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The Functioning of the Mufti Institution in Bulgaria at the Beginning of the 20th Century. A Case Study*

Zarys treści: Autor analizuje działalność muftich, jednej z najważniejszych instytucji administracji muzułmańskiej w Bułgarii w okresie Trzeciego stanu (1878–1944). Przedstawione zostały trzy przypadki: Afiza M. Mustafowa, Afiz Suleymanova i Sali Effendiego, które ilustrują szereg zjawisk związanych z funkcjonowaniem muzułmańskich autonomicznych instytucji w Bułgarii na przełomie XIX i XX w. Studia przypadków oparte są na materiałach z Centralnego Archiwum Państwowego Bułgarii w Sofii.

Outline of content: The author analyses the functioning of the muftis in Bulgaria, one of the most important institution of the Muslim religious-administrative autonomy in that Balkan country during the Third State period (1878–1944). The presented three cases of Afiz M. Mustafow, Afiz Suleymanov, and Sali Effendi illustrated series of phenomenon linked to the functioning of mufti and Muslim autonomous institutions in Bulgaria in the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The case studies are based on the materials from the Central State Archive of Bulgaria in Sofia.

Słowa kluczowe: mniejszość muzułmańska w Bułgarii, Bułgaria, instytucje muzułmańskie w Bułgarii, historia Bałkanów, Bałkany na początku XX w.

Key words: Muslim Minority in Bulgaria, Bulgaria, Muslim Institutions in Bulgaria, Balkan History, Beginning of the 20th Century

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Introduction

The modern Bulgarian state,¹ created in 1878, was not ethnically and religiously homogeneous. In 1881, 26% of the country's population was Muslims (527 000), in 1887 – 21% (676 000), in 1892 – 19% (643 000), in 1900 – 17% (643 000), in 1905 – 15% (603 000) and in 1910 – 14% (602 000).² The Muslim community was guaranteed administrative, educational and judicial autonomy in the Principality of Bulgaria by a series of official state and international documents. *The Berlin Treaty* (1878), *The Tărnovo Constitution* (1879), *The Temporal Act of Religious Administration* (1880), *The Temporal Act of Religious Administration of Muslims* (1895), and *The Constantinople Treaty* (1909) were the legal basis of the rights of the Muslim population in the Bulgarian lands at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The autonomy of that community in the Principality of Bulgaria was based on four institutions: mosque councils, school councils, kadis, and muftis, who played the main role in that structure.

A mufti was a representative of the Shaykh al-Islām of Constantinople – the Islamic high court, which was the judiciary in faith-related cases and issued binding verdicts on the creed in the name of Caliph as the successor of Mohammed and supervisor of all Muslims.³ The mufti's duties were: dealing with current problems of a religious commune, management of mosque and school staff, and administration of waqfs (inalienable religious endowments, generally a building or plot of land; to use for Muslim religious community, the maintenance of school, mosque etc., or charitable purposes).⁴ In 1881 there were 10 muftis in the Principality of Bulgaria,⁵ in 1912, that number increased to 38 (14 regular muftis and 22 mufti deputies)⁶. There was a grand mufti of Sofia, who supervised the work of other

¹ The “Greater Bulgaria” was created on the basis of the decision of the San Stefano Treaty, but I did not survive and the Principality of Bulgaria (a Turkish vassal and a Russian protectorate) and Eastern Rumelia (an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire) were founded in its place. They were unified in 1885. In 1908, the Bulgaria gained official independence from the Ottoman Empire and its ruler Ferdinand I Coburg started to title himself as a tsar.

² *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, vol. 1: 1878–1912, part 1: *Възстановяване и развитие на българската държава*, eds. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1996, p. 135; *Статистически годишник на Българското Царство*, vol. 1: 1909, София 1910, pp. 46–47; J. McCarthy, *Muslim in Ottoman Europe: Population from 1880 to 1912*, „Nationalities Papers”, 2000, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 39.

³ More about the Shaykh al-Islām: И. Татарлъ, *Институцията шейху’л-ислям в Османската империя*, „Годишник на Вишия ислямски институт”, 2010, no. 2, pp. 5–58.

⁴ В. Şimşir, *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878–1985)*, London 1988, pp. 27–28; Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878–1908)*, Ankara, 1998, p. 166; А. Eminov, “The Status of Islam and Muslims in Bulgaria”, *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 1987, vol. 8:2, p. 293.

⁵ *Привременни правила за духовното управление на християните, мюсюлманите и евреите*, София 2.07.1880, БИА f. 290 а.е. 176, l. 23–30.

