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Between Sofia and Ankara – the Turkish minority in contemporary Bulgaria

Elżbieta Szyszlak^a

^a University of Wrocław

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Elżbieta Szyszlak

Between Sofia and Ankara - the Turkish minority in contemporary Bulgaria

Abstract: The Turks are the largest national minority in Bulgaria. Since the creation of the independent Bulgarian state in the 19th century, i.e., since the Turks began to function as a minority group in this country, they have not identified with their new homeland nor integrated with other ethnic groups. After 1989 the situation has changed, the symbol of which is the activity of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS). The article addresses the situation of the Turkish minority in this new, changed reality of modern Bulgaria.

Keywords: Bulgaria, Turkey, Turkish minority in Bulgaria, Turks in Europe

Introduction

The Turks are perceived in Europe as an immigrant community, though their presence in the southeastern part of the Old Continent dates to the late Middle Ages. This is in Bulgaria where they are the largest national minority. Separateness from the titular nation manifests itself here not only in nationality but also in religion. Being an ethnically foreign element, the Bulgarian Turks also adhere to Islam, a religion with negative connotations in their Bulgarian homeland. It puts them in a specific situation, and in the past, it strongly influenced the policy implemented by the authorities in Sofia towards them. The situation changed into the better after 1990, along with the democratization of Bulgarian. Interestingly, it happened with the significant participation of the Turks, who ceased to be a passive community and, through their political representation, gained influence on the policy of the state and

local authorities in their dwelling places. Their political emancipation resulted in a change of its position in relation to Sofia authorities. The minority often co-created the position through participation in ruling cabinets. The considerations in the paper were based on two theses. The first one assumes that the process of political emancipation has caused a noticeable change in the Turkish minority's status in Bulgarian-Turkish relations, which ceased to act only as an object of impact of political dissidents (in Sofia or Ankara), but gained independence as exemplified by the recent elections in Bulgaria. The second one assumes that the process of Turkish integration in Bulgaria is dynamic, and its most important conditions include their relations with the spiritual homeland – Turkey. Turkey is still a crucial reference point for the Bulgarian Turks and remains vividly interested in its minority, including retaining its influence. Thus, the Bulgarian Turks are somewhat suspended between Sofia and Ankara.

This article addresses the situation of the Turkish minority in contemporary Bulgaria, especially in the context of Bulgarian-Turkish relations in international and internal dimension. Therefore, it is necessary to answer the questions: How does the Turkish minority present itself as compared to the Bulgarian ethnic structure? What social processes dominate among the Bulgarian Turks? How are they perceived in Bulgaria and what actions is Turkey taking towards them? What is the Turkish minority's political activity like?

The limited size of the article does not allow the analysis of all significant threads. Hence, it addresses these that seem crucial to the undertaken subject. It begins with the study of the genesis of the Turkish community in Bulgaria and bringing closer its fates in a historical perspective. Next, the ethnic and religious structure of Bulgaria and its most severe demographic problems are characterized as the background for discussing demographic processes occurring among the Turkish population. The following part is devoted to the political activity of the Turkish minority. The considerations end with the characteristics of the situation of the Bulgarian Turks in the context of Bulgarian-Turkish relations.

The issue of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria has not been met with much interest by Polish political scientists, thereby a negligible

amount of publications on it¹. Thus, this article deals with issues rarely undertaken in the Polish political science, as well as is partly devoted to current affairs not analyzed so far.

1 The Turkish minority in Bulgaria in a historical perspective

The presence of the Turks in Bulgaria dates to the 14th century and is a direct consequence of the Ottoman expansion to the Bulgarian state, resulting in its liquidation². The Bulgarian lands located closest to the capital of the Ottoman Empire became the strategic and agricultural base for Constantinople during the Ottoman rule³. The expression “Western suburbs of Istanbul”⁴ reflects their specific geographical location. It effectively facilitated the influx of Turkish people. The process of “turkization” of foreign ethnic groups, as well as some Bulgarians who decided to accept Islam and the Turkish ethnic option, became apparent⁵. The situation changed after Bulgaria had gained independ-

