

Identity politics: Case of Torbeshi community in North Macedonia

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Abstract

The development of identities among the Muslims in the Balkan states at the end of the XX and beginning of XXI century is an issue that has very deep social, cultural, economic and political consequences and in various Balkan states we could see various context, circumstances, and state strategies and policies. Ethnic and national identities among Muslims in the Balkans are very changeable. The processes of identity building and identification of Slavic speaking Muslims caused many ethnic, demographic and political consequences in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (in a Sandzak region), Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania...

However, the most dramatic issue is in North Macedonia, with the development or fluctuation of the identity of the Torbeshi community. The estimated number of this community in North Macedonia is around 150,000 people and the identity fluctuates among Muslim Macedonians, Albanians and Turks. But, in the last 20 years, the identification of people with the Torbeshi identity as a separate and particular community in Macedonia causes many reactions in the political and scientific circles in Macedonia.

In this paper we analyze and elaborate different identification, ethnic, demographic and political processes and phenomenon among the Macedonian speaking Muslim community (Torbeshi) in North Macedonia.

Keywords: Torbeshi, Macedonian- Muslims, Turks, Albanians, Macedonian.

Introduction

The history of Muslim population in the Balkans in XX and XXI centuries, is full with migrations, evictions, struggles for recognition of identities and minority status in new established states, direct or indirect discrimination, genocide etc. If we researching for a paradigm, all these issues could be understand and packaged in framework of the so-called “Eastern issue” or better to say as is it continuation. Many studies, documents and witnessing, are saying about the surviving of the mentality of “Eastern issue” among the Balkan’s national elites, which was express through the presentation of Islam and Muslims as a “outside” religion and population in the European soil. (Karčić F. 2014)

Predictions that a secular liberal state will replace religions exclusively in the private sphere and deprive them from their collective meaning, by recognizing religion as a human right subject of free choice, are increasingly subject to scrutiny. This is even more that some groups and communities, especially in the diaspora, develop their ethno-cultural identity around religion. The acculturation that is reflected in the changes of nutrition and clothing, the attitudes towards marriage and the woman's position, or the forgetting of the language of the ancestors, failed to enter into the faith and move her away from the core, which is the stronghold of maintaining relationships with the home country and preservation of ethno-cultural identity (**Башић Г. 2016**)

In this complex, the role of language cannot be bypassed, which is both a product and an expression of culture, its bearer and creative principle. There is no culture without linguistic expression, nor is there language without cultural content. At the same time, one language can serve several cultures (for example, the world's widespread languages), and one culture can be expressed in several languages (for example, the many multilingual countries), so that the relationship of the type 1:1 or one people - one language, is more the exception than the rule. Anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir, at the beginning of the 20th century, changed the face of language and culture research, saying that the language of a certain culture directly affects how people think (**Neuliep, 2009**). The network of cultural patterns of a civilization is indexed in the language through which that civilization expresses itself. Language is the guide to societies reality. People do not live alone in the objective world, but are much more at the mercy of the particular language that is the medium of expression for their society. People perceive the world around them, including the natural and social environment, as instructed by their language. People who speak different languages see different worlds, are directed towards different types of observation, and so they are not equivalent as observers and arrive at different views of the world.

This means that two individuals speaking different languages think differently, and thus intercultural communication is quite difficult. From here comes the growing need to learn and use other languages in the community in which we live, or at least to actively accept them, through understanding communication in common life.

Religion and ethnos, as well as religion and ethnic identity through the history of the Balkans, Europe and wider, were and are the most important pillars and identities on development or collapsing, determination and stratification of societies.