⁶ *Доклад до негово величество Фердинанд I цар на българите по случай 25-годишнината от възшествие му на българския престол 1878–1912*, София 1912, p. 20; In Eastern Rumelia the

muftis of Bulgaria. The muftis were responsible for the functioning of school and mosque councils, and the Sharia judges in the country. Additionally, they represented the communities in contacts with local and central Bulgarian authorities, collected taxes and prepared internal censuses.⁷ There are many similarities between the Bulgarian organisation of minorities and the Ottoman system of *millets*.⁸

Theoretically, the muftis were elected by the Muslims of the commune whom were granted suffrage by the Bulgarian law.⁹ Many practices related to the mufti's election were not based on legal regulations, but on traditions and established practices. The election was not direct, but indirect via representatives sent by the Islamic communes. For example, in October 1910, 141 delegates who represented about 40 000 Muslims from the district voted in the election of the Burgas mufti.¹⁰ Despite the Bulgarian suffrage, there was a wealth restriction at the beginning of the 20th century – only Muslims who paid at least 100 levas of taxes a year had the right to vote.¹¹ The election result was approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions and the Shaykh al-Islām in Constantinople.¹² The mufti institution in Bulgaria had permanent financial problems. In many cases

Plovdiv mufti also had the title of the grand mufti. И. Ялъмов, *История на турската общност в България*, София 2002, p. 83.

⁷ *Привременни правила за духовното управление на християните, мюсюлманите и евреите*, София 2.07.1880, БИА f. 290 а.е. 176, l. 23–30; *Заявление от мюсюлмански жители на г. Хасково до Хасковски околийски начелник*, Хасково 12.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, ор. 1 а.е. 795 l. 68–69.

⁸ R. Crampton, “The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878–1944”, in: *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, ed. K. Karpat, Istanbul, 1990, s. 65.

⁹ *Указание за въвеждането на временни правила за мюсюлманското духовенство*, 29.08.1880, ДА-Варна f. 852к ор. 1 а.е. 1 l. 1; Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава и нейните малцинства 1879–1885*, София 1999, p. 15.

¹⁰ ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 794 l. 21–22; *Статистически годишник на Българското Царство*, vol. 3: 1911, София, 1914, pp. 46–47.

¹¹ *Телеграм от Разградски кмет до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията*, Разград 19.11.1905 [the date of receipt], ЦДА f. 166кк ор. 1 а.е. 794 l. 4.

¹² *Протокол*, Бургас 17.10.1910, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 793 l. 72–75; *Телеграм от Бургаско окръжно управление до Министерство на външните работи изповедания*, Бургас 15.10.1910, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 793 l. 76; *Телеграм от Бургаско окръжно управление до Министерство на външните работи изповедания*, Бургас 18.10.1910, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 793 l. 81; *От Бургаско окръжно управление до Министерство на външните работи изповедания*, Бургас 19.10.1910, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 793 l. 82; *Телеграм от Разградски кмет до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията*, Разград 23.11.1905 [the date of receipt], ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 794 l. 6; *Телеграм от Разградски кмет до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията*, Разград 28.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 794 l. 9; *Протокол*, Разград 27.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к ор. 1 а.е. 794 l. 14; М. Сарафов, *Дипломатически дневник 1909–1912. Българи в Турция в навечерието на Балканските войни*. Ц. И. Величкова, София, 2008, pp. 142, 163; В. Стоянов, “Турското население на България официалната малцинствена политика (1878–1944)”, in: *Страници от българската история. Събития – размисли – личности*, vol. 2, ed. М. Босева, София, 1993, p. 196.

they could not afford to maintain a necessary office staff: a secretary, a translator, and a clerk.¹³

The muftliks were the field of many conflicts between the minority and the Bulgarian authorities – same went for the Islamic community. The stormy careers of the three muftis from the beginning of the 20th century, Afiz M. Mustafafov, Afiz Suleymanov, and Sali Effendi,¹⁴ are fascinating cases which illustrate these problems, the mufti's place in the apparatus of the Bulgarian administration and standards in the public sphere of the Islamic community.

Each of the present cases refers to a Bulgarian region with different demographic specifics. Sali Effendi Halilov was a mufti of Razgrad, which represented north-eastern Bulgarian lands, inhabited by a numerous Muslim community. In 1905, in the District of Razgrad, 90 082 people lived, among them 41 603 Orthodox Christians (46.18%) and 48 114 Muslims (54.41%). The Afiz M. Mustafafov's case is linked to Vratsa, which was located in the north-western part of the country, from where the Muslims emigrated in a significant extent during the War of 1877–1878 and in the first years after. That area became dominated by the Bulgarians in that time. According to the Bulgarian census of 1905, in the Vratsa District, there were 285 461 inhabitants: 208 050 Orthodox Christians (72.88%) and 12 244 Muslims (4.29%). Haskovo, where Afiz Suleymanov was a mufti, is located in southern Bulgarian lands, where Muslims were numerously dominated by Bulgarians like in the North-West, but had slightly different status until 1908, linked to the former Eastern Rumelia's status. In that time, in the Haskovo District, there were 56 803 Orthodox Christians (88.59%) and 6 465 Muslims (10.08%)¹⁵.

