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On: 21 October 2007
Access Details: [subscription number 772814175]
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Southeast European and Black Sea Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713634533>

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Online Publication Date: 01 December 2006

To cite this Article: Köksal, Yonca (2006) 'Minority Policies in Bulgaria and Turkey: The Struggle to Define a Nation', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 6:4, 501 - 521

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14683850601016390

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683850601016390>

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Minority Policies in Bulgaria and Turkey: The Struggle to Define a Nation

Yonca Köksal

This paper analyses how state policies towards minorities are defined in new nation-states. It compares the treatment of Turks in Bulgaria and Kurds in Turkey from the foundation of both states until the 1940s. Imperial legacy, elite unity, responses of minority groups and the international context are important factors that influenced government policies to include or exclude minority groups. In Bulgaria, government policies towards the Turkish minority varied from indifference to tolerance and later to assimilation. In Turkey, the trajectory of state policy shifted from tolerance to assimilation in the early years of nation-state formation. Findings suggest that when unified central governments and organized minority reaction coincide, state policies tend to aim at the assimilation of minorities.

Theories of civic and ethnic nationalism assume that civic and ethnic forms are constant and lead to the adoption of fixed state policies towards minorities (Kohn 1944; Smith 1991; Brubaker 1992). The cases of Turks in Bulgaria and Kurds in Turkey in the early years of nation-state formation suggest that civic and ethnic forms change, especially in the new states. Bulgarian state policies isolated Turks in the early years, later tolerated them during the Agrarian Union government, and turned towards assimilation during the right-wing governments of the 1930s. In Turkey, Kurds were first included and tolerated in the definition of the nation, while state policy became more assimilationist after the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925. Bulgaria and Turkey started with different state policies but both trajectories turned towards assimilation in the long run.

This essay attempts to account for such variance in state policies. It examines how two states that used different policies of inclusion and exclusion ended up in a similar trajectory of assimilation. It presents a path-dependent model, in which imperial administrative practices combined with other factors define a trajectory for the

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government policies of new nation-states (Skocpol 1984; Tilly 1997). Both Turkey and Bulgaria were the successor states of the Ottoman Empire, and they inherited the same legacies of imperial rule. The legacy of the Ottoman millet system influenced the trajectories for nation-state policies, in which different factors such as crystallization of the nation in the legal sphere, international pressure, unified central governments and minority responses interacted with each other and defined limits and options for future state policies.

Further, this paper compares and contrasts Bulgarian and Turkish state policies from the foundation of both states until the 1940s. This time period allows for a measurement of the impact of imperial legacy in the formative years of the nationalist projects. It also provides a good opportunity to analyse changes in state policies in practice over time. The late 1940s marked regime changes in both countries, which also altered minority policies of governments. In Bulgaria, the Communist regime was established in 1944, and Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1946.

This study refers to Turks in Bulgaria and Kurds in Turkey as minority groups. There is no universally accepted definition of minorities, however. In some studies, 'minority' refers to politically conscious communities at the stage of their own nation formation (Kirişçi & Winrow 1997: 34). Nevertheless, this usage does not do justice to Turks in Bulgaria and Kurds in Turkey. When the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, the majority of Turks and Kurds considered themselves members of the Muslim community. The idea of belonging to a Kurdish or Turkish nation developed long after the formation of the Bulgarian and Turkish nation-states. In order to capture this process, the use of 'minority' does not imply political consciousness and perceptions of individuals. Rather, minority in this paper simply refers to groups that are ethnically, religiously, linguistically and culturally different from the majority of the population. The recognition of this difference can be either by outsiders (i.e. majority groups or state authorities) or by members of the minority group.

Inclusion and Exclusion of Minorities

For a long time theories of nationalism explained the formation of a nation by the two alternative paths of 'civic' and 'ethnic' forms. Newly founded states in the early stages of forming their nation usually face two options: They either exclude minorities from their definition of nationhood or attempt to incorporate them into the nationalist project. Ethnic nationalism has been defined as a form of exclusive nationhood, defining the nation and granting citizenship rights based on cultural and ethnic criteria. Minority groups who do not fit into this ethnic criterion are excluded from citizenship. Civic nationalism incorporates all citizens and grants them equal social, political and cultural rights regardless of their ethnic or religious origins (Geertz 1963; Smith 1986; Anderson 1991; Brubaker 1992; Hobsbawm 1992).

Western European nationalism has been associated from its start with civic inclusiveness and liberal and inclusive forms of representation. 'Liberal states should be 'neutral' with respect to the ethnocultural identities of their citizens, and indifferent to the ability of ethnocultural groups to reproduce themselves over time' (Kymlicka

2001: 16). The growth of industrialization, the rise of the bourgeoisie and the increase in literacy contributed to this inclusive process. Eastern European nationalism has been considered more ethnic as the absence of industrialization, low literacy rates and restricted means of communication limited options for civic nation building. In Eastern Europe, the nation was assumed to exist before the state, and the state, once created, had an inherent interest in protecting the nation that it arose from. Instead of inclusion, collective solidarity was built on the exclusion of minority groups (Kohn 1944).

The problem with this dichotomization of civic and ethnic nationalism is its static nature. Assuming that states in the West were built exclusively on the principle of civic nationalism disregards the use of exclusion in several instances. Anthony Marx argues that there are analytical and empirical distinctions between more inclusion and exclusion, but nation-building did not consistently pursue one or the other (Marx 2003: 116). Civic inclusiveness has usually been a result of earlier exclusion and intolerance. Moreover, the stereotyping of civic nationalism for Western Europe and ethnic nationalism for Eastern Europe presumes a relatively fixed government policy from the start. Most studies on civic and ethnic nationalism usually analyse how civic and ethnic forms influence the treatment of minorities without analysing how inclusionary and exclusionary government policies come into being.¹ This paper reverses the logic and questions how inclusive and exclusive government policies are formulated in the first place.

The transformation from a multiethnic empire into nation-states necessitates a reformulation of the relations between states and minority groups. The form of government policy towards minorities is defined under the influence of several factors, and it may fluctuate until state consolidation is completed. Instead of pure forms of civic and ethnic nationalism, there are degrees of inclusion and exclusion in the early years of state formation.