Their different combinations, variations and models have strong impacts and influence on state politics, policies, strategies, doctrines, image of societies, as well as develop of human beings and humanity. Politics of affirming or neglecting of the religion or the ethnicity in different historical periods show that these two variables on managing of diversity in a society are very vital, adjustable and even indestructible. (Zemon R., 2021)

Nenad Markovickj (Markovickj N., 2021) and Ivan Damjanovski from the University of Skopje, in their analyses of ethnicity and identity fluctuation, except the language and religion, as important factors are including also the comparative group worth (symbolic group worth) and political interest. According to these authors *“it is exactly the combination of these four independent variables, and their interplay with the religious, linguistic and political features of both the Gorani and the Torbesh/Macedonian Muslim groups, which reveals the complicated and often troubled relation between members of both communities and other ethnic groups in their proximity. What is more, outgroup factors often inflict internal splits in the ethnic tissue of both communities, disabling a unison identification of the members of the Gorani and the Torbesh/Macedonian Muslim groups on ethnic, linguistic, political and cultural grounds.”* (Damjanovski I., 2021).

A famous Swedish scholar and researcher on identities, especially of ethnic identities and boundaries Frederic Barth had a position that ‘what by the time is transferred is not the cultural arsenal, but the boundary of a particular group: the inner content is changing and boundaries survive’. Ethnic boundaries imply inter-ethnic relations: ethnic identity is formed and survive right through to the contacts with other ethnic groups. Differences between ethnic categories are not rely on the absent of movements, contacts and information, but understanding social processes of excluding and including. (Barth F., 1969)

The theory of ethnicity and nation experienced a major change with the emergence of the Anderson’s study "Imagined communities". According to him, the nation, and every other group, in particular ethnic group, is imaged (but not invented) community: it is imaged because a member of a large group never will meet all members of a group, but they in his consciousness are there and it takes a certain kind of friendly relationship toward to them. This type of relationship is based on a sense of a strong horizontal friendship and solidarity. Communities differ themselves primarily on the way of how they are imaged". (Anderson B. 1983)

For the topic of this paper it is worth to mention the work "Ethnicity and Nationalism" by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, which addresses the basic problems of the study of ethnicity: the ratio for "the other", according to history and politics. The existence of others is an essential element of ethnic identification: without "the others" is not possible to experience and understand the "We". (Eriksen Th. H., 1993) . History is not a problem of the past, but is response to the demands of the present: the anthropologist does not concern what really happened; she/he would not like historians to exploring the differences between "real" and "invented" traditions, but wants to uncover how a certain historical content is used in the actual process of construction of identity.

Identity and identifications of Slavic speaking Muslim communities in the Balkans through the history

Up until the Ottomans evacuated the area in 1912 as a result of the First Balkan War, it is asserted that the Torbeshes consistently identified as Turkish. The "forced assimilation" policies of the Bulgarian government were introduced to the Torbeshes during the Balkan Wars and subsequently in World War II. Following the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia in 1946, the Torbeshes were forced to assume an ethnic Macedonian identity by the ruling Communists, who also forced Macedonian Christians to do the same. Administrators who supported Macedonian nationalism were troubled by the Torbesh people's tendency to identify as Muslims, particularly Turkish ones. They were coerced into accepting their Macedonian identity and becoming Christians in a methodical manner. Communist leaders forced the Torbeshes to adopt a "Macedonian identity" through a variety of tactics, including persecution, intimidation, and historical misinformation. For example, when the economic crisis forced the dismissal of thousands of workers in the post-Communist era, the Macedonian authorities demanded a signed document from the Torbeshes reapplying for jobs, certifying that their identification is Muslim and nothing else. (Dikici A., 2008)

The long Ottoman ruling in the Balkans caused very important social, economic, political and cultural changes until the present day. One of the characteristics of the Ottoman period in the Balkans was the affirmation of the Islam religion. In the first decades of the Ottoman ruling in the Balkans whole groups of people accepted Islam almost in every region of the Peninsula.

