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In the last decade, the Balkan Muslim populations have been involved in most of the crises that have shaken the region, from the massive exodus of Bulgarian Turks in 1989 to the war in Kosovo in 1998-99, through the Bosnian conflict in 1992-95 and the Albanian civil war in 1997. This, of course, does not mean that Islam itself was the explanatory factor in these crises: they were political in nature, even when religious symbols and religious actors played an important part, as has been true in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, inevitably, Balkan Islam has been influenced by the political events that followed the collapse of communism in Southeastern Europe. Conversely, a solid understanding of the new realities of post-Communist Balkans requires that one considers certain developments specific to the Muslim populations.

Unfortunately, analyses of contemporary Balkan Islam have been largely superficial and full of exaggerations. Some conjured up visions of a “green diagonal” penetrating the flank of a Christian Europe; others referred 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 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 seems therefore necessary to outline a new approach to Balkan Islam, one which stresses its internal diversity and recent transformations. This paper deals with the relationship between Islam and politics in the post-Communist Balkans from that perspective. The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors was 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 countries. 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.

Muslim Populations as New 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 clientelistic bonds. Only the Bosnian Muslim notables succeeded in building their own party, but they also maintained allegiance to the central authorities, while shifting alliances back and forth between Serbian and Croatian political forces. The communist period encouraged the formation of new Muslim elites (professors and teachers, physicians, engineers, and so on) and the crystallization of national identities that until then had remained

unclear and fluid, as shown by the case of the Bosnian Muslims and the Albanians in Yugoslavia. But it was only after with the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989-90 that these social and cultural changes got their political expression.

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 law 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 of Democratic Action (SDA) for the Bosnian Muslims, and Party of Democratic Prosperity (PPD) for the Albanians of Macedonia. The ban of ethnic parties became therefore 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. More precisely, they were led 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 Dogan, 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 that appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1930s and whose main representative was Alija Izetbegovic himself. But the SDA also had to incorporate intellectuals and notables coming from the League of Communists in order to become a mass party¹. 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, however, did prefer to vote for the former communists, owing to some specific identity choices (“Yugoslavism” of the Bosnian urban elites, Pomak identity in some Bulgarian villages²) or to general fears of economic reforms and land restitution to former owners.

The triumph of the Muslim parties therefore did not correspond to a monolithic Muslim vote. In those places where different 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, but the SDA itself split in 1991 into a pan-Islamist 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 1990s, resulting in the formation of several new parties. The Party for the Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians (PPDSH) in Macedonia was formed in 1994 and merged in 1996 with the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) to create the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH). The Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (SBiH) was created in 1995, led by the former prime minister, Haris Silajdzic. The Albanian Democratic Movement (LDSH) was formed in 1998. But the LDK was already challenged by the Parliamentarian Party (PP), created in 1990 and led by Adem Demaqi since 1996. The Turkish, Gipsy and Bosnian Muslim parties of Macedonia also experienced internal splits, as did the SDA of Sandjak between 1994 and 1998.

¹ About this pan-Islamist current and its role in the creation of the SDA, see Bougarel 1997.

² Pomaks are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. There are about 165,000 Pomaks in Bulgaria (Western Rhodopes), and 30,000 in Greece (Western Thrace).

There were two Turkish parties in Kosovo, one linked to the “Kosovo Republic” (the Popular Turkish Party, or THP) and the other to the Serbian authorities (the Turkish Democratic Union, or TDB). The SDA representing the Bosnian Muslims in Kosovo supported the “Kosovo Republic”, but the Democratic Reform Party of the Muslims (DRSM) representing the Torbeshs (Macedonian-speaking Muslims) and the Gorani (Serbian-speaking Muslims) of the Prizren area, did not.