- 1 Cf. K. Bieniek, ‘Ruch Praw i Wolności – partia bułgarskich Turków’ [Movement of Rights and Freedoms – the party of the Bulgarian Turks], *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Politologica*, no. 11, 2013, pp. 8-20; D. Kasprowicz, ‘Partie etniczne mniejszości narodowych na przykładzie bułgarskiego Ruchu na rzecz Praw i Wolności (DPS)’ [Ethnic parties of national minorities on the example of the Bulgarian Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)], *Acta Politica*, no. 27, 2014, pp. 81-96; K. Fijolek, ‘Ruch na rzecz Praw i Swobód. Pomiędzy partią liberalną a reprezentacją mniejszości tureckiej w Bułgarii’ [Movement for Rights and Freedom. Between the liberal party and the representation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria], *Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne*, vol. XXVI, 2017, pp. 263-278; K. Stanek, ‘Tożsamość turecka – tożsamość bułgarska – tożsamość europejska na przykładzie mniejszości tureckiej w Bułgarii’ [Turkish identity – Bulgarian identity – European identity based on the example of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria], in: K. Bieniek (ed.), *Republika Turcji. Polityka zagraniczna i wewnętrzna* [Republic of Turkey. Foreign and internal policy], Kraków: Episteme, 2016, pp. 425-456.
- 2 A. Goćłowski, ‘Exodus bułgarskich Muzułmanów do Turcji w 1989 roku jako zapowiedź zmierzchu wpływów imperialnych ZSRR na Bałkanach’ [Exodus of the Bulgarian Muslims to Turkey in 1989 as a preview of the Soviet imperial twilight in the Balkans], in: J. E. Zamojski (ed.), *Upadek imperiów i rozwój migracji* [The fall of empires and the development of migration], Warszawa: Neriton, 2003, p. 22.
- 3 Z. Klejn, *Bułgaria. Szkice z dziejów najnowszych* [Bulgaria. Sketches from the newest history], Pułtusk: Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna im. Aleksandra Gieysztor, 2005, p. 165.
- 4 T. Szyszlak, ‘Religia w bułgarsko-tureckim konflikcie etnicznym. Historia czy współczesność?’ [Religion in the Bulgarian-Turkish ethnic conflict. History or modernity?], in: R. Zenderowski and K. Cebul, B. Koziański (eds), *Konflikty etniczne w Europie oraz w jej bezpośrednim otoczeniu po 1989 roku. Uwarunkowania – stan obecny – wyzwania dla polityki bezpieczeństwa* [Ethnic conflicts in Europe and its immediate environment after 1989. Conditions – current state – challenges for security policy], Warszawa: CeDeWu.pl, 2016, p. 158.
- 5 Goćłowski, op. cit., p. 22.

ence. The status of the local Turks changed from the dominant nation into a minority. Many of them decided to emigrate. About 2 million Turks and Muslims left until the Bulgarian communists took power⁶.

After 1945, the Bulgarian authorities agreed on the emigration of the Turks⁷ and allowed them to conduct some socio-cultural activities. However, Sofia's policy aimed at atheization and identification of the Turkish population with a socialist state, and weakening Turkish influences among other Muslim groups, primarily the Pomaks and Roma. It was decided relatively late to organize the Turks' bulgarianization, although plans for their resettlement and forcible assimilation had existed already in the 1970s. That was mainly due to the size of this minority and communists' fears of the international community and Turkey. The "national revival" began in June 1984. It was brutal and resulted in arrests and fatalities among resistant Turks and forced the change of names into Bulgarian ones in response to their "voluntary request". The action did not bring the expected results. At the beginning of 1985, only a part of over 800,000 "planned people" had their names changed⁸. Gradually, all forms of cultural separateness of the Bulgarian Turks, including closing socio-cultural institutions, banning the public celebration of Muslim holidays or using Turkish in public places appeared⁹.

The development of the political situation in Central and Eastern Europe and in Bulgaria itself in 1989 activated the Turkish minority. Demonstrations in defense of identity took place and demands arose to allow emigration to Turkey. The latter were in line with the commu-

6 M. Żmigrodzki, *Przeobrażenia polityczno-ustrojowe i Sąd Konstytucyjny w Bułgarii* [Political and structural transformations and the Constitutional Court in Bulgaria], Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997, pp. 88-89; T. Szyszlak, 'The Ethnic Policy of Bulgaria', in: H. Chalupczak and R. Zenderowski, W. Baluk (eds), *Ethnic Policy in Contemporary East Central European Countries*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015, p. 147.

7 Żmigrodzki, op. cit., pp. 88-91.

8 An example of this type of action is the fate of the most famous Bulgarian weightlifter, who was born as Naim Sulejmanow, and after the "revival" action he received a new name Naum Schalamanov. In 1986 he asked for asylum in Turkey together with citizenship, however he was refused, as it turned out, too Slavic, original name, and received a new one – Naim Süleymanoğlu. A. Burakowski and A. Gubrynowicz, P. Ukielski, *1989 Jesień Narodów* [1989 Autumn of Nations], Warszawa: Trio, 2009, p. 306.