Many scholars make conclusions that in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the XV century members of the Bogomilian movement in the Balkans, as a main religious, ethic, ideological and social power, massively accepted the Islam religion (**Стојановски А. 1987**). Other scholars have a position that is not absolutely possible to determinate the religious origin of pre-Islamic groups (**Лиманоски Н., 1993**). But the Ottoman government did not force the process of “Islamisation”- term which is often used in scientific books in the Balkans, for the process of changing or shifting the religious belief of the people. They allowed Christians to respect their religion, practice their rituals and their kind of living. The most important issue for the Ottomans was that the “raya” be quite and pay taxes. Christian adult men were obliged to pay a special tax called “Dzizja”, from which Muslim adult men were freed. (**Zemon R., 2014**)

An act of accepting Islam religion among the people was known as “poturcuvanje”/ “becoming a Turk”. For that reason one of the identity names for those people was and is “Poturi”. This name sublimates all existing contradictions related with religion, identity and the “otherness”. For the Christians, shifting to Islam was identification with a process of naturalization, becoming “other”, becoming a Turk (**Лиманоски Н. 1993**). On the other hand, in the Middle Ages, Turks-Ottomans experienced and felt themselves much more as Muslims than as Turks in the modern sense of the identity (**Smith A: 1991**). For that reason an identity of a “Turk” was identification with an identity of a “Muslim”, and the conversion of people to Islam was called “Turcenje”, and the new Muslims became Turks. In this way two basic categories of belonging “in” and “out” of groups were determined: “Turks” and “Christians”. This basic demarcation and distinction was made according to the religious identity, without consideration of the ethnic and linguistic characteristics and features. In this way under the category “Turks” were understood, except the “real Turks”, also Muslim Albanians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians, Montenegrins and other ethnic communities which accepted the Islam religion.

During the Ottoman Empire as a theocratic state, ethnic identities and the ethnic belonging of people were not important vs. the religious identity and determination. The ethnic identity lost its importance in the Ottoman Empire and the priority was given to the religious identity, with the aim that all Muslim people belong to one Muslim community. Even ethnic Turks did not feel as Turks, but as Muslims. The phenomenon of losing the ethnic feeling as a consequence of a universal spirit of Islam was installed in the Balkans, too. (**Zemon R. 2014**)

At the end of the XXVIII and the beginning of the XIX century, the process of the development of modern nations began among the various nationalities in the Balkans. The millet system, with its classification based on religion, became increasingly less viable. A process known as the National Revival was and is much more intensive among the Christian population, than among the Muslims (**Mazower M. 2000**). The processes of development and construction of national identities in the Balkan states mainly follow the primordial way, which as a consequence has social antagonisms on a religious base among the people, presented as ethnic conflicts. The fight for national liberation and the creation of national states was not just a radical break with the past, but it was negation of the past, too. This caused the creation of nations to be built on the basis of two central principles- language and faith.

South East Europe at the beginning of the XIX century was not a region determined with nation-states, but with symbols of orthodoxy. In those circumstances, the Muslim millet, with no consideration for the ethnic and linguistic diversity, remained as a part of the same discourse of the Otherness. Islamic community and mosques were not national, and they fought against the national consciousness of Muslim people, advocating for the universality of the religion, as a unique leader of collective organization of the believers. Contrary, Christian churches appeared as bearers of national awaking and revival, presenting the institutional fundament of the Balkan nation-states.

The creation of nations on the basis of language among the orthodox faced Slavic people with obstacles in religious aspect, by keeping the old distinctions of “Muslims” and “Christians” from the Ottoman Empire. In that context, the self-integration of groups with the same pre-Ottoman ethnic origin and similar languages but with different religion was impossible. Christian people in the Balkans started to understand the world with the language of nationalism, while their views toward the Muslims stayed in a domain of the same discourse among the religious communities (**Todorova M. 2001**).

On the other hand, because the Balkan Muslim were incapable to adopt the national code and practically were excluded from the process of national consolidation and integration, they kept the fluid conciseness, which was an image of the millet mentality as Ottoman heritage (**Todorova M. 2001**).

