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Mobilizations for Western Thrace and Cyprus in Contemporary Turkey: From the Far Right to the Lexicon of Human Rights*

This chapter raises the issue of the symbolic and political role of migrants from the Balkans in the (re)definition and promotion of contemporary Turkish nationalism. My research mainly deals with the mobilization of associations representing the “Turks” from Western Thrace (Greece) living in Turkey. They are designated as “Batı Trakyalı” in colloquial Turkish, and I will use this term as well in order to avoid any confusion between those who are Greek citizens and Turkish citizens.

In the 1960s and 70s, along with ultranationalist movements, these associations contributed to the revival of the myth of the Ottoman Empire’s “lost territories” owing to a “chauvinist and aggressive” political context also marked by claims on Cyprus.¹ “Lost territories” refer to the National Pact adopted in 1920 by the dissident National Assembly in Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. This assembly rejected the transfer of territories to European countries that had been negotiated by the Ottoman government in Istanbul and confirmed by the Treaty of Sèvres. Three years later, however, the Ankara Parliament ratified the Treaty of Lausanne, which delineated the borders of contemporary Turkey and recognized Western Thrace as a Greek province. The compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey was organized by an addendum to the Lausanne Treaty, from which the Muslim population of Western Thrace and the Orthodox population of Istanbul (and of the Turkish islands Bozcaada and Gökçeada) were

* I would like to thank Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel for their helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.

¹ M. Tunçay, “About the First Article of the National Pact,” *Birikim*, 1976, No. 18-19, p. 12-16 (in Turkish).

exempted. They were officially defined as minorities and were granted specific rights for the first time in international law².

Strictly speaking, the abovementioned National Pact did not make any claims on Western Thrace. But nowadays it is commonplace to read in Turkish newspapers that it is “a part of our National Pact.” Neither was Cyprus an issue at the end of the Ottoman Empire, whereas it is the very embodiment of contemporary nationalism based on the “Turkish world”: namely the Balkans, the Caucasus, central Asia, Iraq (Kirkuk) and Cyprus. Moreover, the success of the Western Thrace Turks’ mobilization seems to be due to their success in the 1970s in linking this issue with that of Cyprus. The EU has become an arbitrator in this issue, since Batı Trakyalı, whose representatives in Greece recognize Turkey as a “kin-state,” became European citizens in 1981.

My contribution to this volume recounts the different stages of a mobilization that accompanied the re-appropriation by official ideology, after the 1980 coup d’état, of the “Turkish world” issue that was traditionally promoted by far rightist movements. I will first emphasize the way organizations that represent the “Turkish world” gained the status of official interlocutor, in spite of Turkish authorities’ strong distrust toward any expression of local cultural identities. Indeed, these are considered a kind of “separatism,” particularly in reference to Kurdish cultural demands. The Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association (BTTDD)³ will be presented as a case study. The aim is to recount the interactions and negotiations linked to the construction of a public issue in a “praetorian regime” in which, especially since the 1960s, the military, supported by the high-ranking civil bureaucracy, has exercised “independent political power, either by

² *Actes signés à Lausanne le 30 janvier et le 24 juillet 1923 et actes signés à Sèvres le 10 août 1920*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1923.

³ *Batı Trakya Türkleri Dayanışma Derneği*, which will be referred to by its acronym.

using force or by threatening to do so.”⁴ In addition, “the military also intervenes in politics via its constant presence in the public sphere on the part of the highest reaches of the military hierarchy.”⁵

As a state-approved association, BTTDD has been granted financial and political support by all Turkish governments since its foundation. Its leaders’ speech, claiming it is a “civil society organization,” should not lead us to substantiate theories in vogue nowadays in the social sciences, according to which “civil society” is a factor of Europeanization and democratization challenging “official” political power.⁶ Neither is BTTDD simply a cog in the machine: the interactions between its representatives and Turkish officials are complex and consist of constant negotiations, as well as divergent opinions. On the one hand, from the 1960s onwards, it went beyond its stated purpose (namely assisting the government in taking in and settling migrants) and succeeded in making the Western Thrace issue a part of the Turkish political agenda with regard to the “national struggle” (*millî dava*). On the other hand, in the 1970 and 80s, these associations’ connections with several extreme rightist organizations represented a challenge to the state’s authority, as well as their obvious connections today with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP)⁷. Associations of migrants from the Balkans and Caucasus grouped together as federations and confederations, forming a “competitive arena” of “Turks from

⁴ W. Hale, *Turkish Military and Politics*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 305. There were three coups between 1960 and 1980.

⁵ A. İnel, “‘Cet État n’est pas sans propriétaires !’ Forces prétorienne et autoritarisme en Turquie” in O. Dabène, V. Geisser & G. Massardier (eds.) *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au 21^{ème} siècle*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 3.

⁶ For an overview, T. Diez, A. Agnantopoulos & A. Kaliber (eds.) “Turkey, Europeanization and Civil Society,” *South European Society & Politics*, 2005, 10 (1): 1-15. For a critical stance, see Y. Navaro-Yashin, “Uses and Abuses of ‘State and Civil Society’ in Contemporary Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 1998, 18: 1-22.

