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Re-claiming Identity: Ethnicity, Religion and Politics among Turkish-Muslims in Bulgaria and Greece

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Introduction

The post-Cold War period is marked by the revival of identities in many parts of the world. Ethnic, national, religious, linguistic and territorial underpinnings of a sense of belonging to a group, community or a nation found new channels of expression, sometimes leading to conflicts of interests. There are numerous instances of clashes generated by tensions between different ethnic, national and religious communities. Wherever boundaries between groups and collectivities are more emphasised and sharpened, it has been observed that particularistic sources of identity differences evidently nurtured the existing tensions and led to full-scale wars. Historical legacy has also played a role in the reaffirmation of divisions. Far-reaching conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the war between Bosnian Muslims and the Serbians in the former Yugoslavia are two striking examples whereby history, religion, ethnic consciousness and national interests were re-emerged and re-expressed.

The Ottoman Empire left a significant legacy in the Balkans.[1] Cultural and religious legacy of the Ottoman Empire still prevails and forms the basis of group identities in some quarters of the region. Turkish-Muslim communities in Bulgaria and Greece, each being an Ottoman legacy, managed to preserve their identities despite projects of 'nation building' accompanied by assimilationist policies. This article is an account of how Turkish communities have emerged as an Ottoman legacy and of their struggle for survival against political pressure. It argues that religion, language and culture strengthened the sense of belonging to a community and generated collective resistance to policies of exclusion and assimilationist forces.

The Ottoman Legacy: Turkish Presence and Islam in the Balkans

The presence of Turkish people in Europe can be traced back long before the arrival of Turkish workers in Germany and in several other European countries beginning in late 1950s and early 1960s. An historical follow-up of the movements of Turkish people towards Europe will reveal to us that, although in different nature, several thousand Turks came to Europe as early as the thirteenth century. Inalcik argues that the advent of the Anatolian Turks in the Balkans dates back to the 1260s.[2] The geographical expansion of the Ottomans has been extended to Thrace by Orhan Gazi (1324–1359), who turned his primary attention to Europe after he established himself in Anatolia. As an eminent historian points out, during the rise of the Ottoman Empire (1280–1566), Orhan led some 5500 soldiers into Thrace in 1346 and the capture of Thrace and

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Gallipoli was accomplished until 1348 by Orhan's son Suleyman, who was then the first ruler of the Ottoman marches.[3] This event allowed the Ottomans to establish the first permanent Ottoman base at Gallipoli in Europe from which the initial conquests of the Balkans were made in subsequent years. Orhan's conquests in Europe were followed by the settlements of Turkoman nomads in large numbers from Anatolia, initiating a change in political and cultural landscape of the territories involved.

Inalcik[4] notes that after moving into the Balkans, the Ottomans encouraged immigration to the newly conquered territories. A large number of Muslim nomads have been transferred to the Balkans in Europe as a state policy. The new Muslim inhabitants have not mixed with Christians in their settlement patterns in the early stages of migration; rather they have settled in their own villages. Murat I (1360–1389) launched an offensive from this base in Europe to conquer Thrace, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Serbia.[5] As did his predecessor, Murat I advocated a programme of mass immigration and settlement of Turkomans in the newly conquered territories in the Balkans to strengthen the Turkish presence in Europe. Eminov points out that settlement of Turkish-Muslims in Bulgaria dates from the second half of the fourteenth century.[6] Sofia was conquered in 1386 and thereafter the tide of invasion rolled on which made the Ottoman Turkish presence in the Balkans more widespread and effective.[7] Decisive victory of the Turkish forces at the Kosova war in 1389 destroyed the last organised resistance in the Balkans against the Ottoman expansion. This failure meant that the Turkish presence in Europe reached as far as Serbia and all of the Southeastern Europe.[8]

It is worth noting here that after the victory in Kosova, the Ottomans established a Turco-Islamic presence in the Balkans as the ruling political power.[9] However, the Ottoman campaigns in Europe lost its effect and decisiveness upon Tamerlane's victory over the Ottoman forces during the battle of Ankara in 1402. The military defeat halted further expansion of the Ottomans for a period of time. While the Ottomans were struggling to recover from devastating effects of the defeat, a power struggle had erupted among Ottoman princes. Mehmet I (1413–1420), nevertheless, resumed military campaigns in Europe upon his acquisition of state authority and restored Turkish presence in Europe. The expansion and settlement of the Turks in Europe continued during his successor Murat II's reign (1421–1451) as conquered lands were defined part of the 'abode of Islam', *daru'l Islam*.

The conquest of Istanbul (Constantinople) by the Ottoman forces in 1453 during the early years of Mehmet II's reign (1451–1481) has been a historical turning point in Turkish history with regard to the Turkish presence in Europe and the consequent relations between the Turks and the Europeans. Mehmet II's treatment of people in Istanbul at the time of its fall and his policy of reconstruction of Istanbul in the aftermath can be viewed as an historical example of tolerance and acceptance of the 'others' in terms of race, religion, language and culture. It may be argued that Istanbul constituted an early model of multi-racial and multi-cultural society with a population of diverse background. As Shaw[10] indicates, Mehmet II 'sought to make his capital a microcosm of all the races and religious elements in the empire'; therefore, he issued decrees as an imperial guarantee to protect the lives and properties of the inhabitants of Istanbul regardless of their racial, religious, cultural and linguistic characteristics. Mehmet II's policy to form a multi-racial and multi-cultural society accommodating various religious persuasions attracted many Muslims, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Slav and many others to settle in Istanbul as early as 1453.

The fall of Istanbul opened a new phase for Turkish expansion and settlement in

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Europe. All of Albania for example, came under the direct control of the Ottoman rule by the end of 1478 as well as some parts of Montenegro. Five years later, the definitive conquest of Herzegovina (1483) was completed under Beyazid II's rule (1481–1512). The Ottoman advances in Europe were also officially recognised by Hungary and Poland. Consolidation of the Ottoman forces both in the East and West created an advantageous climate for Suleyman, the Magnificent, to continue the expansion of Turkish presence in Europe beyond the present borders. Belgrade, for example, fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1520, bringing the last part of Serbia under Turkish control. Nevertheless, the Ottoman efforts to penetrate into central Europe failed following a set back at the door of Vienna.

