

## ISLAM AND POLITICS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST BALKANS

Xavier BOUGAREL, Institut d'études politiques, Paris. Paper presented for the Socrates Kokkalis Student Workshop : New Approaches to Southeast Europe, Cambridge, Mass., february 12-13, 1999 <sup>1</sup>.

### Introduction : Balkan Islam between Stigmatization and Victimization

In the last decade, the various Balkan Muslim populations have been involved in most of the crises which shook the region, from the massive exodus of Bulgarian Turks in July 1989 to the outbreak of violence in Kosovo in March 1998, through the Bosnian conflict in 1992/95 and the Albanian civil war in 1997. This, naturally, does not mean that Islam itself is the explanatory factor of these crises: they are political in nature, even when religious symbols and religious actors play an important part, as has been true in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, inevitably, Balkan Islam has been influenced by the political reconfigurations which followed the collapse of communism in Southeastern Europe. Conversely, a solid understanding of the new realities of post-communist Balkans requires to take account of some evolutions specific to the Muslim populations.

Unfortunately, analyses of contemporary Balkan Islam have been largely superficial and full of exaggerations. Some conjure up visions of a "green diagonal" penetrating the flank of a Christian Europe ; others refer to "European Islam" as an Island of tolerance, lost in an ocean of Orthodox fanaticism. These two representations of Balkan Islam, which at first glance seem to conflict with each other, are in reality closely related. The first presents Islam as alien to, and incompatible with European culture and values. The second shifts this incompatibility toward Orthodoxy, but still

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<sup>1</sup> This paper presents some results of a collective research on "*The Islamic Dimensions of the Balkan Crisis*" I organized in 1997-1998. Some of the informations presented here were first presented in the case studies of Nathalie Clayer (Macedonia and Kosovo), Joëlle Dalègre (Greece), Rajwantee Lakshman-Lepain (Albania) and Nadège Ragaru (Bulgaria).

implicitly contrasts a "tolerant" European Islam with an "intolerant" non-European Islam, locating the origin of this tolerance not in the historical features of Ottoman Islam, but in some hypothetical common and ancestral European values. Above all, both represent the Balkan Muslim populations as a homogeneous and stable whole.

It therefore seems necessary to outline a new approach to Balkan Islam, one which stresses internal diversity and continuous transformations., This paper deals with the relationship between Islam and politics in the post-communist Balkans from just such a perspective. The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is indeed one of the major changes of the last decade. Examination of this development reveals the complex and diverse links existing between Islam and national identity, and between political and religious actors, in each of the Balkan Muslim communities. A better understanding of the internal cleavages and dynamics operating within Balkan Islam can in turn lead to a more informed debate on the reality of the "Islamic threat" in the Balkans.

### **The Emergence of the Muslim Populations as Autonomous Political Actors**

Before World War II, the Balkan Muslim populations were represented by their traditional notables (landlords and wealthy tradesmen), who were linked to the ruling political parties through patron-client bonds. Only the Bosnian Muslim notables succeeded in building their own party, but they also maintained allegiance to the central authorities, and were content to constantly shift alliances back and forth between Serbian and Croatian political forces <sup>2</sup>. The communist period encouraged the formation of new Muslim elites (professors and teachers, physicians, engineers, etc.) and the crystallization of national identities which until then had remained undefined

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<sup>2</sup> About the political history of the Bosnian Muslims, see Robert DONIA, *Islam under the Double Eagle. The Muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina 1878-1914*, New-York : Columbia University Press, 1981 ; Mark PINSON, (ed.), *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1994 ; Aydin BABUNA, *Die nationale Entwicklung der bosnischen Muslime. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der österreichisch-ungarischen Periode*, Frankfurt a. Main : Peter Lang, 1996.

and fluid, as is clearly shown by the case of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. But it was only with the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989/90 that these social and cultural changes were able to reach any form of political expression on.