⁷ The Muslim conservative party AKP (in power since 2002) is considered by the military and a great part of the civil bureaucracy as a threat to the Turkish secularism. In April 2007, the military threatened to use force to prevent Abdullah Gül (AKP) from being elected President of the Turkish Republic. Moreover, state-approved associations must remain apolitical.

abroad” articulated with the political one.⁸ Thus it is not exact to state that the de-legitimization of militant commitments after the 1980 coup d’état has confirmed the “separation between formal politics dominated by parties, and civic groups.”⁹

This paper will then examine the definition of an international and European strategy for promoting the Western Thrace issue in the 1990s, in consultation with state representatives. I will emphasize the *de facto* supervision by the Turkish state over the Western Thrace Turks’ mobilizations in different scenes (mainly Germany and Western Thrace), and their abdication of their contentious arguments for others based on lobbying for human and minority rights. Unlike the literature on “civil society,” I stress the learning and use of a repertoire of European actions by actors close to state representatives in order to promote Turkish national interests in Western Thrace. “Europe” refers not only to the European Union: norms dealing with human rights standards were first defined by the Council of Europe and organizations such as the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, before becoming in the 1990s a full part of *acquis communautaire*. Consequently, “Europe” has also become part of the vocabulary framing political struggle in the Greek-Turkish rivalry.

I. AGENDA SETTING IN A CONTEXT OF POLITICAL RADICALIZATION (1967-80)

I. The institutionalization of hosting refugees from former Ottoman provinces

Like the various associations of “Turks from abroad,” BTTDD was created in 1946 to organize the settlement of migrants and refugees who had fled World War II, and then the Greek

⁸ In 2004, for instance, among the 30 BTTDD representatives to the Rumelian Turks Federation were listed MP Mustafa Dündar and Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, president of Istanbul local assembly, both AKP members.

⁹ P. Kubicek, “The Earthquake, Civil Society and Political Change in Turkey: Assessment and Comparison With Eastern Europe,” *Political Studies*, 2002, 50 (4): 770.

civil war.¹⁰ In 1954, along with other mutual aid associations for Balkan migrants, BTTDD created the Federation of Turkish Migrants and Refugees Associations, which became a state-approved organization in 1960. This Federation embodied pan-Turkish nationalism *vis-à-vis* provinces ruled by communists and Greeks. In this respect, the Turkish migratory policy as regards Western Thrace has always been ambivalent: In this respect, the Turkish migratory policy has always been ambivalent -- considered a “Turkish province” since the end of the Ottoman Empire, official immigration from Western Thrace disappeared from the record books in the 1960s, though clandestine population movements continue to take place. From the 1970s onwards, the privileged relationship between BTTDD and police headquarters has been illustrated by the publication in journals connected to the association of precise information dealing with illegal immigrants, namely their exact place of origin in Western Thrace, the point where they entered Turkey, and a list of persons who were granted Turkish citizenship every month.

Created in 1967, *Western Thrace* (“*Bati Trakya*”) was the first journal to promote the Batı Trakyalı cause and BTTDD activities, without explicitly being the latter’s organ. But its owner and chief editor, Selahattin Yıldız, led the BTTDD twice in the 1970s, and then the Federation of Turkish Migrants and Refugees Associations in the 1980s until its dissolution in 1987.¹¹ In this journal, and also in the scope of protest actions, Batı Trakyalı activists appropriate themes that conform to the official historiography but that are also promoted by far right organizations such as the Association for Struggle Against Communism or the National Union of Turkish Students.¹²

¹⁰ It was named Western Thrace Migrants Mutual Aid Association until 1969.

¹¹ BTTDD is nowadays a member of the Rumelian Turks Federation together with the Rumelian Turks Association and the Georgian Turks Association.

¹² For an overview, see K. Can “Youth, Turkism and the Extreme Right. The ‘Idealist Hearths’” in S. Yerasimos, G. Seufert & K. Vorhoff (eds.) *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism*, Istanbul, Orient-Institut /IFEA, 2000, p. 335-373.

Western Thrace reproduces their rhetoric and relates their actions, which are sometimes organized in common with BTTDD members.¹³ One has to keep in mind the context of the 1960 and 70s, where political life was strongly polarized between far rightist and leftist movements leading to a quasi civil war, put to an end by the 1980 coup d'état.

1.2. Re-definition of the “national struggle”

In the same vein as the pan-Turkist rhetorical flaying of the “enemies of the Turkish nation,” *Western Thrace*'s content was virulent towards Armenians and “*Rum*,” (Greek speaking orthodox Christians) be they from Istanbul, Cyprus or Greece. During the 1960s, a decade of “fragmentation and radicalisation,” the Kemalist doctrine was “challenged by new ideologies and social projects.”¹⁴ In 1969, the Party of Nationalist Action (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) was founded by Alparslan Türkeş, who popularized the idea of a “Turco-Islamic synthesis”¹⁵ and a Turkish nation transcending contemporary Turkey's borders. His movement clearly influenced Western Thrace Turks' identity mobilization, both in Turkey and Germany in the 1980s.

In this journal, there were various ways of linking the issues of Western Thrace and Cyprus. Firstly, *Western Thrace*, reprinted official petitions signed by BTTDD leaders and addressed to the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister or military authorities.¹⁶ In 1967, for instance, after the military junta came to power in Athens, the Association of Immigrants from Western Thrace (later BTTDD) petitioned President Cevdet Sunay to have “Western Thrace

¹³ See for instance (in Turkish), “Statement of the Association for Struggle Against Communism”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 4, August 1967; “Prayers in memory of the martyrs of the War of Independence”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 5, September 1967.

¹⁴ H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie contemporaine*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁵ A nationalist ideology considering Islam as an integral part of the Turkish identity. MHP is nowadays the third political force in Turkey.

