

Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans

Xavier Bougarel

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is reflected by the formation of their own political parties. Since 1990, these populations express openly some cultural and political claims, strengthen their national awareness and sometimes proclaim their own political sovereignty, like in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Kosovo. At the same time, the breaking out of their internal conflicts leads to the split of some ethnic parties and to the contestation of the highest religious authorities. The questions of islamism and reislamization are to be examined within this general context. The collapse of communist regimes explains the appearance of islamist currents. But these currents play only a marginal part, except in Bosnia-Herzegovina where they managed to take over the direction of the SDA, the main Bosnian Muslim party. Similarly, apparent "reislamization" processes are in reality linked to the reshaping of the relationship between Islam and national identity, and do not really question the secularization of the Balkan Muslim populations.

Xavier Bougarel

Xavier Bougarel was born in 1965. From 1987 to 1990, he studied political science in the Institute for Political Studies (IEP) in Paris. From 1990 to 1992, he was French lecturer at the Law Faculty of the University of Belgrade. Since 1993, he is preparing a PhD in political science on "*Islam and politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina : the Party of Democratic Action*". He has published a book on the Bosnian war ("*Bosnie : anatomie d'un conflit*", Paris : La Découverte, 1996) and several papers in French and English languages.

Introduction : Balkan Islam between stigmatization and victimization

In the last decade, the different Balkan Muslim populations were involved in most of the crises which shook the region, from the massive exodus of Bulgarian Turks in July 1989 to the sliding of Kosovo crisis into violence in March 1998, through the Bosnian conflict in 1992/95 and the Albanian civil war in 1997. It does not mean, of course, that Islam is the explanatory factor of these crises: they are political ones, even when religious symbols and religious actors play an important part, like in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, inevitably, Balkan Islam has been influenced by the political resettlements following the collapse of communism in Southeastern Europe. Conversely, a good understanding of the new realities of post-communist Balkans requires to take account of some evolutions specific to the Muslim populations¹.

Unfortunately, the analyses of contemporary Balkan Islam are often superficial and exaggerated ones. Some conjure up visions of a "green diagonal" penetrating the flank of a Christian Europe ; others refer to "European Islam" as an island of tolerance, lost in an ocean of Orthodox fanaticism. These two representations of Balkan Islam, which at first glance seem to conflict with each other, are in reality kindred ones. The first presents Islam as strange to and incompatible with European culture and values. The second shifts this incompatibility toward Orthodoxy, but still contrast implicitly a "tolerant" European Islam with an "intolerant" non-European Islam, placing the origin of this tolerance not in the historical features of Ottoman Islam, but in some hypothetical common and ancestral European values. And, above all, both consider the Balkan Muslim populations as a homogeneous and stable whole.

It seems thus necessary to elaborate a new approach to Balkan Islam, stressing its internal diversity and its continuous transformations. In such a perspective, this paper handles with the relationship between Islam and politics in post-communist Balkans. The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is indeed one of the major changes of the last decade. Its analysis emphasizes the complex and diversified links existing between Islam and national identity, political actors and religious actors, in each of the Balkan Muslim communities. A better understanding of the internal cleavages and dynamics of Balkan Islam can then lead to a more dispassionate debate on the reality of the "Islamic threat" in the Balkans.

The emergence of the Muslim populations as autonomous political actors

Before World War II, the Balkan Muslim populations were represented by their traditional notables (landlords and rich tradesmen), who were linked to the ruling

¹ About the Balkan Muslim populations after 1990, see Hugh POULTON, (ed.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, London : Hurst, 1997.

political parties through clientelist bonds. Only the Bosnian Muslim notables succeeded in building their own party, but they also showed allegiance to the central power, and contented themselves with shifting alliances with the Serbian or Croatian political forces². The communist period encouraged the formation of new Muslim elites (professors and teachers, physicians, engineers, etc.) and the crystallization of national identities which till then had remained unclear and fluid, as clearly shown by the case of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. But only the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989/90 allowed these social and cultural changes to find an expression on the political level.