Most of the new laws on political pluralism adopted by the Balkan states in 1989/90 banned parties founded on the basis of ethnicity or religion. But this clause did not prevent the creation of parties representing the Muslim populations. At first, these parties circumvented the bans by choosing names without any ethnic connotation : Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) for the Albanians of Kosovo, Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) for the Turks of Bulgaria, Party for Democratic Action (SDA) for the Bosnian Muslims, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) for the Albanians of Macedonia. The banning of ethnic parties therefore became irrelevant, and new parties appeared later with overt ethnic names, such as the Turkish Democratic Party and the Party for the Complete Emancipation of the Romas in Macedonia, the Turkish Democratic Union in Kosovo or the Democratic Union of the Muslim Turks in Romania.

These new Muslim parties were for the most part led by members of the new elites associated with communist modernization process and, more precisely, by former activists of the party and its mass organization, as in the case of Ibrahim Rugova, former president of the Union of Writers of Kosovo and president of the LDK, or Ahmed Džan, former member of the Institute of Philosophy in Sofia and president of the DPS. Only the SDA was founded by members of a pan-Islamist current appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1930', and whose main representative was Alija Izetbegović himself. But the SDA also had to incorporate intellectuals and notables close to the League of Communists in order to become a mass party<sup>3</sup>. At the first free elections, these parties won a huge majority of the votes of their respective communities. A large part of the urban middle classes and some village dwellers,

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<sup>3</sup> About this panIslamist current and its role in the creation of the SDA, see Xavier BOUGAREL, "From 'Young Muslims' to the Party of Democratic Action : the Emergence of a Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Islamic Studies*, vol. XXXVI, n° 2-3 (Summer/Autumn 1997, special issue "Islam in the Balkans"), p. 533-549.

however, preferred to vote for the former communists, owing to some specific identity choices ("yugoslavism" of the Bosnian urban elites, Pomak identity in some Bulgarian villages <sup>4</sup>) or to general fears of economic reforms and land restitution to former owners.

The triumph of the Muslim parties therefore does not correspond to a monolithic muslim vote. In those places where multiple Muslim populations coexist, the main Muslim parties did not succeed in crossing the boundaries of their own ethnic group. In Macedonia, for example, the SDA tried to challenge the Albanian, Turkish and Gipsy ethnic parties with a call to the political unity of the *Umma* (Community of the faithful). Not only did this call go unanswered, the SDA itself has split in 1991 into a panIslamist party (SDA-"*Islamic Path*") and a Bosnian Muslim ethnic one. Political and strategic conflicts added to these ethnic cleavages, and the main Muslim parties experienced internal splits in the 1990' (Party for the Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians -PPDSH- in Macedonia in 1994 <sup>5</sup>, Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina -SzaBiH- in 1995 <sup>6</sup>, and the Albanian Democratic Movement -LDSH- in Kosovo in 1998 <sup>7</sup>).

The situation in Bulgaria seems to differ, since the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) led by Ahmed Dođan has had no direct rival <sup>8</sup>. But this is only a relative difference. During the general election of April 1997, Dođan's main rival inside the DPS, Giuner Tahir, decided to run on the list of the United Democratic Forces, a coalition led by the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), without leaving the

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<sup>4</sup> Pomaks are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. There are about 165 000 Pomaks in Bulgaria (Western Rhodopes), and 30 000 in Greece (Western Thrace).

<sup>5</sup> The Party for the Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians (PPDSH) merged in 1996 with the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) to create the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH). The Turkish, Gipsy and Bosnian Muslim parties of Macedonia also experienced internal splits.

<sup>6</sup> The Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina is led by the former Prime Minister Haris Silajd ić. The SDA of Sandjak experienced several internal splits between 1994 and 1998.

<sup>7</sup> The Albanian Democratic Movement (LDSH) split off from the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in 1998. But the LDK was already being challenged by the Parliamentarian Party (PP), created in 1990 and led by Adem Demaqi since 1996. There are two Turkish parties in Kosovo, one linked to the "Kosovo Republic" (Popular Turkish Party -THP) and the other to the Serbian authorities (Turkish Democratic Union -TDB). The SDA representing the Bosnian Muslims from Sandjak in Kosovo supports the "Kosovo Republic", but the Democratic Reform Party of the Muslims (DRSM) representing the Torbeshi (Macedonian-speaking Muslims) and the Gorani (Serbian-speaking Muslims) of the area of Prizren has not joined it.

