

## The Fight for Balkan Latinity (II). The Aromanians after World War

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**Abstract** *The article focuses on the Vlach question after the first World War, when the Balkan region was finally divided among the different national States and the Ottoman Empire collapsed. In this period the Aromanian communities had to find a new policy inside a new scenario and addressed towards different options represented by Albania, Italy and Romania. In a first time Vlachs also tried to create an autonomous principality of Pindus but this experience was short-lived and did not produce tangible results. On the contrary, during the interwar period the Vlachs consolidated their privileged relationship with Romania and established an influent group at Bucharest, where they participated to the internal political life even supporting the most radical movements such as Corneliu's Codreanu Iron Guard.*

**Keywords:** *Aromanian, Vlach, Balkan, Albania, Romania.*

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### 1. Introduction. The Vlachs and the First World War.

The history of the Vlachs in the Balkan regions was undoubtedly conditioned by the unstable and chaotic situation of the region, which during the troublesome period of the "Eastern Question" became a central area for the system of international relationships. The problems were particularly acute in the regions of Pindus, Epirus and Macedonia, and were naturally exacerbated by the constant atmosphere of war that the people of this area breathed for many years, at the end of XIX century and during the first decades of the XX.

The dispute between Romania and Greece, which led to a real break in their diplomatic relations in 1905, was soon aggravated by the outbreak of the Balkan wars, in which the Vlachs tried to secure their position approaching the newborn Albanian state. But the end of the Balkan wars, in 1913, was soon followed by the start of a new period of conflict and by the continuation of the struggle which in the past had directed the Vlachs against the assimilation policies of Greece.

If in the past, the intervention of Romania has been useful to strengthen the cultural rights of the Aromanian people, in this phase of war the need of a foreign help further increased and became an essential condition in order to safeguard the political interests of a scattered minority, who had no kin States to rely on in the proximity. The war meant for these regions a continuous turmoil with the arrival of several armies and the birth of many short-lived and semi-autonomous States. In 1914, in the aftermath of Balkan wars, an Autonomous Republic of Epirus was formed around Gjirokastër.<sup>1</sup>

Even if the two provinces of Korytsa and Argyrokastro were inhabited by a melting pot of creeds and populations, during the Epirus autonomy, the Greek administration viewed all Albanian Aromanians as part of the Greek minority without taking into account their different nationality. The region later fell under the control of the Bulgarians, who tried to join Austrian allies, before being stopped by French intervention. When the city of Koritza came under French control, an Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë was established with a council made up of seven Christians and seven Muslims

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<sup>1</sup> From the Albanian perspective, adopted also by Italian and Austrian sources of that time, the Northern Epirote movement was directly supported by the Greek state with the help of a minority of inhabitants in the region, resulting in chaos and political instability in all Albania. In Albanian historiography, the Protocol of Corfu was either scarcely mentioned, or its interpretation grounded on different positions: it is seen as an attempt to divide the Albanian state and as a proof of the Great Powers' disregard for Albania's national integrity. With the ratification of the Protocol of Corfu the term "Northern Epirus", which was the common name acquired official status. However, after 1921, when the region was finally ceded to Albania, these terms were considered to be associated with Greek irredentism action and did not acquire any legal status by the Albanian authorities. On the other hand, anyone that made use of them was persecuted. The autonomy question remained on the diplomatic agenda in Albanian-Greek relationships as part of the Northern Epirote issue. In the 1960s, the Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev asked his Albanian counterpart about giving autonomy to the Greek minority, but this initiative was without any results. In 1991, after the collapse of the communist regime in Albania, the chairman of the Greek minority's organization Omonoia called for autonomy for Northern Epirus on the basis that the rights provided for under the Albanian constitution were highly precarious.

and with Themistokli Gërmenji as prefect of police.

Italy reacted against this French policy aimed at influencing Albanian affairs and, counting on the presence of Italian armies were also present in many parts of Albania, proclaimed Albanian independence and tried to counter-balance French dominion.

In 1917, when Italian troops advanced into Albania they were welcomed in all Aromanian villages, for example in Ciamuria and Samarina. A National council for Pindus was created and a "Principate of Pindos" in the area of Aromanian settlement was created with the help of some local representative as Alkiviadis Diamantis.

In this particular context, Italian military forces felt the need to improve the ethnic and political conditions of the Aromanians, and sketched some documents on their history and traditions.

Their villages could be distinguished for the solidity and a certain elegance and were often placed in positions of military interest, next to the mountains and road junctions.<sup>2</sup> The Aromanians were described as calm, wealthy, occupied in trade or sheep-breeding, resistant to any persecution or massacre, even though the denaturalization policies pursued by the Greeks "*con ogni arte e con ogni mezzo*".<sup>3</sup>

The Aromanian presence was particularly evident in two districts, Grammos – especially in the city and around Koritza - and Pindus, where 36 villages clearly had a Vlach character. Even if they were not as populous as the old Moscopole, these settlements maintained their ethnic identity. The language, instead, was in some case abandoned, also as a consequence of the Greek propaganda, pressures and abuses. Aromanians even arrived at creating national armed bands against those sent by Greeks to terrorize the region and this resistance was considered almost incredible by Italians, due to the peaceful and calm traditions of the Vlachs. It was also noted that many Vlachs enlisted in the Romanian army staying in Moldova asked to be sent back to the Balkans to fight for the security of their lands.