Case of the mufti of Vratsa Afiz M. Mustafafov

The case of Afiz M. Mustafafov dominated the public life of the Muslim community in the muftlik of Vratsa at the beginning of the 20th century. Mustafafov was elected mufti in May 1900, in place of Suleyman Kyurkliyski. In February 1901

¹³ *Рапорт от Търновски окръжен управител до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Търново 8.01.1881, ЦДА ф. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 866 л. 243–244; Рапорт от Силистренско окръжно управление до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Силистра 23.01.1885, ЦДА ф. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 869 л. 50.*

¹⁴ In the case of the Muslims' names I use the Bulgarian transcription. I do not use the Turkish one because I estimated the Muslims in Bulgaria did not subscribe to any national identity at the time. Still at the turn of the 19th and 20th century members of the Muslim population identified themselves through the prism of religion (as "ummah") and membership of local communities. National identity based on language and ethnic origin was not a widespread concept in the Balkan Peninsula at that time, especially among Muslims. In the sources the term "Muslim" is usually alternative to "Turk".

¹⁵ *Общи резултати от преброяване на населението в Царство България на 31 декември 1905, vol. 1, София, 1911, pp. 168, 190, 205.*

the new mufti was dismissed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions without an official reason, and his predecessor was reinstated without an election. Afiz Effendi wrote a few letters to the ministry asking for an explanation of that decision.¹⁶ His claims were finally admitted as justified and he was reinstated in October 1902.¹⁷ However, the later events show that the Ministry should not backtrack from that decision.

From July 1903 onwards, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions was receiving an increasing number of complaints from the Muslims of the District of Vratsa regarding their mufti. The authorities mostly did not answer to them.¹⁸ In one of the petitions, from February 1908, a group of Muslims from Vratsa and Ferdinand¹⁹ demanded that Afiz Mustafov be dismissed. They stressed that he was too young to become a mufti and that he “was behaving badly”: the people were wary of allowing him have contact with women, and said that he was “more a merchant than a mufti”. The authors of the complaint added that “the Bulgarians had good authorities, the Muslims deserved that as well.”²⁰ Again, there was no answer to the petition from the Ministry, and, in June 1908, the Muslims from Vratsa and Ferdinand wrote another one, albeit more strongly worded. The mufti of Vratsa was indicted of being “the fraud with a bad past, completely unprepared for his office”. It was said that Mustafov had neglected the Muslim schools in the district of Vratsa, which did not adhere the letter of the Koran, and their estate was in terrible condition. The petition claimed the teachers were friends of Afiz Effendi and people without basic education and diplomas. The group of the mufti’s enemies was getting more numerous – among the signatures of the Muslims from Vratsa and Ferdinand, there were also people from Berkovitsa, Byala Slatina, and Oryahovo.²¹ There was an inspection by the district authorities of Burgas (from

¹⁶ *От Афъз М. Мустафов, бивши Врачански окръжен мюфтия до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 5.02.1901, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 42; Прошение от Афъз М. Мустафов, бивши Врачански окръжен мюфтия до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 4.05.1901, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 47.*

¹⁷ *Акт, Враца 17.10.1902, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792, л. 57–58; От Врачанско окръжно управление до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 23.11.1904, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 75.*

¹⁸ *Писмо от граждани на Враца до Р. Петров, Враца 12.07.1903, БИА f. 266 а.е. 26 л. 5–6; Писмо от В. Загоров до Р. Петров, Враца 12.07.1903, БИА f. 266 а.е. 26 л. 14–15; Бележка от Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, София [1909], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 136.*

¹⁹ Nowadays: Montana.

²⁰ *Молба на мюсюлманските жители на Враца до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Врачанско окръжно управление), Враца 6.02.1908, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 110–111; Молба на мюсюлманските жители на г. Фердинанд до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Врачанско окръжно управление), Фердинанд 15.02.1908, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792, л. 114.*