The military expansion of the Ottoman Turks not only changed political and economic power balance of the region but it also altered ethnic and demographic structure of the Balkans. The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, as it has been pointed out,[11] set in motion an important population movement that modified the ethnic and religious composition of the territory under question. In order to accomplish a demographic restructuring many soldiers, nomads, artisans, farmers, merchants, preachers and administrative personnel were brought and settled in these areas. It has been a systematic state policy of the Ottomans to create new towns or repopulate the older towns with Turkish-Muslim inhabitants to consolidate the Turkish presence in the Balkans. The arrival of Turkish groups evidently changed the distribution of people with regard to ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions in the society. However, ethnic and cultural diversity has always been maintained through adopting a policy of recognition and tolerance of other nationals and cultures. The maintenance and nourishment of ethnic diversity were not only encouraged to promote a multi-racial society but such diversity was also protected by imperial decrees within this multi-ethnic society. The Ottoman bureaucracy seems to have succeeded in dealing with ethnic groups by devising an administrative system which allowed the existence and preservation of ethnic diversity. It is noteworthy here to make a brief analysis of what the rationale behind *millet* ('nation') system was and how it worked because of its relevance to contemporary debate on ethnic groups in multi-racial societies. However, the value of this system should be judged not by modern standards of liberty and egalitarianism of this century but by the standards and existing conditions in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Millet (Nation) System as a Mechanism for Accommodating Others

As noted earlier, Mehmet II adopted a pioneering policy of race and ethnic relations as to establish a heterogeneous but harmonious society in Istanbul, composed of different racial and religious communities. In the words of Alexandris, 'Istanbul became the centre of Muslim–Christian coexistence which lasted for over five hundred years. This was mainly the outcome of a remarkable system of government, the Millet system ...'[12] The *millet* system has been an important administrative apparatus to nurture and sustain multi-cultural and multi-religious nature of society throughout Ottoman history. As a well known historian points out 'the *Millet* system emerged gradually as an answer to the efforts of the Ottoman administration to take into account the organisation and culture of the various religious–ethnic groups it ruled. The system provided, on the one hand, a degree of religious, cultural and ethnic continuity within these communities, while on the other hand it permitted their incorporation into the Ottoman administrative, economic and political system'.[13]

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Broadly speaking, the term *'millet'* in the context of Ottoman history means a religiously defined people.[14] The Turkish *millet* system had a socio-cultural and communal framework based, first, on religion and, secondly, on ethnicity which in turn reflected linguistic differences of the *millets* consisting essentially of people who belonged to the same faith.[15] Shaw further elucidates the nature of this system:

> ... division of society into communities along religious lines formed the *millet* (nation) system, with each individual or group belonging to one millet or another according to religious affiliation... Each *millet* established and maintained its own institutions to care for the functions not carried out by the ruling class and state, such as education, religion, justice and social security. The separate schools, hospitals and hotels, along with hospices for the poor and the aged, have remained to modern times long after the *millet* courts and legal status were ended by the nation states established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[16]

The *millet* system allowed the development and maintenance of ethnic identity on the part of minority subjects within the Ottoman Empire. Greek Orthodox Christians were established as the first major *millet* and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate was recognised within the *millet* system. The patriarch was allowed to apply Orthodox law in secular and religious matters to the followers of the Orthodox Church in Istanbul.

Similarly, the policy of tolerance and multi-culturalism consolidated by the *millet* system allowed the Jews[17] to form their own ethnic community and to establish independent religious institutions in Istanbul. It has been noted that the autonomy given to the minorities within the Ottoman territories attracted large numbers of displaced Jewish communities who at that time were among the victims of persecution in Spain, Poland, Austria and Bohemia. Dumont points out that while in Russia, Rumania, and most of the Balkan states, Jewish communities suffered from constant persecution (pogroms, anti-Jewish laws, and other vexations), Jews established on Turkish territory enjoyed an altogether remarkable atmosphere of tolerance and justice.[18] Along with the Greek Orthodox and Jewish communities, the Armenians were also given the status of a *millet*. The recognition of Armenians within the *millet* system in 1461 was spontaneously followed by the granting of the same authority to the Armenian patriarch over his followers as given to the Greek patriarch and the Grand Rabbi. The development and practice of a tolerant administrative system under the Ottoman Empire made the coexistence of different religious, racial and ethnic communities possible. Inalcik notes that this system remained in practice and it was widely accepted by the Balkan nations until the nineteenth century when under nationalistic fervour, the Bulgarians, Serbs and the Greeks began to revolt with a view to establish their own respective states.[19]

Nationalism, Nation-states and Emigration to Turkey

The rise of nationalism in the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East where the Ottoman administration was stretched had prepared the dramatic downfall of the empire. The rise of nationalism resulting in establishing independent nation-states marked the end of the Ottoman Empire. With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire a large-scale refugee problem occurred as early as 1840s. In order to escape from persecution and massacres, thousands of refugees began to flood into the empire for shelter and security.

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TABLE 1. Ottoman population by religion in 1906 and 1914

	1906	1914
Muslims	15,518,478	15,044,846
Greeks	2,883,370	1,792,846
Armenians	1,140,763	1,294,831
Bulgarians	762,754	14,908
Jews	256,003	187,073
Protestants	53,880	
Others	332,569	186,152
Totals	20,897,617	18,520,016

Source: Istatistik-i Umumi, p. 15; Istanbul University Library, TY5651.