<sup>8</sup> The DPS experienced two splits in 1993 and 1994, but the two splitting parties (Turkish Democratic Party and Party for the Democratic Changes) remained marginal and disappeared short after their creation.

DPS. The Turks of the Rhodopes (Dođan's home region) remained loyal to the DPS, but many Turks of the Deli Orman (where Tahir comes from) decided to vote for the United Democratic Forces. Conversely, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia, the splitting parties have signed coalition agreements with the main ethnic parties before the elections (the "Coalition for Bosnia-Herzegovina" was made up of the SDA, the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina and a few other small parties in the local elections of September 1997 and the general elections of September 1998; there was also a coalition between the PPD and the Democratic Party of the Albanians -PDSH<sup>9</sup> for the Macedonian general elections of October 1998).

If one is to more fully understand the nature of political organization among the Balkan Muslim populations, the distinctive cases of Albania and Greece must also be considered. Albania is the only former communist country where the banning of ethnic and religious parties is still in force<sup>10</sup>: in 1993, the Albanian authorities refused to register the Party of Islamic Democratic Union, and there is no Muslim party in Albania, at least officially<sup>11</sup>. But the central cleavage of Albanian political life, that is the conflict between Democratic Party and Socialist Party, is also related to the debate on Islam and national identity, as will be shown further. Greece was not a communist country. But in this country too, the election of the independent candidate Ahmed Sadik in the general election of April 1990 showed that also the Muslim (mainly Turkish) population of Western Thrace was about to emerge as an autonomous political actor. The new electoral law passed a few months later, however, compelled this population to come back to its former allegiances to Greek parties<sup>12</sup>.

In the 1990's, the Balkan Muslim communities not only created their own political parties, but also various reviews and newspapers, cultural associations, charitable societies or intellectual forums, such as the influential Congress of the Bosnian

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<sup>9</sup> About the Democratic Party of the Albanians, see footnote 5.

<sup>10</sup> The Albanian authorities, however, tolerated the creation of the Union for the Human Rights (BDN-"Omonia") which represents the Greek Orthodox minority.

<sup>11</sup> The Party of National Recovery (PRK) led by Avdi Baleta can be seen as a Muslim party, since it strongly emphasizes the connections between Islam and Albanian national identity.

<sup>12</sup> This electoral law specifies that a candidate can be elected to Parliament only if the party (s)he belongs to wins more than 3 % of the vote at the national level.

Muslim Intellectuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Association of the Muslim Intellectuals in Albania. These organisations often serve as bridges between the political and the religious elites of the Muslim communities. Finally, the Balkan Muslim diasporas have also created their own associations in Turkey as well as in Western Europe and North America, and are able of playing a very important role at the political and financial level, as is shown by the case of the Albanian diaspora from Kosovo. But this diasporic situation does not encourage the crossing of ethnic boundaries. In Germany, the Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovo Albanians jealously preserve their autonomy from the tutelage of their Turkish "big brothers". And in Istanbul, even the Turks from Bulgaria and the Turks from Western Thrace have two quite distinct associations.

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is thus a general phenomena. But the position of these populations in the political life of each Balkan state can vary to a considerable extent. First, it is possible to distinguish some parties which have only cultural claims, on a symbolic level (the return of the Turkish names in Bulgaria, the replacement of the religious designation "Muslim" by the national designation "Turk" in Greece) or institutional level (teaching in the Turkish language in Bulgaria and Romania), and others which concentrate on political claims (independence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, territorial autonomy in Sandjak). Second, some parties accept prevailing institutional and legal frameworks and even take part in sharing the power, like the DPS in Bulgaria, while others refuse every participation to the existing institutions and create their own parallel ones, such as the LDK in Kosovo or the SDA in Sandjak (the "Kosovo Republic" was proclaimed in July 1990 ; a "National Muslim Council of the Sandjak" was created in May 1991).