I define four different government policies to describe degrees of inclusion and exclusion in nation-states that break away from multiethnic empires: repression, assimilation, pluralist policies (institutionalized tolerance) and indifference. Tolerant or intolerant attitudes towards language, education and religious practice of minority groups define the character of state policies. The policies available to governments to prevent the maintenance of separate ethnic identities or to limit the influence of ethnic groups range from the most extreme form of *repression*, including genocide and deportation, to policies designed to undercut potential bases for ethnic group mobilization through *assimilation*. Assimilation can aim at control over usage of common cultural and linguistic symbols in schools. It can also aim at administrative incorporation through the interaction or cooperation of ethnic group leaders into the structures of power and wealth in the society.

Alternatively, governments may choose to follow explicitly *pluralist policies* and solutions to state–nation relations by establishing political structures such as federalism or by conceding to different ethnic groups the right to receive education through the medium of their mother tongue and to protect, preserve, and promote their culture in a variety of ways. (Brass 1991: 50)

Indifference refers to disinterest in minority problems and non-acknowledgement of minorities as a group by the ruling elites. By ignoring minorities, however, education in the mother tongue and religious practice can be tolerated. Indifference is different from institutionalized tolerance since it is not based on written rules and stable long-term official policies.

The Bulgarian and Turkish nation-states employed indifference, pluralist policies and later assimilation in the foundation years, while repression was occasionally utilized in both cases. Several factors influenced this shift in government policies. Among these factors, imperial legacy, legal definitions, international pressure, ruling elite unity and responses of minority groups to earlier state policies played an important role in defining state policies in both countries.

Nation-states emerging from multiethnic empires tend to carry previous administrative practices into their new administrative structures.² The decision to follow or break with previous imperial policies is context specific (Motyl 1992). It is dependent on political, social and economic circumstances as well as the legacies of empires. Imperial regimes form patterned relations between centre and periphery, which are mediated by peripheral elites. These relations survive in the new nation-states and dominate the types of state and nation formation (Barkey 1997, 2000; Hechter 2000).

Imperial legacy is especially important in the early years of state formation. Imperial policies in multiethnic societies set certain administrative patterns as available means for new nation-states to treat their minorities. First, the definition of minority as a distinct group is contingent upon imperial administrative practices. Minorities can be defined with various criteria (i.e. ethnic origin, language or religion) depending on the previous definition in the imperial regimes. Second, imperial legacies that are former means of conduct between the state and minorities influence the definition of minority rights in the legal sphere. Third, the existing treatment of different groups in empires may set a model for international actors, and they can pressure new states to apply imperial legacies in international treaties.

The Ottoman administration recognized confessional communities called *millets* and granted them certain rights for religious practice and the expression of ethnic and religious identity. Religious leaders and notables administered justice and education within their community (Sugar 1996). The millet system was not egalitarian: although millets were granted certain rights, Muslims were privileged. Overall, this system provided the continuation of religious and ethnic identities and the ordering of social and political life along millet lines (Bradue & Lewis 1982). The millet system was not a static institution and underwent substantial transformation throughout the nineteenth century with reforms that improved the conditions of non-Muslims as part of the incomplete state attempt to create an equal Ottoman citizenship (Karpat 1973).

The succeeding Balkan states, especially Bulgaria and Greece, had similar policies towards their minorities and both adopted the millet legacy to administer their Muslim minorities after their independence (Eren 1997). In Bulgaria, all Muslims were defined as Bulgarian citizens but excluded from the Bulgarian nation since their administration was separated from the rest and run by their religious leaders as a continuation of the millet system. The new Turkish Republic used the legacy of Islamic community and

considered all Kurds as an integral part of the Turkish nation in the early years of state building, especially until the Kurdish upheavals of 1925. Even though these earlier policies were subject to change in later stages, the millet legacy played an important role in the treatment of Turks and Kurds in both states.

Imperial legacies start a trajectory for state policies by influencing the legal sphere, the international environment and minority groups, and in the process of state consolidation all these factors also influence government policies. Imperial administrative practices can help to draw up the legal framework for minorities in new nation-states. In turn, by granting certain rights to minorities and denying others, legal definitions set a framework for future interactions between minorities and government policies. This process of fixing definitions and limiting further enactments of legal practices can be called the crystallization of the nation in the legal sphere.³ The delimitations put into the legal sphere are subject to change in practice. In some cases, although different groups are declared equal by law, they can become *de facto* minority groups when administrative practices isolate and treat them differently. In other cases, groups that are given legal minority status may be treated as an integral part of the nationhood project by pluralist policies. Turks under the Communist regime were forcefully integrated into the Bulgarian nation while their legal status granted them minority rights. Kurds were considered an integral part of the Turkish nation and never legally recognized as a minority group. However, in practice they emerged as the largest minority group in Turkey.

Depending on interactions with other factors, international pressure can help minorities by forcing governments to respond to minorities or can hurt them by making minorities seem an ally to an enemy state. When the international environment does not intervene much in domestic affairs, newly founded nation-states have more power to apply coercive policies. When there is a 'homeland state' to protect the rights of minorities (Brubaker 1996), repression or forced assimilation is less likely. The Ottoman Empire and Turkey acted as homeland states for Turks in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian state usually considered Turkish-speaking Muslims as allies of Turkey. This contributed to the exclusion of Muslims from the definition of the Bulgarian nation but also provided protection of Turkey for them. Kurds, however, did not have a homeland state.

More importantly, government policies are influenced by power struggles among the ruling elites to control the administration. Unified central governments can allow ruling elites to mobilize and deliver resources to respond to minority demands. Alternatively, a unified government with more resources can allow ruling elites to successfully repress minorities depending on other factors. The early years of state formation can be vulnerable to competition among different elite fractions. States inheriting major internal conflicts often construct racial and ethnic justifications for loyalty. Without such contested loyalty, states can afford to be more 'civic' or at least to project themselves as such in official policy (Marx 1996: 275). In the early years of state formation, the competing elites in Bulgaria excluded Turks while relatively unified rulers in Turkey included Kurds when other factors such as imperial legacy and international pressure favoured their decisions.