Turkish authorities decreed the first Refugee Code in 1857 for the welfare of refugees and made it possible for the migrants and their families to obtain a certain amount of capital and plots of state land with exemptions from taxes. As in the *millet* system, all the immigrants taking refuge within the empire were not only protected but also were promised freedom of religion regardless of their ethnic origins and religious convictions. Moreover, they were granted the right to institutionalise their ethnic and cultural values by establishing religious centres for worship and education. Administration of refugee affairs and their settlement was given to the Refugee Commission, which was established in 1860 solely for handling this issue.[20] Within a period of 20 years (1876–1895), according to the official statistics of Refugee Commission, more than one million displaced people migrated to Ottoman Empire where they have been provided with shelter and protection. The composition of the Ottoman population in 1897 represents a multi-racial and multi-religious society, which consisted of various ethnic communities.[21] Ottoman population distribution by religion in 1906 and 1914 provides us with the proportion of minority communities in the empire as shown in Table 1.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of serious decline. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries several nationalist movements emerged against the Ottomans to gain independence, inspired by the idea of establishing nation-states. While the Ottoman army was forced to retrieve, the Turkish inhabitants in different parts of the Balkan regions fell victim to discrimination and violence. Sweeping forces of extreme nationalism and self-determination uprooted millions of people from all ethnic and religious backgrounds who once lived side by side within the Ottoman controlled territories. Boundaries of difference were drawn sharper among national and ethnic communities. Turkish-Muslim communities in Bulgaria and Greece are only two examples of politics of ethnicity, religion and identity marked by nationalism and projects of nation building.

Turkish-Muslims in Bulgaria: A Troubled Community

There is a significant number of Turkish-Muslims in Bulgaria as an Ottoman legacy. Since the establishment of an independent Bulgarian nation-state, the fate of the Turkish-Muslim community changed dramatically. As seen in Table 2, the Muslim population in Bulgaria on the eve of gaining independence was 676,215, the second largest community. The period from 1878 onwards has often been marked by op-

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TABLE 2. The population of Bulgaria by religious group in 1887

Religion	Population
Orthodox	2,424,371
Muslim	676,215
Catholic	18,505
Protestant	1,358
Jewish	24,352
Others	9,574

Source: 1887 census, cited in J. McCarthy, *Death and Exile, The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821–1922*, Preston: Darwin Press, 1995, p. 342.

pression of and discrimination towards Turkish and Muslim subjects in Bulgaria. The authoritarian treatment of Turkish-Muslims was tightened after 1934. The demographic equilibrium which lasted from the beginning of the sixteenth century was reversed in Bulgaria after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 when large numbers of Turks and other Muslims were dislocated and forced to flee.

The establishment of the Bulgarian state in 1878 affected the lives of more than one million Turks living between the Danube river and the Balkan mountains and almost half a million uprooted people died while fleeing.[22] It has been reported that between 1880–1881 and 1910 the Turkish population continued to decrease as a result of forced migration. More than 50% of the Turkish population had to leave Bulgaria during this period. The number of Turks who left Bulgaria between 1886 and 1890 was 74,735. Bulgarian statistics report that 70,603 Turks left for Turkey between 1893 and 1902. The flood of Turkish immigrants continued in greater number after the Balkan wars, and the Turkish–Bulgarian Residence Agreement, signed in 1925, regulated the successive population movements in the republican period. As seen in Table 3, almost 200,000 Turks left for Turkey between 1923 and 1939.

TABLE 3. Turkish emigration from Bulgaria between 1923 and 1939

Year	Number of immigrants
1923–1933	101,507
1934	8,682
1935	24,968
1936	11,730
1937	13,490
1938	20,542
1939	17,769
Total	198,688

Source: Dr Cevet Geray, *Turkiye'den ve Turkiye'ye Gocler ve Gocmenlerin Iskani, 1923–1961*, Ankara: Faculty of Political Science, 1962 (cited in *Turkish Presence in Bulgaria*, Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 1987, p. 49).

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Politics of Homogenisation and Suppression of Turkish-Muslim Identity in Bulgaria

Political developments after the military *junta's* take over of the government administration in 1934 had worsened the situation of Turkish population in Bulgaria. The military leadership imposed severe restrictions upon ethnic minorities living in this country. The period between 1934 and 1944 was marked by the application of various prohibitions on the Turkish community in different forms. The closure of large numbers of Turkish schools, expropriation of the properties of religious endowments, prohibition of the publication of newspapers and periodicals in Turkish language and the exile of Turkish intellectuals were among the oppressive measures exercised on the Turkish minority by the Bulgarian regime. The proportion of Turkish population in Bulgaria had fallen below 10% by the beginning of World War II as a result of discrimination and violence targeted at them.

After World War II, a new period of deterioration regarding the situation of Turks was to begin. From 1945 onwards, the Muslim population in Bulgaria faced a new situation as Bulgaria entered into the orbit of the Soviet Union.[23] The fundamental premise of the Communist ideology of the state regarded religion as the opium of the people; thus its prohibition was forcefully imposed on people of all beliefs. Although the freedom of conscience and religion has been guaranteed in the 1947 and 1971 constitutions, it has never been the real policy of the Bulgarian Communist regime. None of these guarantees have been observed in reality. Contrary to the accepted provisions in the constitution, which guarantees the basic human rights of freedom of conscience and religion, the Bulgarian government launched anti-religious campaigns against the Turkish-Muslim minority. It has been observed, for instance, that all Quranic schools that disseminate Islamic knowledge among Turks were closed by 1949. Religious institutions such as mosques which were seen as centres for communal and social gathering as well as prayer and other religious functions were also closed. The freedom of religious practice was undermined and the teaching of its principles was made a serious crime.[24] Pious religious foundations, Sufi lodges and mosques are sanctified places for Muslims and have a significant symbolic meaning as well as practical social value as centres to strengthen collective identity by participating in activities taking place in these sacred domains. The Bulgarian authorities wanted to reduce the effect of religion as a source of identity because Islam stimulated the Turkish-Muslims to gather around a set of common core values contributing to the construction of their distinct identity *vis-à-vis* others.

