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**The Exceptionality of Central Europe:
The Muslim Minorities**

In the old member states of the European Union, public opinion has been divided over the question of Muslim communities for years. These same communities have also compelled many in these countries to propose isolation and adopt an overall negative attitude vis-à-vis immigrant groups. Parallel to these changes in social attitudes, at the level of government policies ever stricter regulations limiting immigration have been implemented. While the societies and states of Central Europe have their own wealth of experience with Islam, often reaching back several centuries and including both periods of conflict and coexistence, it is the ripple effect of the controversies and the Islamophobia in the old member states of the EU that is stirring up passions and giving rise to debates in a region where there are few traditional Muslim communities (or they are virtually invisible for the wider public), and, where the number of immigrants from Muslim countries is still very low.¹ Bulgaria is the only exception to this pattern in Central Europe, where the Muslim, mostly Turkish, population accounts for 12-14 percent of the total population.

This paper analyzes Muslim minorities in Central Europe, *i.e.* in Central European member states of the EU,² but its general conclusions and the historical processes it describes are valid for the whole of the region broadly understood. At the same time, the paper treats separately and thus excludes from analysis – perhaps somewhat arbitrarily – the Balkans, despite century-old shared development patterns. This move may be justified partly because the Balkans is the subject matter of another chapter in this volume, and partly because the history of Islam in the Balkans also demonstrates some divergent features. (At the same time, Bulgaria is included here by virtue of being an EU member state.)

Central European experiences with Islam predate those of Western Europe (excepting the Iberian Peninsula) by centuries. These first hand experiences date back to the Middle Ages. From that period on, the peoples of Central Europe have experienced both century-spanning fights against, and coexistence with Islam, given that for hundreds of years this region had been the frontier between *dar al-islam* and *dar al-harb*. In sharp contrast to this, for most of Western Europe direct contact with Muslims has been the product of events and processes in the 20th century. Aside from the differences in the historical background and in the time span of

interaction, the Central European experience with Islam is also different from that of Western Europe in the sense that it is associated with the Ottoman Turks and the Tartars, determining the key features of the Islam experience of Central European societies. The Islam of Ottoman Turks and Tartars differs in many respects from most of the other Islamic identities, for instance from those found in contemporary Western Europe which are largely rooted in the experiences of Maghreb Arabs in France and Pakistanis in the UK.

Islam has penetrated Central Europe in several waves, but the Muslims settling in the region have often disappeared, becoming assimilated to the local population. Muslim influence first appeared in the age of migrations when various peoples settled on the east European steppe. In this period, some of the tribes living on the Eastern European steppe were Muslims, so at the time of the Magyar conquest (at the end of the 9th century) some Muslims may have arrived in the Carpathian Basin with the Hungarian tribes. The last large wave of migrations was the Mongol invasion. This was followed by vast conquests from the east, by the Golden Horde in the north, representing the minor dimension of this expansion, and by the Ottoman Empire in the south, a larger and more lasting enterprise, which together carved out the borders of Muslim penetration and settlement up to the present. While to the south of Slovakia the Ottoman Turk experience has been definitive (most of these territories were parts of the Ottoman Empire for longer or shorter periods between the 15th and the 18th or 19th centuries), to the north of this line it was the Tartars flooding in from the steppe who represented a direct Muslim influence. In this context, Romania represents a special transitional region, as it experienced both Turkish and Tartar influence, and some of these communities exist up to our day. (At the same time it must be noted that the Romanian Tartars in Dobrudja had arrived from the Crimean peninsula and had been the vassals of the Ottoman Turks, signalling that ultimately Romania too belongs to the larger zone of Ottoman influence.)

Owing to the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, smaller Muslim communities had come to exist in the territories of (re-established) Central European states first and foremost during the Russo-Turkish wars, and later, during the Balkan wars. Furthermore, Bosnian Muslim communities appeared in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in greater numbers following the annexation of Bosnia, while in the Baltic States Central Asian Turkic Muslim groups arrived as a result of Russian expansion into their homelands, followed by a type of intra-imperial ethnic migrations.

During the socialist period, a common characteristic of Central European states was their system of relationships with the Muslim world, which was dictated by Moscow, centre of the informal Soviet empire. Within this system, the Muslim world meant, for all practical purposes, friendly Arab states (often labelled 'socialist') and, temporarily, Afghanistan. At the same time, Turkey enjoyed little, if any attention. Muslims appearing in Central Europe during this time represented in many respects a new phenomenon, as the majority were Arabs, typically young and single (being students), and staying in the recipient country temporarily, for the

duration of their studies. Those who eventually decided to stay usually founded a family and integrated into the local majority.

It can be said in general about Muslim communities in Central Europe today that traditional and entrenched differences in the Muslim world (those separating Sunni and Shia, the influence of dervish orders, Sufi schools, currents of legal thinking and practice, etc.) exist at most formally, and appear – for now at least without much significance – due to the recent migrations after 1950, which hit Central Europe even later, towards the end of the 20th century. Part of the reason for the waning of intra-religious fault lines has been the quasi-uniform practice in the Socialist bloc to push religion into the background. Though these efforts took different forms in individual countries, they always produced the same results, strengthening the feeling of interdependence rather than disagreement in the religious communities. The other reason lay in the low number, almost non-existence, of Muslim communities, which made the common overarching identity seem more important than any differences. On this issue, Bulgaria shows considerable difference from the other Central European new member states of the EU, as it has a significant native Muslim minority. However, the differences within Islam are not conspicuous there either, as the whole traditional community uniformly belongs to the Hanafi School, which means that they exercise their religion uniformly. Furthermore, both Bulgarian nationalism and assimilationist tendencies appearing from the 19th century onwards and 20th century socialism worked towards strengthening unity and cohesion in the community.

It follows from what has been said above that Muslim communities living in Central Europe today cannot be grouped according to religious differences, or, in many cases, not even by ethnic differences. The length of the historical experience of coexistence with the majority society and the extent of integration of these communities represent factors of far greater significance. Indigenous communities, *i.e.* communities living in the territory of a given country continuously for an extended period, cannot be found in every country, and even where they exist, many have an ethnic, rather than a religious identity (the Tartars in Poland, the Tartars and the Turks in Romania, the Turks, the Pomaks and a part of the Roma population in Bulgaria). Under the Hungarian minority law, acknowledged communities are only those that have lived in Hungarian territory for at least one hundred years, so Muslims do not qualify as a minority at all. On top of that, the 13 minorities officially acknowledged in Hungary are ethnic, not religious, minorities. In general, the indigenous Muslim minorities, where they exist, are viewed by the majority as “belonging” to the country, almost as a historical fact or heritage, and in no way representing a source of threat for society.

Muslim communities that settled in the socialist period had usually arrived from (more or less) secularized countries. Also, they chose to settle in fully secularized states which sought to limit religious practices or were outright hostile to all forms of religion. As a result, most of the newer settlers chose to not exercise their religion, at least not publicly. Having settled down, they integrated into the host society, typically through mixed marriages, and have not provoked any negative response.

Post-socialist transition and later EU accession, however, created a dramatically new situation in Central Europe, when, after the opening up of the borders, the region became a popular transit route. The latest wave of migration basically resulted in the formation of two groups: those of the recent immigrants and refugees. But as most Central European countries remained transit countries even after their accession to the EU, refugees account for a relatively insignificant share even within the (already small) Muslim communities.

Another group found in each country is made up by local converts, mostly women converted due to marriage and dissatisfied young people seeking adventure and experience, whose religious zeal and practices are often much more rigorous than those of the new immigrants. As Gyula Kozák noted in the context of Romanian Muslims, “the newly converted are more devoted. They are conscious of their religiousness. The Muslims in Dobrudja are not like that”.¹

The only indigenous Muslims living in Central Europe and having a kin state are the Turks of Romania and Bulgaria. This kin state is Turkey, where the state has assumed an official role in supporting these communities. In more recently formed Muslim communities, maintaining relations with the homeland happens much more on a personal basis, *i.e.* it mainly takes the form of family visits, and does not imply a community sustaining relations with the Muslim community back home in a socially coordinated manner. Also, in Central European countries (in contradistinction to Western Europe) the leaders of the local religious communities are either local converts belonging to the majority nation, or members of historically established, long-standing – indigenized – communities, whose expertise in religious scholarship, as well as the Muslim religious practices of the local indigenous communities in general, are questioned by the “new Muslims” (the recent migrants), on the grounds of having become mixed with the local (Christian) traditions.

The arrival of these “new Muslims”, especially if they come from the Muslim heartlands, sheds light on a problem that has historical roots and that still poses a challenge today: As most of Central Europe had not been part of the Muslim world (*dar al-islam*), no Muslim educational institutions or religious centres had been established there. For this reason, Muslim communities of the whole region (with the exception of those living in Bulgaria) struggle with the problem of not having their own religious schools. As a result, future religious leaders of the communities have to travel and train abroad, to accepted sites of religious study, or, alternatively, highly qualified Muslim scholars have to be invited, raising a series of further questions. Who will be coming and whence? Will they accept that in Central Europe the Sunni-Shia division, differences of legal traditions² do not matter, or not like at home? What supporting base will these leaders build for themselves – a question which also raises the danger of fundamentalism and terrorism in the wake

¹ Kozák, “Romániai muzulmán intézmények diskurzusa az identitásról és integrációról”.

² It has repeatedly happened that somebody arriving from Saudi Arabia to lead the local community had to leave early because the local community did not accept his radical Wahhabi dogmas and his attitude excluding everybody confessing different doctrines. (Interview with Zoltán Sulok, leader of the Organisation of Muslims in Hungary.)

of 9/11. These doubts and uncertainties explain, at least in part, the tendency that Central European Muslim communities are trying to select religious leaders from their own ranks, which has become a lot easier since the fall of socialism. This widespread preference also explains the fact why there are many young leaders throughout the region, adding to the constraining factor of the difficulties (of foreigners) to communicate in the local languages.

Historically established and recent Muslim communities usually live parallel, but separate lives and they do not unite or do so only temporarily. While the indigenous communities have adapted to their environments in many respects, the newer communities regard their own practices as representing 'genuine' Islam, which they sometimes represent radically. From the point of view of the majority society, the difference lies primarily in the nature of Muslim identity. This means that for the host societies, the question is not so much whether one is a Muslim, but the extent to which somebody is a Muslim and how one practices Islam.³ In answering this question, besides religious practices, such factors as loyalty to the recipient state, a citizen's status, the duration of staying in the recipient country, etc, also play an important part. The degree of integration of indigenous minorities can be best described by the so-called 'Dobrudja model', which can be characterized by the symbolic nature of the ethnic and religious identity.⁴

The legal systems of the recipient countries usually acknowledge only the old, integrated and in some ways "consolidated" Islam. It is this "native" stream that often receives state subsidies and support, while the "genuine", more radical Islam of the newcomers remains outside the system and lacks all official acknowledgment. As in Central Europe, due to the Turkish and Tartar influences discussed above, Sunni Islam (or one of its specific legal traditions or practices) has become a received religion, Shia Muslim communities, which emerged with the arrival of recent immigrants, are subject to *de facto* discrimination.

Muslim organizations and associations, as a result of the common socialist heritage, usually organize the operation of the community, or its official representation, as part of the state administration, or in close connection with it. (Which, incidentally, offers an intriguing parallel with the institutions of "state religion" common in the Muslim world.)⁵ The outward forms can be different depending on the legal and administrative system of the given state: There are some countries where muftiates have been established, in other countries Muslim organizations have been registered as denominations, with either form being usually accompanied by foundations and cultural associations dedicated to the preservation of traditions, customs and identity. In conclusion it can be stated that the organizations of Central European Muslims, at least for the moment, have a local-regional character, they were established to perform cultural, humanitarian or strictly religious purposes, and have no detectable political ambitions, which also follows from their limited membership. Bulgaria is an exception, but the political

³ KOZÁK, *op. cit.*

⁴ KOZÁK, *op. cit.*

⁵ For more details see: TÜSKE, "Visszatérítők".

party Movement for Rights and Freedom supported predominantly by Turks and Pomaks has been refraining from declaring itself as a party of Muslims or Turks, in compliance with Bulgarian law.

