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## EXAMINING "EASTERN" AID: MUSLIM MINORITIES AND ISLAMIC FOUNDATIONS IN BULGARIA

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Since 1989, a veritable tsunami of foreign aid has crashed into the countries of the former Eastern Bloc in order to achieve a wide variety of political, economic, and social changes in these postcommunist societies.<sup>1</sup> After time, as the complicated and often unexpected effects of this aid became apparent, a second wave – this one of scholarship on foreign aid – subsequently developed to analyze and understand how and why things went right or wrong. An important part of this literature looks at the role of the so-called "Third Sector," in particular the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other charitable or "civil society" institutions.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of this literature, however, focuses exclusively on the role of Western aid: funds originating in North America, Europe, and to a lesser extent Japan. This brief article (based on initial research findings) aims to expand the field of inquiry on foreign aid and NGOs in the postsocialist context by examining a little-studied but very important alternate source of funding for civil society in the former communist countries – the Middle East.

Admittedly, there are a few factors that make a comparison between aid from the West and aid from the Middle East difficult. First, the amount of money flowing from the Western countries far exceeds that coming from the Middle Eastern countries, but the amounts of the latter are still significant enough to warrant further examination. Second, there is some evidence that the way foreign aid is distributed and the ultimate goals of aid differ significantly between the two sources. A recent report by ActionAid found that most Western aid money is "phantom aid" that is squandered, misused or recycled into the economy of the donor country,<sup>3</sup> whereas some aid from Middle Eastern countries comes in the form of suitcases full of cash or goods distributed directly to Muslim populations. Third, foreign aid from the Middle East mostly goes to countries where there are a significant number of Muslims in order to support the global Islamic umma; this fact excludes many of the Central European countries. But in the Balkans and in Central Asia where the transition from communism has not been so easy

and where there are Muslim majorities and/or countries with large Muslim minority populations, foreign aid from the Middle East was and remains an important player in the creation and sustainability of many third sector organizations. Finally, much foreign aid from the Middle East is tied to religious education and Islamic cultural development which is quite different from the secular nature of most official Western Aid. However, as part of their spiritual mission, Middle Eastern donors support many of the same types of activities that Western donors do: distributing humanitarian aid; providing social services such as job training, education and health care; supporting small businesses; promoting cultural production, etc. Thus, although there are important differences between the two sources of aid, there are enough similarities to warrant at least a closer examination of what I will call "Eastern" aid.<sup>4</sup>

These initial findings are based on four months of fieldwork in Bulgaria in 2004 and 2005, and a series of interviews with high-ranking officials in the Muslim hierarchy. In this paper, the data is derived from participant observation in two cities and one village primarily populated by Bulgarian Muslims -- the majority of who would self identify as ethnic Bulgarians who profess Islam. I have changed the names of these places to protect the identity of my informants. I will refer to the two cities as Zelengrad and Cherna Kurpa, and the village as Djamichino. All three are clustered together in the Rhodopi mountain region of southern Bulgaria near the Greek border. I want to stress that these findings are preliminary and constitute no more than a glance at three Bulgarian Muslim communities that have been influenced by the presence of Islamic aid from abroad. Furthermore, I do not want to insinuate that aid from Islamic countries is inherently "bad" or that it constitutes the support of any type of radical Islamic activity (i.e. "terrorism") – I have no solid evidence to support either of these claims.

However, I am interested in examining the extent to which Islamic aid to minority Muslim populations might increase the chances for ethnic conflict in otherwise "peaceful" countries. This is particularly salient in Bulgaria, which has just

witnessed the election of the first openly right wing and nationalistic party to the national parliament, a party aptly named "Attack." This party received over 200,000 votes and ran on a platform of "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians," an anti-Turkish, anti-Roma, and by extension anti-Muslim sentiment.<sup>5</sup> As Bulgaria prepares to join the European Union as early as January 2007, it will be the first EU country with a large population of indigenous Muslims who are not recent immigrants or their children. The purpose of this study is merely to examine the sudden upsurge in Islamic activity funded by foreign states and associations in the country before EU accession, and what this activity might mean for interethnic and inter-religious relationships in a so-called "new" democracy like Bulgaria.

