

## **DISCRIMINATION POLICIES THAT LEAD TO FORCED MIGRATION: THE QUESTION OF THE BULGARIAN TURKS WITHIN UNITED NATIONS (1988-1989)**

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### **Abstract**

On August 21, 1989, Turkey's decision to close the borders with Bulgaria it was interpreted by the authorities in Ankara as an attempt to force Sofia through dialogue both governments to reach an immigration agreement. Turkey considering itself as the kin state several times tried to sensitize and prove that ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria experienced continued repression and forced assimilation while Bulgaria perceived those attempts as long-term policy of Turkey in interfering on internal issues of Bulgaria. The confrontations between Turkey and Bulgaria increased with the decision of Turkey to address this problem within United Nations. In the recent academic literature, most of the studies are focused on the internal factors and practices related to the assimilation campaign, for the period 1985-1989. The purpose of this paper, it is to contextualize the arguments used in favor and against internationalization of the question of the Bulgarian Turks through multilateral diplomacy as an instrument used by state authorities in Turkey and Bulgaria. The term Bulgarian Turks it is used in the sense of ethnicity referring to the ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria and having the status of the minority group. In this paper will be analyzed the content of the documents delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Turkey and Bulgaria in UN to the UN Secretary General and UN General Assembly, and the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur appointed in accordance with resolution 1986/20. The paper it is guided by two research questions: What kind of engagement Turkey chose in raising the question of the Bulgarian Turks into UN level? What actions took Bulgaria within UN in negating the accusations for an assimilation campaign?

*Keywords:* assimilation campaign, infringement, human rights and freedom of religion, international treaties, multilateral diplomacy, OIC, UN Commission on Human Rights

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### **Introduction**

Becoming noticeable actor through active participation in the regional and international organizations it was one of the strategies of the states that realized that the status quo present in the late years of the Cold War will be challenged in early 1990s by tendencies of part of states to increase their influence at least in the regional politics. The advocacy, increasing awareness and finding a solution for the question of the Bulgarian Turks it was a moral obligation for Turkey in being the kin-state of the Turks living outside of the national borders, neighbor state with Bulgaria, and member state of the United Nations (UN) and of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). From the other side, Bulgaria being aware that those worldwide ideological transformations would have been reflected on every sphere of the state, particularly on the domestic political stability, it was very decisive the issue of the Bulgarian Turks not to be part of the international agenda. Furthermore, the governmental policies not to be interpreted as assimilation campaign against the Turkish minority. On contrary, in proving that the Government had been for years dedicated for improving the overall wellbeing of the Turks in Bulgaria it was an strategy of the governmental authorities in Bulgaria to preserve its existence in a period when as they perceived that had to cope with internal and external threats. Moreover, that the question of the Bulgarian Turks could place Bulgaria, on international level, as a country

that didn't fulfill the obligations defined in the international treaties, especially related to the issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms. From the other side, knowing that the survival of the regime it was uncertain and worrying that in addition the question of the Bulgarian Turks can lead to failure of the regime they tried to enhance the idea that Turkey had nationalistic and political ambitions towards Bulgaria. In other words, there were reciprocal accusations between Bulgaria and Turkey on purpose to protect their national interests.

From 1980 to 1990 were the years when international community, primarily the Western countries, was focused on the protection and promotion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms. In such an environment, it was adapted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Declaration remained a challenge in several states around the world. In some cases, implementation it was opposite to the principal values and ideas under which were build states' political systems. Very often, political motives related to the violation of the freedom of religion or belief were the causes for infringement in the implementation of the Declarations, too. The question of the Bulgarian Turks embodies three components: the political uncertainty and instability present on international and national levels, discrimination policies encouraged by political reasons and manifested also on religious grounds, and forced migration legitimized as voluntary form of movement of people through a legislative national act. Large number of Turks that lived in Bulgaria decided to go in Turkey, temporarily or permanently, and the peak it was reached on August 1989 which by international press, international organizations and Western countries it was characterized as humanitarian crisis. Therefore, from the Bulgarian side for years it was paved the way for a massive immigration of the Turkish minority living in Bulgaria and from the other side the immediate decision of the Turkey for closing the border with Bulgaria and their insistence for an bilateral agreement that would regulate the flow of the migration and the rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria weren't developments that could happen suddenly.