Italians were sure that all Aromanians believed their origin was different from the one of the surrounding populations. Moreover, a particular feature to take into consideration was the particular economic situation of those shepherds who periodically migrate and had thus become matter of study because they kept high the economy of sheep-grazing, dairy, weaving and tanning - "*la principale industria valacca della pastorizia e quelle altre che ne derivano (caseificio, tessitura, conciatura etc.)*" - . Trying to conquer the sympathies of those communities, the Italians thought that the strategy to follow was that of sponsoring the birth and increase of local authorities in order to prepare for the peace negotiations a fertile ground for the establishments of cantons or political and administrative autonomy. These hopes were alimentated also by the demands of Aromanian communities, who after the years of the Greek-Romanian dispute and the troubles of war searched in Italy a stronger protector.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1917 a first phonogram was addressed to colonel Delli Ponti, who was called brave Duce (Duce valoroso), and his new legions, while on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1917 the Italian commander in Valona, General Giacinto Ferrero, received a telegram coming from the mayors (sindaci) of many Aromanian villages who met in Metzovo, representing the Pindus-Zagori people.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the enthusiastic recalling of ancient Roman roots, in this appeal the Aromanians underlined the security given to them by the Italian troops; their leaving would mean falling easily prey of the enemies who looked forward to the extermination of Aromanians. The latter invoked Italy and her powerful and careful protection, the only means of defence against the superiority of the enemies, "*il numero soverchiante di avversari*". Finally, the signatories self-appointed

2 After remembering some of the denominations under which they are known, the documents describe the Aromanians in this way: "Colonie di questi aromani se ne trovano un poco dappertutto nei territori già ottomani ed i loro villaggi, che si distinguono per la solidità ed una certa eleganza delle costruzioni, per la cortesia degli abitanti quieti, benestanti, occupati nei traffici o nella pastorizia, e per le istituzioni civili...". Colonel Fortunato Castoldi, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917. The number of Aromanians in 1916 was indicated by an Italian Atlas as more or less 600.000 divided among Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania and Greece. L'Europa etno-linguistica. Atlante descrittivo in tre carte speciali colorite con testo dimostrativo, Novara, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1916. For a comprehensive study of Vlach history, see I. Nicolau, Les caméléons des Balkans. Civilisations En Quete d'identité XLII/2 (Université Libre de Bruxelles), 1993; G.Zbucea, Români de la sud de dunăre.documente, Editura Arhivele Naționale ale României București 1997 (up to 1810); Tom Winniffrith, The Vlachs of the Balkans: A Rural Minority Which Never Achieved Ethnic Identity. In D. Howell (ed.) Roots of Rural Ethnic Mobilisation: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe 1850-1940. Vol. 7, New York, Dartmouth 1992; T. Kahl, The Ethnicity of Aromanians after 1990: the Identity of a Minority that Behaves like a Majority, in "Ethnologia Balkanica", 6 (2002), 145-169; The most important bibliographical source, anyway, remains Payfuss'work. M.Payfuss, Chestiunea Aroânească, Ed Enciclopedică, București 1994.

3 Note circa la questione valacca, report issued by colonel Castoldi (May 29, 1917). Aussme, E8, 74, 6.

4 "Figli non degeneri di Roma sempre memori della madre nostra antica e tenaci custodi della lingua e delle tradizioni dei nostri padri dopo lunghi secoli di lotta sanguinosa contro la straniero che tentava tutti i modi di cancellare nostro carattere nazionale latino respiriamo finalmente le pure aure della libertà che le nuove legioni di roma vittoriose agli ordini vostri hanno apportato ai loro fratelli di sangue dispersi lontani sul Pindo e Zagori". These documents are kept in the Historical Archive of the Italian Army,s General Staff (Aussme, Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Roma), Catalogue E8, box 74, dossier 10.

themselves the sons of Rome, who throughout millenary events had kept intact and preserved the remembrance of the Roman civilization in the valleys and the mountains of Pindus.<sup>5</sup>

The same declarations were included in the communication sent the same day to the president of the United States, to the -president of the Provisional Russian Government, to the Belgian Foreign Affairs minister, to the French, English and Russian consuls in Yanina, to General Ricciotti Garibaldi in Rome and to the mayor of Rome, who was informed in Latin:

*“Saeculis compluribus non mutata Romana gens Pindi et Zagoriae castra patribus custodienda per Traianum tradita distinctus libertati et cultui defendes hostibus immitibus strenue adversata demum votis expletis alma amplexatur matrem urbem divinam Romam invictam aeternam...”*<sup>6</sup>

The restoration of order and peace under Italian military rule, anyway, was soon followed by the arrival of Greek troops at the beginning of September, and meant for the “revolutionary” Aromanians a whole of arrests and repression.<sup>7</sup>

When the war ended and the peace conference started its works at Versailles, the Vlachs tried to present their pleas in order to improve their situation and finally obtained the formal engagement of the Greek government. The latter accepted the provision regarding Vlach autonomy inside the minority treaty signed at Sévres in 1920, only after the pressures of Romanian and international diplomacy. As a matter of fact, during the peace talks, the Vlachs pressured Rome and Bucharest in order to make them represent their interests at the conference of Versailles. In 1918 a memorandum of the Vlach people was addressed to the Foreign Affairs minister Sydney Sonnino by the *Comité de l'action nationale du peuple valaque* together with a *Codicille confidentiel*.<sup>8</sup> Another one was sent to the conference in Paris through the volume *Les Macedo-Roumains (Koutzo-Valaques) devant le Congrès de la Paix* redacted by the National Council of the Pindus Roumanians and signed by G. Munru, Nicolae Tacit, Arghir Culina, T. Papahagi. This document asked for a full scholastic and ecclesial autonomy and a for a political reform in order to develop Vlach ethnic identity.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the historical connection, the Aromanians recalled their will of joining Roman Catholic Siege repairing “*le plus grave erreur historique*” and reestablishing the relationships that Kalojan Asan had with the Pope, which proved the never-ending Latin character of the Vlach people, “*son orientation spirituelle découlant naturellement et logiquement de sa latinité*”.<sup>10</sup> The memorandum also asked the Pope for the envoy of a Bishop in Macedonia in order to find a compromise and to combine the adhesion to the Roman Church with the respect of the Eastern religious rites exercised by the Vlachs used to exercise - “*l'exercice de leur culte conformément aux règles prescrites par l'Eglise Orientale*” -.

