

Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria
(Chief Mufti's Office in the Republic of Bulgaria)

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION MEETING OF THE ODIHR/OSCE

September 26 - October 7, 2011, Warsaw

STATE OF AFFAIRS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS IN BULGARIA
IN RELATION TO THE MUSLIM MINORITY

I would like to bring to your attention the problems encountered by the Muslim community in Bulgaria. More than 20 years since the democratic changes the Muslim minority in Bulgaria is still struggling with its problems. Muslims in Bulgaria are subjected to discriminatory practices of administrative and judicial authorities which amounts to denial of basic human rights. This affects the overall life of the community development and on the democracy in the country.

Violation of the basic human rights to which Muslims in Bulgaria are exposed can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Uncertainty on the status of the Office of the Grand Mufti – Problems with the democratic election of the leadership in the community and its registration in the Court
- 2- Negative attitudes of the public opinion against the Muslim community
- 3- Failure to return the Wakf (Muslim foundation) property confiscated during the communist regime and the inability to repair the existing properties
- 4- Growing acts of hate crimes against Muslims

**UNCERTAINTY ON THE STATUS OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MUFTI -
PROBLEMS WITH THE DEMOCRATIC ELECTION OF THE LEADERSHIP IN THE
COMMUNITY AND ITS REGISTRATION IN THE COURT**

Office of the Chief Mufti, which is the legitimate and legal representative of the 1 million strong Muslim community in Bulgaria, has been beset by a legal struggle in the last 20 years. The Law On Denominations enacted in 2002 stipulates that decisions of the conferences by which Chief Mufti and members of the Supreme Holy Council are elected by the delegates representing the Muslim community, be registered at the Sofia City Court. This requirement paved the way for the legal and political manipulation of the official authorities. For, in total

disregard of the will of the Muslim community, court rulings imposed the annulment of the Office of the Chief Mufti and registration of another religious administration which purports to represent the Muslim community. Hence, latest judicial dispositions arising from the discriminatory clauses of the Law On Religious Denominations have put the Muslim community under dire strait.

The ruling of the Bulgarian Higher Court of Administration on 12 May 2010 which declared a null and void the Conference of the Bulgarian Muslims held on 19 April 2008 by which Mustafa Alish Hadzi was elected as Chief Mufti constituted a manifest violation of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) jurisprudence. ECHR ruled in two separate decisions delivered in 2000 and 2005 respectively that Bulgaria violated Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms governing the freedom of religion. The rulings were based on the fact that Bulgaria has interfered with the internal organization of the Muslim religious community thus contravened the commitments it has undertaken to protect human rights and minority rights as well as religious freedom. The argument to the effect that abovementioned ECHR decisions relate to the application of the previous Religious Denominations Act of 1949 and that according to the most recently adopted Law on Denominations enacted in 2002 registration procedure falls within the competence of the Sofia City Court does not negate the intervention of the state into internal affairs of the Muslim community. First of all, the judiciary is a natural extension of the state power. It can not be dissociated from the state apparatus. Moreover, Law on Denominations exempts the Orthodox Church from the requirement to register at the court. This is an expressly discriminatory clause at the expense of the Muslim Community and other religious denominations alike. Therefore, the situation described above questions the impartiality of the Law On Religious Denominations with regard to the other Denominations except Orthodox Church and renders the revocation of the discriminatory provisions of the Law On Religious Denominations a necessity.

I would like again to remind that Nedim Gencev has been the appointed Chief Mufti of the communist regime of Bulgaria from 1988 to 1992. As the incumbent Chief Mufti he collaborated with the communist regime which imposed the assimilation policy against the Muslim minority between 1984-1989. Therefore, Genchev has been associated with the repressive policies of the communist regime against the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. Having regard to the above, he does not have the moral authority to stand for the Office of the Chief Mufti and he has no legitimacy whatsoever among the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. He attempted to replace the local Muslim Board of Trustees and regional muftis with his own supporters. Moreover, Gendzhev's henchmen went as far as to use physical force against the imam of the Djumaya Mosque in Plovdiv to extort the keys of the Mosque as well as offices of the Regional Mufti and local Muslim Board located in the annex therein in 2010. This blatant act of usurpation contradicted with the rhetoric of those who claim to be the genuine representative of the Muslim confession in Bulgaria and lay bare their lack of legitimacy among the Muslims.

Despite being afflicted with legal hurdles and political pressures, Office of the Chief Mufti has the unequivocal legitimacy emanating from the strong will of the Muslims of Bulgaria.

Hence they chose their lawful representatives at the conference held on 12 February 2011. On 20 April 2011 the Supreme Court of Cassation registered the officials and organs elected at the Conference. However, Nedim Gendzhev litigated this decision arguing that the conference was not convened by authoritative organs. As a result, on 20 May 2011 the Sofia City Court decided to halt to register new applications for registration in the Muslim Denomination until the completion of the legal procedure. Due to this decision, Office of the Chief Mufti could not appoint regional muftis and religious boards afterwards. It enables Nedim Gendzhev and his entourage to continue to harass Muslim community. Thus, the expectations that the latest Extraordinary National Muslim Conference, held on February 12 2011, whereby the Muslims once again elected their leadership in the most democratic way, would bring an end to the leadership dispute, proved elusive.

In that context I would like to remind you that Ashim Asan, Nedim Gendzhev's "representative" in Plovdiv, who has been occupying the regional Mufti's Office in Plovdiv in 2010, has assaulted the mufti in Plovdiv and two of his associates during a prayer in the mosque. Because of this offence he was sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment. The case is still ongoing. But we hope that the Judicial authorities will have to judge fairly.

