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The Revival Process and its Influence on the Identity of Bulgarian Turks in Turkey

This paper describes so called the Revival process amidst Turkish community in Bulgaria between 1984-1989 as a political instrument for construction of new Bulgarian "socialist" nation and its influence on the different Turks` identity markers as the myth of ethnic origin, language, name, religion, rituals and etc. This report has a more different point of view. It treats the reverberation of the "process of revival" over the identity of the Bulgarian Turks who leave Bulgaria during the summer of 1989 and settle down along the Aegean coast of Turkey in populated areas as Izmir, Kusadasi and so forth. They will be called "Bulgarian Turks Migrants" in the investigation.

I will begin with a description of the "process of revival". Its study has various points of view. One of them belongs to the historians and the researchers, another – to its organizers, and third – to the Turks themselves, who experience it¹. Further to the description of the events an attempt will be made to find out the reasons, the ideological justification, the initiators and the results of the "process of revival" over the identity of the Bulgarian Turks-migrants in the Republic of Turkey at this moment.

For the researchers, initiators and victims, the "process of revival" in the middle of the eighties of the twentieth century is a part of a more long-term policy, which commences as early as with a change of the names of the Bulgarian Muslims in the seventies. It is a consequence of gradual and well prepared policy of integration and assimilation of the individual ethnic and confessional minorities in Bulgaria of many years like Roma minorities and Bulgarians-Muslims (Bulgarian Mohammedans)².

According to the organizers and the researchers the reasons for the conduct of the "process of revival" in the eighties are several in number. The change in the policy of the Bulgarian Turks was influenced by the successful renaming of the people from the mixed

¹ See also Георгиева, Ив. "Възродителният процес" и "Голямата екскурзия" (Опит за орална история) – В: Етническата картина в България (проучвания 1992 г.). С., Клуб`90, 105-109.

marriages, the pressure of the local figures, the crumbling to nothing of the hope and arrangement may be reached with Turkey for the full expatriation, the nationalistic propaganda of our Southern neighbor, and finally – the hazard of a “Cyprian variant” in Bulgaria³. The Bulgarian authorities indicate as the most important reason for the change of the names the demographic boom of the Turkish population, which according to different data is between 900 000 and 1.5 million people⁴. The fast increase of the Turks is perceived by the rulers as hazardous for the Bulgarian nation and they think over a plan for its decrease⁵. Since the Turkish country refuses to accept more migrants, the sole variant is the renaming of the Turkish population aimed at the incorporation to the Bulgarian nation. The Bulgarian government awaits for solely a favorable moment for the change of the names, so as to reduce to a minimum the protests on the part of our Southern neighboring country. The appropriate situation occurred at the beginning of the eighties. At that time Turkey was caught up by a powerful Kurdish, workers’ and students’ movement. In a foreign political plan the country had problems with Greece, Iran and EEC⁶. Making use of the situation in Turkey, the Bulgarian authorities commenced the conduct of the “process of revival”.

According to the Bulgarian Turks – migrants the reasons for the conduct of the “process of revival” are several in number. In the first place they also place the international situation – the fact that Bulgaria and Turkey belong to two different military political blocks (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and the aggressive Russian policy on the Balkans. For the most migrants the change of the names of the Turks is rationalized by the migrants as a “revenge”, as a response of the pressure, exerted by the Ottomans over the Christian population within the framework of the Ottoman Empire⁷.

It is seen during the analysis of the facts that according to the initiators, the researchers and the victims the reasons for the conduct of the “process of revival” may be united in several main groups. The international situation, which determines the

²Archive of the Ethnographic Institute and Museum (АЕИМ, № 574-III, 34).

³ Асенев, Б. Възродителният процес и Държавна сигурност. С., 1990, 89, Живков, Т. Мемоари. С., 1997: 443-450, Стоянов, Д. Заплахата. Великодържавният национализъм и разузнаването на Турция против България. С., 1997.

⁴ Бюксеншютц, У. Малцинствената политика в България. Политиката на БКП към евреи, роми, помаци и турци (1944-1989). С., МЦПМКВ, 180.

⁵ Милушев, Г. По коридорите на властта. С., 1991: 207.

⁶ Central State Archive (ЦДА, чп 174 б, оп. 2, а. е. 2412, л. 137).

relationships between Bulgaria and Turkey, is placed in the first place, in the second – the internal situation in each of the parties, and finally – the emotional accumulations from the common historical past.

