

Refugees of Bulgaria Turks 1950–1953

Bulgaristan Türkü Göçmenleri 1950-1953

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Abstract

The Republic of Turkey during the Second World War was a neutral state. During the Cold War, Ankara supported the United States. One of the consequences of the tightening of relations between the East and the West was the deterioration of relations with neighbors who found themselves in the opposite sphere of influence. In the early 1950s Bulgarian Turks fell victim to this struggle. Ankara used this minority in propaganda, Sofia wanted to "get rid of the problem". As a result, hundreds of thousands of persons had to leave their homes and go to Turkey, which they did not know before. The common feature of the arrivals was written in documents Turkish as a mother tongue. Turkey struggling with economic problems would not be able to help the arrivals without the help of US. At the same time, it was proof of Turkey's unequivocal support for the West.

Keywords

Turkey, refugees, IRO, Bulgaria

Özet

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti II. Dünya Savaşı sırasında tarafsız kalmıştır. Soğuk Savaş sırasında ise, Ankara ABD'yi destekledi. Doğu ile Batı arasındaki ilişkilerin sıkılaştırılmasının sonuçlarından biri, kendilerini farklı etki alanında bulmuş olan komşularla ilişkilerin bozulmasıdır. 1950'lerin başlarında, Bulgar Türkleri bu mücadelenin mağdurları oldular. Ankara bu azınlığı propaganda amacıyla kullanırken, Sofya bu "sorundan kurtulmaya" çalışıyordu. Sonuç olarak, yüz binlerce insan evlerini terk ederek daha önceden bilmedikleri Türkiye'ye gittiler. Belgelere göre gelenlerin ortak özelliği adadillerinin Türkçe olmasıydı. Ekonomik sorunlarla mücadele eden Türkiye, ABD'den destek almaksızın gelenlere yardım edemeyecek durumdaydı. Bütün bunlar diğer yandan, Türkiye'nin Batı'ya olan kesin desteğinin bir kanıtı.

Anahtar kelimeler

Türkiye, göçmen, IRO, Bulgaristan

In the 1950s Turkish citizenship was granted to Turks from Bulgaria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, Iran and Iraq. 95 percent of them were refugees from Bulgaria (Türkiye Cumhuriyet Devlet Arşivleri, 30-18-1-2 / 126-70-2, 1951, p. 5–119). A common feature of all those arriving was giving the "Turk" in the breed section, and the "Turkish" in the mother languages section, one person Tevfik Alacakoç wrote in this place Pomak language (Türkiye Cumhuriyet Devlet Arşivleri, 30-18-1-2 / 126-70-2, 1951, p. 22). It is very interesting that an organization dealing with refugees (International Refugee Organisation) helped them, despite the fact that they were recognized as Turkish citizens, so in theory they were not under the care of IRO. Thanks to

American help in Turkey, settlements for Turks from Bulgaria were created. It is worth considering how the Cold War influenced these resettlements.

TURKISH MINORITY IN BULGARIA

During World War II, Turkish-Bulgarian relations were far from friendly but correct. Bulgaria was a part of the Axis countries, the Republic of Turkey remained neutral until February 23, 1945. After that date, Turkey supported the Allies. Nonetheless Ankara did not gain the favor of the Allies who were disappointed with the attitude of Turkey during the war. Turkey was in a difficult situation, they had no support among Western countries and the Soviet Union issued their a pact of friendship in 1925. İsmet İnönü (President of Turkey in 1938-1946) was aware of the difficult position of the state in the international arena. In this connection İnönü tried to maintain good relations with neighbors. The Turkish government manifested its friendly intentions towards Sofia. Even the entire circulation of the “Tasvîr” newspaper was confiscated cause it contained anti Bulgarian articles (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 107). Turkey did not want to cause tensions with Sofia, because Bulgaria was a ally of Moscow and the Soviet Union was advancing further towards Ankara.

In the first years after the war, economic cooperation between countries increased. The Bulgarian-Turkish relations deteriorated with Turkey's approach to Western countries. After the announcement of the Truman doctrine in 1947, the Bulgarian-Turkish relations significantly deteriorated. There were border and diplomatic incidents on both sides. The Bulgarians accused Turkey of subordinating its policy to Cold War goals (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 110). One of the main inflammatory issues between Sofia and Ankara was the issue of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

The Muslim population in Bulgaria consists of three ethnic groups: Turks, Gypsies (mostly Turkic speakers) and Pomaks (in Bulgaria known officially as Bulgarian Muslims)., After coming to power, the communists restored national laws to the Turks, treating them as a tool for rapid Sovietization. The trend from before the war turned away, new Turkish-language schools were opened and a few communist newspapers were issued in Turkish.