In educational matters, the situation for the Turkish minority also worsened. One can argue that organised education in the schools is an efficient method of imparting state ideology to create an officially sanctioned identity. One way of imposing state ideology is to control the flow of knowledge by centralising the education system so that a single type of people-hood/identity/belonging can be constructed. In order to achieve this objective the Bulgarian National Council added one article to Education Law in 1946 to nationalise all Turkish community schools to terminate the education of Turkish children in their vernacular and a uniform curriculum was introduced to Turkish pupils. The government confiscated the lands, buildings and educational equipment of private Turkish schools. A few years later in 1951–1952 all nationalised (centralised) Turkish and Bulgarian schools were merged to minimise the significance of Turkish schools by implementing tighter control over Turkish children and teachers as well as the curricula.[25] The teaching of Turkish language which was already

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deteriorated and was insufficient after the merger with Bulgarian schools, completely ceased by the early 1970s[26] as a part of the policy of the Bulgarisation of the Turks.[27]

Forced assimilation of Turkish minority in Bulgaria continued during the period that followed. The Bulgarian government launched a large-scale name changing campaign on its ethnic population as early as 1970 and it was strictly enforced in the early 1980s. The Bulgarian government forced the Turkish-speaking population to change their Turkish-Muslim names to Bulgarian names in order to strip Turkish minority of their ethnic identity. It has been reported that the Turkish community in Bulgaria displayed a strong resistance to the forced assimilation in order to maintain Turkish–Islamic ethnic/religious identity within the larger society. On the face of growing resistance to the forced name changing campaign, the Bulgarian government accelerated its efforts to crack down the protest of Turkish-Muslims by arresting and imprisoning thousands of Turks. While Bulgarian oppression stepped up, hundreds of Turks were reported to have been killed and many others were deported to other areas away from their community. Yet, these incidents indicate that ethno-nationalist policy of the Bulgarian regime was counterproductive because Turkish-Muslims seem to have become more aware of their own religion, language and ethnicity.

In the following period, enforcement of the prohibition of traditional dress of Muslim women and circumcision of Muslim boys was tightened and the use of Turkish language in public led to many arrests. Radios and tape recorders were all confiscated to prevent Turkish-speaking people from listening to Turkish broadcasting. Bulgarian authorities went beyond these tactics as part of forced assimilation policy so far as to restrict Islamic funerary practices and they have even destroyed many tombstones bearing Turkish inscriptions.[28]

The Turkish-Muslim population in Bulgaria has steadily declined as a result of unfavourable conditions created by ethnic conflicts and more effectively because of political campaigns against minority communities. Migration of Turks continued. For example, more than 95,000 Turks from Bulgaria left for Turkey between 1935 and 1940. In the period between 1941 and 1949 covering the second World War a far fewer number of Turks from Bulgaria, 14,390, emigrated to Turkey.[29] After World War II, Turkey and Bulgaria reached an agreement over the immigration of ethnic Turkish community members from Bulgaria. Accordingly, more than 155,000 Turks migrated to Turkey between 1949 and 1951. It is reported that the Bulgarian government allowed some 250,000 Turks to leave the country between 1950 and 1953. There was a clamp down thereafter and only 25 were given legal permit to leave Bulgaria between 1954 and 1968.[30] In 1968 the Turkish and Bulgarian governments signed a new agreement under which only close relatives of those who left Bulgaria in the earlier phase were allowed to depart to join their families in Turkey. This agreement remained valid until 1978. During this span of time, according to the official Bulgarian statement, 52,392 Turks and according to official Turkish figures 130,000 Turks left Bulgaria and arrived in Turkey.[31] It is estimated that the number of emigrants from Bulgaria to Turkey between 1878 and 1984 reached a total of 719,836.[32]

Despite continuous migration to Turkey in the past, there is still a large population of Turkish-Muslims in Bulgaria, as shown in Table 4.

The estimated number of ethnic Turks resident in Bulgaria varies. According to the *World Directory of Minorities*, for example, in 1989 Turkish population was at least 900,000;[33] but according to the Table 4 below, in 1992 there were just over 800,000 Turks in Bulgaria.

Despite international agreements[34] which protect the rights of minorities, the Bulgar-

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TABLE 4. Muslim population in Bulgaria and their ethnic origins, 1992

Ethnic origin	Number	Percent of total population	Percent of Muslims
Turkish	802,187	9.4	72.2
Bulgarian	176,687	2.1	15.9
Romany	123,173	1.5	11.1
Other	8,284	0.1	0.8
Total	1,110,331	13.1	100.0

Source: Natsionalen Statisticheski Institut, *Resultati of Prebrojaveto: Demografski Kharakteriski*, Vol. 1, Sofia, 1994, p. 222, adapted from A. Eminov, 'Islam and Muslims in Bulgaria', *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 36, Nos 2–3, 1997, pp. 222–229.

ian government continued its policy of repression on the Turkish minority. Popovic points out that the situation of Turkish-Muslims suddenly 'took on a much more dramatic and completely unexpected turn: Bulgarian authorities have suddenly decided to steer a new course and to simply abolish the existence of the Turkish and Tatar minorities altogether.'[35] The name changing campaign gathered momentum in the late 1984 and early 1985 under the pretext of 'the reconstruction of Bulgarian names'[36] as the Bulgarian authorities denied the existence of the ethnic Turkish-Muslim population claiming that the ethnic Turks were in fact descendants of Slav Bulgarians who had been forcibly converted to Islam under the Ottoman rule.[37] Anti-religious campaigns continued as part of a policy of assimilation introducing more restrictions after 1985. Bulgarian authorities simply continued to close mosques and destroy minarets. Mosques were converted into warehouses and museums. The repressive measures against Islamic traditions such as fasting in the month of Ramadan, traditional celebrations of religious festivals, the Islamic mode of animal slaughtering, circumcision of boys, and the Islamic custom of washing the body of the deceased prior to burial have been implemented more severely than ever.[38]

Nevertheless, implementation of these measures by using state power and authority was not very successful in silencing the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. It may be argued that discrimination and exclusion of Turks have crystallised the boundaries of collective identity among Turkish-Muslims. In an attempt to maintain Turkish–Islamic identity, opposition groups came into being to resist forced assimilation and a number of mass protests, hunger strikes and demonstrations have taken place to stop the Bulgarian campaign. The massive participation of ethnic Turks in sporadic protests in early 1989 was responded to by Bulgarian authorities with violent repression and expulsion of thousands of activists.[39] Under these circumstances a general exodus of Turks was triggered and more than 369,839 Turks left for Turkey in search of a new life in 1989. This wave of migration was described as the 'most considerable population movement not only in the history of emigration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, but the most massive emigration within such a short time from a socialist East European country to a non-socialist one in the post-war period'.[40]