Of course, these two aspects are closely related. From both perspectives, Macedonia constitutes an intermediate case. There, for the Albanian parties seek the recognition of the Albanians as one of the two constitutive nations of this state, and even held a referendum on the territorial autonomy of Western Macedonia in January 1992. But these parties concentrate their claims on the implementation of complete bilingualism in

administration and the school system, and also take part in the ruling coalition <sup>13</sup>. As for the Turkish and Gipsy parties, they are loyal to the state and hostile to the autonomy of Western Macedonia.

Several factors can explain these differences in the positioning of Muslim parties. The most important is obviously the demographic balance in each state or territorial entity : the Muslim parties are more tempted to put forward political claims where the Muslims make up an absolute (Kosovo) or relative (Bosnia-Herzegovina) majority of the population than where they represent only a small minority (Greece, Romania). But this demographic factor can not explain why there is no claim for territorial autonomy in Bulgaria, in contrast to the situation in Macedonia and in Sandjak.

To answer this, some political factors must be taken into account. On one hand, the Muslim populations of the Yugoslav space experienced a federal system in which multilingualism and territorial autonomy were self-evident, while those of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania are accustomed to a national state with a single constitutive nation and official language. On the other hand, the states with strong Muslim minorities in the Yugoslav space (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Macedonia) are in an advanced state of decomposition, while the others are more or less stable.

Finally, the importance of concrete political decisions must not be underestimated. The repressive and discriminatory policies of Serbian authorities, for example, could only have led to a radicalization of the Albanian population in Kosovo, as was the case in 1998 with the legitimacy crisis of Ibrahim Rugova and the violent uprising led by the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). Conversely, in Bulgaria it is evident that the re-establishment of the rights of the Turkish minority and the integration of the DPS into political life (facilitated by its role as arbiter between the Socialist Party and the Union of Democratic Forces) largely contributed to the deescalation of interethnic conflict

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<sup>13</sup> From 1990 to 1998, the Party of Democratic Prosperity joined in a coalition led by the Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM, the former communists). In October 1998, short after the general elections, the Interior Revolutionary Macedonian Movement (VMRO, who are nationalists) and the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH, see footnote 5) formed a new ruling coalition.

and the marginalization of radical forces in the country. The radicalization of the Albanian population in Macedonia, however, testifies to the fact that a long term political integration of the Muslim populations would require both socioeconomic advancement and cultural recognition.

### **The Transformation of the Relationship between Islam and National Identity**

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors goes hand in hand with the politicization of their ethnic identity. The best illustration of this phenomenon is no doubt the decision taken in September 1993 by the *Bošnjački Sabor* (Bosniac Assembly) <sup>14</sup> to replace the old national name "Muslim" with the new one "Bosniac", and in this way, to stress the transformation of the Bosnian Muslim community into a political and sovereign nation, closely linked to the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This change of name was followed by a significant effort to strengthen the Muslim/Bosniac national identity (through the formalization of a Bosnian language different from both Serbian and Croatian languages, the publishing of an anthology of Bosnian Muslim literature, etc.).

A similar process of ethnic identity politicization is also present by Slavic-speaking Pomaks (in Bulgaria and Greece) or Torbeshi (Macedonia), as well as by the Gipsies across the whole Balkan peninsula. All these populations have until now been devoid of any precise national identity. Only recognition as legitimate ethno-national groups allows them to accede to some political visibility, and in turn to mobilize internal or external political resources. Within this context, these small populations can adopt three different identity strategies.

The first aims at a merging into a larger muslim group which already enjoys an institutional recognition of its identity. This is the strategy being utilized by many Macedonian Torbeshi and Bulgarian Pomaks or Gipsies who declare themselves as

"Turks", as well as those Macedonian Gipsies even declare themselves to be "Egyptians". The second strategy involves affiliation with the dominant national group in a given state. This tactic has resulted in Muslims declaring themselves to be "Greeks", "Macedonians" or "Bulgarians" of Islamic faith and, in Bulgaria, keeping the Christian names imposed by the state in the 1980's, during the "national revival" campaign<sup>15</sup>. Of course, this type of identity choices is encouraged by the authorities, and concerns in the first place those who are or intend to become civil servants. Finally, a third strategy tries to define a distinctive Roma (Gipsy), Pomak or Torbeshi identity, insisting on its recognition. This strategy involves an "invention of the tradition", as can be seen in frequent reference currently by Pomaks and Torbeshs to specific pre-ottoman Turkish or Arab origins.