The literature about Islamic charities and nongovernmental organizations is sparse and much of it is quite sensationalistic, focusing on the alleged link between Islamic aid and terrorism.<sup>6</sup> Within the postsocialist context, there is even less scholarship, and much of it focuses on the role of Islamic relief agencies in promoting jihad. By most accounts, however, foreign aid organizations from the Middle East gained a foothold in Europe after the outbreak of the Bosnian War, and have steadily increased their influence by mounting relief operations in Chechnya and Kosovo.<sup>7</sup> When the Bosnian conflict erupted in 1992, existing Islamic organizations entered the country to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Bosnian Muslim refugees. New Islamic organizations were also specially created to deal with the Bosnians' plight. Foreign governments, too, felt they needed to respond to the growing crisis in the Balkans and various organizations were set up or indirectly sponsored by the Saudi Arabian, Sudanese and Iranian governments to provide "help." It soon became apparent, however, that some organizations were also providing arms and supplies to the Bosnian army, and that their mission overtly included the reislamization of the Bosnian Muslims and support for the creation of an Islamic state in Europe. Jerome Bellion-Jourdan refers to organizations like the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) as "so-called NGOs" and claims that in fact they were merely "para-statal structures corresponding to the Saudi strategy in Bosnia."<sup>8</sup>

Many Islamic NGOs also openly endeavored to protect the Islamic identity of Muslims from the onslaught of Western Aid flowing into the region. Islamic states and organizations were suspicious of both the Christian

and secular Western aid agencies and NGOs that were supposedly importing values and ideas "foreign" to Muslim sensibilities, such as the emancipation of women. In one example, the president of a local Islamic NGO condemned the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for sending food aid packages that contained pork. Another example is that some organizations conditioned the receipt of aid on whether or not individual Bosnians were "proper" Muslims or not (whether they had given up alcohol and pork, went to the mosque on Fridays, etc.)<sup>9</sup>

In Kosovo, Isa Blumi has complained that Western aid agencies have abandoned the local population to the relief efforts of faith-based Saudi organizations and ignore "...the efforts of Arab NGOs to impose their Salafî practices on Kosovar Albanians..."<sup>10</sup> Blumi claims that the rural population in Kosovo was left in abject poverty following the conflicts, and that many families have become completely dependent on Saudi-based NGOs for their basic needs. This has been problematic because in addition to providing humanitarian aid – food, shelter, clothing, etc. – the primary tasks of the Islamic NGOs has been education, and the teaching of "correct" Islamic practices to the syncretistic Albanian Muslims. The forced separation of boys and girls in schools, the requirement for boys to memorize the Koran in Arabic, the destruction of cultural sites deemed inappropriate for Muslims, and other conflicts between local Muslim practices and Salafism have led to claims of "Arab imperialism" through the guise of aid.

The focus of this article, however, is Bulgaria, a country which is often ignored in discussions of Muslim communities in the Balkans. Bulgaria has about one million Muslims representing roughly 12 percent of the population, and has largely avoided the ethnic conflicts that have torn apart its former Yugoslav neighbors or Chechnya. Muslims in Bulgaria (although they have been there for centuries) are a minority in a majority Christian state, with Bulgarian Orthodoxy constitutionally recognized as the official religion of the country. Precommunist and communist governments both endeavored to assimilate, convert and/or expel the Muslim population throughout the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Despite these efforts, the Muslim communities reemerged with newfound fervor after the fall of communism in 1989. Since the early 1990s, the Muslim community in Bulgaria has slowly reestablished a visible and sometimes controversial presence as the second largest religious group in the country.

With the financial aid and assistance of foreign Islamic states and international Islamic charities, often working through locally registered cultural foundations, the Bulgarian Muslim community has seen a significant increase in the construction of mosques, the creation of Islamic schools and study groups, the publication of religious literature, and the adoption of more "traditional" Islamic practices such as the wearing of hijab for women and fasting for Ramadan.

Despite the resurgence of Islam in the country, however, the Muslims are far from a homogenous group; there are three ethnic constituencies in the Bulgarian Muslim community. By far the largest is that of the ethnic Turks that make up the majority of the Muslims, followed by the ethnic Bulgarian Muslims (called Pomaks) and the Muslim Roma. Exact numbers on the size of these populations is very difficult to estimate because many Roma Muslims and some Bulgarian Muslims will self-identify as Turks on the census. There was, in fact, a great scandal after the 1992 census when the Bulgarian parliament declared the results of the census for ethnicity invalid after it was allegedly proved that Pomaks were being forced to identify as Turks in the Western Rhodopi Region. There are other groups of Pomaks who will identify as Bulgarians while stating their religion as Islam, and still others who will simply declare themselves as Christian Bulgarians. Beyond the ethnic differences, there exist vast differences in the type and depth of belief Bulgarian Muslims hold. While the majority of Muslims are Hanafi Sunni Muslims, there is a small community of Shi'a Muslims as well. Adding to the disparities, forty-five years of communism and official state atheism has worn away at the devoutness of much of the otherwise already syncretistic Muslim community.