The initiators of the “process of revival” are not known. The organizers, the researchers and the victims are united around two main theses. One of them determines the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov as the initiator of the “process of revival”, and the second maintains the standpoint about the role of functionaries (it is not clear which in particular) of the party⁸. All the migrants are definite that the “process of revival” pursues political goals, its organizers are solely the rulers in Bulgaria at that time and thus they justify all the remaining Bulgarians⁹.

The conduct of the “process of revival” passes through a party and operational preparation respectfully by the Bulgarian Communist Party and by the Ministry of the Interior. The beginning was placed on 19 June 1984. In the document adopted by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party anxiety is stated by the “continuing differentiation of the Bulgarian Turks, by the manifestations of provisions-Turkish nationalism, religious fanaticism and everyday conservatism.” It was decided “to accelerate the development of the districts with a compact mass of Bulgarian Turks, to settle down specialists from the country in these regions, to develop the Turkish intelligence, to promote the system of mixed marriages, to impose communications in the Bulgarian language in public places and to suspend the constructions of new mosques.”¹⁰ On 10 December 1984 the Ministry of the Interior provided for instructions to commence the renaming of the Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin in all the regions where there is such population.¹¹

7 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 16-17.

8 Асенов, Б. Възродителният процес..., 70. This thesis is held by Konstantin Chakaro, the advisor of Todor Zhivkov – see Добрева, Д. Горбачов нагло излъга – Монитор, 2002, 14 май (<http://www.zone168.com/news.html>).

9 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 35.

10 Асенов, Б. Възродителният процес..., 3, ПС, 1991, бр. 5-9, Цветкова, М. Българската политика към Възродителния процес след 1944 г. – МО, 2000, кн. 2, 85.

11 Archive of Bulgarian Interior Ministry, a report of the operation (АМБР, пер. № I 5224 от 17 декември 1984 г. Протокол от оперативка на ръководството на МВР, проведена на 10.12.984 г.)

The next stage in the conduct of the “process of revival” is the replacement of the Turkish with Christian or respectively Slavonic names of the Bulgarian Turks first in Southern and then in Northern Bulgaria as well. The campaign itself commenced around Christmas. It passed in the same manner everywhere – the populated areas were surrounded by the army and the militia, the leaving was forbidden, the telephone connections were cut off, the identity papers were taken and the people were compelled to sign declarations that they did not have any relatives in Turkey and that they did not want to emigrate and they voluntarily changed their names¹². Enrolment forms were passed over for the selection of a new name. In the populated areas where people preliminarily found out about the change of the names, they ran out in the forests and the mountains, they hid for several days, but soon because of the cold weather they were forced to go back to their houses and to obey the police¹³. In some populated areas of the country the Turkish population organized protests against the renaming and in others everything passed fast and without any incidents¹⁴. In the populated areas where resistance was put up with regard to the change of the names, and there were not only wounded people during the conflicts with the army and the militia but people were even killed¹⁵. Others died in consequence of the mental cruelty during the renaming¹⁶. A lot of people were arrested aimed at the intimidation of the population and the provision of calm conduct of the “process of revival”¹⁷. Those Turks, who managed to avoid the imprisonment, were dismissed and settled separately in the inside of the country. The expatriation from the native places was related to the wish of the authorities to settle in different places the compact Turkish population aimed at its easier assimilation¹⁸.

12 Стоянов, В. 1998. Турското население между полюсите на етническата политика. С., Лик, 163.

13 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 33.

14 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 28.

15 For presentation of the Revival process in Bulgarian media see Кусева, М. Един вестник за “Възродителния процес” – В: Етническата картина..., 164-167; in Turkish media see. Димитрова, Д. Турският печат за т. нар. “Възродителен процес” (1984-1989 г.) - В: Етническата картина..., 168-182; in the other media see Şimşir, В. 1990 (ed.) and the Immigration Question – In: The Turkish Presence in Bulgaria. Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 39-58; About the attitude of Turkey towards the process see. Eroğlu, Н. The Question of Turkish Minority in Bulgaria from Perspective of International Law - In: The Turkish Presence in Bulgaria. Ankara, 1986, 59-90; Стоянов, Д. Заплахата....; Стоянов, В. Турското население..., 82.

16 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 36.

17 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 16, 35.

18 АЕИМ, № 574-III, 27.

In this manner as of 14 January 1985 the names of over 310 thousand people were reinstated¹⁹.