The situation in Bulgaria seems to be different, since the DPS led by Ahmed Dogan has had no direct rival³. But this is only a relative difference. During the general election of April 1997, Giuner Tahir, Dogan’s main rival inside the DPS, decided to run on the list of the United Democratic Forces, a coalition led by the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), without leaving the DPS. The Turks of the Rhodopes (Dogan’s home region) remained loyal to the DPS, but many Turks of the Deli Orman (Tahir’s home) decided to vote for the United Democratic Forces. Conversely, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia, the splitting parties have built electoral coalitions with the main ethnic parties from which they split: 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; the PPD and the PDSH also formed a coalition for the Macedonian general elections of October 1998.

In order fully to 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 has remained in force⁴: in 1993, the Albanian authorities refused to register the Party of Islamic Democratic Union, and there is no Muslim party in Albania, at least officially⁵. 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 that country too, the election of the independent candidate Ahmed Sadik in the general election of April 1990 showed that 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 parties⁶.

In the 1990s, the Balkan Muslims have created not only 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 Muslim Intellectuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Association of the Muslim Intellectuals in Albania. These organisations were often used 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 were able to play a very important role at the political and financial level, as shown by the case of the Albanian diaspora from Kosovo. But this diasporic situation did not encourage the crossing of ethnic

³ The DPS experienced two splits in 1993 and 1994, but the two splitting parties (the Turkish Democratic Party and the Party for the Democratic Changes) remained marginal and disappeared short after their creation.

⁴ The Albanian authorities, however, tolerated the creation of the Union for the Human Rights (*Omonia*, or BDN) which represents the Greek Orthodox minority.

⁵ The Party of National Recovery (PRK) led by Avdi Baleta can be seen as a Muslim party, since it strongly emphasizes the links between Islam and Albanian national identity.

⁶ This electoral law specifies that a candidate can be elected to parliament only if the party to which he or she belongs wins more than 3 percent of the vote at the national level.

boundaries. In Germany, the Bosnian Muslims and the Albanians jealously preserved their autonomy vis à vis the tutelage of their Turkish “brothers”. And in Istanbul, even the Turks from Bulgaria and the Turks from Western Thrace have created two distinct associations.

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors has been thus a general phenomenon. But their position in the political life of each Balkan state has varied to a considerable extent. First, it is possible to distinguish some parties that have made only cultural claims at the symbolical level (the return of the use of Turkish names in Bulgaria, the replacement of the religious designation “Muslim” by the national designation “Turk” in Greece) or at the institutional level (teaching in the Turkish language in Bulgaria and Romania) from others that have focused on political claims (independence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, territorial autonomy in Sandjak). Second, some parties have accepted prevailing Constitutions and taken part in power sharing, like the DPS in Bulgaria, while others refused to participate in existing institutions and created their own parallel ones. Examples of these latter parties are the LDK in Kosovo, where the “Kosovo Republic” was proclaimed in July 1990, and the SDA in Sandjak, where the National Muslim Council of the Sandjak was created in May 1991.

Of course, these two aspects are closely related. From both perspectives, Macedonia did constitute an intermediate case. There, the Albanian parties called for the recognition of the Albanians as one of the two constituent nations of this state and even held a referendum on the territorial autonomy of Western Macedonia in January 1992. But they have concentrated their practical claims on the implementation of complete bilingualism in administration and the school system, and have taken part in ruling coalitions⁷. As for the Turkish and Gipsy parties, they have been loyal to the Macedonian state and hostile to the idea of autonomy in Western Macedonia.

Several factors can explain these differences in the attitudes of Muslim parties. The most important is obviously the demographic balance in each state or territory: the Muslim parties have been more tempted to put forward political claims where the Muslims make up an absolute majority (Kosovo) or relative majority (Bosnia-Herzegovina) of the population than where they represent only a small minority (Greece, Romania). But this demographic factor can not explain why there were some claims for territorial autonomy in Macedonia and in Sandjak, and not in Bulgaria.