In the academic literature there are well-founded studies that in depth analyze the impact of the Bulgarian Government's policies over the Turkish minority, the components on which it was founded the assimilation campaign, the reaction of the local community over the governmental policies, and the opportunities for enjoying the freedom of religion by the Muslims during the communist regime. There are few studies that examine the question of the Bulgarian Turks from the perspective of the foreign policy, more concretely on the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Turkey. Considering that the readiness of Turkey through the multilateral diplomacy to gain recognition of the problem of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and to get support in finding a solution resulted in deterioration of the bilateral relations and drove Bulgaria to look for mechanisms in its defense remains to be analyzed how Turkey and Bulgaria used multilateral diplomacy in promoting and protecting their national interests within UN over an sensible issue that interlinked political, economic and religious factors. Therefore, the purpose of this paper it is to contextualize the arguments used in favor and against internationalization of the question of the Bulgarian Turks during 1988-1989 by Turkey and Bulgaria addressing this problem in the relevant institutions of the UN. The paper it is guided by two research questions: What kind of engagement Turkey chose to raise the question of the Bulgarian Turks into UN level? What actions took Bulgaria within UN in negating the accusations for an assimilation campaign?

The research it is in-depth analysis and it is composed from four main parts. Oriented towards the contextual factors, in the first part, it is explored the approach of UN regarding the religious intolerance and discrimination in the period of the 1980s and for that reason are analyzed the content of the UN Charter, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief (DEAIDRB). In the second part, are presented the findings from the Reports of the UN Special Rapporteur about Bulgaria's responsibilities in accomplishing the obligations derived from the

DEAIDRB. Third part it is focused on analyzing the nature and the content of the documents that Turkey used in its efforts for advocacy within UN. The fourth part contains the analysis of the responds of Bulgaria aiming to disapprove the evidences provided by Turkey within UN. In the paper, the term Bulgarian Turks it is used in the sense of ethnicity referring to the ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria and having the status of the minority group.

### **United Nations approach on the elimination of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief**

In the Charter of the United Nations, Article 1, among the main purposes of the organization, it is placed:

“to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”

Moreover, in Article 13 of the UN Charter it was underlined the responsibility of the UN General Assembly to “*initiate studies and make recommendations for the purpose of promoting international cooperation, ..... and assisting in the realization of the human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion*”. The element of universality in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms it was added, too (Article 55). From these articles originated not only the obligation of UN but also for the Member States to guarantee the rights and freedoms for their citizens. Important advancements regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion, it was made with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which was adapted by General Assembly, on 10 December 1948. In this document it wasn't guaranteed only the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion but in Article 18 it was specified how this freedom can be enjoyed and expressed by followers of a religion individually or collectively. Furthermore, it was defined that this freedom can be practiced freely in private or in public, including also the freedom to abandon or change the religion or belief<sup>1</sup>.

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief it is the document where it was paid great attention to the scope of the freedom of religion and belief. For sure, its content was a result of field work, since the early 1950s, on collecting information systematically, on reliable sources and on worldwide level related to the phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination based on religion and/or belief. The Declaration it is a wider extension of what had been earlier defined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, aiming to be provided a deeper and more comprehensive understanding related to the fundamental freedom of religion or belief. As it is underlined in the Declaration that General Assembly “*convinced that freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among people*” it represents the attitude of UN to eliminate religious intolerance and discrimination globally and it was linked also with the efforts for sustainable peace. Preventing religion to be the source of conflicts between states or sufferings of nations around the world it was more than a vision for the future. Furthermore, UN Member States were responsible through national laws to guarantee the freedom of religion or belief (Article 4 and Article 5). In the Declaration, priority it was given to the equality; and as such within the concept of intolerance and discrimination were enclosed any activity intentionally undertaken in prohibiting, limiting or denying implementation of the fundamental freedom as well actions that

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the debate about the content, amendments and ratification of the Declaration see the records from the 183rd plenary meeting A/PV.183

will favor and/or differentiate any person or group of people on the grounds of religion or belief over other individuals or communities (Article 2).