9 Gocłowski, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

nists' plans¹⁰. In May 1989, Todor Zhivkov called on Ankara to open the border for the Bulgarian Muslims, and in June, an émigré fever called the “great tour” began among the Turkish minority¹¹. The Turks sold off their lifelong achievements and left for border crossings. It is estimated that around 320,000 people left Bulgaria this way. However, the emigration was not always voluntary. The Bulgarian authorities and Turkish nationalists often enforced the decision. The effects of the rapid emigration wave turned out to be more severe than expected – the regions inhabited by the Turks saw a significant decline in population and labor force, whereas in the national perspective there was a slump in agriculture and reduction in export revenues. The crisis in the state functioning associated with the “great trip” is considered the important reasons for the loss of power by Zhivkov's team and the democratization of Bulgaria. The “success” of such organized resettlement proved short-lived, and re-emigration of some of the people who had left Turkey in 1989 began¹².

2. The Turkish minority against the ethnic and religious structure of modern Bulgaria

Demographic issues are among the most critical factors in determining the approach of the Bulgarians to minorities. First, Bulgaria is ethnically and religiously diversified. Over a dozen percent of citizens declare themselves as members of national minorities. Importantly, some of them are Muslims (see Table 1). Minority issues were the source of Bulgaria's strong fears in the past. Nowadays, the cause of these fears is still vital resentments conditioned by historical experiences and disproportions of natural growth, which is low among the titular population and relatively high among ethnic minorities¹³.

10 In May 1989, during the Political Council meeting, Todor Zhivkov spoke about the need to resettle at least 200,000 people in order not to turn Bulgaria into a second Cyprus. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

11 Officially the Bulgarian Turks were leaving for a trip to Turkey.

12 Gocłowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 33.

13 D. Stankov, 'Zahraniční a bezpečnostní politika Bulharska' [Bulgarian foreign and security policy], in: V. Stýskalíková and H. Smekal (eds), *Zahraniční a bezpečnostní politika vybraných zemí Balkánů* [Foreign and security policy of selected Balkan countries], Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2004, pp. 201-202.

The phenomenon of depopulation in Bulgaria is visible. Statistical data indicates that this country has lost almost 2 million inhabitants since 1989, due to aging of the population and high mortality, low birth rate, and mass emigration of young and relatively well-educated people¹⁴. Emigration is currently considered as one of the most serious problems in Bulgaria. The depopulation scale is evidenced by the results of 2001 and 2011 censuses. The data collected at that time shows that between censuses, the population of Bulgaria decreased by 124,790 people, i.e., 15.7%, while the number of people declaring themselves as the Bulgarians by nearly a million. Moreover, trends in the age structure of the population are very unfavorable for the ethnic Bulgarians¹⁵. Their share is gradually decreasing in the lowest age categories. This is of increasing concern to the Bulgarian society, effectively fueled by populist and nationalist groups and additionally supported by the fact that the phenomena are not so visible among the most numerous minorities, i.e., the Turks and Roma¹⁶.

Table 1. Religious structure of Bulgaria (according to 2001 and 2011 censuses)

Religion	2001		2011	
	in thousand	in %	in thousand	in %
Orthodox	6,552.8	82.6	4,374.1	76.0
Catholic	43.8	0.6	48.9	0.8
Protestant	42.3	0.5	64.5	1.1
Protestant	967.0	12.2	577.1	10.1
of which: Sunni	---	---	546.0	9.5
other	14.9	0.2	11.4	0.2
unspecified or no answer	308.1	3.9	682.2	11.8
total	7,928.9	100.0	5,758.3	100.0

Source: T. Szyszlak, *The Ethnic Policy of Bulgaria*, in: H. Chałupczak and R. Zenderowski, W. Baluk (eds), *Ethnic Policy in Contemporary East Central European Countries*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015, p. 146.

14 S. Dinew, 'System szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce i Bułgarii – próba porównania' [Higher education system in Poland and Bulgaria – a comparative study], *Nauka*, no. 2, 2014, p. 173.