Therefore, some political factors must also be taken into account. On the one hand, the Muslim populations of Yugoslavia had experienced a federal system in which multilingualism and territorial autonomy were self-evident, while those of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania were accustomed to states with a single constituent nation and official language. On the other hand, the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s, and thereafter the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Montenegro) and Macedonia were in deep political crises, while the others have remained more or less stable.

Finally, the importance of concrete political decisions must not be underestimated. The repressive and discriminatory policies of Serbia, for example, could only lead 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 organized by the Kosovo

⁷ From 1990 to 1998, the Party of Democratic Prosperity joined in a coalition led by the Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM). After the general elections of October 1998, the Interior Revolutionary Macedonian Movement (VMRO) and the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH) formed a new coalition.

Liberation Army (UCK). Conversely, the restoration of the rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria 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) have contributed to the easing of interethnic tensions and the marginalization of extreme nationalists. The radicalization of the Albanians of Macedonia, however, shows that the long-term political integration of the Muslim populations requires both socioeconomic advancement and cultural recognition.

The New Relationship between Islam and National Identity

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors went hand in hand with the politicization of their ethnic identity. The best illustration of this phenomenon was no doubt the decision taken in September 1993 by the *Bosnjacki Sabor* (Bosniac Assembly)⁸ to replace the old national name “Muslim” with the new “Bosniak” 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 significant efforts to strengthen the Muslim/Bosniak national identity, such as the formalization of a Bosnian language different from both Serbian and Croatian languages.

A similar process of politicization of ethnic identity took place among Slavic-speaking Pomaks (in Bulgaria and Greece) or Torbeshes (in Macedonia), as well as among the Gipsies across the whole Balkan peninsula. None of these populations had until then possessed any precise national identity. But only recognition as legitimate ethno-national groups could enable them to accede to some political visibility, and in turn to mobilize internal or external political resources. Within this context, these small populations could adopt three different identity strategies.

The first aimed at a merging into a larger Muslim group that already enjoyed an institutional recognition of its identity. This was the strategy adopted by many Torbeshes in Macedonia and Pomaks or Gipsies in Bulgaria, who declared themselves Turks, as well as some Gipsies in Macedonia and Kosovo who claimed to be Egyptians. The second strategy involved affiliation with the dominant Christian nation. This tactic has led Muslims to claim to be Greeks, Macedonians or Bulgarians of Islamic faith and, in Bulgaria, to keep the Christian names imposed by the state in the 1980s during the assimilation campaign (at times, this strategy has been combined with conversion to Protestantism, especially by Pomaks). Of course, this type of identity choice has been encouraged by the state authorities and was adopted in the first place by those who were or intended to become civil servants. Finally, a third strategy involved defining a distinctive Roma (Gipsy), Pomak or Torbesh identity, insisting on its official recognition. This strategy involved an “invention of the tradition” (Eric Hobsbawn), as can be seen in the reference made by some Pomaks and Torbeshes to hypothetical pre-Ottoman Turkish or Arab origins.

Thus, the process of politicization of the Muslim ethnic identities has been sometimes quite obvious, as in the outright renaming of whole groups. A potential process of re-Islamization of these same identities has been more difficult to perceive. In fact, the situations did vary considerably from group to group. There has been no re-Islamization of the Gipsy identity, as the high level of segmentation of this ethnic community prevents any common reference to

⁸ During the war, the *Bosnjacki Sabor* gathered together the main political, religious and cultural representatives of the Bosnian Muslim nation.

