POLITICAL REPRESENTATION WITHOUT RIGHTS: EXPLAINING THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT IN THE CASE OF ETHNIC TURKS IN POST-COMMUNIST BULGARIA

Idlir Lika[1]

Abstract: Bulgaria is a home to demographically the largest and spatially the most concentrated indigenous Turkish minority in the Balkans. An analysis of the long-term trends in post-communist Bulgarian politics, however, throws into sharp relief two contradictory patterns concerning the political representation of Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, the minority party Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) still holds a monopoly of Turkish /Muslim minority representation and has played the kingmaker role in several coalition governments in Bulgaria. On the other hand, despite this substantial political clout, Bulgarian Turks still have minimal ethno-linguistic rights. Through process tracing based on 12 semi-structured elite interviews in Bulgaria, I argue that a particular political opportunity structure variable, the absence of Bulgarian majority mainstream parties willing to enact minority legislation, accounts for the democratic deficit in the case of ethnic Turks in post-communist Bulgaria.

Keywords: Bulgaria, post-communism, minority representation, democratic deficit, ethnicity

1 Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul Gelişim University, ilika@gelisim.edu.tr

Introduction

Bulgaria is a home to demographically the largest and spatially the most concentrated indigenous Turkish minority in the Balkans. An analysis of the long-term trends in post-communist Bulgarian politics, however, throws into sharp relief two contradictory patterns concerning the political representation of Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, more than three decades after transition to democracy, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)[2]still holds a monopoly of Turkish /Muslim minority representation and it has played the kingmaker role in several coalition governments in Bulgaria. On the other hand, despite the substantial political clout Bulgarian Turks have through DPS, they still have minimal ethno-linguistic rights. With the notable exception of the constitutionally guaranteed right to study Turkish as an elective course in public schools, Bulgarian Turks have no constitutional status as a minority, Turkish language is not official at the local level even in towns where Turks constitute a majority of the population, and still there is not any Turkish language school in Bulgaria. This *democratic deficit* - having substantial political representation but minimal ethno-linguistic rights - is particularly puzzling if one considers several influential theories in the literature on ethnic parties and minority representation, all of which argue that significant legislative and executive representation of minority parties leads to appreciable policy influence. The case of the Bulgarian Turks contradicts such findings. Through process tracing based on 12 semi-structured elite interviews in Bulgaria, I argue that a particular political opportunity structure variable, the absence of Bulgarian majority mainstream parties willing to enact minority legislation, accounts for the democratic deficit in the case of ethnic Turks in post-communist Bulgaria.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, I outline the extant theoretical explanations in the literature, the research design and method employed in this paper and my contribution to the literature. The second section provides a brief historical background of the indigenous Turkish minority in Bulgaria and of the political dynamics in post-communist Bulgaria. The third section gives a descriptive account of the gap between the substantial political clout of DPS and the minimal ethno-linguistic rights Turks have in post-communist Bulgaria. The fourth section accounts for this democratic deficit. The concluding section summarizes the findings and assesses the potential impact of this democratic deficit on Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral relations.

2 In its Bulgarian acronym, *Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi* (DPS)

Literature review, research design and method

According to several influential theories in the scholarly literature on ethnic parties and minority representation, the success of ethnic parties[3] in having access to the legislature and especially to the executive leads to appreciable policy influence. For conventional accounts of ethnic politics, this is the case because ethnic parties *naturally* advocate for the substantive interests of their group members (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972; Lijphart, 1977; Horowitz, 1985). For the now-dominant constructivist accounts of ethnic politics, this is the case because in settings in which ethnic distribution and other policy benefits motivate voting behavior, ethnic parties have the *electoral incentive* to target benefits to their ethnic group members (Chandra, 2004; Birnir, 2007; Madrid, 2012). For instance, Johanna Birnir (2007) makes the case that *sustained* legislative representation of ethnic parties is only possible through its ability to enact legislation that furthers the interests of the minority. As she aptly puts it, "Ethnic groups seek satisfaction of policy demands. Policy demands are met when the group has bargaining leverage in the legislature or direct access to the executive" (Birnir, 2007, p. 168). A proportional representation (PR) based electoral system makes the electoral success of ethnic parties even more likely, and by implication, their achievement of ethno-linguistic rights (Lijphart, 1977; Van Cott, 2005). In brief, if an ethnic party has legislative and executive power, it can potentially barter its political support to mainstream majority parties in return for getting ethno-linguistic rights for its constituency.