Thus, the process of politicization of the Muslim ethnic identities is sometimes quite obvious (as in the outright renaming of whole groups). A potential process of reIslamization of these same identities is more difficult to perceive. In fact, the situations vary considerably from group to group. There has been no reIslamization of the Gipsy identity, as the segmentary logics of this ethnic community prevent any common reference to Islam. In contrast, the Bosnian Muslim community inevitably tends to stress its belonging to Islam as the main factor distinguishing it from the (Orthodox) Serbian and (Catholic) Croatian communities, and the leaders of the SDA openly support the re-Islamization of the Muslim/Bosniac identity. Moreover, this process of re-Islamization was accelerated by the war, as shown by the development of a cult of the *shehids* (martyrs of the faith) and by the creation of so called "Muslim brigades" whose fighters respected the Islamic religious precepts and regarded their fight as a *jihad* (holy war).

A similar resort to Islam as a central ethnic reference has been possible for some Pomaks, who have in this way tried to compensate for their lack of a legitimate national identity, as well as for members of the traditional Muslim elites of some

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<sup>14</sup> During the war, the *Bošnjački Sabor* included all of the main political, religious and cultural representatives of the Bosnian Muslim nation.

<sup>15</sup> Sometimes, this strategy is combined with conversion to Protestantism (especially by Pomaks).

towns in Macedonia and in Kosovo, who have in this way reasserted their difference from and superiority toward the neo-urban elites in control of the Albanian nationalist parties. In the Albanian and the Turkish communities, Islam has remained secondary in relation to national and linguistic identity. But reference to Islam can be used in order to facilitate the national assimilation of small Slavic-speaking populations (Torbeshs in Macedonia, Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece), or to accentuate cultural or political cleavages.

The Balkan Turkish populations, for example, did not remain insensitive to the passionate discussions on Islam and secularism in Turkey, as was seen in Macedonia when the Turkish Democratic Party split into a "religious" majority and a "secular" minority. Similarly, since 1990, controversy over the relationship between Islam and national identity has divided the Albanian intelligentsia. Some Christian or ex-communist intellectuals like Ismail Kadare or Ibrahim Rugova claim that conversion to Islam was harmful to the Albanian nation, because it involved a severance of the links with Western Europe and a late identification with the Ottoman Empire. Religious leaders and some Muslim intellectuals, however, argue that only Islam protected the Albanians from complete cultural assimilation by the Greeks and Serbs.

This debate is not only an academic one. In Albania, the Democratic Party, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims from the north-east of the country and remains closer to the Muslim religious leaders, took up again some of their arguments, while the Socialist Party, well established in the Orthodox and Bektashi South and successor of the former Communist Party, repeated the classic anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic arguments of Albanian nationalism. The leaders of the Democratic League of Kosovo, influenced by clerics and intellectuals of the small Catholic minority, have put forth similar arguments. But the confrontation between an almost completely Muslim Albanian community and a Serbian state linked to Orthodoxy favours an identification of Islam with Albanian national identity. Within this context, it is possible that the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK), whose founders are former Marxist-Leninists, but

whose fighters are often pious countrymen, will attempt to instrumentalize Islam for national and political aims.

While the re-Islamization of the national identity of Balkan Muslim populations is a partial and limited process, the converse one -that is the "nationalization" of Islam- has no exception. From this point of view, national identity is stronger than religious identity. The best illustration of this "nationalization" of Islam is the splitting of Yugoslav Islamic religious institutions along national lines which was paradoxically caused by... the Bosnian pan-Islamist current ! Indeed, in April 1993, the SDA decided, against the will of the majority of the religious leaders, to create new religious institutions intended only to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandjak and the Bosnian Muslim diaspora. In the following months, new Islamic religious institutions were formed in Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. In Macedonia, the Slavic-speaking (Torbeshi) religious leaders were eclipsed by new Albanian leaders close to the PPD. This "Albanization" of Islamic religious institutions led to some (unsuccessful) attempts to create religious institutions specific to the Slavic- or Turkish-speaking populations.