Having regard to the above, we call upon the member states of the OSCE to take note of the legitimate concerns of the Muslim community voiced by the Office of the Chief Mufti and that to act on their commitments to ensure that long cherished democratic values and human rights norms enshrined in the founding documents of OSCE are fully observed in Bulgaria.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES OF THE PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Unfettered dissemination of negative stereotypes about the Muslim community has repercussions in the Bulgarian society. A case in point for this trend is the recent uproar of negative reactions in the Bulgarian media about the proposed facility, consisting of Higher Islamic Institute, dormitories, recreation center and a small mosque for the theology students therein, to be built in Sofia by the Office of the Chief Mufti. The nationalist media has already engaged in a brutal campaign of misinformation against the construction of this facility by presenting it as merely a mosque. (Currently there exists only 1 mosque open to worshipping in Sofia and it is not enough to accommodate the 30.000 strong Muslim population residing in Sofia is another matter of discussion) The Project of the complex submitted by the Office of the Chief Mufti to the Municipality of Sofia in November 2008 was returned with the request that it be devised so as not to include a mosque. Once the Office of the Chief Mufti handed over another project which did not include the mosque, Office of the Chief Prosecutor launched an investigation to determine the financial source with which the lot was purchased in the first place. Whereas no tangible result was achieved at the end of the investigation, it was decided that the lot was not fit to build an Islamic Center thereupon.

In the same vein, Bourgas Municipality revoked in March 2009 the permission it has given for the construction of a mosque in the city citing incomprehensible technical arguments for its decision. Bourgas Municipality has also retaken the lot it has granted to the Muslim dwellers of the city with a view to constructing a mosque on the grounds that it was necessary to stem the surging nationalist wave in the city.

In October 2010 the State Agency for National Security (SANS) carried out raids against the imams in the Rhodope Mountains region. They leveled unfounded allegations against the imams accusing them of involving fundamentalist activities. They took literature, took computers without any proof. The most shocking of all is that the publicity did not see any report whether the people were guilty or not. It is startling that none of the confiscated items was restored to their owners. It is not possible to confiscate books in a democratic country. More, there are no laws in Bulgaria about “forbidden literature”.

I would like to state that the Bulgarian Muslims are extremely loyal to their native country, they have their own mechanisms which protect them from potential radical or non-traditional preachers who would come to our country. They are not open to fundamentalist and extremist ideas and trends and they will never be. Yet the violence exerted on them since the last year has been worrying the whole Muslim population. Muslims cannot bear their spiritual leaders in towns and villages to be offended as they value the latter highly. They are competent and educated people, intelligent people who do not think of evil actions, they are just religious leaders of the local population. Similar actions and attitude, which show the distrust of the state to its own citizens, offend and insult the Muslims in Bulgaria.

These actions leave a negative impression in the people’s minds about Muslims, hence a negative attitude against the Muslims.

FAILURE TO RETURN THE WAKF (MUSLIM FOUNDATION) PROPERTY CONFISCATED DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME

Systemic hindrance applies to the restoration of expropriated property as well. Dozens of buildings and lots owned by the members of the Turkish minority or in possession of the foundations established by the Muslim community, were confiscated unlawfully during the communist era. In the aftermath of the regime change, Muslim community began to challenge the legality of the aforementioned actions and resorted to legal means to restore the ownership of these confiscated properties. However, the litigations lodged by the Office of the Chief Mufti gave modest results at best. The fact that the relevant law stipulates advance payment of % 4 of the value of the land or the building for the return of which a petition will be lodged at the court constitutes an unmistakable deterrent factor for remuneration demands. The Chief Mufti’s Office cannot afford to pay this amount because the properties are quite valuable.

Numerous properties which belonged to the Muslim denomination have been destroyed by means of the “Act on the Territory Arrangement of Settlements” and new buildings have been

erected in their places for which we cannot claim. Yet there are lots of existing properties which are known to belong to the Muslim Denomination but no deeds of title for ownership have been issued for them therefore we cannot restore them. They are mostly historical monuments, mosques and former schools. Currently they belong to the state. The state neither allows the Muslim community to restore them, nor reconstruct itself. As a result they are in ruins. If they are not repaired soon, they will disappear. The mosques that are recorded as state properties are kept empty and the Muslims are not allowed to perform prayers therein. In many towns where Muslims constitute discernable numbers, those mosques are not allocated for divine services. The Muslim community is agreeable to use for worship the mosques in the category of national monuments of culture without prejudice to their status.

I would like to give a few examples:

The mosque in Stara Zagora (Hamzabey Mosque) was built in 1409 and used as mosque since then. It is the oldest Muslim shrine in Bulgaria. It was denominated as a “cultural monument of national and world significance” in 1954. It is one of the numerous mosques systematically appropriated by the Bulgarian authorities from the Muslim community in the country and at present is the only mosque intact in Stara Zagora. There is no act of state property, but it is not used by the Muslim community. Hamzabey Mosque was usurped from the Muslim community on the grounds that it would be turned into a museum of religions. The Ministry of Culture transformed the mosque into museum of religions in total disregard of the will of the Muslim community. We have repeatedly expressed our opposition to this project, however the project was implemented without consent of the Muslim community. Around 5.000 Muslims live in Stara Zagora and they have not a mosque to pray. So called “museum of religions” was inaugurated on 16 September 2011.