Indigenous Muslim religious practice in Central Europe shows an interesting picture, a product of the situation described in connection with the selection of religious leaders. Minority existence, framed by a dominant Christian environment, has led to the abandonment or the rather liberal interpretation of some Muslim laws and norms (the ban on drinking alcohol, the wearing of headscarves for women, etc.). At the same time, certain elements from the practice of the majority societies have been adopted by Muslims as well (*e.g.* lighting candles). The religious practices most persistently surviving even the period of the socialist anti-religion policies are the observation of Muslim religious holidays, Kurban Bayram⁶ and Ramazan Bayram⁷. Beyond the adoption of some elements of Christian practice, certain ethnic traditions have also become part of local Muslim customs over the centuries. The most remarkable such practice is found in Romania and Bulgaria, where the Muslim population of mostly Turkish origin (or at least registered as Turkish) annually celebrate Nowruz⁸, the beginning of the Iranian new year. This, on the one hand, is obviously due to the influence of Iranian (perhaps Kurdish) groups coming from the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire and settling in these areas, reinforced perhaps by central Asian steppe traditions. On the other hand, some elements of celebrating Nowruz, such as fire-jumping, represent an interesting parallel with the ancient Bulgarian rite of spring, which, in all likelihood, has helped the tradition of Nowruz to survive.

The media coverage of, and the general discourse and controversies about Islam, largely replicating the dominant discourse of Western Europe, are influenced by two processes.⁹ On the one hand, fears caused by linking Islam with terrorism, further intensified and made more conscious by the War on Terror figure prominently in the discourse. On the other hand, apprehensions concerning immigration, a potential correlate of EU membership (so far not confirmed by actual trends even if the number of immigrants has been on the rise for some time) have started to figure in public thinking.¹⁰ This is an interesting peculiarity of Central Europe, as it implies that the region which has a wealth of historical experience with

⁶ In Arabic *'id al-adha*, the festival of slaughtering sheep, to commemorate that Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son to God, who, in the last moment, replaced the child with a lamb (sheep, the sacrificial lamb). The tenth day of the last month in the Muslim calendar is at the same time the event closing the pilgrimage of Mecca.

⁷ In Arabic *'id al-fitr*, the event closing the fasting month of Ramadan

⁸ "Turci".

⁹ KOZÁK, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ For data from the south and east coasts of the Mediterranean toward the new EU member-states, see: N. RÓZSA, "Mediterranean Migration to New Central European Member States of the EU, Present and Future Trends".

Islam is actually adopting foreign patterns of thinking about it, borrowed from countries which often have a far smaller stock of common history.

Central Europe has so far not experienced terrorism,¹¹ nor have radical militant Muslim groups been active in this region.¹² As the majority society tends to consider indigenous Muslim communities as truly native, something well-known and not something to be feared, they have been increasingly associated with the emergent category of “Muslims living proper lives”. The real fears, consequently, are caused by immigrants, even though Central Europe continues to be a transit area, rather than a destination, and despite the number of immigrant asylum-seekers, even compared with the small Central European populations, having remained rather low.¹³ Muslim groups vying for public attention and for legitimacy sometimes take advantage of exactly these fears.

Why recent Muslim migrants differ from the preceding waves may be partly explained by the re-Islamization of their places of origin. In the wake of the era of secular Arab nationalism that extended over much of the 1970s and '80s, an evident religious revival is taking place throughout the Islamic world today, also finding manifestation in the formal aspects of religious practice. As a result, those arriving from these re-Islamized areas hold on to the external marks of their identity in Central Europe as well, thus becoming much more visible for the majority society than earlier migrants. This, in turn, has invoked campaigns against Muslim communities and Islam, though for the time being only in a limited form, which, however, has been reinforced the influence of tendencies originating in Western Europe.

The most important form of visibility for the community is its place of worship, especially the mosque, which provokes passionate arguments in Central Europe when the construction of new mosques is planned. The reinstatement of historical mosques as a place of worship, however, does not usually cause controversy. A functioning Muslim community requires – beyond the place of worship – other, less noticeable institutions, such as *halal* butcheries or cemeteries. Maintaining and taking care of the cemetery is usually a responsibility delegated by the state or the municipality to the trust of one of the Muslim communities, which emphasizes the official acknowledgement of the given organization or community, and enhances its prestige. This is, however, a question that may cause disagreement more within the community, than provoke any sentiments directed against it.

The activities of Central European Muslim communities, beyond religious practice, have followed two main aims. One of them has been emphasizing the

¹¹ The only exception is Bulgaria where in response to the 1984-1989 Bulgarian assimilation campaign some terrorist acts also occurred. Though these attempts can be linked to Muslim/Turkish groups, we are not paying attention to them now, as their aims were not those common in today's terrorist attacks (an Islamic state, introducing the *shari'a*, the takeover of power).

¹² For more details see LEDERER, “Countering Islamist Radicals in Eastern Europe”, p. 15.

¹³ N. RÓZSA, *op. cit.*

peaceful character of Islam towards the majority society, typically in the form of providing information, education, or, concerning some political events of the world, taking a political position. The other main direction has involved organizing aid shipments, which can be interpreted as a form of social responsibility or charity considered obligatory by Muslims. Such relief shipments have been organized by several Central European Muslim communities for people in Sudan, Iraq and tsunami-stricken Muslim areas, as well.

Poland and the Baltic states

From a historical point of view, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Muslim minorities are logically best discussed together, inasmuch as these territories have experienced the same influences, having once belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The first exposure to Islam was brought on by the conversion of the Golden Horde, an experience that was to last due to the Horde's successor states and the later Crimean Tartar Khanate. In later centuries, Russian expansion became a further shared experience for the inhabitants of these regions. As a result, from the 14th century onwards, Tartar communities have settled down and some have survived until our day, even if their ethnic Tartar identity, Muslim faith and religious practices have often faded, or have at the very least lost their political character. The descendants of the Tartars settled in the territory of the one-time Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are today Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian or Ukrainian citizens. A few centuries ago, however, following the disintegration of the Polish-Lithuanian principality (1795), most of them first became Russian subjects, and were thus placed under the religious administration of the Crimean Muftiate, established by Catherine the Great in 1788 – even if most of these settled communities never accepted its authority. During the period of Russian domination, a new Muslim ethnic group, the Turks, also appeared within the empire, primarily as prisoners of war from the Russian-Turkish wars. In the ex-Soviet Baltic republics a further two-phase direction of immigration is discernible: both in during the empire and in the Soviet period there is evidence of some Muslim migration from central Asia (becoming the Central Asian Soviet republics after the victory of the Bolsheviks). Finally, the general tendency of the Soviet period left its mark on these territories as well, as guest students arrived from friendly Arab countries, who formed a markedly different group from both an ethnic and a cultural point of view. Following the post-socialist transitions and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, new Muslim minorities appeared with mixed ethnic and Islamic backgrounds, posing as *de facto* challengers to the indigenous Tartar minority. These emergent groups went as far as to question the “true” Muslim identity of the indigenous communities, and sought to divert resources which the state administration had previously been supplying to the ‘historical’ Tartar minorities.

Poland

The Muslim minority in Poland counts about twenty thousand people who can be divided into two major groups: a 5-6 thousand-strong quasi-indigenous community of Tartar origin, and the newcomers, mostly made up of Arabs, Bosniaks, Chechens, and (fewer) Turks, whose number, taken together, is estimated at 13-14 thousand. Both the Polish Tartars and the newcomers are Sunni. Shia Muslims from Iraq and Iran are present only in negligible numbers.

The majority of the Tartars live by the eastern borders of Poland. They had fled to this area and settled down here when during the Second World War their homeland for centuries was annexed by the Soviet Union (today this region is part of Lithuania). Another group, however, settled down in the territories annexed by Poland in the west, occupying areas abandoned by their earlier German inhabitants, while some others opted for large cities. The immigrants who arrived during the socialist period did not attribute great significance to religion, so the places where they settled depended primarily on where they studied or found work.

The first Tartars were prisoners taken during the fighting with the Golden Horde. These prisoners settled in the Lithuanian Grand Duchy at the beginning of the 14th century. The larger wave of Tartar migration, however, took place during the reign of Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas (Witold, 1392-1430). Though there still were prisoners of war among them at the time, most of them arrived after fleeing from the civil war ravaging the Golden Horde. They settled down and completely integrated in their new homeland, fighting together with the Poles and Lithuanians for centuries, and defending the country against Germans, Russians, Swedes, and even other Tartars or Turks. In recognition of their services they were endowed with lands and privileges, had the freedom to practice their religion, were allowed to build mosques, marry local women and raise their children as Muslims. Also, they were directly under the suzerainty of the ruler, which exempted them from the caprices of local nobles and clergy.

The linguistic assimilation of these early settlers had been completed by the 16th century. As a result, they adopted their own Slavic dialect based on Polish or Belorussian, mixed with Turkish and Arabic words. At the same time, they kept their religion and traditions. In the second half of the 17th century, these Tartars totalled about one hundred thousand. King Jan Sobieski III (1629-1696),¹⁴ who fought successfully against the Tartars and Turks, endowed these auxiliaries with lands. Following the partitions of Poland, Tartars went on to take part in every movement of independence, also supporting Napoleon's military expedition in Russia. Though in the First World War many Tartars were conscripted into the Russian army, after the formation of the new Polish state, Tartars were once more found fighting in the Polish army against the Soviets, even forming a separate unit, at the time of the 1920 invasion by the Red Army.

Between the two World Wars, Tartars were simply Polish citizens of Muslim faith, fighting for the recognition of their religion by the state. Until 1918, the Polish

¹⁴ Sobieski also played an important part in liberating Vienna from the siege by the Turks in 1683.

Tartars were under the jurisdiction of the mufti of Simferopol (in the Crimean peninsula). When the Muftiate was dissolved by the Soviets in 1917, Polish Tartars eventually founded the Muslim Religious Union in 1925, which exists to our day, and they also elected the first Polish mufti in the person of Jakub Szynekiewicz. The mufti was based in Vilnius, the former capital of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy, where the largest Muslim community (with the exception of Warsaw) lived.

The Polish Parliament passed a law that officially recognized Islam in 1936. The election of the mufti, the leader of the community, was henceforth approved by the president of Poland. The mufti, the imams and the muezzins received salaries from the state. The *waqf* estates were also exempted from taxes, completing the transition of Islam in re-established Poland to a received denomination.

Between the two World Wars, there existed 19 Muslim communities in Poland, with their mosques and cemeteries. These all fell under the supervision of the Muslim Religious Union. The imams and the muezzins to these communities were appointed by the mufti, in agreement with the council of the MRU.

A further group, bearing the name Cultural and Educational Association of Polish Tartars, was established in 1926. The two organizations published several reviews in Polish, including the *Islamic Review*, the *Tartar Almanac* and *Tartar Life*.

During the communist period, religion was consciously marginalized, and the operation of religious institutions was significantly restricted in Poland as well. Though the MRU technically continued to exist, it was not able to function properly. There was no mufti either, as Szynekiewicz emigrated to the West, never to return. Similarly to the practice of other socialist countries (compare Bulgaria and Romania), in Poland, too, Muslim names were no longer permitted for newborns, in accordance with an overall drive to homogenize the population. In this situation, Polish Tartars often gave their children names that sounded similar to Muslim names (Emil – Emir, Halina – Halima, Alexander – Ali, etc.).

This was also the period when Muslim students, primarily from friendly socialist countries, appeared. As relations were determined by affinity for the socialist world view, most of these students did not practice their religion. Incidentally, the same period also represented the heyday of secular nationalist ideologies in the Arab world, and religion was temporarily being pushed into the background, especially in the Arab countries with a 'socialist' power structure, which most of them had arrived from. After finishing their studies some of these students settled in Poland permanently.

Post-socialist transition made it possible for Polish Muslims to freely practice their religion once more. Religious education, which had been banned from state-run schools in 1948, was resumed, and in settlements with larger Muslim populations state-financed religious education schemes are in place today.¹⁵ The MRU has resumed its operation, and in 2003 the association elected a new mufti, Tomasz Miśkiewicz, who has appropriate education (he had studied in Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) to ensure his legitimacy. Imams, on the other hand, are invited

¹⁵ NALBORCZYK, "Islam in Poland. 600 years of Muslim Presence", p. 254.

from abroad for the time being, as no Muslim institutions of higher religious education exist in Poland. Several Polish Muslims currently studying abroad are expected to take over from foreign imams in the future. An important deficiency concerns the number of mosques. During the Second World War there were 17 mosques operating in Poland, most of which were to be found in areas currently belonging to Lithuania or Belorussia. Today there are only two pre-war mosques still in operation in the territory of post-1945 Poland, while a third was constructed in Gdansk in 1990.