To empirically test the aforementioned theories and to theoretically contribute to the literature, I develop a research design that takes the case of DPS in post-communist Bulgaria as a "most-likely case". As John Gerring (2007, p. 232) puts it, "a most-likely case is one that, on all dimensions except the dimension of theoretical interest, is predicted to achieve a certain outcome and yet does not. It is therefore disconfirmatory." In this respect, the case of DPS in post-communist Bulgaria would be a "most-likely case" to observe a significant level of ethno-linguistic rights for the Turks because of the substantial legislative and executive power of DPS. However, empirically, this has not been the case as the level of ethno-linguistic rights of Bulgarian Turks is minimal. Hence, the case of the DPS *disconfirms* the predictions of the aforementioned theories in the literature. It shows that,

3 Following Van Cott (2005) and Madrid (2012), I define an ethnic party as a political organization the majority of whose leaders and members self-identify as belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group (Van Cott, 2005, p. 3), that "prioritizes" the interests of that particular group, and that appeals to them as members of that group (Madrid, 2012, p. 6).

while the political clout of an ethnic party may be a *necessary* condition for achieving ethno-linguistic rights for its constituency, it is *not sufficient*. For an ethnic party to be able to translate its political clout into policy influence, another condition needs to be present. To uncover this condition and thus make an important theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature, I employ process tracing as a qualitative method (Bennett & Checkel, 2015), focusing on the interaction between DPS and the Bulgarian mainstream majority parties and on how the Bulgarian majority parties have reacted to the Bulgarian Turks' political demands for ethno-linguistic rights. In addition to the secondary sources, I base my process tracing on 12 semi-structured elite interviews conducted in Bulgaria between November 2018 and May 2019 with former/current ministers, members of parliament, party leaders and deputy leaders, as well as academics and journalists. I find that for an ethnic party to be able to translate its political clout into policy influence, it needs to have political allies among mainstream majority parties which are willing to enact minority legislation *and* which command a majority of votes in the parliament. Both conditions need to be met. In the absence of such allies, the minority is likely to experience a democratic deficit - that is, being politically represented but without rights.

Historical background

According to the 2011 census, 588,318 Bulgarian citizens self-identify as ethnic Turk, thus accounting for 8,8 percent of the 7,3 million population (Bulgaria Census, 2011)[4] Table 1 lists in descending order the Bulgarian districts where Turks constitute between 70 and 10 percent of the local population.

TABLE 1 Bulgarian districts (out of a total of 28) where ethnic Turks constitute between 70 and 10 percent of the local population

District	% ethnic Bulgarian	% ethnic Turk
Kardzhali	30.2	66.2
Razgrad	43.0	50.0

4 The other Balkan countries populated by ethnic Turks are North Macedonia, where 3,85 percent of Macedonian citizens self-identify as ethnically Turk (Macedonia Census, 2002); Kosovo, where Turks comprise 1,08 percent of the population (Kosovo Census, 2011); and Greece, where Muslims account for around 1 percent of the population (Aktürk and Lika, 2022, pp. 3-5). In the Greek case, I use religion as a proxy for ethnic belonging since Greece does not collect ethnically specific information in its national census

Silistra	57.4	36.1
Targovishte	54.7	35.8
Shumen	59.2	30.3
Dobrich	75.4	13.5
Burgas	80.5	13.3
Ruse	81.4	13.2
Haskovo	79.4	12.5

Source: (Bulgaria Census, 2011)

As the data from Table 1 shows, ethnic Turks outnumber ethnic Bulgarians in only two districts, Kardzhali (southern Bulgaria along the border with Greece) and Razgrad (northeastern Bulgaria) where they constitute a majority of the population. On the other hand, taken together, Turks constitute a significant part of the population in nine out of 28 Bulgarian districts (32 percent).