Islam. In contrast, the Bosnian Muslim community did inevitably tend to stress its belonging to Islam as the main factor distinguishing it from the Serbian (Orthodox) and Croatian (Catholic) communities, and the leaders of the SDA have openly supported the re-Islamization of the Muslim/Bosniak identity. Moreover, this process of re-Islamization was accelerated by the war, as shown by the development of a cult of the *shahids* (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 use of Islam as a central ethnic reference has been possible for some Pomaks, who tried in this way to compensate for their lack of a legitimate national identity, as well as for members of the traditional Muslim elites of some towns in Macedonia and in Kosovo, who reasserted in this way their difference from and superiority to the neo-urban elites in control of the Albanian nationalist parties. In the Albanian and the Turkish communities, however, Islam has remained secondary in relation to national and linguistic identity, although religious references have been sometimes used to facilitate the national assimilation of small Slavic-speaking populations (Torbeshes in Macedonia, Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece), or to accentuate some internal cultural and 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 such as Ismail Kadare and Ibrahim Rugova have claimed that conversion to Islam was harmful to the Albanian nation, because it involved the severing of the links with Western Europe and a lasting identification with the Ottoman Empire. Religious leaders and some Muslim intellectuals, however, have replied that only Islam protected the Albanians from total cultural assimilation by the Greeks and Serbs.

This debate was not only an academic one. In Albania, the Democratic Party, which was dominated by Sunni Muslims from the northeast of the country and remained closer to Muslim religious leaders, took up again some of their arguments, while the Socialist Party, successor of the former Communist Party and well established in the Orthodox and Bektashi south, repeated the classical 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 has favoured an identification of Islam with Albanian national identity.

While the re-Islamization of the national identity of Balkan Muslim populations has been a partial and limited process, the converse one –the “nationalization” of Islam – has known no exception. From this point of view, national identity turned out to be stronger than religious identity. The best illustration of this “nationalization” of Islam was the splitting of Yugoslav Islamic religious institutions along national lines, which was, paradoxically, caused by the Bosnian pan-Islamists! Indeed, in April 1993, the SDA decided, against the will of the majority of the religious leaders, to create new religious institutions limited to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the 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 (Torbesh) religious leaders were replaced 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 remained perceptible through the ethnic rather than religious meanings associated with the celebration of the main religious feasts, the organization of Sufi pilgrimages, or the opening ceremonies for the consecration of new mosques. Politicians have very well understood the importance of such events, and have systematically made efforts to attend them. The end of the communist regimes has therefore led to a change not only in the relationship between Islam and national identity, but also in the links between religious and political actors.

The New Links between Religious and Political Actors

Between 1989 and 1998, Islamic religious institutions in the Balkans have experienced a clear resurgence in activity. This trend was perceptible in all of the former communist countries of the region, but was especially obvious in Albania, where Islamic institutions reappeared after twenty-two years of complete prohibition. Such processes of renewal were characterized by the building or restoration of numerous mosques, the development of religious newspapers and publishing houses, and the opening of several Islamic schools. At the end of the 1980s, there were only three *madrasas* (Islamic secondary schools) in the Balkans – in Sarajevo, Pristina and Skopje – and a single Islamic Theology Faculty in Sarajevo. Ten years later, there were ten *madrasas* 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 education were opened in the region – two in Bosnia-Herzegovina, one in Kosovo, one in Macedonia and one in Bulgaria.

This unquestionable renewal of activity was not, however, synonymous with a “restoration” of Islamic religious institutions. On one hand, after half a century of communism, the re-establishment of religious freedom has also 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 has necessitated the establishment of new *madrasas*), and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Bulgaria, Islamic religious institutions have experienced serious internal crises⁹. On the other hand, in none of these countries did such institutions obtain restitution of the rights and properties they had before World War II. The only country where *shari‘a* law is still in force for family issues is Greece, the restitution of the *waqfs* (religious estates) has been slow and partial, and religious education has been introduced only in the Bosnian schools, and this as an optional subject. It seems that neither the authoritarian secularization nor the larger social and cultural changes of the communist period can be undone.

Other signs indicate a deep secularization among the Muslim populations, and a persistent weakness of Islamic religious institutions. Most importantly, there is no re-Islamization of Muslims’ 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 discrediting of Islam, as many have come to see religion as a tool in the hands of political opportunists and former communists. What’s more, Islamic religious

⁹ 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 Sadik until his death in 1995.

institutions' monopoly on the interpretation of Islam has been questioned by various religious groups, intellectuals and ordinary believers. Whereas religion remains an irreplaceable marker of collective identity, religiosity has become more and more an individual issue.