15 Szyszlak, 'The Ethnic Policy...', pp. 151-152.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

The Turks are the largest national minority in Bulgaria. When analyzing their situation in the demographic context, attention should be paid to three aspects. Firstly, they still constitute a large ethnic group in Bulgaria, although their number and percentage in the population structure has decreased significantly over decades (see Table 2). According to the data from the 2011 census, there were slightly more than 588,000 of them in Bulgaria. Secondly, it is a “young” community. Children, young people and people of working age make up its majority¹⁷. Thirdly, the Turkish minority lives in a compact territory. Its largest cluster is the Kyrgyzstan region, near the Turkish border. Over 86 thousand Turks accounting for 66.1% of the population live there. The remaining districts with a large Turkish minority are Razgrad, Silistra, Shumen and Turgovishte. The Turks constitute 30 to 50% of the population¹⁸.

Table 2. The number of the Turks in Bulgaria in 1880/1884-2011

Year	Population of Bulgaria	Number of ethnic Bulgarians	Number of ethnic Turks	Percentage of Turks in total population
1880/1884	2,982,949	2,027,241	727,773	24.4 %
1892	3,310,713	2,505,326	569,728	17.2%
1900	3,744,283	2,888,219	531,240	14.2%
1910	4,337,513	3,518,756	465,641	10.7%
1920	4,846,971	4,036,056	520,339	10.7%
1934	6,077,939	5,204,217	591,193	9.7%
1946	7,029,349	5,903,580	675,500	9.6%
1965	8,227,966	7,231,243	780,928	9.5%
1975	8,727,771	7,930,024	730,728	8.4%
1992	8,487,317	7,271,185	800,052	9.4%
2001	7,928,901	6,665,210	746,664	9.4%
2011	7,564,570	6,464,624	588,318	8.5%

Source: Own study based on: Birdahaasla, 'Bulgaristan'daki Türk Nüfusunun Yıllara Göre Dağılımı' [The Turkish population in Bulgaria in particular years], <http://www.birdahaasla.org/documents/events/bulgaria/table.pdf> [2018-02-09].

17 Ibid., p. 152.

18 The ethnic structure of individual districts in Bulgaria; for more see: *ibid.*, p. 155.

3. Socio-cultural characteristics of the Turkish minority

The Turks living in Bulgaria are predominantly a rural community¹⁹ and their level of education is lower than the Bulgarians²⁰. The Bulgarian Turks also belong to the groups worst touched by unemployment and poverty problems. This stems from the fact that the areas inhabited by them were severely affected by economic changes, including the collapse of local enterprises. The Turkish minority involved in agricultural activities was painfully hit by changes in this economy sector and land reprivatization at the beginning of the 1990s. The difficult economic situation favored the Turks' emigration²¹.

Islam is an important determinant of the Turks' cultural distinctiveness. Daniel Stankov stressed that during the formation of the modern Bulgarian nation, the Turkish minority retained specific, different from the Bulgarian ones, customs and values associated with the religion. In the interwar period, it was primarily Islam, not national consciousness, that was the basis for the Bulgarian Turks' identity. It resulted from the fact that the ideas related to Mustafa Kemal's reforms did not reach the region. Despite the secularization process following World War II, the role of religion as a leading element of identity and dissimilarity remained important among the Turks, which prompted the Sofia authorities to limit the Muslims' religious freedom²². The situation has improved along with the democratization process of Bulgaria, together with guarantees of religious freedom. Nevertheless, Islam is still one of the foundations of cultural distance between the Bulgarians and their Turkish fellow citizens²³; it plays a fundamental role in identifying "others" and the group's internal consolidation. However,

19 Szyszlak, 'The Ethnic Policy...', p. 146.

20 M. Arndt, 'Muslime in Bulgarien. Integrationsgrad, politische Repräsentanz und sozialer Status der Türken, Pomaken und Roma' [Muslims in Bulgaria. The level of integration, political representation and social status of Turks, Pomaks and Roma], *KAS Auslandsinformationen*, no. 7, 2013, pp. 8-9; Dinew, op. cit., p. 174.

21 R. Woźnica, *Bułgarska polityka wewnętrzna a proces integracji z Unią Europejską* [Bulgarian internal policy and the process of integration with the European Union], Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2012, pp. 111-112.

22 Islam was also a strong determinant of the dissimilarity of other Muslim groups in Bulgaria, especially the Pomaks. Stankov, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

23 For more see: E. Krasteva-Blagoeva, *Symbols of Muslim Identity in Bulgaria: Traditions and Innovations*, <http://old.nbu.bg/PUBLIC/IMAGES/File/departments/anthropology/research/Microsoft-Word-berlin1.pdf>, p. 8 [2017-09-13].

not so much the religious institutions or orthodoxy, but the value system is important. The determinant of belonging to the Turkish Muslim community is the preservation of a specific social structure, behavioral patterns, and cultural heritage²⁴.