¹⁶ “Telegrams”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 90, October 1974 (in Turkish). See also A. G. Altnay & T. Bora, “Army, Militarism and Nationalism” in T. Bora (ed.) *Political Thought in Modern Turkey...*, *op.cit.*, p. 140-154 (in Turkish).

and Cyprus saved together.”¹⁷ After the 1974 Cyprus crisis, similar telegrams were sent to the Prime Minister and military officers in order to denounce Greek retaliatory measures against Turks in Western Thrace. Indeed, Turkish military staff seemed to show a growing interest in the Western Thrace issue. Since the 1970 and 80s, staff officers’ interventions as experts in BTTDD journals or in conferences on the “Turkish world” have become commonplace. Appeals for military intervention then became clearer in *Western Thrace* journal, as illustrates, for example, an article published in January 1975, “Western Thrace front in Cyprus’s peace operation.”¹⁸ Secondly, narrative and semantic processes were used in order to connect events that occurred in Western Thrace and in Cyprus, such as simultaneously occurring deaths, even if no true link existed between them.¹⁹ The national press in Turkey also tended to conflate these two situations when the junta came to power in Athens.²⁰

On the other hand, a separate semantic process aimed at appropriating the expression “national struggle.” It was first used in reference to Cyprus by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in the 1950s and has then become a constant and preponderant element of the official rhetoric on that issue.²¹ The “national cause” or “struggle”²² adopted by BTTDD leaders concerning Western Thrace is omnipresent in *Western Thrace* journal’s writings from the 1970s onwards, and also in the interviews I conducted with the association’s representatives. The consequences of the 1974 conflict in Cyprus actually did in a way back up Batı Trakyalı militants in Turkey, since the

¹⁷ “Telegrams from the Western Thrace Immigrants Mutual Aid Association”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 8, December 1967 (in Turkish). Cevdet Sunay was himself a former staff officer and he approved the 1971 military Coup. See H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie contemporaine, op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ “Western Thrace front in Cyprus’s peace operation”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 93, January 1975 (in Turkish). “Peace operation” is the official expression used to name what is considered by international law as the military invasion of Northern Cyprus by Turkish army in 1974, after the failure of the coup d’état planned by Makarios and the Greek junta.

¹⁹ “Two Turks were killed in Cyprus and Western Thrace”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 3, July 1967 (in Turkish).

²⁰ “Turks in Western Thrace and Cyprus”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 4, August 1967 (in Turkish), based on an article published in *Sabah* daily newspaper.

²¹ G. T. Alpkaya, “Nationalism in ‘Turkish Foreign Policy’” in T. Bora (ed.) *Political Thought in Modern Turkey...op.cit.*, p. 155-167 (in Turkish).

²² In Turkish, it has the double meaning of cause and struggle, but also of trial.

Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus had strong repercussions on Western Thrace Turks' everyday life: considered a threat, they were subject to a curfew during several months and their hunting weapons were seized.

1.3. Protest action following in far right's wake

At its beginning, *Western Thrace* merely recounted the demonstrations organized by nationalist rightist groups, such as the Nation Union of Turkish Students,²³ which claimed a military intervention in Cyprus.²⁴ These articles' titles and content often refer to the Kemalist vulgate establishing youth as the guardian of the "Eternal Chief's" heritage. This vulgate was appropriated by military staff who decided the 1960 coup and in the following decade by the different rightist and leftist factions confronted to the civil government's political and economic mediocrity.²⁵

According to *Western Thrace's* archives, there was a turning point on April 13, 1974, when several Batı Trakyalı took part in such a demonstration for the first time. Nevertheless, BTTDD was not officially involved in this demonstration organized by the National Union of Turkish Students aiming at "warning Greeks," while the situation in Cyprus was becoming worse.²⁶ The report's author notes that he met several acquaintances whose "national consciousness" was "finally born." Three days earlier,²⁷ according to a mode of action that would be frequently used in the 1980s by BTTDD leaders, the National Union of Turkish Students' leader placed a funeral

²³ This organization used to illustrate the most radical pan-Turkist nationalism. It gave birth to the movement "Cyprus is Turkish" and disappeared after joining the Islamist Party of National Salvation in 1969.

²⁴ "Turkish youth has had its voice heard in meetings organized in Istanbul and Ankara", *Batı Trakya*, No. 7, November 1967 (in Turkish).

²⁵ H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie contemporaine, op.cit.*, p. 53-64

²⁶ "Beyazıt square in Istanbul experienced a historical day", *Batı Trakya*, No. 84, April 1974 (in Turkish). One of the Western Thrace movement's leaders, Ahmet Aydın, made a speech "on behalf of the Batı Trakyalı." He published in 1971 a satire entitled *Western Thrace's disaster*, which made him known as an intellectual of the Western Thrace cause. He was also president of BTTDD between 1981 and 1984.

²⁷ In the context of a negotiation breakdown in Cyprus on April 9th.

wreath in front of the Greek consulate in Istanbul which bore the following inscription: “Have you forgotten September 9th?”, referring to the date of the capture of Smyrna in 1922, the symbol of the Greek presence in Minor Asia, after Mustafa Kemal’s army defeated Greek invasion on August 30. Afterwards the crowd stood and sang the national anthem, and then scattered. One can see in the accompanying picture a group of persons wearing hoods: they were allegedly young Batı Trakyalı with Greek citizenship, fearing retaliation against themselves or their families if Greek authorities learned of their participation in this meeting.²⁸

This statement could not be fully verified, but interviews conducted with Batı Trakyalı of Greek citizenship who studied in Turkey – be it in the 1970s or in the 1990s – suggest a desire to avoid political mobilization in order not to draw the attention of either the Greek or Turkish authorities. One of my interlocutors had to interrupt his studies in the 1970s after he was expelled from Turkey for publicly claiming his sympathy for extreme leftist movements. Until recently, studying in Turkey was, for most of this population, the sole path toward social mobility. Besides, political issues related to Turkey often do not make sense for people who grew up in Greece. And, in any case, the aforementioned demonstrations do not seem to have been designed to mobilize Batı Trakyalı students or residents. In the classic manner of collective action, they were very likely organized to show the positioning of the associations of “Turks from abroad” within extreme right movements and to negotiate the latter’s high profile in the Turkish political arena.