The introduction of prohibitions to speak Turkish in public places, to practice Islamic customs and rituals, to listen to Turkish music and to wear traditional Muslim clothing followed after the replacement of the names. The specific measures for the development of the process were noted – ratification of the new Bulgarian names, propagation of the thesis for the Bulgarian origin of the Turkish population in the country, enhancement of the study of the Bulgarian language and imposition of its use in public places, overcoming of the influence of the Islam through systematic political work with the imams, construction of unified common cemeteries, suspension of the circumcision and the holidays related to it, severe sanctioning of the suneters and the parents who circumcise their children and so forth. The aspiration was to incorporate this population to the “socialist way of living”²⁰.

It was only after the conduct of the “process of revival” that its ideological justification was made. In February 1988 “Theses on the Process of Revival” were presented. It was noted in them that this was a “process of revival, clarification and enhancement of the Bulgarian national consciousness.”²¹ Bulgaria declared that all the Muslims were inheritors not of the “colonizers Turks, but of Bulgarians forcibly Islamized in the course of the Turkish yoke”²². An ideological connection was made with the Bulgarian national Revival, whose beginning was made by Paisiy Hilendarski with the writing of the “Slavonic Bulgarian History” in 1762. The revival of that part of the Bulgarian people, which under the virtue of historical circumstances was torn off from the main Bulgarian ethnos and was Islamized and made Turkish started to be spoken about.

The communist ideology staked on the thesis for the role of the ethnos with regard to the determination of the identity. The idea of one-nation state was maintained by the view for overlapping of a nation and nationality: “the measure for ethnic belonging is the

19 Доклад на Георги Атанасов за среща с първите секретари на ОК на БКП (18 януари 1985 г. - ЦДА, ф. 1б, оп. 63, а. е. 72.

20 Гочева, П. През Босфора към възродителния процес, С., 1994, 351 – В: Стоянов, В. Турското население..., 166.

21 Загорев, О. Възродителният процес. Теза. Антитеза. (Отрицание на отрицанието). С. 1993, 60

connection with the Bulgarian nation.”²³ “The Bulgarian nation is formed over the ethnic cultural inheritance of a nationality – the Bulgarian one.”²⁴ In this manner the nation itself was identified with the dominating ethnos ignoring the variety of its ethnic ingredients. To attain the idea of a unified Bulgarian nation it must be proven that the Turkish population belongs to the Bulgarian ethnos. The process of revival is “reinstatement, clarification and ratification of the Bulgarian national consciousness in all those Bulgarians with proven Bulgarian origin, whose forefathers and ancestors were converted to Mohammedanism during the yoke. In the wide sense this is a process, which reinstates the moral and political unity of the nation and contributes to the building up of the Bulgarian socialist nation.”²⁵

The common ideological formulations contribute to the appearance of a new exonym. The communist power introduced the term of “citizens with reinstated names”, which enhanced the confusion. By it the focus was placed over the name, which turned into a bearer of the new, Bulgarian identity. It was also spoken about “Islamized Bulgarians”, emphasizing in this manner the forcible imposition of the Islam²⁶. The other name - “Bulgarians, who have a different degree of development of the patriotic consciousness, the religious convictions”²⁷, indicated the idea for the different degree of devotion to the Bulgarian state.

The results of the “process of revival” were numerous. In the first place it resulted in the confinement of the Turkish community and its turning to its past and roots²⁸. The resistance forces of the group awoke in result of the political pressure and it tried to find out the truth about its origin, to go back to religion and to reinstate the forgotten traditions. This counteraction inevitably reflects over the identification of the Bulgarian Turks. They started not only to feel but also publicly declare their belonging to the Turkish and Muslim community. The Bulgarian Turks returned to the history and to its

²² Доклад на Георги Атанасов за среща с първите секретари на ОК на БКП (18 януари 1985 г.) – ПС, бр.4, 1991, 9.

²³ Живков, Т. Етнокултурно развитие на Възродителния процес – В: Проблеми на развитието..., ¹²⁹.

²⁴ Живков, Т. Етнокултурно развитие..., ¹³⁵.

²⁵ Петров, П. Исторически основи на възродителния процес. С., ¹⁹⁸⁸, 61-62.

²⁶ See Кръстева, А. Идентичност и власт: Комунистически и посткомунистически дискурс върху малцинствата – В: Кръстева, А. (съст.) Общности и идентичности. С., 1998: 150.

