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Freedom walk of the Turks in Bulgaria: Events of May in 1989 and their reflections

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Abstract

The Events of May having a distinctive place in the history of Bulgaria of Socialist Era in 1989 lead the major ethnical issues which are avoided to be discussed. These social events indicate that the processes of returning to origin which has the essence of assimilation and Bulgarization are not accepted and internalized by the Turkish Minority. The Events of May left its traces of shame as a bloody stain in the history of the Bulgaria. In the conflicts between innocent and civil mass of Turkish peoples and armed security forces, many people were injured, beaten, arrested and disabled. What is more to the point, during these events, the innocent Turks were killed who had not got any offence. In this study, reasons, progress, properties, reflections and results of the Events of May are discussed. In this study for which the Bulgarian scientific resources are frequently referred, those social events which are not known well in Turkey are enlightened and the struggle of the Turks in Bulgaria for their rights and freedom in 20th century is semitized.

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1. Reasons of Events of May in 1989

The year of 1989 is a milestone for Bulgarian History which is full of social enthusiasm, political crisis, ethnical unrest, and unknown surprises. Ethnic riots, bloody conflicts, injured, killed, and expelled people, refuge outflow of the Turks and the biggest migration wave of the Bulgarian history are among the unforgettable and striking frames of 1989. 1989 is important because of the Turks' gaining ethnical and cultural rights back and of collapsing totalitarian regime of Jivkov and socialist system in Bulgaria. Events of May in 1989 reflect the last phase of struggles of the Turks in Bulgaria for gaining ethnical liberty and their fight against oppressive ethnic policies. Therefore, events of May in 1989 are the climax of the process of name changes and the campaign of returning to origin.

Events of May in 1989 reflect the latest but the least discussed era of Bulgarian history and full of inconsistent information and the unknowns. The era is tried to be covered by loose ends and scientific mysteries and although it is the black page of Bulgarian history, it symbolizes the beginning of bright democracy era. 20th anniversary of Events

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of May, I mean 2009, is remembered with respect by Muslim minorities but it is unmemorable and appalling time for the socialist and nationalist Bulgarians.

In the democracy era of Bulgaria, although distinctive manifestos, comments, articles and columns were published in many newspapers and magazines, stances of different people were also different. There were people describing these events as treason, challenge to Jivkov and revolt to socialist system but there were also people saw the events as pursuit for human rights and ethnical liberty. People organizing, inducing and directing these events are still living witnesses and this is another perspective of Events of May discussions.

Stances and expectations of wolf and lamb for “liberty” and “life” are naturally different. Therefore, stance of Bulgarian governments and authorities to the Events of May cannot be same or similar to those of ethnic Turks. For some, these are “organized outbreak”, “uprising to the State”, “and initiative of establishing autonomous republic” but for some these are “struggle for ethnic and cultural rights”, “fight for minority rights against Bulgarization, degeneration and assimilation”. No matter what the stance is, the Events of May took their place in the latest history of Bulgaria.

At the commencing and expanding of the Events of May, everyone accepts that secretly founded associations out of State control and non-governmental associations together with radio and media broadcast from Turkey and the Western Europe played an important role. These events are the biggest protest wave of returning to origin process, and everyone knows and accepts that the Turks’ reaction “struggle for ethnic rights” against Bulgarization and assimilation campaign was organized and evolved by planned social movement. What we exactly do not know and what we still discuss are who trigger and organize these events. Which NGOs and Turkish associations and which Turkish leaders gave a start to the events? How these organizations and associations were founded, how did they enlarge and muster up support, and what were their purposes, targets and wills? It is thought that many unanswered questions will be answered by declaring thousands of documents kept in Bulgarian State Archives, the Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Bulgarian Intelligence Office about the events happened between the dates of January- May 1989 in Bulgaria to public [1, 2].

There are two different stances and approaches among today’s Bulgarian historians and scientists about the Events of May in 1989.