At the same time, the proportions and the composition of the Muslim community has also changed. The indigenous Muslim community of Tartar origin is now the minority outnumbered by recent immigrants who no longer comprise only students, but include businessmen, employees or refugees in their ranks. Islamic denominations previously not present in the Polish Muslim community have also appeared, including the Shia and the Ahmadiyya, though they have very few followers.

The official representative of Muslims in the relations between the Polish state and the Muslim community is still the Muslim Religious Union in Poland. Every Muslim having Polish citizenship or a residence permit can become a member of MRU, but all other Muslims are also allowed to take part in the Union's activities. The mufti and the Supreme Council are elected by the Congress of Polish Muslims for 5 years. The Congress meets for a session every two years. In Poland, there are seven official Muslim communities, four of which are established ones (in Warsaw, Bialystok, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany), while three have been formed only recently (in Gdansk, Gorzów and Poznan).¹⁶

Besides the religious organizations several cultural organizations also exist, partly to organize the cultural life of the traditional Tartar minority, partly facilitating the cultural activities of recent Muslim immigrants. The oldest organization is the Polish Tartar Society established in 1926, primarily catering to the cultural needs of the Polish Tartars. The Muslim Unity Society (1989), the Muslim Students' Society in Poland (1989) and the Muslim League (2003) are the cultural organizations primarily of Muslims, Arabs, etc. having immigrated in the socialist era and after 1989. The Muslim League is especially making efforts to stand up for the new Muslims and emancipate itself with regard to the Muslim Religious Union. Its arguments include the claim that Polish (*i.e.* indigenous) Muslims cannot be considered among the genuinely faithful, since their women do not wear the headscarf, they are not able to properly enunciate the holy scriptures and many of them attend the mosque on Sundays (Friday being a working day). For the moment this rivalry is the most conspicuous sign of the competition between the old and the new community.¹⁷

¹⁶ NALBORCZYK, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹⁷ NALBORCZYK, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, which has a population of 3.5 million, according to the data of the 2001 census, there are 2,860 Muslims, of whom 1,679 defined themselves as Tartars and 185 as Lithuanians. (It is to be noted that not all Tartars defined themselves as Muslims, and as a result the total number of Tartars came to 3,245).¹⁸

Groups with Muslim or Tartar origins have lived in Lithuania since the 14th century, having arrived from the territories ruled by the Golden Horde and later the Crimean Tartar Khanate. The immigration of peoples with Turkish origin (generally also referred to as Tartars) lasted until the late 15th century. These early settlers comprise three loose groups: refugees fleeing from various Turkish hordes and khanates, Muslim warriors engaged by Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas (at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries), and prisoners of war. There exists no authentic data concerning their numbers, yet according to most estimates it never exceeded ten thousand, and they are also presumed to have enjoyed the same rights as the Christians. Similarly to those in Poland, Muslims living in Lithuania were also directly subordinated to the ruler. They were allowed to practice their religion and elect their religious leaders freely. They even built mosques, albeit these have greatly deteriorated because of their wooden structure. In the 16th-17th centuries there were about two dozen mosques operating in the territory of the principality.¹⁹ At the time of the disintegration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1795) most Lithuanian Tartars became Russian subjects, thus belonging to the Crimean Muftiate, though they only reluctantly accepted its authority, and never really observed it, insisting that to elect their religious leaders was their sovereign right. When Vilnius became part of Poland in 1923 and most Lithuanian Tartars became Polish citizens, the 1936 law, which recognized Islam as a received faith, also ensured for these Muslims the right of self-government and the right to elect their religious leaders. At the same time, by the early 20th century only six mosques remained in use in the territory of what is today Lithuania. During the Soviet period even these were shut down, and reopened only at the beginning of the 1990s. Today there are four mosques operating in Lithuania: in Kaunas, the village Nemezis, Keturiasdešimt Totorių, and Raiziai. There is no mosque in Vilnius, where the local community gather in the Lithuanian Tartar community centre instead.

Though Lithuanian Tartars successfully resisted religious assimilation, by the early 17th century they had abandoned their mother tongue, and spoke Polish and Belorussian instead. Technically they remained Muslims, but they also gave up several elements of Islamic religious practice, and even adopted some Christian elements of worship (*e.g.* lighting candles at funerals), as well as some other popular traditions: Lithuanian Muslims, for instance, even though Sunnis without exception, also celebrate Ashura.²⁰ All of these features are reflected in the religiousness of Lithuanian Tartars, more precisely, in the lack of their religiousness.

¹⁸ RACIUS, "The 'New Old' Islam in Lithuania", p. 360.

¹⁹ RACIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

²⁰ RACIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

E.g. they do not ask for religious guidance from learned men, and celebrate only the two major Muslim holidays, Kurban Bayram and Ramazan Bayram. They do not attend the mosques (the Friday prayers are not attended by Tartars, and their places are taken by recent immigrants), so the mufti mainly performs administrative duties, and he certainly does not have to face any significant challenges concerning his proficiency in the teachings of Islam. One of the reasons for this is that the religious education of Lithuanian Muslims has been rather restricted, largely confined to reading the Qur'an, there being no formal institutions of religious education operating in the country. As a result, indigenous Muslims do not understand or cultivate the Arabic language. Russian and Polish translations of the Qur'an appeared only in the 19th century. The commentaries indispensable for interpreting the Qur'an and prayers were also written in Polish or Belorussian. Religious literature was not published either by the Tartars or the Muftiate, it was rather imported from Russia, meaning that it was printed in Russian only.

Lithuanian Tartars identify themselves with Turks as well, which can partly be explained by the fact that Turkey shows an active interest in their lot and their problems. This interest manifests itself in Turkish imams and Turkish Islamic literature being sent to Lithuania, Turkish language training being available, as well as the financing of mosque renovations and visits.

Yet most importantly for the indigenous Tartars, their Muslim identity means an ethnic and cultural status and values much more than a system of religious regulations. For the recently arrived Muslims, on the contrary, Islam is a way of life in itself, but as their numbers have been low, they had not attracted much public attention prior to 2001, the year when Muslim Tartars and newly arrived Muslims were first sharply distinguished. While the Tartars were never suspected of religious extremism and nobody has ever questioned their loyalty to Lithuanian (and Western) values, the background and religious attitudes of the 'new' Muslims arriving in ever increasing numbers were increasingly thought suspicious. This was a particularly significant problem in the case of two groups: Arab students (150-200 young men yearly) and Chechens, whose number grew to exceed one thousand within just a few years. Though a social integration program was launched for the Chechens, its results are unknown at present. A few Chechens have established an informal Muslim community aiming to better acquaint Lithuanians with Islam. They are seeking to build a mosque in Vilnius, and have applied for foreign support to do so.

Aside from the historical and the recent settling of Muslims in the country, the conversion of Lithuanians to Islam is also worth mentioning. The number of Lithuanian converts is low, but it is showing a rising tendency. There exists no official data, yet the group is estimated to comprise around 100 people,²¹ primarily Lithuanian women who married a Muslim husband, and some adventure-seeking young people.

In Lithuania, Islam is one of the nine 'traditional' religions enjoying the protection of and support by the state. The Lithuanian state, however, recognizes

²¹ RACIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

only 'local Islam', *i.e.* the religious practice of the Lithuanian Tartars, officially referred to as Sunni Islam, and at the same time it proceeds on the assumption that the Muslim religious organizations operating in Lithuania all belong to Lithuanian Tartars. (Lithuanian Tartar public thinking is also of the view that in Lithuania, Muslims are Tartars and Tartars are Muslims). For this reason, Lithuanian Muslims (Tartars), when they had the Muftiate registered with the Ministry of Justice in 1998, were forced to insert the adjective 'Sunni' in its name, which became 'The Spiritual Centre of Lithuanian Sunni Muslims – Muftiate'.²² On the other hand, non-Tartar Muslims have been completely excluded from state support. Since the Lithuanian legal system regards Islam as an ethno-specific religion, the question as to whom the state seeks to support, Tartars (as an ethnic group), Tartar Muslims or Lithuanian Muslims (Sunni Muslims), remains open. Today there are five registered Tartar communities in Lithuania, which are all independent organizations. Since 2000 the Muftiate has been the recipient of the state subsidy, distributing it among Tartar communities. The state recognition of the community, the financial support implied by the former, the fact that the newcomers have no say in the affairs of the community and the Muftiate, nor do they have representatives in the recognized structures, and that the new immigrants do not consider the Tartars to be "true" Muslims have led to conflicts, particularly after the Muftiate demanded in 2002 that the approval of the Muftiate become the precondition of registering any Muslim community.

Until 1998 local Muslims had no problems with Muslims arriving from abroad, but the fact that the newcomers are questioning the authenticity of their Muslim identity and their proficiency in their own religion has gradually given rise to the claim that locals should have the say in most issues arising in the mosques: "The mosque belongs to local Tartars, not to the Arabs" – one Tartar community leader argued.²³ At the state level the situation is reinforced: the new Muslims are left outside of the state-financed support scheme. Every functioning mosque in Lithuania is controlled and owned by the Tartars, but at present one of the three imams in office, the one in Vilnius, is Turkish. The fear of the danger of extremism (real or imagined), has also given cause for controversy between the indigenous and the newly arrived Muslims since 2001. The local Tartar community is afraid of extremism in the name of Islam, the source of which they believe are the new immigrants. The imam of the Kaunas mosque stated in an interview²⁴ that the local Tartars have no such inclinations, but as to the foreigners praying in his mosque he was not quite convinced. (Similar accusations have also appeared among Central European Muslim communities. See *e.g.* the section on Hungary).

²² RACIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

²³ Jonas RIDZVANAVICIUS, ex President of the Society of Lithuanian Tartar Communities in: RACIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 370, footnote 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 371.

Latvia

The number of Muslims living in Latvia, which has a population of about 2.3 million, is estimated to lie between 500-10,000,²⁵ but official data are not available. Islam never attracted large numbers of people in Latvia, and while it emerged in the country under similar circumstances as in other parts of the Polish-Baltic region, its presence has not been continuous.

The earliest records proving the Muslim presence reported two Muslims²⁶ in Courland and 465 in Riga²⁷ in the second half of the 19th century. At the same time in Livland and Courland provinces 1.135 Muslims were reported, 920 of who had been serving in the Tsar's army.²⁸ Most of these Muslims were illiterate peasants, who left the Baltic provinces after having been released from military service. The appearance of permanently settled Muslims is usually linked to the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, when about 100 Turkish prisoners of war were settled down in the town of Cēsis (Wenden), of whom thirty soon died because of the unusual climate. The other typical, albeit sporadic, source of immigration was Muslims arriving from other territories of the Russian empire. During the First World War, following Turkey's entry into the war (1915), the Muslim Turkish (Tartar) population was arrested and deported to central Russian provinces. At the time of the war of independence following the World War, one also finds Tartars fighting in the Latvian army.

The first Muslim community was registered and officially recognized in Riga in 1902. The Muslim community later enjoyed autonomy in independent Latvia, holding the privilege of electing their religious leaders.²⁹ The Muslim community at that time consisted of 130 Muslim men (among them two Latvians) and 32 women, of whom 115 were Tartars and 19 Turks, but these numbers kept changing depending on the events taking place in the Soviet Union, as refugees were continually arriving.³⁰ While some groups of refugees became Russified, the Tartars were rather characterized by "Latvianization". During the German occupation, repression affected the majority and the minorities alike. In 1943 only 40 Tartars, 35 Turks and 5 Uzbeks were reported, some of them soldiers of the Red Army taken prisoner in the war.

After the Second World War and the Soviet annexation, Muslims arrived in Latvia in several waves: first came the discharged soldiers from the frontlines with their families, while later migrants arrived from territories of the Soviet Union with large Muslim communities. By the 1950s, 20 Crimean Tartars had settled in Latvia. Later

²⁵ The figure 10,000 is the estimation of the spiritual leader of the Latvian Muslim Islam Centre, see BANKS, "Latvia's Muslim community reaches out".

²⁶ Statistisches *Jahrbuch für das Gouvernement Kurland für 1863*, p. 199, quoted by "Muslims".

²⁷ According to data from the 1897 census, quoted by "Muslims".

²⁸ ŠČERBINSKIS, "Eastern Minorities".

²⁹ Shakir Husnetdinov was elected in 1928, and his appointment was confirmed by the Bureau of Religious Affairs. He occupied the position till 1940, then emigrated to the West and died in Germany.