These figures describe the most recent demographic composition of post-communist Bulgaria after more than one century of Bulgarian nation-building (1878-1989) based mostly on the violent exclusion and assimilation of Ottoman Muslims/Turks (Chirot, 2005). The process of nation-building initially took the form of several waves of violent expulsion. It began with the Ottoman defeat in the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War and continued during the twentieth century with the Ottoman defeat in the First Balkan War (1912). After the communist takeover in Bulgaria in 1944, Turks were initially expelled from Bulgarian territory in 1950-1951 in order to break their resistance to the forceful collectivization of agriculture (Neuburger, 2004, pp. 67-73; Crampton, 2005, pp. 91-99). All in all, "taking into account only figures which are relatively reliable", writes Wolfgang Höpken (1997, p. 55), "it is possible to demonstrate that well over 1 million Turks have left Bulgaria since the modern Bulgarian state came into being in 1878."

Bulgarian nation-building shifted from exclusion to assimilation by the late 1950s, when the then Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov, in a direct emulation of Maoist China, launched the Bulgarian "Great Leap Forward" and the accompanying "Cultural Revolution", during which "Campaigns against the fez, turban, veil, shalvari, circumcision, and household culture penetrated the most intimate reaches of Muslim homes and bodies." (Neuburger, 2004, p. 199) The assimilation process that continued at a lower

pace ever since it reached its peak during 1984-1985 with the forceful name-changing policy and the total ban of Islamic practices, a process that has rightfully been described as "one of the most extensive and certainly the most rapid assimilation campaign in European history." (Dimitrov, 2000, p. 1) In the midst of mounting international condemnation and domestic unrest, the communist regime opened the border with Turkey in May 1989 and as a result, around 350 000 Turks left Bulgaria during June-September 1989, in what Neuburger (2004, p. 82) considers "the biggest mass exodus in Europe" since the Second World War.[5]

Political dynamics in the post-communist period

Despite its assimilationist and exclusionary communist past, post-communist Bulgaria, unlike its neighboring former Yugoslav republics, had a remarkably peaceful political transition and succeeded in building enduringly peaceful inter-ethnic relations. Credit for this has been causally attributed to the Bulgarian transition that was based on the Round Table negotiations between the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)[6] and the anti-communist opposition Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)[7] (Kolarova and Dimitrov, 1996); the reasonable political behavior of the mainstream Bulgarian elites (Barany, 2002, p. 153; Gallagher, 2003, p. 20); the end of the assimilation campaign that slightly upgraded the status of Turks (Koinova, 2013); and the "(proto-) liberal multiculturalism" ethnic incorporation mode Bulgaria shifted to in the post-communism period (Alptekin, 2017). This list of causal factors should be complemented with the constructive role played by the DPS, the first minority political movement formed in the then newly democratic environment. The formation of DPS had tremendous repercussions for Bulgaria's peaceful political transition which cannot be overstated.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) was founded on January 4, 1990, in Varna by 33 members of the former Turkish National Liberation Movement (TMKH).[8] Since the very beginning, DPS was conceived and

5 More than half of those who emigrated later returned after Zhivkov was deposed in a peaceful palace coup in November 10, 1989.

6 BSP is the legal successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

7 In its Bulgarian acronym, Sayuz na Demokratichnite Sili. Founded on December 7, 1989, SDS was actually a loose coalition of human rights groups, environmental associations, trade unions, and traditional Bulgarian political parties revived after the fall of communism. By the first democratic election in June 1990, SDS was composed of 16 different organizations (Lika, 2020, pp. 114-115).

8 The Turkish National Liberation Movement (Bulgaristan Türk Milli Kurtuluş Hareketi) was the underground resistance organization that was formed in 1985 during the assimilation period in Bulgaria. Many of its members were subsequently imprisoned in 1986 and were released only in December 1989 after the communist leader Zhivkov was deposed.

founded as TMKH's political successor and as such, TMKH's leader, Ahmed Doğan, a former philosophy professor at Sofia University and member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, was agreed upon to preside over the DPS also.[9] The founding objective of DPS was to protect and advance Bulgarian Turks/Muslims' ethno-linguistic rights *beyond* the mere right to reclaim their names. After all, the assimilation policies had been officially terminated *before* the DPS was founded[10], since the former communists well understood that it would have been difficult to preserve power in the new democratic system with such policies intact. Therefore, DPS would focus exclusively on furthering minority rights through the democratic institutions and by respecting the territorial integrity of the Bulgarian state.[11] "Armed conflict was a distant possibility," avers Hyusein Ömer, "we simply wanted to work and live with dignity as equal citizens of this country."[12]