The cultural distance impacted the situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria in the past. Its genesis is linked to the Turkish occupation. Following Bulgaria's independence, everything associated with the Ottoman authorities was perceived negatively, and the destruction of material remnants of Ottoman culture was to express reluctance to Turkish heritage²⁵.

4. Political aspects of the situation of the Turkish minority

The Basic Law belongs to fundamental documents regulating the situation of national minorities in Bulgaria. It guarantees the protection of the rights and freedoms of ethnic and religious groups (Article 6 (2); Article 36 (2); Article 55 (1)). The Constitution does not define a national minority. Besides, it contains a provision prohibiting the creation of political parties “on the basis of ethnicity, race, and religion” (Article 11 (4))²⁶. From the perspective of the Turkish minority, the provisions contained in specific detailed legal bills are also vital.

Bulgaria has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but the prevention of possible separatist actions by the Turks and the Macedonians was one of key issues in the preceding parliamentary discussion²⁷.

When analyzing Bulgaria's ethnic policy after 1990, its evolutionary character should be emphasized. The process of accession to the European Union completed in 2007 became the main factor triggering positive changes. The dual nature of this policy is, on the one hand, addressed to all “recognized” ethnic groups and primarily covers broadly understood cultural issues, on the other hand, activities

24 Ibid.

25 Stankov, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

26 Konstytucja Republiki Bułgarii [Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2012.

27 Stankov, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

for the integration of one ethnic group, namely the Roma, are crucial²⁸. At present, the impact of the apparent increase in nationalistic attitudes among the society and the extreme groups' (e.g., Ataka established in 2005) success in the last parliamentary elections on Bulgaria's ethnic policy remains unknown. They are characterized by anti-minority, also anti-historical, rhetoric and securitization of racial issues. The Turkish community is one of the biggest threats to Bulgaria²⁹. After the recent elections, this group – being part of the extraordinarily nationalistic and anti-minority Union of Patriots³⁰ – entered the government coalition.

The political activity of the Turkish minority in contemporary Bulgaria is referred to as a phenomenon in this part of the Old Continent. It has its representatives in political life at the national and local government levels. Furthermore, the group representing the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) is one of the most stable forces on the Bulgarian political scene.

The DPS was established in 1990, with the primary purpose to defend the rights and freedoms of ethnic, religious and cultural communities. Ahmed Doğan³¹ was at its head. The dominance of the Muslims, especially the Turks, among its electorate was visible from the first elections³². With time, the Movement gained the position of a relevant party and its coalition potential frequently enabled tipping the balance in the government forming process. It is significant that the DPS recorded successes in the European and local government elections³³. According to Ali Eminov, the creation and activity of the DPS

28 For more about the ethnic policy of Bulgaria see: *ibid.*, pp. 139-174.

29 For more about the process of securitization of the issues of national and ethnic minorities see for example E. Szyszlak, *Etniczność w kontekstach bezpieczeństwa. Mniejszość romska w Republice Czeskiej* [Ethnicity in security contexts. The Roma minority in the Czech Republic], Wrocław: Arboretum, 2015, pp. 28-32.

30 Following the parliamentary election of spring 2017, the Union of Patriots, earning almost 10% of votes, entered the Bulgarian Parliament. It is a coalition of three parties: Ataka, Bulgarian National Movement (WMRO) and the Movement for the Salvation of Bulgaria. These are strongly nationalistic and pro-Russian factions S. Domaradzki, 'Domaradzki: Bułgarska pułapka Rosji' [Domaradzki: Bulgarian trap of Russia], <http://publica.pl/teksty/domaradzki-bulgarska-pulapka-rosji-60737.html> [2017-08-11].

31 Arndt, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Bieniek, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

32 A. Eminov, 'Turks and Tatars in Bulgaria and the Balkans', *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2000, p. 146.

33 Bieniek, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-18.

caused that “for the first time after the Bulgarian liberation from the Ottoman rule, the Turks and other Muslims have had an authentic opportunity to participate in the political process on their own terms”³⁴. The reasons for its strong position among the Bulgarian Muslims, including the Turks, are seen above all in undertaking actions to solve problems important for them, especially in the areas of education, economy, social and agricultural policies, and to counteract discrimination on the grounds of ethnic and religious affiliation. At present, Mustafa Karadayı is the DPS head³⁵.