Such crises did not happen in Albania, Bulgaria or Romania, where the Muslim populations are much more ethnically and linguistically homogeneous. But the "nationalization" of Islam remains perceptible through ethnic rather than religious meanings associated with the celebration of the main religious feasts, the organization of some Sufi pilgrimages, or the opening ceremonies for the consecration of new mosques. Politicians make no illusion about the importance of such events, and systematically make efforts to attend them. The end of the communist regimes has therefore led to the reshaping not only of the relationship between Islam and national identity, but also of the relations between religious and political actors.

## The Reshaping of the Relations between Religious and Political Actors

Between 1989 and 1998, Islamic religious institutions in the Balkans experienced a clear resurgence in activity. This trend has been visible in all of the former communist countries of the region, but was especially drastic in Albania, where Islamic institutions reappeared after a full twenty-two years of absence. Such processes of renewal have been characterized by the building or restoration of numerous mosques, by the development of religious press and publishing activities, and by the opening of several Islamic schools. At the end of the 1980's, there were only three *madrastas* (Islamic secondary schools) in the Balkans (in Sarajevo, Pristina and Skopje), and a single Islamic Theology Faculty in Sarajevo. Ten years later, there are ten *madrastas* in Albania, six in Bosnia-Herzegovina, three in Bulgaria, one each in Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Sandjak. At the same time, five institutes for higher Islamic learning were opened in the region (two in Bosnia-Herzegovina, one in Kosovo, one in Macedonia and one in Bulgaria).

This unquestionable renewal of activity has not, however, been synonymous with a "restoration" of Islamic religious institutions. On one hand, after half a century of communism, the re-establishment of religious freedom has, at the same time, revealed all the deficiencies of these institutions : many mosques are still in a state of neglect, many imams and religion teachers are weak in religious knowledge (which necessitated the establishment of new *madrastas*), and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Bulgaria, Islamic religious institutions have experienced serious internal crises<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, in none of these countries did such institutions obtain restitution of the rights and property they had before World War II : the only country where shariat law is still in force for family issues is Greece, the restitution of the *waqfs* (religious estates) has been slow and partial, and religion has been introduced only in the Bosnian schools, and this as an optional subject. It seems that

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<sup>16</sup> Since 1990, the two legal muftis appointed by the Greek authorities in Western Thrace have also been challenged by two "illegal" muftis close to the Turkish nationalist current which was led by Ahmed Sagik until his death in 1995.

neither the authoritarian secularization nor the larger social and cultural changes of the communist period can be undone.

There are other signs of a deep secularization among the Muslim populations, and of a persistent weakness of Islamic religious institutions. Most importantly, there is no re-Islamization of the way of life : the few campaigns of re-Islamization led by the SDA and religious institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina have sparked furious controversies, and have actually led, paradoxically, to a certain discreditation of Islam, as religion has been suspected of becoming a tool in the hands of opportunists and former communists. What's more, the Islamic religious institutions' monopoly on the interpretation of Islam is now being questioned by various religious groups, intellectuals and ordinary believers. Religion remains an irreplaceable marker of collective identity, but religiosity has become more and more an individual attitude.

The reshaping of relations between religious and political actors has to be considered within this context. First of all, the end of the communist regimes has been followed by a loosening of state control over religious institutions. But the Balkan states still exert some influence over religious life, through the privileged status given to Orthodoxy or to the three main religions of the country (Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism) in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, and through close links, either administratively or through financial aid, which exist between state authorities in charge of religious affairs (the State Secretariat for Religions in Albania, the Directorate for Religious Affairs in Bulgaria, etc.) and religious hierarchies.