With the fall of communism in 1989, the devolution of the Afghan resistance to Soviet domination into a bitter civil war after 1991, and the outbreak of the Bosnian war in 1992, Islamic charities and nongovernmental organizations began to create a presence for themselves in the Balkans for the purpose of protecting and supporting the cause of fellow Muslims. This sudden interest and presence in the Balkans was to have repercussions beyond the Bosnian conflict as Islamic charities and foundations attempted to extend their influence into Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bulgaria. At the national level, the Bulgarian government officially welcomed some of these foundations in the mid-1990s. On October 16, 1996, the then deputy Prime Minister,

Svetoslav Shivarov, together with the Chairman of the Supreme Theological Council of Muslims in Bulgaria, Nedim Gendjev, received a delegation from the Muslim World League in order to discuss Christian-Muslim relations and the "cultural and spiritual development of Bulgarian Muslims."<sup>12</sup> Both parties also apparently discussed the possibility of closer relations between Saudi Arabia and Bulgaria. The Muslim World League is a Saudi organization that was founded in 1962 to promote "Islamic Unity," and has recently been called an "agent of Wahhabi propagation in Europe."<sup>13</sup> The organization is said to be "targeting Europe as an ideological recruiting ground,"<sup>14</sup> and has come under investigation in the United States for supposed links to terrorism in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001.<sup>15</sup> It was during this time in the late 1990s that there was a sudden upsurge in mosque building in the Bulgarian regions with Muslim populations.

After the change of government in 1997, however, the new Bulgarian administration became less tolerant of what it began to consider "radical" Islam, Islamic "fundamentalism," or religious "fanaticism." In 1999, the Bulgarian government expelled a "stateless" person, Daruish Al-Nashif, for preaching radical Islam and attending a seminar run by the Dutch/Saudi organization Al-Waqf Al-Islami.<sup>16</sup> This seminar was apparently approved of and attended by representatives of the Chief Mufti's Office, the official leadership of the Bulgarian Muslim community, but was raided by the police. The Bulgarian government felt that the seminar and Al-Nashif were a threat to national security, and despite the fact that his wife and children were Bulgarian citizens; he was detained and subsequently deported. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee sued the Bulgarian government over this expulsion. The European Court of Human Rights ultimately accepted the case and found the Bulgarian government guilty. The government was ordered to pay a hefty fine, and lost some of its desire to pursue radical "Islamists" despite the fact that Al-Waqf Al-Islami later came under investigation for possible links to the terrorists who planned the September 11th attacks in New York and Washington, DC in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

The annual report of the British based Islamic charity Muslim Aid confirms that they have been active in Bulgaria since 2000, albeit very minimally, mostly providing food and sacrificial meat for the two large Muslim feasts: one marking the end of Ramadan and the kurban-bayram.<sup>18</sup> Muslim Aid is a large Islamic charity

founded in 1985 by 23 leading British Muslim organizations. It is one of the charities that have been accused of placing heavy conditions on its aid efforts in Bosnia.<sup>19</sup> In the mosque in Djanichino, I also found brochures from the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) that were being produced and distributed through a local affiliate foundation called "Al-Manar" based in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. The World Assembly of Muslim Youth is another Saudi-based organization. Founded in 1972, it has a presence in over fifty countries and is associated with over 500 youth organizations around the world. With considerable resources at its disposal, its humanitarian efforts focus on building and running schools, hospitals and mosques.

A foundation supported by the Turkish government, United for Islamic Development and Culture, has been actively supporting Islamic publications and other Muslim cultural products, including producing compact discs of local Islamic folk singers in Cherna Kurpa. Both the Turkish government and the government of Oman have committed themselves to restoring historic mosques in Bulgaria, often through local foundations. In July of 2005, the Sultan of Oman directly donated about \$400,000 for the renovation of the Tomboul Mosque in Shumen.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the British Islamic foundation, Small Kindness has expressed interest in working in Bulgaria in the near future.<sup>21</sup> These are just fraction of the numerous foundations officially working in the country. In the European Court of Human Rights testimony regarding the Al-Nashif case, his Bulgarian "wife" talks of "suitcases full of money" that were being brought into the country to support the unofficial development of Islamic centers, mosques and schools.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult to estimate how many Islamic NGOs were or are operating in Bulgaria. Before 2000, there was no central national registry for NGOs; organizations registered with the local district courts where they operated. The law governing NGOs before 2001 was the product of socialist-era legislation that was ill-suited to the huge increase in both Western and Islamic NGO activity in the country.<sup>23</sup> As a result, many NGOs operated without direct oversight or regulation of the state. Under the new Bulgarian law governing NGOs there are more controls on the non-profit sector, particularly with regard to annual reporting.<sup>24</sup> Under this law, only two types of organizations are allowed: "associations" and "foundations." Associations have members and foundations have no members, and the reporting