³⁰ ŠČERBINSKIS, *op. cit.*

other relatives joined those already living here, attracted by the better standard of living. In 1979, the number of Tartars living in Latvia was 3,764, *i.e.* more than the number of Estonians living in the country. Most of the immigrants were settling down in Riga.

In the Soviet era, Muslims in Latvia formed a small, loosely connected community, the members of which practiced their religion in private homes. The disintegration of the Soviet Union opened up borders, but mass immigration was prevented by various official measures, and in the first years of independence emigration was in fact more typical. At that time there had been about 5,000 Tartars living in Latvia, which had gone down to 3,500 by 1993, but since then their numbers have been increasing slowly but steadily. Immigration and integration is considerably hindered by a Latvian law under which the knowledge of the Latvian language is indispensable for filling a position in the state administration. Additionally, very few Muslim immigrants hold a Latvian citizenship (155 Tartars and 165 Azeris), which can be explained by the fact that learning Russian was understandably the priority for most people during the Soviet era.

During and after the transition, Muslim minorities with different ethnic backgrounds used their chances and established cultural organizations: the Crimean Tartar Cultural Educational Society (21 members), the Azeri Cultural Society (27 members) and the Idel (Volga) Tartar Society (182 members). These associations all aim to cultivate their respective national languages and cultures. In the 1990s, Tartars began to organize the Muslim religious community as well, joined later by other Muslim communities that had not lost their ethnic and religious identity. Today there are two active Sunni Muslim communities in Latvia, one in Riga, the other in Daugavpils. There are, however, Muslims living in other towns, like Ventspils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, and, in smaller numbers, in Valmiera.³¹

As in other Central European countries, ethnicity counts for little in Latvian Muslim communities. The different schools of Islam are no more a source of division, even though aside from the quasi-indigenous Tartar and Turkish Muslims, there are also Arabs, Chechens, and newly converted Latvians and Russians living in the country.

Public opinion surveys suggest that Latvians, in spite of the small size of the Muslim community, are intolerant toward Muslims, and even consider their “otherness” a threat.³² This is part of a broader trend, however, which also governs attitudes towards *e.g.* the Roma and homosexuals. (The survey was carried out by the State Agency for Regional Development).

At the same time, the Latvian radio broadcasts regularly in Azeri and Tartar languages. The translation of the Qur’an into Latvian is underway. The work is being done by Uldis Berzins, a poet and translator who also speaks Turkish and Arabic.

³¹ ŠČERBINSKIS, *op. cit.*

³² The survey found that in eight cities more than half of the population did not want to live next door to Muslims, or considered them a threat. See “Latvians don’t want to live in vicinity of gays and Muslims”. AKULE, “Turkish EU membership from Latvia’s perspective: Why should we care?”

The translation is supported by the Latvian Cultural Fund (Latvijas Kulturkapitāla Fonds), a state institution.³³

Estonia

In Estonia, a country with a population of about 1.3 million,³⁴ there live about 1,400-14,000 Muslims, according to estimates. The only solid point of orientation (explaining the huge differences in estimates) is the 2000 census, which reported 1,387 Muslims older than 15 living in the country.³⁵ The Muslims themselves estimate the size of their community at 3,500. Currently, the Muslim community is very heterogeneous. The first and biggest group, historically and at present, have been the Tartars who appeared in Estonia during the 18th century, after it had become part of the Russian empire. The second wave of Tartars arrived in the 19th century, after the Russo-Turkish war and from the Crimea essentially along the pattern described with regard to Latvia.

Following annexation by the Soviet Union (1940), and as a result of internal migration within the Soviet Union, the Muslim community started to grow, and new ethnic groups appeared in Estonia: Azeris, Uzbeks, Kazakhs and others from the Caucasus and Central Asia, even if Tartars remained the largest ethnic group within the Muslim community. During this period, however, religion was practiced in private homes and the community had no religious leader.

In the late 1980s, the different ethnic communities started to organize their cultural lives and established cultural associations. In 1989 the Tartar Cultural Society established the Estonian Islamic Congregation, which was registered with the Bureau of Religious Affairs of the Estonian Interior Ministry in 1994, in compliance with the 1993 law on Churches and Congregations. The Estonian Islamic Congregation (according to its statute) is neither Sunni nor Shia, and wishes to unite the followers of both schools, as well as Muslims with varying ethnic backgrounds. The reason for this was that the Tartars, most numerous among the many small groupings, are Sunni Muslims, while the second most populous community was that of the Shiite Azeris.

In 1995, the formal unity of the community ended, when a group of 13 had the Estonian Muslim Sunni Congregation registered. The foundation of the new community can be traced back to personal disagreements and ethnic differences within the larger community. Since 2002, however, both communities recognize Ildar Muhameddsin (a Tartar) as their spiritual leader. Muhameddsin's qualifications are beyond any doubt, as he holds a degree from the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia.³⁶ Estonian Muslim leaders and intellectuals say about the country's

³³ BANKS, *op. cit.*

³⁴ CIA *World Factbook*.

³⁵ Quoted by RINGVEE, "Islam in Estonia", p. 242, footnote 2.

³⁶ The Bureau of Religious Affairs registered the two communities under one paragraph (10.3) as "Estonian Islam Congregation and Estonian Mussulman Sunnite Congregation, embracing the Tartars, Azerbaijanis, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Chechens, Lesgins", in *Report Submitted by Estonia*, p. 34.

Muslim community that Muslims there wish to maintain their ethnic identities, rather than rebuild their religious identity.³⁷ The multiethnic characteristic of the Estonian community also takes the form of citing the common prayers in Russian, Tartar or Arabic.

The two mosques built during the period of independence between the two World Wars were destroyed in the Second World War. Building a new mosque has been on the agenda since the transition, and the city council of Tallin was even ready to provide a building site for the construction in 1998, but the plan was not realized for financial reasons. As another reason for this failure, sources have named the rivalry between ethnic groups within the Muslim community.

Estonian Muslims are usually integrated into Estonian society, and they only got in the focus of public attention because of the planned mosque construction in 2000, against which the Estonian Christian People's Party was directly campaigning. The community as a whole does not get involved in politics, except their statements published during the Chechen crisis and war. At the same time, the Estonian Islamic Congregation is actively participating in the dialogue between the religious associations in Estonia.

Migration – especially from Muslim countries and other European Muslim communities – was an important item on the agenda of the debates around the EU accession, and, though the concerns have not been justified since then, Muslims arrived only in very limited numbers, they have even come from very different backgrounds. This aspect, however, is still playing a role in the public discourse of the Estonian society.

Haljand Udam, Estonian Orientalist, had completed the Estonian translation of the Qur'an before he died in 2005, with the book being eventually published in 2007.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia

The history of Muslim minorities in today's Czech Republic and Slovakia is an integral part of the history of former Czechoslovakia and the Central European regional developments prior to the formation of former Czechoslovakia. The Muslim experience in some parts of Slovakia stretches back to the Habsburg Empire, and to the Ottoman-Turkish invasion (reinforced by having been a part of Hungary). The north-eastern part of the country is more affected by the Polish-Lithuanian experiences, while Bohemia, far away from the Turkish-Tartar conquests and the migrations, had accumulated precious little in experience with Islam prior to the late 19th century. Starting with the expansion into the Balkans by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, heralded by the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, and lasting all the way up to the formation of Czechoslovakia (October 28, 1918), there was a degree of Muslim, mainly Bosnian, immigration into these territories as

³⁷ RINGVEE, "Islam in Estonia", p. 244.

well, even if it was not very spectacular. After the Soviet Union had come into existence, Circassian and Tartar refugees also arrived in Czechoslovakia.³⁸

During the socialist period of Czechoslovakia, the Muslim community, thus far having only negligible numbers, was bolstered by students arriving from friendly Arab countries, an outcome that was essentially the consequence of a political preference found throughout the region. Religious practice was restricted for Muslims as well as for other religious communities, but beyond this they were not subjected to any particular persecution. This was because on the one hand the number of the community was still insignificant, while on the other hand the majority of the students arriving did not practice their religion, or at least not rigorously. Their selection in the Soviet-friendly, (quasi-)socialist secular Arab systems, in the era of Arab nationalism, was based on their loyalty to the system and ideological compatibility. Following the changes in the Arab world and the defeat in 1967, simultaneously to the decline of Arab nationalism and secularism, Muslim practices reappeared also among students, and from the 1970s on Muslim places of worship were established.

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia and later the accession to the EU of the Czech Republic and Slovakia represented the beginning of a new era. After 1990, immigration to the republics began, even if the numbers of those choosing to settle in one of the two states has remained low, at least for now. The number of the Muslim community in Czechoslovakia today can be estimated at about 20,000, of which about 400 are Czech converts. The others have arrived mostly from the Balkans, the Arab states and the Caucasus, but there are also Afghan and Pakistani refugees among them. In Slovakia, according to intra-community estimates, there are about 5,000 Muslims:³⁹ Primarily Arabs who arrived as students in the socialist era, but the number also includes about 150 Slovak converts. While the majority of immigrants are men, the larger part of converts consists of women. The number of Muslims has virtually doubled in recent years, both in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

While Slovak society is usually indifferent towards Muslims living in Slovakia, the similarly indifferent attitude formerly prevalent in Czech society has recently changed, due to the emergence of anti-Muslim sentiments fed by the debates concerning the construction of *masjids*, and the fears and frustrations originating in the old member states. These developments are partly due to the political events in the world following 9/11, which have coincided with the Balkans refugees of the 1990s being replaced by refugees with various – Arab, Caucasian, Afghan, etc. – ethnic backgrounds. Muslims from the Balkans had not been perceived as a threat: On the one hand, from an ethnic and linguistic point of view, they too were Slavs, on the other hand, they led largely secular lives. The Muslim communities both in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, like in other Central European Muslim

³⁸ Mendel, “Beginnings of the Muslim Religious Community in former Czechoslovakia”.

³⁹ According to data of the Slovak Statistics Office, at the time of the 2001 census there were 1212 people identifying themselves as Muslims. Quoted by PIRICKY, “Restrictive Legislation towards Numerically Small Religions in Slovakia: the Case of the Muslim Community”, p. 7.

communities, were emphasizing tolerance, the dialogue and understanding between religions and civilizations, yet this has not proven sufficient to counter recent anti-Muslim sentiments in society

Muslims in Czechoslovakia, both Czech and foreign, first started to organize themselves into a community in 1934. This initial effort was led by a Czech convert, Abdullah Brikcius, and it led, in 1935, to the founding of an organization named 'Muslim Religious Community for Czechoslovakia with its Centre in Prague', which was also supported by patrons, many among them belonging to respected intellectual and business groups. Though Czech converts were few, they tried to spread Islam. Brikcius was a journalist and traveller, who thought that Germany can be the power to help free the Muslim world from British-French colonial oppression, which is why he supported Nazi Germany in his articles. As a result of his pro-Nazi activism, Muslims in Czechoslovakia faced a difficult situation in the wake of the Second World War.

After a long interlude characterized by the lack of institutionalization, the Head Office of Muslim Organizations was registered in the Czech Republic in 2004. At the time, several organizations protested against the registration, partly because the Muslim community was unable to produce the required number of signatures prescribed by the law.⁴⁰ Protesters also argued that "Islam is the hotbed of terrorism", or that it is characterized by religious intolerance, the subordination of women, and allegedly represents a drive towards "the formation of a parallel Islamic society and the Islamization of Europe". While few organizations actively participated in the protests, the issues they raised touched a nerve with Czech society and Islam came into the focus of attention in the context of *masjids* planned in the country. Muslims attempted to gain the necessary permits to build a *masjid* in Teplice in 1995 and again in 2003-2004, in Brno in 1995-96, in Orlova and Prague in 2003, but each of these plans failed. Today there are two places of worship in use, in Prague and Brno, and in 1999, in an outskirt area of Prague, the Islam Centre was established. A *masjid*, however was not opened even on this occasion: The mosque accommodating about 500 people has been in operation only since 2005.

The Main Office of Muslim Associations (*Ústředí Muslimských Obcí*) in the Czech Republic is an umbrella organization, itself consisting of three associations: the Islamic Foundation in Prague, the Islamic Foundation in Brno, and the Muslim Students' Union. Beyond these associations, two civil organizations also pursuing religious activities exist: The Union of Islamic Cultural Centres in Prague, operated by Turks and part of the network of 'Islam Cultural Centres' financed by Turkey, and the Muslim Union, established officially by Czech converts on January 20, 2001. In Slovakia, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia was established in 1999. The aims of the Foundation include the fostering of peaceful relations between Slovakia and the Muslim countries, representation of the cultural and social interests of Muslims in Slovakia and providing humanitarian relief in natural catastrophes.