1.4. Institutional mobilization and emergence of specific demands

These affirmations are reinforced by the fact that BTTDD leaders seem to have favored establishing close relationships with state representatives, to the detriment of protest actions.

²⁸ “Wreath deposit at consulate’s door and meeting illustrate demonstrators’ maturity,” *Batı Trakya*, No. 84, April 1974 (in Turkish).

They would in particular send delegations to Ankara to address the Prime Minister or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs about the situation of “Turks” in Western Thrace. Behind the rhetorical facade designed to appeal to Turkish interest in the region, the associations’ purpose was to heighten government awareness of Batı Trakyalı settled in Turkey without being blamed for promoting cultural identities at the expense of national unity.

The first of these delegations recounted in *Western Thrace* journal, in 1968, was dismissed by both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Interior.²⁹ This failure may illustrate the government’s caution towards an association whose political commitment was obvious, whereas an important agreement providing for teacher exchange in minority schools was to be signed with Greece the same year. Yet BTTDD representatives succeeded two years later: they were received by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and the person in charge of the Balkans committee in the Ministry for Foreign affairs.³⁰ Those visits became a kind of ritual aiming at reaffirming Batı Trakyalı’s allegiance towards Turkish governments: one of them occurred on the pretext of congratulating Bülent Ecevit’s government when it took office in 1974.³¹ After establishing such ties, demands shifted from the situation of “Turks” in Greece to the one of Batı Trakyalı living in Turkey: having the right to purchase property in Turkey and have an activity in trade and business sectors; and also the softening of procedures to be granted Turkish citizenship.³²

A few months before the 1980 coup, even though there had been no significant Batı Trakyalı immigration to Cyprus, a Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association was

²⁹ “Contacts of the board of the Association of Immigrants from Western Thrace in Ankara”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 14, June 1968 (in Turkish).

³⁰ “The association’s board was received by our Prime Minister, Mr. Demirel”, *Batı Trakya*, n°37, May 1970 (in Turkish).

³¹ “Contacts of the associations’ leaders in Ankara”, *Batı Trakya*, n°83, March 1974 (in Turkish).

³² “The claims of Western Thrace Turks living in Turkey but who still have Greek citizenship”, *Batı Trakya*, n°85, May 1974 (in Turkish).

founded in Nicosia.³³ It was BTTDD's twin organization led by Fikret Alasya, an ultranationalist Cypriot intellectual close to Rauf Denktaş. After the 1974 "peace operation," he became the representative in Cyprus of the Turkish Ministry of Defense.³⁴ Many of my interlocutors among BTTDD representatives deny the fact that such an association existed. The legitimacy of Batı Trakyalı's political and (Turkish) identity speech is indeed based on the assurance that such an identity claim will never open the door to secessionist thought or to any Turkish territorial demand concerning Greece. It is all the more important that Turkey's presence in Cyprus is considered a military occupation from the point of view of international law. After the 1980 coup, unlike most political parties and associations, BTTDD was not banned but had to leave its activities in abeyance. In the following months, in accordance with a decision of General Kenan Evren, some 6,000 Batı Trakyalı who were living in Turkey – many of them illegally – became Turkish citizens.³⁵ Taking advantage of the favorable context for the "Turks from outside," BTTDD claimed the creation of a "directorate general" dedicated to them, attached to the Prime Minister.³⁶ It is a fact that currently there is not only a vice Prime Minister but also state secretaries and state representatives at the local level who are in charge of the "Turkish world."³⁷

³³ "The anniversary of the Association of Western Thrace and Cyprus Turks association was celebrated", *Batı Trakya*, n°169, May 1981 (in Turkish).

³⁴ "Turks from Cyprus and Western Thrace", *Batı Trakya*, n°209, September 1984 (in Turkish).

³⁵ "6000 Batı Trakyalı fellowcountrymen are granted Turkish citizenship", *Batı Trakya*, n°167, March 1981 (in Turkish).

³⁶ "A Directorate General for the Turks from abroad depending on Prime Minister should be created", *Batı Trakya*, n°168, April 1981 (in Turkish).

³⁷ N. Özgür-Baklacıoğlu, "The Associations of Migrants from Rumelia and Balkan in Turkey's Balkan Policy: Expectations, Roles and Problems" in *Civil Society Organizations and Turkish Foreign Policy*, İstanbul, Marmara University editions, 2005, p. 9 (in Turkish).

II. SINCE 1980, A STATE-SPONSORED MOBILIZATION TOWARDS THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

II.1. The disowning of the ultranationalist right and the “official” demonstrations in the 1980s

Despite the fact that movements involved in the violent riots of the former years were banned and that the extreme right leader Alparslan Türkeş was imprisoned, the Turco-Islamic synthesis he had promoted became a quasi-ideology of the state. On the other hand, the cult of Mustafa Kemal was simultaneously strengthened³⁸ and “Turks from abroad” was henceforth officially recognized as a “national cause.” Consequently, the BTTDD’s ideological line evolved during the 1980s. Allegiance rituals to Atatürk were scrupulously observed, and one could note a shift in meaning: BTTDD meetings were no longer punctuated by a reading from the Koran but by the placing of a spray of flowers at the feet of a sculpture of Atatürk.³⁹

The military returned power to civilians in 1983 after writing a new constitution allowing officers to exercise power in political life and over citizens’ personal freedom, especially concerning the right to demonstrate. At that time, BTTDD officially took part in street demonstrations that were obviously state-approved. On March 21, 1985, a demonstration was organized in Istanbul by several associations representing different “Turkish nations” – including the BTTDD – in support of the Turks in Bulgaria. This demonstration, reportedly gathering 200,000 persons, had received approval from the police headquarters, which had forwarded the application to the First Army and Martial Law Commander.⁴⁰ Considering the way Turkish authorities apply Law 2911/1983 on meetings and demonstrations – most of them are actually

³⁸ E. Copeaux, *Espaces et temps de la nation turque*, Paris, CNRS, 1997 p. 81. The author reminds us that until the 1980 coup, textbooks’ covers did not even bear the effigy of Atatürk.