The new state-borders from 1878 and from 1912 became the basic criteria for defining the collective identity. National belonging was promoted as a prime factor for group identification, opposite the former religious collective categorization. National governments and administration, mainly implemented restrictive politics of integration of Muslim population and their participation in the public life, because of their superstition for loyalty to the new states, bearing in mind that Muslims lost the benefits which they had in the Ottoman Empire.

The national ideology imposed cultural identity by taking the control over the economy and conventional collective images from families and from the local communities. The lack of national strategy for inclusion and integration of Muslim Slavic population in the new societies and in a national “WE” or “OURS”, brought confusion related with the definitions of Muslim population. **(Kulafkova K. 2018).**

The most important segments in forming the collective identity of nation-state are its institutions, especially the local administration, military service and mass education. While in the Ottoman Empire in the settlements where Muslims speaking Slavic languages lived, or there were mixed settlements with Muslim and Christian population, the political elite and local leaders mainly were from the Muslim community, in national states there were mainly Christians. These politics of “revenge” strengthened the solidarity among the Muslims with different ethnic and linguistic belongings in the new nation-states **(Стојаноски С. 2010).**

However, we have to point the fact that in the collective memory of the Balkan population it was impossible to throw the “collective blame and guilt” towards the Muslims with Slavic languages, because they felt threatened and changed their religion and “became Turks”. The reconstruction of the social matrix that they belong to one nation and have to be considered as “We”, “Us” or “Ours” was impossible because the memories from the Ottoman state were fresh **(Лиманоски Н., 1993)**

Nevertheless, public opinion for “forced Islamization” of the so-called “Bulgarian-muhamedanes”, “Serbian-muhamedanes”, “Muslim with our blood” and other identity terms, which were used in a time of national revival of the Christian population in the Balkan states, especially in Bulgaria and Serbia, was created in the intellectual circles, before the creation of national states. This public opinion was constructed in a way that Islamization of the Slavic people was made in a forced way by the Ottomans **(Zemon R. 2014)**, and because the Ottomans had to go back in Asia, Muslims with Slavic pre-Ottoman origin had to come back to their Christians roots **(Ајрадиноски Ш., 2011)**. But these theses in the intellectual circles, found their places in the construction of national and nationalistic state ideology in the Balkan states, whose frustration of “the five-century long Turkish slavery” was unleashed on “our Turks”. In cultivating the myth for homogenous and pure national states, the national Balkan states at beginning of the XX century signed Agreements in 1919 and 1923 in Neuilly and Lozano, between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey for changing the population.

A similar agreement was signed between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Turkey in 1933. With these Agreements, most of the Muslim population with Slavic origin was forcibly migrated in Turkey, because they were declared as ethnic Turks. These Balkan nation-states were constructed and implemented in the “Balkan way” (Даскаловски Ж., 2010), with a strong influence of a former Millet system, where confessions, and in this case national orthodox churches, gave the final “stamp” on the national identity.

After the Second World War, the Muslims in Tito’s Yugoslavia were in much better position than before the war, as well as in comparison with the Pomaks in Bulgaria who experienced a total violation of their human rights, especially in a governmental policy of chaining their Muslim names into Christian ones (Maeva M., 2008)! The introduction of modern or relatively modern political life in socialist Yugoslavia, accompanied by the establishment of a public domain from which religion was excluded, led to a certain retreat of the ethnic. There is no doubt that confessional identity- the form of the collective identity that had dominated for so long-did retreat when faced with the onslaught of aggressive secularization. In socialist Yugoslavia as well as in other socialist states were produced two major ethnic reconstitutions. The first resulted from the introduction of a modern political identity, the identity of the working class (Vlaisavljevic U. 2003). Despite the violent repression of the religious identity, the ethnic identity continued to play a major role in Yugoslav society (even if it was secondary to the political identity).