The new laws on political pluralism adopted by the Balkan states in 1989/90 usually banned every party founded on an ethnic or religious basis. But this clause did not prevent the creation of parties representing the Muslim populations. At first, these parties circumvented it by choosing names without any ethnic connotation : Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) for the Albanians of Kosovo, Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) for the Turks of Bulgaria, Party for Democratic Action (SDA) for the Bosnian Muslims, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) for the Albanians of Macedonia. The banning of ethnic parties became therefore obsolete, and new parties appeared later with overt ethnic names, such as the Turkish Democratic Party and the Party for the Complete Emancipation of the Romas in Macedonia, the Turkish Democratic Union in Kosovo or the Democratic Union of the Muslim Turks in Romania.

These new Muslim parties were usually led by members of the new elites associated to the communist modernization and, more precisely, by former activists of the party and its mass organization, as shown by the case of Ibrahim Rugova, former president of the Union of the Writers of Kosovo and president of the LDK, or Ahmed Doğan, former member of the Institute of Philosophy in Sofia and president of the DPS. Only the SDA was founded by members of a panislamist current appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1930', and which main representative was Alija Izetbegović himself. But also the SDA had to incorporate intellectuals and notables close to the League of Communists in order to become a mass party³. At the first free elections, these parties won a huge majority of the votes of their respective communities. A large part of the urban middle classes and some village dwellers, however, preferred to vote for the former communists, owing to some specific identity choices ("yugoslavism" of the Bosnian urban elites, Pomak particularism of some Bulgarian villages⁴) or to general fears of economic reforms and land restitution to its former owners.

² About the political history of the Bosnian Muslims, see Robert DONIA, *Islam under the Double Eagle. The Muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina 1878-1914*, New-York : Columbia University Press, 1981 ; Mark PINSON, (ed.), *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1994.

³ About this panislamist current and its role in the creation of the SDA, see Xavier BOUGAREL, "From 'Young Muslims' to the Party of Democratic Action : the Emergence of a Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Islamic Studies*, vol. XXXVI, n° 2-3 (Summer/Autumn 1997, special issue "Islam in the Balkans"), p. 533-549.

⁴ Pomaks are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. There are about 165 000 Pomaks in Bulgaria (Western Rhodopes), and 30 000 in Greece (Western Thrace).

The triumph of the Muslim parties is therefore not synonymous with a monolithic muslim vote. Where different Muslim populations coexist, the main Muslim parties did not succeed in crossing the limits of their own ethnic group. In Macedonia, for example, the SDA tried to challenge the Albanian, Turkish and Gipsy ethnic parties with a call to the political unity of the *Umma* (Community of the faithfuls). Not only did this call remain without echo, but the SDA itself divided in 1991 between a panislamist party (SDA-*"Islamic Path"*) and a Bosnian Muslim ethnic one. Political and strategic conflicts added to these ethnic cleavages, and the main Muslim parties experienced internal splits in the 1990' (Party for the Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians -PPDSH- in Macedonia in 1994 ⁵, Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina -SzaBiH- in 1995 ⁶, Albanian Democratic Movement -LDSH- in Kosovo in 1998 ⁷).

The situation in Bulgaria seems to be different, since the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) led by Ahmed Doŭan has no direct rival ⁸. But this difference is only a relative one. At the general election of April 1997, the main rival of A. Doŭan inside of the DPS, Giuner Tahir, decided to run on the list of the United Democratic Forces, a coalition led by the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), without leaving the DPS. The Turks of the Rhodopes (where A. Doŭan comes from) remained loyal to the DPS, but many Turks of the Deli Orman (where G. Tahir comes from) decided to vote for the United Democratic Forces. Conversely, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia, the splitting parties have signed coalition agreements with the main ethnic parties before the elections ("*Coalition for Bosnia-Herzegovina*" between the SDA and Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina at the local elections of September 1997 and the general elections of September 1998, coalition between the PPD and the Democratic Party of the Albanians -PDSH ⁹ at the Macedonian general elections of October 1998).