²¹ *Заявление от мюсюлманските жители на Враца до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 16.06.1909, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 127–129.*

the other part of the country, which guaranteed impartiality). It showed that the situation in the muftlik of Vratsa was very tense.²² In June 1908, the movement against Afiz M. Mustafov gained the support of one deputy from the Vratsa district, T. Statkov.²³ There was a suggestion that the former mufti, the old and respected Suleyman Kyurkliyski, should be appointed as the new mufti.²⁴ The case became more complicated after the death of Suleyman Effendi shortly after that proposal and the problem of finding a new candidate for that post arose. Again, the Ministry did nothing. In June 1909, the Bulgarian government received three new petitions signed by 100 Muslims from the Vratsa area with the complaints about the schools' functioning and the "devastation of the social life of the Muslim community by the mufti's intrigues."²⁵ Again, there was no answer from the Ministry. The last petition against Afiz Mustafov came from November 1911, in which Muslims demanded the dismissal of the mufti of Vratsa, who neglected his responsibilities and expressed no respect to the elders of the Islamic community.²⁶

In December 1911 the grand mufti of Sofia prepared a special report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions about the stems of the dissatisfaction of the Muslims from the Vratsa District. According to the document, there were about 15 000 Muslims in the muftlik and only two muftis: one of Vratsa and his deputy in Oryahovo (4 000 Muslims lived in the latter location). The muftlik's peripheries were located about 150 km from Vratsa or Oryahovo, and many of the communes had problems contacting their religious authorities. Many inquiries regarding schools, marriages, heritage, or family matters remained neglected. The communes organized their own religious institutions and did not pay taxes to the muftlik, which had a bad influence on its financial situation. The grand mufti advised appointing four new deputies to the mufti: for Byala Slatina, Ferdinand, Berkovitsa, and the outer Vratsa area, who would efficiently meet the needs of local Islamic communities.²⁷

²² Бележка от Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, София [1909], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 136.

²³ От Врачански народни представител Т. Статков до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 07.1908, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 119.

²⁴ Молба на мюсюлманските жители на Враца до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Врачанско окръжно управление), Враца 6.02.1908, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 110–111; Молба на мюсюлманските жители на г. Фердинанд до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Врачанско окръжно управление), Фердинанд 15.02.1908, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792, л. 114.

²⁵ Бележка от Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, София [1909], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 136.

²⁶ Молба на мюсюлманските жители на Враца до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Врачанско окръжно управление), Враца 28.11.1911, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 183–185.

²⁷ Рапорт от Главно муфтийство до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, София 6.12.1911, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 198–199.

The conflict in the Vratsa muftlik resolved itself in 1912. In March, due to his bad health condition, Afiz M. Mustafafov asked to be transferred to Tatar Pazardzhik, where he could assume the office of the deputy mufti.²⁸ Again, there was no answer from the Ministry. In October 1913, he withdrew his request and declared that he would remain in the office of the mufti of Vratsa.²⁹ He was dismissed, but he did not get a new post. His protests were ignored by the authorities.³⁰ It was not the end of the problems of the Muslim community of the Vratsa district – the discredited former mufti of Haskovo, Afiz Suleymanov, became the new mufti without an election.

The case of Afiz Suleymanov

In March (February old style) 1908 Afiz Suleymanov was appointed to replace Ali Halil Mehmedov on the post of the Haskovo mufti.³¹ However, shortly after the nomination, a series of complaints surfaced. They regarded accusations of fraudulent lease of waqfs in the villages of Lyubimets and Kirilovo (the Harmanli county), and of mismanagement of the Charshiya Mosque in Haskovo. At the end of the year, Afiz Suleymanov referred to the complaints in a letter addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion – he accused the former muftlik clerk Marko Avramov that he fabricated these slanders after the dismissal. In his defence, Afiz Suleymanov pointed out that there was a signature of the former mufti Smail Hadji Halilov on the petition from March (February) 1908, despite the fact that he did not read the Bulgarian language and could not have approved the complaint.³² The Ministry decided that the mufti would keep his post.

During the mufti election in Haskovo in 1910, Afiz Suleymanov was chosen for a second term. The results met with the protest of the Muslims from Harmanli and Lyubimets, who complained that the president of the electoral commission Ahmed Effendi Hadji Mehmedov had not allowed their delegates to cast

²⁸ *Заявление от Врачански мюфти Хафъз М. Мустафов до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Враца 6.03.1912, ЦДА ф. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 201.*

²⁹ *Молба от Врачански мюфти Хафъз М. Мустафов до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Главно муфтийство), Враца 2.10.1913, ЦДА ф. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 209.*

³⁰ *Молба от Врачански мюфти Хафъз М. Мустафов до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията (чрез Главно муфтийство), Враца 2.10.1913, ЦДА ф. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 792 л. 209.*

³¹ *От Хасковско околийско управление до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Хасково 23.02.1908, ЦДА ф. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 5; Акт, Разград 21.02.1908, ЦДА ф. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 6.*

