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AN ANALYSIS OF TURKEY'S SUPPORT TO THE TURKISH-TATAR MINORITY IN ROMANIAN DOBRUJA AFTER 1989 REVOLUTION

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Abstract

The communist regime in Romania oppressed all minorities in every aspect of life for more than fifty years following the WWII in order to create a homogeneous society. Turkish-Tatar minority living in Northern Dobruja was not spared of those suppressive policies and accordingly, its rights related to education in mother tongue was taken away by gradual closing down Turkish schools, specifically the emblematic Muslim Seminary in Medgidia. Moreover, its rights and freedoms related to the religion were put under strict surveillance. Harsh measures of the regime in the two fields eventually caused weakening of the columns of ethnic and cultural identity of the minority. The new democratic era inaugurated in the wake of the 1989 revolution in Romania was promising for all minorities including Turkish and Tatar communities to rediscover their identity-specific values and symbols. At this historical turning point, Turkey's support was crucial for the minority to reconstruct and restore its cultural and religious heritage. Turkey contributed to this process in moral and material terms by its all relevant institutions and support of its strong private sector. Romania, being aware of extent of Turkey's influence over the minority and importance of its support facilitated the process in good will. Thus, the Muslim minority turned into a catalyst for improving relations between two countries rather than being a point of conflict.

Keywords: *Turkish-Tatar Minority, Northern Dobruja, Romania, Muslim Seminary, Ethnic and Cultural Identity, Turkey's Support*

1989 DEVRİMİNDEN SONRA ROMANYA DOBRUCASI'NDA YAŞAYAN TÜRK-TATAR AZINLIĞA TÜRKİYE'NİN VERDİĞİ DESTEĞİN ANALİZİ

Özet

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında Romanya'da yönetimi ele geçiren komünist rejim elli yıldan uzun bir süre homojen bir toplum yaratmak adına yaşamın her alanında tüm azınlıkları ezdi. Kuzey Dobruca'da yaşayan Türk-Tatar azınlığı bu baskıcı politikalardan muaf tutulmadı. Azınlığın anadilde eğitim hakları, başta Mecidiye'deki simgesel Müslüman Semineri olmak üzere Türk okullarının kademeli olarak kapatılmasıyla ortadan kaldırıldı. Dahası, Müslüman azınlığın din alanındaki hak ve özgürlükleri sıkı bir gözetim altına alındı. Bahsekonu alanlarda rejimin aldığı sert önlemler azınlığın etnik ve kültürel kimliğinin zayıflamasına neden oldu. Romanya'daki 1989 devriminin ardından başlayan yeni demokratik



dönem, Türk ve Tatar toplulukları dahil olmak üzere tüm azınlıklara kimlikleri ile ilgili değerlerini ve sembollerini yeniden keşfetmeleri için umut verdi. Bu tarihi dönüm noktasında, Türkiye'nin desteği azınlığın kültürel ve dini mirasını yeniden inşa etmesi açısından çok önemliydi. Türkiye, sözkonusu yeniden inşa sürecine tüm ilgili kurumları yoluyla ve güçlü özel sektörünün desteğiyle maddi ve manevi anlamda katkıda bulundu. Romanya, Türkiye'nin Müslüman azınlık üzerindeki etkisinin ve desteğinin önemini farkında olarak, yardım ve destek sürecini iyi niyetle kolaylaştırdı. Böylece, Müslüman azınlık, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerde bir çatışma noktası olmaktan çıkıp ilişkileri geliştirici bir katalizör haline dönüştü.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türk-Tatar Azınlığı, Kuzey Dobruca, Romanya, Müslüman Semineri, Etnik ve Kültürel Kimlik, Türkiye'nin Desteği*

Introduction

The communist regime in Romania oppressed all minorities in every aspect of life for more than fifty years following the WWII. Among others, Turkish schools, associations, newspapers and magazines were also closed down. Their religious and cultural activities were not allowed (Horata, 2003: 156). Turkish and Tatar children were obliged to attend the Romanian schools letting them forget their mother tongue. In the last years of Ceauşescu's regime even Turkish traditional music and folkloric dances were not aired on radio and TV. Worse than that, many Muslim intellectuals or educated people were put into jail or executed under the Soviets' pressure due to their allegedly involvement in illegal activities on the way of Crimean independence or forming a union of Turks. For instance, the leading Dobrujan Tatar nationalist Necip Hacı Fazıl and his friends were declared traitors for their supposedly nationalistic activities. He was arrested by the security forces in 1948 and his dead body was given back to his family after five days later. Many others were sentenced to 5-20 year imprisonments. One of them was Turkish language teacher in Mangalia, Mehmet Vani, who was kept in prison for five years between 1952 and 1957 (Yurtsever, 2013: 242-243).