⁴⁰ Under Czechoslovak law, any religious organization wishing to receive state support needs to collect ten thousand signatures. In the case of other religious organizations the authorities usually disregarded this condition.

There are four places of worship currently operating in Slovakia, one of them, however, is merely a temporary place of prayer in Bratislava. The Muslim community has been trying to acquire a permit for building a cultural centre and a *masjid* for years, but the authorities have refused the application arguing that a mosque would not fit harmoniously into downtown Bratislava.⁴¹ As Bratislava is near Austria, Turkish Muslims often cross the border for the Friday prayers, heading to Hainburg, Austria, which has a significant Turkish population.

Hungary

The history of Hungary's Muslim minority appears peculiar even when compared to other Central European countries, as the presence of Muslims has not been permanent and historically the community has not been homogeneous. Moreover, their presence among the Magyars had preceded the first settlement of the Magyars in Hungary.

The presence of the Muslim community in Hungary can be divided into at least five major eras. The period lasting from the pre-conquest epoch to the end of the reign of the House of Árpád was characterized by different steppe tribes – primarily Turcomans – migrating together with the Hungarians settling in the Carpathian basin. During the time of the Ottoman conquest, the Muslim community was made up of Turks arriving from the Balkan or Anatolia, while in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, with the occupation and later the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was the Bosniaks that became dominant. In the socialist period the word Muslim acquired a new ethnic referential object, as it signified primarily students from the friendly Arabic (quasi-)socialist countries. Finally, during the post-transition period, especially following Hungary's EU accession, the Muslim population in Hungary has undergone a process of 'internationalization', as almost every Muslim country has some of its citizens, albeit in low numbers, living in Hungary. On the other hand, as a further peculiarity, Hungarian converts also account for a relatively considerable proportion of the active community. The most marked feature of Muslim presence and development in Hungary, however, is the fact that between any two of the above periods the Muslim community virtually disappeared, even though its heritage lived on in the form of historic buildings, popular and literary stories and names.

It is very difficult to estimate the number of Muslims living in Hungary today. Some estimates largely accept the census data mentioning 3,200 Muslims of Hungarian citizenship, but even this figure is rather uncertain. First of all, the 2001 census was the first tally after fifty years to inquire about the respondent's religion, but the response was voluntary and did not specifically gauge whether the respondent was actively practicing his/her religion. It merely asked about the religious affiliation of the respondent. On the other hand, the questionnaire did not specifically ask for Muslims to identify themselves, lumping them together under the heading "belonging to other churches or denominations" and holding "other

⁴¹ A 2005 opinion survey says that 61.5 pc of Slovaks reject the plan of building a mosque. Referred to by PIRICKY, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

beliefs in God”.⁴² Such statistics permit only limited and uncertain conclusions. Concerning Muslims with no Hungarian citizenship, however, there are much higher figures floating around, with estimates usually mentioning 20-50 thousand, but larger figures – up to 60 thousand – have also been proposed. It is a peculiarity of the Muslim community in Hungary that, besides being ethnically diverse, the Muslim identity and religious awareness of its members is also rather varied.

Hungarian converts usually choose Sunni Islam, which is best explained by the fact that the vast majority of the communities and most of the Muslims living in the country belong to Sunni Islam. The three largest Muslim associations, the Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK), the Organization of Muslims in Hungary (MME) and the Islamic Organization (IE), give very low estimates of the numbers of their members. The Islamic Community has for instance put the number of its followers at 1,200. The number of Muslims not belonging to such quasi-official communities, and those affiliating themselves with the former only casually, (this category includes many businessmen, diplomats and students) is much higher (in Budapest alone there are seven places of worship).⁴³

Hungarian tribes had already met and lived together with Muslim tribes and groups during their steppe migrations. What is more, the first sources reporting on the steppe history of the Magyars include descriptions by Jayhani, Ibn Fadlan,⁴⁴ Ibn Rusta and other Arab travellers.⁴⁵ It is well-known that the Kabars who arrived with the conquering Hungarians to the Carpathian basin were Muslims and they were followed by various steppe Muslim groups (Bulgarians from the Volga region, Pechenegs, Cumanians, later Tartars etc.), who were often ‘first generation’ Muslims. The main sources of information on the life of the Muslim community during the reign of the House of Árpád include the laws and charters issued by the kings, and the great traveller of Granada, Abu Hamid al-Gharnati, who sojourned in Hungary between 1150 and 1153.⁴⁶ The former bear testimony to the privileges, and later the revocation of these privileges,⁴⁷ granted to Muslims who were directly subordinated to the king and typically performed military service. al-Gharnati, on the other hand, provides information about the everyday life of the Muslim community, including the fact that the Muslims living in Hungary were unfamiliar with theology, causing him to attempt to educate them.⁴⁸

⁴² ZSUPPÁN, “A gyermekeim már magyar muszlimok lesznek”.

⁴³ For more see KISS, *Muszlimok Budapesten*.

⁴⁴ See IBN FADLÁN, *Beszámoló a volgai bolgárok földjén tett utazásról*.

⁴⁵ See e.g. HARMATTA, “A magyar honfoglalás írásos kútfői”.

⁴⁶ ABU HAMID AL-GHARNATI, *al-Mu‘rib ‘an ba‘d ‘aja‘ib al-Maghrib*, pp. 56; 139.

⁴⁷ In the period between 972 and 1291 AD there are 32 references in the sources in which the mention made of Muslims is always telling news about restricting the ritual prescriptions of Islam, cf. UDVARVÖLGYI, *A magyar iszlám vallásszociológiája*.

⁴⁸ ‘I was instructing them a bit on religious sciences, I also managed to persuade some of them to try and study the Arabic language, and I made efforts, together with them, with a lot of persistence, to review and practise the prescriptions of prayer and other religious duties. Similarly, I summarized for them briefly the regulations referring to the pilgrimage to Mecca and to inheritance... They had not known the Friday prayer, but

The Muslim community at the time, according to estimates, accounted for about 2% of the population, but by the last years of the House of Árpád – mainly as a consequence of laws aiming to assimilate Muslims and other minorities – the Muslims in Hungary had become all but completely absorbed in the majority society, or had emigrated through Moldavia to the territory of the Golden Horde.⁴⁹ Eventually, under the reign of the proselytizing Louis the Great, the practice of Islam completely disappeared from Hungary.⁵⁰

During the Ottoman conquest few settlers from Asia Minor chose to come to distant Hungary, which was occupied in a later phase of Ottoman expansion, and the dangers characteristic of a contested border province were not encouraging to potential migrants either. At the same time, Hungarians of the Ottoman era were preoccupied with infighting between Protestants and Counter-Reformation Catholics anyway, and consequently Islam had very little attraction for society. As a result of the above factors, Islamization was all but unheard of, aside from some sporadic exceptions. So the Muslims of the age of the Ottoman conquest mainly counted those ordered by the Ottoman state to fulfil military or administrative duties.⁵¹

Following the expulsion of the Ottoman Turks and the Peace of Karlowitz (1699), there remained once more no sizeable Muslim community permanently settled in Hungary. After the Rákóczi war of independence (1703-1711) and the 1848-49 revolutionary war several Hungarians found asylum in the Ottoman Empire, and many among them also converted to Islam, though Hungary itself had no Islamic community in this era. The appearance of the next Muslim community in Hungary is linked to the 1878 occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when the population of the Monarchy grew by about half a million, the majority of them Muslims. Thanks to this and to the way the Balkan wars were perceived by the increasingly Russophobic Hungarian public, a friendly attitude prevailed towards the Turks.⁵² It was in this context that Islam was declared a received religion in 1916.⁵³

now they learnt it from me, together with the Friday sermon...' ABU HAMID AL-GHARNATI, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁹ UDVARVÖLGYI, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ See e.g. *A magyar iszlám története*.

⁵¹ UDVARVÖLGYI, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵² 'The regulation of the legal status of Islam in Hungary'. In July 1912 there was already an Austrian law that recognized the Hanafi School, but the Hungarian Parliament was not tolerant enough for that at the time. According to the data of the 1910 census there were 553 Muslims living in the country (without Croat-Slavonia), of them 179 Turks and 319 Bosnians, most of the latter were soldiers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the number was 612,137, this should be completed with about five hundred inhabitants of the Adekale Island occupied and subordinated to Hungarian administration in 1913... Most of the Turks settled down in Hungary at the end of the first decade of the century. For the most part they were tradesmen (many of them confectioners), and students, the first group of whom arrived in 1909 led by a religious leader, Abdul-Latif. At the beginning of the century the pro-Turkish sentiment was still enhanced by bringing home the mortal remains of Ferenc Rákóczi, Ilona Zrínyi and Imre Thököly, and by the news of

In 1916, there were about 2,000 Muslims living in Budapest, while in the whole country their number was about 4,000, with most having arrived from the Balkans. They included a 300-strong group of Turks with a Turkish imam, Abdul-Latif. The community in Buda, mostly Bosniaks but also including some other Muslims, was led by Durics Hilmi Huszein, who eventually became the mufti of Buda in 1931, after a rather adventurous life. All his life he cherished the plan of establishing a *masjid* and an Islamic centre next to the Mausoleum (*türbe*) of Gül Baba, the Bektashi dervish who died in Buda in 1541. The two communities had very strained relations with each other. Of the two, it was clearly the community led by Durics that enjoyed the support of well-known personalities of the age, while no such honours befell the other Muslim community. The communities that flourished between the two World Wars disappeared quickly after the Second World War, as their members either left the country or became assimilated.

The immigrants in the socialist period were mainly students from Muslim countries, who settled in Hungary temporarily or for good, but their ranks also included intellectuals fleeing the political system at home and taking advantage of the educational, scientific and art scholarships provided by the friendly socialist regimes. Their Muslim identity was either non-existent – most of them considered themselves atheists – or in everyday practice it proved to be so loose that the majority society barely took notice. They were considered to be kind of exotic and nothing more, a very mild distinction which certainly did not prevent their integration. The first and the second generations of these recent arrivals did not assimilate, and even mixed marriages sustained consciousness of a separate ethnic identity, but only rarely did this assume a religious character.

The first organization established specifically as a religious community was the Association of Muslim Students in the 1980s, coinciding with the first conversions among Hungarians. The first Muslim community was the Hungarian Islamic Community. It was registered in 1988 with 20 members and Balázs Mihálffy as sheik and president. He held the position until 1996, when Zoltán Bolek assumed the leadership of the community. As the 1916 legislation has never been repealed, the State Office for Confessional Affairs recognized it as the successor to the community founded by Durics Hilmi. The Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK) has today about 1,200 members, mostly Hungarian Muslims, about a quarter of whom live abroad.⁵⁴ Their plans include founding an Islamic centre, representing the enduring appeal of Durics Hilmi Huszein's plans.⁵⁵ They perform international charitable activities, including transporting relief shipments to the conflict- and disaster-stricken territories of the Muslim world (including Iraq, Sudan, Indonesia, etc.).

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary (MME) was established with 300 members who were mainly Arab Muslims living in Hungary in 2000. It has been led by Zoltán Sulok with the purpose of officially co-ordinating all the Muslim

pasha Ödön Széchenyi (son of 'the greatest Hungarian', István Széchenyi) and his fire fighters in Constantinople...' UDVARVÖLGYI, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Article XVII of 1916 on the recognition of the Islam religion

⁵⁴ *Report with the President of the Hungarian Islamic Community.*

⁵⁵ Durics was planning to build a large Islam centre around the Mausoleum of Gül Baba.

organizations and foundations in Hungary. The Islamic Cultural Centre of MME has been operating in Sáfrány Street in Budapest since 2004. MME also maintains close connections with communities in the countryside,⁵⁶ in Szeged they are operating the Mecca mosque and in Pécs the historic Jakovali Hassan mosque, which they have received for use.