In order to get a comprehensive insight into the political organization of the Balkan Muslim populations, the distinctive cases of Albania and Greece have also to be described. Albania is the only former communist country where the banning of ethnic and religious parties is still in force ¹⁰: in 1993, the Albanian authorities refused to register a Party of Islamic Democratic Union, and there is no Muslim party in Albania, at least

⁵ The Party for the Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians (PPDSH) merged in 1996 with the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) to create the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH). The Turkish, Gipsy and Bosnian Muslim parties of Macedonia also experienced internal splits.

⁶ The Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina is led by the former Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić. The SDA of Sandjak experienced several internal splits between 1994 and 1998.

⁷ The Albanian Democratic Movement (LDSH) splitted off from the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in 1998. But the LDK was already contested by the Parliamentarian Party (PP), created in 1990 and led by Adem Demaqi since 1996. There are two Turkish parties in Kosovo, one linked to the "Kosovo Republic" (Popular Turkish Party -THP) and the other to the Serbian authorities (Turkish Democratic Union -TDB). The SDA representing the Bosnian Muslims from Sandjak in Kosovo supports the "Kosovo Republic", but the Democratic Reform Party of the Muslims (DRSM) representing the Torbeshs (Macedonian-speaking Muslims) and the Gorani (Serbian-speaking Muslims) of the area of Prizren do not take part in it.

⁸ The DPS experienced two splits in 1993 and 1994, but the two splitting parties (Turkish Democratic Party and Party for the Democratic Changes) remained marginal and disappeared short after their creation ;

⁹ About the Democratic Party of the Albanians, see footnote 5.

¹⁰ The Albanian authorities however tolerated the creation of the Union for the Human Rights (BDN-*"Omonia"*) representing the Greek Orthodox minority.

officially ¹¹. But the central cleavage of Albanian political life, that is the conflict between Democratic Party and Socialist Party, is also related to the debate on Islam and national identity, as will be shown further. Greece is the only Balkan state which is not a post-communist one. In this country too, the election of the independent candidate Ahmed Sadik at the general election of April 1990 showed that also the Muslim (mainly Turkish) population of Western Thrace was about to emerge as an autonomous political actor. But the new electoral law passed a few months later compelled it to come back to its former allegiances to Greek parties ¹².

In the 1990's, the Balkan Muslim communities did not only create their own political parties, but also various reviews and newspapers, cultural associations, charitable societies or intellectual forums, such as the influential Congress of the Bosnian Muslim Intellectuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Association of the Muslim Intellectuals in Albania. These different organisations often serve as bridges between the political and the religious elites of the Muslim communities. Finally, the Muslim diasporas originating from the Balkans have also created their own associations in Turkey as well as in Western Europe and North America, and can play a very important role at the political and financial level, as shown by the case of the Albanian diaspora from Kosovo. But this diasporic situation does not encourage the crossing of ethnic boundaries. In Germany, the Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovo Albanians jealously preserve their autonomy from the tutelage of their Turkish "big brothers". And in Istanbul, even the Turks from Bulgaria and the Turks from Western Thrace have two quite distinct associations.

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors is thus a general phenomena. But their positioning in the political life of each Balkan state can vary to a considerable extent. First, it is possible to distinguish some parties which have only cultural claims, on a symbolical (return of the Turkish names in Bulgaria, replacement of the religious designation "Muslim" by the national designation "Turk" in Greece) or institutional level (teaching in Turkish language in Bulgaria and Romania), and others which concentrate on political claims (independence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, territorial autonomy in Sandjak). Second, some parties accept the institutional and legal framework and even take part to the power, like the DPS in Bulgaria, while others refuse every participation to the existing institutions and create their own parallel ones, like the LDK in Kosovo or the SDA in Sandjak (proclamation of the "Kosovo Republic" in July 1990, creation of a "National Muslim Council of the Sandjak" in May 1991).

