken at least under the state control or thanks to its direct initiative and internal Turkish disturbances in the years of the Cyprus crisis proved it once more.

In April 1986 a decision was made in Bulgaria prohibiting the usage of the Turkish language in public places. The ones violating that decision were fined. New restrictions were imposed on performing Islamic rites; circumcision was completely prohibited [12, pp. 59-90]. Some representatives of the Turkish intelligentsia agreed to cooperate with the Bulgarian authorities; the others initiated an underground movement which was to become the core political movement of the local Turks in Post-Communist Bulgaria [13].

1. The Turks of Bulgaria after the collapse of Communist Regime

The situation started to change in parallel with the collapse of the Communist Regime: the ideas of Moscow «perestroika» reached the states of the socialist bloc, shaking the foundations of the ruling Communist Regime. On February 23, 1988 an «Agreement on friendship and partnership» was signed by Foreign Ministers Mesut Yilmaz and Peter Mladenov. On June 3, 1989 Sofia opened its borders encouraging the emigration of Turks. On August 21 the frontier gates were closed before the Turks by ... Ankara, as in the given period, that is, 78 days, 311,862 ethnic Turks passed from Bulgaria to Turkey, or 4 thousand people per day. The Prime Minister T. Ozal pointed out that each year Ankara is ready to accept a maximum of 30 thousand citizens [6, 14, p. 567]. It is also probable that the mass «discharge» of Turks from Bulgaria was undesirable for the Turkish government as the latter could in due time play the role of «the fifth column» for Turkey, which has come true in practice. It is noteworthy that based on the same consideration, the same politician persuaded the Azerbaijani authorities to come to terms with Armenia and to stop the emigration of Azerbaijanis from Armenia caused by the Karabakh movement. The large number of Azerbaijanis in independent Armenia would guarantee a wider field of maneuver for Ankara. Today we see Turkey working with ethnic Turks inhabited in the north of Iraq the Turkmen, pursuing the aim of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs and «torpedoing» the establishment of Kurdistan. Let us note that about 100 thousand Bulgarian Turks who migrated to Turkey during the above mentioned 78 days returned to Bulgaria. In Turkey the immigrants were not met properly at the state level, there was a definite tension with regard to the migrants in the society. As a result, in 2001 about 746,000 Turks lived in Bulgaria, making up 9.4% of the country's population [8, p. 10]. They inhabit the southeast regions of Kircaali, Haskovo and in the south-western Blagoevgrad, as well as in the north-eastern regions of Razgrad, Silistra, Shumen, Targovishte, Ruse and Burgas.

In the late 1980s the active work carried out by Ankara with the Bulgarian Turks became more obvious. Ankara raises the questions of their rights in the UN, PACE, European Parliament and the organization of «Islamic Conference.» In August 1989 Ankara managed to «induce» its NATO allies (especially from the US) to make a political statement on the status of the Bulgarian Turks. This initiative was also furthered by the fact that it was advantageous for the North-Atlantic bloc to denounce still Socialist Bulgaria. «The attitude to the Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin is a horrific example of human rights violation. This problem remains in the center of attention of allies»,» said the statement published on behalf of the Secretary General of NATO Manfred Werner [15]. Only

Greece treated that document with some reservations supporting Bulgaria on this issue for decades. It was the question of rights of the representatives of a «hostile» country, and besides the North Atlantic bloc was not that consistent when the matter concerned the scandalous cases of violating the rights of minorities, including Greeks, in Turkey proper. One should only mention that in the 1950s about 200 thousand Greeks lived in Turkey, but at the moment there are only 3000-4000. It may be assumed that the «Cyprus syndrome» also played a certain role. «Greece has its reservations in connection with this announcement. Greece is uncompromising in the issues of preserving human rights and the main liberties, but at the same time it considers that they should be accepted worldwide,» the Greek delegates said in the text of the statement. On the same day the US Secretary of State also appeared with an announcement concerning the Bulgarian Turks. «Together with our NATO Partners the United States will go on pursuing a chance to express its concern in connection with the facts of violating human rights in Bulgaria concerning not only ethnic Turks but also to human rights advocates» [16]. On August 29 Washington also appeared with its peculiar demarche recalling its ambassador Saul Polanski.

