



Reflections of The Organization of The Islamic Conference Meetings During The Bosnia-Herzegovina War to The Turkish Press

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ABSTRACT

The right of self-determination that includes 'the secession' of the federated states which constitute the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) is placed on a legal basis in the prologue part of the SFRY Constitution. In this constitutional context, with the plebiscite held on March 1st 1992, the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina had declared its independence by secession. Upon the worldwide recognition of the independence declaration in April 1992, the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina about establishing full sovereignty on its own territory had turned into a war within short time.

Since the Bosnia-Herzegovina War had been perceived as a religious conflict by international public opinion, the meetings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) were followed from a different point of view by the participating countries' public opinions. Turkey has been in this process since its early beginning due to both its historical and regional connection to the territory. It is important to investigate to what extent the statements of Turkish leaders in the OIC summits that presented by the Turkish printed media to the public opinion, had contributed to the peaceful settlement of the Bosnia and Herzegovina War in an urgent way within the framework of international law.

Keywords: Former Yugoslavia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Organization of the Islamic Conference, Turkish Press, International Politics and Press.

1. Introduction

After worldwide recognition of the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the struggle to establish full sovereignty over all its lands turned into a war within a short time and took the name of Bosnia-Herzegovina War. The Bosnia-Herzegovina War constituted one of the most important items of international political agenda until the official signing of the Dayton Agreement on 14 December 1995. Bosnia-Herzegovina War has coincided with a period in which the changes within the international system were experienced considerably fast, widely and deeply with the end of the Cold War, especially by gaining the acceleration of technological progress on the field of communication. The role of international organizations' which were becoming more active within the new establishing system, has brought international organizations to a more different location in the political leaders' mind in the

context of addressing to both their own countries and public opinion. In Turkey, political leaders kept pace with global change that the international organizations had experienced in the context of activity and seen the international meetings, in which they attended as the traditional part of foreign policy application process, as a kind of opportunity to create public opinion both in their own country and around the world.

Within this drawn respect, it could be thought that the statements that Turkish leaders had made in the meetings held within the international organizations during the Bosnia-Herzegovina War would have been turned into a unified platform where both Turkey's official approach on the issue had been mentioned in the international arena and the statements had been made inside the country for public opinion as well. Actually, Turkey declared its opinion about the issue to the world public opinion in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meetings, the meetings of the Council of Europe and in the international platforms such as international conferences held by the European Community in London for peace talks.

Nevertheless, Turkey's efforts in creating public opinion towards 'the constitutional rights of Bosnia-Herzegovina regarding to the both SFRY Constitution and international law' were blocked by the Serbs. Unavoidably Turkey could not prevent to start evaluating the issue within the frame of 'Muslim-Christian War' in a short time at international platforms. As of the period the efforts of Turkey for the settlement of peace urgently has remained inconclusive on these platforms because of the traditional position of Turkey which is neither political nor historical to talk on behalf of all the Islamic countries (Kut, 1993). By taking into account the different perception of Bosnia-Herzegovina War in the world public opinion, Turkish leaders understood the necessity of establishing a strong co-operation among the Islamic countries about the Bosnia-Herzegovina War. In this regards, Turkey issued a call for an extraordinary meeting to the foreign ministers of member states of the OIC in Istanbul on 17 June 1992.

2. Reflections of the OIC Meetings to the Turkish Press during the Bosnia-Herzegovina War

2.1 Fifth Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers

Thirty nine states as in 'member state' status, 5 states and 2 international organizations representatives including Bosnia-Herzegovina as in 'the guest' status participated in the meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting organized extraordinarily for the fifth time in Istanbul on 17-18 June 1992. The Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin represented the host country Turkey in the meeting (Helvacioglu, 1992).

Suleyman Demirel's speech about the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, statements and his answers that he gave to the journalists about the issue have been presented in the Turkish press as in the following:

We came together to raise our voice in order to help the people who resist the aggressive forces that want to turn back the flow of history and to reinforce their struggle determinations against the oppressors; To activate the world's public opinion is our binding duty; It is a historic time to show that if necessary, the Muslim community could bunch up against the

threatening and the dangers in the most urgent and continuous manner. I am confident in that Islamic Conference will make its voice heard more effectively during the turbulent period we are living now with responsible and pro-justitia manner presented in line with this behavior; You will contribute the full and strong confirmation of the purposes and principles which the Muslim community defends against an armed attack, the occupation of territory by force and driving off the people from their father lands. (Sen, 1992 June 18)

(To the question posed by press members "Is it too late to do something in Bosnia-Herzegovina?") I think it is the high time. The work of this meeting is to create world opinion... There is no military force at the disposal of this meeting. The sanction power in Bosnia-Herzegovina belongs to world's public opinion. There is public opinion to be activated for the implementation of international law. We are trying to provide it here (Sen, 1992 June 18, 10).