However, the aim of the party members to advance minority rights through peaceful means was not fully shared by the DPS leadership. For Ahmed Doğan, preserving inter-ethnic peace involved a fundamental trade-off. Peace could be preserved only at the expense of furthering minority rights. Hence, since the very beginning, Doğan shelved any ethno-linguistic agenda for advancing the rights of Bulgarian Turks and torpedoed any effort in this direction by DPS members by expelling them from the party.[13] Relying on the unwavering political support of both left-wing and right-wing Bulgarian mainstream parties, Ahmed Doğan gradually made DPS a formidable political player, yet one that put aside the ethno-linguistic and socio-economic interests of its constituency.[14] I now turn to a descriptive account of the gap between the substantial political clout of DPS and the minimal ethno-linguistic rights ethnic Turks have in post-communist Bulgaria.

9 Author's interview with Kasım Dal, 11 November 2018, Sofia. Kasım Dal was one of the 33 founding members of DPS. He has served as deputy leader and member of parliament for four legislative terms (1997-2011). In 2011, he leaves DPS and co-founds People's Party for Freedom and Dignity (NPSD) with Korman İsmailov.

10 In December 29, 1989, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party officially put an end to the assimilation process by allowing Bulgarian Muslims and Turks to initiate legal procedures for reclaiming their names.

11 Author's interview with Kasım Dal.

12 Author's interview with Hyusein Ömer, 13 November 2018, Razgrad. Hyusein Ömer is DPS' Razgrad deputy elected to the first post-communist legislature (June 1990-October 1991). Together with Halim Pasajov, they were the first party members and deputies to be expelled from DPS by Ahmed Doğan.

13 Author's Interview with Hyusein Ömer.

14 Author's Interview with Güner Tahir, 7 November 2018, Sofia. Güner Tahir is a former DPS (1994-1997) and SDS (1997-2001) member of parliament. In 1998, he founded the National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (NDPS).

Describing the *democratic deficit* in post-communist Bulgaria

Empirically, DPS' enormous political clout in post-communist Bulgarian politics can be shown in two ways. Firstly, after a total of 11 parliamentary elections from the transition in 1990 up to present, DPS is still the only minority party that has succeeded in entering the Bulgarian parliament. Despite the presence of a host of other minority parties[15] claiming to represent the interests of the Bulgarian Turks /Muslims, DPS' monopoly of minority representation is still unbroken. DPS' average vote share across 11 parliamentary elections is around 10 percent and its average number of parliamentary seats around 27, which is 11.25 percent of the 240 seats Bulgarian parliament has in total (Lika, 2020, p. 153). Hence, both DPS' average vote share and seats exceed the percentage of its core constituency (Bulgarian Turks comprise 8,8 percent of Bulgaria's population). Moreover, due to the solid and loyal support of the Turks, DPS is "the only party in Bulgarian politics whose vote share has not fluctuated but has instead steadily increased" across the parliamentary elections (Aktürk and Lika, 2022, p. 14).

Secondly, DPS has used its solid numbers in the legislature to play the kingmaker role in several Bulgarian coalition governments. More specifically, DPS has been the key in determining the ruling coalition in five different instances since 1990. After the October 1991 general elections, DPS leader Ahmed Doğan firstly swang the executive to SDS and then he allied with the former communists (BSP) and brought down the SDS government (Lika, 2021, p. 9). After the June 2001 election, Doğan allied with the then newly formed party of former King Simeon II (NDSV) and brought them to power - in what was considered "a first for Bulgaria, for Europe, and the world" (Crampton, 2005, p. 248). Finally, after the June 2005 and May 2013 general elections, DPS again allied with the BSP and brought the former communists back to power (Lika, 2020, p. 152). All in all, DPS' monopolization of Turkish /Muslim minority representation and its kingmaker role in several coalition governments empirically show the enormous legislative and executive clout the party has in post-communist Bulgarian politics. Has the party been able to translate this political clout into concrete policy influence that advances the ethno-linguistic rights of its constituency?