On November 10, 1989 Bulgaria's Communist regime was overthrown. On December 29 a decision was made on the governmental level and later on, on March 1990 a law was ratified on allowing the Bulgarian Turks to «restore» their Turkish surnames. Until the first of March of the coming year for about 600 thousand applications were received on the above mentioned issue [17, c. 67-117]. In the same year the institution of the Spiritual leader of the Bulgarian Turks, the Mufti was founded. In 1991 the new Constitution was adopted granting the citizens of non-Bulgarian origin a wide range of rights, lifting the legislative ban of teaching Turkish. In January of the same year another law was adopted allowing the Turks to change their names or «strike out» their Slavonic endings like «ov», «ova», «ev», «eva» within three years.

Since 1992, the Turkish language teachers of Bulgaria have been trained in Turkey. At the initial stage only the textbooks published in Turkey were used for teaching Turkish, later on, in 1996, Bulgaria's Ministry of Education and Science began publishing the manuals of the Turkish language. Turkish schools are financed by the government of Bulgaria. A number of newspapers and magazines are published: the «Muslumanlar» («Muslims»), «Haq ve Ozgurluk» («Right and freedom»), «Guven» («Trust»), «Jir-Jir» («Cricket», a magazine for children), «Islam kulturu» («Islamic culture»), «Balon», «Filiz». In Turkey summer holidays for the Turkish children living in Bulgaria are organized. During the holidays the children are thought the Koran, Turkish literature, Turkish history and language [18].

There is Turkish radio broadcasting, and in October 2000 daily TV broadcasting was launched. There is also a trilingual website *www.bg-turk.com*. In parallel with the Turkish original, the issues of the newspaper «Zaman» are published in Bulgaria. In Sofia there is an Islamic Institute and in the cities of Rushe, Shumen and Mestanli there are Muslim religious schools. In 1989-2004 150 mosques were built in Bulgaria and the general number of mosques in Bulgaria reached 1150; old mosques are restored at the expense of the government. The Bulgarian Turks elect their spiritual leader themselves. At the moment their leader is Selim Mahmed [18; 14, p. 567].

Such a radical reconsideration of the stance by the Sofia authorities with regard to the Turkish community was also caused by dramatic improvement of Bulgarian-Turkish relations in the Post-Soviet period, Bulgaria's integration into NATO, Bulgaria's Eurointegration course and its obligations assumed before the EU in protecting the rights of minorities. The relations with Turkey become close both within the framework of bilateral political-economic ties and partnership in NATO. The former enemies, Sofia and Ankara, have now become partners. In 2004 the amount of Turkish investments into Bulgaria reached \$500 million and the construction of the factory producing glass tares by a Turkish company «Sisecam» was awarded the «Investment of the year» prize.

In June 2005 a new border check point was opened between the two states by the Prime Ministers Recep Erdogan and Simeon Saksoburggotski. «This check point will make it easier for the Bulgarian Turks to visit their relatives in Turkey,» said Erdogan [19]. The Prime Minister also announced that the new check point should become an example for the other countries of the region. This warm and friendly announcement is more noteworthy in terms of the closed Turkish-Armenian border.

«Bulgaria, aspiring to join the EU, must suffer certain «losses», continuing to improve the conditions of protecting the minorities' rights. Over the last years the conception of the «Bulgarian model» has become the indicator of expanding the rights of minorities,» Turkish researchers point out [14, p. 568].