Ethno-religious identity was transformed into ethno-political identity. Interpreted and institutionalized by modern political means, the ethnic or ethno-religious identity became the national identity. Communist ideology and its political institutions took the place of religion. Though politics became more important than religion, this did not mean that the ethnic lost its significance. On the contrary, the ethnic was sufficiently important, indeed more so than either politics or religion, therefore it may be assumed that in taking the place of religion, politics also had to take on its role: to become a political or secular religion. The ethnic emerges here in an entirely modern form: it is a name for the place or framework within which politics and religion relate to each other. (Vlaisavljevic U., 2003).

In these circumstances with the collective identity of the people, in Social Yugoslavia rose a question of the legal recognition of the *Muslim nation*. The Constitution of SFRY recognized *narodi* (nations—native peoples which were explicitly named in the Constitution, giving them special privileges) and *narodnosti* (nationalities, with status comparable to that of minorities).

The Austro-Hungarian Empire officially introduced the term *Bosniaks* for the Slavic Muslims who lived in Bosnia; prior to it, it was used to describe a resident of Bosnia regardless of his/her nationality or religion. In a debate that went on during the 1960s, many Bosniak communist intellectuals argued that the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina are in fact native Slavic people that should be recognized as a nation. But the name *Muslims* was sometimes rejected - to quote the Bosniak politician and president Hamdija Pozderac: “*They do not allow Bosnianhood but they offer Muslimhood. We shall accept their offer, although the name is wrong, but with it will start the process*”— In a discussion with Josip Broz Tito in 1971 regarding the constitutional changes which recognized Muslims, later Bosniaks (**Lisica A. 2022**).

As compromise, the Constitution was amended in 1968 to list the *Muslims by nationality* recognizing a nation, but not the Bosniak name. The Bosniaks considered the Yugoslav "Muslim by nationality" policy to neglect and oppose their Bosnian identity because the term tried to describe Bosniaks as a religious group not an ethnic one. Sometimes other terms, such as *Muslim with capital M* were used (that is, "musliman" was a practicing Muslim while "Musliman" was a member of this nation; Serbo-Croatian uses capital letters for names of peoples but small for names of adherents).

After the 1990s, most of these people, around two million, mostly located in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region of Sandžak, were declared as ethnic Bosniaks (*Bošnjaci*, sing. *Bošnjak*). On the other hand, some still use the old name *Muslimani* (Muslims), especially outside Bosnia and Herzegovina (**Kurpejovic A. 2008**).

The recognition of the Muslim identity as a national identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1970s caused a reaction in the other Yugoslav republics of Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. With the constitutional changes from 1974, the ethnic identification of the people in Yugoslavia was based on the free declaration of every individual according to her/his conciseness, different than previously, when the ethnic/national identification was based on the spoken language. For that reason the republic's authorities in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro were afraid that Muslims in their republic will declare themselves as Muslims in as a nation, and asked that such right have only the Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because this proposal was refused, the authorities in Macedonia launched an informal campaign for encouraging the population to accept the identity of Muslim Macedonians (Makedonski Muslimani) (**Ајрадиноски Ш.. 2011**). The main role in this campaign belonged to the so-called Republic Community of Cultural Manifestation of Muslim Macedonians, led by Nijazi Limanonski (**Лиманоски Н. 1993**).

A parallel campaign was implemented among Christian Macedonians too, with the aim to accept Muslim Macedonians as their compatriots, as members of the same nation. But such activities did not give the expected results.

With the collapse of the socialist regime, among the Slavic people with Islam religion appeared new processes which were related with respect of human rights, participation in the public life and decision-making processes and bodies. These processes caused new development of the identity, with request for recognizing their local community as a particular national minority in the respective state.

The Kosovo crisis discovered for the public the existence of a new community in Kosovo-Gorani community. Actually it is Muslim population that speaks a Slavic language in a region of Gora, divided between three states Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. Even if they may be aware that they are members of the same local/regional community in present day Kosovo, we may find people from the Gorani community who declare themselves as Boshinaks, Turks, Gorans etc. Member of the Gorani community which live or have migrated to Macedonia, generally declare themselves as Macedonians with Islam religion.