The first group scientists defending socialist ethnic policies in Jivkov era see the Turkish minority as “fifth colony” of the Republic of Turkey threatening nation-state. According to them, the main purpose of the Turks is dividing and separating Bulgaria and founding an autonomous Turkish Republic. For this reason, all patriots thinking the future of Bulgaria should fight with the Turks living in Bulgaria who are pawn and extension of the Republic of Turkey against Cyprus issues and possible divisions. According to the so-called nationalist-socialist first group, ethnic Turks are separatist and insurgent group and, they will politically undo the state by dividing it after having their social and cultural rights politicized. So the scientists in the group see the campaign of security forces, intelligence officers, police forces and members of BKP (Bulgarska Kommunisticheska Partii-a- Bulgarian Communist Party) against Turks in the Events of May in 1989 as patriotism fight, national matter of honor, and even as a war against imperialist panturcist forces [2].

However some writers and scientists accomplished to reflect returning to origin process and the Events of May in 1989 in their books by evaluating the events objectively and without twisting the facts and misleading the audience. Although writers such as Evgeniya Ivanova, Valeri Stoyanov, İbrahim Yalimov, İbrahim Karahasan Çınar, Antonina Jelyazkova, Veselin Angelov, Georgi Fotev, Mihail Gruev and Aleksey Kalyonski got reactions from nationalists and they were accused of selling national interests by publishing in conformity with Turkish side; they showed great courage as Bulgarian citizens and scientists by reflecting the events Turks in Bulgaria living through objectively. Also some writers, not being citizens of Bulgaria, declared objectively the misery Turks in Bulgaria living through by writing books about these subjects. Ulrich Büchsenschütz and Hugh Paulton can be counted among foreign writers semtinizing these subjects objectively [3, 4].

The factors and reasons causing the Events of May in 1989 can be summarized like:

- These events indicate that the Turks living in Bulgaria could not be assimilated by compulsions, threats and pressures.
- These events are collective ethnic reaction to the name change of Turks living in Bulgaria from Turkish-Arabic names to Bulgarian-Slavic names in the period of 1984- 1985.
- These events are the evidence that returning to origin process based on assimilation and run by Bulgarian authorities was not accepted and internalized by the Turkish Minority.

- These events indicate that the Turkish Minority developed self-protection reflex and protected social, ethnic and cultural rights. Moreover, they show that Turkish people never accepted Bulgarization and imposed identities.
- These events are the blasting point of getting free from social, politic and cultural pressure imposed on Muslim minorities by Politburo and BKP during socialist era; these are social struggle for gaining cultural freedom; and these are minority outcry of Turks who do not want to be Bulgarian.
- These events are social and democratic reaction of assimilating the Turks into united homogeneous socialist Bulgarian nation project planned by Politburo and BKP. The Events of May in 1989 realized for peaceful purposes by peaceful methods from beginning till the end without using weapons, raising red flag, without attacking, injuring, or killing public officers or innocent Bulgarians. As state security officers used weapons and force, they should be responsible for injuries and deaths.
- These events are not a minority uprising, an ethnic riot, a war waged against Bulgaria or state bodies with the support of the Republic of Turkey, and a terrorist action. These events are not a separatism initiative run against national territorial integrity of Bulgaria and not an initiative of founding Autonomous Turkish Republic in the territory of Bulgaria.
- The purpose of these events is to take the attention of public opinion to the Turks living in Bulgaria, to announce the tragic events to the world media and so as to gain support from many states and leaders. When we look at the events from this perspective, Events of May in 1989 reach their aim largely. Many people injured and died in the clashes between security forces and defenseless Turks. Even though Bulgarian media tried to hide these facts, the clashes hit the headlines in many newspapers abroad and whole world learned the facts tried to be hidden until that day.
- One of the main purposes of these events is to take the attention of world media and international organizations to the problems of Turks living in Bulgaria before Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe organized in Paris[†].

Why such a great social reaction was given in 1989 while the Turks living in Bulgaria were forced to change their names and surnames in 1984-1985? What is the reason behind the delay of 4-5 years and 4-5 years of refractory period of Turkish minority? The most important reason is harsh practices of security forces and intimidation of the Turks by using suppression, threat, fear, psychological pressure and force applied by police, soldiers and intelligence agencies. The many of the ones reacting to officers of name change, nonconsenting with Bulgarian names, propagating Turkish nationalism, organizing the Turks against State bodies were arrested and sent to jail in 1985. Some of them were tried to be “persuaded” in persuasion rooms in police stations and the ones not voluntarily persuaded were sent to Belene involuntarily[‡]. So at the beginning of returning to origin process, Turkish society left leaderless.