³² *От Хасковския муфтлики до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Хасково 10.03.1908, ЦДА ф. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 7; От Хасковския муфтлики до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Хасково 30.12.1909, ЦДА ф. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 40.*

votes.³³ In May, new accusations against the mufti appeared, which were linked to frauds during the appointing of the local mosque councillors. It was said that under the pressure of Afiz Suleymanov the county (*okoliya*) authorities ignored the official results of the election and designated the old councillors. Among them, there was Akif Eminov, a close friend of the mufti, who was both his secretary and cashier.³⁴

Next year, Eminov was dismissed from all of these posts. It was illegal to work in multiple offices at a time and that he was guilty of professional misconduct.³⁵ Meanwhile, Suleymanov kept his post of the mufti of Haskovo and dealt with waves of accusations from the local Muslim community: about neglecting his duties because of working in two offices (as the mufti and as the imam of the Charshiya Mosque as well) and leasing waqfs without transparent tenders. The Ministry of Finances performed an inspection and proved that there was a legal basis for a lawsuit. The case was transferred to the District Authorities of Stara Zagora, who passed it on to the prosecutor's office.³⁶ Afiz Suleymanov was suspended from his duties, Beker Effendi Mustafov became the acting mufti until the new election. Eventually, the case was remitted – one of the waqf tenants Ahmed Effendi was found guilty of the frauds linked to the accusations (he did not pay the rent for the local schools as he had been obliged to). The planned election was cancelled and Suleymanov was reinstated.³⁷

In 1911, the conflict in Haskovo grew more exacerbated. As a result, on 26th (12th old style) of May, there was an assault on Afiz Suleymanov, most likely organized by his opponents. After an evening prayer in the mosque, the mufti was attacked by the band of 5–6 men who were lurking in front of the home's doors. He was hit on the head, the blow was likely intended to be deadly.³⁸ Afiz

³³ *Заявление от главните по избране в г. Хасково, живещи в Харманлии Любимец до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 10.04.1910, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 42; От Хасковско окръжно управление до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 12.04.1910, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 44; От Старозагорско окръжно управление до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Стара Загора 14.07.1910, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 53.*

³⁴ *Заявление от жители на Хасково до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 29.05.1910, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 47–48.*

³⁵ *Заявление от мюсюлмански жители на г. Хасково до Хасковски околийски начелник, Хасково 12.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 68–69.*

³⁶ *От Старозагорско окръжно управление до Министерсрво на вътрешните работи, Стара Загора 21.09.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 95; Записка, Стара Загора 6.08.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 98.*

³⁷ *Поверително до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, 28.10.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 122–125.*

³⁸ *Полицейско дознание, Хасково 30.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 56–67; Телеграм от Хасково до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 16.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 77; От Хасковски околийски начелник до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 25.06.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 90.*

went on sick leave due of the injuries suffered.³⁹ The district governor connected the incident with the complaints about the mufti.⁴⁰ Also, the grand mufti of Sofia pointed out that Afiz Suleymanov was very unpopular in Haskovo and it appeared to be a possible cause of the assault.⁴¹

In the mufti election of October 1911, Afiz Suleymanov once again won and became the mufti of Haskovo for a third term. His opponents, among them the other candidate Beker Effendi Mustafov, formed an accusation that the result was invalid because of the Roma people participating in the vote and other irregularities (since 1895, Gypsies had not right to participate in the mufti's elections⁴²). They wanted to repeat the election, but without Afiz Suleymanov's candidature. He was said to be an Ottoman citizen with a family in the Kärzdhali region, so legally he could not become a mufti.⁴³ Despite these complaints, there was no new election and Afiz was designated to the office of the Haskovo mufti. Beker Effendi did not show up to the nomination ceremony.⁴⁴

The conflict in the Haskovo muftlik caught attention of the Bulgarian authorities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions ordered that a special report about Afiz Suleymanov be prepared. The document confirmed the big aversion to the mufti shown by the Muslim community from the Haskovo and Harmanli counties, who had the support only of his co-workers and the "homeless people preparing for emigration". Accusations of his immorality were common – in Kärzdhali he had had a wife and children, but he had been presenting himself as single, and in result, he had got a divorce. According to the report, people said that he was thriftless and fraudulent. There were claims that he pocketed the income from the waqf lease. The inspections proved that Afiz Suleymanov was responsible for corruption as he demanded higher fees for his official services. Also, it was said that the mufti did not devote enough time and attention to his duties and worked inefficiently. The most alarming facts were presented at the end of the report. Despite being born in Kärzdhali, Afiz Suleymanov had a Bulgarian passport, which incited suspicion. The region was within the Bulgarian and Eastern-Rumelian

³⁹ Телеграм от Хасково до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 23.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 89.

⁴⁰ От Хасковски околийски начелник до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 16.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 79; От Хасковски околийски начелник до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 25.06.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 90.

⁴¹ Рапорт от Главно Мюфтийство до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, София 17.05.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 80.