Regarding implementation of the Declaration there were two important resolutions of the General Assembly, in 1985 and 1986. Acknowledging the obligation for universal promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms it was expressed the necessity for higher engagement of different actors in the dissemination of the information about the freedom of religion or belief, including the role of the UN. It had resulted that guaranteeing the freedom of religion or belief it hadn't been sufficient. Data from the fieldwork showed that intolerance and discrimination based on religion continued to be present as a phenomenon in different countries even though the Declaration it was adapted and ratified by significant number of states. For that reason, General Assembly requested from the member states of the organization *“in accordance with their respective constitutional systems, to provide, where they have not already done so, adequate constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief”* (A/RES/40/109). As well, it was added that the states had to undertake measures in order to prevent and end religious intolerance and discrimination. Therefore, the attention of the UN, concretely of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council, it was in pressing the UN Member States to incorporate within their legal frameworks the freedom of religion or belief and it to be incorporated into concrete governmental policies making possible for every citizen to enjoy the rights and freedoms that were guaranteed by international public law and that needed to be also by national law. It was essential that General Assembly observed the activities undertaken by states and this was done through the Commission on Human Rights which had to deliver reports related to advances and deficiencies on national level about the freedom of religion and belief. In that context, it was highlighted participation of the Secretary General in the process of spreading the information about the content of the Declaration into national languages and engaging non-governmental organization that would have contributed to enhancing of the awareness of the public opinion, too (ibid). In 1986, it was manifested deep concern associated with implementation of the Declaration. Due to the lack of progress, particularly in some countries, the General Assembly decided to appoint Special Rapporteur having the mandate to collect valid and well-founded information on the implementation of the Declaration on national levels; and from various sources, including the governments of the UN Member States, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and communities of religion or belief (E/CN.4/RES/1986/20). In the resolution, it was defined the support that Secretary General needed to provide to the Special Rapporteur, including the *“appeal to all Governments to co-operate with and assist the Special Rapporteur in the performance of his duties and to furnish all information requested”* (ibid). In other words, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur it was comprised by three elements: collecting, analyzing and preparing reports, on reliable data found in particular countries, independently and impartially.

### **Special Rapporteur's findings on the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination in Bulgaria**

The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, enjoying the mandate given by UN, during the year, contacted, visited and gathered information regarding implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. As it is emphasized in the report, in order:

*“to identify the general trends and characteristics of the problems of religious intolerance as defined in the Declaration, the information collected has been reassembled according to several criteria; first, the factors the existence of which seems to constitute an obstacle to the implementation of the provisions of the Declaration have been identified; secondly,*

various types of infringement of the provisions of the Declaration have been identified in the light of the relevant articles; thirdly, information has been provided on the negative repercussions of infringements of the provisions of the Declaration on the enjoyment of various human rights” (E/CN.4/1987/35).

In 1986, among the recognized factors that hindered the implementation of the provisions of the Declaration were legislative provisions, governmental policies, political, economic and cultural factors and intolerance towards other religions and beliefs. Regarding national legal frameworks it was concluded that incorporation of the right to freedom of religion and belief found in several states it was not a guarantee that in practice citizens enjoyed these rights and freedoms derived from the constitution and/or domestic laws. Moreover, situation it was more delicate in the countries where by constitution it was denied the freedom of religion and belief under the justification of an atheist state, explicit declaration in a constitution for an official state religion where favoring the one over other major religions and beliefs it was embraced and promoted, constitutional proclamation on secular state where anti-religious propaganda it was encouraged, and cases where by the law proselytism it was forbidden and considered as an offence (ibid). For sure, the foundation of the national legal frameworks in most of the cases it was reflection of a given ideology where through governmental policies it was expressed the intolerance and discrimination based on religion and/or belief. Further, in the Report, it was emphasized that in specific countries the approach of governments towards the issues of religion or beliefs it was reflected on the implementation of the Declaration. It was concluded that there were cases where religious intolerance and discrimination it was a governmental policy and took several forms, including campaigns for forced assimilation, confiscation and/or destruction of the religious buildings, attacks, charges and convictions against individuals and religious leaders who showed disobedience and resistance to the governmental decrees and policies, measures on limiting or forbidding religious practices, media propaganda associated with criticism of religion(s) and denigration of the religious values, restrictions on the employment or political activity of followers of specific religion or belief, and mobilization of youth in manifesting religious intolerance (E/CN.4/1987/35).

Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, in the report of 1986, had drawn attention that “*certain political, economic and cultural factors help to create a climate conducive to distrust and religious intolerance*” (ibid). He emphasized, referring to the political factors, that there were countries where adherence to specific religion it was linked to the ethnic identity, nationalism and separatism. In extreme cases, attachment and commitment to a religion, or to a specific religion, it was interpreted by the state institutions’ not only as disobedience of individuals and particular groups but even as not being loyal to the state, political party and/or ideology (ibid). Concerning economic and cultural factors, it was underlined that very often governments due to their religious intolerance and discrimination undertook actions like “*assuring economic development of certain backwards areas*” or privatization of lands that where of crucial economic and cultural importance for certain group of people (ibid). This was an indication that governments had expected that by limiting or cutting the material and spiritual sources than followers of certain religion(s) will be more eager to assimilation. In other words, that resource scarcity, environmental degradation, political and institutional pressure and unemployment will deteriorate economic well-being and quality of life for the groups and it will lead to the successful realization of the governmental goals.

From the visit in Bulgaria, in 1987, the Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights came to the conclusion that the “*question of a purely religious nature have thus become part of a latent bilateral dispute between two people, two ethnic groups, namely the Bulgarians and the Turks*”, underlining that in the case of Bulgaria respect for the freedom for religion or beliefs, particularly related to the rights of the Bulgarian Turks, must be analyzed by taking into consideration the historical, political and cultural context of the national identity formation in

Bulgaria (E/CN.4/1988/45). Furthermore, in the report were presented findings that demonstrated infringement of the rights to enjoy and practice religion or belief, discrimination on religious basis, “*campaign to change Muslim-sounding names*”, religious and cultural intolerance (ibid). The Special Rapporteur trying to have an impartial attitude and well-founded and comprehensive conclusions based on proven data also from observations in the terrain during the visit he had preferred to meet with state’s representatives, religious clerics, Muslim followers and intellectuals from different profiles who had impact over the Muslim community in Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>. As it is added in the Report, from the Bulgarian officials it has been repeated that state institutions were engaged completely in protecting and promoting the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as it is defined in the DEADR and the right it was guaranteed also with the country’s Constitution and the national laws. Nevertheless, Muslim followers, particularly from the Turkish ethnic community, experiencing a complete different reality from what it was considered and presented as constitutional right and governmental policies, pointed out that in their daily life they had have difficulties even continuously faced pressure to practice religion and stay devoted to religious core beliefs. In their statements were presented situations of limiting or forbidding by Bulgarian state authorities to the believers to attend and perform religious rituals and activities, including access to religious education for children.

The Special Rapporteur looked on positively to the Protocol signed by Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria and Turkey, on 23 February 1988, expecting that there will be strengthening of the neighborhood relations and overcoming bilateral problems between both countries, including the question of the Turkish community living in Bulgaria. In addition, once more it was communicated in the report of 1988 that conditions of the Muslim community in Bulgaria didn’t improve and reliable data confirmed the same situation as it has been detected a year before (E/CN.4/1989/44). That was an indication that political environment hadn’t changed in Bulgaria. Moreover, through the governmental policies continued to be promoted discrimination, intolerance and assimilation towards Muslim believers, especially against Bulgarian Turks.

### **Turkey’s approach to the freedom of religion regarding Bulgarian Turks 1988-1989**

Turkey’s strategy in raising the question of the Bulgarian Turks into UN level had been focused primarily in engaging the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations in all formal communications with the relevant UN institutions responsible for human rights, especially for the human rights and fundamental freedoms based on religion. On those lines, communication of the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations with the UN Secretary General it has been continuous which it is seen in the efforts to keep UN Secretary General informed also about the activities and findings of the OIC concerning the Muslim community in Bulgaria. Consequently, the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressing to the UN Secretary General delivered the resolutions adapted by the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on 1986, 1988 and 1989 which as mentioned above were related to the rights and freedoms of the Muslim community living in Bulgaria. Moreover, prior to the analysis of the content of the OIC resolutions it must be recognized the importance of the OIC resolution 31/16-P in which it was restated the willingness that in the near future to be strengthen mutual cooperation between OIC and UN. Both organizations had shown readiness to continue to work together on international level in reaching solutions for wide scope of issues, including the questions related to the religion.