(To the question about whether this meeting has enforcement power or not?). Which meeting has the sanction power! These are the events of creating public opinion in the world. The important event is the world's public opinion; The sanction power is in world's public opinion; Today's civilized world is trying to make the world's public opinion become a mean for the implementation of international law" (Helvacioglu, 1992, 10).

Hundreds thousands of Bosnian Muslims who are seeking for remedy against the hardships and the difficulties brought by the war, immigrated to our country in different periods of history. Descendants of those people constitute a bridge of brotherhood between Turkey and the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina today (Yeni Gunaydin, 1992 June 18).

Time will show that whether the sanctions decided by the UN Security Council against the Belgrade authorities can provide the desired results or not (Akay, 1992; Yeni Gunaydin, 1992 June 18).

Re-establishment of peace in the Balkans will not be actualized without putting an end to the Serbian adventurousness and stopping this aggression (Akay, 1992; Helvacioglu, 1992).

For the establishment of peace and justice in Bosnia-Herzegovina, if necessary, in case receiving calls from the UN, Islamic states are ready to give military to a possible military intervention (Akay, 1992; Helvacioglu, 1992; Turan & Ulku, 1992).

Throughout the written statements reflected to the press, the then Prime Minister Demirel focused on the importance of the creation of a public openion at an international scale within the shortest possible time through this meeting held within the OIC. The statements of the then Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin and his answers to the questions at the press conference organized with the OIC Secretary General Hamid al-Gabid had taken place in the Turkish press as in the followings:

The decisions are taken here represent an important support to the United Nations. Turkey will continue following an active policy for peace and stability in the Balkans around. OIC gathered to discuss the status of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina and help them (Ozdemir, 1992, 11).

Hikmet Cetin stated that it was time for the member countries of OIC to take action in order to bring peace, justice, fairness and dialogue for the people who are the target of Serbian Attacks in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Yeni Gunaydin, 1992 June 18).

Cetin stated that if necessary, Turkey would not avoid giving soldier to Peace Force to be established in Bosnia-Herzegovina but he hoped that the dispute would be settled peacefully." (Helvacioglu, 1992; Sen, 1992 June 18, 10)

In the decision asserted before Cetin's press conference, in the event of not stopping the massacres of Serbs, 'use of force' call was done (Ozdemir, 1992).

Ministers of Foreign Affairs achieved a consensus on supporting the use of force and the implementation of an oil embargo on Serbia by OIC countries if the UN decision would not give result. However, Iran and Libya notified that they would not stop oil sales to Serbia". (Turan and Ulku, 1992)

The Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC was ended with the calls to UN for 'taking further measures including military intervention to stop the Serbian attacks against Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sen, 1992 June 19). A short summary of Final Communiqué prepared in the meeting for submission to the UN was published in Sabah (Sen, 1992 June 19). Notwithstanding addressing to various issues experienced by Northern Cyprus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Lebanon and Palestine who are the parties of other international conflicts in the full text, in Turkish press we see that the statement of the meeting results presented to public availability mostly concentrating on Bosnia-Herzegovina related substances.

During the Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC, the highlighted issues in all statements of Cetin and Demirel transferred to the public through the media are "peaceful resolution of the war as much as possible within the framework of international law (Helvacioglu, 1992; Sen, 1992 June 17), and the historic-cultural connections with Bosnia-Herzegovina (Yeni Gunaydin, 1992). The emphasis made on "to take care of constant and immediate cooperation between Islamic countries" can be considered as a reference to Iran and Libya which notify that they will not apply 'oil embargo on Serbia' (Final Communiqué of the Fifth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, 1992, Article 12, paragraph 3, 5) specified in the final declaration of meeting or to Iraq which is described as 'Serbian spy' in some press organs.

Even the meeting has started with the opening speeches towards disengagement of Bosnia-Herzegovina War that caused Foreign Ministers to be met extraordinarily under the rules of international law and peaceful means, it changed into a different atmosphere especially after the reflected views (Akay, 1992) of the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haris Slajdzic in the Turkish press. This change in the atmosphere of the meeting is also reflected to the statements of Demirel and Cetin that take place in the press: Both leaders requested to actualize the military intervention as soon as possible by convincing the UN by Islamic countries.