In fact, the president of the Union of Macedonians with Islam religion, Mr. Ismail Bojda has an origin from the village Brod in the Gora region. The new independent state of Kosovo recognizes Gorani and Boshnjaks as particular communities, they are mentioned in the Constitution of Kosovo, they have reserved seats in the Kosovo parliament and separately they enjoy minority rights as all other non-Serbian communities in Kosovo. The ethnic identity of Gorani community started to appear in Albania, too. The main intellectual front-man not only in Albania, but broader for the Gorani identity and in direct relation of the Gorani, Torbeshi and Pomaks communities with the Bogomils in Middle Ages was Mr. Nazif Dokle, who died in 2014. In 2009 he published a book “Bogomilzism and ethnogenesis of Torbesh from Gora in Kukes” (**Dokle N. 2009**), which in October 2011 was translated in *Boshniak* language. Repeated aspirations for appropriation of the Gorani community in the frame of their nation have the Bulgarian scholars, too. Tanja Mangalakova, a famous Bulgarian journalist, published the book “Ours in Kosovo and Albania” in 2008 (**Мангалакова Т. 2008**). Bulgarian scholars organized many events, such as expositions of photos, object, clothes etc. related with the traditional culture of the Muslim population in Albania, in the regions of Golo Brdo and Gora, like the expositions of Veselka Toncheva from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore with the Ethnographic museum in Sofia. The regions of Golo Brdo and Gora in the expositions were presented as the “most western Bulgarian lands”! (**Tončeva V. 2009**)

Identity and identification of Torbeshi community as political issue

However, the most dramatic issue is in Macedonia, with the development of the identity of the Torbeshi community. The estimated number of this community in Macedonia is around 150,000 people and the identity fluctuates among Muslim Macedonians, Albanians and Turks. But, in the last two decades, the identification of people with the Torbeshi identity as a separate and particular community in Macedonia causes many reactions in the political and scientific circles in Macedonia. In 2006 a leader of the Party for European Integration (PEI) Mr. Fijat Canoski, became member of the parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, and in his speeches in the parliament he declared that he will represent and protect the interest of the Muslim population in Macedonia known as Torbeshi, or as he liked to say “people of my kind (soj)”! Later in 2010 was established the Torbeshian Cultural- Scientific Center “Rumelija” with Sherif Ajradinoski as the chairman, which in January 2011 proclaimed the “Torbeshian Declaration”, with the request that the Torbeshi community be recognized as a separate community in Macedonia and mentioned in a Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia (Ајрадиноски Ш., 2011). Immediately came a strong response from the Union of Macedonians with Islamic religion, by organizing scientific public tribunes in cooperation with the national institutes for history, Macedonian language, folklore, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, the Institute of Ancient Slavic Culture and the Macedonian Ethnologists Society. As an output from the public tribune on the topic “*Macedonians with Islamic faith between national belonging and religious determination*”, was published a booklet/collection of work (Дрвошанов В. (ed.) 2011). The cultural- scientific center “Rumelija”, responded with a scientific tribune, too, where prominent scholars from Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Bulgaria gave the contribution of giving a scientific base for the Torbeshi identity. But, this identity conflict in Macedonia is not only in the scientific circles! On the socials networks, especially on Facebook, there is a real cyber war between both sides (Facebook, ObedinetiTorbeshi). Some people say that even in the background of closing A1 television and arresting its owner, Velija Ramkovksi, (Time.Mk. 24.12.2010) as well as destroying the building complex “Cosmos” that is in ownership of Fijat Canoski, is a political fight against the main front-men of the Torbeshi movement. (Press 24, 04.08.2011)