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<sup>2</sup> The visit it had been initiated by the Bulgarian Government where after they replied to the letter of the Special Rapporteur, from July 1987, and provided their arguments for the situation in Bulgaria about the freedom of religion saw as suitable to invite the UN Rapporteur for an visit in the country. Moreover, Bulgarian authorities later will bring to the attention of the Special Rapporteur that Bulgaria had been the only state that officially had invited him for a visit related to the implementation of the Declaration (E/CN.4/1989/44). This had been an attempt by the Bulgarian institutions’ to prove that in Bulgaria there was no discrimination and pressure based on religion.

In 1986, during the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) it was discussed about the situation of Turkish Muslim community in Bulgaria. Referring to the principles of the OIC Charter, UN Charter and other international instruments and expressing serious concerns about deprivation of human rights and fundamental freedoms based on religion it was decided that OIC Member States to be engaged entirely in finding political solution that would ended the assimilation campaign against Turkish minority and would be guaranteed cultural rights and freedom of religion for the Muslim community in Bulgaria (30/16-P). In the resolution it was emphasized the importance of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in the search for the political solution. Moreover, appointment of a group of experts, the Contact Group, to study the circumstances under which occurred the problem of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria demonstrated similar approach to the UN General Assembly in collecting reliable data regarding guarantees and respect for the freedom of religion. Among the assignments of the Contact Group it was that the findings to be presented in the upcoming meeting of the ICFM. Analyzing the dynamics and the context of how the events developed it can be seen that the letters of the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressing to the UN Secretary General, in March and April 1988, were delivered a short period of time after the Report of the Special Rapporteur submitted to UN Commission on Human Rights, on 6 January 1988, and the Report of the Contact Group it was send to the latest meeting of the ICFM, on march 1988. In both reports there were conclusions for intolerance and discrimination based on religion against the Muslims in Bulgaria, particularly towards Turkish minority. Efforts made by Turkey in 1988 within UN must be perceived from three perspectives: Turkey being the kin-state and protecting the rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, Turkey as OIC member and acting on multilateral diplomacy based on the OIC resolution 30/16-P, and Turkey as UN member state giving priority to the protection and promotion of the freedom of religion. Additionally, it must be taken into consideration the political and ideological factors that were present in the final years of the Cold War, especially related to the neighborhood relations between Turkey and Bulgaria.

The report of the Contact Group and the Resolution of the ICFM represented the official approach of the OIC on the question of Turkish Muslim minority in Bulgaria. In other words, in the report it was contained the analysis of the information from the study while the resolution comprised the decision based on the report. The Contact Group gathered information by travelling in Bulgaria and Turkey, too. From the contact they had have with the Bulgarian officials and politicians it had been evident the sensitivity they demonstrated when members of the Contact Group during the conversations referred to the situation as the question of the Turkish Muslim minority (A/43/230). As it was stressed in the report, the mandate of the Contact Group it was not to treat the infringement of the rights of the Turkish population in Bulgaria but because it was the case where question of religion and of the ethnic identity were very much interlinked consequently it hadn't been possible to study separately them (ibid). The Contact Group couldn't meet with the local Muslim population and from the meetings they had with the Muftis and Imams it was realized the pressure they faced by the state authorities. Moreover, in the report it was written that:

“the stereotype account of living conditions of Muslim minority in Bulgaria given by the Muftis and Imams was more of a political nature aimed more highlighting the social and economic objectives of the party in power than to throw any light on the religious problems faced by the Muslims. The statements of these Muftis and Imams could not be accepted by the Group for another reason, namely, that they worked under the control of the authorities in Sofia and the members of the Group had a strong feeling that they were not free to express themselves, especially in the presence of the large number of high Bulgarian officials accompanying the Contact Group” (ibid).