The Turkish-Tatar minority –this divide is in fact a fabrication of the communist regime– was put into an assimilation process during this era. The ones who desired to leave for Turkey were not given permission or deterred by heavy financial costs (Bozkurt, 2008: 13). The state did not abolish Muftiate or locally established religious committees, but the official atheist policy weakened the authority of these religious institutions on the Muslim community as the young generation developed reservations towards practising their religion in their everyday lives (Cupcae, 2016: 214).

Nonetheless, the new democratic era following the revolution was promising for the minorities, including Turkish and Tatar communities, to rediscover their identity-specific values and symbols. In other words, they captured a historic chance to re-own their cultural and religious codes



which was given as a constitutional right to them. The new Romanian constitution adopted in 1991¹ stipulates that Romania is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens regardless of race, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political allegiance, wealth, or social origin (article 4 para.2). Furthermore, with the Article 6 under the title of "the Right to Identity", the state recognizes and guarantees for members of the national minorities the right to preserve, develop, and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity. While the constitution asserts that the language of instruction on all levels is the Romania language (article 32 para.2), it also ensures in the following third paragraph that the right of members of ethnic minorities to learn their mother tongue and the right to be taught in this language are guaranteed. On top of that, Article 29 under the headline of "Freedom of Conscience" declares that all religions are free and organized in accordance with their own statutes, under the terms defined by the law and adds that the religious sects are autonomous in relation to the state and enjoy its support.

In the same constitution the Turks and Tatars were accepted officially as distinct ethnic minorities, and were treated on par with other 16 national minorities. The communist regime had tried its best to deepen the minor differences between the two groups using the terminology of Turks and Tatars separately. This classification was in contradiction with the conventional terminology used in the past since all Muslim groups were used to be called as Turks. The regime targeted to destroy the cohesiveness and unity of members of an ethnic group, whose religion, culture and language are the same, and thus to eliminate a possible threat to its totalitarian rule even though they were the most loyal minority to the Romanian state.

Establishment of the Representative Organizations of the Turkish-Tatar Communities

Having the strong constitutional support behind them, the Turkish and Tatar communities immediately started to reconstruct and restore their cultural, religious and educational institutions and heritage. They came up with the idea of creating a single ethnic institution which would represent a united Muslim minority. In early 1990 they managed to establish it under the name of the Turkish Muslim Democratic Union of Romania (Uniunea Democrata Turca Musulmana din Romania or UDTRM in Romanian language). Its main purpose was to make sure that they were granted national minority status as a single ethnic community, ie. the Turkish national minority, though seven out of ten members of the constituent group were of Tatar origin. The two communities were deemed two groups sharing one ethnicity and known as the Turks and Tatars. The decision to

¹ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Romania_2003.pdf?lang=en



bring them together under one name and one organization was determined by historical and cultural reasons, e.g. shared belonging to Islam, Turkic origins and linguistic affinities between the two groups as the Tatar language being a dialect of the Turkish language.

The manifested goal of the first Union was two fold in the ethnic and religious forms, expressed in their immediate priorities to reorganize education in Turkish-language, the Muslim religion, to reopen the mosques closed during communism and the Medgidia Muslim Seminary. The reopening of the seminary was prerequisite for the revitalization of the Muslim clergy, of the Muslim community's religious life and important step towards reviving Turkish-language education.

This first umbrella organization for the Muslim community did not include ‘‘Tatar’’ word on purpose because it sought for the material and moral support from the Turkish state; the mother-state of the Turkish ethnic group and protective state as seen by the Tatar ethnic group, but also from other Muslim states in the Arab world, namely from ummah or the international Muslim community. Tatars accepted unreservedly the umbrella name of Turk which referred to the Romanian Turko-Tatar population. UDTMR was however short-lived. In early 1990, it split into two organizations: the Turkish Ethnic Minority Union of Romania (Uniunea Minorităţii Etnice Turce din Romania or UMETR), later renamed the Democratic Turkish Union of Romania (Uniunea Democrată Turcă din Romania or UDTR), and the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania (Uniunea Democrată a Tatarilor Turco-Musulmani din Romania or UDTTMR) (Cupcae, 2015: 41).

Despite repeated calls for unity among the Turks and Tatars, a conflict related to the appointment of Mufti arose between the communities in a very short period of time and caused the first break up. Iacub Mehmet, the veteran Tatar Mufti for more than four decades, was representing the old communist era and was quickly sacked from his post following the revolution. As a tradition and a natural end of Tatars' more focus and interest in the religious realm, Tatar origin imams occupied the post of the Mufti in the past. In parallel, most of the imams were too of Tatar origin. In the new democratic era, some Turks claimed that the post of Muftiate should be given to them to balance the influence of the Tatars, and eventually proposed Mustafa Ali Mehmed, a Turkish graduate of the Seminary in Medgidia, to be the new Mufti. This move met with a harsh reaction by the Tatar imams triggering their rapid announcement of the appointment of Ibraim Ablachim, a Tatar origin imam as the new Mufti. Hence, the first joint organization of the two communities came to end (Gemil, 2012: 354). In due course, Turkey intervened in the conflict and sent an Islamic delegation to Romania to mediate between the two groups. In the presence of this delegation the Islamic Council appointed an ethnic Tatar, Negeat Osman, as the new Mufti, while, in the summer of



1990, the position of chief advisor of the Muftiate was taken up by a leader of the opposing Turkish party.