The effects of elite unity can vary in the long term. Once they consolidate their rule and secure their hold on the state, ruling elites tend to erode the previous legacies of imperial rule. In Bulgaria and Turkey, the modernist authoritarian states forcefully assimilated minorities in the long run. In Bulgaria, the military coups (1923 and 1934) brought right-wing governments to power and formed strong ruling elites that eroded the millet legacy of Ottoman administration. In Turkey, the consolidation of nation-state authority eliminated imperial legacies such as the binding role of religion in defining the nation and the autonomy of Kurdish tribal leaders after 1925. Unified central governments can also impose their ideological projects easily. Secularism and ethnic nationalism in Turkey, populism and later racist ideologies in Bulgaria played a role in state policies towards minorities. The role of ideology was limited by the overall trajectory that was drawn by imperial legacies, legal definition, international pressure and minority responses.

In addition to the structure of ruling elites, responses of minority groups to state policies can shape future state action. Societies affect transformations as much as or more than states affect societies, and states are never independent of social forces (Migdal et al. 1994: 1–4). The resistance of minority groups to government policies can intensify exclusion of minorities and state attempts to erode their communal identities. In contrast, cooperation with government policies provides bargaining opportunities depending on the existence of favourable circumstances. When elite unity and the organized response of minority groups coincided, both Bulgaria and Turkey adopted assimilation as their main policy. This was actually a circular process where regime consolidation after elite unity contributed to increasing minority organization and response leading to more repression. After the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925—itself a reaction to earlier efforts of state centralization—the Turkish government turned to assimilation. In Bulgaria, Turkish organizations and the meeting of the Turkish Congress contributed to the shift towards assimilation in the 1930s.

Where They Stand: Muslims, Bulgarians or Turks?

Bulgaria was declared an autonomous principality after the 1877–1878 Ottoman–Russian War and acquired formal independence in 1908. Consequently, the Bulgarian state inherited a large Muslim population in its territory. At the time of its independence, one-third of the population was Muslim—mostly Turkish but also Pomak, Tatar and Roma. There were massive flows of Muslims from Bulgaria to the Ottoman Empire and later to Turkey, but the addition of new territories in several wars brought new Turkish populations under Bulgarian rule.

The crystallization of the definition and rights of Muslim minorities took place in the legal sphere first, and then nationalist policies were reformulated in practice. Muslim groups were given minority status through international treaties. At the end of the Ottoman–Russian war, the Treaty of Berlin affirmed the foundation of the Bulgarian principality and recognized Muslims in Bulgarian territory as a minority group with equal rights. Article 4 of the treaty stated that:

... in the districts where Bulgarians are intermixed with Turkish, Romanian, Greek, or other populations, the rights and interests of these populations shall be taken into consideration as regards the elections and the drawing of the Organic Law. (Turan 1998: 166)

Article 5 ensured the variety of religious beliefs of individuals and the freedom to have separate mechanisms for community affairs. Article 40 of the Bulgarian Constitution of Târnovo, which was adopted in 1879 by a Constituent Assembly along the lines of the Berlin Treaty, gave non-Orthodox individuals the full right to profess their religion (Turan 1998: 166–167).⁴

The Treaty of Istanbul (1909) and the subsequent Peace Treaty of 1913 described the administration of the Muslim community by detailing the responsibilities of the office of the head müftü. A head müftü would be elected by the müftüs, administrators of local Muslim communities in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Minister of Public Worship would notify the highest religious office holder in Istanbul, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, of the election of the head müftü and receive his approval. This treaty changed the regular Ottoman practice of the Sheikh-ul-Islam appointing müftüs directly, thus reducing the ties of the head müftü of Bulgaria to the Ottoman government. The head müftü was responsible for verifying the election of müftüs, checking their legal decisions, supervising and administering endowments, and inspecting the councils of public instruction and the Muslim schools in Bulgaria.⁵

Another important international agreement concluded between Bulgaria and the Entente powers, the peace Treaty of Neuilly (1919), dealt with the international protection of minorities. It granted the protection of the League of Nations for minority rights (Article 57). Bulgarian was declared the legal language but the mother tongues of minorities could be used in court. Minorities had the right to open religious and social institutions and endowments, and to learn their mother languages in their schools (Article 54). The Bulgarian government was responsible for providing education in the mother tongue in primary schools (Article 55) (Kâmil 1980: 20–22). In 1925, Bulgaria and Turkey signed a friendship treaty affirming the application of the Treaty of Neuilly specifically to the Turkish minority. This is the first bilateral agreement that mentioned Turks as separate from the Muslim minority. This treaty confirmed the existence of the Turkish minority and granted Turkey a legal tie to this minority (Şimşir 1986; Pazarıcı 1985).

The statement concerning equal rights to all Bulgarians and ‘other ethnicities’ seemed to be an inclusive definition of citizenship. By granting minority status to the Muslim community, however, and by specifying its administration in these treaties, a difference between Bulgarian and its ethnic other was created in the legal sphere. The minority communities in Bulgaria were not related to Bulgarian domestic affairs but represented a foreign political matter. Therefore, the department responsible for the administration of Muslim communities was part of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry (Turan 1998: 188). Minorities were Bulgarian citizens legally but they were also treated as foreigners as a result of their separate administrative status.

Similar to the millet system, the legal rights granted to the Muslim minorities in international treaties and in the Bulgarian Constitution emphasized rights for religious practice and education. Under Ottoman rule, the müftü was originally a religious official

who had the right to issue decisions (*fetva*) on legal matters according to Islamic (*Sharia*) Law. Administrative duties in the Muslim community were handled by secular officials such as provincial governors, accountants and military commanders. The Bulgarian Constitution reduced this complex administrative mechanism to the religious office of the müftü. This system was very similar to the leading administrative role played by the religious leaders of non-Muslim millets of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state was content with the situation because the link between Sheikh-ul-Islam and the head müftü was a guarantee for the continuation of Ottoman influence in Bulgaria. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the office of the head müftü became a problem. When the Caliphate and the office of the Sheikh-ul-Islam were abolished, müftüs in Bulgaria left the orbit of Turkey's influence.