Pursuing the mission of the organization and fulfilling the responsibility that it was given by IFCM, the OIC Contact Group come up with the conclusions, state obligations and recommendations. In the first part, were presented the evidences about prohibition and violation of the freedom of religion for Muslim community. The experts of the Contact Group had been conscientious in using in the report only the term Muslims or Muslim population and not Turkish Muslim minority. In the second part, were summarized the national and international legal instruments that obliged the Bulgarian Government to implement. Furthermore, Contact Group considered that due to the inconsistent behavior of the Bulgarian Government to the implementation of the legal instruments the question of the Muslim community cannot be treated solely as an internal issue of Bulgaria. In the third part, it was proposed active engagement and participation of the OIC and the OIC Member State to internationalize the issue of denial of the freedom of religion of Muslims in Bulgaria and increasing awareness about the repression and assimilation they experienced in political, economic, and cultural matters (A/43/230). In the following resolution of the IFCM it was asked Bulgaria to comply its constitutional and international responsibilities regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular related to the religious and cultural rights of the Muslim minority (A/43/263).

OIC Contact Group continued with monitoring and analyzing the situation in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, even in 1989 there were no positive developments in improving the conditions of the Muslim population. On contrary, there were founded cases that demonstrated deterioration of the circumstances instead of mechanisms that had to strengthen the guarantees for enjoyment of the freedom of religion. In the Report, were presented evidences not only in forbidding freely to be practiced religious rituals in private and in public, including prayers in the mosques; but that the assimilation campaign it had been transformed into an instrument for forced migration (A/44/190). During the IFCM, held on March 1989, were expressed regrets that with the Turkish-Bulgarian Protocol, signed a year earlier, it hadn't been achieved as it was expected to be solved the issue of the Turkish Muslim minority (ibid). Furthermore, in the resolution that was adopted were repeated the same requests towards the Bulgarian Government and to the OIC Member States as in the resolution from 1988. Additionally, IFCM asked Bulgaria to put serious efforts in issues related to emigration and/or family reunification and to be stopped the anti-Islamic campaign in Bulgarian press that in nature it was denigrating and shared false information (ibid).

### **Bulgaria's approach to the freedom of religion regarding Bulgarian Turks 1988-1989**

The reaction of Bulgaria to the Turkey's letters submitted to UN Secretary General regarding the resolutions of the IFCM and the reports of the OIC Contact Group it had been immediate. The Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN addressing letters to the Secretary General aimed to demonstrate protest to the approach of Turkey in drawing multilateral diplomacy, especially the UN, and in using the question of the Turkish Muslims as a pretext for deterioration of the bilateral relations. Additionally, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria made serious efforts to disapprove and provide information that the Bulgarian Government didn't have made pressure over the Muslims in the country, particularly rejecting that there were governmental policies associated with an assimilation campaign against Turkish minority. It had been of vital importance for Bulgaria at that time to succeed in negating the accusations within UN for an assimilation campaign due to the possible diplomatic consequences over the political stability and security of the state.

In the respond, in 1988, by the Bulgarian Government, the Report of the OIC Contact Group it was described as a "*biased report*". Furthermore, according to them the Contact Group:



“elected to ignore its mandate and the truth about Bulgarian Muslims. In its own admission, the Contact Group did not take into consideration either what it had observed in Bulgaria or the information provided by the Bulgarian side. The report submitted on its behalf is written entirely on the basis of argumentation whose total mendacity and pronounce tendentiousness have been exposed time and time again by the Bulgarian side, including by the Muslims of Bulgaria themselves” (A/43/230).

In the letter, on purpose to manifest disapproving of the Turkey’s approach, it was attached the Protocol that had been signed by Bulgaria and Turkey, on 23 February 1988. In the Protocol had been defined that “*regular political consultations*” will be conducted between both countries (A/43/320). As well, in it was specified that Bulgaria and Turkey in sprit of strengthening neighborhood relations will respect bilateral and international treaties and through joint working groups they will work together on solving the bilateral problems and expanding in future their cooperation in various fields. Certainly, the Protocol it was an agreement that both countries needed to abide by but there were also other organizations that repeatedly displayed information about the pressure on ethnic and religious grounds that happened in Bulgaria. As well, Bulgarian Government it was responsible to fulfill its obligations, especially related to the freedom of religion, founded on the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that also the UN Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights it had submitted the Report couple of months earlier and his findings were very similar on those of the OIC Contact Group. In other words, the attempt of Bulgaria to use the Protocol as legal instrument and trying to prove that Turkey didn’t comply with what both countries had have agreed, it was more a step to manifest disapproval rather well-founded argument.