2.2 Twenty-first Term Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers

Twenty-first Term Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers was held between 25 and 29 April 1993 in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. Fifty-one countries participated in the meeting as in 'member' status; four states and twelve international organizations including the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina participated in 'guest' status.

During the meeting, Turkey was represented by Foreign Minister of then, Hikmet Cetin. The speech that Cetin made about the ongoing war in Bosnia-Herzegovina with increased severity, explanations and answers to journalists' questions on the subject presented in the Turkish press as in the following;

Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin who made the opening speech at the Twenty-first Term Foreign Ministers' meeting stated that the international community could not effectively show in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Azerbaijan crisis, the same common and stable attitude that was shown before for the Gulf crisis (Ayin Tarihi, 1993, 81; Yeni Gunaydin, 1993).

Cetin stated that Bosnia-Herzegovina's requests concerning with 'condemnation of the Serbs, lifting the arms embargo, financial and military assistance of the Islamic countries, more stringent supervision of air force' had been accepted at the Contact Group meeting of the UN-OIC (Hurriyet, 1993; Milliyet, 1993).

Cetin stressed that during the two years Turkey's assumption of the OIC presidency, the OIC made itself heard worldwide by passing beyond the traditional agenda such as the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict at a press conference in Ankara. (Ayin Tarihi, 1993, 86; Anadolu Ajansi, 1993; Cumhuriyet, 1993; Yeni Gunaydin, 1993)

As part of the international community, the OIC should apply more pressure on the Serbs to accept peace plan (Milliyet, 1993).

Members of the press conducted the quotations taken by the opening speech of Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin and his responses to the questions after press meeting to the public daily, as in the followings:

Hikmet Cetin stressed that the meeting has encountered to a period in which dramatic changes in world politics have been experienced in recent years (Cumhuriyet, 1993; Milliyet, 1993).

The draft resolution, "OIC Foreign Ministers 21st Term Meeting, Solution Number: 7/21-P, "The Situation" was accepted by common consent. In the Resolution, by issuing a call for taking all necessary measures including using force by the UN Security Council, wanted to effectively control of all heavy weapons in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the international community (Ayin Tarihi, 1993, 83; Cumhuriyet, 1993).

Hikmet Cetin, who participated in the session that the OIC Foreign Ministers attended and dealt with the financial assistance to support Bosnia and Herzegovina, announced that previously he delivered thirty million dollars to Bosnia and Herzegovina and would deliver another ten million dollars as soon as possible. (Hurriyet, 1993)

Cetin stated that Turkey respected and called for the implementation of the decisions numbered with 816, 819 and 820 of UN Security Council envisaging the supervision of no-fligh zone over Bosnia and he recalled that Turkey had given eighteen F-16 aircrafts for NATO monitoring operations but they also wanted to see the same stable attitude of UN shown in stopping this war in taking under control of Serbian heavy weapons and in the areas of giving an end to Serbian's encircling in Bosnian towns (Milliyet, 1993).

Compared to the 'extraordinary' meeting held in Istanbul in 1992, the statements of Turkish leaders about Bosnia-Herzegovina at the OIC meeting in Karachi had taken place in a much-limited way in Turkish press. The death of President Turgut Ozal, the ongoing presidential election which occupies of the domestic agenda, and having coincided with an intense period in which the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the

disappointment occurred in public opinion because not to be applied of decisions created in the previous extraordinary meeting of the OIC foreign affairs with great expectations are the main reasons behind this situation.

Many common assessments related to the decisions made about the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina at both of the OIC meetings have also placed in Turkish press:

The Arab countries had kept away from being active enough against the massacre of Muslims in Bosnia despite the various decisions taken by the Organization of Islamic Conference. The Arab countries announced on several occasions that they were ready to join any military operation within the framework of UN. However, enough effort has not been shown to implement the decisions. (Nokta, 1993)