⁴² Временни правила за духовното управление на мюсюлмани, „Държавен вестник“, 1895, vol. XVII, бр. 210 (26 септември), pp. 2–4.

⁴³ Телеграм от Хасково до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 7.10.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 98 l. 112.

⁴⁴ От Хасковски околийски управител до Хафъз Сюлейман Мехмедов, Хасково 10.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 113; Акт, 9.10.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 115.

borders for a really short time – between February (January old style) and June 1878, and between 1880 and 1886. It became an incentive for further investigation that proved that the mufti kept in touch with the Ottoman Commissars in Sofia and Plovdiv as an “informer”. Suleymanov authored of 50–60 reports on various topics linked to the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. Documents published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions were attached to the reports. The mufti also approved the certificates and passports granted the Muslims who wanted to migrate to Turkey. The inspectors admitted that Afiz Suleymanov “represented foreign interests using legal and illegal methods, did not work in favour of the inhabitants of Bulgaria” and “transformed the Bulgarian state institution [muftlik] into an Ottoman outpost”. Also, it was estimated that 2/3 of his activity as the Haskovo mufti aimed to benefit the interests of the Ottoman Empire, and only 1/3 was performed in favour of the local Muslim community.⁴⁵

The author of the report, N. Semenov, met with the Haskovo mufti and presented him with accusations of espionage. Afiz Effendi did not deny them, in his defence he said that other muftis in Bulgaria worked in the same way. He added that his position was dependent on the High Porte and some “people in high places”, who forced him to prepare these reports. During the meeting, Suleymanov gave names of the Ottoman spies, who had created a organisation in Plovdiv named the “Balkan Committee”. The conclusions of the report recommended to roll out a much stricter control over the muftliks and Muslim communities in Bulgaria. Finally, Semenov gave Afiz Suleymanov a week to resign. In spite of the statements of the report, the mufti of Haskovo held his post.⁴⁶ The assumption is that that outcome was linked to the information about the Ottoman spy network in Bulgaria, which he had given to the authorities. He could have started working as a double agent for Sofia.

Afiz Suleymanov did not keep his post for a long time. On the 12th of January 1912 (30th of December 1911), there was a considerable Muslim protest against the mufti of Haskovo. Only a police intervention stopped the crowd from lynching Suleymanov.⁴⁷ Having regard to the public peace, the authorities transferred Afiz Suleymanov to Vratsa, where he became a new mufti. The muftlik clerk Hafuz Sali became the acting mufti of Haskovo until the new election.⁴⁸ It is significant that Afiz Effendi was designated to the new post illegally, without an election among the Islamic community of the Vratsa district. That is why that decision led to grave discontent among Muslims, who were additionally irritated given the problems

⁴⁵ *Поверително до Министерсво на външните работии изповедания, 28.10.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 122–123.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 123–125.

⁴⁷ *Телеграм от Хасково до Министерсво на външните работии изповедания, Хасково 30.12.1911, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 135.*

⁴⁸ *Заповед на Министерсво на външните работии изповедания, 27.02.1912, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 l. 140.*

with the former mufti Afiz M. Mustafov and did not understand why an outsider became their religious leader.⁴⁹ The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs and Religions did not change its mind. At the beginning of 1913, the local Muslims wrote a new complaint as they “could not understand how a man so fraudulent had become a mufti”. First of all, the petition’s authors protested against the nomination of Afiz Effendi without an election. The accusations contained arguments similar to those in the complaints against Suleymanov from the time when he was the mufti of Haskovo. He was not popular with his new community because of his lies and immorality – he pretended to be a widower and took a 15-year-old girl to wife, despite the fact that he had another wife and five children in his hometown. Additionally, Suleymanov did not frequent the muftlik office often, neglected his duties, distributed religious materials that were contradictory to the Koran, and was using forged documents.⁵⁰ This time the complaint met with a response – in February 1913 Afiz Effendi was dismissed from the office of the Vratsa mufti.⁵¹ It was the end of Suleymanov’s turbulent career. He later sent requests to the ministry asking for any post in the state, complaining that he had been unemployed for a few months.⁵² He never received a reply.