Of course, these two aspects are closely related. From both perspectives, Macedonia constitutes an intermediate case, for the Albanian parties want the Albanians to be recognized as one of the two constitutive nations of this state and even held a referendum on the territorial autonomy of Western Macedonia in January 1992, but concentrate their claims on the implementation of a complete bilingualism in administration and school

¹¹ The Party of National Recovery (PRK) led by Avdi Baleta can be seen as a Muslim party, since it strongly underlines the links existing between Islam and Albanian national identity.

¹² This electoral law specifies that a candidate can be elected to the Parliament only if the party he belongs to got more than 3 % of the votes on the national level.

system, and take part in the ruling coalition¹³. As for the Turkish and Gipsy parties, they are loyal to the state and hostile to the autonomy of Western Macedonia.

Several factors can explain these differences in the positioning of the muslim parties. The most important is obviously the demographic balance in each state or territorial entity : the Muslim parties are more tempted to put forward political claims where the Muslims make up an absolute (Kosovo) or relative (Bosnia-Herzegovina) majority of the population than where they represent only a small minority (Greece, Romania). But this demographic factor can not explain why there is no claim for territorial autonomy in Bulgaria, contrary to what happens in Macedonia and in Sandjak.

Therefore, some political factors have to be taken into account. On the one hand, the Muslim populations of the Yugoslav space experienced a federal system in which multilingualism and territorial autonomy were self-evident, while those of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania are accustomed to a national state with a single constitutive nation and official language. On the other hand, the states with strong Muslim minorities in the Yugoslav space (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Macedonia) are in an advanced state of decomposition, while the others are more or less stable ones.

Finally, the importance of concrete political decisions must not be underestimated. The repressive and discriminatory attitude of Serbian authorities, for example, could only lead to a radicalization of the Albanian population in Kosovo, as happened in 1998 with the legitimacy crisis of Ibrahim Rugova and the violent uprising led by the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). Conversely, it is obvious that the re-establishment of the rights of the Turkish minority and the integration of the DPS into Bulgarian political life (facilitated by its role of an arbiter between the Socialist Party and the Union of Democratic Forces) largely contributed to the desescalation of interethnic conflicts and the marginalization of radical currents. The radicalization of the Albanian population in Macedonia, however, testifies to the fact that a long term political integration of the Muslim populations requires both a socioeconomic advancement and a cultural recognition.

The reshaping of the relationship between Islam and national identity

The emergence of the Balkan Muslim populations as autonomous political actors goes hand in hand with the politicization of their ethnic identity. The best illustration of this phenomenon is no doubt the decision taken in September 1993 by the *Bolnjacki Sabor* (Boshniak Assembly)¹⁴ to replace the old national name "Muslim" with the new one "Boshniak", and this way to stress the transformation of the Bosnian Muslim community

¹³ From 1990 to 1998, the Party of Democratic Prosperity took part to a coalition led by the Social-Democrat Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM, former communists). In October 1998, short after the general elections, the Interior Revolutionary Macedonian Movement (VMRO, nationalists) and the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH, see footnote 5) formed a new ruling coalition.

¹⁴ During the war, the *Bosnjacki Sabor* gathered the main political, religious and cultural representatives of the Bosnian Muslim nation.

into a political and sovereign nation, closely linked to the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This change of name was followed by an important effort to enhance the Muslim/Bosniak national identity (formalization of a Bosnian language different from both Serbian and Croatian languages, publishing of an anthology of Bosnian Muslim literature, etc.).

This process of politicization of ethnic identity is also present by Slavic-speaking Pomaks (Bulgaria, Greece) or Torbeshs (Macedonia), and by the Gipsies of the whole Balkan peninsula, all these populations being till then devoid of any precise national identity. Only the identification with a recognized national identity allow these populations to accede to some political visibility, and then to mobilize internal or external political resources. But, in each of them, one can distinguish three different identity strategies.