Such situations have led to different forms of connivance. In Albania, the Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox religious hierarchies have supported the Democratic Party in the first years after its accession to power in March 1992, and the relations between this party and the Islamic religious leaders have remained close even after the fall of Sali Berisha in June 1997. In Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece, state authorities sided with the Islamic religious hierarchy against dissident factions, in exchange for discreet support to moderate Muslim political leaders. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the state

authorities hastened to endorse a "coup" of the pan-Islamist current within the Islamic religious institutions, and thereafter delegated to them various foreign policy missions such as fund raising in the diaspora and the wider Muslim world.

The Bosnian case brings to light another major aspect of the recent evolution of Islamic religious institutions, which is the influence exerted over them by the main Muslim political parties. In moves similar to those of the SDA, which brutally took control of the Bosnian Islamic religious institutions in April 1993, the PPD in Macedonia and the DPS in Bulgaria took pains to ensure that the new religious leaders elected after 1990 were close to their parties. Likewise, dissident religious factions are often linked to political ones : in Macedonia, the leaders of the "radical" PPSSH supported a dissident faction in the local religious institutions of Tetovo ; in Bulgaria, the self-proclaimed Grand Mufti Nedim Gendzhev threatened to create its own political party in the case that state authorities would not recognize his legitimacy. But there are only a few religious actors, such as the muftis of Mostar (Seid Smajkić) or Zenica (Halil Mehtić) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who have enough legitimacy and resources to acquire any real autonomy<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, as a general rule, the religious actors prefer to follow cautiously in the wake of state and political actors. The case of the Islamic religious institutions of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which have clashed openly with Yugoslav authorities, does not really contradict this rule. On one hand, the Islamic religious institutions of the former Yugoslavia remained in favor of keeping Yugoslavia together until 1991, even while the Catholic church actively supported Slovenian and Croatian bid for independence, and the Orthodox church was deeply compromised by its involvement in Serbian nationalism. On the other hand, the Muslim religious leaders of Kosovo and Sandjak are currently involved in an open conflict with the new Yugoslav authorities,

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<sup>17</sup> In Mostar, Seid Smajkić was one of the main organizers of the Muslim resistance against the Croatian HVO in May 1993, and Halil Mehtić was closely linked to the *mujahideens* (foreign Muslim fighters) and the Islamic NGO's present in Central Bosnia during the war. H. Mehtić was dismissed by the *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Cerić (who is close to the SDA) in November 1997.

but at the same time they submit to the "Kosovo Republic" set up by the LDK, or to the Bosnian Islamic religious institutions controlled by the SDA.

All of this means that almost without exception, political actors prevail over religious actors. It is thus necessary to clarify in what ways these political actors utilize Islam, and to which types of political practices and ideologies such instrumentalizations of religion are connected. With this in mind, it is possible to distinguish three main patterns :

1) in the first one, Islam is nothing more than a common ethnic marker, a symbolic resource bringing which brings added prestige to political notables, and further legitimates their practices of client-patron reciprocity. Such a pattern is often accompanied by close links between religious and political leaders (through friendship, kinship or common place of origin), and can be used to accurately describe the uses of Islam by the DPS in Bulgaria, the PPD in Macedonia and the Democratic Party in Albania, for the purpose of strengthening their electoral bases ;

2) in the second pattern, on the contrary, radical nationalists try to instrumentalize Islam in order to contest the dominant ethnic party. In April 1996 in Skopje, for example, the PPDSH formed a coalition with the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" and chose an imam as a candidate in order to win a deputy seat against the PPD. In this pattern, which also applies to the Party of National Recovery (PRK) led by Avdi Baleta in Albania, the radicalization of nationalism encourages both the Islamization of the national identity and the "nationalization" of Islam ;

3) in the third pattern, Islam is perceived both as a political community transcending the national belongings, and as a political project which strives for a true re-Islamization of the Muslim populations. This pan-Islamic and ideological view of Islam is supported by small Islamist groups such as the Organization of Islamic Youth in Albania, the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" in Macedonia, or the Bosnian panIslamist current which created the SDA in 1990.