Organized resistance of the Turks was hindered because, name change events was coincided with harsh winter months, telephone lines and transportation were blocked deliberately, weapons of Turkish hunters were collected before months, the news of hundreds of Turks were killed in many village was bandied about. Psychological pressure on especially Turkish intellectuals (teachers, doctors, academicians, writers, engineers, headmen, journalists, etc.) was increased and many of them pretended to approve and support ethnic and minority policies implemented by the state. For those who opposed to returning to origin process or did not support state policies, the first step was firing them, the second step is interrogating them in police station and persuading them for cooperation, and the third step is expelling or jailing them (Yalimov 2002: 389-408).

During the socialist period, many of the Turks in Bulgaria approached to the state, government and BKP with trust and sympathy. A half-century of socialist life and commitment to BKP were internalized by thousands of Turks. Therefore name change hurt many Turks deeply and destroyed the trust Turks had for the state and BKP. One of the most important results of name change campaign is turning their back on the state and the government, and breaking the confidence between common citizens and the state irrecoverably. Therefore, members of Turkish minority understood that they could not gain cultural and ethnic rights unless socialist leaders, responsible from assimilation process, removed from power and BKP and Jivkov regime were broken-down. The biggest mistake of BKP is to hurt

[†] Vahit Halefoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, accused the Bulgarian State of assimilating Turks and violating human rights before all politicians and journalists in the international meeting organized to sign Helsinki Final Act of Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe done at Helsinki, capital of Finland in August 1, 1985 and the event had a broad repercussion abroad

[‡] Belene is a river island and a border between Romania and Bulgaria. Belene passed into history as a place where people opposed to state policies were expelled and home of one of the biggest jail in the state. Many Turks opposed to assimilation policies were put in prison in the island during Bulgarization of Turkish society against their will.

and stab Turkish minority, the most loyal hardworking and quiet mass out of the blue with the assimilative returning to origin policy. The assimilation initiative hurt the Turks deeply and damaged the ethnos-state relation which was irretrievable. Consequently, the Events of May can be perceived as a riot of broken Turks caused by resentment and mistrust to the state. Events can be seen as reflection of transition from passive resistance to organized active resistance and end of dialogue between the state and minorities.

When we came to 1989 politic environment both abroad and in Bulgaria created available basis for the organization of the Turks in Bulgaria and social resistance.

We can summarize the events triggering the pursuit of right, freedom and justice like the following:

- Hundreds of intellectual Turks were under arrest under aggravated conditions,
- Hundreds of Turks were interrogated and encountered with violence and psychological pressure as they opposed to returning to origin process,
- Some of the Turks were deported after placed label as agents of the Republic of Turkey, with other words they were expelled from Bulgaria by being dismissed,
- Some of the Turks got in touch with broadcast institutions in the Western Europe and leaked information on the situation of Muslim minorities,
- Turkey and some countries in the West gave the Turkish problem in the world media prominence,
- Ethnic Bulgarians founded anti-socialist NGOs and some Bulgarian intellectuals supported peaceful ethnic resistance of the Turks can be seen as the reasons of the Events of May in 1989.

2. Organizers and People Responsible from the Events of May

The Turkish and some Bulgarian Associations are referred in many sources as the organizers and initiators of the Events of May [2]. It is a crystal clear fact that these associations and NGOs became real problem to the state by demanding human rights, ethnic freedoms and pluralistic democracy, and they fired Turkish society up on freedom walk and instilled hope on ethnic rights. But it is still a question in Bulgarian scientific literature exactly which association or organization, who ignite the wick?