Turkish Primary School (TPS) “Medrese” in Kardzhali. It was built on a land owned by the Muslim community of Kardzhali from 1921 to 1933 to provide religious education for the Muslims. The land was purchased by the Muslim community in 1922 and it was built in 1922 by means of the local Muslim community’s own finances. The building also was constructed entirely by means of the Muslim community and with the support of the Office of the Chief Mufti. Records which date back 1947 show “Medrese” among the assets of Kardzhali Muslim denomination. “Medrese” was declared as state property in 1950 in accordance with article 1 and 2 of the Law on State Property of 1949. In 1977, National Institute for Monuments of Culture, the building was declared a cultural monument. On that basis, the second Act of state property was issued in 1994.

Muslim community lodged restitution claims for the “Medrese” since 1992. However, with the ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court in 1993 the request was rejected. Office of the Chief Mufti sent a letter to the Regional Governor of Kardzhali in 2001 requesting the restoration of the ownership of “Medrese”. Regional Governor also responded in negative citing numerous groundless allegations for his decision. The Office Of the Chief Mufti urges justice be meted out and the “Medrese” be returned as wakf property to the Muslim community which has expressed its willingness for the use of the building as a museum on the basis of a contract to be signed with the due state institution. -Tash Kopru Mosque in Plovdiv.

The title of deed dated 1939 indicates the ownership of the building by the Muslim community. Its yard was sold the same year. Heirs of the yard acquired the ownership of the mosque proper in 1992. Currently the mosque is used as a restaurant.

3. The Bedesten in Yambol,

4. Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad, state property since 1996.

5. Fatih Mehmed Mosque in Kiustendil, state property since 1996. Left to be ruined. If no measures are taken, perhaps it will vanish from the earth in 1-2 years.

6. Bayrakli Mosque in Samakov, declared a cultural monument in 1928. It functions as a museum since 1964 museum. No act of state property, but the mosque is not used by the denomination.

7. Kurshunlu Mosque, Karlovo, museum since 1964. No act of state property, but it is not used by the denomination. It is in poor condition but we cannot reach it to reconstruct it.

8. Eski Mosque in Vratsa, cultural monument since 1972. No act of state property enacted, however it is not used by the denomination.

9. Buyuk Mosque in Sofia, currently used as National Archeological Museum.

10. Kara Mosque (Black Mosque), which is currently used as an Orthodox Church.

11. Mosque in Dupnitsa

12. Kurshunlu Mosque, Silistra

13. Karadzha Pasha Mosque in Gotse Delchev

14. The Mosque in İhtiman

15. Ahmet Bey Mosque in Kiustendil

16. Historical Turkish Bath in Plovdiv

17. Bedesten (vaulted bazaar) in Shumen

18. "Hadzhi Huseyin" Mosque in Belogradchik

19. The Mosque in Montana

20. "Tash Kopru Mosque" in Plovdiv. It is used as a restaurant.

GROWING ACTS OF HATE CRIMES AGAINST THE MUSLIMS

Notwithstanding the progress made since the advent of democracy in Bulgaria 1990, discrimination, ethnic hatred and prejudice against the Turkish-Muslim minority persists in the country. Ethnically and religiously motivated offensive acts against the Turkish-Muslim

minority and its institutions continue unabatedly. Unfettered dissemination of negative stereotypes about the Muslim community is reflected on the increasing trend of desecration and vandalization of mosques. The cases of encroachment on mosques in the form of desecration and vandalization of mosques over 20 years exceed 100. Acts of torching mosques, smashing windows, inscribing offensive and vulgar words and drawing swastikas on the walls and injuring worshippers have been taking place not as an exception, but as a norm of conduct with impunity. The fact that none of the perpetrators and culprits was brought to justice renders the situation more alarming for the Muslim community. In many cases Muslim community was unable to receive consideration and professional commitment from the authorities of the Ministry of Interior whose investigations proved inconclusive since all the files are closed file by invoking the cliché expression "offender unknown and unrevealed".

In addition to desecration of mosques, Muslim community of Bulgaria is subjected to the discriminatory acts of the extreme segments of the Bulgarian public and indifference of the state officials. Discriminatory and prejudicial behavioral patterns prevail against the Muslim community in the Bulgarian public opinion. Political parties and formations in Bulgaria explicitly display hostility against the Turkish and the Muslim community in the country. The letter and spirit of these statements intend to usurp fundamental freedoms accorded to the Muslim community during the transition period after 1990. Racist/xenophobic ATAKA party continues to openly incite hatred against Turks-Muslims in Bulgaria by a persistent defamation campaign through its newspaper and television channel which it owned until recently. SKAT TV, owned by a former ATAKA member still continues to use inflammatory rhetoric against Turks-Muslims. Unfortunately, Council For Electronic Media, entrusted with the task of controlling the content of TV broadcasts and internet coverage, is ineffective in combating with this explicit form of racism committed through media and internet.

In order to combat racist discrimination Bulgaria should ratify immediately the Protocol no:12 to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which was devised as a mechanism for protection from racial discrimination. A phrase should be inserted into the Penal Code to the effect that in case a crime is committed with a racial motivation it will be considered as an aggravating factor.