The first one aims at a merging into a larger muslim group which already enjoys an institutional recognition : that is the reason why many macedonian Torbeshs and bulgarian Pomaks or Gipsies declare themselves as "Turks", and some Macedonian Gipsies even declare themselves as..."Egyptians". On the contrary, the second strategy consists in declaring oneself as a "muslim Greek", "Macedonian" or "Bulgarian" and, in Bulgaria, to keep the Christian name given in the 1980's during the "national revival" campaign ¹⁵. Of course, these identity choices are encouraged by the authorities, and concern in the first place those who are or intend to become civil servants. Finally, a third strategy try to shape a distinctive Roma (Gipsy), Pomak or Torbesh identity, and insist on its recognition. This strategy implies an "invention of the tradition", and now Pomaks and Torbeshs often refer to specific pre-ottoman Turkish or Arab origins.

Thus, the process of politicization of the Muslim ethnic identities is sometimes quite obvious (change of national name). A possible process of reislamization of these same identities is more difficult to perceive. In fact, the situations vary considerably with the populations. There is no reislamization of the Gipsy identity, for the segmentary logics of this ethnic community prevent any common reference to Islam. Conversely, the Bosnian Muslim community inevitably tends to stress its belonging to Islam as the main distinctive factor toward Serbian and Croatian communities, and the leaders of the SDA openly support the reislamization of the Muslim/Bosniak identity. Moreover, this process of reislamization was facilitated by the war, as shown by the development of a cult of the *shehids* (martyrs of the faith) and by the creation of so called "muslim brigades" whose fighters respected the Islamic religious precepts and regarded their fight as a *jihad* (holy war).

A similar resort to Islam as a central ethnic reference can be met by some Pomaks, who this way try to compensate their lack of a legitimate national identity, and by the traditional Muslim elites of some towns in Macedonia and in Kosovo, which this way reassert their difference and superiority toward the neo-urban elites which are in control of the Albanian nationalist parties. In the Albanian and the Turkish communities, islam remains always secondary in relation to the national and linguistic identity. But the reference to Islam can be used in order to facilitate the national assimilation of small

¹⁵ Sometimes, this strategy goes together with a conversion to Protestantism (especially by Pomaks).

Slavic-speaking populations (Torbeshs in Macedonia, Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece), or to express some cultural or political cleavages.

The Balkan Turkish populations, for example, did not remain insensitive to the passionate discussions on Islam and secularism in Turkey, as shown in Macedonia by the split of the Turkish Democratic Party between a "religious" majority and a "secular" minority. Similarly, since 1990, a controversy on the relationship between Islam and national identity divides the Albanian intelligentsia. Some Christian or ex-communist intellectuals like Ismail Kadare or Ibrahim Rugova claim that conversion to Islam was harmful to the Albanian nation (severance of the links with Western Europe and backwardness, late identification with the Ottoman Empire), while the religious leaders and some Muslim intellectuals retort that only Islam protected the Albanians from a complete cultural assimilation by the Greeks and the Serbs.

This debate is not only an academic one. In Albania, the Democratic Party, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims from the North of the country and remains closer to the religious hierarchies, took up again some arguments of the Muslim religious leaders, while the Socialist Party, well established in the Orthodox and Bektashi South and successor of the former Communist Party, repeated the classic anti-Ottoman and anti-islamic arguments of Albanian nationalism. The leaders of the Democratic League of Kosovo, influenced by clerics and intellectuals of the small Catholic minority, have a similar argumentation. But the confrontation between an almost completely Muslim Albanian community and a Serbian state linked to Orthodoxy favours an identification of Islam with Albanian national identity. Within this context, it is possible that the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), whose founders are former marxist-leninists, but whose fighters are often pious countrymen, try to instrumentalize Islam for national and political aims.