requirements for foundations are not as strict as those for associations. Most Islamic NGOs in Bulgaria operate as foundations (this is why I use the terms "NGO" and "foundation" interchangeably).

In spite of the new law, enforcement of the financial reporting requirements is still quite sporadic, and NGOs can easily hide funds from abroad. This makes it almost impossible for the Bulgarian government to quantify the amount of money that has entered the country to support local Islamic foundations. This problem was finally recognized in 2002 when the government required the Chief Mufti's office to account for all funds accepted from abroad. But this new requirement could not account for all of the funds entering Bulgaria for projects outside of the jurisdiction of the Chief Mufti's office. Indeed, upon questioning various official sources in Bulgaria, no one seems to have any idea just how much money is flowing into the country in the form of Islamic aid. There seems to be a consensus, however, that the amounts are quite substantial as evidenced by the sheer volume of projects undertaken in the Muslim communities in the last fifteen years.

The role of this invisible foundation money has also fueled accusations between two rivaling factions within the Muslim community. In 2004, the former Chief Mufti, Nedim Gendjev, accused his successor of accepting money from foreign foundations and allowing them to run illegal Islamic schools in the country.<sup>25</sup> The new Chief Mufti vehemently denied these claims.<sup>26</sup> In the second half of 2004, these accusations reached a fever pitch and the possibility that Bulgaria was harboring "terrorists" reached the international media.<sup>27</sup> These accusations were traded at a time when there was a considerable amount of confusion about who the "rightful" leader of the Bulgarian Muslim community was, a conflict that had been ongoing since the early 1990s. The charges were clearly politically motivated, but there was enough of a sliver of truth to them to fuel a heated public debate about the role of foreign foundations in the Muslim community.<sup>28</sup>

Although the sources and amounts of money are difficult to trace with any measure of certainty, the effects of these funds were readily apparent if one spends any amount of time in the region where I conducted my fieldwork in 2004 and 2005. The most visibly obvious manifestation of this foreign aid is the proliferation of new mosques in what are very economically depressed regions of Bulgaria. Most new mosques in the

Muslim regions follow the traditional Bulgarian mosque architecture of a rectangular building with the addition of a minaret. In Zelengrad, Cherna Kurpa and Djamichino, however, the new mosques, all of which were opened after 1999, have clear Arab influences in the architecture particularly with regard to the use of domes and rounded embellishments. Moreover, the mosques in these three cities/villages are significantly larger than most Bulgarian mosques, particularly the mosque in Zelengrad, which locals claim to be the largest mosque in the entire Balkan Peninsula. In otherwise dilapidated cities, these new mosques stand out in their opulence. Although the mosque in Djamichino was most likely built solely with the local money and labor, most people in the region recognize that the mosques in Zelengrad and Cherna Kurpa were built in part with foundation money from Turkey, Syria, Iran and the Gulf Arab states of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

These mosques serve as a center of Islamic culture for the people of the region. In the mosque in Zelengrad there are a wide variety of classes available in addition to the usual religious services. There is a Koranic school for both girls and boys, and I saw at least eight young boys who live in the mosque full time. The mosque offers language classes in Turkish, Arabic, Persian and English. The teacher of the English class told me that her salary is paid by an Iranian foundation. There is also an information board that has announcements for Islamic courses in other parts of Bulgaria, particularly the Islamic high school in Momchilgrad and an Imam course in Surnitza, all advertising the possibility of scholarships. Similar announcements were found in the mosques of Cherna Kurpa and Djamichino, where there were also daily Koranic courses for children. In Cherna Kurpa, I also heard of six students – four boys and two girls – who had spent eight years studying abroad in Saudi Arabia on full scholarships. They had recently returned to Cherna Kurpa and local residents said that they had brought with them Islamic practices quite different from the form of Islam traditionally practiced in the city.