The exodus of Turkish people to avoid 'Bulgarianisation'[41] started in June 1989 and continued thereafter. Meanwhile, despite severe treatment of Bulgarian authorities, demonstrations continued and proved to be effective towards the end of the same year, especially after the collapse of the Communist regime in November. Konstantinov notes that a number of concessions were given in the beginning of 1990.[42] Among them Muslims were allowed to regain their Turkish/Arabic names. An Act of Parliament in

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November 1990 also allowed Muslims 'to drop the Slavonic -ov/-ova suffix from their surnames (i.e. instead of Ali Osmanov, Ali Osman). Demonstrations also marked the decision of the Ministry of Education to allow the teaching of Turkish language in Bulgarian state schools to those students whose mother language is Turkish'. In the light of new developments in Bulgaria, such as the fall of Communist system, transition to democracy[43] and the aforementioned concessions as well as dissatisfaction with the economic expectations in Turkey, 154,937 Bulgarian Turks, almost half of the recent immigrants, have returned to Bulgaria.[44]

Relations between Turkey and Bulgaria improved after the 1990s which was reflected in the restoration of human rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgarian. Turkish people of Bulgarian nationality participated in political life and the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (Haklar ve Ozgurlukler Hareketi) came into existence in 1990[45] and gained prominence among Turkish and other Muslim minorities. The programme of the movement 'calls for respect for all civil rights and freedoms of individuals and that of communities as enshrined in the Bulgarian constitution and international instruments. It opposes all forms of segregation in education, the economy or culture. It rejects any form of separatism, nationalism or fundamentalism, as well as attempts to fuel ethnic hatred and calls for hostility'[46] Candidates who were supported by MRF entered political competition in the elections of October 1991 and received 7.56% of the votes, gaining 24 seats in the 250-seat Bulgarian parliament and 58 municipalities. MRF also gained over 650 village mayors and 1,000 councillors.[47] Nevertheless, MRF is constantly viewed as a 'Turkish Party'[48] by the official circles because of its predominantly Turkish leadership and constituency. The 1991 constitution included an article which does not allow the formation of parties on the basis of ethnicity; therefore, MRF's effort to form a legal political party was rebuffed by the Supreme Court in September 1991 on the claims that MRF is an ethnic organisation despite MRF's rejection of such a claim.[49] MRF proved to be an effective political player in the 13 October 1992 election by winning 7.6% of the votes and 10% of the seats in the parliament. The results of local elections, in which MRF received 10.6%, also indicate the prominence of MRF in constituencies largely populated by the Turks and other Muslims such as Kurdzhali, Silistra and Shumen. MRF gave its support to the anti-Communist Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) to form a government then allied itself with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) on the grounds that UDF did not give enough attention to the Turkish issues. The instability and accompanying collapse of the next government led to national elections in 1994 in which MRF claimed 5.4% of the votes, gaining 15 seats in the parliament.[50]

Yet new rules of participation in political process through elections put MRF in a difficult situation. Four percent electoral threshold was introduced to gain seats in the National Assembly. Any party that could not receive at least 4% of the votes in the general elections would not be qualified to be represented in the parliament in 1997 elections. In addition to erosion of support and split within the party, the 4% hurdle forced MRF to seek for coalition with other parties in the elections. Before elections 'anti-Turkish and minority nationalism was fostered by the ex-Communists, and there was a potential for ethnically dominated politics to emerge, Bulgaria was the only country where nationalism never became a dominant force'.[51] However, during the election campaigns, MRF was accused of being an ethnic movement with a dominant Turkish and Muslim leadership. It was portrayed as a potential setback to the integrity of Bulgarian nation. Despite these accusations, MRF received offers of coalition from mainline parties for 1997 parliamentary elections. The Union of Democratic Forces,

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TABLE 5. Bulgarian parliamentary election results, 19 April 1997

	%	Seats
The Coalition of United Democratic Forces	52.26	137
The Coalition of Democratic Left	22.07	57
The Alliance for National Salvation	7.60	19
The Euro-Left	5.50	14
The Bulgarian Business Block	4.93	12

for example, expressed its willingness to take part in joint election campaign with MRF on 6 April 1997 to gain support from Turkish electorates.[52] MRF's leadership rejected this offer and decided to take part in a joint electoral campaign with the Alliance for National Salvation.

As seen in Table 5, political parties are very fragmented in Bulgaria and small parties were forced to join in coalitions to beat the 4% threshold in the elections. MRF entered elections with the Alliance for National Salvation, which received 7.6 of the votes gaining only 14 seats in the National Assembly. The Alliance for National Salvation received 41,835 votes in Kurdzhali, a stronghold of MRF. Yet, election results indicate that MRF's power base is not as strong as it was during the movement's formative period. This means that relying largely on an ethnic base for support may gradually marginalise a political movement and alienate other potential supporters from different ethnic backgrounds. Given the increasing number of Turkish and other Muslims reaching 1,110,331 (13.1 of all population), one can argue that these communities have a significant potential role to play in the political scene of Bulgaria.

Turks of Western Thrace: Struggle for Survival

The Ottoman heritage has also marked the history of Greece and left its legacy until the modern times. It seems that the presence of an established Turkish-Muslim minority in Greece will, on the one hand, continue to influence politics of ethnicity and identity within Greece and, on the other hand, perpetuate nationalist fervour in both countries as an item of domestic politics. The continuous references to issues surrounding Turkish minority in Greece has already started to feed the emergence of transnational nationalism among Turks of Western Thrace living in Turkey and in various European countries. The Turkish-Muslim minority as an Ottoman legacy in Greece will also continue to determine Turkey's attitude towards their affairs as a kin-state and influence Turco-Greek relations.