Thus the «Golden Age» has started for the Turkish citizens of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Turks take part in the country's political life. Back in the end of 1984 an underground organization called «National Liberation Movement of the Turks in Bulgaria» was formed in Bulgaria which headed the Turkish community's anti-governmental movement. In 1985-86 the organization carried out terrorist acts and in the summer of 1986 captured a hotel in Sofia called «Zlatni Piasaci», took its guests hostages laying down political claims [20]. On January 4, 1990 the activists of the movement registered an organization with the legal name «Movement

for Rights and Freedom» (MRF) (in Bulgarian: *Движение за права и свободи*; in Turkish: *Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi*) in the Bulgarian city of Varna. At the moment of registration it had 33 members, at present, according to the organization's website, 68 thousand members plus 24 thousand in the organization's youth wing [21]. The organization was headed by the political prisoner of the Soviet period Ahmed Dogan. «This political event changed Bulgaria's political map and announced the Turkish community's impressive entrance into the domestic political life,» - writes the professor of Varna's Open University, Vladimir Chukhov, about MRF's political activity. On March 26-27, 1990 in Sofia the organization's constituent assembly was held [22, p.3].

Indeed, in a short period the organization became the main political support of the Bulgarian Turks. The MRF adopted centrist liberal orientation. According to Chukhov, three main reasons determine the choice of liberal ideology. In this way the MRF desires to enlarge its social base in order not to appear as a mere Turkish ethnic party and along with it also to have national ideology and importance. «Dogan pointed out that only the liberal concept could ensure the integration of national minorities and retain the balance between their ethnic and religious identity,» writes Chukhov. Bulgaria's course to Euro-Atlantic integration fitted into the liberal ideology, and Dogan's party was one of the most active adherents of it. «Dogan shares the opinion that the full membership in the EU and NATO may once and forever guarantee the rights and liberties of Bulgarian minorities,» mentions the professor. Here one can add another motive: moving towards NATO, Bulgaria moves towards Turkey which coincides with the interests of both the Bulgarian Turks and Ankara. In addition, the membership of the Bulgarian Turks in the European structures, together with guaranteed preservation of the rights of ethnic minorities, would allow to initiate lobbying of Turkish interests in the EU. We will still make sure of that after Bulgaria's membership to the EU on January 1, 2007. It goes without saying that the bills on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide introduced in the EU will face the resistance of the Bulgarian Turks. Three deputies out of the 18, representing Bulgaria in the EU since January 1, are MRF members: Filiz Husmanova, Cetin Kazak and Necmi Ali [23].

In May, the special election for the 18 seats assigned to Bulgaria by the EU will be held in Bulgaria and the indicators may change. Let us also mention that there are already 3 deputies of Turkish origin in the EU Parliament, 2 of whom represent Germany and the other one represents Holland. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning that it is expected that in 2007 the first Armenian deputy representing France's UDF Party, Aleksi Govjian, will join the EU Parliament.

The other reasons why preferring liberal ideology was preferred also attest

to Dogan's forethought and prudence. «Liberalism was the only ideological field not occupied by any other political subjects,» mentioned the Turkish politician. In fact, Dogan has found quite a convenient, note merely Turkish, dimension, which enabled him to appear on the nationwide level. «Liberalism» also grants the Turkish party a «European image.» The party founded by Dogan is a member of the International Liberal Party and All-European Liberal-Democratic, Reformist Party.

At the elections held in the year of the party's foundation, in 1990, the MRF won 23 seats in the Bulgarian Parliament out of 400 seats. The party was presented in all the parliaments of Post-Soviet Bulgaria winning 24 seats (according to the new constitution, the number of Parliamentary seats was reduced to 240) at the extraordinary elections held in 1991, 15 seats in 1994, and 19 seats in 1997.

As a result of elections held in 2001 and 2005, the MRF was included in the coalition government. At the parliamentary elections held on June 17, 2001, the MRF got 21 deputy mandates by 7.45% of votes. In the parliament, there was also an independent Turkish deputy, Osman Ahmed Oktay. The Turkish party formed a coalition government in a non-Turkic country. Mehmet Dikmen, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment represented the MRF. Filiz Huseynova, presently working at the European Parliament, held the post of the State Minister for minorities. Earlier she was the Deputy Mayor on humanitarian issues in her native town Silistra; she was appointed Minister on July 17, 2003.