While I was in the Zelengrad mosque, I discovered an employment announcement for truck drivers in various Arab countries promising a salary of \$1,000 a month (quite attractive in a region where the average monthly wage is no more than \$150). The man who works in the café of the Zelengrad mosque told me that about twenty men from Zelengrad had been “sponsored” to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and I heard similar stories in

both Cherna Kurpa and Djamichino where the number of Hadji and Hadjiki seemed to be even higher. The mosques serve as distributors of donated meat and sweets during the month of Ramadan and for the large Islamic feasts. Additionally, all three mosques had special rooms for travelers, and offered free accommodation to both foreign and domestic guests. The English teacher at the Zelengrad mosque claimed that there had been guests from Macedonia, Albania, Serbia (Kosovo), Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in the mosque, and a local Peace Corps volunteer had been asked to translate for six British Muslims who were doing a tour of Bulgaria. The Peace Corps volunteer said they were very “strict” Muslims who would not look her in the eye and felt uncomfortable in her presence. One of the young men studying in the Djamichino mosque also confirmed that there had been six British guests staying with them. He explained that they had received money from a foundation in England that allowed them to travel around the world for one month a year to meet and learn about other Muslim communities: they told him that he might be able to win one of these stipends to go to England.

There is also a sudden upsurge in the number of foreign funded Bulgarian language publications for the Pomak communities. The official publication of the Bulgarian Chief Mufti’s office, *Myusyulmani*, is published in Sofia once a month in both Bulgarian and Turkish, since many Turks in Bulgaria do not speak the Bulgarian language. This publication began in the early 1990s and is paid for through the Chief Mufti’s office in Sofia. There are other publications, however, which are not controlled by the Chief Mufti’s office. The Islamic magazine, *Selyam*, also published in Sofia, began in 2003, and is published only in Bulgarian. The Bulgarian-language magazine *Myusyulmansko Obshtestvo* (Muslim Society) began in January 2005 and is published in the Rhodopi city of Smolyan with the help of United for Islamic Development and Culture. In Zelengrad itself, a home-grown Islamic lifestyle magazine for Muslims in Bulgaria also began publication in January 2005. Both *Selyam* and *Muslim Society* are photo-intensive, glossy magazines that are clearly being supported by outside funding. Even the Zelengrad publication went from being a small newsprint booklet to a more well-formatted magazine on higher quality paper in the span of three months, is now sent for free to subscribers, and is also available for purchase at the High Islamic Institute

in Sofia. That all three of these magazines are published only in Bulgarian is significant, since the Pomaks number no more than 250,000 by most estimates. If these resources are being committed just to this small portion of the overall Muslim population, the foundation money flowing into the Turkish and Roman Muslim communities must be very significant.<sup>29</sup>

All of this activity, however, should be contextualized within Bulgaria's recent history. The Muslims in the country suffered forty-five years of heavy-handed communist oppression of their cultural practices. Throughout the communist period, the government outlawed Muslim burials and circumcisions, strongly discouraged the wearing of headscarves, fezzes and shalvari (traditionally Turkish baggy pants for women), and forced Muslims to discard their Turko-Arabic names and accept new Slavic Christian names.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore quite understandable that the end of communism would see resurgence in visible Muslim practices. What is interesting, however, is the debate around whether the newly emergent practices are indeed "local." As with the architecture of the mosques, foreign states and organizations working through local foundations and NGOs are actively trying to shape postcommunist Islamic identity in Bulgaria. For instance, the majority of Muslims in Zelengrad does not abstain from alcohol and eat pork. In fact, after the Friday service most of the Muslim men go straight from the mosque into the pub. The three Bulgarian language publications targeting the Pomaks, however, all advocate against both alcohol and pork, arguing (rightly) that they are forbidden by the Koran. Muslims in Bulgaria have read the Koran in either Bulgarian or Turkish for at least the last 70 years, but these publications also insist that the Koran must be read in Arabic.

Muslim women's fashion provides the best example of changing local customs in the face of foreign influences. Traditional Muslim modesty in Zelengrad, Cherna Kurpa and Djamichino requires that married women and older women wear a headscarf tied loosely under the chin, and that they dress conservatively. However, most young women and middle-aged women do not follow the traditional custom and go bareheaded. Indeed, many young Muslim women dress quite provocatively. There is a small group of young women, however, that has recently adopted a more "Arab" style of dress, choosing to cover their bodies completely with headscarves tied tightly around their faces so that none of their

hair is visible. I observed two women in Cherna Kurpa that walk around completely veiled with only their eyes visible, and three others that I saw walking together wearing identical white robes and headscarves. Despite the fact that it was atypical to see very young girls with their heads covered in this region, I saw two young girls in Djamichino playing on the street with headscarves.