The same behavior continued during the 1989, too. The first reaction it was related to the Turkey’s approach in submitting to the UN Secretary General the conclusions from the IFCM meeting held on March 1989. In the letter, Bulgarian Government paid attention to three elements: cooperation with OIC and its member state, historical documents and context associated with the existence of the Turkish Muslim minority and constitutional guarantees in Bulgaria about the freedom of religion. Firstly, for the authorities in Sofia it had been important in the letter to mention that “*Bulgaria maintains mutually beneficial and fruitful relations with the majority of the member states of that Organization (OIC) sincerely striving for their further development and the pursuance of a constructive dialogue*” (A/44/271). Comparing with the language used in the letter addressed from a year before it gave the impression that Bulgaria endeavored not to deteriorate further the relations with the OIC, especially taking into consideration that in the latest meeting of the IFCM it was concluded that if Bulgarian institutions will not withdraw from the policy of pressure, oppression and discrimination against Muslims than OIC Member States to reconsider their economic cooperation with Bulgaria (A/44/190). Furthermore, the question of the Muslims living in Bulgaria, especially linked with the Turkish minority, begun to grow. As such, there it was a risk to become an international issue and repercussion not to be only politically but also in the field of economy. Moreover, there were direct accusations against authorities in Ankara in involving OIC, as Bulgaria perceived that through distorted information and unreliable data, in order Turkey to fulfill its “*politically motivated and nationalistic goals*” (A/44/271). Secondly, Bulgarian Government referring to their interpretation of historical background related to the issue of the Turkish Muslim minority went back to the period of the Ottoman Empire and holding them responsible for the “*assimilative policy*” during the 14 century against the Bulgarians (ibid). This argument it was done with the purpose to: demonstrate that the ethnic roots of the Muslims in Bulgaria belonged to the Bulgarian nation and by that the Turkish minority in Bulgaria in essence were Bulgarians who had been forced to convert to Islam; and to undermine the linkage that it was

made in the OIC Contact Group's report related to the association of the Muslims with Turkish minority in Bulgaria. Thirdly, political leadership in Bulgaria found unavoidable to preserve and even enhance the image of the state versus international community related to the obligations derived from the international treaties about the human rights, particularly the freedom of religion. For that reason, they emphasized the chapters and articles found in the Constitution and national laws protecting and promoting the freedom of religion.

In the following months there it wasn't progress neither in the approach of the Government of Bulgaria towards the question of the Turkish Muslim minority nor in the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Turkey. On contrary, resistance of the local population against the Bulgarian institutions started to increase. There were cases of mobilization of the Turkish minority leading to an organized confrontation rather a spontaneous. As well, what had been considered earlier as a domestic issue of Bulgaria already reached to international dimension. This time, Bulgaria perceived it as a reflection of the Cold War mindset where part of the Western countries were engaged in sharing disinformation regarding Bulgaria's adaption of the laws on passports and foreign travail, on 9 May 1989 (A/44/300). In the reaction of the Bulgaria within UN, it was delivered the Statement of President of the State Council of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, which had been broadcasted, on 29 May 1989, on Bulgarian radio and television. The Bulgaria's statesman conveyed the message that those laws were adapted with intention all Bulgarian citizens to enjoy their right to travel and which were in conformity with international treaties. Moreover, in his speech were called institutions in Turkey to open the borders *"to all Bulgarian Muslims who want to go to Turkey for short-term stay or for permanent residence. The time of diversionary maneuvering is over.....If it comes to claims, we too, can bring up the question of how many Bulgarians live in the Republic of Turkey"* (ibid). Announcing that the question of the Bulgarians in Turkey can be opened demonstrated that the crisis can be transformed into a conflict which was not in the interest neither of Bulgaria nor for Turkey. In the upcoming month there were expectations and declarations that dialogue between the two neighbors will be restored (A/44/412). Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Even more, closing of the borders by Turkey made international community to see the question of the Bulgarian Turks as a humanitarian issue. The justification of the Turkish authorities it had been that *"the decision was an effort to press the Bulgarian Government in Sofia into negotiating a diplomatic solution....., the border would be reopened once Bulgaria signed an agreement regulating the human flow and guaranteeing the property rights of ethnic Turks who live and the civil liberties of those who stay behind"* (New York Times, 22 August 1989). Turkey facing at that period also with an economic crisis and being in the role of the kin-state it was interested to protect the interests of the Turks living in Bulgaria by a bilateral agreement which would have prevented the forced migration to be legitimized by the laws from May 1989. Thereafter, on October, the National Assembly of Bulgaria amended the Law on the Bulgarian Citizenship and the Law on Foreign Travel Passports (A/44/618). With regime change in Bulgaria, part of Bulgarian Turks returned and from the new government it was paid greater attention to political, conomic and cultural rights of the Turkish minority living in the country and to their participation in the political processes during the transition from communism to democracy.