Having regard to the above, Bulgaria is expected to combat with racist and religious intolerance with all its manifestations. Hence, it should streamline its legislation so that attempts and actions of this nature will not be treated as "hooligan activities", but will be considered as acts "threatening ethnic and religious peace" in the country and be punished strictly and uncompromisingly, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation of the perpetrator and to whom they are directed (*ADDENDUMS 1 and 2*).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BULGARIAN AUTHORITIES:

1. Prevent the interference of the state organizations in the religious matters and the political regulation of religious problems.
2. Encourage Bulgarian authorities to make amendments on the Law On Religious Communities of 2002 so that the decisions taken at the “National Conferences of Muslims in Bulgaria” are not subject to court registration.
3. Streamline the Criminal Code so that attempts and actions of this nature against religious and ethnic minorities will not be treated as “hooligan activities”, but will be considered as acts “threatening ethnic and religious peace” in the country and be punished strictly and uncompromisingly, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation of the perpetrator and to whom they are directed.
4. Undertake measures to ensure that the Council for Electronic Media and the Law of Media to be effective in controlling and combating with the explicit form of racism and discrimination committed through media and internet.
5. Introduce amendments to the relevant law which will facilitate restitution of foundation properties of the Religious Denominations.
6. Urge Bulgarian authorities to submit periodically the annual hate crime list to ODIHR.
7. Facilitate religious self-identification of the Bulgarian citizens by acknowledging that Orthodox and Muslims religious practices are traditional for Bulgaria.
8. Guarantee freedom of belief and implement effectively anti discriminatory legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ODIHR/OSCE:

1. ODIHR’s Panel of Advisers on Freedom of Religion or Belief to observe whether Bulgarian authorities are implementing the Religious rights of Muslims in the country, as well to recommend and advise Bulgarian government on the issue of Religious freedom and Fundamental rights;
2. Bulgaria ratified international convention for abolition of all kinds of discrimination. It has also passed a special law for protection from discrimination. In fact, discriminatory practices against religious and ethnical minorities take place very often. ODIHR should suggest specific measures to prevent intolerance, xenophobia and hate crimes.
3. ODIHR to observe closely the process of Freedom of Religion of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries.

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(ADDENDUM No.1)

*LIST OF HATE CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY FOR THE
LAST 4 YEARS (SINCE 2007)*

1. *01.07.2007 – the sound system of “Tekke Djamiya” mosque in Dobrich and the office equipment of the Regional Mufti’s Office-Dobrich were stolen*
2. *On 27.01.2007 Hanife Musa, a student at the High Islamic Institute was attacked before the confectioner’s located behind the stop of bus No. 78 near the post by Stefan Grigorov Stoimchev who used words and expressions as “a dirty Turkish girl”, “we will kill all of you here”, “I am Petko Voyvoda”, “take off your head-cloth, why have you put it on?”. He uttered threats about the institute, as well, and he said that they would come and kill everybody. The attacker took away the girl’s head-cloth and he humiliated her a lot in this manner. Regardless of the fact that this case was registered in the police and a legal claim was submitted no results were achieved.*
3. *On 18.02.2007 the lock of the gate of the High Islamic Institute-Sofia was covered with sticky stuff and because of it the lock should be changed.*
4. *03.03.2007 the walls of the mosque in Varna were covered with insulting inscriptions*
5. *On 11.05.2007 the mosque in Silistra was profaned by hanging pig heads on its walls*
6. *In June 2007 the windows of the mosque in Aytos were broken*
7. *On 24.10.2007 one of the windows on the second floor of the High Islamic Institute-Sofia was broken with a stone that was found in the room*
8. *On 24.12.2007 the walls of the mosque in Varna were covered with writings*
9. *On 31.12.2007 the windows of the mosque in Varna were broken*
10. *2007 the walls of the mosque in Pazardjik were covered with writings*
11. *In 2007 the windows of the building of the Regional Mufti’s Office in Gotze Delchev were broken*
12. *In 2007 again the windows in the southern part of the mosque in Aytos were broken half a dozen times the windows of the mosque in Kazanlak were broken*
13. *At the beginning of 2008 the walls of the mosque in Karnobat were painted and its windows were broken*
14. *At night on 15.02.2008 to 16.02.2008 the threat “Turkish people die” was written on the main entrance of the building of the Chief Office of the Mufti*

15. *On 03.03.2008 the windows of the mosque in Silistra were broken*
16. *In April, 2008, the windows of the High Islamic Institute-Sofia were broken*
17. *On 24.05.2008 the walls of the mosque in Varna were covered with writings*
18. *July 2008 the doors and glass of the mosque in Blagoevgrad were broken*
19. *In August, 2008 the walls of the Secondary Religious School in Russe were painted all over*
20. *On 8.09.2008 crosses were drawn on the walls of the mosque in Lovech*
21. *On 11.09.2008 a Muslim worshipper who was going to the Central Mosque in Plovdiv for the morning prayer was attacked and violently beaten. Two days after this incident a group of women and children who were having their dinner-iftar which is traditional for Ramazan were attacked and stones were thrown at them; as a result a four-year-old child was injured, it had head trauma. The same morning swastikas were drawn on the walls of the mosque in Plovdiv that had been renovated soon*
22. *On 22.09.2008 a few windows were broken in the girls' dormitory of Religious High School in Russe*
23. *On 28.10.2008, while Fikrie Tefik and Anife Chausheva, students at the High Islamic Institute-Sofia, were waiting for bus No. 78 at the bus-stop near the post, a 30-year-old man came and started pecking at them as he called them "dirty Turks" and told them not to wait for a bus at this bus-stop any more but at another bus-stop and he threatened that if he saw them waiting there, their head-cloths would be taken off. After that he took out a truncheon and kept on threatening the girls saying that even Ahmed Dogan could not help them, that he also had a friend in the Parliament. At the end he told the girls that if he saw them again at the bus-stop, he would kill them with a gun. Later the same person was spotted wearing a uniform of a security guard.*
24. *On 16.12.2008 – the store-room of "Imaret" mosque in Plovdiv was broken into*
25. *On 7 January 2009 the windows of the recently restored and renovated Central Dzhumaya Mosque in the city of Plovdiv were smashed.*
26. *12 July 2009 windows of the mosque in Haskovo were smashed.*
27. *In October 2009 the mayor of Draganovo Village of Gorna Oryahovitza Municipality prevented the imam a few times from reading ezan (call for prayer) through loud speakers.*
28. *On 6 October 2009 the only mosque in Blagoevgrad was set on fire. The ceiling of the mosque was destroyed.*