The millet legacy also led to the aggregation of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups such as Turks, Pomaks, Tatars and Romas under the same Muslim category. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Turkish groups increasingly tried to differentiate themselves from other Muslim groups. Defining Turks as a separate minority group became an important struggle to eliminate other Muslim groups from the administration of Turkish local communities.

The millet system was a way to keep Muslim minorities compact and separate from the process of nation-state formation. The exclusion of Muslims from the Bulgarian nation in the legal sphere led to very different government policies in practice. The period from the foundation of the Bulgarian state until the establishment of communist rule can be divided into three periods in terms of minority policies: the monarchical governments and their indifference to minority issues (1878–1919), the Agrarian People's Union governments and their tolerance towards minority groups (1919–1923), and the right-wing and authoritarian governments and their assimilationist policies (1934–1944). Minority policies evolved from indifference to relative freedom, and then to assimilation during these governments.

In the 1878 to 1919 period, Bulgaria entered several wars, absorbed constant migration flows and territorial borders and the ethnic composition of the population fluctuated. The ruling elites were mainly concerned with consolidating their rule against political opposition, European pressure and the negotiation of independence with the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, minority issues rarely appeared on the political agenda. International treaties were in the making, and they limited the options of Bulgarian governments in minority politics. This period was characterized by the crystallization of minority issues in the legal sphere and indifference to minority problems in practice.

Under the centralized Ottoman rule, the non-Muslim Bulgarian elites were contained at the local level and acted as intermediaries, not as rulers (Todorova 1996: 56). The ruling elites had to be formed and unified in the early years of the Bulgarian state. The ruling elites emerged as a result of expanding economic and political opportunities during the nineteenth-century Ottoman reforms, and they were divided between liberals and conservatives in the early days of the Bulgarian Principality. Bulgarian conservatives originated mostly in the old ruling elite, powerful under the Ottoman rule. They were in favour of keeping the status quo and their privileged economic positions as *çorbacıs* (notables and representatives of non-Muslim communities who held some

administrative duties), landlords, religious leaders and merchants. They were mainly concerned with religious and educational revival without specific demands for independence. Some members of the conservatives even favoured a two-state solution under the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, the liberal elite represented the new ideas of the nineteenth century, and they had constrained ties with the old ruling elite. They demanded complete independence from both Ottoman and Russian influences (Pundeff 1969: 122–129). After 1887, this group of liberals gained the upper hand in the institutions of the Bulgarian state, and the newly crowned King Ferdinand and Prime Minister Stefan Stambolov were in favour of complete independence and of decreasing Russian influence (Perry 1993).

The competition between liberals and conservatives in the 1880s, Stambolovists and anti-Stambolovists, Russophiles and Russophobes, and amongst the increasingly fragmented political parties in the period between 1899 and 1918 was reflected in the field of minorities by the absence of stable minority policies. The parties considered Muslim minorities as a source of vote in their struggle against the political opposition. Although significant numbers of Muslims migrated to the Ottoman Empire, the addition of Eastern Rumelia, Pirin Macedonia and especially Western Thrace (1913–1919) and the Rhodopi region brought new Muslim communities under Bulgarian rule. The majority of this population lived in rural areas controlled by Muslim landlords. Rural Muslims were mostly illiterate and tended to follow the instructions of party officials when political parties formed alliances with local Muslim elites. Muslims were represented in the parliament as a result of this clientelist politics. In the absence of coherent Muslim voting patterns, whoever the local leaders allied with received the majority of Muslim votes. For example, the Third National Assembly had fifty-six deputies in 1882. Among them, forty-nine were conservatives, mainly wealthy merchants and rich peasants, thirteen of whom were Turks (Manolova 1989: 107).

In the 1914 elections, Muslims gave the first organized reaction and supported the National Liberals of Vasil Radoslavov in exchange for restoration of their rights, including reversing the Christianization of the Pomak population in the newly acquired territories of Rhodope and Western Thrace. The success of the Liberals in these elections was often explained and excused by the Turkish votes from Komotini and Shumen. In Komotini, wealthy *beys*⁶ gathered and placed on the ballot list the names of twelve Muslim men for deputies and decided to collaborate with the present government (Kostadinova 1995: 37). These Muslim representatives in the Bulgarian Parliament (Narodno Sâbranie) proposed several measures to improve the conditions of the Muslim minority, but their demands were never discussed in the Parliament (Şimşir 1986: 116–128). Minority politics entered government policies only in times of elections. This treatment provided a distance between Muslim communities and the government and prevented assimilationist policies.

In these early years, the election of müftüs was a hotly debated issue. There was a struggle over the control of elections between the Sheikh-ul-Islam in Istanbul and the Bulgarian government. The Turkish minority and the Ottoman government claimed that the head müftü should be directly appointed by Sheikh-ul-Islam, and that the Bulgarian government should not have any rights to dismiss him. The Ottoman

millet system was presented as an example to support this argument. The Greek and Bulgarian Patriarchs were appointed within the church hierarchy, and the Bulgarian and Ottoman governments had no power to dismiss them. Yet, the Bulgarian government secured the practice of the dismissal and appointment of the head müftü, in order to decrease Ottoman influence over the Turkish community (Turan 1998: 187).

Another important issue was the education of Muslim children. Since other Muslim groups were few in number, less organized and hardly integrated to the Turkish schools during the Ottoman era, all Muslim schools were effectively Turkish schools in Bulgaria. International treaties and the Bulgarian Constitution secured the right of education of Muslim minorities and granted the right to open their separate private schools. Although the regulations mentioned that the Bulgarian government had to provide for the educational needs of Muslim children, especially in areas largely populated by Muslims, Turkish schools rarely received state funding in practice. All expenses were met by the local Muslim community, and teachers received their salaries from the community, not from the state. The lack of Bulgarian intervention in the curriculum provided some space for the Turkish community to educate their children without assimilating into the Bulgarian educational system. Nevertheless, without state funding, the relatively impoverished community could not afford the educational expenses. There were additional burdens restricting the education in Turkish schools: the teachers had to be Bulgarian citizens, but there was no special academy to train teachers for Turkish schools in Bulgaria. The educational level in Turkish schools was very low, and most Muslim students rarely received regular education (Mancheva 2001: 367–369).