In the March 2017 elections, the Movement lost 12 seats compared to the previous ones, nevertheless, it managed to win 9% of the votes and keep 26 seats in the parliament³⁶. The above confirms its stable position on the Bulgarian political scene³⁷. The DPS position, as the Bulgarian Turks’ representative, seems unthreatened, although other groups with aspirations to represent the Turkish minority (e.g. DOST – Democrats for Responsibility, Freedom and Tolerance) have also appeared.

Its origin dates to December 2015 when the then chairman Lütvi Mestan was excluded from the Movement, after he had presented a strongly pro-Turkish position during the Russian-Turkish tensions against the background of the Su-24 bomber shot-down³⁸. The DOST defines itself as a liberal party and postulates the need to guarantee the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, as well as minority rights “through effective integration while maintaining identity”³⁹. For the 2017 elections, the DOST

34 Eminov, op. cit., p. 147.

35 Устав на Движение за права и свободи [Statute of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms], <https://www.dps.bg/za-dps/ustav.html> [2017-12-13]; Предизборна програма [Pre-election program], 22 February 2017, <https://www.dps.bg/izbori/predizborna-programa.html> [2017-06-11].

36 M. U. Ekinçi, ‘Bulgaristan Seçiminin Ardından: Görünen Statüko, Görünmeyen Değişimler’ [After the elections in Bulgaria: Apparent status quo, invisible changes], https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/04/BulgaristanSecimleri_son.pdf, p. 3 [2017-12-02].

37 Arndt, op. cit., p. 13.

38 Eurasianews, ‘Türkei baut neue Türken-Partei in Bulgarien auf für mehr Einfluss auf Sofia’ [Turkey is building a new Turkish party in Bulgaria for greater influence on Sofia], *Eurasianews*, <http://eurasianews.de/blog/tuerkei-baut-neue-tuerken-partei-in-bulgarien-auf-fuer-mehr-einfluss-auf-regierung/> [2017-08-09].

39 Устав на Политическа партия Демократи за отговорност, свобода и толерантност ПП ДОСТ [Statute of the Political Party Democrats for Responsibility, Freedom and Tolerance PP DOST], Art. 4 (1), p. 4, Art. 4 (2), p. 13, <http://dost.bg/Document> [2017-12-23].

ran for parliament together with the People's Party "Freedom and Dignity" of Orhan Ismailov. The alliance won a total of less than 3% of votes (slightly over 100,000), which was not enough to enter parliament⁴⁰. The Mestan's party presents a strongly anti-Russian position and criticizes the Bulgarian political elite, as well as the DPS, for their pro-Russianness⁴¹. The Leader of the Democrats emphasized in the pre-election campaign that Ankara was not an enemy but Sofia's strategic partner, and supported the accession of Ukraine, the Balkan states and Turkey to the EU⁴².

The prospects of the DOST on the Bulgarian political scene are difficult to assess. unequivocally When pointing out that this is a group seeking a niche among the Turkish voters, Turkish analyst Mehmet Uğur Ekinçi believes that its result indicates that there is a group of voters contesting the DPS activities⁴³. Bulgarian analysts predict that the rise of nationalist sentiments and actions of the Bulgarian extreme right will serve the mobilization of the Turkish or Muslim voters. Thus, it is possible that a few Turkish groups will enter the Bulgarian Parliament after several elections⁴⁴.

5. The Turkish minority in Bulgarian-Turkish relations

After Bulgaria gained independence, an extremely negative interpretation of the Ottoman rule was adopted, and the situation changed neither during the interwar period nor after World War II. The above and the ethnic policy of the Bulgarian authorities did not favor forming good relations between the Turkish population and the titular nation, thus contributing to the isolation of the Turks and their frequent migration from Bulgaria⁴⁵. The Bulgarian extremist

40 Ekinçi, op. cit., p. 3.

41 See: Л. Местан [L. Mestan], 'Крим – будната съвест на евро-атлантизма' [Crimea – the awakening conscience of euro-atlan], 21 September 2016, <http://dost.bg/Analysis/Index/3> [2018-01-02]; idem, 'Смелчащи!' [Be brave!], 21 September 2016, <http://dost.bg/Analysis/Index/4> [2017-12-29].

42 BTA, 'DOST, Freedom and Dignity People's Party form DOST Alliance Coalition', *Bulgarian News Agency*, <http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1513001> [2017-03-02].