29. *On October 6 2009, the mosque in Nicopol was subjected to an arson attack which left the mosque completely destroyed.*
30. *On 20.05.2010 an inscription reading "Turks die Bulgaria" was written on the external wall of the washing-place at "Banya Bashi" mosque in Sofia.*
31. *The walls of "Aziziye Mosque" in Varna were painted on March 28 2010. The imam of the "Aziziye Mosque" in Varna found the walls of the temple spread with blue color and the shoe cupboards thrown down. The records of the cameras were brought to the police inspector with protocol. We have not received any notification from the police since then.*
32. *"Yali Mosque" in Karlovo was burned down on April 17 2010. At 3 a.m. on 17th of April the imam of the mosque—Mustafa Mustafa was awoken by a noise. He found out that the mosque was burning and immediately called the fire brigade. The fire brigade arrived within several minutes and extinguished the fire approximately in one hour. The fire destroyed the entire roof construction and the ceiling and only four walls and the minaret of the mosque were left standing. According to the police investigation the fire was caused by the electrical equipment, but the imam of the mosque and other witnesses noticed visible marks of incendiary agents.*
33. *The mosque in Blagoevgrad was attacked on April 17, 2010. In ten days the windows of the mosque in Blagoevgrad were broken twice. On April 17, 2010 around 23.40 p.m. the police guard system of the mosque was on alarm and afterwards it was found out that the windows of the praying hall were broken. The imam referred the situation to the police, but unfortunately as usually the perpetrators were not found.*
34. *Windows of the office of the local Muslim Board in Russe were broken on August 23 2010. On August 23 2010 in the morning the chairperson of the Local Muslim Board in Russe found out that the windows of the entrance doors of the two offices (both Muslim Board Office and District Mufti Office) were broken.*
35. *Racist and derogatory signs and words with a view to insulting Muslims were inscribed on the walls of the Tombul Mosque in Shumen. Anti-Muslim statements and swastika signs were drawn on the walls of "Tombul Mosque" and "Killak Mosque" in Shumen on August 26 2010. Similar words are inscribed on the walls of the Clock Tower in Shumen. On August 26 2010 in the morning hours the first worshipper saw the drawings and swastika on walls of the two mosques. The statements read as "Death for Islam", "Allah the pig to the gallows". Drawings in the form of swastika*

and “IYI” (the Proto Bulgarian symbol) were also found on the walls. No investigation into the incident was launched whatsoever.

36. Skinheads entered “Aziziye Mosque” in Varna and stroke the doors of the mosque during the prayer in the holy month of Ramadan in August and September 2010. In the holy month Ramadan (August and September 2010) during the prayer, a group of skinheads entered the “Aziziye Mosque” in Varna, shouted insulting remarks and stroke the doors of the temple.
37. Drunk people attacked on a worshipper in front of the mosque in Sofia on November 6 2010. At 6:30 a.m. on 6 November 2010 a group of drunken people attacked on a worshipper in front of the “Banyabashi Mosque” who happened to be there for the morning prayer. The group attacked the worshipper, saying “No mosque... no Islam!” and one of them showed an official identity card given by the “General Directorate on Combating Organized Crime”. With the arrival of another worshipper the victim was able to run away. A patrolling police car noticed the quarrel and the policemen intervened. Then the perpetrators were engaged in a heated argument with the policemen and pointed out their identity cards and official positions. With the arrival of more worshippers the wrangler calmed down and the people dispersed. We do not have any information as to whether an investigation was launched into the incident and the result thereof, if any.
38. Tombstones in the Muslim cemetery in Levski were broken on September 10 2010. The violation took place at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. About 30 tombstones were profaned and desecrated. The tombstones were pulled out of the ground and broken. The imam of the mosque in Levski informed the police. The police investigated the case, however, we were not informed of the result.
39. Defamatory words are inscribed on the walls of the “Ahmetbey Mosque” in Razgrad on 14 November 2010. A slanderous statement (Dirty Turks, get out of Bulgaria) was written on the walls of the “Ahmetbey Mosque”. The same expression was also inscribed on the walls of a high school in Razgrad.
40. Office of the district mufti in Dobrich was attacked on December 31 2010. When the imams Beysim Perihanov, Gunan Yakub and Djengiz Aliev were on a night duty, a group of drunken people broke the two of the windows of the office of mufti in Dobrich at 23:40 pm on 31 December 2010. Once Beysim Perihanov and Djengiz Aliev went out to see what was happening they had met the group of ten people. After the imams asked them whether they saw something, the group attacked the imams. During the

fight the fingers of Djengiz Aliev were broken. Gunan Yakub, who was in the office was able to press the button to call the security guards. Five minutes later security guards arrived and they called the police. When the policemen arrived the perpetrators offered an apology and left. The imams explained the case to the police, but the police have not prepared a report.