³⁹ “Our ordinary assembly gathered in an atmosphere of great maturity”, *Bati Trakya*, n°158, June 1980 (in Turkish).

⁴⁰ “Protest meeting against Bulgaria will take place on 21st March”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 215, March 1985 (in Turkish).

illegal – one may assume that the demonstrations they permit are welcome by the government.⁴¹

In contrast to street demonstrations in the former period, this time BTTDD leaders walked at the procession's head and the *Western Thrace's* editor in chief, also president of the Federation of Turkish Immigrants and Refugees Associations, led the demonstration's organizing committee.⁴²

In these demonstrations, the most contentious dimension is often the least important one, as the following examples show. In 1989, the BTTDD organized a sit-in in front of the İpsala bridge-border between Greece and Turkey to protest the measures taken by Greek authorities to prevent Batı Trakyalı living in Turkey from voting in general elections. This protest action remained symbolic: after a declaration from the president of the BTTDD, 35 persons sat down for a time before leaving.⁴³ To put it differently, although protest actions are organized as a retaliation against Greek policy towards “Turks” in Western Thrace, they actually address Turkish authorities. Along with the laying of funeral wreaths, a protest action which is often referred to in *Western Thrace*, some protest practices confirm the will of the Batı Trakyalı to place their struggle against the “Greek oppressor” within Turkey's republican heritage, thereby avoiding any interaction with Greek authorities. In November 1989, for instance, during Sadık Ahmet's trial in Thessaloniki,⁴⁴ the procession's target in Istanbul was not the Greek consulate as it was usually, but rather the monument dedicated to the Republic's glory in Taksim square. This

⁴¹ A. Uysal, “Maintien de l'ordre et risques liés aux manifestation de rue” in G. Dorronsoro (ed.) *La Turquie conteste. Mobilisations sociales et regime securitaire*, Paris, CNRS, 2005, p. 36.

⁴² “A huge protest meeting against Bulgaria”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 216, April 1985 (in Turkish).

⁴³ “Protest against Greece at border”, *Bati Trakya*, No. 257, Oct.-Dec. 1989 (in Turkish). Between 1989 and 1993, because of the emergence of independent ‘Turkish’ MPs in Western Thrace, Greek authorities used to prevent buses coming from Turkey from crossing the border just before elections.

⁴⁴ The first Batı Trakyalı to be elected MP without being affiliated to a Greek political party, he was a leading figure of the Turkish identity movement in Western Thrace. He was tried for “Turkish propaganda” during his electoral campaigns. He is also famous for his connections with extreme right wing movements in Turkey (1949-1995).

highly symbolic monument celebrates the day Allied troops left Istanbul in 1923 and can be reached only by demonstrations approved by authorities.⁴⁵

Strikingly, the “ruder” a demonstration is, the less it addresses the authorities. When violent means are used, it is not against Greek or Turkish authorities but rather against Christian Turkish citizens, considered enemies of the Turkish nation by people in nationalist milieus.⁴⁶ For five days in 1991, demonstrators laid siege to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. The BTTDD instigated the demonstration; its aim was to protest the promulgation of a new law in Greece that cancelled the provisions of Law 2345/1920 concerning the election of muftis’ in Western Thrace. Although not officially sanctioned, the demonstration was reportedly accepted in a tacit way by police headquarters. Policemen contented themselves with preventing Grey Wolves activists⁴⁷ from approaching the Patriarchate, and refused to scatter demonstrators who blocked Patriarchate’s entry. The police chief of the Fatih district – where the Patriarchate is located – is said to have supported demonstrators.⁴⁸ The BTTDD president wanted the Patriarchate to denounce the Greek law; he exhorted him to cooperate and prove he could be a good citizen, in other words, a loyal Turkish citizen even though he was Christian.⁴⁹ My interlocutors justified the connivance with policemen arguing they were fighting for the “national cause,” which was acknowledged by police headquarters. As a matter of fact, the protest action was not motivated by the defense of Batı Trakyalı rights in Greece, but rather the re-affirmation of Turkey’s far rightist credo in reaction to an attempt to the “Turkish” minority’s status such as defined in 1923.

⁴⁵ For example, for the first time since 1977, trade union demonstrations on May 1st were allowed to reach this monument in 2009. “A sensible end: a consequence of strong bargaining, certainly, but 1st May was celebrated at Taksim square for the first time since 1978”, *Radikal*, 02.05. 2009 (in Turkish).

⁴⁶ Examples of this hate’s climax include the events of September 6-7, 1955; the murder of journalist Hrant Dink in 2007; and the fact several priests have been murdered in Turkey in the last few years.

⁴⁷ They are a branch of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Interview with the former president of a BTTDD local branch who took part to the blockade, February 2004. Another former BTTDD leader related this demonstration being very proud of what happened, July 2003.

⁴⁸ Vemund Aarbakke, “The Muslim Minority of Greek Thrace,” PhD dissertation, Bergen University, 2000, p. 519.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 520, referring to extreme rightist daily newspaper *Türkiye*, 27. 08.1991.

The quasi official character of those demonstrations is *a contrario* confirmed by the banning of another demonstration planned in Istanbul in January 1988 on the BTTDD's initiative on the occasion of the Davos bilateral conference aiming at sealing friendship between Greece and Turkey.⁵⁰ This demonstration was supposed to take place to echo one organized in Western Thrace on January 29 as a protest against the court decision banning associations that bore the adjective "Turkish" in their name.⁵¹

Over the course of the 1980s, the various protest actions listed here began to be organized in reaction to precise events occurring in Western Thrace, rather than in accordance with political parties or other organizations of "Turks from abroad." During this period, connections strengthened within the network of Batı Trakyalı network between Germany, Western Thrace and Turkey, leading to a broader convergence of agendas and modes of action.⁵² This is related to the definition of a European strategy, to which I will return below.