When I asked the local women about this style of dress, many of their comments were either defensive or disdainful. On at least three separate occasions in Zelengrad, I was told that these women were being paid to dress that way. I also heard it said that they were simply religious "fanatics," and that I should not pay attention to them, as they were not "real" Muslims. One woman told me that the girls who dressed like that "were only looking for rich Arab husbands." Another young woman who worked in the city hall of Cherna Kurpa became uncomfortable when I asked her about the women in the "Arab" dress. She told me: "Everyone is free to dress as they wish. They are not Al-Qaeda or anything like that. Maybe they just spent time in Saudi Arabia and like those kinds of clothes."

Those kinds of clothes were quite expensive compared to local fashions, and although I could not find any evidence that women were actually being paid, I suspected that devout women were given the clothes by foundations. In fact, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth has given out headscarves in the past,<sup>31</sup> and it would not be surprising if there were similar types of programs in this region. Moreover, in Bosnia it has been reported that British charities such as Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief would not give out aid to women who were not wearing headscarves.<sup>32</sup> When I asked where I could buy clothes of this sort, I was taken to a store in Zelengrad run by a very devout Muslim woman who imported much of her stock from Turkey. Commenting on the prices, I asked her how women in Zelengrad could afford to buy the clothes. She simply replied, "Allah always provides."

What is interesting in all of these cases is the extent to which the local Muslim population that disapproved of the "new" Islamic practices blamed the arrival of these practices on "foreign foundations." In fact, in almost all of my conversations about the Islamic revival in Zelengrad and Cherna Kurpa, the influence of "foundations" was always mentioned, although people had varying degrees of specific information

At the mosque in Djamichino it was stressed to me that there was no foundation money involved in its construction, a point of particular pride among the young men who studied there. Thus, even among the more devout Muslims there was a great deal of skepticism about the role and influence of the foreign foundations. Outside of the Muslim communities, Christians were even more suspicious and often angered by Islamic aid. Many Orthodox Bulgarians with whom I spoke felt that Bulgaria needed aid to help build infrastructure and deal with pressing social problems that afflicted both Christians and Muslims, not money for more mosques. Both communities also recognized that foreign aid from the Middle East had a political agenda attached to it (whether they agreed with the agenda or not), a sentiment that mimics the overall Bulgarian mistrust of the activities of nongovernmental organizations in general.<sup>33</sup> But although there is a growing literature that examines the effects of Western aid in Bulgaria (and other postcommunist countries), the role of "Eastern" aid has been largely ignored, despite the fact that they operate in similar ways.

Western aid, whether it comes in the form of bilateral aid from foreign states, multilateral aid from the World Bank or the European Union, or funding from transnational nongovernmental organizations, always comes with certain ideological strings attached to it. In most cases, Western aid has been used to promote democratic institutions and/or the efficient functioning of free market capitalism in the region. Other forms of aid, especially from international NGOs, are specific to certain agendas such as supporting environmental protection, human rights or feminism. In all of these cases, foreign aid to local NGOs within the country bypasses the Bulgarian government in order to ensure the independence of the recipient organization. Although there are financial reporting standards, the Bulgarian government does not have the resources available to conduct audits of nonprofit organizations, and even if it did, Western NGOs would surely balk at government interference in their finances. Aware of this, many of the Islamic foundations operate under the guise of cultural preservation and supporting minority rights and religious freedoms, all legitimate and desirable causes in any liberal democratic society, and this is perhaps why they have managed to avoid closer scrutiny.

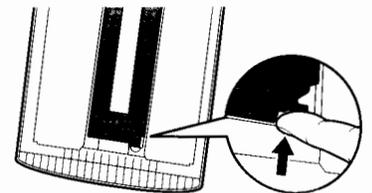
It is not my intention to suggest that Islamic NGOs and foundations should be subject