The Turkish community considered the Agrarian People's Union term in office (1919–1923) as the most favourable Bulgarian government. The Agrarian People's Union (BAPU) was founded by Stambolijski in 1899 and became the leading party in the 1919 elections, and when it formed a single party government a year later (Crampton 1997: 149–157). The BAPU's two major principles hinted at its minority policies: rule by the people and the favouring of labour and agricultural property against big business interests and landlords. Considering that the majority of the Turkish population consisted of peasants, the Agrarian Union became the first government to focus systematically on the problems of the Turkish minority, especially in terms of education and religious practice.

In the sphere of education, the Treaty of Neuilly was put into effect and a new National Education Law was passed in 1921. The new law granted state funding for Turkish schools. Previously, Turks had paid money for local school funds, which mainly funded Bulgarian schools. Now, the local school funds would allocate some money for Turkish schools, and learning Bulgarian became voluntary. Another important development was the opening of a Teacher's College and a religious high school for the training of müftüs and assistant müftüs in Shumen, the Mekteb-i Nuvvab (Şimşir 1986: 61–65).

The 1934 coup d'état gave complete control to the dictatorship of the authoritarian-elitist Zveno group supported by the Military League, a right-wing officer organization. Similar to other fascist regimes in Europe, the Bulgarian regime followed an

intolerant policy towards its ethnic minorities. Although state policies were relatively less destructive in Bulgaria compared with those of other fascist regimes in Europe, the mistreatment of Jews was common (Anson et al., 1993; McIntosh et al. 1995). The regime was intolerant of other minorities too. Many private Turkish schools were closed down or brought under state control. The number of Turkish-language classes was reduced and Bulgarian language classes were added to the curriculum. The number of Turkish schools decreased from 1712 in 1921–1922 to 545 in 1936–1937 (Şimşir 1986: 149).

After the Second World War, the leaders of the Turkish community joined the Fatherland Front (FF), the leading Communist organization. In 1946, a referendum was held in order to decide the political future of Bulgaria as a monarchy or a republic. Minority groups largely supported the Fatherland Front and the Republican option (Kostadinova 1995: 90). Turks considered the People's Republic as an opening for the improvement of minority rights. However, in the long run, the assimilationist policies of the Communist Party proved to be the opposite of this expectation. Especially under Zhivkov's rule repression became the main state policy in the early 1980s.

The response of the Turkish minority to government policies shows a gradual increase in associational activity, which reflected the imperial legacy of the Ottoman ruling elites. Some members of the political opposition in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Turkish Republic escaped to Bulgaria. The émigrés included Young Turks during Abdulhamid's regime and later the supporters of the Sultanate in the 1920s. These opposition figures were well-educated elites and active journalists in the Istanbul media. They contributed to the Bulgarian Turkish press and introduced some political concepts such as Turkish nationalism. In addition, increasing educational opportunities under the Agrarian Union government raised the literacy level and permitted the formation of the first Turkish associations such as the Turkish Teachers' Association (*Türk Muallimler Birliği*).

The involvement of the Bulgarian and Turkish states created a divide within the Turkish community. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the müftüs in Bulgaria generally supported religious activism against the new Kemalist regime. The head müftüs objected to the adoption of Turkish reforms, and in particular to the use of the Latin alphabet in Turkish schools in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian governments encouraged this conflict between the head müftü and the Ankara government. Conservative elements (müftüs, the majority of the graduates of the Nuvvab school and Turkish exiles in Bulgaria) struggled with progressive groups that supported Kemalist reforms in order to gain control over the Turkish minority. These conflicts reduced the capacity of the Turkish community to make coherent and persistent demands of the Bulgarian government.

Nevertheless, the extent of the division should not be exaggerated. The leading figures, whether they were conservative or progressive, demanded almost the same thing: freedom of religion and education in the native language, although the meanings of both demands differed in both camps. Both conservatives and reformists shared similar concerns for keeping the Turkish identity of the community but differed in the meaning of 'Turkishness'. Consider these two statements from opposite camps

concerning the adoption of the Latin alphabet in Turkish schools in 1928: Ahmet Şükrü, the author of the first Turkish alphabet for the Turkish schools in Bulgaria, stated:

The new Turkish letters will be very beneficial for Bulgarian schools. This is the reason I have prepared the Turkish alphabet. The method I have followed is to make sure that children will get used to the new letters easily. If the difficulties of using the old alphabet are considered, how easy it is to follow the new letters will be apparent. (Şimşir 1986: 130)

In contrast to this practical concern of Ahmet Şükrü, the headline in *Intibah*, a conservative newspaper, asked:

Do Bulgarian Muslims have to apply Turkey's reforms which aim to destroy Islam? Bulgarian Muslims cannot change their letters, which reflect the high ideals of Turks in harmony and in ease, with the Latin alphabet that does not and never will belong to Turks. (Şimşir 1986: 132–133)

While the supporters of the Latin alphabet mentioned practical needs, such as easy learning and teaching, and its relevance to Turkish reforms, the conservative segments interestingly emphasized the Turkishness of the old Arabic alphabet, in addition to its religious virtues.

Another important association was *Turan*, the Turkish Sports Association, which linked politics and sports together. In 1923–1924, many Turkish sports clubs—especially soccer clubs—flourished in towns and cities. The Turkish Sports Association was established to bring these clubs under a single umbrella in 1925. This organization was renamed *Turan* in 1926 and became the symbol of solidarity among Turkish youth.⁷ Members shared clothing styles and special words to salute each other. The organization supported Kemalist reforms against conservative groups in the Turkish community. *Turan* was very active in opening new branches in many parts of Bulgaria and in organizing meetings and sports festivities. It was closed down in 1933 under the right-wing extremist regime (Şimşir 1986: 98–106).