While the reislamization of the national identity of Balkan Muslim populations is a partial and limited process, the converse one –that is the "nationalization" of Islam- has no exception. From this point of view, national identity is stronger than religious identity. The best illustration of this "nationalization" of Islam is the split of the Yugoslav Islamic religious institutions along national lines, this split being paradoxically caused by... the Bosnian panislamist current ! Indeed, in April 1993, the SDA decided against the will of most of the religious leaders to initiate new religious institutions limited to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandjak and the Bosnian Muslim diaspora. In the following months, new Islamic religious institutions were formed in Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. In Macedonia, the Slavic-speaking (Torbesh) religious leaders were marginalized by new Albanian leaders close to the PPD. This "albanization" of the islamic religious institutions led to some (unsuccessful) attempts to create religious institutions specific to the Slavic- or Turkish-speaking populations.

Such crises did not happen in Albania, Bulgaria or Romania, where the Muslim populations are much more homogeneous on the ethnic and linguistic level. But the "nationalization" of Islam remains perceptible through the ethnic rather than religious meaning associated with the celebration of the main religious feasts, the organization of some Sufi pilgrimages or the opening ceremonies of new mosques. Politicians are not

mistaken about it, and systematically try to attend such events. For the end of the communist regimes leads to the reshaping not only of the relationship between islam and national identity, but also of the relations between religious and political actors.

The reshaping of the relations between religious actors and political actors

Between 1989 and 1998, the Islamic religious institutions of the Balkans experienced a clear renewal of activity. This trend is especially blatant in Albania, where these institutions reappeared after twenty-two years of absence, but can be noticed in all the former communist countries of the region. This renewal is reflected by the building or restoration of numerous mosques, by the development of the religious press and publishing activities, and by the opening of several islamic schools. At the end of the 1980's, there were only two *madrasas* (islamic secondary schools) in the Balkans (the first in Sarajevo, the second in Priština), and a single Islamic Theology Faculty in Sarajevo. Ten years later, there are ten madrasas in Albania, six in Bosnia-Herzegovina, three in Bulgaria, one in Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Sandjak. In the same time, four institutes for higher islamic studies were opened in the region (two in Bosnia-Herzegovina, one in Kosovo, one in Bulgaria).

This unquestionable renewal of activity, however, is not synonymous with a "restoration" of the Islamic religious institutions. On the one hand, after half a century of communism, the re-establishment of the religious freedom reveals also all their deficiencies : many mosques are still in a state of neglect, many imams and religion teachers have a weak religious knowledge (therefore the priority to the opening of new madrasas), and the Islamic religious institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Bulgaria experienced serious internal crises¹⁶. On the other hand, nowhere did these institutions obtain the restitution of the goods and rights they had before World War II : the only country where shariatic law is still in force for family issues is Greece, the restitution of the *waqfs* (religious estates) is slow and partial, and religion was introduced only in the Bosnian schools, as an optional subject. Neither the authoritarian secularization nor the larger social and cultural changes of the communist period can be undone.

There are other signs of a deep secularization of the Muslim populations, and of a persisting weakness of the Islamic religious institutions. Above all, there is no reislamization of the way of life : the few campaigns of reislamization led by the SDA and the religious institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina gave rise to furious controversies, and led paradoxically to a discredit of Islam, suspected of becoming a tool in the hands of opportunists and former communists. Besides, the monopoly of the islamic religious institutions on the interpretation of Islam is now questioned by various religious groups, intellectuals or simple believers. Religion is still an irreplaceable common mark, but religiosity becomes more and more an individual attitude.

¹⁶ Since 1990, the two legal muftis by the Greek authorities in Western Thrace are also contested by two "illegal" muftis close to the Turkish nationalist current led by Ahmed Sagik until his death in 1995.

The reshaping of the relations between religious and political actors has to be considered within this context. First of all, the end of the communist regimes is followed by a loosening of the state control over the religious institutions. But the Balkan states still exert some influence on the religious life, through the privileged status given to Orthodoxy or to the main religions of the country (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania), the close links existing between the state authorities in charge of religious affairs (State secretariat for religions in Albania, Direction for religious affairs in Bulgaria, etc.) and the religious hierarchies, or the financial aid granted to them.