II.2. Appeal to the Islamic Conference Organization

Before turning to the EU, Western Thrace promoters appealed for support from "Muslim and sister countries." In the official lexicon, this expression refers to a hierarchy and a degree of proximity with neighboring "peoples" or "countries" according to whether they adhere to Islam (in that case they are "friends") or belong to the "great Turkish family" (in which case they are "sisters"). Until 1983 and the revival of BTTDD activities, the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association was in charge of the defense of Batı Trakyalı's cause. It seems that its

⁵⁰ "Protest meeting against Greece was cancelled", *Batı Trakya*, No. 250, February 1988 (in Turkish).

⁵¹ B. Oran, *The Western Thrace issue in Greek-Turkish relations*, Ankara, Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991 [1986] (in Turkish).

⁵² J. Hersant, "Mobilisations politique, co-gouvernementalité, construction ethnique. Sociologie du nationalisme turc à travers le cas des Turcs de Thrace occidentale (Grèce, Allemagne, Turquie)", unpublished PhD thesis, (EHESS, Paris, 2007).

efforts were particularly dedicated to the strategy of internationalization⁵³ and at first mainly directed towards the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO).⁵⁴ That was the association president Fikret Alasya's idea, in accordance with the credo of Turkey's ruling figure, General Kenan Evren.⁵⁵ Linking together Turks of Cyprus and Western Thrace— both of whom were portrayed as victims of the Greeks – was a way of making acceptable the 1983 proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the island's *de facto* partition for the Turkish government. But ICO is only concerned with Muslim populations, and the organization would find it out of the question to promote the “Turkish world.”⁵⁶ Worse, the ICO never officially recognized the TRNC.⁵⁷

On the other hand, at the end of 1980s, BTTDD leaders became aware of the European dimension of the Western Thrace minority issue thanks to the ties they developed with Batı Trakyalı associations in Germany. The semantic register of human rights was gradually superimposed on that of Turkish nationalism, both in official and BTTDD speeches.

II.3. The adoption of the language of human rights and expertise in the framework of the EU (1990s)

The European strategy was defined by Batı Trakyalı actors in Turkey at the end of the 1980s. It coincides with the launching of the BTTDD's new journal, *The Voice of Western Thrace (Batı Trakya'nın Sesi)* in 1987. Considering the erratic publication of *Western Thrace*

⁵³ “The anniversary of the foundation of the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association was celebrated”, *op.cit.*; “A new directorship was elected during our annual general meeting”, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ See, in Turkish: “A diplomatic note sent to Islamic Conference” *Batı Trakya*, No. 145, May 1979; “Western Thrace Turks attend the meeting of Foreign Affairs ministers at the Islamic Conference”, *Batı Trakya'nın Sesi*, No. 9, March-April 1989; “Western Thrace Turks attend Islamic Conference”, *Batı Trakya'nın Sesi* No. 18-20, 1990; “Islamic Conference Organization stand up for Western Thrace Turks”, *Batı Trakya'nın Sesi* No. 37, December 1991.

⁵⁵ “Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks”, *Batı Trakya*, n°209, September 1984 (in Turkish).

⁵⁶ This is valid *a fortiori* for ‘Turks’ in Iraq, to Panturkist militants’ great displeasure: “Mufti of Xanthi was invited in Iraq”, *Batı Trakya*, No. 160, August 1980 (in Turkish).

⁵⁷ G. Bertrand, *Les mutations du conflit helléno-turc*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004, p. 239.

between 1987 and 1989 before it died out, as well as the tone and contents of some of the last articles published, it seems that its owner was gradually disavowed by the BTTDD leadership. This, coupled with the banning of a rival journal, *The New Western Thrace* (*Yeni Batı Trakya*), illustrates the ambivalence of the BTTDD's political line. Created in 1983, this second journal became the BTTDD's instrument: as the publication of official information from police headquarters previously published in *Western Thrace* suggests. This second journal's owner, Süleyman Sefer Cihan, was a member of the BTTDD board between 1981 and 1984 until he was dismissed, apparently because of his sympathies with extreme rightist movements.⁵⁸

The Voice of Western Thrace was created in 1987 as the BTTDD's official publication after the infighting between the two former ones. It displays an intellectual ambition to break – at least formally – with the militant rightist line of *Western Thrace* and *The New Western Thrace*. After finding resources in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to radical rightist organizations' rhetoric and know-how, the BTTDD was thereafter forced to maintain a non-political stand. The new journal's tone is far less virulent compared to former publications and its articles concentrate on Western Thrace, relinquishing the Cyprus issue and denunciation of the Turkish nation's "inner enemies." From then on, even *Western Thrace* stopped mentioning the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association, although Fikret Alasya was one of its regular columnists throughout the 1980s. As for Rauf Denktaş, President of the TRNC between 1983 and 2005, he remains an honorary member of the BTTDD.

⁵⁸ He is now a sympathizer of *İşçi Partisi* (Workers Party), an ultra-nationalist organization mobilized in particular for the Cyprus issue. The president of *The New Western Thrace's* editorial board since 2003 is retired general Veli Küçük, who was in 2008 one of the main defendants in the trial of the sub-state organization Ergenekon. Gathering officers, politicians and journalists, this ultra-nationalist organization was suspected of journalist Hrant Dink's assassination and of planning a coup d'état. See for instance, "'Deep state plot' grips Turkey", *BBC News*, 4 February 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7225889.stm>.