- 41. On 14.02.2011, in the evening when the Muslims celebrated the birth of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh), unknown people broke in the mosque that was in the very centre of the town of Silistra and drew insulting inscriptions as "Death for Islam" with graffiti on the mihrab of the centuries-old mosque. Afterwards they broke the windows and woodwork one more time. There were broken beer bottles on the mosque floor.*
- 42. On 20.04.2011 the following inscription was written on the walls of the mosque in Pleven: "Turks out – the station at Bunovo – March 9th, 1985.*
- 43. On 29.04.2011 the mosque in Blagoevgrad met the dawn with swastikas on the walls.*
- 44. On 29.04.2011 we witnessed another outrage with the Islamic values, which the representatives of the political party "Ataka" dared to do. During the whole Friday prayer in the central mosque "Banya Bashi" in Sofia, even during the sermon, bell tolls and Christian chants were played from the loud speakers placed on a car that belonged to Ataka party.*
- 45. On 12.05.2011, in the centre of Pleven, Izgordu Gulsun, a student from Turkey, was assaulted, hit on the head and her head-cloth was pulled down in front of dozens of people.*
- 46. On 20.05.2011, during Friday prayer at the "Banyabashi Mosque" in Sofia, representatives of Ataka party headed by their leader Volen Siderov and other members of the Parliament, attacked the Muslims who were praying peacefully in front of the mosque and who made attempts for self-defense. Stones, eggs were thrown at the Muslims; some of them were badly injured.*
- 47. On 20.05.2011 at around 13.00 hours, just before the Friday prayer, which would have taken place at 13:30 pm, when the worshippers were on the verge of performing their holy Friday prayer, in the immediate vicinity of the fence of the Banyabashi mosque, a group of 150 supporters of the ATAKA political party started shouting and chanted insults against the worshippers. By means of the loudspeakers and speaker-systems used by them and installed in front of the mosque fence the group thundered: "This is Bulgaria, you must go to Anatolia", "The Turks – out of Bulgaria", "Turkish stooges", "We do not want these physical drills, we have them neither in Europe, nor*

in America” (they referred to the Muslim prayer); they tried to exert psychological pressure with the loudspeakers, through which you could hear a police siren. Symbolically they cut a traditional Muslim hat into two by a knife and threatened the Muslims that the same would be applied to them (the Muslims). The speaker systems were placed on the roof of the small building (washroom) in the garden of the mosque so that to play chants and to shout during the prayer as they usually do during the prayer on Fridays. All that stirred up discontent among the worshippers; afterwards a few people got on washroom and tried to stop the protesters to place the speaker systems there. The worshippers’ dismay provoked them more and their chanting turned into whirling of stones, hard objects and eggs on the visitors of the mosque. It developed into a fight between the Muslims and the ATAKA supporters. The latter attacked the believers by hitting them with fists and kicking them and using hard and sharp objects. They unstuck and tore off marble tiles from the washroom attached to the mosque and whirled them onto the peaceable Muslims. As a result 5 worshippers were seriously wounded, one of them had grave head trauma. The ATAKA representatives were talking about “Islamic fundamentalists”, “Islamic extremists” in the interviews in the media and accused the Muslims that actually the worshippers attacked the ATAKA supporters. After a while the praying rugs were pulled out under the Muslims’ feet and were put into fire in the middle of the street. Among dozens of wounded were people who were badly injured and were taken to hospital.

After the clash the Prosecutor’s office started investigation against an unknown doer. Some national media were shooting during the incident – both reporters and photographers. This party in the person of its leader have violated the Constitution of Bulgaria not only once as they have used the religion and faith of the Muslims for political reasons. They have preached hatred on religious and ethnic base, have profaned the religious temple and shrine of the Muslims, have attacked praying people, have thrown stones, wood and eggs at them, have performed xenophobic, racial and Islamophobic actions.

Dozens of mediamembers that were shooting the ATAKA protest witnessed this incident. Some of them shot the incident to the end.

I would like to state clearly that the protest meeting of the ATAKA party was held against the loudspeakers on the mosque, which were actually in the within the range of the lawful decibels. I would like to underline that the loudspeakers are used to enable the bigger part of the worshippers who are obliged to pray outside in front of the mosque to listen to the imam or the preacher. It is the only mosque in Sofia and it cannot hold all worshippers.

The incident is an alarming escalation of xenophobia and religious hatred instigated by political circles as they turned such provocation into a profession. It is a grave infringement on the physical inviolability and religious rights of the Bulgarian citizens.

This party in the person of its leader violated the Constitution of Bulgaria not only once by using the Muslims' religion and religious beliefs for political interests. It preaches hatred on religious and ethnic base, profaned the Muslims' religious temple and sanctuary, attacked praying people, threw stones, branches and eggs on them, did xenophobic, racial and Islamophobic actions.

The response of the Bulgarian community, state institutions and non-governmental organizations to this abominable event was praiseworthy. They condemned this act of violence. The Chief Mufti's Office expresses gratitude to them.

Only 20 days after this case a group of unidentified people jumped over the fence of the same mosque, broke the windows of the cabin at the entrance, broke open the door and got into the mosque. When they were going out they encountered a worshiper who came for the morning prayer. The boy was attacked and beaten badly, he was left helpless and covered with blood...

48. On 23.05.2011 a few swastikas were detected on the walls of the building housing the Chief Mufti's Office in Sofia.

49. On 28.05.2011 Aydin Aliev (a worshipper) was attacked in the mosque vicinity after getting out of Banyabashi Mosque in Sofia; he succeeded to run away and to submit a complaint to Police; lots of cameras are installed in the area though, yet the doers have not been found.