Such situations lead to different forms of connivance. In Albania, the Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox religious hierarchies supported the Democratic Party in power from 1992 to 1997. In Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece, the state authorities sided with the Islamic religious hierarchy against dissident factions, in exchange for a discreet support to the moderate Muslim political leaders. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the state authorities hastened to endorse the "putsch" of the panislamist current within the Islamic religious institutions, and delegated them some foreign policy missions such as fund raising in the diaspora and in the Muslim world.

The Bosnian case brings to light another major aspect of the recent evolution of the Islamic religious institutions, that is the ascendancy exerted over them by the main Muslim political parties. Similarly to the SDA, which took roughly control of the Bosnian Islamic religious institutions in April 1993, the PPD in Macedonia and the DPS in Bulgaria made sure that the new religious leaders elected after 1990 were close to them. Conversely, dissident religious factions are often linked to political ones : in Macedonia, the leaders of the "radical" PPSSH supported a dissident faction in the local religious institutions of Tetovo ; in Bulgaria, the self-proclaimed Grand Mufti Nedim Gendzhev threatened to create its own political party in the case the state authorities would not recognize its legitimacy. But there are only a few religious actors who, such as the muftis of Mostar (Seid Smajki≡) or Zenica (Halil Mehti≡) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have enough legitimacy and resources to acquire a real autonomy ¹⁷.

Thus, as a general rule, the religious actors prefer to follow cautiously in the wake of the state and the political actors. The case of the Islamic religious institutions of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which clash openly with the Yugoslav authorities, does not really contradict this rule. On the one hand, the Islamic religious institutions of the former Yugoslavia remained in favor of its upholding till 1991, at a time when the Catholic church supported actively the Slovenian and Croatian independances, and the Orthodox church was deeply compromised with Serbian nationalism. On the other hand, the Muslim religious leaders of Kosovo and Sandjak are now in an open conflict with the new Yugoslav authorities, but submit to the "Kosovo Republic" set up by the LDK, or to the Bosnian Islamic religious institutions controlled by the SDA.

¹⁷ In Mostar, Seid Smajki≡ was one of the main organizers of the Muslim resistance against the Croatian HVO in May 1993, and Halil Mehti≡ was closely linked to the *mujahideens* (foreign Muslim fighters) and the Islamic NGO's present in Central Bosnia during the war. H. Mehti≡ was dismissed by the *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Ceri≡ (close to the SDA) in November 1997.

It means that the political actors almost always prevail over the religious ones. It is then necessary to clarify which are their uses of Islam, and to which kind of political practices and ideologies such instrumentalizations of religion are connected. From this perspective, it is possible to distinguish three main patterns :

in the first one, Islam is only a common ethnic mark, a symbolical resource bringing an additional prestige to the political notables, and legitimating their clientelist practices. Such a pattern goes often together with close links between religious and political leaders (friendship, kinship or local origin), and describes well how the DPS in Bulgaria, the PPD in Macedonia or the Democratic Party in Albania make use of Islam in order to strengthen their electoral basis ;

in the second pattern, on the contrary, radical nationalists try to instrumentalize Islam in order to contest the dominant ethnic party. In April 1996 in Skopje, for example, the PPDSH made a coalition with the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" and chose an imam as a candidate in order to win a deputy seat against the PPD. In this pattern, which corresponds also to the Party of National Recovery (PRK) led by Avdi Baleta in Albania, the radicalization of nationalism encourages both the islamization of the national identity and the "nationalization" of islam ;

in the third pattern, Islam is perceived both as a political community transcending the national belongings and as a political project implying a real reislamization of the Muslim populations. This panislamic and ideological notion of Islam is supported by small islamist groups such as the Organization of Islamic Youth in Albania, the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" in Macedonia, or the Bosnian panislamist current which created the SDA in 1990.