This turning point was illustrated by what Prof. Kemal Karpat said in the first issue of *The Voice of Western Thrace* as a member of its academic board. The famous historian encouraged the Batı Trakyalı to publish abundantly in Greek and English, and to not only address their claims to the Turkish people. He suggests that they should resort to international organizations: “One has to choose precise and influential targets: Amnesty International, European Parliament, OECD, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (...) just as the Bulgarian Turks did.”⁵⁹ Kemal Karpat also encouraged the Batı Trakyalı to invest themselves in academic conferences and research centers specializing on South-Eastern Europe that were emerging in Europe and the United States. Throughout the 1980s, the BTTDD did indeed invest heavily in creating expertise in this field, although mainly from the “Turkish world” perspective.⁶⁰

The underlying logic was to shift the Batı Trakyalı issue from Turkish nationalism to the framework of human and minority rights. For example, the famous journalist Mümtaz Soysal, at a conference on the “Turkish world” organized by the BTTDD, lamented the fact “we pay dearly for not using in due time, according to our own point of view, such a fashionable theme [as minority rights] that entered the world by our door.”⁶¹ These words allude to the suspicion engendered in Turkey by human rights, the promotion of which is closely connected to minority rights for several reasons. First, historically, “national liberation” struggles by Christian minorities that weakened the declining Ottoman Empire were supported by European countries – especially France and England – hoping to take control of strategic Ottoman provinces.⁶² Now,

⁵⁹ “About Western Thrace, with Professor Kemal Karpat”, *Batı Trakya'nın Sesi*, No. 1, November-December 1987. Helsinki Watch also published in a famous report in 1991 that contributed to publicizing Western Thrace Turks. The writing of this report is said to have been suggested by Turkish officials as a riposte to a report on the situation of Kurds in Turkey.

⁶⁰ J. Hersant, 2007, *op.cit.*

⁶¹ Mümtaz Soysal quoted in “A panel of experts on Greek-Turkish relations, Lausanne Treaty and Western Thrace Turks”, *Batı Trakya'nın Sesi*, No. 1, November-December 1987 (in Turkish).

⁶² T. Akçam, “Another History on Sèvres and Lausanne” in H- Kieser & D. J. Schaller (eds.) *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, Zürich, Chronos Verlag, 2nd edition, 2003, p. 281-299.

these struggles took place in the name of political liberalism and the rights of minorities.⁶³ Second, the minorities issue in Turkey became internationally oriented from 1984 onwards with the establishment of the guerrilla party PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) opposing the Turkish army. Last but not least, the protection of “ethnic” or “national” minorities has indeed become one of the EU’s main systems of reference, along with state law, since the collapse of former Yugoslavia and the revival of the “Balkan powder keg.” As a matter of fact, influenced by the repercussions of the 1990 Helsinki Watch’s report on Western Thrace,⁶⁴ the EU has come to acknowledge Batı Trakyalı actors’ claims and now advocates the recognition of a Turkish minority by Greece –not a Muslim one – in Western Thrace. This European injunction led to the redefinition of the political lexicon and to an evolution in the repertoire of actions used within the Batı Trakyalı identity movement.

II.4. Abandoning the language of protest

At the beginning of the 1980s, the political language of human rights had not yet been developed or mastered by Batı Trakyalı associations in Turkey, whereas the actions implemented by associations in Germany opened up new forms of mobilization and a new semantic register: that of the European Union. Throughout 1980s and 1990s, these associations organized several demonstrations and, in parallel, sent delegations to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. After the violent events in 1990 in Komotini,⁶⁵ there were no more demonstrations for the rights of the “Turkish” minority in Greece. Between 1982 and 1997, six street demonstrations in Germany, one in Great Britain and one in France (Strasbourg) occurred. They were all organized in

⁶³ *Idem*, “A Few Theses About Turkish National Identity” in T. Bora (ed.) *Political Thought in Modern Turkey...op.cit*, p. 53-62.

⁶⁴ L. Whitman, “Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks in Western Thrace”, Helsinki Watch Report, 1990.

⁶⁵ Street demonstrations in 1990 led to the ransacking of Turkish shops, mosques and houses by Greek rightist activists.

response to events in Western Thrace, except for one in 1986 that was organized by a “Turkish organization”⁶⁶ to protest against Bulgaria’s policy towards its Turkish minority. This mobilization was organized in cooperation with the identity movement in Western Thrace, and soon came to be seen as a good means to promote “Turkishness” there. Moreover, since the end of 1980s, Turkish authorities and the BTTDD actors have gradually become involved in associations in Germany by choosing or co-opting their leaders.⁶⁷

The movement away from protest actions was enunciated during the 4th Western Thrace Turks International Conference, which took place in June 2000 in London. The goal was to put the Western Thrace Turks Federation in Europe in the forefront, rather than the BTTDD, whose members are mainly Turkish citizens. The BTTDD and Turkish officials were nevertheless well represented,⁶⁸ and the rhetoric linking Cyprus and Western Thrace was reaffirmed. The means of action recommended during this conference emphasized conducting a lobbying strategy towards the European Union. In a context where the Greek state was blamed by Turkey and the United States for offering PKK militants protection and logistical support,⁶⁹ the strategy adopted by Batı Trakyalı actors stressed the non-violent and sophisticated character of their own demands. The representative of the Helsinki Monitoring Committee in Greece, also a representative of the Turkish identity movement, argued that “we shall not demonstrate and shout in the streets any more; otherwise the Greek media will condemn us as a fanatic group.”⁷⁰

The abandonment of the language of protest coincided with shifting the European mobilization’s center toward Western Thrace. Such an evolution is linked to the changes in the

⁶⁶ “Protest march against Bulgaria in Düsseldorf,” *Yeni Batı Trakya*, No. 34, 1986. The march (which is said to have gathered 5,000 persons) is recounted by one of the participants who does not name the “Turkish organization.”