The Turks in Greece, from where a voluminous wave of emigration of ethnic Turks took place after the collapse of the Ottoman control over the area, faced a similar fate to that of Turks in Bulgaria. The first attempt to reach an agreement over the exchange of Turkish-Muslims living in Greece and Greeks living in Turkey was formulated as early as 1914, but the exchange of people was hindered by the beginning of World War I. The estimated number of Muslims in Greece just a few years before the start of the war is said to be around 640,000, of which 480,000 are believed to be Turks including those living on the Greek islands.[53] Some 10 years later, on 30 January 1923, the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Populations was signed between the two countries at Lausanne. According to the Convention, the persons that were subject to compulsory exchange are described in its first article as follows: 'Turkish nationals of

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TABLE 6. Turkish immigrants from Greece to Turkey, 1921–1926

Year	Number
1921	11,079
1922	10,093
1923	50,689
1924	235,414
1925	56,523
1926	35,051
Total	398,849

Source: *Istatistik Yilligi III*, McCarthy, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

the Greek Orthodox Religion established in the Turkish territory and Greek nationals of the Muslim religion established in the Greek territory'. As this article makes clear, the only valid criterion of the exchangeability of a person, besides the fact that s/he was a national of the country which s/he was compelled to leave, was that of religion.[54] Two exceptions to this general arrangement, however, were inserted in the protocol according to which the Greeks settled in Istanbul and the Muslims settled in Western Thrace were exempted from forced migration.[55]

In the following four-year period after the signing of the 1923 Convention,[56] according to figures provided by the Mixed Commission, about 190,000 Greeks were transferred from Turkey. The statistical data for Muslims who were subject to emigration was much higher for that period. It has been stated that more than 355,000 Muslims were transferred to Turkey under the convention of Lausanne; this figure reached a total of 388,000 in 1926.[57] Greek immigrants from Turkey, on the other hand, outnumbered the Turkish migration from Greece, reaching almost 1.3 million.[58] Further migrations of Turkish-Muslims took place during World War II and the Greek Civil War when royalist and Communist forces targeted the community. More than 20,000 Muslims were reported to have been moved to Turkey between 1939 and 1951.[59]

Ethnic Turks who were exempted from forced migration are mainly concentrated in Western Thrace. Greece annexed the region in 1920 under the Treaty of Serves and the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923 secured the Greek position on Western Thrace. The Greek census of 1928 indicated that there were more than 190,000 Turks in the region while the 1951 census results recorded the number of Turkish people as about 180,000.[60] Greek sources, on the other hand, give a different demographic picture,[61] according to which the Muslim minority in Greece includes ethnic Turks, the Pomaks and the Athigani. Greek sources claim that the total number of Muslim minorities was around 120,000 in 1981, of which 45% were Turkish, 36% Pomaks and 18% Athigani. The data based on Greek sources related to 1993 indicate a further fall in the total number of Muslim minority to 114,000 of which Turks constitute only 53,000.[62]

Reports of international observers support Turkish claims that the Turkish minority in Greece has been facing discriminatory treatment, political exclusion and cultural repression.[63] It was argued that that there has been a well-established national policy to Hellenise the region and ethnic Turks living in Western Thrace were subjected to

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different assimilative and repressive policies.[64] The national project of reconstructing the ideal Greek identity and nation seems to be the principal ideological ground of pursuing such a policy. Herzfeld's observation lends support to this argument. Herzfeld[65] explains that Greek intellectuals began to construct 'cultural continuity in defence of national identity' soon after achieving independence from the Ottoman Turks in 1821. School textbooks dealing with the Ottoman period, Turks and Islam include topics such as enslaved Hellenism under the Ottoman yoke to support the reconstruction of Greek identity after the liberation from Turkish domination. Greek–Ottoman history, therefore, is described as a difficult subject to deal with in school textbooks.[66] The project of reviving Greek national consciousness was related to a particular 'Hellenic ideal'. Implementation of this 'Hellenic ideal' and reconstruction of Greek national consciousness not surprisingly influenced 'others' who remained outside the boundaries of Greek political and cultural identity despite their citizenship. Observing the concerted efforts of authorities and contending silence of Greek intellectuals, one can argue that individual, collective and institutional discrimination and isolation of Turkish-Muslims[67] as 'others' is a part of nation building project. Military dictatorship in Greece during the period of 1967–1974 worsened the existing conditions of Turkish minority. The conflict between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus issue has also influenced the deterioration of ethnic community relations in Western Thrace. Under the military dictatorship, elected members of the Turkish minority community boards were dismissed and replaced by non-elected people who were appointed by government officials and prepared to act against the interests of the Turkish-Muslim population. The appointment of a non-Muslim as chairman of the council for the administration of religious organisations is only one example of such an arbitrary policy towards an ethnic population. More systematically than this, government had given financial inducement to Greek people to convince them to move into Western Thrace as to dilute Muslim Turkish-speaking population. Bahcheli notes that Greek authorities have periodically expropriated the lands owned by Turks in order to change the population and land-holding ratios in the region.[68] It is reported that, as a result of land expropriation and restriction on land ownership by Turks, the ratio of land ownership fell from 85% in 1923 to about 35% at present.[69]

The optimist expectations of Turkish people in Western Thrace after transition to democracy in 1974 remained unfulfilled. Since 1977, for example, all the place names in Komotini region have been replaced by Greek names and the use of Turkish names for official purposes was forbidden and also fines were introduced in order to prevent the use of old names. In educational matters a similar trend was observed. The Greek authorities have constantly increased teaching in Greek at the expense of Turkish language and the employment of teachers from Turkey to Turkish schools ceased. The government issued a stipulation in 1984 that graduate examination from Turkish secondary and high schools had to be in Greek language. The implementation of this law in 1985 created an extremely difficult situation for Turkish children at Turkish schools. Accordingly the number of Turkish secondary schools have dramatically declined from 227 to 85 in Xanthi and from 305 to 42 in Komotini between 1983 and 1987.[70] The number of primary schools serving all Muslim minority children was 232 in the 1992/1993 schools term, and only two secondary schools remained open along with three religious schools (*medrese*).[71] The number of Turkish teachers was also gradually reduced in favour of Orthodox teachers and teaching in Greek has been increased progressively.[72] Concerning religious education, the Greek authorities implemented a policy of nationalising Islamic education in minority schools. As a part of this