The case of the SDA in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows that, in the reality, these three patterns can combine together: the panislamist current did create the SDA, but this party later incorporated the various currents of Muslim nationalism and the numerous clientelist networks of the Bosnian Muslim community. While the islamists of Albania and Macedonia remain on the margin of the political life (although the SDA-"*Islamic Path*" got a deputy siege in Gostivar at the general election of 1994, thanks to a coalition with the Turkish Democratic Party), the Bosnian panislamist current thus managed to propel itself to the top of the new political elites, and then to come to power. In the event of a general crisis of the SDA and of the creation of a separate islamist party in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, it would gather only a small minority of the Muslim votes (from 5 % to 15 % according to the most likely estimations).

However that may be, the appearance and the possible success of such islamist movements is not related to a high religiosity of the Muslim populations. On the contrary, the Bosnian Muslim population is for long one of the most secularized of the Balkans, while the traditional and rural religiosity of the Muslim populations of Western Thrace, Bulgaria or Macedonia facilitates the clientelist practices of the notables, but hinders the diffusion of an ideological and militant notion of Islam. In the Balkans as elsewhere, islamist movements appear in the ranks of the intelligentsia and of the academic youth, and substitutes itself for communist commitment as often as for traditional islamic belief. As for the ability of these movements to exert a political influence on the Balkan Muslim

populations, it seems to depend on two main factors : a close link between Islam and national identity on the one hand, an escalation of interethnic tensions and a crisis of the Muslim political elites on the other hand. In such situations, islamist movements can lead a populist and nationalist mobilization of the Muslim population and instrumentalize it for their own aims, as shown by the "Bosnian exception".

Conclusion : is there an "islamic threat" in the Balkans ?

Beyond a great diversity of situations, one of the main evolutions of Balkan Islam since 1989 is the emergence of the Muslim populations as autonomous political actors. This evolution does not represent a danger or a anomaly, but a logical consequence of the collapse of the communist regimes and a sign of the integration of Balkan Muslim populations into European political modernity.

It would be therefore unjustified and dangerous to present Balkan Islam and its current evolutions as a threat to Europe. There is no "green diagonal" in the Balkans, and the Muslim populations of this region are not a crisis factor, but victims and actors among others of a wider regional crisis. In concrete terms, the political or religious leaders of the Muslim communities are not the first to blaim for the violent conflicts in which these populations were or are involved. The Bosnian conflict was linked to the falling apart of former Yugoslavia, and to a violent reshaping of the Serbo-Croatian space led by the Serbian and Croatian nationalist leaders. The conflict in Kosovo is the result of the repressive and discriminatory policy led by the Serbian authorities since the end of the 1980's. In order to understand and to prevent other possible conflicts involving Balkan Muslim populations (Macedonia, Sandjak), it will always be necessary to take account of the general context of the region.

It does not mean that the Muslim political and religious actors do not have any responsibility in the present situation, or that there is no ultra-nationalist or radical islamist currents in the Balkan Muslim populations. But these currents are minority ones, and manage to overcome their own marginality only when the escalation of political and ethnic tensions allow them to instrumentalize the national and political frustrations of the Muslim populations. The creation of the SDA by the Bosnian panislamist current in 1990 or the rising of the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998 are good illustrations of such a process. Conversely, the recent evolutions of the SDA (moderate turn of Alija Izetbegovic and defeat of the radical wing led by Hasan Cengic at the second Congress of the SDA in October 1997, stagnation of the votes for this party at the general election of September 1998) shows that even an incomplete and precarious "normalization" of the political situation leads to a decline and a quieting down of these radical currents.

Moreover, the appearance of such currents is also a normal consequence of the re-establishment of religious and political freedoms in the Balkans, and can indirectly contribute to the internal pluralization of islam and the individualization of faith in this region. Within this context, a stigmatization or a criminalization of these radical currents would only incite them to more and more radicalism and turn their members into martyrs,

as already shown by the case of the Bosnian panislamists, jailed in 1983 as scapegoats of the Yugoslav communist party, and released a few years later as heroes of the Muslim cause.