⁶⁷ J. Hersant, 2007, *op.cit.*

⁶⁸ The symposium’s proceedings were printed by the BTTDD main branch in Bursa.

⁶⁹ Its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was arrested in February 1999 in the Greek embassy in Nairobi where he had sought asylum.

⁷⁰ “Speeches, Commission Reports, Conclusions”, 4th International Western Thrace Turks Conference, 16-18 June 2000, London, Bursa, BTTDD (in Turkish).

social characteristics of the identity movement's entrepreneurs in Western Thrace, and their cooperation with second-generation migrants in Germany. Unlike the first-generation migrants who launched the European mobilization, these tend to be young people who have graduated from Turkey's universities, and sometimes even hold Masters degrees obtained in Germany or Great Britain. They speak perfect English (and Greek for the youth in Western Thrace) and have skills related to the field of human rights intervention: they have considerable knowledge of international norms concerning the rights of minorities, know-how regarding lobbying techniques, and an understanding of the various European institutions. They are also well integrated in the forums dedicated to the promotion of the rights of minorities. In fact, they are both experts and militants of their own cause.

In 2000, the Western Thrace Turks Federation in Europe was granted a consultative status in the UN Economic and Social Committee. And the Association of Graduates from the Muslim Minority in Western Thrace has conducted several projects with Minority Rights Group (MRG, London): for example, writing an English-language "UN guide for minorities." This guide was then translated into Turkish and distributed both in Western Thrace and Turkey. This second part of the project did not involve MRG but rather the Turkish consulate in Komotini, one of the most powerful, although there are no Turkish citizens in Western Thrace. Unlike former protest actions, the lobbying strategy that has been implemented for the last ten years systematically bypasses Greek authorities: it addresses European representatives, never Greek MPs or MEPs.

Conclusion

In this study of the politicization of the Batı Trakyalı issue – namely its reformulation into a public issue first in the Turkish national framework and then on the European scale – I tried to follow the methodological approach suggested by Siméant: "clarifying the nature of links

between protagonists, specifying what leads actors and organizations to internationalization, and studying the possible transformation of protest forms.”⁷¹ The nature of the Batı Trakyalı movement challenges the conventional approach to social movements, which opposes “ordinary people” to either authorities or “powerful opponents.”⁷² In this case, it seems that the more access activists have to state institutions, the more aggressive their demonstrations are and the less they address Greek authorities. In a similar manner, the category of “transnational social movements” fails to distinguish between contentious actions and lobbying, which can be intertwined.⁷³ That is why it seems more appropriate to consider Batı Trakyalı activists a “transnational network of militants,”⁷⁴ or an “advocacy coalition,”⁷⁵ in which NGOs or state administrations can be involved as well.

As for the appropriation of human rights lexicon, it might at first sight appear as the illustration of the first step in the “norms socialization” process such as stressed by Risse & Alii, namely “instrumental adaptation and strategic bargaining.”⁷⁶ But this model, as well as the distinction on which it is based between “Western” and “liberal” states on the one hand, and states that do not respect human rights on the other hand, is just not relevant. It stresses the external pressure on states due to “domestic opposition” resorting to “international human rights NGOs/organizations” and to “Western powers.”⁷⁷ Notwithstanding the fact that “NGOs” and “transnational advocacy networks” – which are supposed to bypass state authority – are often

⁷¹ J. Siméant, “Des mouvements nouveaux et globaux? Sur les mouvements sociaux ‘transnationaux’ dans quelques ouvrages récents,” Congrès de l’Association Française de Science Politique, 2005, <http://www.afsp.msh-paris.fr/archives/congreslyon2005/lyon2005.html>.

⁷² S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2nd edition, p. 2.

⁷³ J. Siméant, *op.cit.*

⁷⁴ S. Tarrow, “La contestation transnationale,” *Cultures & Conflits*, 2000, 38-39: 208.

⁷⁵ P. Sabatier, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Revisions and Relevance for Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1998, 5 (1): 98-130.

⁷⁶ T. Risse, S. Ropp & K. Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19

totally or partially state-sponsored organizations⁷⁸ (like the BTTDD), this schema does not fit here. In their desire to “evaluate” human rights practices, these authors do not take into account the uses or bypassing of international norms, even by states that claim to uphold international law.⁷⁹

More relevant is Sikkink’s and Dezalay and Garth’s analysis stressing the emergence of human rights between 1970 and the 1990s as a central element of American foreign policy,⁸⁰ and therefore as a universal reference in the “international field of practices.”⁸¹ From this point of view, the process of European construction involves both prescriptive and ideological aspects: it was able to prescribe a common and relatively stable perception of values such as democracy, human rights, law state, and citizenship. Besides, the process of Greece’s European integration has often been considered as a moment in the country’s “democratic transition” following which it has reached “Western standards.” This is the reason why, although it is not an EU member, the Turkish state makes good use of European norms dealing with national minorities in order to legitimate its sovereignty over the “Turkish” minority in Western Thrace. Consequently, it succeeded in promoting its own interests concerning a European territory (Western Thrace), whereas its military occupation of Northern Cyprus has been strongly opposed by European Union.

⁷⁸ M. Keck & K. Sikkink (eds) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca N-Y: Cornell University Press, 1998; for a critical stand, J. Siméant, *op.cit.*

⁷⁹ J. Hersant, “Contourner les normes européennes...grâce aux instruments européens. L’impératif de sécurité nationale ou les résistances à l’intégration européenne de la Grèce,” *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 2008, 15 (4) : 639-652.

⁸⁰ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2004.

⁸¹ Y. Dezalay & B. Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars: Lawyers, Economists and the Contest to Transform Latin American States*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.