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policy, the Greek Ministry of Education did not recognise degrees obtained in Turkey and instead a special teacher training school was established in Thessaloniki. Since 1968, only the graduates of this school are recognised as qualified teachers of Islam in minority schools. It is also noteworthy that compulsory education in Greece is nine years in Greek national schools. The Turkish community has only two upper secondary schools in contrast to almost 240 elementary schools. This means that Turkish children are forced to complete their compulsory education in state schools simply because there is not enough space in minority upper secondary schools. The Turkish Teachers Association of Western Thrace and Turkish Youth Association of Komotini also came under pressure due to the word 'Turkish' in their names. The Greek High Court passed a decision in 1987 (decision 1729/20 November) outlawing the use of the adjective 'Turkish' in the title of the organisations.[73] This court decision generated a large movement of protest among the Turkish community. More than 20,000 Turks organised a march in Komotini on 20 January 1988, protesting the court decision. The police used excessive force acting indiscriminately to stop the protest. Since then this day of protest has acquired a symbolic value among Turks in Greece. Turks of Western Thrace in Greece and in diaspora started to organise special meetings and events to commemorate 20 January every year as a symbol of collective will to express their identity.

The appointment of *muftis* as religious leaders of the community has always been a problematic issue in Greece because of official involvement during the process of their election and appointment. According to the Lausanne Agreement, the Muslim community has the right to select its own *mufti.* Muslims are supposed to choose five candidates and submit their names to the Greek government, which is subsequently expected to appoint one of these names. However, the policy and practice of the Greek government seem to be in conflict with the relevant articles of the Lausanne Agreement. In 1991, for example, the Greek government appointed Mehmet Emin Sinikoglu as a *mufti* in Xanthi, replacing Mehmet Emin Aga. Turkish minority did not recognise the legitimacy of Mehmet Emin Sinikoglu because his appointment was not based on election and submission of his name to the government. Similar policy was implemented in Komotini where Neco Cemali was appointed as *mufti* in the same arbitrary manner as Sinikoglu. The persistent rejection of elected *muftis* by the Greek authorities exhausted the expectations of the Turkish community. This led to a peaceful street protest. It is reported that during the protest ultra-nationalist Greek groups attacked the protesters, injuring 13 Turks and damaging Turkish work places. These incidents soured the relations between Turkey and Greece.[74] The elected *mufti* of Komotini Ibrahim Serif, however, faced trial and persecution in 1991. The appointed *mufti* Neco Cemali was not recognised by the Muslims as legitimate and was described as 'Mufti of Christians' and 'Puppet Mufti'. Ibrahim Serif, on the other hand, was blamed by the Greek Authorities to use his influence for political aims among Turkish community because he joined the opening ceremony of the Turkish Youth Union Office, wearing traditional *mufti* garments. He was also blamed for his public appearances during religious ceremonies and using political language. Ibrahim Serif's appeals and trials are still continuing to exacerbate the polarisation between state supported/appointed *muftis* and locally elected and recognised *muftis.* An important implication of appointment of *muftis* is the centralisation of religious foundations' (*waqfs*) administration. Elected *muftis* have no authority and control over the administrative affairs of pious foundations whereas appointed *muftis* have the authority for staffing, spending budget and restoration of religious buildings.

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Citizenship can be understood as a contract between the state and its subjects. Therefore, conferring citizenship and using its rights has been a constant debate. Turks in Western Thrace are Greek citizens. However, Greek citizens of Turkish origin are worried about the future of their status if they leave Greece for the purposes of education, training or employment elsewhere. This means that Turks who have Greek nationality may lose their citizenship if they travel outside Greece. It is a constant complaint by the Turkish minority that Greece is interpreting Article 19 of the Greek constitution arbitrarily. In February 1991 alone 544 members of the Turkish minority were stripped of their Greek nationality while they were outside the country. The issue was taken to the European Parliament and in its Annual Report, the Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs made the following statement:

> (The Committee) expresses its concern with regard to Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code which, without any legal basis and in defiance of international commitments, is used to deprive members of Turkish minority of their Greek citizenship if they leave the country with the 'intention' of not returning;
>
> (The Committee) reaffirms that the exercise of the fundamental right to leave any country and return to one's country may not be penalized by the withdrawal of citizenship rights.[75]

Although the Greek government abolished Article 19 recently, the lost citizenships of Turks will not be restored. Application to the European Parliament by members of the Turkish minority further strengthens the following argument that political participation and representation are seen as efficient channels of expressing problems on national and international levels. However, as will be seen in the following part of the article, the political participation of Turks in the political life of modern Greece remains problematic.

Exclusion from Mainstream Political Representation

Turkish minority in Greece resists the pressure of state ideology and tries to defend its identity within the framework of constitutional rights. Participation in politics is seen as an effective channel to express the complaints of Turkish-Muslims. There is no record of involvement in or resort to violence as means of protest because Turks see themselves as Greek citizens and believe that only way forward is a concerted attempt to influence politicians as decision makers. Therefore, Turkish community leaders in Western Thrace decided to form a political movement to take part in the political life of modern Greece. Before establishing a formal party, leading figures presented themselves as independent candidates in April 1990 elections and with the support of the majority, Sadik Ahmet and Ahmet Faikoglu became independent members of the parliament. Meanwhile the government passed a new electoral law in June 1990 introducing a 3% threshold in the future elections for representation in the parliament.