The major contribution of *Turan* to Turkish political activity was the organization of the first Turkish Congress in Sofia (1929), at the time of the relatively liberal government of Andrej Ljapchev. The elected delegates discussed the major problems of the Turkish community and reported their demands to the Bulgarian government. The main concerns were about education, Muslim endowments, the election and duties of müftüs, and property rights of Turks who had migrated from Bulgaria. The Congress decisions repeatedly emphasized the Turkish community instead of Muslims in an attempt to separate themselves from other Muslim groups such as Roma and Pomaks. The demands of the Congress were well received by the Bulgarian government but never put into practice.

During these fifty years of state consolidation, Bulgarian state policies shifted from indifference in the early years to assimilation during the right-wing extremist governments. In practice, exclusion maintained the community ties and the Turkish minority slowly formed its associations. These associations never requested separation from the Bulgarian state. Their leaders did not ask for integration into Bulgarian society either. Rather, they accepted their status as the other and continued to form their separate

institutions to improve their social and cultural life. When they were pressured, they used the less costly exit option by migrating to Turkey.

In and Out of the Turkish National Project: Kurds in Turkey

The situation was different for the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Kurds were not defined as a legal minority in the early years of the Republic. This led to an inclusive definition of citizenship in the legal sphere but also set a trajectory with severely limited cultural and social rights for the Kurdish population in practice. The international environment was not supportive either, as there was no protective homeland state.

Several international treaties were signed to mark the end of the Ottoman Empire. The most relevant one to the Kurdish minority was the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, signed between the Ottoman government in Istanbul and the Allied Forces. This treaty granted local autonomy and possibly independence in the long run to the Kurdish region, which was on the east of the Euphrates, west of the Armenian border, and north of the Turkey–Syrian border. However, this treaty was never approved by the National Forces, which were already fighting against the Allied Powers and the Istanbul government from their base in Ankara (Kirişçi & Winrow 1997: 71).

The Treaty of Sevres was the only international agreement that mentioned the possibility of autonomy for the Kurds as following treaties never mentioned Kurdish independence. The National Pact (*Misak-ı Milli*), in which the borders of the future Turkish state were drawn, was extended to include the Kurdish regions and the province of Mosul in Iraq. The peace treaty of Lausanne (1923) granted Turkish independence and secured the rights of minority groups. While Lausanne was indeed the foundation treaty of the Turkish Republic, it only accepted non-Muslim groups as minorities with legal rights. Article 39 stated that ‘Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems’ (Kılıç 2000: 23). Thus, the main difference in defining minority status was between Muslims and non-Muslims. Kurds were Muslims, and therefore they were not recognized as a separate minority group.

In the early years, the Turkish resistance movement represented their fight as a struggle of the Muslim community to protect its state against non-Muslim occupation. Cooperation with Kurds was necessary to win the independence struggle, while religion played a major role in the movement. The importance of Turkish ethnicity entered at a much later point in time. This was partly related to the legacy of imperial administrative practices. The Ottoman administration never differentiated among the ethnic origins of its Muslim millet. Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Albanians, Caucasians and other groups were members of a single Muslim community of the empire, at least in theory, while in practice a clear hierarchy of different Muslim groups prevailed. This administrative practice became an ideological policy of Pan-Islamism in the late nineteenth century. Under Abdulhamid II’s administration (1876–1908), the dominant policy was to promote a common Islamic identity, since after the loss of the Balkan territories the majority of the empire’s population was now Muslim. This idea of having a single Muslim state provided support for the loyalty of different Muslim groups to the Sultan

Caliph. Arab and Kurdish nationalism gradually and weakly emerged towards the end of the Young Turk administration, which propagated Turkish nationalism ever more ferociously after the Balkan Wars in 1913 (Zürcher 2001: 131–137).

The Ottoman administration had another legacy in Kurdistan. Until the early nineteenth century, the region was ruled by tribal chiefs who submitted to the Ottoman Sultans only on the issues of tax collection and foreign relations. These tribal chiefs had semi-autonomy in the sense that they were responsible for the internal administration of their provinces. For centuries, Kurdish tribes enjoyed minimum state intervention, a privilege that the nineteenth-century Ottoman reforms terminated as the state aimed to increase central control in the provinces. The autonomous administration in Kurdistan was challenged as Istanbul continued to appoint central state officials to the region, who were then to usurp the relative autonomy of the Kurdish tribal leaders. This process led to a decrease in power of the prominent families, and hence caused their immediate uprisings, e.g. the famous Bedirhan uprising (Van Bruinessen 1992: 143–204). Until the end of the Ottoman Empire, efforts to integrate the Kurdish provinces into the central administration continued, and they were resumed in the Turkish Republic.

The legacy of international treaties and Ottoman administrative practices was reflected in the Turkish Constitution. Article 88 in the first Turkish Constitution (1924) stated that:

... without religious and racial differentiation everyone is called Turk in terms of citizenship. A child who was born to a Turkish father in Turkey or abroad and a child who was born in Turkey to a foreign father settled in this country and who has applied for Turkish citizenship is Turkish.⁸

This definition of citizenship was a civic definition. It did not relate citizenship to blood and ethnicity.

However, there were biased opinions as to the definition of ‘Turk’. Even ‘the definition in the 1924 Constitution ‘signifies that there is “another” Turkishness considered by the Turkish state which is more than Turkishness in terms of citizenship’ (Yeğen 2004: 59). ‘Turk’ referred to an ethnic category during Ottoman rule. It was ascribed by Europeans to Ottoman Muslims and internalized by the ruling elite during the Young Turk administration. In the new republic, the term Turk referred to everyone living in Turkey but it still had ethnic connotations. In the National Congress, there was a long debate over how to address citizens and members of the nation. One delegate, Celal Nuri Bey, claimed that legally recognized non-Muslim minorities, Greeks, Jews and Armenians, should be called Turk if they accepted the common language and morality of the nation. Objections among other delegates were recorded. They called these minorities ‘*Turkiyeli*’ meaning ‘from Turkey’ (Kirişçi & Winrow 1997: 100).