In a third decade of the XXI century the issue of identity of Macedonian speaking Muslims in North Macedonia, appeared again in a public discourse. For the first time in history of censuses, on a question of ethnic affiliation a number of people that declared themselves as ‘Torbeshi’ was sublimated in a special census codex. Official data from the State Statistic Office are saying that 4,174 citizens of North Macedonia identified themselves as ‘Torbeshi’. This is first official statistic data from the time when censuses are organizing in this territory (1921 and 1931 during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1948, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 in Tito’s Yugoslavia and 1994, 2002 in Republic of Macedonia). However, almost all censuses are contested regarding the official data of ethnic composition in a territory of today North Macedonia. Figures regarding the ethnic structure until 1971 are not based on free declaration of the individual identity. People started freely to declare their ethnic identity from 1981 as a consequence of a Constitutional changes in Tito’s Yugoslavia from 1974. But, even that from 1981 Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia ethnically started to declare themselves as Muslim like ethnic affiliation, authorities in Socialist Republic of Macedonia affirmed a declaration as “Macedonian- Muslims”, and in a final statistic results they were included in a total number of Macedonian ethnos.

However, from 1981 census, we could see that 39 513 people declared as Muslims. But this number in next censuses gradually will be declines to 31 356 people in 1991, 15 418 people in 1994, to 2 553 people in 2002 . (**Table 1.**) At the last census in 2021 official number of declared as Muslims is 1187 people and 455 as “Macedonian Muslims”. In 1994 “Muslims” in Macedonia started to identify themselves as “Bosniaks”, and their number in 2002 was 17 018 people, and 18 163 people in 2021.

Issues of ethnic identity, identifications and belonging to the certain community not always had a proper statistical reflections. A certain person, or a group of people could belonging to certain community, but to identify their ethnic identity as they thinking or feeling to another community. The Macedonian speaking Muslim community is split in many ethnic identities: A big number of them are declaring themselves as Albanians (because of political interests and religious closeness), then as Turks (because of the reflections in religious identity and closeness), as Torbeshi (because of ethno-cultural identity), and as Macedonians (because of the same speaking language). A small number of them are identifying themselves as Bosniaks, as a big number of Gorani community in Kosovo is doing. (**Markovickj N., 2021**)

For that reason we don't know the exact number of this population in present time. Situation is much more uncertain that generally in last two decade emigration on Macedonian citizens is very high and total population in the Republic of North Macedonia is decline for about 200 thousand people, and villages where the Macedonian speaking Muslim communities is living are almost abounded.

Republic of North Macedonia from June 2022 had a condition to make the changing of the Constitution for continuation of the negotiation for membership in EU, by including other ethnic communities in Preamble of the Constitution, such are Bulgarians. This issue made a lot of political tensions in a country. The Government opened a process of expression of interest of communities, and non-governmental organization of Torbeshi community "Torbeshi most" ("Torbeshi bridge"), submitted official request Torbeshi community to be included in Constitutional changes, too. But, their request was not accepted by the expert governmental commission, because the political party of Turkish community TDP (Turks Democratic Party), was strongly against it, and even threatens that will not vote in a Parliament for the Constitutional changes at all, if Torbeshi community will be mention in a draft amendments¹.

But is not excluded that and other ethnic political parties gave "silent consent" to this "hard position" of TDP, especially those with nationalistic Macedonian and Albanian attitudes. However, the process of Constitutional changes didn't pass the first voting, yet, (from three voting procedures), so everything is possible regarding the Torbeshi issue. Moreover, the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities by the Council of Europe, in its last Opinion from 2022, also recommended that in addition to the need to protect the Egyptians, the Croats, Montenegrins, and Torbeshi communities are also mentioned, as well as all those who request it are emphasized. **(CoE AC FCNM 2022)**.

Conclusions

The ethnic or national revival of the Muslim population in the Balkan states, especially among the Bosniaks, Torbeshi, Pomaks, Gorani and other communities, which appeared much later than among the Christians, is in its very early stages. They want to build and construct their identity houses, which are legitimate goals in general civilization sense. Identity is subjective category, and objectification of the same is a long process of intercultural dialog.