Through political participation, issues surrounding Turkish-Muslim minority were channelled into a wider context drawing attention from a larger audience. This led to the establishment of the Friendship and Equality Party (FEP) (*Dostluk ve Esitlik Partisi*) on 13 September 1991, led by Sadik Ahmet, independent MP. In the Party constitution, its *raison d'être* and main purpose is related to the political representation of all Greek citizens. It is specified in the Party's constitution that the Party represents those who accept that the society should be constructed on the basis of equal citizenship before the law, respecting human rights. Therefore, the Party is prepared to cooperate with other local, national and international organisations defending equality, human

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rights and political participation. The Party constitution expresses that peace is a symbol of mutual understanding among people. Therefore, the Party accepts the coexistence of different religions and categorically rejects discrimination based on race, religion and gender. FEP, under the leadership of Sadik Ahmet, increased its support base in Western Thrace considerably within a relatively short span of time and many problems of the Turkish minority such as appointment of *muftis*, school textbooks and withdrawal of citizenship found more powerful voice in political circles than ever. Yet, the introduction of the 3% threshold in general elections in 1990 created an atmosphere of uncertainty for locally supported parties. This, in return, opened a way for political exclusion of ethnic or religious minorities from democratic participation as a basic citizenship right. Although FEP's political profile increased through its active campaigning on the issues mentioned, it was not able to make an impact on 1993 elections in its constituencies because of the 3% electoral threshold on a national scale. Despite the electoral hurdle, Sadik Ahmet and his supporters chose to enter elections with a list called 'Independent Trust List' (*Bagimsiz Guven Listesi*) which received the largest support in Rodopi, yet nobody could enter the parliament. Sadik Ahmet, political leader of Turks in Western Thrace, died in a car accident in June 1995.

The 1996 elections marginalised the political participation of ethnic Turks in Greece. This is interpreted as an exclusion of Turkish people from the mainstream politics in modern Greece. 'The three per cent threshold effected the reintegration of Greece's Muslim minority in mainstream national party politics'.[76] Since the 3% of electoral threshold made it impossible to obtain any seat in the parliament for local/minority parties or independent candidates, in the last elections few Turkish candidates entered elections on PASOK (41. 4 %), New Democracy (38.1%) and Synaspismos (5.1%) ballot lists in Rodopi and Xanthi where there is a strong ethnic minority presence. Three candidates of Turkish origin were elected as MPs, one for each of these parties. Yet, ethnic tensions in Western Thrace still prevail due to the continuation of Greek policy in the region based on isolation and political exclusion.[77]

Conclusion

The Ottoman presence has left a significant cultural, religious and political legacy in the Balkans. Institutionalisation of Islam, settlements of Turkish people and conversions to Islam in the Balkans have changed the political and religious landscape of this region. Images related to Turks and Islam entered the Western public imagination as Muslims in the Balkans became a permanent part of Europe. Images of Islam and Turkish people were constantly reproduced as 'others' throughout modern history. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the emergence of nationalism and establishment of nation-states, 'un-mixing of people'[78] gathered momentum as a result of mass migrations, expulsions and population transfers. However, despite the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish and Islamic elements of its legacy remained as a permanent entity in the Balkans. As such Turkish ethnic minorities in Greece and Bulgaria are parts of the Ottoman legacy in these countries. Both communities have undergone difficult times and are caught in the quagmire of political conflicts between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece.

Establishment of nation-states generated an ideology of nation building and homogenisation of collective identity in Greece and Bulgaria. The projects of reconstructing Greek and Bulgarian nations, derived from shared history, language, myth and territory did not recognise ethnic, linguistic and religious differences of Turkish-

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Muslim minorities. Although Turkish-Muslims were citizens of these countries, they were not able to enjoy the rights of citizenship fully. The sources of Turkish identity were not only ignored but also categorically suppressed. Politics of nation building and reconstructing idealised identity in Greece and Bulgaria undermined Turkish language, culture and Islam. Turkish minority experienced long-term discrimination in education, employment and political participation. Despite the assimilationist and isolationist policies of undermining their culture, Turkish minorities continued to cultivate Turkish language and Islamic values among young generations and maintained their identity against state ideology, which ignored the heterogeneity of Greek and Bulgarian societies.

With the end of the Cold War, Bulgaria took positive steps towards establishing a democratic civil society where ethnic, religious and linguistic differences were recognised for the first time. The Turkish-Muslim minority re-claimed some of those rights that were suppressed by the authoritarian regime during the Cold War. This was reflected in the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria reducing the tension between the two countries that lasted for many years. This implies that progressive recognition of the Turkish minority may have a wider potential impact of conflict resolution. In contrast to Bulgaria, Greece still implements its policies against the Turkish minority in Western Thrace. It is not unrealistic to argue that the recognition of Turkish minority by eliminating discriminatory policies and treating them equally with the rest of the population will improve Greco-Turkish relations considerably.

Turkish minorities in Greece and Bulgaria should not be viewed in isolation from other Muslim communities in Europe. Muslims became a permanent part of Europe over a long period of time. In addition to the legacy of the Ottomans and the Islamic Empire in Spain, there has been a large volume of migration of Muslims from Southeast Asia, North Africa and Turkey to Europe. The estimated size of Europe's current Muslim population is around 23.5 million.[79] Yet misperceptions, stereotypes and prejudices about Islam and Muslims largely prevail in Europe. The revival of nationalism and reproduction of historical images have significant impact on the representation of Islam in public discourse perpetuated by the mass media. The nationalised form of organised religion that transmitted historical metaphors to the modern era rekindled religious sentiments. Cviic's[80] analysis of conflicts in Bosnia supports the foregoing argument which presupposes that religion has a potential power to produce violent nationalism. Cviic asserts that the Orthodox Church assumed a status of being a nationalist institution representing the Serbian nation in the Balkans. Religious and national identity became inextricably linked among Serbians and the Orthodox Church nurtured nationalism by perpetuating symbolic values of metaphors such as the 'chosen Serbian nation', 'sacred places', 'martyrdom' and the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. The use of violence against infidels is thus legitimised by the sacred authority of religion.

The division on the lines of religious commitment still exerts itself powerfully even in the age of liberalism and secularism which were supposed to curb the influences of religion. Against the widespread expectation that religion will lose its significance and importance it still resists to demising effects of modernity and reproduces itself at the turn of the century.[81] Yet, there is an important but largely neglected and ignored dimension of Muslim presence in Europe; that is Islam's potential contribution to conflict resolution in Europe and elsewhere. The significance of peace for Muslims is indisputable. The representation of authentic Islam by Muslims in Europe will contribute to the elimination of prejudices, medieval images and myths about Islam. Muslim communities in Europe may also help construct not only economic relations but also

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cultural bridges between the countries involved. However, this will very much depend upon to what extent the European host nations may overcome their long-standing 'fear of Islam' and Muslims.

NOTES

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