15 Former DPS deputy Adem Kenan founded the Turkish Democratic Party (TDP) in December 1992; Güner Tahir founded the NDPS in 1998; Kasım Dal and Korman İsmailov founded People's Party for Freedom and Dignity (NPSD) in 2011 and most recently former DPS deputy leader Lyutvi Mestan founded Democrats for Responsibility, Solidarity, and Tolerance (DOST) in April 2016 (Alptekin et al., 2020, pp. 85-86).

The short answer is no. To start with, Bulgarian Turks do not have any constitutionally recognized minority status. Instead, Article 36(2) of the Bulgarian constitution implicitly refers to them as "citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian" (Bulgaria Constitution, 1991). Second, Turkish language is not official at the local level even in towns where Turks constitute the majority of the population (such as Kardzhali in the south and Razgrad in the northeast), and as of 2022, not a single Turkish language school operates in Bulgaria, despite the frequent demands of the minority and occasionally of Turkey itself.[16] Even the exercise of the only constitutionally guaranteed right, studying Turkish language as an elective course in public schools (Bulgaria Constitution, 1991, Art. 36/2), is often hampered in practice through various legal arrangements. As such, the number of Turkish students who selected Turkish language courses in Bulgarian public schools in the academic year 1992-1993 was around 114,000. However, by the 2017-2018 academic year this number had fallen drastically to only 5,385 (Alptekin et al., 2020, p. 22). Lastly, Bulgaria (together with Greece) is the only Balkan country where a Yunus Emre Institute and a TİKA Office (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) does not operate. Why is there such a significant gap between the political clout of a minority and its ethno-linguistic rights?

Accounting for the *democratic deficit* in post-communist Bulgaria

I argue that a particular political opportunity structure variable, the presence of allies among the majority mainstream parties, what I call "majority allies", which are willing to enact minority legislation and which command a majority of votes in the parliament, is a necessary condition for the minorities to achieve ethno-linguistic rights.[17] The logic is straightforward. In democratic countries, to enact any kind of legislation, a majority of votes in the parliament is needed. As far as minority rights legislation is concerned, the support of an ethnic majority party that commands a majority of the votes in parliament is indispensable for any such legislation to pass. In brief, I argue that for an ethnic party to be able to translate its political clout into policy influence, it needs to have political allies among mainstream majority

16 Author's interviews with İsmail Cambazov, Turkish journalist and publicist in Bulgaria, 29 April 2019, Sofia; and Hayri Emin, Foreign Relations expert at the Bulgarian Office of Grand Mufti, 8 November 2018, Sofia.

17 In developing this argument, I have been influenced by the influential theoretical contribution of Aktürk (2012), who argues that ethnicity regimes in different countries can be changed by "counterelites" who have a new discourse linking ethnicity and nationhood, and who command a hegemonic majority of votes in the legislature.

parties which are willing to enact minority legislation and which command a majority of votes in the parliament. Both conditions need to be met. In the case of post-communist Bulgaria, such "majority allies" among both mainstream center-left (BSP) and center-right parties (SDS, NDSV, GERB) have been conspicuously absent. Although DPS has been a kingmaker in several coalition governments and they have controlled a majority of votes in the parliament in several instances, Bulgarian parties of both the left and right have opposed the granting of ethno-linguistic rights to the Turks, because both of them essentially view the Bulgarian nation as being mono-ethnic and mono-lingual. Several empirical instances can be mentioned to substantiate this point.

To begin with, during the course of the Round Table talks that took place between BSP and SDS from January to May 1990, both parties agreed to exclude DPS from the Round Table. They agreed upon Bulgarian being the only official language at both the local and national level. Equally importantly, they also agreed upon banning ethnic / religious parties while, behind closed doors, they allowed the registration of DPS as the only legal political representative of ethnic Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria (Aktürk and Lika, 2022, p. 13). As such, a kind of informal understanding emerged since the very beginning of Bulgaria's democratic transition, whereby Bulgarian parties of both the left and right would help DPS preserve a monopoly of Turkish / Muslim representation, while the DPS in return would shelve any ethno-linguistic agenda for advancing the rights of Bulgarian Turks.[18] The passing of the first post-communist constitution in July 1991 was also a clear indication of the presence of such an informal understanding between mainstream Bulgarian parties and the DPS. While the ethnic decisions reached during the Round Table talks (concerning the officialdom of Bulgarian language and the ban on ethnic parties) were eventually incorporated into the constitution, the proposals of the then Turkish-descent BSP deputy İbrahim Yalımov and two DPS deputies (Hyusein Ömer and Adem Kenan) for minority status for the Turks and for the right to establish Turkish-language schools were ignored by both the BSP and SDS.[19] As a result, Yalımov and Ömer resigned from BSP and DPS, respectively, while Adem Kenan was eventually expelled from the party.[20]