¹ <https://www.dw.com/mk/ustavnite-izmeni-na-vrela-ringla/a-65625218>

The researching of the Slavic-speaking Muslim communities' fluid identity construction in North Macedonia supports theories that view ethnic identity as a dynamic concept. The most likely explanation to explain the theoretical underpinnings of this study appears to be Barth's theory on border maintenance, self-ascription, and outgroup ascription of ethnic identity. A common example of communities whose ethnic allegiance is highly reliant on outgroup ascriptive variables is the Muslim community of the "Torbeshi". The dependent variable of this analysis, which is fluctuations in ethnic identification, is influenced by these ascriptive elements, which are taken as independent variables and include religion, language, comparative group worth, and political interest, The carriers of these outgroup ascriptive influences are neighboring ethnic groups, and each group has a distinct influence on members of the Torbeshi community, primarily due to shared characteristics like language or religion, but also because it raises the relative group worth of both groups and because political interest is a potent tool for ethnic outgroup ascription.

Table 1. Population in a territory of today North Macedonia according to declared ethnic affiliation by censuses (Source Statistical Office of North Macedonia).

03.01. Пописи

03.01. Censuses

T-03.01.3: Население според припадноста кон етничка заедница, по пописи

T-03.01.3: Population according to declared ethnic affiliation, by censuses

	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991 ¹⁾	1994 ¹⁾	2002	
ВКУПНО	1 304 514	1 406 003	1 647 308	1 909 136	2 033 964	1 945 932	2 022 547	TOTAL
Македонци	860 699	1 000 854	1 142 375	1 279 323	1 328 187	1 295 964	1 297 981	Macedonian
Албанци	162 524	183 108	279 871	377 208	441 987	441 104	509 083	Albanian
Власи	8 668	8 046	7 190	6 384	7 764	8 601	9 695	Vlach
Роми	20 462	20 606	24 505	43 125	52 103	43 707	53 879	Roma
Турци	203 938	131 484	108 552	86 591	77 080	78 019	77 959	Turkish
Австријци	24	12	9	30	15	8	35	Austrian
Бошњаци	-	-	-	-	-	6 829	17 018	Bosniak
Бугари	920	3 087	3 334	1 980	1 370	1 682	1 487	Bulgarian
Германци	136	94	77	288	230*	68	88	German
Грци	848	836	536	707	474	368	422	Greek
Евреи	55	47	32	27	26	23	53	Jew
Египјани	-	-	-	-	3 307	3 080	3 713	Egyptian
Италијанци	41	57	48	96	74	61	46	Italian
Муслимани	1 591	3 002	1 248	39 513	31 356	15 418	2 553	Muslim
Полјаци	24	26	72	223	248	158	162	Polish
Романци	103	135	105	97	87	37	38	Romanian
Руси	672	640	516	359	332	340	368	Russian
Русини	127	124	59	23	51	11	24	Ruthenian
Словаци	20	64	46	67	56	60	60	Slovak
Словенци	983	1 147	838	648	513	403	365	Slovene
Срби	35 112	42 728	46 465	44 468	42 775	40 228	35 939	Serbian
Украинци	-	-	50	68	74	102	136	Ukrainian
Унгарци	207	252	229	280	222	128	129	Hungarian
Хрвати	2 770	3 801	3 882	3 307	2 878	2 248	2 686	Croatian
Црногорци	2 526	3 414	3 246	3 920	3 225	2 318	2 003	Montenegrin
Чеси	114	92	80	164	143	84	60	Czech
Други неспомнати	1 950	2 350	22 845	18 792	36 313	2 408	5 332	Other
Не се изјасниле	414	505	1 791	1 882	404	Ethnically undeclared
Се изјасниле како припадници на одредени региони	-	-	684	943	1 303	593	829	Regional affiliation

¹⁾ Полишано и проценето население

¹⁾ Enumerated and estimated population

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