According to Bulgarian sources, Mustafa Ömerov, Mümün Akkaş, Hüseyin Nuh, Hasan Byalkov, Avni Veliev, Şükrü Aliev, Nuri Durgudov, Zeynep İbrahimova and Sabri İskenderov are referred as “Turkish think-tank” organizing the Events of May in 1989. In the Northeastern Bulgaria during the Turkish freedom walks happened between the dates of 19-27 May 1989 the following Turkish names come into prominence as organizers and initiators [2]:

- Ali Mustafov Hüseyinov,
- Naim Naimov,
- Ahmet Osmanov,
- Safet Hasimova Paşova,
- Grança Alieva Ormanlieva,
- Zakri Fikriev Hasanov,
- Adem Şakirov,
- Gülten Osmanova,
- İsmet İsmailov Eminov,
- Hayredin Aliev,
- Feyzula Yakub Feyzula,
- Feyzi Redjep,
- Osman Osmanov,
- Sabahat Naimova.

Veselin Bojkov, worked at Bulgarian intelligence agency for years as responsible from Turkey, expressed his comments on Turkish threat against Bulgaria, so-called terror events and attacks by drawing pessimistic and one-sided table according to his opinions in his book titled as “Zaplahata Nastapva” (Rising Threat). In the book, Bulgarian nationalist writer mentioned the Events of May in 1989 and indicated that Turkish National Intelligence Service (MIT), nationalist Turks willing to migrate to Turkey, and “separatist Turkish terror organizations” active in Bulgaria were responsible from the Events of May. In a period when the pressure of police and intelligence agency was at its peak, it was not possible for Turks living in Bulgaria to get into terror events practically as they had no

weapons, no explosives, no defense materials or military technology.

The writer perceived and defined the Turks' pursuit of ethnic rights and freedom as "a terror initiative perpetrated against the state" but he did not skip to confess that returning to origin process and name change events triggered the Events of May [5].

1989 May Walk led by the Turkish minority was defined as the first civil commotion against socialist government in the Bulgarian history since the 1951 peasant revolt. In the Bulgarian history, for the first time a minority group reacted to the state, government and BKP with massive social movement. In the Bulgarian history, ethnic Turks directed such harsh criticisms to Jivkov, Politburo, socialist system and Bulgarian Government for the first time. For the first time Hundreds or thousands of people attended to massive demonstrations and walks for Turkishness and protecting their ethnic identity by resisting all risks and threats in a period when communication was limited. Therefore, the Events of May both triggered the migration wave of the Turks living in Bulgaria to Anatolia and returning to origin process became meaningless, Turks come close to, integrated and strengthened as minority. So, it can be said that the Events of May has social function for strengthening ethnic conscious, politic sacrifice and cultural relation of Turkish minority.

Leaders of Turkish associations, people responsible from the Events of May, many of the organizers and initiators were deported and expelled from Bulgaria as a result of decisions taken strictly and quickly by the Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs. But there is an important question in here: while the leaders of Turkish associations were expelled why was Ahmet Doğan the leader of today's HÖH (the movement of Rights and Freedom) not deported? Why did the Bulgarian Government and the Ministry of Internal Affairs do such a privilege and let him stay in Bulgaria? [6, 7, 8]. Veselin Angelov, investigative writer gave a convincing and reportedly correct but interesting reply [2]:

- As of the deportation of Turkish Association leaders and Turkish nationalists Turkish society in Bulgaria was deprived of leaders who were not filled. So, Turkish associations and non-governmental organizations lost their strategy capabilities, politic effects, i.e. politic power substantially. In other words, in the post-socialist era, it had been planned sneakingly by the government that Muslim minority would have been leaderless when democratic political life was established and the Turks was founded their own parties.

- Bulgarian Government did not deport Ahmet Doğan consciously. Bulgarian Government and Bulgarian Intelligence Agency paved the way of all the leaders of today's HÖH like Kasım Dal, Lütfi Mesin and Ahmet Dogan on purpose and they got into the Bulgarian Parliament as representatives of Turkish minority as they worked for Bulgarian Intelligence Agency in the socialist era [9]. In other words, the Turks not complied with the system and not cooperated with the intelligence were deported while agreeable cooperative and passive ones were allowed to stay in Bulgaria. But after 1990s, we saw that the impact of the government and intelligence on these leaders were decreased but did not cease to exist and Ahmet Dogan would say his most disputed remark: "Jivkov is a good player but all in all I won the game."