Italy was the natural benchmark of the Vlachs and her prestige deriving from the victory of the war increased her power and attraction towards the Vlachs, who kept on invoking Italian protection for the safeguard of their Latin culture.

At Delvino, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1919, a special Assembly was convened. The meeting defined a precise political project: the autonomy of Pindus and Zagori united with Albania and under the protection of Italy and pointed out a strategy to avoid any other undesired solution.

<sup>5</sup> “Siamo figli di Roma sotto le ali dell'alma madre affronteremo fiduciosi l'avvenire pieno per noi di speranza, di prosperità e di progresso fra le genti latine”. Telegram n.118 sent from Samarina on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1917 to general Ferrero, Commander of the XVI Corpo Armata. It was signed by the mayors of Samarina, Abela, Perivoli, Amingui, Paliوسي, Papes, Turia, Bicaso, Laca, Dobrinovo, Armata Vraca (J.Dabura, Arociani, Teguaiiani, Nolla, Mike, Zissachi, Paponi, Scufi, Pispas, Safarico, Caragiorgio) and the respective delegates. Aussme, E8, 74, 10.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Datas communicated by the Vlachs, they were 70.108 in the Vilayet of Janina, 161.699 in Salonique, 29.506 in Skutari, 25.109 in Cossova (Kosovo), 148.699 in Monastir, and 81.620 in Thesalia.

<sup>7</sup> FILE PINDU 1917 as stated by the documents sent of the Romanian consulate in Janina (September 9 and 12)

<sup>8</sup> A copy of this document is kept in the Archive of the Italian Army in Rome. It is dated 13 September 1918, Aussme E8, 74, 11. The signature on it, at least that of the president is not readable. The secretary a certain Zega while the cashier was George Celea.

<sup>9</sup> “La pleine autonomie scolaire et ecclésiastique, et un régime politique compatible avec un libre développement de leur individualité ethnique, sous la surveillance de la Société des Nations, la Roumanie étant autorisée à subventionner leur institutions culturelles et à intervenir au cas où les droits concédés ne seraient pas respectés. Ces revendications modestes et légitimes, tendent à obtenir: 1. Le libre développement ethnique de l'élément latin que représentent les Macédo-roumains dans la péninsule balkanique. 2. La disparition de tous foyers de discorde politique ou de guerre de nationalités dans la péninsule. 3. La création et le développement d'une oeuvre de civilisation en Orient. La région du Pinde présente, sous les rapports: historiques, ethnographique, économiques, stratégiques et politiques, toutes les conditions nécessaires à une existence indépendante durable. Les Macédo-roumains ont la ferme conviction que le Congrès de la Paix, réuni pour réparer toutes les injustices et assurer l'existence libre la solidarité et la fraternité des nations leur rendra la justice qui leur est due, car: “La chose juste est la seule chose permanente dans le monde, et une solution vicieuse n'est qu'une solution temporaire” (Wilson).

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum of the Vlach people was addressed to the Foreign Affairs minister Sydney Sonnino by the Comité de l'action nationale du peuple valaque, p. 5. Aussme, E8, 74, 11.

*“Ad evitare che i nemici, approfittando della nostra assenza e disorganizzazione all'estero, riescano, con intrighi e menzogne, ad indurre in errore gli uomini di Stato delle Grandi Potenze che, tra breve, alla Conferenza della Pace decideranno delle sorti di ogni popolo; sia eletta una delegazione, di compatrioti la quale venga inviata in Europa per esprimere, a chi di ragione, l'incrollabile volontà e la ferma decisione delle popolazioni romene del Pindo di non indietreggiare dinanzi ad alcun sacrificio per realizzare il loro sacro ideale nazionale; cioè: L'autonomia della regione del Pindo e Zagori unita politicamente all'Albania e sotto la protezione dell'Italia, sola via di salvezza...”*

Another memorandum was sent to the Peace conference by the Macedo-Roumanian Cultural Society of Bucharest which asked the incorporation in the State of Albania, the only one where the Romanism could freely develop as the others, Serbia (with six Aromenian groups), Greece, (with Meglene, Veria, Pindus and Thesalia) and Bulgaria (with smaller communities) were all considered enemies of the Romanian national identity.

During the peace talks, Romania pressed Italy to assume the role of defending the interests of Balkan Vlachs because, as stated by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Romanian priorities were to be put in the question of the borders. The target was the establishment of a Balkan policy which could represent a *“trait d'union”* between Italy and Romania, who had to sustain and turn into their favour the presence of a million of Vlachs.<sup>11</sup>

These political requests, anyway, were part of a precise strategy Bucharest pursued to obtain the great territorial extension necessary to create a Great Romania. Aromenians continued to feel Romania as their mother-country and during the interwar period benefited from special policies that let them settle in Romania, especially in Dobruja, where they finally became integral part of the Romanian nation.

## 2. The New Sons of the Romanian Nation

The Vlach communities of the Balkans sent to the peace conference their documents and their requests but, as a little minority who was living far from their mother-country, they did not have great chances of success.

The above mentioned acts were to be put into a more complex context, which opposed Albania and Greece for the possession of Epirus and Pindus regions. As a consequence of it, the presence of the Italian army was seen as an obstacle by the Greeks, who wished to occupy the region and demanded it at the negotiations in Versailles. As a consequence, Albanians and Aromenians, who were generally pro-Albania, considered the Italians as protectors against Greece, in a particular moment when Albania needed a defense to establish and consolidate the independence of the State.