The case of the Razgrad mufti Sali Halilov

Another interesting case is linked to the attempts of the dismissal of Sali Effendi Halilov from the function of the mufti of Razgrad. He took office after the election in November 1905, during which he got more votes than Yuzein Effendi Dyulyumanov (90 to 50 votes cast by delegates).⁵³ However, the mayor of Razgrad got a complaint prepared by the deputy of the National Assembly, Hadji Nedjib Bey, and five other Muslims from the town. They claimed that one of the members of the electoral commission had agitated in favour of Sali Effendi and had slandered the other candidate. According to the petition, the militia frightened the delegates and did not allow one of the Yuzein Effendi’s followers to cast a vote, which was explained by his old age (74); the other delegate, Yuzein Yuzeinov Kanzar, who

⁴⁹ *От мюсюлмански жители на Враца до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Враца 6.08.1912, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 146–147; Заявление от мюсюлмански жители на Враца до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания (чрез Главния Мюфти в София), Враца 24.08.1912, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 151.*

⁵⁰ *Заявление от мюсюлмански жители на Враца до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания (чрез Врачански окръжен управител), Враца 11.01.1913, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 159–160.*

⁵¹ *Акт, 2.02.1913, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 168.*

⁵² *Заявление от Хафъз Сюлейман Мехмедов, бивши окръжен мюфти на Враца, до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания (чрез Главния Мюфти в София), Враца 10.09.1913, ЦДА f. 166к, оп. 1 а.е. 795 л. 179.*

⁵³ *Протокол, Разград 27.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 14.*

supported Salim Effendi, could vote even he was older than him (76). Also, the mayor of Karlovo, Mustafa Hadji Alishov, who represented 50 Muslim households, was prevented from voting. The petition's authors demanded to void the result the election.⁵⁴ After an inspection by the District Court in Ruse, the accusations were recognized as groundless and motivated only by the dislike of the opponents of Sali Effendi. It was said that the election results reflected the common mood among the Muslims from the district.⁵⁵ Finally, on the 1st of March (17th of February old style) 1906 Sali Effendi was officially appointed as the mufti of Razgrad – the petition by Nejib Bey delayed the nomination by 4 months.⁵⁶

However, the case was not closed. In April 1906 Sali Effendi was dismissed by the decision of the Razgrad county authorities and his opponent Yuzein Dyulyumanov was appointed in his place. A group of Muslims from Razgrad protested that the county governor did not have the right to do that and made that decision only because of party interests.⁵⁷ It was true – only the government could do that.⁵⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions ordered that Sali Effendi be reinstated.⁵⁹

The next unsuccessful attempt at the dismissal of the mufti took place at the end of 1908. There was a petition to the Ministry prepared by Afiz Redjib of Torpak, who wanted to replace Sali Halilov in his office. That proposal was ignored by the authorities.⁶⁰

During the later elections in May 1910, the main candidates were Sali Effendi and Yuzein Effendi. Once again Halilov was elected to the office, gaining an overwhelming number of 166 delegates' votes (only 140 were recognized as valid because of the abnormalities found with the mandates issued by their communes).⁶¹

⁵⁴ *Протест до председател на Бюро на избиране на Разградския мюфти от гласоподаватели, Разград 27.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 27; Прошение от Хаджи Наджиб бей из Разград до Бюро на избиране на Разградския мюфти от гласоподаватели, Разград 27.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 28; Заявление от общинските съветници на село Калово до председател на Русенски окръжен съд, Разград 21.12.1905, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 30.*

⁵⁵ *Репорт на Разградско околийско управление до Русенки окръжен управител, Разград 28.11.1905, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 16; Телеграм от Разградски кмет до Министерство на външните работи изповеданията, Разград 30.01.1906, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 33.*

⁵⁶ *Акт, Разград 17.02.1906, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 37.*

⁵⁷ *Телеграм от Разград до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Разград 26.04.1906 [the date of receipt], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 61.*

⁵⁸ *Временни правила за духовното управление на мюсюлмани, „Държавен вестник”, 1895, год. XVII, бр. 210 (26 септември), pp. 2–4.*

⁵⁹ *Телеграм от Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания до Околийски началник на Разград, София 04.1906, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 63.*

⁶⁰ *Телеграм от Разград до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Разград 20.12.1908 [the date of receipt], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 72.*

⁶¹ *Протокол, Разград 9.05.1910, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 81; От Русенско окръжно управление до Министерсрво на външните работи изповедания, Русе 19.05.1910, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 84.*

In June, Sali Effendi was officially confirmed for a second term in the office of the Razgrad mufti.⁶²

A new attempt to dismiss Sali Effendi happened in March 1912 – as in 1906, Halilov's opponents wrote a petition to the Razgrad county authorities. The complaint said that the mufti did not have the support of the majority of the local Islamic community, and that the election of 1910 were counterfeit. There were accusations of forcing to vote openly and voting cards forgery. Sali Effendi was presented as “no true leader of the religious community, but man entangled politically”, who was guilty of much neglect and abuse: incompetent administration of waqfs, tender fabrication, converting public income for himself, selling the commune's estate at a discounted price to his friends, or illegally giving himself a rise⁶³. The petition was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions, but as before it was recognized as unjustified and there was no answer from the authorities⁶⁴.