- It is a disadvantage that most of the intellectual Turks migrated to Turkey and Muslim society was lack of leaders while Muslim minorities encountered with different barriers and politic difficulties in founding associations and nongovernmental organizations in the democratic transition period after 1990. Bulgarian authorities, having realized the gap before and developed a plan, gave special missions to former Turkish intelligence agents who would be addicted to Bulgarian authorities in their political works and supported them to step up the political stairs quickly. The fact that at least 10 of the Turkish member of parliaments in the Bulgarian Parliament in 1990s had been worked in Bulgarian Intelligence Organization in the socialist era confirms the claim.

3. Progress of the Events of May: Turkish Peoples' Walk for Their Rights and Freedoms

Turkish people had started to stage hunger strikes§ by turns in some regions on the eve of the events of May and the protest walks organized in the North-eastern Bulgaria. These hunger strikes launched as a result of the fact that ethnic and cultural rights of the Turkish people were grabbed were organized in order to protest BKP, Politburo and the Bulgarian Government before the world. Most outstanding requests of the Turkish people who participated in these hunger strikes from the Bulgarian Government were as follows [2]:

- Abandoning the processes of Bulgarization and returning to origin,
- Giving the old Turkish names and surnames back to the ethnic Turks and the other Muslim people,

§ "Ştafetni gladni stački" in Bulgaria, it is deemed appropriate to translate it into Turkish as "dönüşümlü açlık grevleri".

- Granting cultural and ethnic rights to the Muslim minority,
- Lifting the bans and restrictions regarding the religious life, clothes and dresses and customs of the Muslim community,
- Providing support to the Turkish prisoners held in Belene and the other prisons,
- Explaining why the Turkish prisoners were arrested, which offences they committed, with which court decision they were put in prison,
- Ensuring that the Turkish prisoners made face-to-face meetings with their families, friends and relatives,
- Preventing the Bulgarian authorities from exiling the Turkish families to the territories where the Bulgarian population was intense without a court ruling,
- Putting an end to the detention and interrogation of the members of Muslim community in police stations just because they sought their ethnic and cultural rights, to their exposure to psychological pressure, to arbitrary behaviours and practices of the information and security forces,
- Ensuring that Ali Osmanov Ormanliev and Mustafa Ömerov kept in prison as detainee are released,
- Drawing the attention of the world public opinion to the Turkish prisoners and having them released,
- Ensuring that deaths, injuries, detentions, exiles that occurred during the process of returning to origin are examined and investigated in detail through the establishment of an international and impartial commission.

To sum up, while minority members participating in the hunger strikes protested the so-called socialist ethnic policies of Jivkov and declared that they did not support the process of returning to origin on one hand, they sent their message that they were determined in their struggle in favour of the Muslim community to acquire their cultural and ethnic rights to Politburo and the Government. When the foreign radio stations started to broadcast the events regarding the hunger strikes to their audiences, ethnic Turkish people participating in the strikes happened to reach the majority of their objectives and targets.

The world learned the hunger strike campaigns launched by the Bulgarian Turks thanks to the interview made in the Radio Free Europe between Gülten Osmanova and Rумыana Uzunova [10]. These hunger strikes, first of which was performed on 6th May 1989 with a protesting objective were led by the following ethnic Turks [2].

- Sevzi Redjepov Hüseyinov, Village of Taslakovo, Province of Razgrad
- Zakir İsmailov Mustafafov, Village of Pravda, Province of Razgrad
- Hakkı Hakkiev Mehmedov, Village of Lyuben, Province of Razgrad
- Remzi Süleymanov Nedjimov, Village of Dulovo, Province of Razgrad

By undertaking the task of unofficial speaker of the Turkish people participating in these hunger strikes, Gülten Hasanova gave to the Radio Free Europe the information as regards to in which provinces this kind of strikes were continuing to be staged. The entire world learned through the Radio Free Europe that Turkish people organized hunger strikes in provinces of Dulovo [10], Kubrat, Zavet, Kaolinovo, Asenovgrad, Tutrakan, Varna, Tolbuhin, Krumovgard, Razgrad as well as in villages of Ostrovo, Nedoklan, Glodjevo, İşirkovo, İskra, General Geşevo, Lebed, Benkovski, Tarnovtsi, Taslakovo, Pravda, Lyuben, Zagoriçe, Braniçevo, Balnare, Orlyak, Sredkovets, Prestoe, Brestovene, Veslets and Byalkovo. Meanwhile, it is also known that Ahmet Doğan who was in prison at that time participated in the hunger strikes [2].