The strong solidarity existing between the Vlach and Albanian populations of Pindus and Macedonia were noticed also by the American commission who visited those zones in spring 1919.<sup>12</sup>

On the contrary, Greek authorities forced the people under their occupation to attend Greek schools and immediately started an active propaganda against Albania and Italy.<sup>13</sup> The attacks against Italy were common in Greek newspapers, which denounced the “Bulgarism” of the Italian Command also because of the contrasting interests of Athens and Rome in Asia minor.<sup>14</sup>

The Greek occupation led to the return of various leaders of different bands (Bolas, Endoas, Karajorghji, Muzervas, Kiriaco) who started a new season of brigantage and persecutions against the Muslims and the Aromenians of Pindus, whose attitude with the Italian troops considered too friendly. Many requests of help were issued to the Italians, informing them about the plans of the Greeks, who put into practice the most discriminatory measures to cut off all the resistance

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Expert Castoldi, Paris, May 24 1919; Report of the Colonel Vicenzi to the Foreign Affairs ministry, Rome, June 18 1919. An introductory travel to start this policy was planned by general Iliescu, who had as fist aid, the Aromenian officer tennant Papahagi from Avdela. I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. Sesta Serie, Vol. III, Doc. 599, p. 615; doc. 838, p. 842.

<sup>12</sup> “Comisiunea americana a parasit acele localitati declarand ca convingerea lor este ca sa se intemeeze un stat etnic albaniano-roman, de oare ce intreaga populatiune a acelor tinuturi nu are nicipior de grec sau de sarb”. Document 36/1. Directiunea Politiei și Sigurantei Generale. Brigada Informatiuni. Note of May 17, 1919.

<sup>13</sup> American Albanians complained that they knew that under French occupation Albanian flags were downed while Greek propaganda started and Greek schools were opened. Note sent from the sub-secretary for the Foreign Affairs Borsarelli to London ambassador Imperiali, Rome, November 18, 1918. I documenti diplomatici italiani, sesta serie 1918-1922, vol. I, Roma 1955 p.108 doc.211.

<sup>14</sup> The attacks against Italy were due to the facts in Epirus, where Italians would have blocked and isolated the region acting in a “Bulgarian way”. Denouncing The effect of these denunciations was to excite public opinion excite public against against Italy. Note from the minister in Athens Avezzana to Foreign minister Sonnino, Athens November 15, 1918. I Documenti diplomatici italiani, sesta serie 1918-1922, vol. I, Roma 1955, p.89, doc. 173.

for the control of the regions.<sup>15</sup>

The National Committee of Pindus, for instance, in April 1919 sent a petition to Paris and asked for a "*solution équitable de la question*", denouncing the continuation of "persecutions by the Greek authorities. The delegate Aulimă critically reported the example of the arrests in Hrupista, where the priest, the director of the school and the president of the Vlach community were beaten and imprisoned, "*mailtrités et jetés en prison par les gendarmes grecs*".<sup>16</sup>

The situation was very troublesome, as the complaints of Vlachs and Albanians were accompanied by analogous acts of the Greeks, who claimed the autonomy of Northern Epirus under Albanian sovereignty. A memorandum issued by the Pan-Epirotic union in America, (August 1, 1921), denounced the regulations of the minister of interior to punish Greek propaganda and the discriminations committed by Albanians "to force the Greeks to participate in the Albanian elections, the expulsion of the Greek clergy, the confiscation of Greek schools and churches, and the introduction in Albania of laws which were in operation only under Abdul-Hamid in Turkey". Local inter-ethnic conflicts, moreover, were accompanied by an instable international situation, in which the interests of Italy, Greece, Albania and, indirectly, also Romania, converged and clashed.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of the war Italy tried to turn her occupation into a sort of protectorate over Albania, but the events led the Italian armies outside the country, isolating the only troops left in the port of Valona. The Italian adventure in Albania soon finished as a widespread rebellion made Italians reconsider their aspirations over the Reign of Albania. After the Venizelos-Tittoni agreement and the start of Greek-Turkish war, in 1921 Epirus was ceded to Albania, which issued her declaration for the protection of minority rights, without referring to any group in particular but adopting the general stipulations already contained in the previous minority treaties.

Also Greece had to accept some provisions regarding her minorities and a special article regarding Vlach autonomy was inserted into the special minority treaty signed at Sevres in 1920: this provision was targeted at solving a controversy that opposed Romania and Greece since the previous century.

A different question was that of Vlachs living under the rule of Karadjordjevic, which costed Romania many diplomatic efforts. The presence of Romanians in many regions of the South Slav Kingdom gave Bucharest the opportunity to use it as a means of pressure over Belgrade, in order to obtain a generous draft of the frontiers. After the signature of the treaties, anyway, the question remained open and the Romanians of Banat and Timok valley remained hidden by the political alliance of the two countries. Bucharest could only make some little moves and did not use the minority card as a means of pressure against a member of the Little Entente. The interest for the conditions of the Latin-speaking population of the Balkans were left unvaried and was still discussed by the nationalist and cultural circles: according to the works and data published in 1918 and 1919 which numbered about 300.000 Romanians in the country of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes<sup>18</sup>.