The MRF's Parliament faction was headed by Ahmed Dogan. Lutfi Yunal became the Vice Speaker of the Parliament as well as the Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Policy, Defense and Security Committee [24]. Lutfi Yunal also headed the Bulgarian delegation in PACE (!). One of the delegation members in PACE was Lutfi Mestan who at the same time represented Bulgaria in the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE.

Cevdet Chakarov headed the Committee for environment and water, Hasan Ademov was the Chairman of Labor and Social Policy Committee, Kasim Dal was the Deputy Chairman of the Internal Security and Public Order Committee, the nonpartisan Osman Oktay was also a Committee member, Kemal Adil was the Deputy Chairman of the European Integration Committee, Nesrin Uzun was the Secretary of the Parliament. The Bulgarian Turks were also included into the committees for energy, culture, information and struggle against corruption.

The junior members of the coalition government worked quite actively. In Bulgaria an opinion was even voiced that «the coalition's ruling wing shouldn't have given so much power to its Turkish partners.» At the end of 2003 the Turks di-

rectly confronted their partner in coalition, the «National Movement Simeon II.» Bulgaria's Minister of Finance, Milen Bolchev, who was the member of that party, announced about the program of cutting down the state subsidy for tobacco-cultivation and farming by 15 million Bulgarian leva (about \$7 million) for the year 2005. As most of the Bulgarian Turks are involved in agriculture, the Turkish wing announced that it wouldn't support the project of the coming year and the Financial Committee Chairman, Ali Osman Imanov, blamed the leading wing of the coalition government for not discussing the issue with the coalition's junior members. At the end of the year the issue of the Bulgarian state budget was frozen. After the intervention of the Prime Minister Saksoburgodski the problem was settled at the expense of concessions made by the coalitions' leading wing [25].

Another time the head of the party, Dogan announced that he would return his state decoration, the order of «Stara Planinae,» first grade, if the authorities awarded it to Vasil Mrichkov who was the Prosecutor General in Socialist Bulgaria. According to the Turkish politician, in 1986-90 Mrichkov imprisoned hundreds of ethnic Turks and «the victim and the butcher shall not get the same decoration» [26].

On June 25, 2005 the parliamentary elections were held. The party's success was very impressive: it won 14.07% of the votes, 34 MRF members entered the parliament; two of them were Bulgarians. A new coalition was formed which at this time consisted of three parties: the Bulgarian Socialist Party, «National Movement of Simeon II» and the MRF.

Aliosman Imanov retained his post in the Budget and Finance and Education and Science Committees of the Parliament. Lutfi Mestan headed the Education and Science Committee and the member of Civil Society Affairs and Media Committee; Hasan Ademov headed the Labor and Social Policy Committee and was the member of Health Care Committee, Ahmed Yusein was the Deputy Chairman of Human Rights and Religious Affairs Committee and the member of Internal Security and Public Order Committee, Kasim Dal became the Deputy Chairman of Defense Committee.

In the fortieth Bulgarian Parliament Emel Etem of Turkish origin occupies the post of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for National Disasters and Emergencies. She is also engaged in the issues of minorities. Nihat Kabil, the Minister of Agriculture, is the member of the mentioned party and Cevdet Chakarov has again held the office of the Minister of Environment. The MRF has also taken over local self-government among the Bulgarian Turks: 24 mayors and 654 village elders appointed in 2001-2005 were MRF members. At the local self-government elections held in October 2005 the Bulgarian Turks won in 29 cities [27]. Two

cities more than in 2001-2005.

The Turkish community also succeeds in the implementation of programs aimed at the community's welfare funded by state subsidies and different grants. The publication of Turkish textbooks is sponsored by the University of Sofia and the Foundation for Liberal Integration. The ethnic Turks residing in Europe often implement communal programs at the expense of state funds. In the Netherlands there were cases, when the funds allocated for communal cultural programs, especially by Amsterdam's municipality, were spent on publishing Turkish extremist literature.