The statements of the Assoc. Dr. Sule Kut's interview that carried out a wider vision on the subject are among the reflections placed during the OIC meetings in the Turkish press: "The main reason why I find Turkey's foreign policy successful in new international environment is not to be failed in an environment that the possibility of failing is too high. (Turkey in the Balkans), is following a well-advised policy. What I analyze are not only all Turkish foreign affairs initiatives but also the other countries even the attitudes in UN, OSCE and NATO especially about the Bosnia issue. When I look around what they have done, there is no other country that has brought the Bosnia issue to its agenda as early and frequent as Turkey. Turkey could go to the war if it had been in different mood. It avoided from it by galvanizing human rights commission in international platforms. No other country realized the cultural cleansing in Bosnia as much as Turkey. What happened when Turkey proposed it for the agenda? Nothing, but at least it is a clear policy as a moral and conscientious... Turkey has made two things in there, referring to the OIC meeting, one positive, and one negative. The positive one is that Turkey has prevented the Islamic countries to show themselves very militant Muslim group. Failure of it is to speak Bosnia policy, at the various institutions of UN and the London Conference on behalf of Islamic countries in the first place. (Kut, 1993)

The twenty-first OIC Foreign Ministers Meeting forced the press to make larger-scale evaluations about the liveliness of Turkish foreign affairs and the change signals of traditional foreign-policy vision through the meeting. In this respect, when comparing the statements of the leader who represents Turkey at the OIC meeting in 1993, it found a less space in the press than the previous year; it can be though that a progress can be considered in the nature of assessments in line with the data obtained in the second year of war.

2.3 Reflection of the Seventh OIC Summit to the Turkish Press

The Seventh OIC Summit Meeting was held in Casablanca in December 1994. Four years passing from the beginning of the war, which resulted in disintegration of former Yugoslavia and not preventing massacres despite the many active international organizations such as UN, EC, and NATO, led to a further increase of despair in the international public opinion. The high loss of Bosnian civilian in the war and UN could not prevent the massacre even in Safe Zones such as Bihac, Srebrenica and Mostar where Protection Force soldiers (UNPROFOR) are situated in caused the hopes and expectations of a lower level than the OIC meeting held in 1993. Moreover, the Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Haris Slajdzic interpreted that he did not have any expectation from the OIC before the Summit (Milli Gazete, 1994).

December 14). Statements of President of Turkey Suleyman Demirel was in the direction of the OIC Summit meeting took place at a time when hopes for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina decreased and even came into a dead end (Ayin Tarihi, 1994 December 13). The other opinion, which is as effective as the opinion of the OIC summit would not bring about very big results, is the ineffectiveness of the international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was also reflected in the speech of Minister of State and Deputy Foreign Minister, Yildirim Aktuna who spoke on the behalf of Turkey (Ayin Tarihi, 1994 December 11).

'The idea of the West's leaving Muslims alone and unarmed against murderers' is the most public consensus idea. As to concrete proposal following this idea is to make UN Protection Force brought more active and armed to prevent the massacres (Milli Gazete, 1994 December 6).

It is observed that the printed press sector representing the conservative party has perceived Serbian-Bosnian conflict as Muslim-Christian (Orthodox) conflict and was presented to the public in this way (see Ahmet Selim, Zaman, 1994 December 16). The religious arguments frequently used in the conflicts experienced in Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Cyprus and Libya in the near term was used in the same way in handling the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the conservative press (see Zaman, 1994 December 14; Milli Gazete, 1994 December 17). Bringing the discourses forefront such as 'the Orthodox World' discourse of Bosnian leader of the period, Alija Izetbegovic and 'Union of the Islamic World' discourse of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus President Rauf Denktas appeared as the supporting statements of this assessment many times (Zaman, 1994 December 16). In the same way, "the Islamic world should be aware of its power" statement of Suleyman Demirel was delivered to the public by the conservative press (Zaman, 1994 December 15). In addition, written press news published in Muslim countries on the subject has been used to support these statements. For example the news of Tehran Times about "the dud of OSCE now been proved again and Muslims should have to rush to help the Muslims" was transferred by Milli Gazete (Milli Gazete, 1994, December 10). The news of Abrar Independent Newspaper, "Bosnia-Herzegovina has turned into the power struggle field between the United States, Russia and Europe" and "OSCE left Bosnia-Herzegovina alone" are in the other titles transferred by media (Milli Gazete, 1994 December 10). On the other hand, while giving place to requests assistance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina in conservative newspapers, the support given to Bosnia-Herzegovina Issue was addressed to the aids should directly be given only to the Muslim people not with the hands of Red Crescent- Red Cross to the Orthodox and Catholic Bosnians (Milli Gazete, 1994, December 9; Milli Gazete, 1994 December 5). The point that the conservative press criticized much is the reaction to the question marks created in the minds of those who want to help by giving more place to scandals occurred in aid campaigns than the other parts of Turkish press (Milli Gazete, 1994 February 2). Especially considering U.S. intervention being associated with oil in many media organs, disclosure is in full "desired" importance (Milli Gazete, 1994 December 6).