The Romanians of Northern Yugoslavia and those of Macedonia joined their efforts and in 1921 issued a common memorandum to manifest the desperate conditions in which they lived under the torture of the Serb dominion. This document accused the Serbs to throw the priests out of the churches, to close their schools, to subject them to the violence of the bands who sacked, burnt and killed. Whole villages were destroyed with fire while the prominent figures of the communities were imprisoned or massacred, as happened with the lawyer Garbovean at Versez (Banat) and with the old Nikola Ibronka, impaled and burnt.<sup>19</sup>

Vlach cultural and political life was jeopardized by the nationalist policies of the different states, and it seemed that it could be safeguarded only by the Albanian government. The only option left for the Vlachs of Greece and Yugoslavia, on the contrary, was the migration to Romania, which in the past had consolidated her role of cultural benchmark for the Aromanian students and her economic connections with the Vlach communities of the Balkans.

The situation of the Aromanians was very complicated: many of them continued their existence in the Balkans, melted with the other people and then dispersed through the States of the region. Some others were assimilated and, for

<sup>15</sup> I documenti diplomatici italiani, sesta serie 1918-1922, vol. I, Roma 1955, p.246, doc.456; p.331 doc. 605; p.336 doc.614. These documents, as the note sent from the general consul in Janina, Nuvolari, to foreign minister Sonnino (Janina, December 5, 1918), described the situation of Pindus and Epirus at the end of 1918 and reported the tranquillity of Muslims and Pindus Romanians; the decision to intensify brigantage of the meeting of Koritza's metropolit, colonel Dudi and others such the tenent Papageorgio, who was notorious for the massacres of Premeti; the wishes of the population for an union with Albania, the fear for the retirement of the Italians, which it would imply the arrival of Greeks and their bands.

<sup>16</sup> The note sent to colonel Castoldi, Paris, April 8, 1919, talked about a "vittoria piena e grande della latinità fra noi". Aussme, E8,74, 2

<sup>17</sup> Letter presented by Rev. Theophanis Nolis, memorandum of the Pan-Epirotic union in America. Historical archive of the League of Nations, section 11, box 585 dossier 9506.

<sup>18</sup> About the conditions of Vlachs in Banat and in Yugoslavia, see Bocu, Le question du Banat – roumains et serbes, Paris 1919; Valsan, Les Roumains de Bulgarie et Serbie, Paris 1918. Draghicescu, Les Roumains de Serbie, Paris 1919.

<sup>19</sup> A.Tamaro, La lotta delle razze nell'Europa danubiana, Roma 1923, p. 224.



example, some remained loyal to the national Greek community (*Ethniki 'elliniki koinonia*), others who had converted to Islam were even wrongly inserted in Lausanne exchange of population and went to Turkey, while the majority maintained their coexistence with the other cultures and in some cases adopted them.<sup>20</sup>

On her side, Roumania continued her traditional policy in favour of her Balkan compatriots recalling from those regions many Aromenians and retaking the colonization projects of 1914. After that in 1919 the government acted in favour of the Aromenians even commissioning to the historian Nicolae Iorga the publication of a little book - *Historie des Roumains de la Péninsule des Balcans (Albanie, Macédonie, épire, Thessalie etc.)* - in the Twenties Bucharest developed a precise policy of solidarity towards the Balkan Vlachs.

The attention for the Romanians in the Balkans was kept alive by some activists and some reviews, which reminded the short independence reached in 1917, during the period of Italian occupation and supported the development of the Vlach national identity and the relationships with Bucharest. In 1924, at Bucharest, the society of Macedo-Romanian culture celebrated the seventh anniversary from the independence of 1917, with a solemn reception and a holy function at the church of Antim. During the same years, many journals like "Graiul românesc", "Peninsula Balcanică", "Revista aromânească" and "Macedonia" dedicated many articles to the Vlach question, appealing to Romanian brotherhood, reporting the impressions of a Czech supporter and of one of the funders of the autonomous Pindus in 1917, Guli Papageorge Samarineanu.<sup>21</sup> The latter described the days of 1917 and the brutal change of the situation after the retreat of Italian troops: then Greek bands soon came and the Romanian patriot was obliged to flee to Argicastro and continue there his struggle against the Greeks, searching the support of Italian authorities. The same pattern was followed by many other activists who fled Pindus and through Albania and Italy continued their journey to Romania.<sup>22</sup>

This flow contributed to press the Romanian authorities towards the definition of an active policy in the Vlach question. The parliament discussed the issue several times between 1921 and 1923, realizing that the conditions of the Aromenians were getting worse as the traditional hostility of Greek authorities continued to constitute an obstacle for the development of their normal cultural life. Aromenians protested against the Greek policies that prevented from them from attending to attend their own schools and against the strict measures adopted against their transfer to Romania.<sup>23</sup> After 1923, another question was raised as the Greeks expelled from Asia minor were placed in the same regions where Aromenian communities were settled, with the clear intention of altering the ethnic balance of those zones. As a consequence, the expropriation was added to the traditional list of discriminations and persecutions enacted by the Greek authorities and Vlachs found another reason to leave the Balkans and settle in Romania. These troubles contributed to renew the policy of colonization in Dobruja, which had already started with the law of the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1914. The colonization of Dobruja was aimed at killing two birds with one stone as it strengthened the Romanian solidarity and the protective role of Romania for the Vlachs and, at the same time, it was useful to enhance the Romanian character of a Bulgarian region as Dobruja. With the law of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1924, Romania decided to give State lands for colonization and created a special office encharged with the implementation of this policy - *Onac, Oficiul Național al colonizării* - and a Central Bank for Colonization (*Casa Centrala de Colonizare*).

Romanian government kept on managing carefully the Romanian schools of the Balkans, attracting to Romania many scholars and activists. But together with the sponsorship of the schools, Bucharest also started a special policy of colonization, which was aimed at settling Romanian-speaking colonists in Dobrudja, especially in Tulcea and

<sup>20</sup> V.A. Friedman, The Vlach Minority in Macedonia: Language, Identity, Dialectology, and Standardization, in "Slavic, Balkan, and Balkan Studies", ed. by Juhani Nuoloto, Martti Leivo, Jussi Halla-aho, (Slavica Helsingiensia 21). Helsinki: University of Helsinki. 2001. 26-50.