In the early years of the republic, the idea of a Turkish nation is employed as an inclusive definition, referring to people who shared the same language, religion and morality. A few days after the opening of the first National Congress, Mustafa Kemal stated that delegates who made up the Congress were not simply Turk, Caucasian, Kurd or Laz. Rather, they were the members of the Islamic community.⁹ Among 437

delegates, seventy-four were Kurdish delegates in the first National Congress (Kirişçi & Winrow 1997: 84). Within a few years this emphasis on religion changed with secular trends among the leadership cadres of the resistance movement. Especially after the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, common morality, language and education became the key concepts of the Turkish nation. These were the ideas of Ziya Gökalp, one of the fathers of modern Turkish nationalism who influenced the Kemalist strand of nationalism.¹⁰ At the same time, however, Gökalp proposed Islam as the binding force for a common morality (Gökalp 1964).

The state elites thought the secular form of Turkish citizenship would incorporate different ethnicities into the Turkish nation. The Turkish state was built on the principle of ‘one nation, one state’. This nation, however, was inclusive and civic only in theory, and, hence, also different from the Bulgarian definition of nationhood. Bulgarian elites used the same ‘one nation and one state’ idea but defined this nation as Bulgarian in opposition to legal minorities such as Turks, Greeks and Tatars (McIntosh et al. 1995). The idea of including all minorities under the category of Turk was fraught with contradictions, as it necessitated the adoption of a common culture and morality in different minority communities. Moreover, when the Islamic bond was removed, nothing much was left for the Kurds that would allow them to feel part of a ‘Turkish nation’. Most Kurds neither spoke Turkish nor shared the same ‘culture’ with Turks. The attempts of the Turkish state to increase state control in the Kurdish provinces also caused tensions and led to the rebellion of Kurdish tribal leaders. These uprisings, in turn, redefined Turkish state policies and, increasingly, ethnic measures and assimilation were applied to the Kurdish community. The civic definition of Turkish nationhood was accompanied by several ethnic measures in the later stages. The resulting Turkish nationalist idea was both civic and ethno-cultural in nature. ‘Its civic character made possible the rise of assimilated Kurds, while its ethno-cultural aspect formed the basis of forced assimilation and repression of those Kurds who refused to accept the “higher and more civilised” Turkish identity’ (Barkey & Fullner 1998: 12).

Turkish state policies towards its Kurdish minority shifted from tolerance to assimilation. The era of 1920–1925 represented the inclusive policies of the Ankara government in its attempt to incorporate Kurds into the nationalist army fighting against the occupying forces. The 1925–1946 period increasingly emphasized assimilationist policies. More radical endeavours such as forced deportations and massacres took place when Kurdish uprisings threatened state control in the region. Right-wing extremist ideologies under the influence of both German ideas and Social Darwinism—introduced and popularized by the Young Turks—contributed to the ruling elite’s tendency towards repressing Kurdish identity.

With the establishment of the Republic, the semi-autonomous Kurdish provinces of the Ottoman Empire were transformed into administrative units of Turkey. In 1925, reaction to the centralizing efforts of the state led to the Sheikh Said Rebellion, a religious upheaval with underlying Kurdish nationalist motives (Mardin 1989). Sheikh Said’s support, however, remained limited, as *Alevi* Kurds did not support this *Sunni* uprising, while the Turkish government dealt harshly with the rebels. Many of the leading insurgents were executed and large numbers of Kurds were deported from the

south-east to the west of the country. The existence of a separate Kurdish identity was officially denied (Zürcher 2001: 179). As long as Kurds were assimilated into Turkish society, they were given equal citizenship rights. However, any marker of ethnic identity (i.e. speaking Kurdish in public) was outlawed and punished.

Another example of exclusive nationalism was the Settlement Law of 1934 (Cagaptay 2002), never implemented in letter but an insightful example of minority policies nevertheless. The law classified the country's citizens roughly into three categories: Turkish speaking and ethnically Turkish groups, non-Turkish speaking but belonging to Turkish culture groups (Albanians, Caucasians, Pomaks, and Tatars), and non-Turkish speaking groups not belonging to Turkish culture (Kurds and Arabs). The country was divided into regions. The first region was open to settlement for people of Turkish ethnicity and language. The second region referred to groups whose language and affiliation with Turkish culture was there, but had to be strengthened. The third region referred to Kurdish areas—if only covertly—and was closed to civil settlement.

Security measures were quite effective in increasing state control in the Kurdish provinces. In the 1940s there were no Kurdish uprisings, and most tribal leaders actively engaged in politics and became candidates in political parties. During the single-party rule, the Republican People's Party (RPP) ruled the region in coalition with tribal leaders. This clientelist politics continued well into the multi-party regime, and survived the continuing political and economic problems that led to the 1960 military intervention. Ironically, this military regime led to the most liberal constitution in Turkey. It granted substantive rights including the freedom of expression and association. These new rights and liberties created a window of opportunity for the formation of new Kurdish organizations and prepared the background for the Kurdish movement that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

It can be argued that the Kurdish community's response to state policies and its organizational capacity influenced the definition of Turkish nationhood profoundly. The organizational capacity of Turks in Bulgaria and Kurds in Turkey was indeed different. Before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Turks in Bulgaria were the administration's privileged community. They represented a Muslim presence within a non-Muslim majority. Their elites were state officials and rich landlords closely associated with the Ottoman state, although most of them migrated to the Ottoman Empire after the foundation of the Bulgarian state. In contrast, Kurds were always distant from Ottoman central control. Their elites were religious sheikhs and tribal leaders who allied with the Ottoman state out of necessity. At the same time, however, these leaders had a contentious relationship with the Ottoman state and they kept the option of rebellion against the central state as a policy option. In the late nineteenth century, largely in response to growing Armenian nationalist mobilization and the prospect of Armenian autonomy in the south-east, Kurds started forming their own organizations and voicing claims for autonomy, or even independence from both Armenians and Ottomans. These organizations were largely the domain of the Kurdish intellectual and political elite, with little support from the impoverished Kurdish masses. However, the existence of these organizations is important to show the, albeit limited, organizational capacity of the Kurds.