The case of the SDA in Bosnia-Herzegovina makes clear that, in practice, these three patterns can be combined together: the pan-Islamist current did create the SDA, but this party later incorporated various strains of Muslim nationalism and numerous patron-client networks from the Bosnian Muslim community. While Islamists in Albania and Macedonia remain on the margins of the political life (although a candidate of the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" was elected in Gostivar in the general election of 1994, as a result of its entering into a coalition with the Turkish Democratic Party), the Bosnian pan-Islamist current has in this way managed to propel itself to the top of the new political elites, and thus to come to power. However, if there were to be a general crisis of the SDA that led to the creation of a separate Islamist party in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such a party would likely gather only a small minority of the Muslim votes (from 5 % to 15 % according to the most likely estimations).

Be that as it may, the appearance and the possible success of such Islamist movements is not related to a high level of religiosity : the Bosnian Muslim population is for long one of the most secularized of the Balkans, and the traditional and rural religiosity of the Muslims in Western Thrace, Bulgaria or Macedonia does encourage the maintenance of patron-client practices, but hinders the spread of an ideological and militant Islam. In the Balkans, as elsewhere, Islamist movements appear in the ranks of the intelligentsia and of the academic youth, acting as substitutes for communist commitment as often as for traditional Islamic beliefs. As for the ability of these movements to exert political influence on the Balkan Muslim populations, this seems to depend on two main factors : a close link between Islam and national identity on the one hand, and an escalation of interethnic tensions on the other hand. In such situations, Islamist movements can place themselves at the forefront of populist and nationalist mobilizations of Muslim populations, and can instrumentalize Islam for their own aims, as shown by the "Bosnian exception".

## Conclusion : is there an "Islamic threat" in the Balkans ?

The great diversity of contexts aside, one of the main developments common to all Balkan Muslim populations since 1989 is their emergence as autonomous political actors. This evolution does not represent a danger or an anomaly, but a logical consequence of the collapse of the communist regimes and a sign of these Muslim populations entering European political modernity.

It would therefore be unjustified and dangerous to present Balkan Islam and its current evolutions as a threat to Europe. There is no "green axis" in the Balkans, and the Muslim populations of this region are not a crisis factor, but victims and actors among others in a wider regional crisis. In concrete terms, political or religious leaders of the Muslim communities are not primarily to blame for the violent conflicts in which these populations were or are involved. The Bosnian conflict was linked to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, and to a violent reshaping of the Serbo-Croatian space led by the Serbian and Croatian nationalist leaders. The conflict in Kosovo is the result of the repressive and discriminatory policy led by the Serbian authorities since the end of the 1980's. In order to understand and to prevent other possible conflicts involving Balkan Muslim populations (e.g., Macedonia, Sandjak), it will always be necessary to take account of the general context of the region.

This does not mean that the Muslim political and religious actors do not bear any responsibility for the present situation, or that there is no ultra-nationalist or radical Islamist currents in the Balkan Muslim populations. But these are minority currents, which have managed to overcome their own marginality only when the escalation of political and ethnic tensions have allowed them to instrumentalize the national and political frustrations of the Muslim populations. The creation of the SDA by the Bosnian pan-Islamist current in 1990 and the rise of the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998 are good illustrations of such a process. In contrast, recent evolutions of the SDA (the moderate turn of Alija Izetbegović and defeat of the radical wing led by Hasan Prizmić at the second Congress of the SDA in October 1997, and the stagnation of

voter support for this party in the general election of September 1998) show that even an incomplete and precarious "normalization" of the political situation leads to the muting and decline in power of these radical currents.

Moreover, the appearance of such currents is also a natural consequence of the re-establishment of religious and political freedoms in the Balkans, and can indirectly contribute to the internal pluralization of Islam and the individualization of faith in this region. Within this context, a stigmatization or a criminalization of radical currents would only incite them to more and more radicalism and turn their members into martyrs, as has already been shown in the case of the Bosnian pan-Islamists, jailed in 1983 as scapegoats of the Yugoslav communist party, who were released a few years later as heroes of the Muslim cause.

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