Conclusion

The three presented cases of Afiz M. Mustafov, Sali Effendi, and Afiz Suleymanov illustrate a series of the phenomena surrounding the functioning of the mufti office and autonomous Muslim institutions in Bulgaria at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Turkish historians accented that those institutions worked chaotically and irregularly because of the defective Bulgarian law. It led to a state of disarray: some of the Muslim communes worked according to their own rules, some of them adhered to the state rules (not necessarily the current ones due to the many novelizations), and others stuck to the ancient traditions from the Turkish times. Also, it was linked to the Bulgarian policy that tried to roll out much stricter control over the Muslim communes and separate them from the Shaykh al-Islām despite the *Berlin Treaty of 1878* and *Constantinople Treaty of 1909*.⁶⁵ However, the cases discussed show that the Muslims were not without blame either – internal conflicts and frauds were probably a bigger detriment to the effective functioning of the autonomous institutions than the unstable law. Conflicted Muslims became a harmless element in the reality of the Bulgarian policy at the beginning of the 20th century. They focused on differences and quarrels. Personal interests became more important than the fight for the rights of their minority. In result, the Muslims could not demonstrate unity in front of the Bulgarian authorities.

⁶² Указ но. 15 Ние Фердинанд I с Божия милости народната воля цар на българите, София 7.07.1910, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 85; От Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания до Русенски окръжен управител, София 15.06.1910, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 86.

⁶³ Молба от жители на Разград до Разградски околийски управител, Разград 13.03.1912 [the date of receipt], ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 112–113.

⁶⁴ Телеграм от Разград до Министерсрво на външните работии изповедания, Разград 27.03.1912, ЦДА f. 166к оп. 1 а.е. 794 л. 114.

⁶⁵ Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878–1908)*, p. 20.

The Bulgarian government ignored the problems of the muftis and Muslim communities in cases which did not concern the Bulgarian matters, even when the mufti broke the law (bad management, remissness, acting to the detriment of the community, violation of moral norms etc.). Only when the local authorities were involved or a problem was linked to the state's interests (for example, espionage or financial fraud), the central authorities would react. Religious autonomy benefitted not only the minority – the Bulgarians benefitted it as well as they did not have to deal with the problems they deemed secondary. It can be said that the Bulgarian minority policy looked like the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire. The authorities in Sofia ignored the Muslim community in the state (other minorities as well) and let them live as they wanted as long as they paid taxes and did not cause any trouble.⁶⁶ These paradigms of the Bulgarian minority policy were independent of whether we were dealing with rather mono- or multi-religious areas. For the 19th-century standards, that kind of approach to a minority can be estimated as tolerant.⁶⁷

The case of Afiz Suleymanov shows that the independence of the autonomous Islamic institutions from the Ottoman authorities was an important goal of the Bulgarian politics. Turkish historiography usually presents the muftis as the representatives of not only the Muslim minority but the High Porte as well, which can be illustrated by their contacts with the Shaykh al-Islām and the Ottoman commissaries in Sofia. The muftis recognized themselves as agents of the Turkish sultan, who at the same time was the caliph. The government in Sofia tried to change that and made them Bulgarian state officials. However, the Bulgarian attitude to muftis and Muslim religious autonomy was quite liberal, especially when compared it with the policy of Austro-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Shaykh al-Islām was absolutely cut off from the local Islam institutions⁶⁸.

The muftis were not only a religious institution, they served a political purpose – they were representatives of the Islamic community and functioned as other state' offices. The problem of intensive political fight between the parties existed among the Bulgarians as well as among the Muslims. The pathologies of public offices, linked to clientelism, using violence in rivalry, abject carelessness, and illegal dismissals and designations, happened also in the mufti offices. It was an effect of the immaturity of the democratic institutions in Bulgaria as much as it was the fault of the mentality – the Balkan people, both the Muslims and the Christians, were used to the autocratic governance of sultans or pashas swollen by corruption (named as *bakshish*).

⁶⁶ The Greek policy due to the Muslim minority was similar in that time: S. Katsikas, "Millet legacies in a national environment: political elites and Muslim communities in Greece (1830s–1923)", in: *State-nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey: Orthodox and Muslims, 1830–1945*, eds. B. Fortna, S. Katsikas, D. Kamouzis, P. Konortas, Abingdon–New York, 2013, pp. 47–84.

⁶⁷ K. Popek, "Cruel Tormentor or Good Neighbour? Stereotype of the Turk and Bulgarian State Policy Towards the Muslim Minority in 1878–1912", *Slavonic Review*, 2017, no. 2, pp. 282–283.

⁶⁸ A. Karić, *Myth of Bosniak Pan-Islamism*, Sarajevo, 2015, s. 77.

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