<sup>21</sup> I. Ursu, Frații din Balcani, în „Peninsula Balcanică”, I, nr. 2, 6 iunie 1923, pp. 3-4. St. Brezeanu, Gh. Zbucea (coord.), J. Müller, România mică aromânească. Un ceh către aromâni cu prilejul unei aniversări, în „Graiul românesc”, I, nr. 8, august 1927; Românii de la sud de Dunăre. Documente (Arhivele Naționale ale României), f.e., București, 1997,

<sup>22</sup> Convorbire cu d. Guli Papageorge Samarineanu, unul din promotorii proclamării independenței Pindului, în „Peninsula Balcanică”, V, nr. 7-8, noiembrie-decembrie 1927, pp. 115-117. The same days were reminded also in another articles, where Italian occupation was regarded with joy and N.Z.Drulla, Italia și macedo-românii, în „Peninsula Balcanică”, VI, nr. 2-4, februarie-aprilie 1928, pp. 53-54.

<sup>23</sup> Presedinția Adunării Deputaților. No. 4326 din 14 Iulie 1921. 1) Deputat I. Buzdugan în sedința din 11 Iulie 1921: "cred ca ma fac ecoul tuturor romanilor cind interpelez pe Domnul Ministru de Externe, care e situatia romanilor macedoneni, aceasta ramura oropsita a neamului nostru, rugindu-l sa intervina totodata pe linga guvernul grec ca sa respecte pe supu-ii romani, caci acolo unde se afla un supus al Romaniei. este un colti-or din Romania". Presedinția Adunării Deputaților No. 2642 din 24 Mai 1923. 1) Deputat Gh. Popp: "De un an de zile, frații no-țri din Macedonia greceasca, aromanii Pindului ~i ai altor regiuni din regatul Elen, traiesc zile tot mai grele. Din ziua dezastrului din Asia Mica, sute de mii de refugiatii din tinutul Smirnei au invadat regiunile aromane din Epir ~i Macedonia, ingustand baza de existenta, pamantul ~i pa-unile fratilor no-țri din Grecia. Guvernul grec a hotarit, ca cu ocazia impropietarilor ce se fac in aceste regiuni, vechii locuitori aromani, cetateni stravechi"; Dosar 20/1923; Direcțiunea Poliției și Sigurantei Generale. Brigada IV. Nota din 9 Octombrie 1923. 1) Indignarea și ura Macedo-Romanilor contra Grecilor ia proportii din zi in zi (si aceasta in urma unor stiri pe care le-au primit din Macedonia-Greaca).

Constanța, where they were called to increase the Romanian element against the Bulgarian minorities.

The effects of this policy were immediate. In January 1925 a delegation of 4 Vlachs from Greek Macedonia was introduced to the Foreign Affairs minister who was asked for an intervention in the question, which was very urgent, due to the expropriation of the lands in favour of the Greek refugees coming from Asia.<sup>24</sup>

Between October 1925 and April 1926 3 ships took almost 1500 families to Romania while, after 1927, the arrivals continued but the involvement of the authorities decreased: as a matter of fact, the signature of a declaration was asked to migrants who accepted to be treated not as State colonists.<sup>25</sup> Between 1930 and 1933 the flows continued but they were stopped with the last 450 families arrived in Constanța in 1933. The policy of colonization was affected by different administrative problems, for example those connected with the status and citizenship of the colonists. But the main obstacle to the prosecution of those measures was represented by the lack of the necessary funds, which constituted a great problem for the interwar governments of Romania, especially after the crisis of 1929.

Moreover, the settlement of Aromenian families in Dobruja gave birth to violent conflicts with the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian revolutionary movement created in Sofia established some branches in Rusciuk, Varna and Durostor, where terrorist actions were organized against Romanian authorities and civilians. Many victims were assaulted near the woods by the "comitagi", also 12-13 years old children, as in the case of the cousins Gheorghe and Tănase Dardac, killed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1930 at Arabagi. This assassination caused the revenge and the murder of a Bulgarian on the road Silistra-Bazargic.

Also in the following years, many other episodes contributed to inflame the situation and destabilize the life of the region, where Aromenians were targeted by the activities of the Bulgarian revolutionaries, while Bulgarian families were maltreated by Romanian authorities. This conflict was well-known also abroad, as documented by the visit of the League's official Pablo De Azcarate, who underlined that Romanian laws required the verification of the property titles of the Bulgarian owners and legitimated the government to confiscate lands in order to give them to the Cutzovalaques. This policy caused a certain lack of security, which was due not only to the activity of Bulgarian komitadji, but also to the revengeful attacks of the Vlachs.<sup>26</sup>

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1934, the Mayor of Carageat Gheorghe Lepăr was quarreling with a *padurar* (woodman) Dimo Jecoff while another Bulgarian appeared from the back and killed him. Aromenians searched the killer in Jecoff's house and when Jecoff responded justifying the assassination he was himself killed too.

Thanks to her colonization measures and to the consolidation of her role of Kin State for the Balkan Vlachs, interwar Romania became the homeland of many Aromenians who moved there, gaining important spaces in the cultural and political life of the country.