As more and more news regarding the hunger strikes were broadcast in the radio stations of Turkey and Western Europe and the reactions from the international community intensified, the number of the people supporting the strikes and participating in these strikes increased rapidly. While the number of the Turkish people participating in the hunger strikes was approximately 30, this number reached to 200 in the middle of May and to more than 1000 in the middle of June [4]. Events of May that caught the Bulgarian state off guard and gave it a deep shock started on 19th May 1989 in the village of Cebel and ended with the conflicts in the village of Dyankovo on 28th May 1989. Throughout the Bulgarian socialist history, 19th May 1989 is the date when the Turkish people participated in the protest walks organized against BKP and the Government in a conscious, collective and organized manner for the first time. Turks protesting the Bulgarianization policies and the process of returning to origin came to the town center of Cebel from the villages surrounding Cebel gathered in the square of the town and started to shout slogans against the government. In the meeting where about 3000 people gathered, some of the Turkish leaders delivered speeches regarding the assumption of the Turkish names and the termination of the returning to origin policy before the excited crowd. In the evening of the same day, security forces surrounding the town of Cebel started to arrest the Turks participating in the meeting individually. Some of them were beat, some of them were interrogated and some were exiled to the other regions [5, 2]. For instance, Avni Veliev who was the founder and head of the 1989 Society for Support of Vienna was deported and sent to Turkey on 24th May [11].

On 20th May 1989, the first Turkish walk in the Northeastern Bulgaria was organized in the village of Pristoe of the province of Şumen and both the Bulgarian Government and Jivkov were protested due to their ethnic policies. Protest walk starting in the village of Pristoe with a small group of 50 persons turned into a big crowd of 5000 persons in Kaolinovo. Protest group growing with the participation of the Turks coming from the villages of Branıçevo, Gusla, Zagoriçe, Kliment, Takaç and Naum called out that Turkish names should be given back, the use of Turkish must be free, Turkish language and education courses should be given in the schools, Muslim customs must be allowed and the people who want to migrate to Turkey should be free to leave Bulgaria. Turks gathering in the square of Kaolinovo were affected at most by the emotional speech of Suzana Babeçova¹⁵ who is from pomak origin. First conflicts between Turks and the security forces broke out on 20th May 1989 and the first Turk was martyred [12, 2].

On 21st May 1989, a protest walk of 3000 Turks was organized in the town of Dulovo with the participation of children, parents, students and many women. Three more Turks were martyred during the events of Dulovo [5]. At the same day, another tragedy recorded as the “bloody wedding” in the history took place. Bulgarian police officers busting a Turkish wedding that took place in the village of Todor İkonomovo attempted to arrest some Turks on the ground of robbery. When the crowded Turkish group walked over the small group of police officers, police officers got into panic and opened fire over the crowd in an uncontrolled way and 27 people were injured. Injured Mehmet Sali Lom, Mehmet Saraç and Hasan Arnavut who were taken to Şumen state hospital died before they reached to the hospital [12].

In the conflicts that broke out between Turks and Bulgarian security forces during the walk in the village of Ezerçe on 23rd May, Ahmet M. Buruk and Sezgin S. Karayumerov were killed by the Bulgarian security forces while they were trying to protect their children from police officers. On 25th May, this time, a Turkish group of 1000 persons launched a walk in the province of Dobriç and after they crossed the police barricades, about 300 of them managed to reach to the town center. On 27th May, similar Turkish protest walks were also held in the provinces of Targovişte and Şumen. On 27th May, conflicts broke out between the demonstrators and the security forces during the walks held in the village of Medovets in Varna region and, at the end of these conflicts, one Turk was killed and another injured Turk died after the events settled down. One more Turk was martyred during the events in the village of Dyankovo on 28th May [12, 13].