Though some ethnic Turks manifested their wish to establish their own representative organization and create a sphere of influence independent of Tatars, most of the Tatar leaders continued to voice to maintain the unity of Turks and Tatars under the umbrella name of the Turkish ethnic minority made up of Turks and Turko-Tatars, the latter being used in this context to refer to the Tatar ethnic group.² The arguments put forward were again their roots to the Turkic Islamic world, the shared history and not least the phenomenon of frequent mixed marriages between the two communities. All of those elements were underlined as commonalities that would place the Turks and Tatars within the same community, with one single body representing them officially. Hence, most leading Tatars accepted Turkey's influence over the Dobrujan community as a natural consequence.

There was also a political dimension to the conflict between the two organizations. Although only UDTTMR participated in the first post-1990 parliamentary elections, the two minorities had each their own deputy seat in the first post-communist legislature. Namely, Tasin Gemil was elected a deputy representing UDTTMR and upon repeated requests by UMETR, the Validation Committee of the Chamber of Deputies also considered Amet Hoge's candidacy. After it made it clear that there was a problem with the ethnic name of one of the two organizations, since the law did not allow that one national minority be represented by more than one deputy, UDTTMR leaders added that the ethnonym Tatar to their name. As a result, as of July 1990, they were officially known as the Democratic Union of Tatar Turkish Muslims of Romania (UDTTMR). Finally, in July 1990, the Validation Committee voted the eligibility of both deputies: Tasin Gemil as representative of the Tatar Turkish Muslims and Amet Hoge as representative of the Turkish Ethnic Minority (Cupcae, 2015: 42)

After the 1990 split, as UDTR and UDTTMR were the only two organizations granted official status by the Romanian Government, which had the right to appoint one representative to the Parliament, took up the role of representative organizations of the two communities. They could get financial resources from the state to protect and develop the minority, to identify cultural activities and support their education. The two unions became therefore the main official channels for Romanian Turks and Tatars to raise their voices in front of Romanian authorities.

² *Karadeniz Journal* (periodic publication of UDTTMR), Year I, No. 2, May 1990: Constanta. p.1.



Turkey's Relations with the Turkish-Tatar communities in Dobruja in the aftermath of the Communist Era

The communist regime in Romania instigated a long break in bilateral relations with Turkey due to the Cold War. Its policy of freezing relations with Turkey was reflected naturally to the lives of the Turkish community of Romania. They were neglected culturally, socially and economically under the pressure of socialist policies and programmes, and always treated as suspects. They were even left without any educational institution by the closure of the Medgidia Muslim Seminary in 1967. However, in the post-revolution period the Muslim community found an opportunity to revive their ethnic and religious values. At this point, Turkey played an important role by supporting the minority in various ways without neglecting good relations with the Romanian government.

Turkey's interest in the Muslim minority in Romania overlapped with its new active policy which was inaugurated following the fall of the iron curtain in 1991. The end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union opened new channels for Turkey to reach his long forgotten ancestors, mainly in the Central Asia and the Caucasus regions, but also in the Balkans. Turkish decision makers reached a conclusion that Turkey's former strategic value in the West has substantially decreased. The newly born republics in the former Soviet Union created a potential sphere of influence. For these emerging independent nations, Turkey is considered a model with its democratic and secular identity and its developing free-market economy. This role as a model country was encouraged by Turkey's Western allies with the expectation that Turkey's influence would limit the roles of Russia and Iran in the region (Aras and Akpınar, 2011: 53-68). Pan-Turkist and religious-nationalist groups in Turkey started to campaign for advocating bloc of Turkish nations under Turkey's leadership, which eventually would bring Turkish supremacy among Muslim nations. Mainstream Turkish politicians quickly grasped the opportunity to paint a bright picture of a new Turkish world stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese wall with Turkey at its centre, and the late Turkish President Turgut Özal further claimed that the 21st century would be the Turkish century (Kara, 2012: 179) . This led also Turkey to pursue a foreign policy of strengthening relations with the former Ottoman territories in its near abroad. It meant to protect the cultural, religious heritage and the Hanafi religious practice in the Balkans. This new foreign policy was called Neo-Ottomanism in the West, even though Turkish politicians never used this term as it negatively associates with imperialism. This was just a process whereby Turkey's geopolitical imaginary and the new opportunities in the global political system allowed the people of the region to reconcile with their history and geography (Kalın, 2011: 5-25).