43 Ekinçi, op. cit., p. 6.

44 NEX24, 'Bulgarien: Türkische DOST Partei protestiert gegen Wahlergebnis' [Bulgaria: The Turkish DOST party protests against the election results], *NEX24*, <https://www.nachrichtenexpress.com/2017/04/bulgarien-tuerkische-dost-partei-protestiert-gegen-wahlergebnis/> [2017-06-13].

45 Stankov, op. cit., p. 206.

nationalist groups exploit these historical resentments. An example is the Ataka's initiative to adopt a resolution on the condemnation of the genocide crime on the Bulgarian nation during the Ottoman rule. However, many abstaining MPs caused that the Bulgarian parliament did not adopt the resolution⁴⁶. In 2012 the parliament passed a document, which condemned the forced resettlement of the Turks in 1989, describing them as “a form of ethnic cleansing made by a totalitarian regime”⁴⁷.

During a survey conducted several years ago, most Bulgarian Turks, 87%, expressed their satisfaction with living in Bulgaria, which they perceived as their homeland. Not much less – 85.5% declared that they had friends among the Bulgarians, and over 90% indicated that they could make friends with the Bulgarians⁴⁸. Many Bulgarian officials, journalists, and politicians have a Turkish origin⁴⁹. However, the spiritual homeland remains an extremely important reference point for the Bulgarian Turks, which is undoubtedly favored by its geographical proximity. Although Bulgaria is one of the poorest EU countries and the economic situation of regions inhabited by the Turks is difficult, some of them are seeking chances for a “better life” in the Turkish state. The dominance of the Sunni faction of Islam in Turkey and among the Turkish minority in Bulgaria fosters a bond with the spiritual homeland. The Bulgarian Turks take over the religious patterns of the Bosphorus, which seems to be the reasons for the dominance of moderate Islam among them, and their low susceptibility to radical moods. The Turks watch domestic television productions, are educated in Turkey, have relatives there, and are interested in Turkish culture⁵⁰.

Moreover, the spiritual homeland is not indifferent to the fate of their minority. Since the creation of the independent Bulgaria, the issue of the Turkish minority was one of the most critical problems in relations with the southern neighbor. The policy pursued by contem-

46 Stanek, op. cit., p. 439.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., pp. 448-449.

49 A. Parzymies, 'Muzułmanie w Bułgarii' [Muslims in Bulgaria], in: A. Parzymies (ed.), *Muzułmanie w Europie* [Muslims in Europe], Warszawa: Dialog, 2005, p. 69.

50 Krasteva-Blagoeva, op. cit., p. 4; A. Adreev, 'Bułgarscy Turcy przeciwko Erdoganowi' [Bulgarian Turks against Erdogan], <http://www.dw.com/pl/bułgarscy-turcy-przeciwko-erdoganowi/a-38439265> [2017-08-15].

porary Turkey impact the Bulgarians' approach to the Turkish minority. Concerns about the Turks are partly related to Ankara's recent foreign policy in the field of "neosmanism"⁵¹, i.e., using by them the Turkish minorities to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries in which they are located⁵².

An example of such activities leading to the crisis in Bulgarian-Turkish relations, is Ankara's activity during the election campaign before the last parliamentary election in Bulgaria. The reason for the crisis was, firstly, exercising the right of the Bulgarian Turks currently living in Turkey but having retained dual citizenship to participate in the elections. Some Bulgarian politicians and society consider them as President Erdoğan's "fifth column" and an instrument of Ankara's interference in the internal affairs of their country. The second reason for the crisis in Bulgarian-Turkish relations was the support that the Turkish authorities gave to the DOST party competing against the DPS. In effect, these relations became the worst from 1989 and the "great trip". It was imputed that in Bulgaria, that the DOST had close links with the President of Turkey and the Justice and Development Party (AKP Party). Erdoğan is considered an inspirer behind the formation of the faction⁵³, and Ankara got actively involved in the campaign before the parliamentary elections in Bulgaria. The Turkish minority was encouraged to vote in favor of the DOST, the Bulgarian Turks who now reside in Turkey were called to vote for this party and transport to Bulgaria was guaranteed⁵⁴. Since the establishment of the DOST, his politicians have met with AKP politicians and President Erdoğan many times⁵⁵. Mestan's opponents called them "a Trojan horse in Bulgaria"⁵⁶. The Bulgarian media stressed the financing of

51 Ekinci, op. cit., p. 5.

52 Stanek, op. cit., p. 444.

53 Domaradzki, op. cit.

54 Onet, 'Ostra wymiana zdań między prezydentami Bułgarii i Turcji' [Acute exchange of views between the Bulgarian and Turkish presidents], *Onet*, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/ostra-wymiana-zdan-miedzy-prezydentami-bulgarii-i-turcji/r6ogckb> [2017-06-08].