The conspicuous activation of the Turkish party caused dual attitude in Bulgaria. Under European integration most Bulgarians believe that the theory about «Bulgaria's conquest by the Turks» is not topical anymore. The global political and security system of the EU really gives reliable guaranties for this Balkan state, minimizing the possibility of the «Cyprus scenario.» On the other hand, it goes without saying that Ankara will try to keep the Bulgarian Turks under control directing their activity. According to information spread in Bulgarian mass media, the ethnic Turkish party works in unison with Ankara. Some facts attest that the high indicators gained at the elections were caused by the «patronage» of Ankara. On the day of elections ethnic Turks with dual citizenship were sent to Bulgaria by special buses and took part in the elections in their constituencies (it is not difficult to guess who they were voting for.) The opposition also announced that the elections were not without fraud: the people of Turkish origin were brought to the constituencies with low MRF rating to take part in the elections illegally [28]. Based on the survey results conducted in March 2006, the MRF's rating was not higher than 8% which on the one hand could indicate the decrease in its authority and on the other hand could directly prove that the indicator of 14% at the June 2006 elections held in was partially exaggerated [28]: «Many Bulgarian cities and villages were handed over to the ethnic Turks to rule. In this connection, Bulgarian citizens and politicians voice their concern against the domination of Turks in some regions» [28].

Recep Erdogan's speech in PACE on October 6, 2006 revealed the common interests of Ankara and the MRF. 11 days before the initiation of Turkey-EU negotiations, when Erdogan delivered his speech, the Prime Minister was asked questions relating to the observance of the minorities' rights in Turkey, the Cyprus issue, and the Kurdish problem. In PACE the Bulgarian delegation's head Lutfi Yunal asked the Prime Minister a question about Turkey's economic development providing a chance for the latter for self-advertising. It was the only positive outcome of Erdogan's speech.

According to the Bulgarian constitution adopted in 1991, no autonomous

entity can be formed in the territory of Bulgaria, which was directed against the threat posed by the Turks. The constitution also prohibited the activity of ethnic parties. This prohibition had a concrete addressee; however, the MRF has been officially denying its being a mere Turkish, ethnic party on the account of involving a minimum number of Bulgarians into the party. In March 2004, during the visit of Kircaali, the US ambassador to Bulgaria, James Perdue, expressed his concern about the party's monoethnic character and called for the Bulgarian Turks to get integrated into other political organizations besides the MRF. In response to this Ahmed Dogan announced that the party was not based on ethnic principle. Dogan's assistant Emel Etem (at present Bulgaria's Deputy Prime Minister) announced: «Apparently ambassador Perdue needs to refresh the information he has, the number of ethnic Bulgarians in the party has reached to 10% in the last two years» [29]. If we take into consideration the fact that the ethnic Turks make up only 10% of the country's population, the number of Bulgarians in the party speaks for itself. As it has already been mentioned, the 2 deputies out of the 34 representing the MRF in the Parliament are Bulgarians. The MRF does not give portfolios to non-Turks in the government cabinet. Minimum involvement of Bulgarians and liberal ideology helped the MRF to evade this constitutional ban. One can not help seeing the obvious support of the West. According to Turkish sources, in 1990-1991 Bulgaria was exerted to foreign pressure aimed at the official registration of the party and its access to the elections. During his meeting with the Prosecutor General of Sofia, Dimitri Popov, the British ambassador pointed out that «the British government will only welcome if the prosecutor uses his power to register the party.» «The party was registered by order of the then Prime Minister Lukanov,» writes the website of the Bulgarian Turks [30]. As a result of ethnic restrictions imposed on party activates, the traditional Armenian parties in Bulgaria are presented indirectly, through cultural organizations. In 2000 the Bulgarian constitutional court banned the party of ethnic Macedonians.