The Islamic Organization (IE), registered in 2003 and led by Saleh Tayseer, seceded from MME due to internal conflicts. Its membership is around 250.⁵⁷ One of their main ambitions is building a mosque, to which end they have already acquired a building site, but, mainly for financial reasons and due to popular protest, they have not yet built it. This organization has been repeatedly suspected of radicalism, and shady financial sources especially with regard to the costs of the planned mosque, but they have denied the accusations. The building of the mosque and the Islamic centre has recently been prevented by the inhabitants living in the vicinity of the building site, arguing that such a major institution would increase traffic in the neighbourhood so much that it would disturb the residents.⁵⁸ In 2005 the leader of IE was arrested following allegations that he might have been planning an attempt against 'a Jewish museum' during the visit of Israeli president Moshe Katsav. Later the charge was dropped due to lack of evidence.⁵⁹

The divisions between the three organizations, as a reflection of Central European conditions, are based neither on ethnic, nor on religious (intra-Islam) differences, as the community is so small and heterogeneous that organizing it on an ethnic basis, or on a Sunni-Shia basis, would be senseless. In addition, as mentioned above, many of the immigrants living in Hungary are not practising their religion, at least levelling an institutionalized fashion, though these Muslims do maintain linkages of varying intensity with their compatriots. This is demonstrated by the Association of the Arab Community in Hungary, which functions publicly, but people from particular Arab countries also tend to spontaneously stick together.

The three organizations, especially MIK and IE, are in a tense relationship, they often resort to openly hostile rhetoric toward one another, mainly because of ideological and personal controversies.⁶⁰ Disagreements and arguments usually arise when world events make Islam appear in a bad light. In such situations both organizations emphasize the peaceful nature of their own activities, but also refer to the dangers inherent in the activities of the other,⁶¹ and they are trying to detach

⁵⁶ *Report with the President of the Hungarian Islamic Community.*

⁵⁷ They have come from different countries, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and several African countries. Kiss, *Muszlímok Budapesten.*

⁵⁸ BROCKHAUSER, "Nem épül iszlám központ".

⁵⁹ "Bezáratják Saleh Tayseer imaházát".

⁶⁰ DOBROVITS, "Islamic Press in Contemporary Hungary", p. 324.

⁶¹ "The Islamic Organization (IE) is intolerant. They have e.g. banned some of our Muslim brothers from their mosque. Their ideology is extremist, also anti-Semitic statements can be heard. It is also interesting that Syrian money-launderers go there to pray, and have even supported the Islamic Organization. In our community these things cannot happen, even the National Security Office is not watching us so actively. The Islamic Organization has accepted funds it should not have accepted", says Zoltán Bolek, MIK

themselves from one another in the eyes of the Hungarian public. (Whether or not these efforts are successful is another question, of course.) At the same time, attracting or even luring believers to themselves can also be an aim, as the faithful pay the *zakat* to their own community.

It is, however, in the interest of all three organizations to depict Islam as a peaceful religion suited for harmonious coexistence, especially at a time when violence and Islam seem to be intimately linked in international politics (9/11, the attempts in Madrid and London, the Muhammad cartoon controversy, the war in Iraq, etc.). To achieve this, these organizations publicly reject violence and try to defend themselves against anti-Islamism, which, if sporadically and in a primitive form, exists in Hungary. All three organizations deny the accusations of terrorist inclinations and connections, and in their own interest they do everything they can to prevent any possible infiltration by actual or potential extremists. As a result, the position in society of these organizations is rather ambiguous, and it also places constraints on their operation. On the one hand, as followers of a proselytizing religion, they should be recruiting believers, but on the other hand, due to world political events, they should avoid getting in the focus of attention.

The communities frequently publish materials concerning Islam and its prescriptions. A complete translation of the Koran is currently being prepared by the Translations Office of the Islamic Organization (IE), but parts of it have already been published electronically. (The first Hungarian translation of the Qur'an made from Latin was published in 1831. From 1947 on Joseph de Somogyi published fragments of translation from the Arabic. Eventually, complete translations were published first by Róbert Simon /1987/, then by Balázs Mihálffy /cca 1990/. Since that time a couple of translations have seen the light.)

Romania

In Romania, Islam is one of the 16 recognized religions/religious denominations, while Muslims account for 0.3% of the total population. Muslims are predominantly of Turkish and Tartar origin. Data from the 2002 census recorded 67,566 Muslims, mainly Turks and Tartars, about 15,000 Muslim Roma⁶² and 3,000 Albanians.⁶³ While the number of Tartars and other minorities is stagnating or decreasing, that

President. "President Bolek will be damned as he is voicing false accusations and sowing dissension. It was rather him who had relations with dubious figures attaching themselves to the Muslims and asked them for money but was refused", Demeter Ferenci, spokesman for IE responded. Both are quoted by LINDER, "Mozlimok Magyarországon: Igaz és igazabb hitűek", SZOBOTA, "Ügynökök altatásban".

⁶² Muslim Gypsies converted to Islam during the Ottoman reign, or settled in from other territories of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire. Part of them got mixed with the Turks from Anatolia, they became the 'Turkish gypsies'. Their number is unknown as they define themselves as Turks in the census. GRIGORE, "Muslims in Romania", p. 34.

⁶³ Albanians immigrated during the First World War, integrated into the Turkish-Tartar community. The first Qur'an written with Roman characters in the Albanian language was published in Ploiesti in 1921, cf. GRIGORE, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

of the Turks shows a slow but steady growth. The vast majority of the Muslims live, for historical reasons, in two counties of Dobrudja, in Constanța (85%) and Tulcea (12%), and in the big cities.

Table 1: The number of percentage of Muslims in Romania (based on the 2002 census)

	number	%
Total population	21,680,974	100
Turks	32,098	0.14
Tartars	23,935	0.11
Muslims	67,257	0.31

Source: Romanian census figures, 2002,
<http://nepszamlalas150.adatbank.transindex.ro/?pg=8>

Table 2: Ethnic groups (based on the 2002 census)

County/city	Turks	Tartars
Bucharest	2,473	363
Konstanța	24,246	23,230
Tulcea	3,334	179
Total	30,053	23,772

Source: Romanian census figures, 2002,
<http://nepszamlalas150.adatbank.transindex.ro/?t=orsz>

Table 3: Religious groups (based on the 2002 census)

County/City	Muslims
Bucharest	9,488
Konstanța	48,454
Tulcea	3,704
Total	61,646

Source: Romanian census figures, 2002,
<http://nepszamlalas150.adatbank.transindex.ro/?t=orsz>

The approximately similar proportion of Turkish and Tartar presence is a reminder that the territory of contemporary Romania, especially the Dobrudja region, has experienced both major Muslim influences Central Europe had seen (the Tartar influence characteristic of the north east, and the Ottoman Turkish, which was typical in the south east). In this region, these influences were present simultaneously albeit from the 14th century on the Tartars living in what is today Romania had been Ottoman Turkish subjects themselves.

The first Muslims whose presence is reported by surviving documents were about 10,000-12,000 Turks from Anatolia, who, escaping the turmoil of the Seljuk empire in 1263-64, settled in Dobrudja led by Sari Saltik, a Sufi dervish, whose tomb later became a place of pilgrimage. The name of this pre-Ottoman settlement became Babadag,⁶⁴ and it soon developed into a cultural and religious centre. (Sultan Bayazid II had built the first *madrassa* there in 1484, which remained in use until 1903, when the school was moved and attached to the hodja school in Medgidia in 1891).

Tartars too appeared for the first time during the 13th century. Some sources associate this with the 1223 Battle of the Kalka River which resulted in a Mongol victory over the forces of several Rus principalities, and when the victorious Mongols pressed forward as far as the mouth of the Danube.⁶⁵ Others believe that the first Tartar groups arrived in Dobrudja under the reign of the Great Khan Nogai (1280-1310), when the Golden Horde occupied the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula including Dobrudja. (According to some theories the memory of this expansion is preserved in the tribal name of Nogai Tartars,⁶⁶ while other sources contend that the relationship between Nogais and the name of Khan Nogai cannot be ascertained.)⁶⁷

Ottoman Turks occupied the territory of what is today Romania in several waves from the late 14th century on. Sultan Bayazid I (1389-1402) conquered Dobrudja temporarily, Sultan Mehmed I (1413-1421) conquered it again in 1419-1420, until finally Sultan Bayazid II strengthened Turkish rule over greater Dobrudja by occupying two fortresses, Chilia and Akkerman in 1484. The region came under the administration of the beylerbey of Rum. Immigration by Muslims started as early as the reign of Bayazid I. Aside from the continual Turkish immigration from Anatolia, the sultan settled Tartars in Babadag, while Bayazid II settled Volga Tartars in the southern part of Bessarabia and in the northern part of Dobrudja. Turks and Tartars were arriving in successive waves during the following centuries.

⁶⁴ The place was named after the Sufi dervish, inasmuch as its meaning is "the hill of baba/dede" (~ uncle, used to address Sufi leaders, respected persons, compare: Gül Baba). One of the tombs that allegedly belong to Sari Saltik can be found here, it is still a place of pilgrimage, which was renovated with the support of the Turkish government.

⁶⁵ "Tatari".

⁶⁶ GRIGORE, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ VÁSÁRY, *Cumans and Tartars*.

While in the 16th century Dobrudja was called ‘the country of Tartars’ – a brother of the Crimean Tartar khan settled down here with 40,000 of his men in 1596 – in the 17th century the names of villages and towns were Turkish. Crimean Tartars were continually arriving in Dobrudja in the 17-18th centuries, with their numbers growing significantly when Russia occupied the Crimean peninsula in 1783. (The waves of migration were also reflected in the different Tartar dialects, of which three are still distinguished today: the Crimean or steppe dialect (70%), Nogai (20%), and coastal (10%).⁶⁸ During the period of Ottoman rule, however, other ethnic groups were also settled in Dobrudja, albeit in much smaller numbers (Persians, Kurds, and Arabs, *e.g.* 150 fellahin families from Syria in 1831-33). (This varied history of migration and presence of the steppe/central Asian folk traditions can explain why Nowruz, which originates in Iran, is celebrated also in Dobrudja by both Turks and Tartars). Despite such traces of their influence, the smaller groups of migrants of varying ethnicity inevitably intermarried with the Turkish inhabitants of the region and assimilated to them over time.

Dobrudja remained under Ottoman rule until the end of the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war, when it was annexed by Romania under the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. Tartars were expelled from Dobrudja three times during this war, but they always returned after each event. In recently formed Romania the Tartars’ position became similar to that of the Turks following 1878, they were marginalized and subject to assimilationist pressure. At the end of the 19th century, there were nevertheless 134,000 Muslims living and 238 *masjids* operating in Romanian Dobrudja.⁶⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century the worsening of the economic situation caused many Tartars and Turks to immigrate to Turkey. At the end of the Second World War there were only 151 *masjids* left, which reflects the decrease in the number of the Muslim population. Even Turkish-language education ceased to exist in 1954. The decrease of the Muslim population has continued until the present, in spite of the fact that after 1989 new Muslim immigrants appeared in Romanian cities (Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj, Timișoara). These groups, however, are too small and are unable to offset the loss in population. The new Muslims are mostly Arabs from the Mashriq, as well as Kurds, Iranians, etc., but only few of them hold Romanian citizenship, and they mostly move further west in Europe as soon as they can. This tends to make these communities very volatile, even if some of them have their own *masjids*, schools, bilingual magazines, and cultural and religious centres. Also, the indigenous and the immigrant communities live parallel with each other. While the majority consider the 800-year old Muslim community of the Dobrudja as part of Romanian society (and its members to be ‘Muslims living properly’), they perceive the newcomers as a source of danger partly due to fears of terrorism, and in part simply because of the possibility of immigration.⁷⁰

Romanian converts also exist in small numbers, but they have not established their own community yet. The only group within the Muslim community which is

⁶⁸ GRIGORE, *I. C.*

⁶⁹ “Turci”.

⁷⁰ KOZÁK, “Romániai muzulmán intézmények diskurzusa az identitásról és integrációról”.

actually increasing in size is that of the Turks, as many Turks from Turkey have joined the Romanian Turkish communities. Despite this trend, there are only 77 mosques operating and the number of Muslim cemeteries has also decreased from 300 to 108.