In the context of exacerbation of the Cold War rivalry, the Turkish side wanted to use its minority to destabilize Bulgaria. Turkish propaganda criticized the state system of Bulgaria and advertised living conditions in Turkey. Turkish minority left Bulgaria for essentially two reasons. First: Acts in force did not provide real freedom of religion. Any manifestation of faith (both Christian and Muslim) was seen as an attempt to destroy public order (Eminov, 1997, p. 52). The second reason: the majority of Turks in Bulgaria were farmers, for this reason collectivization aroused their opposition (Fijołek, 2016, p. 118.). In the years 1947-1948 displeasure increased among the people of Turkish origin. The peasants sabotaged the obligatory supplies, the military were suspected of being espionage (Wolff, 1974, p. 477). Thousands of people sold their property and moved to cross-border areas. On the border were many excesses, many people wanted to cross borders illegally, they were detained by the border authorities on both sides. The Bulgarian-Turkish relations have deteriorated more and more. In February 1948, two Turkish planes were shot down for violating the Bulgarian air zone. In July

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1948, Turkey refused to extradite a Bulgarian who hijacked aircraft and fled to Turkey (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 114–115).

In Bulgaria was established a commission, composed representatives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of War, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Internal Trade, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education as well as Ministry of Agriculture and Public Property. The Commission dealt with the issue of Bulgarian-Turkish relations of Bulgarian-Turkish relations. An immediate resettlement was recommended as the Bulgarian Turks were considered as a non-productive and potentially dangerous element (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 115). On January 6, 1949, the decision to resettle the Turkish minority was officially made. In the first place, it was supposed to cover about 265,000 people living along the southern Bulgarian-Turkish border (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 116).

It is worth noting that the migration of Bulgarian Turks from Bulgaria to Turkey lasted during World War II and also after war end. The volume of migration in the years 1940-1946 decreased significantly and systematically. Over the next three years, it began to increase slightly. However, compared to the 1950s, few refugees from Bulgaria came to Turkey every year.

1.1 Table showing the number of refugees arriving from Bulgaria to Turkey in the years 1940-1949 (Çolak, 2013, p. 118)

Years	The number of refugees
1940	6.960
1941	3.803
1942	2.672
1943	1.145
1944	489
1945	631
1946	706
1947	1.763
1948	1.514
1949	1.670
Mount	21.353

RESETTLEMENT IN THE 1950s

The Bulgarian government willingly gave passports to everyone who was of Turkish origin (to the members of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria). In August 1950 the Bulgarian government sent the diplomatic

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note to the Turkish Ambassador in Sofia with the reference to the old Turkish-Bulgarian treaty of friendship of the 18th October 1925 (Bayır, 2013, p. 88.). The part of this treaty concerned the population exchange between Turkey and Bulgaria. The Turkish government has announced that it will gladly accept the "Turkish population", but Ankara wanted the Bulgarian government to issue emigration documents only to those who had already received Turkish entry visas.

Theoretically, the leave of Bulgaria was voluntary but the Bulgarian government pressed Turkey to accept 250 000 refugees within the period of just three months. The large part of applicants did not receive the Turkish visa. In August 1950 the Turkish consulate in Sofia admitted 54 000 Turkish visas (Archives Nationales de France, AJ 43 / 430, 1952, p. 2). Bulgaria wanted to send people without visas, basing solely on the aforementioned old treaty.

1.2. Table showing the influx of refugees in 1950.

Month	Families	Numbers of peoples
January	224	816
February	285	1.212
March	463	2.186
April	588	2.387
May	296	1.274
June	804	3.930
July	898	3.065
August	1.330	6.028
September	1.449	7.308
October	867	2.572
November	-	-
December	4979	21.407
Amount	12.333	52.185

Therewith, on the 7th October 1950, the Turkish-Bulgarian border was closed. It was the beginning of the diplomatic game between Ankara and Sofia. Turkey did not have any solution to the problem, they had submitted their protests to the United Nations and the Council of Europe, but these bodies have not taken any further actions (AN, France, AJ 43/1093, 1950, p. 1). The Bulgarian government wanted to open the Turkish border again but the Turkish side had its one condition: the border between Bulgaria and Turkey could be crossed only by people having a Turkish visa. The Bulgarian government struggled with big problems. Near the checkpoints on the Turkish-Bulgarian border were thousands of people with movable property and livestock. Refugees were dissatisfied and organized demonstrations. The main Mufti sent a protest message to the Turkish legation in Sofia (Wolff, 1974, p. 478). The Bulgarian government was forced by the situation to provide shelter and provisioning for camp out under the Turkish border. The Bulgarian Red Cross in October 1950 spend 1 202 493 lev for supplying these people with food, money, medicines ect (The Turkish Minority in The People's Republic of Bulgaria, 1951, p. 45).

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The Bulgarian authorities had to make concessions. After 10 days, they stopped issuing emigration passports. They accepted back those refugees who had already crossed the border but did not have the Turkish entry visa and what was the most important the Bulgarian government undertook not to issue immigration documents in the future for those emigrants who did not obtain an entry visa at the Turkish consulate.