Within the scope and aims of its new foreign policy stated above, Turkey had a particular interest in the Muslim minority in Dobruja though its population decreased significantly since 1878 due to mass emigration. As of 1992, 29,533 Turks and 24,649 Tatars lived in Romania amounting 54,182 which meant 0,2 % of the total Romanian population. The latest census conducted in 2011 showed these figures are even more diminished. According to this survey 28,226 Turks and 20,464 Tatars live in Romania totaling 48,690 people (Bozkurt, 2008: 9). No matter how many Turks and Tatars lived in Dobruja or Romania, Turkey considered them as a historical heritage to be preserved and promoted in line with its reopening policy to the surrounding region.

It should also be noted that Turkey did not and still does not differentiate between Turks and Tatars in extending its help and assistance in a wide-range spectrum to these communities. Whether they are Turkish or Tatar, the Muslims of Dobruja enjoyed the help of the Republic of Turkey, being seen as part of the Turkish diaspora in need for support. As far as Tatars are concerned, Turkey takes into consideration of having common origin and belonging to the Turkish peoples' family.

In parallel with this, even today the Crimean and Dobrujan Tatars regard Turkey as their motherland (Ata Yurt) and sacred land (Ak Toprak) since Turkey undertook the role of protector of all Tatars living in any part of the world by its moral, cultural, spiritual, political, diplomatic and economic support. As a matter of fact, they think that the identities of the two communities are same. Islamic religion, similar cultural habits, inherent intent on combating ethnic assimilation on a foreign land justifies the sense of affiliation to a single identity that some of the Tatars subscribe to. From such a perspective, marriages between the Turks and the Tatars are not categorized as mixed families. Furthermore, a common Turkish-Tatar identity is deeply internalized by millions of Tatars immigrated to Turkey (Preda, 2015: 317). However, there is another prevailing view among some Dobrujan Tatars that there is a fine distinction between Turks and Tatars. In their opinion, even though Tatars are known and labeled as Turks or Crimean Tatar-Turks by Turkey, they have a different identity emanating from their roots from Crimea, not from Anatolia. According to this view, most Tatar families send their children to Turkish courses rather than Tatar language courses in Dobruja. But, still they live in their separate neighbourhood (Gemil, 2016: 86).

Yet, it is undeniable fact that the Turks and Tatars intermingled with each other through ages and Turkey as a mother or protector state treated them on equal foot. After the democratic forces came to power in Romania, both communities in Dobruja looked for Turkey's help in reconstructing their minority rights. This search of the roots of their identity coincided with the Turkey's new visionary foreign policy objectives in which all-Turkic people in the Balkans, Central Asia or



Caucasus regions would be supported in every possible means. This convergence of needs and means brought about Turkey's increasing involvement in the revival of religious, cultural and educational lives of the Turkish-Tatar communities in Romania.

Before dwelling into the details of the Turkish assistance to the Dobrujan Muslims, it is worth mentioning that Romanian authorities cooperated with Turkey in good will by facilitating the works of the Turkish representatives or institutions. One of the many reasons behind this collaboration was that Romania needed Turkey's political support to consolidate its new democratic regime. Secondly, its economy was starving for foreign investors, and the closest country that could send its businesspeople to Romania in a very short time happened to be Turkey. In addition, the most importantly, Turkey had historical, cultural and religious affinity with the Muslim minority living in Dobruja, who tried to reorganize and assert themselves as one of the national minorities. The Turkish model with its moderate and secular features was more fitting to the Muslim minority as a continuation of its historical evolution. It was preferable to the neo-conservative Islam steady grew in the world and tried to penetrate into the Balkan countries under the strong support of Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries. Turkey tried to fight their influence and protect the Hanafi Sunni Islam also known as the Ottoman Islam. In the context of emerging radical Islamist movements, the Muslim community emphasized the need for reopening of the Muslim Seminary in Medgidia, which would train imams thus ensuring the continuation of the local religious tradition and providing a means to fight radical doctrines coming from the Arab World. However, the most pressing problem for the community was the shortage and the ageing of the Muslim clergy at the beginning of the 1990s. Since the seminary was closed in 1967, it did not graduate any imams for almost 40 years. Due to the shortage of imams, Friday and Bayram prayers, and basic religious rituals such as circumcisions and funerals could not be performed in rural areas, and even remote mosques were shut down for not having an imam. It can be argued that interests of Romania, Turkey and the Dobrujan Muslims converged at this juncture.