The disclosures of the Presidents and Heads of State of the OIC member states, among them President Suleyman Demirel, that they could send soldiers to Bosnia and Herzegovina are the issue to busy the agenda again (Gun, 1994 December 15, 1994 December 17; Yeni Gunaydin, 1994 December 15; Yeni Bati Trakya, Year 10, Issue 100-111, Hurriyet, 1994 December 14). During the meeting, the bilateral talks between the leaders are also in the lines

(see Gun, 1994 December 15). Another issue taken care of attention is the criticism of the implementation of 'embargo' decision (UN Security Council: Resolution 755, 1992) in Bosnia-Herzegovina which has the property to prevent the right to defend of the state of being a member of the UN (Aksam, 1994 December 14) and secretly enabling the UN embargo applied to Bosnia-Herzegovina by the OIC member states in accordance with the Declaration of the OIC summit (Aksam, 1994 December 14).

Cumhuriyet newspaper explained that some negative effects in the domestic politics before the upcoming OIC Summit has weakened Turkey's hand in foreign policy. Especially the resign of Foreign Minister Mumtaz Soysal because of domestic political reasons and Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister Murat Karayalcin's assumption of mission of Ministry of Foreign Affairs vicariously revealed the problems that may arise about the political stability in Turkey in the near future (Cumhuriyet, 1994 December 1). If we consider that Turkey is not represented by deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs but by the State Minister Yildirim Aktuna at the OIC summit, there can be justified in the comments of Cumhuriyet Newspaper (Orhan Birgit, 1994 December 11).

Among the issues thrust to the forefront by the Turkish press at the OIC summit has given more space to disclosures about the other states which has near historical and cultural ties such as Cyprus, Azerbaijan and Chechnya compared to previous years in addition to Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Cumhuriyet 1994 December 13, 1994 December 15; Halka ve Olaylara Tercuman 1994 December 12, 1994 December 13).

The pessimism at the OIC Summit Meeting is also reflected to the public by Turkish press: Kyrgyzstan under the influence of Russia tried to influence the decision of the OIC about Azerbaijan at the summit (Hurriyet. 1994 December 14). upon Moroccan authorities trying to reject the Western Thrace Turkish Delegation, having only provisional monitoring card with the pressure of Turkey (Halka Tercuman 1994 December 14). And as an example for keeping in the forefront of national interests for the determination of foreign policy, Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev's seeing the struggle of Chechnya for independence whose their cultural historical ties are very tight. As an internal matter of Russia (Sabah, 1994 December 13) also took place in the media thus attention attracted on the disappointment emerged in the public attention about 'creating the spirit of cooperation that the Islamic world needed' issue constantly referred to at the OIC meetings.

3. Conclusion

Starting from 1992 until the 1995 Dayton Agreement, Bosnia-Herzegovina War was constantly seen as one of the main agenda items at the meetings of the OIC. However, the OIC could not show the spirit of cooperation that was demonstrated the Gulf War ended before the starting of Bosnia-Herzegovina War in a peaceful and effective ways. The OIC, which was called for an extraordinary meeting with great expectations of the public in 1992, gradually moved away from broad interest of Turkish media in 1993 and 1994. Ultimately it managed to attract interest of media finitely with conflicts other than Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition, the OIC does not have the sanction power due to its nature and the goal of Turkish leaders to "create world's public opinion for the sanctions" was not accomplished

through the media. Among the reasons for the OIC members having difficulties in creating a common policy on Bosnia-Herzegovina, the followings differences can be counted; after the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries with a majority Muslim population are currently in the process of nationalization, countries in the Middle East particularly including Palestine and "Israel" have focused on regional conflicts, countries that have influence in the OIC such as Iran and Libya are giving priority to commercial interests. The internal instability observed in almost all member countries has limited the effectiveness of the OIC on Bosnia-Herzegovina War by deepening these differences. If we leave aside the moral aspect and the limited financial support of meetings carried out within the OIC, they did not proceed further except invalidating the UN embargo in favor of the Bosnians.

All these experienced problems decreased the level of interest of media as well as Turkish Leader's one, except for the conservative press evaluating the war through religious arguments; were the issue was left its location to the discussions about the financial aid campaigns.

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