foundations, and I want to reiterate that I found no evidence whatsoever that anything these organizations are doing constitutes a threat to Bulgarian national security. However, I do believe that "Eastern" aid in the postsocialist world, and particularly in Bulgaria, should be subject to the same type of scholarly scrutiny that Western aid has been subjected to in the last few years, particularly if it plays a role in heightening interethnic or inter-religious tensions in a country. It is this gap in the literature that I intend to address with my current research and continuing fieldwork in Bulgaria; I hope that other scholars will also broaden their studies of foreign aid to include non-Western sources.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the specific topic of Western aid to Eastern Europe see Janine Wedel's excellent book, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Aid to Eastern Europe*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> For information on NGOs in Eastern Europe, see Sarah Mendelson and John Glenn, *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Sarah Mendelson and John Glenn, "Democracy Assistance and NGO Strategies in Post-Communist Societies," *Carnegie Endowment Working Papers, Democracy and Rule of Law Project*, no. 8. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); Kevin Quigley, "Lofty Goals, Modest Results: Assisting Civil Society in Eastern Europe," In Ottaway and Carothers 2000); Laura Grunburg, "Women's NGOs in Romania," in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism*. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, eds. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); Rebecca Kay, *Russian Women and Their Organizations: Gender, Discrimination, and Grassroots Women's Organizations, 1991-1996*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender* (2000); Julie Hemment, "Global Civil Society and the Local Costs of Belonging: Defining Violence Against Women in Russia," *Signs*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring 2004) 815-840; Elissa Helms, "Women as Agents Of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International



Intervention in Postwar Bosnia–Herzegovina,” *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (January 2003) 15-34; Ishkanian, Armine. 'Working at the Global-Local Intersection: The Challenges Facing Women in Armenia's NGO Sector.' In *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation-Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Edited by Nechemias, C.; Kuehnast, K. Woodrow Wilson Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004; Kristen Ghodsee, "Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalisms, Cultural Feminism and Women's Nongovernmental Organizations in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Spring 2004 (Vol. 29, No. 3).

<sup>3</sup> ActionAid, "RealAid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work," 2005. Available online at: <http://www.actionaidusa.org/ActionAidRealAid.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that I will, of course, be accused of "orientalism" and creating dangerous and inaccurate binary oppositions.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Wood, "Ultranationalist gains complicate Bulgaria's EU bid," *International Herald Tribune*, 27 June 2005, Available on-line at: [www.iht.com](http://www.iht.com).

<sup>6</sup> Evan Kohlmann, "Islamic Charities" in *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network*. Oxford: Berg, 2004. Reprint, Oxford: 2005; Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed – and How to Stop It*, Chicago: Bonus Books, 2005, J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; United States Senate One Hundred Seventh Congress Second Session. The Role of Charities and Ngo's In The Financing Of Terrorist Activities. Hearing Before The Subcommittee On International Trade And Finance Of The Committee On Banking, Housing, And Urban Affairs, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, August 1, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Kohlmann 2005; Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World*. London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003, pg 132.

<sup>9</sup> Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003

<sup>10</sup> Isa Blumi, "Indoctrinating Albanians: Dynamics of Islamic Aid." ISIM Newsletter, 11/02, available on-line at: <http://www.isim.nl/files/news11.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Tsvetana Georgieva, "Pomaks: Muslim Bulgarians," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (July 2001) pp. 303-316.

<sup>12</sup> Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, "Muslim World League Delegation in Bulgaria" October 16, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Evgenii Novikov, "The Muslim World League: Agent of Wahhabi Propagation in Europe," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 9, May 6, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Mary Beth Sheridan, "Raid Targets Islamic Charity in Falls Church," *Washington Post*, July 26, 2005, available online at: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/25/AR2005072501632\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/25/AR2005072501632_pf.html)

<sup>16</sup> Emil Cohen, "Tolerance Foundation Press Release – Bulgaria: Religious Activists Beaten by Anti-Sectarianists, Muslim Activists Expelled From the Country." 16 June 2000. Available online at: [www.Pili.Org/Lists/Piln/Archives/Msg00614.Htm](http://www.Pili.Org/Lists/Piln/Archives/Msg00614.Htm); European Court Of Human Rights, Fourth Section, Case Of Al-Nashif V. Bulgaria (*Application No. 50963/99*): Judgment, Strasbourg: European Court Of Human Rights, 20 June 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Albena Shkodorova and Iva Roudnikova, "Bulgaria: Muslim Infighting Fuels Fundamentalist Fears." Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 8, 2004, Available online at: [http://religion.info/english/articles/printer\\_103.shtml](http://religion.info/english/articles/printer_103.shtml)