Political talks took two months and finally the border was re-opened on the 5th December 1950. In the next year, the problem of visas came back. The new Bulgarian government believed that Bulgarian citizen should be of Christian cultural origin and that the mother tongue of each citizen should be Bulgarian. Everybody else should leave the country. Many people were directed, against themselves, towards the Turkish border. This story ended by the closure of the Turkish border once again on the 8th November 1951. Until that date, 154 393 persons belonging to the group referred to had arrived in Turkey (AN, France, AJ 43/430, 1952, p. 4). The Turkish side accused the Bulgarian government of forging visas. The Bulgarian government investigated this case and concluded that visas have been falsified but by the Turkish side (Znamierowska-Rakk, 1979, p. 120). Once again, the diplomatic game began. This state of affairs persisted until the 26th February 1953, they were actually not eager to resume reception of large numbers of new refugees because of the vast expenditures that has already been made (Vasileva, 1992, p. 46).

1.3. Table showing the influx of refugees in 1951.

Month	Families	Numbers of peoples
January	5073	21.325
February	5538	20.237
March	2240	9.553
April	3812	16.250
May	1668	8.008
June	2098	8.646
July	1220	5.243
August	1394	5.489
September	723	2.861
October	886	3.455
November	268	1.114
December	-	-
Amount	25.118	102.208

When analyzing the gender structure among the arrivals, it should be noted that the number of women and men was relatively balanced. Percentage was about 53% of men compared to 47% of women. The largest group were children between 5 and 15 years of age, about 46 percent. It was the result of a whole family moving, usually having several children (TCDA, 30-18-1-2 / 126-70-2, p. 1–119). Among all immigrants from Bulgaria arriving in 1950-195, about 83 percent were farmers, foresters, fishermans, hunters. The percentage of people who studied in primary school was higher among immigrants. Many women were able to write and read, the percentage of illiterates was much smaller (Geray, 1970, p. 16).

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In Turkey during the Immediate Postwar Period between 1945–1951 functioned the international specialization organizations such as United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) and International Refugee Organization (IRO). In 1947 the member governments of IGCR decided to transfer its funds and duties to IRO. On the same date, UNRRA also turned over funds and functions to IRO (Şekowski, 2017, p. 122.). The International Refugee Organization was the first international agency created by the United Nations Organization. It was active between 1947 and 1952. IRO is particularly known as an organisation aiding refugees, which was active in the British, French and U.S. occupation zones of Germany and, Austria. The last main IRO mission in Europe was located in Italy.

According to the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization under the IRO protection could be refugees and displaced persons¹ (Holbom, 1958 p. 584–585). 26 states become members of the IRO, and this countries financed this organizations. United States was the main payer to the budget. In the organization were not the Soviet Union and any other country of the people's democracy. The IRO helped refugees financially and legally, organized resettlements and new places of stay. It worked from Turkey in the beginning. The Turks case from Bulgaria was exceptional because they were citizens of Turkey and did not formally receive IRO assistance. Despite this, the IRO supported these refugees, reported on their situation and helped the Turkish government. It was inextricably linked with the Cold War and the alliance with Turkey that was important for the USA.

Conclusion

The Bulgarian citizens of Turkish ethnicity generally quickly made the decision to search for the opportunities to be moved to Europe or Canada. People who wanted to stay in Turkey and who had the Turkish visa and the Bulgarian passport finally got a residence card for one year. Within this year, the concerned persons were exempt of tax and this period should serve as the adaptation time. The situation of the Bulgarian group of refugees was easier because so far, the Bulgarian nationals were of the Muslim faith and in Francis Blanchard opinion Turks would be ready to grant them Turkish citizenship (AN, France, AJ 43/1093, 1950, p. 30). But the Bulgarian migration had also had positive aspects for Turkey, for example, immigrants from Bulgaria as a whole were more skilled, better educated and generally more effective than the average worker in Turkey.

¹According to Constitution of the International Refugee Organization the term "refugee" applies to a person who has left, or who is outside of, his country of nationality or of former habitual residence, and who, whether or not he had retained his nationality, belongs to one of the following categories: (a) victims of the Nazi or fascist regimes or of regimes which took part on their side in the second world war, or of the quisling or similar regimes which assisted them against the United Nations, whether enjoying international status as refugees or not; (b) Spanish Republicans and other victims of the Falangist regime in Spain, whether enjoying international status as refugees or not; (c) persons who were considered refugees before the outbreak of the second world war, for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion. The term “displaced persons” were people who, due to the war and decision of the occupational authorities, had found themselves outside borders of country of their pre-war residence.

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Refugees who stayed in Turkey were deployed throughout the country. The Turks accused the Bulgarian government of forcibly expelling the Turkish population. The Bulgarians believed that the Turkish government wanted to use its minority in Bulgaria to weaken the country internally. Undoubtedly, the resettlement of Turks from Bulgaria was part of the Cold War rivalry. Without the help of the American government, the Turkish government would not cope with only thousands of refugees. International Refugee Organisation representatives in Turkey were reporting accurately about problems with refugees from Bulgaria. Officially, these refugees were under the care of the Turkish government, not directly IRO, but it was through this organization that American help came. This detracts from the standard IRO mission, which is why it is worth attention.

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