Some of them distinguished for their skill in the cultural field. Among them: Teodor Capidan, born and educated in Perlepe. He studied in Bucharest and Leipzig and worked in the universities of Cluj and Bucharest becoming a member of the Romanian academy also thanks to his works on Aromenian language and culture; the writer Marcu Beza, who also became a member of the Romanian Academy, and Tache Papahagi, who studied and worked at the university of Bucharest dedicating his works to Aromenian history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

Aromenians participated actively not only in the cultural life of the country but also in political competitions and many of them became notorious as they proved to be fierce nationalists and adhered to rightist movements, as Codreanu's Iron Guard (*Garda de fier*). In his book, *Pentru Legionarii*, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu testified his friendship and common activity with Beza and the group of Aromenians; the latter showed to be extreme nationalists and were greatly appreciated by *Capitanul* Codreanu. The leader of the Iron Guard met in prison many young Aromenians and

24 Direcțiunea Poliției și Siguranței Generale. Nota din 31 Ianuarie 1925. 1) Pe ziua de 29 Ianuarie corent a sosit în Capitala o delegație de 4 români macedoneni, din regiunea grecească, care se va prezenta Oomnului Ministru al Afacerilor Straine cu un memoriu prin care vor cere să li se dea pământ în țara spre a se stabili aici, întrucât guvernul grec i-a deposedat de terenurile de cultură ce au avut ;;i le a încredințat refugiaților greci din Asia Mică".

25 N. Cușă, Macedo-Aromenii dobrogeni. The Macedo-Aromenians in Dobruja, Constanța 2004, p.53.

26 The latter was another well-known grievance and contributed to aggravate the troublesome situation of Bulgarians outside Bulgaria. Report of the visit of De Azcarate in Bulgaria (February 1931). HALN, section 41, box 2176, dossier 40409. The Romanian colonization, in fact, made the exercise of Romanian authority even more difficult. P. De Azcarate, League of Nations and National Minorities. An Experiment, Washington 1945., p. 48.

27 T. Capidan wrote *Meglenoromânii, București 1925-1935*, vol. I: Istoria și graiul lor; vol. II: Literatura populară la meglenoromâni; vol. III: Dicționar meglenoromân. Fărșeroși: studiu lingvistic asupra românilor din Albania, Cluj 1930; ;Aromânii: dialectul aromân, studiu lingvistic, București 1932. T. Papahagi was the author of *Aromânii din punct de vedere istoric, culturași politic*, (1915); *La români din Albania* (1920); *Antologie aromânească* (1922); *Din folclorul româniși cel latin*, 1923; *O problemă de romanitate sud-ilirică*, 1923; *Biblioteca națională a aromânilor*, 3 vols., (1926-1935).

described their "pure ancestry" and their moral sanity, which made them good patriots and fighters ready to sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> Some of them were among those *Ni.ca.do.ri* who assassinated the first minister Ion Duca in 1933. The term *nicadori* came from the assassins' initial letters Nicolae Constantinescu, Ion Caranica, Doru Belimace; among them Constantinescu and Belimace were Aromenians born in the Balkans and then settled in Romania. The Aromenians were really much upset with the Romanian government, which was accused of having betrayed them stopping the colonization policies. Beza, for example, attempted to the minister Angheliescu's life only wounding him, while Ion Duca paid with his life not only owing to his policy of repression against the revolutionary legionaries, but also as he was considered guilty of having stopped Aromenian immigration while increasing Jewish one.

Other acvittists of the Iron Guard were Sterie Ciumeti and Constantin Papanace, who was born in Greek Macedonia and studied in Bucharest. In 1930 he met Codreanu in prison and started his career among the ranks of the Iron Guard.<sup>29</sup>

The involvement of the Aromenians inside the most radical factions of the Romanian nationalist movements was justified by the bad conditions Vlach communities were keeping on experiencing all over the Balkans. As a matter of fact, the cultural life of the Vlachs was deteriorating not only in Greece or Serbia, which were traditionally adverse to their Romanian citizens, but also in Albania, where the number of Romanian churches was gradually decreasing.

The problems experienced in all the Balkan States strengthened Aromenian consciousness and also gave birth to the organization of political movements against the authorities and the local élites. One of the co-founder of the first Pindus republic, Alchiviad Diamandi of Samarina or Alkiviadis Diamandi or Alcibiade Diamandi or Diamandis, started to work for a complex and ambitious project to create a wide empire of Latin-speaking peoples around the Mediterranean. He contacted the Romanian embassy in Rome and fascist regime and maybe was encouraged to travel to the various Vlach-speaking villages of the Pindus mountain to raise a Romanian national consciousness. After 1927 he worked for the National Petroleum Company of Romania in Athens and made several travels to the Italian-occupied island of Rhodes attracting the interest of the Greek counter-intelligence services. As a result, Diamandis received an expulsion order which was never carried out. On the contrary, he remained in Greece until the Italian invasion, when he was appointed translator and aide of the general Alfredo Guzzoni.

After 1938, the Italians occupied Albania and prepared their further advance into Greece recruiting the Aromenians of those regions, or at least trying to,<sup>30</sup> Naturally, Greeks reacted to this treason with barbarity and violence, burning some Aromenian villages - Samarina, Perivoli, Avdela, Baisa - arresting and shooting Aromenians who were accused to revolt against the Greek State.<sup>31</sup>

The failure of Italian attacks soon required the intervention of Germans, who were successful in overthrowing the Greek resistance and occupying the country. As a consequence, in 1941, Diamandis could finally create the "Autonomous State of Pindus," or "*Principatu di la Pind*" composed of Vlach speaking villages in Epirus, Macedonia and Thessaly. He founded the Roman Legion of Larissa, a paramilitary group, to assist the Italian and German occupation and even tried to summon a parliament of his principality. Even if it was a body deprived of any real power, this assembly issued a series of local regulations, making Vlach the official language of the region and proscribing the use of Greek. On March 1, 1942, Diamandi issued a complete *Manifesto* which was co-signed by leading Aromenians (Vlachs)

28 C.Z.Codreanu, Pentru Legionari, pp. 263, 354. Codreanu described his meeting with Sterie Ciumeti, who has been chosen by god for his good and pure soul to become the greatest martyr of the legionary movement, and the solidarity expressed with all the Romanians, from the Dneestr to Pindus.