To sum up, collective walks held by the Bulgarian Turks were organized in the villages of Todor İkonomovo [10], Vokil, Oven, Çerkovna, Ezerçe, Dyankovo, Pravda, Hlebarovo, Podayva, Kitancevo, Granitsa, Tsar Kaloyan, Pristoe, Beli Lom, Medovets villages and İsperih, Kaolinovo, Dulovo, Razgrad, Omurtag, Dalgopol, Dobriç, Targovişte and Cebel between 20th and 28th May 1989 [14] 19. Some of the Turkish people participating in the events of May were arrested and some of them were exiled out of the country.

It is seen that BKP and the Bulgarian Government continued to despise the Turkish minority and not to take any step in order to give their cultural and ethnic rights back while all these conflicts, injuries and deaths were going on. What is more important to point, in a meeting held in the BKP Central Committee on 26th May 1989, approval of such expressions as “Nobody of Turkish origin ever lived in Bulgaria and there is not a Turkish minority in our country” [14] confirmed that the obstinate attitude was not abandoned and the Government had no intention to step back.

4. Reflections and Consequences of the Events of May

Events of May that took place in 1989 included and affected a specific part of the Turkish community. Rapid and sudden progress of the events caught BKP, the intelligence units, security forces, socialist government and the state organs off guard.

These events reflecting the social rage of the Turkish society should be accepted as the combat of survival of a minority, as the struggle to retrieve the lost rights and freedoms rather than an ethnic uprising or a Turkish riot against the state. Basic objective of the meetings and walks organized by the Turkish people during the events of May was to draw attention of the world media and the international institutions to the problems of the Bulgarian Turks before the CSCE Human Rights Conference. Unfortunately, the people who were injured, arrested, beat and martyred sacrificed themselves in the attempts to “draw attention” to the Turkish minority issue in Bulgaria.

The events of May left its traces of shame as a bloody stain in the history of the Bulgaria. In the conflicts between innocent and civil mass of Turkish peoples and armed security forces, many people were injured, beat, arrested and disabled. What is more important to point, during these events, the innocent Turks were killed who had not got any

offence [4, 15, 12, 13]. According to the historian Dr. Kalyonski, number of the Turkish people killed by the Bulgarian security forces during the events of May was 10 at the most [13]. According to Valeri Stoyanov, in these events 7 Turks were killed and 28 Turks were injured [16]. Names of the Turkish people that were killed between 20th and 28th May 1989 are listed below [17]: Necip Osman Necip, Hasan Salih Arnavut, Mehmet Salih Lom, Mehmet S. Saraç, Sezgin Saliyev Karaömerov, Ahmet Burukov, Şakir Mehmet Şakir, Mehmed Karov [2], Mehmed Emin, and Nefize Hasan Osman.

During the events of May, Turkish community shouted hundreds of different slogans, hung hundreds of banners and submitted hundreds of different requests to the state authorities as regards to the assimilation and Bulgarianization campaign and to their cultural and ethnic rights. None of them contained a request or an intention to divide and disintegrate Bulgaria and to establish a Turkish state on the territories of Bulgaria. Even though the Bulgarian security forces recorded the events of May thoroughly via video cameras, the fact that no such request or incentive was recorded in any walk is of vital importance. Bulgarian Turks did not support separatism, they did not participate in the terrorist actions, they did not attack the ethnic Bulgarians, they did not betray the territories on which they were living and they did not request an autonomous republic. On the contrary, Bulgarian security forces responded to the peaceful requests of the Turkish minority and to their armless walks with guns, tanks, fire brigade trucks, dogs, specially-trained soldiers and even by opening fire. Thus, although some nationalist Bulgarian writers such as Veselin Bojkov, Bonço Asenov and Dimitar Filipov assessed these events as separatism and terrorism, ethnic right and freedom dimension of these events has already taken its place in the history.