The Turkish Support to the Dobrujan Muslim Minority in the Field of Education

The first initiative by Turkey as regards to the Muslim community was taken in the field of education in the form of reopening the historical institution in Medgidia. In fact, the Turkish and Tatar Unions were acting in unity about its reopening and already followed the issue through their channels at the official level assisted by the Turkish diplomatic missions. As a corollary of those efforts, the Ministry of Education and the State Secretary for Religions approved the reopening of the Muslim Theological High-School in Medgidia starting with school year 1993-1994 (Garlan, 2011: 285). Constanta County School District provided the former dorms of the Nicolae Balcescu



High School in Medgidia, while the Ministry of Education provided a significant sum of money for the renovation of the building. The seminary was reopened through an Order of the Minister and technically operated as a section of the Nicolae Balcescu High School in Medgidia for two years (1993-1995). The Muslim community was to provide the teachers for specialized disciplines, namely Islamic Theology and Turkish language, by hiring qualified teachers, while Constanta County School District was to appoint teachers for History and Romanian Language and Literature.

In 1995, an official protocol was signed between Turkey and Romania to reopen the seminary. And the name of the school was determined as Teacher and Theological Education High School Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Medgidia as it was later renamed Kemal Atatürk National College because of the Turkish contribution to the reopening of the institution. At the signing ceremony of the protocol, Turkish Ambassador to Bucharest, Yaman Başkut pointed out that the Turkish and Tatar communities could play an important role in strengthening the Romanian-Turkish relations, emphasizing the importance of maintaining friendly relations with both the host country and the homeland for the preserving of the cultural identity of the two ethnic communities. In his speech, the Romanian signatory to the Protocol, Minister of Education Liviu Maior stated that he had always been an advocate of the minorities' right to education in their mother tongue and that, as a history professor, he wanted that the high-school should bear the name of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Fetislam, 2013: 233-226).

According to the Article 1 of the said protocol, the school is defined as the state school for the Turkish and Turkish-Tatar minority in Romania. The second Article emphasizes the historical role of the Muslim Seminary in Medgidia and it commands the way of education in the new school should be organized to continue the traditions of the old seminary. The third Article states that the school teaches grades 1 through 12, with grades 1 through 8 taught according to the standard curriculum, with the possibility of adding Turkish Language and Islam as electives, and grades 9 through 12 taught according to specific theological and teacher training curricula in students' mother tongue. Article 4 further adds that the curriculum of the theological education will be prepared by the Muftiate with the approval of the Ministry of Education and the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs. Article 5 covers that the graduates of the school will take the baccalaureate exams upon completing the 12th grade and enjoy all the rights granted to other Romanian high school graduates. In addition to the baccalaureate degree, each graduate of the Theological and Teacher Education programs will receive a professional certification as a Muslim cleric or as a pre-school/primary school teacher in the case of those completing the Teacher Education program. Article 6 stipulates that the costs with accommodation, meals, clothes and school supplies for the students will be



covered by the Turkish party. The Turkish language and religious textbooks will be provided by Turkey while the Romanians provide the textbooks for the other subjects which are taught in Romanian. The Romanian authorities will also bear the cost of day-to-day maintenance of the premises and the salaries of the faculty, administrative and maintenance staff. Article 9 conditions that the Turkish party is to furnish the school and to provide the necessary teaching material at its own expense. The Turks will issue documents waiving any financial contribution from the Romanian party while the latter is to issue documents waiving any customs duty for said furnishings. Article 10 of the Protocol regulates the appointment, salaries and further training of specialized teachers. The Turkish side will provide the teachers of Turkish language and Islamic courses. These teachers will receive the same salaries as the Romanian teachers with equivalent education and work experience. And Article 11 allows the Turkish party to name the assistant Principal of the school among the teachers it delegates and his salary will be borne by Turkey (Cupcae, Marin and Ömer, 2016: 519-520). Reopening of the symbolic educational institution of the Dobrujan Muslims in 1995 with Turkey's contribution constitutes a perfect example of good relations between Turkish and Romanian governments. By this joint venture, Romania delivered the right of Turkey to become an active player in reviving the ethnic and religious identity of the Muslim minority.

In the following years the Turkish assistance to the Kemal Atatürk College in Medgidia gradually increased and diversified. As the school had two major aims of raising Islamic clergy and Turkish language teachers (After Romania joined the EU in 2007, the Romanian authorities did put the pre-condition of graduating from a University to become a teacher in line with the EU standards), both branches benefited from the Turkish help in different forms and sizes. Pursuant to a protocol signed in 2006 with the Muftiate of Romania, Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs bore the cost of meal of all boarded students who were in theology branch and gave monthly scholarships to them. The same Turkish institution also provided extra payments to all teachers of the school including the Principal as a small contribution to their salaries. Some graduates were given scholarships to continue their high education in the universities of Turkey in the field of religious studies. The Religious Affairs Attache at the Consulate General of Turkey is the contact point of organizing these assistance to the school. The Attache also organizes a campaign of delivering tons of meat of the sacrificed animals during the Sacrifice Fest to the boarded students at the school. This donated meat is consumed by the school all the year.