²⁷ ЦДА, чп 147 б, оп. 2, а. е. 2989, л. 6.

²⁸ See Кръстева, Н., Б. Асенов. Потурчване II. С., 1993.

roots during the “process of revival” with the sole purpose to prove their Turkish ethnic belonging. During the time when a process is conducted of substantiation of their Bulgarian origin, the Bulgarian Turks sought for all sorts of evidence which would prove their Turkish ethno-genesis²⁹.

The “process of revival” also resulted in the clarification of the idea that Turkey was the “mother country”, “the land of ancestors” and more precisely - “the historical native land”. The support in an international plan, which the country provided for, ratified the idea of the Bulgarian Turks that it protected its people. The migrants determine it through the terms of “vatan”, “anavatan” or “memleket”. Its mythological image is built up through the legend about the origin of the Kurdzhali Turks from the region of Karaman in Konya. During the time of ruling of Sultan Selim I (1512-1520) they were punished for insubordination and expelled from their native land. Owing to this reason the migration from Bulgaria into Turkey in the summer of 1989 was perceived by the migrants as a return to the native land even as leaving hell and entering paradise³⁰.

For the Bulgarian Turks migrants the key result of the “process of revival” was the reinstatement or more precisely the “clarification” of the Turkish ethnic and cultural self-consciousness: *“Bulgaria made us nationalists.”*³¹ This is why more of the migrants declare that it was namely then when they started to feel themselves more Turks than Bulgarians. The identification with the Turkish nation started from that time period according to the migrants. For them the belonging to Bulgaria remained more as devotion to the land and to the people.

The “process of revival” also reflected over the cultural identification of the Turks. Most of the Turks, who up to that time did not know the Islamic norms, studied them and commenced to fulfill them zealously. Even secret courses of Koran were organized. The prohibition of the Muslim customs and rituals generated their mass secret practicing. This enhanced the feeling for belonging to the Muslim community. The belonging to this confessional group turned out to be decisive with regard to the

²⁹ АЕИМ, № 574-III, 16, 20.

³⁰ АЕИМ, № 574-III, 35.

³¹ АЕИМ, № 574-III, 16.

adaptation of the migrants in the Turkish society, where they are well accepted as Muslims.

But the “process of revival” also resulted in the enhancement of the mundane influence amongst the Bulgarian Turks. Under external pressure they took in some of the Bulgarian and international holiday. Their practicing is noted even now – 15 years after the migration. Holidays as 1 March (the Day of Grandma March – a traditional Bulgarian holiday, related to the tying of a white and a red thread on the wrist) or 8 March - the International Women’s Day) are celebrated by the migrants nowadays too³². They are rationalized as brought in from Bulgaria and are defined as typical for the migrants’ community.

The forcible imposition of the Bulgarian names also reflected over the identity of the migrants. The paradoxical use of two names was reached. Now the Turks prefer to be entered in the Bulgarian identity papers with their Bulgarian names whilst in the Turkish ones they are entered with their Turkish names. Usually the use of one or another name is situational, it depends on the interlocutor. The reason for this fact further to being personal and aspiration after a better acceptance in the Bulgarian society, is often pragmatic and is related to the problemless travel in Western Europe.

The reverberation of the “process of revival” over the two languages is to be noted as well. The prohibition of the Turkish language in the middle of the eighties results in its use as secret for the community of the Bulgarian Turks. At that time the study of the modern Turkish language commenced too (by then the Turks spoke an old Ottoman dialect). After the migration a conversion was observed – the Turkish language became official whilst the Bulgarian acquired the functions of apocryphal. These two moments turned out to be decisive. On the one hand the mastering of the modern Turkish language helps with the adaptation in the new society, whilst the use of the Bulgarian language turns into a specific feature of the migrants’ group, which came from Bulgaria.

The “process of revival” is one of the main reasons for the formation of the specific identity of the Bulgarian Turks - migrants. It results in the clarification of the Turkish and Muslim belonging and in the enhancement of the feeling of national devotion to Turkey. On the other hand, it contributes to the entry of individual elements

³² АЕИМ, № 574-III: 7.

of the Bulgarian culture, which regardless of the initial resistance with regard to them, are transferred to the new country after the migration. The continuing use of two languages, of two names and of various customs and rituals are only a part of the characteristics, which suggest the border position of the migrants. This proves that the Bulgarian Turks migrants continue to live torn not only between two parts but also between two cultures.