Further substantiating my argument, DPS had wide bargaining leverage

18 Author's interviews with Güner Tahir and Hayri Emin.

19 Author's interview with İbrahim Yalımov, prominent Turkish academic and former BSP deputy (1990-91), 2 May 2019, Sofia.

20 Author's interview with Hyusein Ömer.

following the October 1991 and June 2001 parliamentary elections due to its kingmaker role in forming the government. Theoretically, DPS could have bartered its political support to SDS and NDSV, respectively, in exchange for ethno-linguistic rights for its constituency. But this never materialized. In this respect, the case of the former Bulgarian King Simeon II's party (NDSV) after its overwhelming victory in the June 2001 election is particularly instructive. Among all Bulgarian mainstream parties, NDSV might have been expected to be closer to the Turks both because Turks/Muslims had traditionally supported the monarchy in Bulgaria (especially during the interwar years) and because many Bulgarian Turks actually voted for Simeon II in the June 2001 parliamentary elections (Crampton, 2005, p. 248). Subsequently, NDSV formed a coalition government with DPS and they together controlled an overwhelming majority of the seats in the legislature. However, no minority ethno-linguistic legislation was enacted during their incumbency (2001-2005). I argue that the reason for this is that NDSV, like all other mainstream Bulgarian parties, was unwilling to support such legislation. As former DPS deputy Ivan Palchev remarked at the time concerning Simeon II: "His majesty must not forget that nationalism is a constant in each Bulgarian party" (Palchev, 2002, p. 81). In brief, as all the aforementioned empirical examples clearly point out, DPS has not been able to translate its significant political clout in policy influence benefiting the Turks due to the absence of "majority allies" willing to enact minority legislation. Even in cases where the majority of seats in parliament necessary for enacting legislation was reached, support from mainstream Bulgarian parties of both the left and right was lacking. This is the reason the ethnic Turks in post-communist Bulgaria have been experiencing a democratic deficit.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the long-term trends of the political representation of the indigenous Turkish minority in post-communist Bulgaria and pointed out two contradictory patterns. While the ethnic minority party DPS has been uniquely successful up to now in monopolizing Turkish/Muslim representation and in playing a kingmaker role in several coalition governments in Bulgaria, at the same time it has conspicuously failed in translating its political clout into policy influence that benefits the ethno-linguistic rights of the Turks. To account for this representation gap and democratic deficit (which contradicts the theoretical predictions of several influential theories in the literature), I develop a new argument whereby I

causally link enacting minority legislation with the presence of "majority allies" which are willing to enact such legislation and which have the necessary majority of seats in the parliament to enact such legislation. Post-communist Bulgarian politics has notably lacked mainstream majority Bulgarian parties willing to support legislation that advances the ethno-linguistic rights of the Turks, and this has generated the democratic deficit.

In light of this representation gap, several influential members of the Turkish minority complain that the DPS "does not voice our demands".[21] The late İsmail Cambazov even averred that "we are being melted away", and that they counted only on Turkey to support the Bulgarian Turks.[22] Yet, Turkey's ability to push through any significant change in this respect is constrained by legal and geopolitical imperatives. Of course, Turkey fully supports Bulgaria's territorial integrity and the successful political / economic integration of its ethnic kin, but at the same time Ankara does not want to be perceived as interfering in Bulgaria's domestic affairs. In light of the long-standing regional rivalry with Greece, it is essential for Turkey to keep good relations with Bulgaria and enlist its support within the EU. Turkish decision-makers are fully aware that both politically and geographically Bulgaria is Turkey's "gateway to Europe" (Aktürk, 2020, p. 170). In brief, the demands of the Bulgarian Turkish representatives are valid and understandable but they have to be weighed against Ankara's geopolitical imperatives.