55 Novinite, 'DOST, NPSD to Run Together in Bulgaria's Early Election', *Novinite*, <http://www.novinite.com/articles/178728/DOST,+NPSD+to+Run+Together+in+Bulgaria%27s+Early+Election> [2017-05-17].

56 M. Orłowski, 'Bułgaria wzywa ambasadora. Turcja ingeruje w bułgarskie wybory?' [Bulgaria calls on the ambassador. Turkey interferes in Bulgarian elections], <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75248,21509153,bulgaria-wzywa-ambasadora-turcja-ingeruje-w-bulgarskie-wybory.html> [2017-05-17].

the DOST election campaign by Turkey, and the fact that the Turkish authorities were involved in it, e.g., the Turkish ambassador in Sofia, Suleiman Gökçe⁵⁷.

These actions met with fierce criticism from Bulgarian politicians, which testified to Ankara's efforts to interfere in the internal situation of Bulgaria⁵⁸. The symbol of the crisis in Bulgarian-Turkish relations was handing the protest note to Ambassador Gökçe and calling on the Bulgarian ambassador to Ankara, Nadezhda Nejsnka⁵⁹, to arrive in the country. The tense situation in Turkish-Bulgarian relations has also become the focus of the European Council⁶⁰.

Ankara's support for the DOST is not surprising given the considerable independence of the DPS from President Erdoğan. The strong position of the Movement among the Bulgarian factions and its political profile, including the critical attitude towards the Turkish leader's actions described as a threat to democracy, favor it. After the referendum in Turkey on April 16, 2017, in a special Declaration, the DPS pointed to irregularities in its implementation and its effects in the form of the polarization of Turkish society and transformation of the "Kemalist Republic of Turkey into Sultanate", which raised several dangers and harms the prospects of Turkey's accession to the Union⁶¹. In the context of the Movement, the Russian theme also appears, because of the pro-Russianness attributed to it, which is no different from other political groups in Bulgaria, as well as its longtime chairman's attitude. There is also an opinion that its political actions testify to close relations with Moscow⁶². In this situation, the support of President Erdoğan for the DOST would be related to the fact that the DPS not only does not succumb to Turkish influence but is also

57 Ibid.

58 Onet.

59 Orłowski, op. cit.

60 Onet.

61 Декларация на Движението за права и свободи относно проведението на 16.04.2017 г. референдум в Република Турция [Declaration of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms regarding the holding of a referendum in the Republic of Turkey on 16/04/2017], 27 April 2017, <https://www.dps.bg/1064-deklaratziya-na-dvizhenieto-za-prava-i-svobodi-otnosno-provedeniya-na-16-04-2017g-referendum-v-republika-turtziya.html> [2018-01-08].

62 Domaradzki, op. cit.

pro-Russian. Given the influence that the Turkish minority retains, it is an unfavorable situation for Ankara⁶³.

The situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria remains a crucial topic in the mutual relations between Sofia and Ankara. However, they are still the best in history and this is undoubtedly the result of progressive integration of the Turkish minority, which is no longer perceived by the moderate Bulgarian politicians only through the prism of risk.

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, the Bulgarian Turks remain the largest national minority in Bulgaria and the most significant Turkish minority in Central and Eastern Europe. They undoubtedly have the strongest political position among the Turkish communities in this part of the Old Continent. Their situation is still the object of interest of Turkey, which is an entity influencing or attempting to influence the position of the Bulgarian Turks, as evidenced by the DOST case and its role as a cultural, religious and economic center. After 1990, the Bulgarian Turks had to redefine their country of residence, a state where they had been previously considered a foreign element and brutally repressed by them a few years earlier. They had to find their place in the democratizing Bulgaria. It was possible thanks to political activity, symbolized by the DPS's successes and the Turkish representatives in local government elections. The Turks gained representation in the Bulgarian parliament and many government offices, as well as the influence on the policy implemented at the local and regional levels. They have become the phenomenon in this part of Europe, which is referred to as an example of political integration. It is part of a broader integration process, which future development is difficult to predict since numerous factors determine the dynamic nature of the situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The most important ones include the political situation development, also an increase in nationalist moods in Bulgaria and improvement of the political and economic situation in Turkey. Hence the Bulgarian Turks are still suspended between Sofia and Ankara.

63 Eurasianews.

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