

POSITION OF THE TURKISH NATIONAL COMMUNITY IN KOSOVO-METOHIIJA SINCE RAMBOUILLET AND PARIS TALKS, AND KFOR AND UNMIK ARRIVAL IN THAT SOUTH SERBIA'S REGION*

Settling down of Turks in Kosovo and Metohija began several years after the Kosovo Battle. The greatest number of their ethnic community members remained in the imperial town of Prizren where they still are. Their presence in Prizren was mentioned for the first time as late as 1455. Since their arrival their majority in Prizren has been living together with the resident population, which was mainly Serbian, as we all know. After the Ottoman Empire departed from our territories in Kosovo and Metohija a considerable number of Turks remained. According to some sources at least 220,000 people in Kosovo and Metohija were speaking Turkish and according to some statements even 400,000 people were using that language.

Turkish ethnic community had a particularly interesting position. In that period Turks were not only the loyal citizens of the Kingdom but were also privileged in various ways. Especially craftsmen, the majority of them known as Turks, were exempted by a royal decree from paying all kinds of taxes and other obligations to the state. Therefore, the loyalty of Turks in the Kingdom has generally never been questioned. The problems that their ethnic community had been faced with reached their culmination only in the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and particularly at present owing to escalation of terrorism and separatism.

After World War II there were 100,000 Turks in Kosovo and Metohija. Some of them were assimilated into the Albanian community in various ways, due to all possible pressures put on them. A greater part of the Turkish population moved for good to their country of origin aware of the fact that besides Albanian nationalists and chauvinists there would be no chance to remain. Realizing their mistakes the communist authorities of that time by a decree opened schools with instruction in Turkish in Kosovo-Metohija wherever Turks were found. Gradually the elementary rights of Turks and of other

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national minorities became increasingly great and plenteous. In addition to the primary and secondary schools in Turkish the Turks in Prizren, Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica and Gnjilane got their radio broadcasting program in Turkish as well. The Turkish daily newspaper "Tan" and many other journals and children's newspapers were subsequently published more than 30 years ago. In all parts of Kosovo-Metohija cultural and artistic societies were founded to cherish authentic Turkish ethnic culture in Turkish. In fact, Turks in Kosovo and Metohija have always been indisputably demonstrating their loyalty to Serbia and Yugoslavia. On the other side they enjoyed far and away the higher extent of rights than all other Turks in Diaspora.

The statement of the former President of the Turkish Republic Bulent Eçevit, given during his visit to Kosovo and Metohija, supported that fact: "It is my pleasure to emphasize that the rights of the Turkish national community in Yugoslavia reached the maximum. Our compatriots do not enjoy even generally comparable rights in the neighboring countries".

In support of that statement one could add that the Turkish television broadcasted on channel D, on April 13, 2000, a program entitled "There has been a country called Yugoslavia". It was clearly stated in it that all ethnic communities in Yugoslavia live on equal terms according to the highest standards and all relevant documents of the European and World Community.

I would now look back on something that I should have done at the beginning, i.e. the position of Turks in Kosovo and Metohija after the escalation of Albanian terrorism and extremism, during the talks in Rambouillet and Paris, throughout NATO aggression and particularly at present – 10 months after KFOR and UNMIK arrived in that part of our country. Since the attempts of the Republic of Serbia to reach the agreement on peaceful solution of the crisis in Kosovo-Metohija in March 1998, the representatives of the Turkish national community took an active part in the efforts to find appropriate solution for their future in that area. On the basis of the existing documents and the Constitutions of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia the Declaration on Political Frameworks of Self-management in Kosovo and Metohija was signed on November 25, 1998. The Turkish delegation signed that Declaration without hesitation and rejected the plan of the Contact Group, unacceptable at that moment, to let virtually two delegations - Albanians and Serbs alone to carry out talks for the settlement of the existing problems.

As we all know representatives of all ethnic communities in Kosovo-Metohija were members of the state delegation of the Republic of Serbia in Rambouillet and Paris. Two representatives of the Turkish ethnic community were among them. On the other side, across from our multiethnic state delegation there was an exclusively Albanian delegation composed largely of the members of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, led by Hashim Taçi. One could predict, judging by the composition of that delegation, that the talks on the future of Kosovo-Metohija will not be held at all. Thus it happened. Throughout

18 days in Rambouillet and 5 days in Paris the team conducting negotiations disabled every direct contact and talks with the other side which meant that the Western countries did not care about the political solution of the problems in Kosovo-Metohija. They tried to plant on us, like a cuckoo's egg, the so-called Agreement prepared by the International Community, headed by the USA, and signed by the political leaders of the Albanian parties with Hashim Taçi at their head. According to that Agreement the existence of all other people in Kosovo except Albanians was denied.

The Agreement was unacceptable at that time because it practically foresaw, in articles 5 and 7, the occupation of our country and its annihilation so that virtually no one could assume responsibility to sign it. A very well conducted media campaign and a sequence of media manipulations were followed by NATO air strikes. Then around 10,000 Turks left Kosovo-Metohija and later, upon the arrival of KFOR and UNMIK, another group of 20,000 Turks deserted the area.

The Turks left behind in Kosovo-Metohija are in an extremely difficult position, because the pressures exerted by the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army are being greater from day to day on a pretext that Tuks are loyal to the Serbian state. They do not receive humanitarian aid and do not get compensation for their work as Albanians do. They are deprived of free movement, and a number of them were killed, while great many Turkish houses were plundered and set on fire. In one word, life has now become unbearable for the members of the Turkish national minority surviving in Kosovo-Metohija.

It is high time that the International Community did everything in its power to settle the problems in Kosovo and Metohija in the right way without preferential treatment of Albanians and to make it possible for all the people who live there to reach a common agreement and arrive at a common solution.



Photo 8. *Gorany women stopped to rest* (photo B. Pelinović)



Photo 9. *Duška River's Gorge - a frozen waterfall* (photo S. Belij)