## Conclusions

Multilateral diplomacy represents a forum where states can openly discuss, advocate and decide over global issues. In other worlds, international and/or regional organizations gather large number of states in solving international problems. During the Cold War peace and security dominated in the meetings' agendas nevertheless themes related to human rights and fundamental freedoms often were part of those debates and consultations. Considering that states in essence prefer to treat the questions associated with minority groups as an internal issue

but intervention of the regional and/or international organizations it had been unavoidable due to cases of continues repression, assimilation and discrimination. Similar approach it is found in the UN's attitude in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief during the 1980s. Appointing Special Rapporteur responsible to collect reliable evidences from different sources, containing data also from the field studies, demonstrated an active engagement of UN in monitoring the implementation of the Declaration by the UN Member States.

Turkey following carefully the international, regional and local events, of the late period of the Cold War, found necessarily and more suitable to address the question of the Bulgarian Turks within the UN institutions. Therefore, it preferred more the multilateral diplomacy rather bilateral communication as a mechanism that could have been more fruitful in finding a solution for the Bulgarian Turks during the last years of the communist regime in Bulgaria, and as such for two reasons. From one side, it was the period when UN had demonstrated its interest and commitment to address religious intolerance and discrimination worldwide. From the other side, Bulgaria intensified political pressure over the Turkish minority in the country giving the impression that it wasn't ready to withdraw from the decisions that contributed in pursuing with the assimilation campaign. Analyzing the nature and content of documents submitted to the UN Secretary General it is evident that Turkey delivered the resolutions and reports of the OIC. In this it is seen the intention to preserve impartiality and to enhance the foundation of its advocacy by presenting not its own findings but of the organization that it was responsible for guaranteeing the freedom of religion of Muslims worldwide and which also had appointed a team of experts with very similar mandate of that of UN Special Rapporteur. Therefore, delivering those letters to the UN Secretary General made Turkey to fulfill its obligations as a kin-state of the Bulgarian Turks, UN Member State and OIC Member State. With closing of the borders with Bulgaria, August 1989, Turkey achieved to internationalize the question of the Bulgarian Turks even more. Dissemination of the information by the international press on what had been treated as an internal issue by Bulgaria resulted into an additional pressure over authorities in Sofia, especially that relevant organizations as such as UN and OIC already had reliable evidences for an assimilation campaign undertaken by the Bulgarian Government.

The reaction of Bulgaria to the Turkey's letters towards UN Secretary General regarding the resolutions of the IFCM and the reports of the OIC Contact Group it had been immediate and in the form of protest and characterizing the conclusions from the reports as biased evidences. Bulgaria undertook several actions aiming to prove to the UN institutions that in the country didn't existed an assimilation campaign or violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of minorities. On contrary, that Turkey and OIC Contact Group intentionally misinterpreted the Bulgaria's governmental policies. Accusations towards Turkey were in the political, nationalist and separatist form. In the beginning, the authorities in Sofia responded to the letter of the UN Special Rapporteur regarding the implementation of Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. Striving to be more trustfully they invited the UN Special Rapporteur for a visit in Bulgaria. Despite the fact, that they made efforts to present that the Government it was dedicated to create, facilitate and improve the opportunities for enjoyment of the human rights and freedoms for all citizens the results from the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur regarding Bulgaria weren't positive. There had been detected cases of religious intolerance and discrimination, and infringement of the Declaration. Being on that situation Bulgaria opposed the validity of the information presented in the report. The tendencies that there it wasn't an assimilation campaign lead to the interpretation of the historical events from the fourteenth century and insistence to demonstrate that forced assimilation had happen in that period. It is unquestionable that in 1980s there it was

assimilation campaign and forced migration it was legitimized by domestic laws adapted on May 1989.

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