Turks participating in the events of May and called as the “think-tank” of the events were exiled to such countries as Austria, Yugoslavia and Hungary. Some Turkish nationalists were forced to migrate to Turkey. According to Yalimov, the fact that about 2000 Turks taking part in the events of May were exiled to different countries in 1980 foreshadowed the following big Turkish migration wave [12]. Turks exiled to foreign countries on the ground that they took part in the events of May nearly assumed the task of freedom envoy. A majority of these nationalist Turks continued to defend the legitimate and respectful cause of Turks in Bulgaria and, in this way, they had a great role both in the collapse of the socialist system in this country and in retrieval of the ethnic rights in Bulgaria.

On 29th May 1989, President Todor Jivkov triggered the last big Turkish migration by calling for Turkey to open its border gates and to admit the Bulgarian Turks into the country in his speech that he delivered in the Bulgarian State Television. 1989 migration is the eleventh migration between Bulgaria and Turkey after the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian war.

Events of May also largely contributed to the democratization of Bulgaria. With the outbreak of these events, underground organization activities of the ethnic Bulgarians increased. A dramatic increase was observed in the number of the associations, organizations and non-governmental organizations. What is more important to emphasize is that demands and objectives of these associations and organizations showed a great parallelism with the associations and organizations established by the Turkish community. Therefore, associations of the ethnic Bulgarians provoked and supported the protests of May of Turks covertly on one hand and on the other hand, they continued their anti-socialist and anti-Jivkov propagandas with their all strength.

Events of May and the collective Turkish migration launched just after them caused the ethnic tension in Bulgaria to reach to the peak and the socialist state to encounter with both a severe social crisis and a deep economic and political crisis. Bulgarian intellectuals who did not object to the assimilation of the Turkish community for five years, writers who remained indifferent to such serious national problems, academicians, artists, journalists and poets suddenly turned into democracy fighters and human rights supporters when these ethnic tensions started to threaten them and to concern their families. No doubt that sometime in the future, this insincere attitude of the Bulgarian intellectuals and this indifferent approach not deemed appropriate for the descendants of Nikola Vaptsarov and Hristo Smirmenski will be expressed by the Bulgarian scientists as a self criticism. Briefly, one of the most embarrassing aspects of the process of returning to origin was that Bulgarian intellectuals supported BKP and the Government indirectly in their assimilation policies by remaining silent and indifferent for five years.

Following the events of May, nobody except for several Bulgarian intellectuals criticized these incorrect ethnic policies. Antonina Jelyazkova and Blaga Dimitrova can be given as examples to the very few intellectuals showing interest, empathy and sensitivity to the ethnic problems of the country and to the Turkish community’s struggle for their rights and freedoms **27. On 22th June 1989, historian Antonina Jelyazkova sent an open letter to Todor

** Main non-governmental organizations established in Bulgaria during this period:
“Klub za Glasnost i Preustroystvo” (Club for Change and Multivocality)

Jivkov and called for the immediate termination of the wrong ethnic policies followed by the state. On 17th July 1989, an open letter signed by 121 individuals including a large number of artists, scientists, writers and intellectuals was sent to the Bulgarian Parliament. Bulgarian intellectuals made sharp and fierce criticisms in this open letter as regards to the wrong policies of Jivkov and called for the Turkish people not to abandon their country. Moreover, it was emphasized in this letter that all people have the rights to determine and live their ethnic and religious identities and the government must abandon the wrong ethnic policies immediately. Both the content of the letter and the names of the intellectuals signing the letter were announced to the whole world through Radio Free Europe [10]. Famous poet Blaga Dimitrova submitted this open letter signed by 121 intellectuals to the Bulgarian Parliament on 18th July 1989.

Events of May were imposed to the ethnic Bulgarians and to the large masses of people with an unrealistic perspective due to the Bulgarian media, BKP propagandas and incorrect guidance of the intelligence units. They were reflected almost as a “Turkish riot”, as an “incentive to establish an independent Turkish state” and as an “ethnic uprising against the state”. Thus, a majority of the ethnic Bulgarians considered Turks participating in the events of May as “separatists who betrayed to the homeland and the state”, “agents serving for the Republic of Turkey”, “rebellious and separatist terrorists”. As a result, one of the major consequences of the events of May was that ethnic relations between Bulgaria and Turkey which was already tense became tenser and they came to the point of break.

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