Turkey's support to the Muslim community of Dobruja in the field of education also encompassed of sending teaching material including text books in Turkish. Turkish teachers were taken to the training courses to excel their skills and to increase their experience of teaching either in



Romania or Turkey in collaboration with the Romanian authorities. Cognizant of importance of teaching the Turkish language to the minority and taking into consideration the level of demand in this field, Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers were opened in Bucharest and Constanta in 2011. Inauguration of the Turkish cultural centers in Romania facilitated the minority members or any Romanian citizens to have the chance of learning Turkish from the experts sent by Turkey. They teach Turkish not only at their buildings attracting many students, but also send their teachers to some schools and universities on the basis of bilateral protocols signed with them. Andrei Şaguna University in Constanta is one of the educational institutions which approached the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center to open a Turkish language class at the university in 2014. This cooperation turned into a big success with joint efforts of the related institutions supported by the moral encouragement of the Turkish Consulate General in Constanta. The center also signed a cooperation protocol with Ovidius University in Constanta in 2015, which had already a Turkish Language Department seconded by a teacher by the Turkish state. However, it could not be materialized in due course because of some administrative changes occurred at the university. The center in Constanta undertakes some joint projects with the Kemal Atatürk College in Medgidia and the local educational authorities, needless to say including the Turkish and Tatar Associations like organizing competitions in the field of reciting Turkish poems in a best way or holding dance and music shows related to the Turkish culture.³

Opening of these centers tantamounts to an important milestone for the teaching of Turkish language in reaching out large public audience and also represents a remarkable achievement for the cultural diplomacy efforts on the Turkish side. Both centers organize many cultural activities from celebrations of important days for both countries including the anniversary of death of the Romanian national poet Mihai Eminescu to the introduction of a new book to the Romanian public. They act as a cultural bridge between the two peoples holding joint shows, programmes and activities. All these activities or programmes are supported by the Embassy or Consulate of Turkey in different forms, either by direct participation or moral support or by sharing the financial cost.

In the field of education, there are scholarships for both undergraduate and graduate students provided by Presidency for the Turkish Diaspora and Kindred Communities giving young people access to Turkish universities. These scholarships cover both religious and secular studies such as philology, economics or technical fields, with the student opting for the desired specialization offered by Turkish universities. While, in the 1960s, scholarships were being provided within the

³ Interview with Ali Oğuzhan Yüksel, Former Director of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Constanta, 20 December 2016.



framework of bilateral agreements signed with other states; especially with the support of the late President Turgut Özal, international student policy of Turkey was systematized for the first time in 1992 and a project titled as "Great Student Project" was initiated. Within the framework of the tasks entrusted to this institution established in 2010, "Turkey Scholarships" program has been implemented in 2012.⁴

Turkey scholarships are advertised widely through the Turkish Embassy in Bucharest, the Turkish General Consulate in Constanta, and the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in both Constanta and Bucharest. The graduates of the Kemal Atatürk College -regardless of their specialization- are part of the target group for these scholarships. The benefits are very attractive for students as the scholarship covers tuition fees, accommodation and meals, plus 300 Dollars per month and two return tickets from Turkey to their home country per year – one at the beginning of the school year and one at the end. No matter attractive those scholarships are, it is not possible to claim that as many as students of the Muslim minority from Romania expected are lured into the Turkish universities through these scholarships. The main reason behind this relative failure is the impact of Romania's membership to EU as of 2007. Like most Romanian citizens, the young students of the Turkish-Tatar communities have found much more chance and different options to receive education at the universities of the European countries. It seems much more respectable to have a European degree than a Turkish one for the new generation. The second reason negatively affecting the university preference is related to finding job opportunities after graduation. Despite the increase of demand to the Turkish language, most graduates encounter difficulties to find appropriate jobs for them. This problem is especially valid for the alumni of theology students of the Kemal Atatürk College who continued their bachelor studies at the Turkish universities. These elements obviously cause the number of applications to the Turkish universities to fall considerably.⁵

The Turkish Support to the Dobrujan Muslim Minority in the Field of Religion

For centuries the religion of Islam has played an important role connecting Turkey to the Turkish-Tatar communities in the region of Dobruja. Turkey was always responsive to the demands of the Muslim community in this field in order to preserve one of the columns of their cultural identity. Attachment to the religious values was the most important element for the minority to survive during the communist era. As an official institution, the Muftiate in Constanta is responsible for organizing and regulating the religious affairs of the Muslims. As elaborated earlier, the Turkish

⁴ <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/international-students/turkey-scholarships>

⁵ Interview with Muhammet Bülbül, Deputy Principal of Kemal Atatürk National College in Medgidia, 21 December 2016.



intervention in the field of religion, could be started with its mediation role between Turks and Tatars in appointing the new Mufti after toppling down of the communist era Mufti Iacub Mehmet in 1991. Turkey's mediation can primarily be attributed to its long respected leading position in the religious affairs along with its deep historical and political past with the region. The Romanian authorities tacitly agreed to the Turkey's re-entrance to this field as it was seen a bulwark against the extreme interpretations of Islam which tried to penetrate into the Dobruja region. Turkey's secular and moderate understanding of Islam could prevent the Muslim minority of turning into a radical threat to the national security of Romania. Convergence of the interests of the all parties, the Turkish-Tatar minority, Romania and Turkey paved the way of increasing cooperation in the field of religion.