From the point of view of the religious practice and organization of Muslim communities, the transition had similar consequences as in other countries of Central Europe. The Democratic Union of Turkish Muslims in Romania (UDTMR) was founded in 1990 as the ethnic and religious organization of the Romanian Turkish-Tartar population, but it soon split in two, and the Democratic Association of Romanian Turks (UTDR) and the Democratic Association of Turko-Muslim Tartars in Romania (UDTTMR) were established. Both organizations have set cultivating and nurturing primarily cultural and traditional values as their chief aim. In the past two Parliamentary cycles (2004, 2008) both UTDR and UDTTMR delegated one MP to the House of Representatives.⁷¹ UDTTMR, which has 22 groups operating in larger cities, and which gained 3 mayor's seats in the 2004 municipal elections, has also established closer connections with Crimean Tartars. (For historical reasons, Romanian Tartars consider themselves a diaspora of Crimean Tartars).⁷²

According to the records of the Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs, there are 77 mosques operating in Romania today. The centre of Romanian Islam and the seat of the Muftiate is Constanța. The Muslim community in Romania is divided into 50 local Muslim groups, each one electing its own leadership. The members provide for the finances of the religious institutions, which is complemented by government support and funding from international Islamic organizations. The group of Muslim religious leaders consists of imams, imam-hatips and muezzins. The Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs recognized 35 imams in 2008. The mufti of Constanța, the highest representative of the Muslim community, is elected by the imams by secret ballot, but his office must be approved by the Ministry and the head of state as well. His work is assisted by the *shura*-council which consists of 23 members (15 religious personalities, 8 civilians, the previous mufti and the head of the Kemal Atatürk Islamic School) and often advises on administrative and disciplinary issues.⁷³ The current mufti, Murat Iusuf, was elected – initially – for five years in September 2005, at the age of 28. He has received his religious education in Turkish schools.

In 2007 Murat Yusuf stirred up a scandal by asking the Ministry of Education not to recognize the diplomas of some Romanian Muslims which they had been awarded in certain other institutions (in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan and Egypt), claiming that there “they had been studying a dangerous radical form of Islam’ and that they were collaborating with foundations that can be suspected of spreading terrorist propaganda”.⁷⁴

⁷¹ “Turci”.

⁷² “Tatari”.

⁷³ *Muftiatul Cultului Musulman din Romania*.

⁷⁴ “Teologi musulmani in ‘razboi’ cu muftiul” [Muslim Theologians at War with the Mufti] quoted by VAINOVSKI-MIHAI, “Romania”, p. 430, fn. 27.

The transition has brought significant changes in education as well: The *madrasa* in Medgidia had closed down in 1965, but was reopened in 1993 under the name of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk College of Muslim Theology and Pedagogy. The Turkish- and Tartar-language education eliminated in 1959 has been resumed in the form of Turkish education after 1989.⁷⁵

There are two monthly magazines published in Constanța aimed at the community: *Hakses* (in Romanian and Turkish) and *Karadeniz* (in Romanian, Turkish and Tartar). Kriterion Publishers in Bucharest has been publishing books in Turkish and Tartar since 1980.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria is worth discussing separately as a territory considered for centuries to be part of *dar al-islam*, and as the only territory, with the possible exception of Dobrudja in Romania, to which there has been spontaneous, sustained and conscious Muslim mass migration.

In Bulgaria there are about one million Muslims today: Data from the 2001 census showed 966,978 people (12.02 %).⁷⁶ The Turks make up the largest group of Muslims (~ 750,000), but there is a significant number of Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), whose number is difficult to estimate as the state considers them to be Bulgarian, and thus the census figures do not reflect their numbers (~250,000).⁷⁷ The number of Muslim Gypsies is also hard to estimate.⁷⁸ The roughly 5,000 Tartars consider themselves separate from the Turks, but from a linguistic point of view they have been almost completely assimilated to them. The vast majority of Muslims in Bulgaria are Sunni, but there are also smaller Shia groups known as Alevi (roughly 7.5%)⁷⁹ who are also referred to as Kizilbash.⁸⁰ They consider themselves to be descendants of Iranians, Kurds, Turks and Bulgarians. However, the Sunni-Shia division has not erupted into conflicts in Bulgaria, it is rather seen as a historical given. This can be explained by the minority policy towards Muslims during the eras of Bulgarian nationalism and communism, especially its assimilatory tendencies, which affected followers of both branches alike.

For most Bulgarian Muslims Islam is more a part of their cultural identity than an expression of religious devotion, in spite of the fact that the post-socialist transition was followed, similarly to other religious communities of Central Europe, by a kind

⁷⁵ GRIGORE, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Census 2001, comparing with 1,110,295 by the 1992 census, (KOINOVA, "Muslims of Bulgaria"), this shows a decrease by about 150,000.

⁷⁷ KOINOVA, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ According to the 1992 census data, about 39.2 % of the 313,396 Roma identified themselves as Muslims, (LENKOVA, "Turks of Bulgaria", p. 20). As the 2001 census figures showed a significant, about 20% growth in the number of Gypsies, the figure grew to 370,908 (*Census 2001*). There is probability that the number of Gypsies identifying themselves as Muslims has also grown.

⁷⁹ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ It is beyond the boundaries of this paper to discuss the development and descent of Shia Islam and the Alevi / Kizilbash line.

of religious revival. The religious practices of Bulgarian Muslims are rather “deficient”, only 25% of the Turks pray five times a day,⁸¹ and it is limited to observing the two major religious holidays, Kurban Bayrami and Ramazan Bayrami, and the strict funeral traditions. Other standard Islamic traditions (the wearing of headscarves, abstaining from alcohol and pork, etc.) are typically not observed.

Ethnic composition of Bulgaria’s population based on the 2001 census

Total	Bulgarian	Turkish	Gypsy	Other	Won’t Tell	Unknown
7,928,901	6,655,210	746,664	370,908	69,204	62,108	24,807

Source: National Statistics office, 2001

http://www.nsi.bg/Census_e/Census_e.htm

Religious affiliation of Bulgaria’s population based on the 2001 census

Total	Christian	Muslim	Other	Won’t Tell	Unknown
7,928,901	6,638,870	966,978	14,937	283,309	24,807

Source: National Statistics office, 2001,

http://www.nsi.bg/Census_e/Census_e.htm

While it is a matter of controversy when exactly Islam reached the territory of Bulgaria (some sources associate it with the Cumanian and Pecheneg groups settling in the 11th century), the appearance of Islam is usually linked to the Ottoman conquest, the most convincing evidence for which is that Byzantine chronicles do not mention Islam as existing simultaneously with Christianity prior to the expansion.⁸²

The Bulgarian Tsardom was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1396, and, according to the political discourse of the nationalist and socialist period, the conquest was followed by genocide and forced Islamization of the local population. However, considering the processes in the neighbouring countries, especially in Romania, it is more likely that waves of Turks from Anatolia (occasionally also smaller groups of other peoples of the empire) arrived in the territory of Bulgaria. While the territory was regarded as part of the *dar al-harb*, i.e. territory to be conquered, Islamization is likelier to have taken place on its own rather than as a result of violence. If they converted, slaves were liberated; children born into mixed

⁸¹ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*

⁸² KOINOVA, “Muslims of Bulgaria”, p. 4.

marriages and children taken away from families as part of the *devshirme*⁸³ became Muslims.⁸⁴ The memory of the latter is an important part of Bulgarian folklore, although there were families which gave up their sons voluntarily in the hope of social mobility for their offspring. Many others converted also in the hope of social advance, and in addition to this converts did not have to pay *jizya*,⁸⁵ the tax imposed on non-Muslims. On the other hand, the theory of forced Islamization is based, besides Bulgarian folklore, on three 17th century Bulgarian chronicles, one of which was written by a priest named Metodi Draginov and is one of the favourite motives of building a nation (creating the image of the enemy). Recent research has suggested, however, that in the 19th century, following the birth of modern Bulgaria, nationalist historiographers interpreted these sources to best suit their goals. The population of Rodope, in reality, rather converted voluntarily, for the sake of economic benefits and social advance.⁸⁶ But it is not only the motivation of conversions, but also the ethnic background of the converts that is disputed. While Turkish historians say that Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) are descendants of Cumanians and Pechenegs settling-in in the 11th century, thus the oldest Turkish minority in Europe, according to Greek historians Bulgarian Muslims descend from the Thracians and Greeks of the ancient times.

In the Ottoman Empire the different Muslim groups belonged to the majority society, with no regard to their ethnic background, they only became a minority after the formation of Bulgaria (1878). The national development of modern Bulgaria, later the internationalist and Bulgarian communist-nationalist periods of communist Bulgaria fundamentally determined the fate of Muslim minorities as well. As the nationalism and the beginnings of national consciousness of the Slav peoples on the Balkan were directed exactly against the Islam of the Ottoman-Turks, which followed from the millet-system of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire, the Muslim minority became a target by the end of the 19th century. So the history of modern Bulgaria was characterized by waves of emigration, mainly to Turkey, of Turks and Bulgarian Muslims continually succeeding each other.

The Berlin Agreement, revising the Treaty of San Stefano of 1878, created the Bulgarian principality and East-Rumelia,⁸⁷ as a result of which 730,000 Turkish and Bulgarian Muslims immigrated to Turkey for fear of becoming subject of the

⁸³ LEWIS, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 25, 59.

⁸⁴ It must be noted, however, that the children were taken away from their birth place, so they did not increase the number of local Muslims.

⁸⁵ *Jizya* is a tax existing from the very beginning of the Islamic conquest paid by members of the 'peoples of the Book', i.e. Jews and Christians. In exchange for this, they enjoyed the freedom of practising their religion and living under their own laws. In some periods and on some territories this was exactly the reason why the mass conversion of the population was not supported, as it would have meant a serious loss in revenues.

⁸⁶ Further evidence can be the fact that during the Turkish occupation of Hungary forced conversions were not common practice.

⁸⁷ The northern principality remained the vassal of the Sultan but elected its principal on its own, while the southern principality, Eastern Rumelia, was granted autonomy, but its Christian governor was assigned by the Sultan. In 1908 united Bulgaria declared its independence.

winners' revenge, since they had been supporting the Turks during the war, because the Bulgarians were destroying mosques and Muslim villages. The *dar al-islam* was pushed in the background and replaced by *dar al-harb*, though the principality and the province alike were 'privileged' parts of the Ottoman Empire legally until 1908, when the concept of the nation-state replaced the Ottoman-Turkish 'religious' concept of the state (the millet-system). These marked changes, aimed at the complete elimination of the Ottoman-Turkish past, did not favour the former ruling majority, even though the Berlin Agreement (1878) prescribed the protection of minority laws, on the other hand the constitution guaranteed equal rights for every citizen. All this, however, was practically the continuation of the Ottoman-Turkish practice that determined minorities on the basis of their religious otherness. Religious leaders were allowed to keep up direct relations with their believers independent of where they were staying, which, though originally it served as a basis of the Russian relations of orthodox Slavs, helped Muslims continue to be under the spiritual leadership of their (Ottoman-Turkish) caliph. There were 12 muftis operating on the territory of the Bulgarian principality paid by the state, the Muslim religious courts and schools also remained in place.

The first self-organization of Bulgarian Muslims under minority circumstances was formed in 1897 named Bulgaristan Muallimîn-i Islâmiye Cemiyeti. The charitable organization Ittikal-i Islam was established in 1911. Both were organized on a religious basis and were not seeking secular identity. Till 1918-20 the schools of the Turkish minority were almost exclusively Muslim schools, with hodjas having no secular qualification teaching in them.

Aside from the 1879 constitution, which prescribed the protection of religious minorities (see above), the main legal instrument guaranteeing the operation of religious minorities was the '*Temporary Statutes on the Spiritual Governance of Christians, Muslims and Jews*', passed on July 9, 1880. It granted a wide range of rights for the muftis in the ten mufti-districts, and the government was not allowed to interfere in any way in the minorities' religious affairs. In 1895 the '*Temporary Regulations of Governing Muslims*' was accepted. Under this legislation, the chief mufti was appointed by the king by way of a royal ordinance, while regional muftis were elected by the local Muslims, though the election had to be approved by the king and the Ministry of Foreign and Religious Affairs.⁸⁸

The basic document regulating the spiritual life and governance of Muslims living in the Bulgarian Kingdom of 1923 granted almost unlimited rights for the Ministry of Foreign and Religious Affairs. Every regional mufti was a public servant and was allowed to keep contact with any foreign institution only through the Ministry.