<sup>18</sup> Muslim Aid. "Annual Review 2000" London: 2000; available from: <http://www.muslimaid.org/docs/AR00.pdf>; "Annual Review 2000" London: 2001; available from <http://www.muslimaid.org/docs/AR01.pdf>; "Annual Review 2000," London: 2002; available from <http://www.muslimaid.org/docs/AR02.pdf>; "Annual Review 2000," London: 2003; available from <http://www.muslimaid.org/docs/AR03.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> "Omani Sultan H.M. Qubus ibn Said Donated \$390,000 for the Renovation of the Tomboul Mosque in Shoumen." From the Government of

Bulgaria's website: <http://www.government.bg/english/print/2745.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Personal e-mail communication with Small Kindness, July 20, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> European Court Of Human Rights, Fourth Section, Case Of Al-Nashif v. Bulgaria (*Application No. 50963/99*): Judgment, Strasbourg: European Court Of Human Rights, 20 June 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Law on Persons and the Family (State Gazette No. 182, 1949)

<sup>24</sup> Law of Juridical Persons with Non-Profit Purposes (State Gazette, No. 81, 3 October 2000)

<sup>25</sup> Polia Alexandrova, "Alerting Bulgaria," Transitions Online, (1 December 2003) Available online at: [www.tol.cz](http://www.tol.cz)

<sup>26</sup> "Faith, Hope and Clarity: An Interview with Chief Mufti Selim Mehmed." *Sofia Echo*, 23 January 2003. Available online at: [http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/faith-hope-and-clarity/id\\_6309/catid\\_30](http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/faith-hope-and-clarity/id_6309/catid_30)

<sup>27</sup> Alexandrova 2003; Yana Buhner Tavaneir, "Mysterious Mosques and Schools," Transitions Online, (27 January 2005) and "The Schools that Aren't Schools," Transitions Online, 3 February 2005, both available on-line at [www.tol.cz](http://www.tol.cz).

<sup>28</sup> Ruslan Yordanov, "Strastite Myuftiiski" (The Passion of the Mufti) Tema, Vol. 4, No. 27 (143), 12-18 July, 2004, pg.42-44; Velina Nacheva, "US Tensions Spread East." *Sofia Echo*, 27 September 2001. Available online at: [http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/us-tensions-spread-east/id\\_2906/catid\\_5](http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/us-tensions-spread-east/id_2906/catid_5)

<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, I did not do fieldwork with these populations and do not have any quantitative or qualitative data to support even a rough estimate of how much aid is flowing into the Turkish and Roma Muslim communities.

<sup>30</sup> For more information on the Bulgarian Muslims, see: Mary Neuburger, "Difference Unveiled: Bulgarian National Imperatives and the Redressing of Muslim Women in the Communist Period: 1945-89," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 1 (1997) pp. 169-181; Mary Neuburger, "Pomak Borderlands: Muslims on the Edge of Nations," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 2000)

pp. 181-199; Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004; Omer Turan, "Pomaks, Their Past and Present," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1999) pp. 69-83; Maria Todorova, "Identity Transformation Among Bulgarian Muslims." In *The Myth of "Ethnic Conflict"*, Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz, (editors) International and Area Studies Research Series/Number 98 Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> "Tajikistan: WAMY Holds Arabic Training Courses for Teachers." *Global News Wire – Asia Africa Intelligence Wire*, 1 April 2003

<sup>32</sup> Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003

<sup>33</sup> For discussions of Bulgarian skepticism toward Western NGO activity, see: For discussions on NGOs in Bulgaria see: Keith Snaveley and Uday Desai, "The Emergence and Development of Nonprofit Organizations in Bulgaria," *Working Paper Series*, (Washington D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 1998); Krassimira Daskalova "Women's Problems, Women's Discourses in Bulgaria," in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism*, Susan Gal, and Gail Kligman, eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); United Nations Development Program, *National Human Development Report 2001: Citizen Participation in Governance, from Individuals to Citizens*, (Sofia, Bulgaria: UNDP, 2001); Keith Snaveley, "The Welfare State and the Emerging Non-profit Sector in Bulgaria," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 48, no.4, (June 1996) 647-663; Gerald Creed and Janine Wedel "Second Thoughts from the Second World: Interpreting Aid in Post-Communist Eastern Europe" in *Human Organization* (Fall 1997); Barbara A. Cellarius and Caedmon Straddon, "Environmental Nongovernmental Organizations, Civil Society, and Democratization in Bulgaria," *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter 2002) pg. 188). Finally, for a more thorough discussion of women's NGOs in Bulgaria see: Kristen Ghodsee, "Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalisms, Cultural Feminism and Women's Nongovernmental Organizations in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Spring 2004 (Vol. 29, No. 3).