The changes in the relationship between religious and political actors has to be considered within this context. First of all, with the end of the communist regimes has come 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, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, to the three traditional religions of the country (Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism), and through the close administrative and financial links existing between religious hierarchies and state authorities in charge of religious affairs (such as the State Secretariat for Religions in Albania or the Directorate for Religious Affairs in Bulgaria).

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 relationship between this party and the Islamic religious leaders has 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 the "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 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 were often linked to political ones: in Macedonia, the leaders of the "radical" PPDSH supported a dissident faction in the local religious institutions of Tetovo and, 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 were only a few religious actors, such as the muftis of Mostar (Seid Smajkic) or Zenica (Halil Mehtic) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who have had enough legitimacy and resources to acquire any real autonomy¹⁰.

Thus, as a general rule, the religious actors preferred 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. The Islamic religious institutions of the former Yugoslavia remained in favor of keeping Yugoslavia together until 1991, while the Catholic church was already supporting Slovenian and Croatian bids for independence, and the Orthodox church was actively taking part to the awakening of Serbian nationalism. Thereafter, the Muslim religious leaders of Kosovo and Sandjak have been involved in open conflicts with the new Yugoslav authorities, but at the same time they submitted to the "Kosovo Republic" set up by the LDK, or to the Bosnian Islamic religious institutions controlled by the SDA.

¹⁰ In Mostar, Seid Smajkic was one of the main organizers of the Muslim resistance against the Croatian HVO in May 1993, and in Zenica, Halil Mehtic was closely linked to the *mujahideens* (foreign Muslim fighters) and the Islamic NGOs present in Central Bosnia during the war. H. Mehtic was dismissed by the Bosnian *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Ceric (who is close to the SDA) in November 1997.

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

1) Islam is nothing more than a common ethnic marker, a symbolic resource that brings added prestige to political notables and further legitimizes their clientelistic practices. Such a pattern is often accompanied by close links between religious and political leaders (through kinship, friendship 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.

2) Radical nationalists try to use Islam 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) Islam is perceived both as a political community transcending the national belongings (the *Umma*), and as a political project that 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 pan-Islamist current that 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 nationalist currents and numerous clientelistic networks from the Bosnian Muslim community. While Islamists in Albania and Macedonia remained 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 managed to propel itself to the top of the new political elites, and thus to come to power.

The appearance and the possible success of such Islamist movements is not related to a high level of religiosity: the Bosnian Muslim population has for long been one of the most secularized of the Balkans, and while the traditional and rural religiosity of the Muslims in Western Thrace, Bulgaria or Macedonia did encourage the maintenance of clientelistic practices, it hindered the spread of an ideological and militant Islam. In the Balkans, as elsewhere, Islamist movements appeared in the ranks of the intelligentsia and of 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 use 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 the integration of these Muslim populations into 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, neither political nor religious leaders of the Muslim communities are primarily to blame for the violent conflicts in which these populations were or are involved. The Bosnian conflict was linked to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and to a territorial reshaping of the Serbo-Croatian space led by the Serbian and Croatian nationalist leaders. The conflict in Kosovo was the result of the repressive and discriminatory policy led by the Serbian authorities since the end of the 1980s. In order to understand and to prevent other possible conflicts involving Balkan Muslim populations, in Macedonia or Sandjak for example, 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 no radical nationalist or Islamist currents are at work in the Balkan Muslim populations. But these are minorities, which have managed to overcome their own marginality only when the escalation of political and ethnic tensions has allowed them to make use of 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, the defeat of the SDA in the Bosnian general elections of November 2000 shows that even an incomplete and precarious normalization of the situation leads to the decline of these radical currents.

Moreover, the appearance of such currents has also to be considered as 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. Against this background, 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 League of Communists, and released a few years later as heroes of the Muslim cause.

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