From the institutional perspective, the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs in collaboration with the Muftiate was instrumental to deliver assistance to the minority. Based on the protocol dated 2006, the Turkish party would provide financial help for the restoration of Muslim worship places, share its experiences to further train Dobruja clerics, help editing of religious books and booklets, and give religious assistance by sending clerics from Turkey to serve in Dobruja mosques alongside local imams. To this end, Turkey repaired many mosques in Dobruja starting from the historical ones like Gazi Ali Pasha in Babadag, Esmahan Sultan in Mangalia and Hunkar in Constanta, Abdulmecid in Medgidia and Abdulaziz mosque in Tulcea starting from the 1990s. In later stages, Turkey again through the same institution, built totally new mosques upon the demand of the local people and the Muftiat such as the one in Calarasi in 2015 or contributed financially to their construction like in Medgidia and Constanta. The carpets and other necessary materials like holy Quran were donated to the most of the mosques. In the same vein, 9-10 imams were sent to serve specifically in the historical mosques of Dobruja alongside with the local imams for 4 to 5 year terms. Especially in Ramadan months a number of clergies were dispatched to the mosques without any local imams. This practice still continues today and is found helpful for transferring the Turkish experience to the minority imams as well as for protecting the Turkish cultural heritage jointly. On the other hand, it should be noted that there exists a certain level of resentment by the local imams towards the ones coming from Turkey as they do not want to be seen inferior of them in the eyes of the community. Secondly, the more important reason of this jealousy is caused by their feeling of sharing their earnings coming from different religious services with the Turkish imams, such as funerals, weddings or circumcision ceremonies. However, such sentiments are taken under control by different ways and means. Besides the intervention of the Muftiat through some periodical gatherings with them, Turkey contributes extra amount to the salaries of the local imams, whose number was around 60 in 2017. This is another an example of the financial support given by the same institution to the Dobrujan Muslims. In addition to the mosques, some tombs of important



religious personalities like Sarı Saltuk and Koyun Baba in Babadag, Ishak Baba in Isaacea and the Muslim cemeteries were either restored, rehabilitated or taken under fenced protection by the assistance of the Turkish people who donated their charities in the mosques of Turkey. It is noteworthy that the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs has a policy of matching a city in Turkey with another city in the Balkan countries to meet its demands and requests. Within this context, Constanta is the sister city of Afyonkarahisar located in the West of Turkey, and the donations or charities of the people living in Afyonkarahisar are spent for the needs of Constanta arising in the field of religion.⁶

TIKA's Role in Supporting the Dobrujan Turkish-Tatar Communities

With the opening of the Coordination Office of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in Bucharest in 2014, a new powerful actor for delivering assistance of Turkey to the Turkish-Tatar minority was added in Romania. Established in 1992 as a technical aid organization to respond to the restructuring, adaptation and development needs of the Turkic Republics after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, TIKa enhanced its activities to the Balkans since the beginning of 2000s with the momentum of new Turkish foreign policy expansions.

In close coordination with the Turkish Embassy and the Consulate General in Constanta and based on the needs of the Muslim community in Dobruja, the Coordination Office of TIKa develops a number of projects for the minority in different areas varying from education, religious services, health, sports to sponsoring field trips for the students to Turkey and bearing even the expenditure of organizing some events of the Turkish and Tatar Associations. In this regard, TIKa undertook the rehabilitation of the building and equipping the classrooms of the kindergarten of the Kemal Atatürk College in Medgidia in 2016, later its main building in 2017 with permission of the Ministry of Education of Romania. TIKa's another project covered establishing 20 Turkish language classrooms and equipping them with modern teaching materials at different schools in Constanta, Mangalia, Medgidia and their villages. TIKa donated 500 mathematic books to the library of the Ovidius University in Constanta and established a math laboratory at the same university in 2015. It gave financial assistance to publishing some academic books prepared by prominent scholars of Romania. It established a sport center for an orphanage in Constanta in 2016 with keeping in mind its social responsibilities for the Romanian people.

⁶ Interview with Aytakin Akçin, Former Attache for Religious Affairs at the Turkish Consulate General in Constanta, 23.05.2015.