During the visit of Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Bulgaria in 2004 Dogan also mentioned at the meeting at the Turkish embassy that the MRF was not a completely Turkish party and worked to get integrated into the Bulgarian society. Erdogan agreed that if the party entirely consisted of Turks, it would cause the party's self-isolation. «We are happy to state as a fact that the Turkish minority actively takes the responsibility for Bulgaria's administrative governance,» announced Erdogan [31].

In one of the materials of the European analytical site *axisglobe.com* it is mentioned that the Bulgarian Turks have become one of the most influential minorities of Eastern Europe and Bulgaria's membership in the EU will make that

minority an instrument for Turkish lobbying [13]. The resistance to the «expansion» of the Turkish party became one of the main reasons to establish the Bulgarian «Ataka» party. The party's name, which is translated as «attack», is determined by the very logic of attacking the MRF. The party's leader, Volen Siderov and «Ataka» itself is labeled by the MRF as «fascist» or «extremist.» The MRF initiated criminal proceedings against Siderov. In 2006 the Parliament deprived him of parliamentary immunity.

However, the rating of «Ataka» is rising: in the elections of 2005 it won 8.93% of votes and 21 seats in the Parliament [24].

In the first round of Bulgaria's parliamentary elections held on October 22, 2006 Siderov and the current President Georgi Pirvanov passed the second round of elections as only 38% of eligible voters took part in the elections, meanwhile, the electoral law required at least 50% voter turnout. With the participation of 4 candidates in the first round Pirvanov and Siderov got 64% and 21% respectively and in the second round 75.9% and 24.01%.

It goes without saying that Ahmed Dogan's party is a leading one, however, in the course of time another, not a very big Turkish union was formed in Bulgaria, mainly by the initiative of the people who left the party.

In 1991 one of the party members, Adem Kenan, left the party and founded the «Turkish Democratic Party.» The organization was not registered by Bulgarian Ministry of Justice up to now. It has radical Pan Turkish views. According to Kenan, Bulgaria should be divided into Bulgarian and Turkish self-governing parts. Dogan's party did not accept Kenan's radicalism. In practice, Kenan's clear-cut nationalism was very favorable for the MRF making it a comparatively more «acceptable» partner.

A break-away MRF party member, Mehmed Hodja, founded the Party of Democratic Reforms. The appearance of this party is accounted for by serious contradictions between Ahmed Dogan and Mehmed Hodja. The party's activity had a local character: it did not exceed the territory of Kircaali. At the parliamentary elections of 1994 it got 0.2% of votes and 4% of Turkish voters respectively. These results doomed the party to failure. In 1994 it gathered 24 thousand votes and in 1997 this number reached 27 thousand [23, p. 23].

The former spiritual leader of the Bulgarian Turks, mufti Nedim Gendjev, leads the «Democratic Justice Party». It has Islamic slogans, but with some socialist bearings. The party does not have many followers.

In the middle of 1997 the party of National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (NMRF) was established which was the cloned copy of the above mentioned MRF. This strategy aimed at misleading the voters at during elections. In the

presence of almost identical names in the ballot paper, the voters could be confused voting not in favor of the main party. Moreover, the party would in a way lose its «oneness» for the society. This technology is not new by itself. Such methods have been applied in other countries as well. NMRF was headed by MRF's former deputy leader Gulnar Tahir. The movement of the Democratic wing was led by Osman Oktay (who worked in the 39th Parliament in 2001-2005 as a nonpartisan deputy) and the Union of Bulgarian Turks, Seyhan Turkan. Asim Hadjihasan established the Foundation called «The Green Light to Bulgarian Citizens of Turkish Origin» which sponsors educational projects with Islamic-Muslim bias.