50. On 28.05.2011, during the morning prayer, a group of unknown people rushed into the prayer hall of Banyabashi" mosque in Sofia shouting, menacing and threatening but they were sent away by the worshippers.

51. On 12.06.2011 a regular worshipper was beaten in the garden of "Banyabashi Mosque" in Sofia just before the morningprayer. He was left to lie in a pool of blood and was taken unconscious to the Emergency by other worshippers.

On 12.06.2011 before the morning worship at Banyabashi Mosque,a group of anonymous people jumped over the fence, broke the windows of the cabin at the entrance; force opened the doors and penetrated inside. At this time a boy came for prayer and met with the vandals. Attacked and severely beaten, the boy remained stretched on his face at the entrance. A little later other Muslims arrived, finding him in a helpless state covered with blood. The boy was immediately taken to Pirogov Hospital. A police team inspected the site and took statements from the witnesses. Investigation is currently in progress. These acts of vandalism continue daily. What

should happen for this to be stopped? Alarm of the satellite security equipment was switched on for minutes, but there was no reaction. The boy was discharged from Pirogov Hospital after getting few stitches on his mouth.

- 52. On July 11, 2011 around 11:00 p.m. unidentified people attacked "Sultan Beyazid Veli" mosque in the city of Aytos. They have tried to break into the mosque. The Muslim board made a complaint at the Police of Aytos.*
- 53. On September 10, 2011, the windows of the the administrative building of the Regional Mufti Office - Blagoevgrad, in the town of Gotse Delchev, 3 Zvanchrska Str., were broken.*
- 54. On september 26, 2011 at 16:00 a group of ill-affected ultra-nationalist protesters in Plovdiv passing by "Djumaya" mosque, chanting racist slogans, threw paving-stones at the mosque. To avoid the provocations and excesses, mosque employees locked the temple and called the police. After 15 minutes police arrived at the site and remained to guard until morning to not get to the clashes. After the inspection police found that several windows were broken and found paving-stones in the Office of District Mufti of Plovdiv. The case is under investigation. On the same date (September 26, 2011) the same happened in Sofia too. Thanks to the Police the protestors couldn't reach to the mosque. The protests and disorders are because of the murder in Katunitsa, Vidin province that is not a religious-motivated crime. However the protestors attacked the mosques along with the other buildings. They attempt to transform the case into an ethnic and religious matter.*

ADDENDUM 2

A news from: <http://www.mediapool.bg> ; <http://society.actualno.com> - September 9. 2011

The technical organizers of the protest in front of “Banya Bashi”:

Volen Siderov Provoked the Fight in Front of the Sofia Mosque

Volen Siderov is the main instigator of the fight in front of the Sofia mosque “Banya Bashi” in May this year. This is what the two former partners in the Ataka headquarters, Ivaylo Minov and Martin Martinov, put forward in front of Mediapool. They were the technical organizers of the nationalistic protest on 20th May, that was permitted by the municipality but which grew into serious clashes between the Ataka supporters and the Muslims who came to pray.

Obviously startled from the fact that accusations could be laid against them and that they could be sentenced due to Siderov, at the moment they are playing the part of the next people disappointed by their leader and who are leaving him. They suddenly opened their eyes about the fake nationalistic motives of Siderov’s public actions whose unreserved loyalty to the currently governing party GERB has had its price – literally in cash.

Up to now Volen Siderov has not picked up his mobile phone to comment on the revelations of his former colleagues in the party on whose services and loyalty he has counted.

A new version about “The Peaceful Protest”

On May 20th while about 50 Muslims were performing their afternoon prayer on rugs in front of the mosque in the centre of Sofia Ataka supporters came there and started playing patriotic songs at first in order to drown the hodja’s voice. The tension escalated when the Ataka supporters started shouting “janissary”, “toadies”, “Ataka”, “victory”. Some minutes later, when the protesters attacked the praying people in front of the mosque with flags and other materials they had at their disposal, fights began. Some policemen who interfered were injured during the bully.

"Ataka" denies and threatened with court procedures

In a letter sent to the Mediapool editorial on Friday the Ataka administration denied the statements of their two members and announced that they would apply to the court for their rights.

"After an internal investigation about what had happened in front of the Sofia mosque on May 20th, 2011 the management of the party took a decision to dismiss Ivaylo Minov and Martin Martinov from the party headquarters. It was established that on this day at the Ataka meeting they did wilful actions which were in discrepancy with the management orders by means of which they contributed for causing a provoking situation of evil-doing factors for the Ataka party" reads the statement.

Volen Siderov's party added further that the approach would be the same to anybody who lowered the prestige of the Ataka party in such a manner. The lies that particular media respond to orders and that were spread by the two persons would be succeeded by legal procedures having the same development as we had already witnessed during Volen Siderov's legal procedures against Slavi Trifonov who had defamed him."

The same day, Ivaylo Minov, who was a member of Ataka party and worked in the party headquarters, said that the Muslims had instigated the protesters and the policemen had not done their job as no Muslim was arrested. "We are protesting against the loudspeakers not against the Muslims. The people in the region complain from the noise coming from the mosque", said he at that time.

Four months later Ivaylo Minov gave a totally different account of the events. He said before Mediapool that the clashes started after Volen Siderov's interference.

"The idea was to have a peaceful protest 15 metres far from the shrine"

"I was the organizer of the protest. Volen appointed me to be responsible for it", confessed the former Ataka party member.