But the development of the nation-state in Europe was irresistibly moving toward the formation of Bulgarian national identity and the assimilation of minorities. In the Balkan wars of 1912-13, Bulgarian identity and the anti-Turkish sentiment got strengthened, and took the form of mainly Bulgarian Muslims changing their names. The Balkan wars and the first World War, in which Bulgaria and Turkey took part on opposite sides, were followed by further waves of

⁸⁸ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

emigration, then, between the two World Wars, under the 1925 Bulgarian-Turkish accord, another 150,000-200,000 Turkish and Bulgarian Muslims left the country. This happened in spite of the fact that, until the 1920s, there was a tacit agreement between the Bulgarian nation-state and the Muslim religious elite that the state will not interfere in the affairs of the religious community if the religious leaders keep the Muslims back from secular political activities. This virtually meant the survival of the practice of the Turkish millet-system. Following the declaration of the Turkish Republic (1923) the fate of the Bulgarian Muslim community was temporarily changed again. Trying to prevent the Kemalist Turkish nationalist ideology from taking roots among Bulgarian Muslims, the Bulgarian state supported the strengthening of the religious identity of the Bulgarian Muslim community, which continued to maintain Muslim religious autonomy. (Bulgarian and Turkish historiography interpret the impact of Kemalism on Bulgarian Turks differently. While according to Bulgarian historians Kemalism was a kind of pan-Turkism aiming to make Bulgarian Turks a willing tool in Ankara's hands, Turks claim that Kemalism turned Bulgarian Turks into an ethnically conscious Turkish community⁸⁹). The effect of Kemalism has not been clarified among Bulgarian Turks, different political forces have given different assessments of it. The fact is that the Turan youth sport and cultural association was established in the late 1920s, showing effects of Kemalism in its activities. During the 1920-30s several newspapers and magazines were published in which the Kemalist influence is perceivable.⁹⁰ The government was interested, to offset the Kemalist effect, in maintaining the traditional (quietist) Muslim identity, not in helping the creation of a new type of Turkish national identity among Bulgarian Muslims or Turks.

In the 1930s, however, forced assimilation got in the focus again, an organization called Rodina started a propaganda campaign to convert Muslims to Christianity and to get them to change their names. Though in 1932 Turkey tightened its immigration policy, another 95,000 Turks left for Turkey between 1935-40.

Propaganda and assimilation efforts did not only affect Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, but also the Roma, who were discriminated not only in terms of religion, but also from an ethnic point of view, *e.g.* they were not allowed to take part in leading a religious community. At the beginning of the 20th century they had no right of vote, and they were not allowed to get married to Bulgarians.

At the beginning of the Communist period – in the 1940s and 1950s – national minorities were tolerated in the name of internationalism, even maintaining their cultural identity was helped, in compliance with the Stalinist thesis that the Socialist, class-based identity will eventually surpass ethnic differences. But while they were supporting ethnic identity, at the same time they were strictly forcing back religion. The Law on Denominations provided the necessary legal basis for the state to exercise complete control over religious practices. They made special efforts to force back Islam, arguing that it had been “alien on the Balkan, forced upon Bulgarians by the Ottoman-Turks, thus hindering Bulgarian cultural

⁸⁹ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹⁰ More details in LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

development for centuries. Another argument was that alien reactionary elements (Turkey) were using Islam to import religious radicalism to Bulgaria, and also that it was preventing the Muslims' integration into the Bulgarian nation, and, finally, that Islam was the decisive factor of the traditional culture preventing modernization (socialist development)". In the communist period the chief mufti and the body of regional muftis were managing the affairs of the Muslim community, but they were appointed on the basis of their loyalty to the government.

Though the 1947 constitution guaranteed the freedom of conscience, there were restrictions referring to Islam: the *vakif* estates were nationalized, the number of hodjas was reduced, and the religious college in Sumen was secularized. In 1949 all Qur'an-schools were closed down. A lot of mosques were closed or abandoned and became ruinous, or were converted into museums or shops. After 1955 religious education in schools was banned and all efforts were made to make religious education in the homes impossible.

In the early 1950s there was a short-lived easing in the relations between Bulgarian communists and the Turkish minority when the Communist Party was trying to involve Turks in the party, in order to establish a socialist Turkish minority,⁹¹ but even so, there were about 150,000 Turks and Muslims leaving Bulgaria in 1950-51, which was, to a large extent, due to the nationalisation of land. In the mid-fifties the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party began the transition from communist internationalism to communist nationalism, so strengthening the Bulgarian national character became a priority again. Simultaneously, it was clear by this time that Islam was more deeply rooted than they had expected. So in 1958 the BCP decided to fight a decisive battle against Islam. Consequently in the 1960s they launched a powerful assimilation campaign, trying, aside from the permanent anti-Islam propaganda, to squeeze Muslim traditions and habits out of everyday life. They organized household culture training courses for women, 'reorganized' holidays, the traditional religious holidays were replaced by new, socialist holidays, they attacked, then banned Ramadan and Kurban Bayram for health reasons, they banned Muslim burials and further reduced the number of hodjas.⁹² After 1971, the new program of the Bulgarian Communist Party, communist nationalism, dictated an even more powerful wave of assimilation. They declared the concept of 'single-nation Bulgaria, the socialist state', this also became the basis of the 1971 constitution. It does not mention minorities, everybody is Bulgarian citizen, partly of Bulgarian, partly of non-Bulgarian origin. Bulgarian Muslims and the Roma had to change their names for Bulgarian names again. The situation of the Turkish minority was a little different, as they had a parent state, Turkey. This, however, did not defend them from the name-exchange campaign started in their ranks in 1984, which was carried out with the scientific justification of Bulgarian nationalism. The argument was that the Turks were indeed Bulgarians Turkified by the Ottoman-Turks and converted forcefully to Islam. The Turks opposed the assimilation campaign of 1984-85 very strongly: They organized demonstrations against the change of names, where the military and the special

⁹¹ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁹² KOINOVA, *op. cit.*

forces had to be deployed against the demonstrators. The town of Jablanovo was literally besieged for three days, 34 people were reported to have died.⁹³ The number of imprisoned Turkish activists is estimated at 450-1,000. Resistance also took the form of terrorist acts: among others there was a bomb explosion at the Plovdiv railway station and at the airport of Varna.

Though the demonstrations and the hunger strikes continued, in 1985 Zhivkov declared that Bulgaria was a single-nation state, there were no more Turks in Bulgaria, in fact, there had never been any, as Bulgarian Turks were indeed Turkified Bulgarians. As their names were turned Bulgarian, it was officially impossible to keep a record, though the authorities always knew very precisely who was who. Even more mosques were closed down and destroyed. Praying was only allowed in Bulgarian. The Qur'an was no longer printed or imported. The Muslim rituals – circumcision, wedding, funeral – were strictly forbidden. Circumcision was checked upon and could lead to severe punishment (imprisonment). Funerals were also checked upon, and the Muslim tombs were destroyed. As the chief mufti and the regional muftis received salaries from the state, they became renegades and even declared that Bulgarian Muslims had never been Turkish (1985).⁹⁴ Meanwhile there was also patriotic education by Bulgarian teachers.

The reasons for the assimilation campaign did not only include communist-nationalist ideological considerations, but primarily the intention of diverting attention from the economic difficulties and the demographic changes (the Bulgarian Muslims and Turks had more children than Bulgarians). All this was underpinned also by international changes: From the late 1970s and through the 1980s, there was permanent strengthening in the world of the Islam movements, a marked breaking forth of Islam could be observed. Central Europe was also amid changes. All these processes were threatening Bulgaria's internal security, for this reason the Zhivkov regime decided to get rid of its Muslim minority. On May 31, 1989, Zhivkov announced on TV that the Turks may leave for Turkey. Though it was made to appear as voluntary emigration, many people were forced, while others left out of fear. There were about 330,000 Turks emigrating, about half of Bulgaria's agricultural workforce.

In November 1989 the Zhivkov regime came to an end. Under the influence of demonstrations by Turks and Pomaks, on December 29th the government withdrew the assimilation law, people could get back their names, practise their Islamic traditions, use their language. The same applied not only to the Turks and the Pomaks, but also to the Roma. The law on the names of Bulgarian citizens of March 1990 created the legal possibility for more than 600,000 Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and Roma to take back their old Islamic-Arabic names.⁹⁵ Emigration and the demonstrations generated certain ethnic tensions: Bulgarian nationalist slogans

⁹³ Hugh POULTON, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*. London, Minority Rights Group, 1993, p. 140, quoted by LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

were also yelled: 'Bulgaria for the Bulgarians', and a 1992 opinion poll found that 83.8% thought Turks to be 'religious fanatics'.⁹⁶

In 1990 the Movement for Rights and Freedom, MRF, was founded, which is usually thought of as the representative of Turks and other Muslims, though the Movement has never admitted to being the party of the Turks, as article #11 of the constitution forbids establishing parties on an ethnic or religious basis. In spite of this, more than 90% of the party's voters are Turks. In today's Bulgaria, MRF is the third largest political party,⁹⁷ it has been permanently present in Parliament since 1990, and it is often an unavoidable coalition partner, the pointer of the scale. It is a secular, liberal party that looks at Islam from the aspect of the human rights of the Muslim community. It is supporting cultural and religious autonomy, but consistently keeps a distance from the question of territorial autonomy.

In the 2005 elections MRF received 14.07 % of the votes. Today it is a member of the coalition government and was given three ministerial portfolios.

Bulgaria, as a state with a significant Muslim minority, produces similar phenomena as can be perceived in other Muslim countries: notably, aside from 'state Islam', an Islamic opposition also appears, even though it is much less organized politically than elsewhere, and, partly separately from the above two, the practice of popular Islam is also present.⁹⁸ At the same time, the dispute about the election of the chief mufti following the transition suggests that there can be official and opposition opinions also concerning the questions of Islam, and that these affairs sometimes find their way onto the domestic political scene. In 1992 the Directorate of Religious Affairs invalidated the election of Nedim Gendjev as Chief Mufti. Muslim leaders appealed, but the Supreme Court rejected the petition. The men of the Directorate of Religious Affairs occupied the office of the Chief Mufti and put their own people in the seats of the chief mufti and the regional muftis. But since the chief mufti had very strong support behind him in the Bulgarian Socialist Party, as soon as BSP won the elections in December 1994, the chief mufti was reinstated in his office.⁹⁹ The opposition attacked it again at the Supreme Court, but it approved the resolution of the Council of Ministers, and accepted the legitimacy of the Highest Religious Council led by Nedim Gendjev.

The relationship between the Bulgarian majority and the Turkish/Muslim minority is peaceful, in today's Bulgaria there is a whole Muslim system of institutions performing the spiritual guidance of the Muslim community and ensuring Muslims' free religious practice. The highest forum is the National Conference electing the Highest Muslim Council and the Chief Mufti. The Highest Muslim Council is the administrative organization of the Muslim community

⁹⁶ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ The number of mandates acquired by the MRF in the Parliamentary elections was 400 in 1990, since 1991 it has 240 seats.

⁹⁸ Liberal Islam, *i.e.* the effort of European Muslims to harmonize Islam with the European way of life, system of values and attitudes has not appeared as yet, due to the peculiarities of the Bulgarian situation.

⁹⁹ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

consisting of the Chief Mufti, ten regional muftis, the President of the Highest Muslim Council and ten regional Muslim personalities.¹⁰⁰

Today there are about one thousand mosques and places of prayer in Bulgaria. Muslims' religious rights are acknowledged, they can build mosques, can validate their marriage before the mufti, and can bury their dead according to Muslim traditions. During the ten years following the transition about one hundred new mosques have been built.

It follows from the above that the peculiarity of Central Europe lies, on the one hand, in the time dimension, and on the other hand in the quality and quantity of Muslim communities. In some countries of the region Islam has been present permanently, while in other countries its presence was/has been periodic, but in any case it precedes West Europe (with the exception of the Iberian Peninsula). Central European Islam has basically an Ottoman-Turkish and Tartar origin, for this reason it is almost completely Sunni. Islam linked to Arabs and other nations only appeared in the late 20th century, and became really colourful as a result of the transitions in Central Europe. While, on the one hand, this results in tensions between the old and the new, the dividing lines traditionally existing in the Islamic world (Sunni-Shia, legal schools, etc.), as well as the ethnic differences are of practically no significance.

Though the number of new immigrants has shown a steady increase in recent years, especially due to the European integration of Central Europe, the region is likely to remain a transit territory rather than a destination. One main reason is, besides Central Europe's economic situation and the low number of Muslim communities, the language, especially in countries where knowing the national language of the given country is a condition of taking a job officially.

While as a consequence of the democratic transition and the Euro-Atlantic integration the internal systems of Central-European states would be suitable to accommodate minorities, even though they do not receive collective rights in every country, the minorities living in these countries are not Muslims. The xenophobe phenomena, all too familiar from West Europe, are focused on other minorities in Central Europe, primarily on the Roma population. On the other hand, there is imminent danger that Islamophobia might infiltrate from West Europe and create hatred toward a community which is practically non-existent, or, at least, has negligible numbers – as yet.

¹⁰⁰ LENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

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