Hence, facing also external limitations, it is important that Bulgarian Turks put more effort domestically to preserve their distinctive ethno-religious identity and advance their rights. In this respect, remembering and commemorating events of collective victimization, such as the assimilation campaign and the 1989 mass exodus, is essential in keeping alive and raising the awareness of being culturally distinct. The efforts of the "Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities" (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB) in organizing various commemorative activities are important in this regard. To be sure, the aim is not to sow hatred, but to raise awareness so that similar tragic events are never repeated.

References

Aktürk, Ş. (2012). Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey. Cambridge University Press.

Aktürk, Ş. (2020). Turkey's grand strategy as the third power: a realist

21 Interview with İbrahim Yalımov

22 Interview with İsmail Cambazov

proposal. Perceptions, 25(2), 152-177.

Aktürk, Ş., & Lika, I. (2022). The puzzle of Turkish minority representation, nationhood cleavage, and politics of recognition in Bulgaria, Greece, and North Macedonia. Mediterranean Politics, 27(1), 1-28 https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1750269

Alptekin, H. (2017). A Theory of Ethnic Violence: Ethnic Incorporation and Ethno-Political Mobilization in Bulgaria and Cyprus. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(15), 2672-90.

Alptekin, H., Lika, I., Dağdelen, M. D., & Erdoğu, V. (2020). *Bulgaristan Türklerinin Kültürel, Ekonomik, ve Siyasi Sorunları, Talepleri,* Çözüm Önerileri. SETA.

Barany, Z. D. (2002). Bulgaria's Royal Elections. *Journal of Democracy,* 13(2), 141-155.

Bennett, A. & Checkel, J. (2015). Process *Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge University Press.

Birnir, J. K. (2007). *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Bulgaria Census. (2011). *2011 Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria*. https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf

Bulgaria Constitution. (1991). *Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*. https://www.parliament.bg/en/const

Chandra, K. (2004). *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed? Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India*. Cambridge University Press.

Chirot, D. (2005). What Provokes Violent Ethnic Conflict? Political Choice in One African and Two Balkan Cases. In Z. Barany and R. Moser (Eds.), *Ethnic Politics after Communism* (pp. 140-165). Cornell University Press.

Crampton, R. (2005). *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Dimitrov, V. (2000). In Search of a Homogenous Nation: The Assimilation of Bulgaria's Turkish Minority, 1984-1985. *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe,* 1(4), 1-22.

Gallagher, T. (2003). *The Balkans After the Cold War: From Tyranny to Tragedy*. Routledge.

Gerring, J. (2003). Is there a (viable) crucial-case method?, *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(3), 231-253. doi: 10.1177/0010414006290784

Horowitz, D. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press.

Höpken, W. (1997). From Religious Identity to Ethnic Mobilisation: The

Turks of Bulgaria before, under, and since Communism. In H. Poulton and S. Taji-Farouki (Eds.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State* (pp. 54-81). C. Hurst.

Koinova, M. (2013). *Ethnonationalist Conflict in Postcommunist States: Varieties of Governance in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kolarova, R. & Dimitrov, D. (1996). The Roundtable Talks in Bulgaria. In J. Elster (Ed.), *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism* (pp. 178-212). University of Chicago Press.

Kosovo Census. (2011). *Vleresim: Popullsia e Kosoves 2011*. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2127/vlersim-popullsia-e-kosoves-2011.pdf

Lijphart, A. (1977). *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. Yale University Press.

Lika, I. (2020, January). *Nationhood Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Post-communist Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia* [Doctoral dissertation, Koç University].

Lika, I. (2021). Nationhood Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Post-communist Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, *Mediterranean Politics* (published online ahead of print) https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2021.1980263

Macedonia Census. (2002). *Census of the Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia–BookXIII*. http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/knigaXIII.pdf

Madrid, R. L. (2012). *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Neuburger, M. (2004). *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria*. Cornell University Press.

Palchev, I. (2002). *Ahmed Dogan and the Bulgarian Ethnic Model*. National Museum of Bulgarian Books and Polygraphy.

Rabushka, A. & Shepsle, K. A. (1972). *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability*. Merrill.

Van Cott, D. L. (2005). *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge University Press.