"Siderov ordered me to summon young people for the protest and I organized it together with our supporters from Sofia region and from Gabrovo – Luibomir Linkov's boys; this group is a bit more extreme than us", explained Minov.

"It took us two days to organize the people and they were in front of the headquarters at 11.30 am. Desislav Chukolov was appointed to be the leader of the procession, but neither he nor Volen Siderov were there. I phoned Volen, he explained to me to go on without him because he had a lecture in Shumen. As I had already summoned all those people for the protest and as he had ordered me and I went there", carried on the organizer.

"We positioned the speakers, gathered together but quite far from the mosque. My idea was to gather at about 15 metres from the mosque in the garden for a silent protest. Actually, we shouted "Ataka", "Victory" and so on for a while; that was all; there was no other aggression", added the member who quitted the party.

“Shortly before the beginning of the protest, about 15 minutes earlier, Volen Siderov and Desislav Chukolov appeared. Then Volen said: “why did you move so far, come forward” – and all the people followed him. Then he started shouting “What are these rugs, what are these things here!?”. Then he wanted me to place the speakers at a higher and nearer location so that people to be able to hear him when he was speaking. So, I climbed up the toilet and put the speaker there. Then we were attacked from the mosque and then the fight started”, explained Minov before Mediapool.

“If he had not been there, we would have protested at a greater distance”, assured he.

“I did not participated in the fighting, but I am leaving because of the mosque”

“We are leaving Ataka because of the fighting in front of the mosque” stated Martin Martinov and Minov. They also emphasized that they had not participated in the fights but they assumed that if they had kept silence until the elections, they would be sacrificed after that.

To the question what made them think in that way the two organizers explained that after the clashes in front of the mosque Siderov congratulated them for the “well done job”.

“Then he took food for all the protesters in front of the mosque and praised us. Now he is explaining to me that the rating of the party has lowered by 30 % because of me”, said Minov.

Siderov points at me because I placed the speakers up on the public toilet”, explained he. “But he is saying it now, he made me do it then though”, added Minov.

The Prosecutor’s office extended the investigation until the end of November

As an answer to a question asked by Mediapool the Sofia Prosecutor’s Office (SPO) announced that the investigation for the spread of ethnic hatred, which started at the end of May, was extended until the end of November. The lawsuit is still against an unidentified doer.

“All members of the Mufti’s Office management are going to be interrogated; technical experts’ note is going to be made about the video recordings from the security cameras around the mosque”, clarified the spokesman of SPO, Margarita Nemska.

The investigation started with the city prosecutor Nikolay Kokinov’s assurance that his colleagues would lay charge only after having collected all evidence. The proceedings before the prosecution were preceded by another scandal generated by Ataka party leader Volen Siderov who rushed to fight with another independent parliament member Korman Ismailov during a programme on the Bulgarian National Radio.

Ataka supporters’ wage - 100 leva per meeting

Meanwhile Minov and Martinov admitted that some of the protests were “paid” by the party headquarters. “For the protest in front of the mosque no money was paid, but there were other protests organized by me again for which the attendees took 100 leva”, gave details Minov.

“Well, the protests we held in front of the Serbian embassy was paid and I was the one who took care of the organization”, admitted he.

Minov and his associate Martinov brought forward another reason for their decision to quit Ataka party – the people from the party paid them only half of the salary they were due to have and which became a tradition.

"Our social security contribution is 1300 leva, actually we are receiving only 500", they said.

Even the accountant of the party, Daniela Radkova, tried to make them sign documents that entitle Siderov to decrease their salaries without any notification but they refused.

“The advice from a friend: I will ruin you”

When Siderov got aware of his subordinates’ intention to leave him he threatened them: “I will ruin you”. Before Mediapool Minov and Martinov said that having been asked the question whether he had threatened them the party leader uttered that it was only “advice from a friend”.

“I simply cannot stay by such a person”, said Minov as he shared his political disagreement to Volen Siderov’s line. “I will give an example right now – it is not possible, after the events in front of the mosque, on the same day when the fighting took place, to request Tsvetanov’s resignation and the other day Tsvetanov to be the best. It is a double standard”, pointed out Minov as he repeated the arguments given by other people who had left the Ataka party and who are against their former leader now.

GERB pay to Ataka for the support

"What Volen makes is not due to a noble cause to improve the standard of life of the people in Bulgaria. On the contrary, the only thing that he is improving is his life. Because the truth is that Siderov takes money from GERB so that Ataka to support Boyko Borisov",also stated the former party member. He did not point out specific amounts of money, neither showed he the manner of how “the payments” were made.

The two people who left Ataka also retold before Mediapool about the instructions they used to have from their boss regarding the support their party rendered to the governing party. “At a meeting in the party headquarters he told us that when we would go to a place we should say that we supported GERB without any conditions, without asking for any offices because it was the smaller evil thing than the coalition of three parties”.

Siderov demonstrates economic prosperity

In order to support their words with facts, Martinov and Minov said that since the party started supporting the government Volen Siderov's financial status has suddenly improved.

“In Dimitrovgrad, for instance, he paid a bill to the amount of 5000 leva for about fifteen people. Only the wine that Siderov ordered was approximately 1000 leva”, stated the two people who left the party. “Volen drinks 18-year-old whiskey and smokes cigars at the price of 120 leva each. If somebody can explain to me in what way it is related to our poor voters, I would be very pleased”, said Minov.

According to his colleague Martinov's words repair works amounting to 300 000 leva were made on the third floor of the party headquarters however, only the floor tiles and the parquet were renewed.

Sources:

<http://www.mediapool.bg>

<http://society.actualno.com>

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