2. The problem of recognizing the Armenian Genocide and Bulgaria's ethnic Turks

In the context of Turkish lobbying and Turkish community in Bulgaria it is necessary to tackle the problem of the process of recognizing or, more precisely, not recognizing the Armenian Genocide in Bulgaria. In Post-Socialist Bulgaria, as well as in other European countries, the subject of the Genocide is gradually gaining significance. On April 20, 1995 the Bulgarian Parliament headed by the Speaker Blagovest Sendov tackled the issue of the Armenian Genocide. In his speech Sendov announced: «On April 24 is the 80th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. In the modern world it is the first attempt of mass genocide which is a great disgrace for the perpetrators. As a civilized European country, which has ratified the UN Genocide Convention and all the international agreements on human rights protection, we observe this anniversary to declare officially: we will do our best for no genocide to be perpetrated on the threshold of the 21st century» [33]. The Parliamentary hearings did not lead to the recognition, and this time as well as afterwards the Turkish Party contributed to it. On January 7, 2006 the faction of «Ataka» party advanced a bill on recognizing the Armenian Genocide by the Bulgarian Parliament. Ten days later the document was sent to Foreign Policy and Human Rights and Religious Affairs Committee. It is noteworthy that it coincided with the official visit to Ankara of the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Sergay Stanishev. The bill pointed out that the Ottoman Empire had also committed genocide against the Bulgarian nation, therefore «the Genocide perpetrated against the Armenian nation is of special interest from the standpoint of Bulgarian history.» «If we take into consideration the international situation, Bulgaria even lags behind with the recognition of the Armenian Genocide,» the bill said [33].

During one of his meetings with this author the leader of «Ataka» party

Volen Siderov mentioned that he attached special importance to the spiritual factor, the fact that Armenia was the first Christian state, the proponent of Christian values because of which it had undergone the ordeals of history. The recognition of the Genocide was greatly resisted by the MRF fundamentally rooted in the National Assembly. The National Assembly Deputy Remzi Osman said to the Turkish mass media «the recognition will contradict both historical events and Bulgaria's interests.» «We will not become a toy yielding to the provocation and will clearly show up our position in the issue of the so called Genocide. We will do our best for the bill to be rejected not in the Parliament but at committees' level,» pointed out Osman [34]. However, the bill on the Armenian Genocide was put to the vote on May 10, 2006 and was rejected. 55 voted for it, 79 against and 49 abstained. On April 25, 2007 the Bulgarian Parliament honoured the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide with a minute of silence, but the Turkish party representatives refused to do that and left the room. Their act enraged the opposition and Boyko Vatev from the Bulgarian National Union said that it was high time the Bulgarian Parliament adopted a declaration condemning the Genocide. He added that the genocide against the Bulgarian citizens during the Ilinden Uprising should be also recognized. Vatev believes that the adoption of such a declaration may make Turkey reconsider the events of the 19th and 20th century. The leader of «Ataka» Volen Siderov also urged the parliament to officially recognize the events in Armenia as Genocide just as 12 European countries did. "This genocide has to be accepted by the Bulgarian Parliament, but I doubt that the majority would do so. There is a party in the ruling majority that protects the interests of Turkey. The representatives of that party are not honouring the memory of a million and a half Armenians," said Volen Siderov

Bulgaria's membership in the EU may promote the Armenian question in the future. It is also noteworthy that a part of the film «The Skylark Farm» by the Italian film directors, the Taviani brothers was made in Bulgaria and it may also contribute to the actualization of this problem in the country.

The success of the Turkish community in Bulgaria, their organized and coordinated work has come to prove the efficiency and importance of working with foreign communities. Although there is no foreign country with 10% of Armenian population as in the case of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, it is worth asking the following question: Is the potential of the Armenian Diaspora used in full? In some countries there are legislators of Armenian origin (Lebanon, France, Canada, Romania, Cyprus); at present there is an Armenian deputy in the Bulgarian Parliament,

Ruben Grigoryan, from the party of «Simeon II». But at the same time isn't it the matter of concern that there is no congressman of Armenian origin in the US Congress, while there is a huge Armenian community. Does the presence of the only Armenian deputy, Patrik Devejyan, in the French Parliament reveal our real potential? There are not well known Armenian politicians in Australia, Poland, and Switzerland although the number of Armenians in these countries is little.

April, 2007

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