Among the projects TIKA carried out in Romania the ones in health sector receive a significant share. It signed a protocol with the Municipality of Medgidia to renovate and refurbish the city hospital in 2015 with a cost of 1,5 million Euro, which is still to be finished. It already completed renovation of the newborn units of the Constanta hospital, and also another hospital in Bucharest in 2017. Equipping the eye unit of the Mangalia hospital with the modern devices in 2016 is another project of TIKA successfully completed in this field.

In essence, TIKA would like to assist to the efforts of conservation of the historical legacy by projects of renovating of old mosques and buildings in Dobruja. It completed feasibility studies of renovation of Hunkar and Isaacea mosques, respectively in Constanta and Isaacea as it helped the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Turkey on an ad hoc mission in the mid 1990s in restoring the Sarı Saltuk Tomb in Babadağ. The Turkish and Tatar community members always express their gratitude for the TIKA's project of putting the warming system under the carpets of the mosques in 2015, which generally do not have sufficient warming facilities in the winter season.

TIKA, like Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center and the Presidency of Religious Affairs in coordination with the Turkish diplomatic missions in Romania, aids and assists to the Muslim community as well as the Romanian people.

Support of the Turkish Businesspeople to the Muslim Community of Romania

Opened up to the world at the beginning of 1990s, the Turkish businessmen and entrepreneurs gained influence in Romania in a very short time. As a virgin market after the fall of communism, Romania needed foreign capital and with the fast unfolding privatization process in the country the unemployment rate was on a steep rise. Turkish businessmen flocking into Romania established many companies creating thousands of jobs for the Romanian people including the members of the Muslim community. This was a win-win situation for the Turkish and Romanian economies. The Turkish companies whose number total to almost 11.000 still operate in many fields from manufacturing plastic materials to producing flour, and from providing services such as restaurants to the agricultural production.

After a short time settled in Romania, the Turkish businessmen started to be involved in establishing social and cultural ties in addition to the economic ones with the Turkish-Tatar communities through either their official associations –the most powerful ones are the Turkish Businessmen Association (TIAD) founded in Bucharest in 1993, and the the Dobruja Turkish



Businessmen Association (DTIAD) established in Constanta in 1999 - or on their individual capacities. TIAD having 105 members and DTIAD 56 members in 2018 represent the most important Turkish companies in Romania. There are other small-size Turkish buisness associations and formations in Romania. The most notable one is the Independent Industrialist's and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD) which was launched in 2016 in Bucharest having 30 members around in 2018.⁷ It should be noted that their activities with or assistance to the Turkish-Tatar communities are not isolated behaviors. Either they take advice from the Turkish diplomatic missions or inform them duly about their aid and assistance projects.

From the beginning they kept good and close relations with the local people and responded positively to their demands in different areas. Under the guidance of the Turkish Embassy and the Consulate General they focused on allocation financial resources to the repair of mosques-like recently in Hirsova and Kastel-, historical buildings, monuments, tombs and cemeteries. They built minarets of many mosques. They donated teaching and office material to the Kemal Atatürk College and many other schools in Dobruja like the school in Başpınar (Fantane Mare) village. They always behave generous to the requests coming from the Muftiate and the local people. They bear the cost of having iftar dinners collectively organized in different cities or villages. They undertake food packages distribution campaigns to the poor on important religious days and feasts. They even contribute extra wages to the low salaries of the imams in the mosques. They see their financial contributions not only mere charity to the needy, but also help to the works of the Turkish state which try to support the Muslim minority in every possible way.

All those business associations are represented at the official celebrations of national and religious days of Turkey and the Tatar minority showing solidarity with the motherland. They deliver their speeches in front of the community exhibiting their moral support to them. For instance, the commemoration event which is organized by the UDTTMR in Constanta on the occasion of the anniversary of the exile of the Crimean Tatar Turks to the Siberia on 18 May 1944, is broadly participated each year by the leading Turkish businessmen. Needless to mention that they are at the top of the invitee lists of the receptions of the national days of Turkey and Romania. In sum, they are not only economical power, but also very strong pushing force for the cultural, religious and social activities of the Turks, whose population is estimated around 17.000 as of 2018, and Turkish-Tatar minority in Romania.

⁷ Interview with Zeki Uysal, Former President of the Dobruja Turkish Businessmen Association (DTIAD) in Constanta, 15.12.2016.

Conclusion

Turkey's support and assistance to the Muslim minority in Northern Dobruja of Romania following the communist period was crucial to reconstruct the ethnic and cultural identity of the minority. To this end, Turkey did not discriminate Turks and Tatars treating both communities on equal foot. Along with this far sighted understanding, the convergence of interests of Turkey and Romania at this historic moment expedited support efforts of various Turkey's state bodies as well as strong private sector towards the minority. This was conducive to rebirth of the Turkish-Tatar cultural heritage in Dobruja together with fostering good relations between Turkey and Romania on the basis of mutual confidence.

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