29 Papanace also published many books about Aromenians: Sur la minorité aromaine (vlachs) dans les Pays Balkaniques, Rome, 1950; La persecution des minorités Aromounes (Valaques) dans les Pays Balcaniques. Le Problème Macédonien, Editura Armatolii (colecția "Biblioteca verde" nr.3), Roma 1950; Geneza și evoluția conștiinței naționale la macedo-români, Ed. Brumar, București, 1995; Reflecții asupra destinului istoric și politic al aromânilor, București, 1996.

30 N.Djuvara, Aromânii: istorie, limbă, destin, ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1996; O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri, seria Istorie, Humanitas, 1999; Cum s-a născut poporul român, seria Humanitas Junior, 2001.

31 Emitent necunoscut - n.n./ Nota Nr.30518 din 11 Octomvrie 1940: "Rezidentul nostru din Grecia comunica urmatoarele informatiuni: In Sudul Albaniei si In Epirul de Nord actiunea Italiei se intensifica. Interesul pe care Italia 11manifesta fata de populatia aromaneasca din Macedonia si In special din Pind, devine din ce In ce mai evident. In legatura cu aceasta se semnaleaza ca 01. Grazzi, Ministrulltaliei la Atena, a avut, cu un distins personagiu dintre Aromani, lungi si repetate convorbiri, cari, dupa informatiile obtinute, star fi Invarțit In jurul atmosferei din Pind si a interesului pe care Italia poarta Aromanilor." Emitent necunoscut - n.n./ Nota Nr. 3070 din 13 Decemvrie 1940; "Asuprirea elementului aromanesc. Rezidentul din Skoplje (Iugoslavia de Sud) transmite urmatoarele informatiuni cu privire la aromanii din Epir si din Macedonia Greceasca: In prima faza a operatiunilor, cand armata italiana se gasea in inaintare, Grecii au incendiat 4 localitati romane-ti: Samarina, Perivoli, Avdela, si Baisa (situante intr'o regiune la 40-50 km. Nord Est lanina). Numerosi aromani au fost arestati, internati si maltratati in mod barbar de autoritatile grecesti".



intellectuals such as George Munru and published in the local press.<sup>32</sup>

The zenith of Diamandis' rule was reached in 1942, when a faction of the so-called Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation offered him the throne of Macedonia. But in late 1942 the local Greek resistance, which was formed also by Vlach-speaking members, intensified its activities against the Italo-German occupation in the Pindus mountains. Diamandi escaped to Romania while his successor, Nicola Matushi, was soon replaced by Gyula Csezneky, a Hungarian-Croatian aristocrat in Italian service, who only nominally reigned as *Voivode Julius* between August-September in 1943 and was later succeeded by M. Hatzl as military governor until the end of the Principality in 1944.<sup>33</sup>

Romania continued to subsidize schools until 1948, when the communist regime ended all links. George Padioti, an Aromanian author (born and living all his life in Greece) described one of the last liturgy services in Vlach, in February 1952, when the priest Costa Bacou officiated the last allowed liturgy in Aromanian language. Afterwards, he was not permitted anymore because he refused to forcibly officiate the divine service in Greek language.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the loss of any help or assistance from abroad, an Aromenian identity survived all along the Cold War age and represented once again after the implosion of the communist regimes. During the Nineties and the following years, Aromenian organizations started a new campaign to be recognized as a national group by the countries where they lived, in Albania, Greece, the Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania. They paved the risk of their total extinction as an ethnic group, who was losing its own traditions and values through a constant process of assimilation, which had been changing their nomadic modes and settling them in existing villages. In 1988, Vlach societies in Bitola and Skopje, as the Pitu Gula Cultural association, launched an appeal to the Foreign ministers of Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey who were meeting in Belgrade.<sup>35</sup> Their principal demands concerned their administrative status, schools and access to the mass media, language and cultural autonomy. These elements were necessary to fight the crisis of identity of the Aromenians, who anyway had not lost any influence in the political sphere. Although the various cultural addresses and distinct profiles, some special figures as Matilda Caragiu-Marioțeanu and some societies and organizations (Academia Română, Fara armânească de Roumanie, Union panhellénique des associations culturelles valaques et d'autres forums valaques, Société de culture aroumaine of Athènes, Association of the Armân Community in Romania) all started to work to defend and keep alive the Aromanian consciousness.

These efforts even attracted the attention of international institutions and so, after the report of the socialist Lluís Maria de PUIG in 1997, the Council of Europe issued a recommendation (no.1333) to encourage the Balkan States to sign, ratify and apply the European Charter of minority and regional languages and to sustain the cultural sphere of the Aromenian communities living inside their borders. The loss of all the protection from abroad made an external intervention more urgent and necessary as the disappearance of the Vlach culture would mean not only the loss of an important piece of the Balkan mosaic, but also a cultural loss for Europe as a whole.

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33 For the Italian occupation during the war, see D.Rodogno, *Fascism's European empire: Italian occupation during the Second World War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

34 According to Sevold Braga in his treatise *Die Aromunische Minderheit in Griechenland* (Albumul Macedo-Roman II, Freiburg 1964), the Romanian help suddenly stopped with the coming of Communism. Braga's explanation was that in fact Romania had shown its true face, having used the Aromanians for its own purposes during the Ottoman rule, but afterwards throwing them away and disowning them.

35 H.Poulton, *The Balkans: minorities and states in conflict*, Minority Rights Publications, London, 1994, pp.95-96.

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