The first organized effort at Kurdish autonomy was the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti*) founded in 1918. Among its founding members were Şerif Pasha, the former Ambassador of the Ottoman Empire to Stockholm, and members of Kurdish notable families such as Abdulkadir of Şemdinan and Mehmet Ali of the Bedirhan family, an important tribal leader and the grandson of the governor of the emirate of Botan, Bedirhan Bey, who had organized the first Kurdish uprising against the Ottomans. Şerif Bey was a Kurdish nationalist and an Ottoman state official. His opinions on Kurdish autonomy were quite fluid and ranged from a semi-autonomous Kurdish province to the idea of an independent Kurdistan. He was marginalized in the Kurdish movement, however, when he conceded to the formation of an Armenian state at the Paris Peace Conference (1919). In return, the treaty suggested a small Kurdish state would be established on its fringes. The other founding member of the organization, Bedirhan Bey, was mainly concerned with revitalizing his grandfather's emirate as an independent state. These Kurdish leaders did not agree on the future administration of Kurdistan. Some supported autonomy and some were secessionist. There was no mass nationalist movement in this early stage (Özoğlu 2004: 87–120).

In addition to divided elites and tribal leaders, there were other factors that limited the formation of a cohesive Kurdish movement: Kurds were religiously and linguistically divided. Sunni Ottoman rule sustained hostility between Sunni and Alevi Kurds, while *Kurmançî* and *Zazakî*, the two most prevalent dialects, were mutually unintelligible, hence producing insurmountable linguistic barriers (White 2000: 30–53). More importantly, tribal loyalties divided the Kurdish population and prevented the formation of a national identity. This state of fragmentation and dispersion differed profoundly from the situation in Bulgaria, where internal and external factors were conducive to the emergence of a relatively unified national identity. In Bulgaria, Turkish was the common language of most Muslims. In a non-Muslim environment, religious differences within the Turkish community were deemed not to be decisive, even if there were numerous sectarian divisions such as that of the Bektashi, Kizilbash and Crypto-Muslim groups often associated with Bogumilism. Tribal structures that would suggest alternative systems of allegiance were non-existent except for Caucasian immigrants. In addition, Turkish organizations also emphasized their separate identity from other Muslim groups, thereby carving out a clearly defined and demarcated ethno-religious and linguistic identity.

Conclusion

The comparison of the Turkish and Bulgarian cases displays how minority policies emerge as contingent outcomes of the interaction of several factors. In this essay, imperial legacy is emphasized as an important factor in the early years of state formation. The imperial legacy defined options and limitations but the trajectory drawn by a combination of ruling elite competition, responses of minority groups, legal definitions and international pressure shaped the later trajectory of government policies. In the long run, both countries appear to have converged on the policy of assimilation,

even though they have followed diverging trajectories. Their different paths emphasize the interaction among various factors in the making of state policies.

In Bulgaria, the Ottoman legacy of the millet system defined all Muslims as a single category that was excluded from the definition of the Bulgarian nation. This practice was crystallized in the legal sphere when Muslims were defined as minorities and took on the role of the 'other' of the new Bulgarian nation. This legal definition and the close scrutiny from the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey limited the policy options in early years. Thus, forced repression and assimilation were not available options. Coupled with the divisions within the ruling elite, Bulgarian policies in the early years ranged from indifference to tolerance.

Assimilation became a likely option only when ruling elites and minority groups started to converge and unify in the process of state formation. In the early years, the Stambolijski government and its alliance with the elites of the Turkish minority resulted in indifferent and later tolerant minority policies. The military coup and successive right-wing governments resulted in strict control and assimilation in the 1930s.

In Turkey, the imperial legacy led to the inclusion of Kurds in the Turkish nation, as the millet system considered Turks and Kurds part of the same Muslim community. International treaties, thanks to the efforts of the representatives of the Ankara government, defined only non-Muslim communities as minorities and, thus, accepted the de facto membership of Kurds in the Turkish nation. The ruling elites of the new nation-state faced several challenges and needed the support of Kurds to succeed in the war of independence. As a result, pluralist policies were applied in the early years for a short period of time and out of necessity. Similar to the Bulgarian case, assimilation became the policy but only when both ruling elites and different Kurdish groups became more unified. When the immediacy of an external military threat was eliminated, consolidation of state rule meant increasing control of Kurdish areas by the central state. This led to a major reaction by Kurds, and to the politicization of existing religious and clientelist networks. After the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion, the Turkish ruling elite aimed at assimilation and resorted to repression. The absence of a homeland state, the legacy of the millet system, organized Kurdish reaction, Turkish ruling elite unity and legal inclusion led to assimilation in the Kurdish case. In Bulgaria, resort to assimilation and repression came late, and only when the trajectory drawn in the earlier years had limited policy options considerably. Only after ruling elite unity and minority group unity was achieved in a suitable international context was assimilation and forced repression employed in Bulgaria.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Karen Barkey, Dimitar Bechev, Roy Licklider, Kerem Öktem and Charles Tilly for their helpful comments.

Notes

- [1] For a summary and critique of civic/ethnic nationalism dichotomy and its relation to state policies, see Shulman (2002).

- [2] See Beatrice F. Manz (2003: 70–101) for the legacy of Habsburg, Russian and Mongol empires on the formation of national identities.
- [3] Rogers Brubaker (1992) defines crystallization of nationhood as the combination of legal definitions and major events such as the French revolution. I narrow this definition to the legal sphere for the moment of fixation.
- [4] Muslim religious leaders were part of the Bulgarian Constituent Assembly ex officio.
- [5] The Treaty of Peace between Bulgaria and Turkey, in *American Journal of International Law* 8.1 (Suppl: Official Documents, 1914): 27–45.
- [6] *Bey* was a title granted to literate and wealthy members of the Muslim community in the Ottoman Empire. It usually implied involvement in state administration or membership to local notable families.
- [7] *Turan* referred to a mythical homeland of Turks in Central Asia.
- [8] T. Düstur, Cilt 26, s.170, Resmi Gazete 15/1/1945-5905, Kanun No: 4695 [Turkish Law].
- [9] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, I: 8, 24-4-1336/1920, vol. 2: 162–165 [Recordings of Turkish Parliamentary Debates].
- [10] Note that Ziya Gökalp was ethnically Kurdish.

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