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Vyšlo s podporou Agentúry na podporu výskumu a vývoja SR v rámci riešenia projektu APVV-15-0360: Rozmery revitalizácie etnickej minority na Slovensku: Interdisciplinárny záchranný výskum u zanikajúcej etnickej skupiny Huncokárov (2016-2020).



AGENTÚRA
NA PODPORU
VÝSKUMU A VÝVOJA



PROJEKT
HUNCOKÁRI



KATEDRA
ETNOLÓGIE
A MINOEURÓPSKÝCH
ŠTÚDIÍ

THE AROMANIAN ETHNOLINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL COMMUNITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: ANTHROPOLOGY OF A SMALL COMMUNITY LOSING ITS STRUGGLE IN SOCIETY

Davorin TRPESKI -
Joana HADZI-LEGA HRISTOSKA

Aromanians represent an ethnic community that today lives in several Balkan countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, as a result of the social and historical context in which it developed. After a brief overview of the circumstances that led to this present state, in our work, we mainly refer to the question of the survival of the Aromanians and their language. Although in the past, the socialist authorities did pay attention to and cared for the smaller ethnicities in SFYR, they did not do enough. Thus, as a result of their small numbers and the intensive communication with the dominant Macedonian population, this small ethnic community in the post-socialist period started to lose the battle within the Macedonian society despite the existing national programs for its survival. In this paper, we look at the elements that enable the maintenance of the Aromanian language and culture, starting with the legal regulations, the forms of political organization of Aromanians, the possibility of television and radio broadcast, the nurturing of folklore through many cultural-artistic associations and especially the possibility of learning the language within primary education and university level.

Keywords: *Aromanians, ethnography, linguistics, Republic of Macedonia, revitalization*

1. Introduction

It is not easy to present the Aromanians from Macedonia in few words. Neither anthropology, nor linguistics are disciplines which allow this. From the point of view of these disciplines we can use the universal dichotomy “us” versus “them”,¹ i.e. Macedonians versus Aromanians, or to be more specific, how the Macedonians perceived the Aromanians in the past and now? The most common stereotype about the Aromanians in Macedonia is the notion that they are wealthy people and they have acquired their wealth through hard work, but also through support and help of each other. The stereotypes in Macedonia even characterize them as scrooges and therefore very wealthy. This is why people in Macedonia, and more broadly the Balkans, tell many jokes about the Aromanians emphasizing their wealth and typifying them as scrooges. Essentially,

¹Lloyd Kramer, “Historical narratives and the meaning of nationalism”, in: *Journal of history of ideas*, Vol. 58, No.3, 541.

this folk medium represents a universal humoristic expression, relatively loosely conceived, with a broad repertoire and continuity, unaffected by time.² Jokes can present the stereotypes about the Aromanians in an easy and simple manner. For example:

“The child says to his Aromanian father:

- Dad, give me 300 denars, I need them to go out tonight. The father replies:

- 200 denars? Why do you need 100 denars? Fifty denars should suffice. Here take 10!”

As a transnational, non-state-forming minority in Southeastern Europe, the Aromanians represent a unique intersection of discursive issues, e.g. autochthony, history, or numbers as sources of legitimacy, on the one hand, and language, religion, lineage, location, or occupation as sources of identity on the other. In discussing the Aromanians, discourses of language endangerment and linguistic human rights intersect with theories of language contact and language shift as well as with questions of politicization, ethnization, and globalization.³ According to their place of origin, the previous research distinguishes several Aromanian communities: Aromanians from Moscopole, Aromanians from Gramos, Aromanians Farsherots and another group, significantly different from the others, i.e. the so called Megleno Romanians. A small community of Megleno Romanians lives in Gevgelija. Most of the emigrants with urban provenance came from Moscopole and its surroundings. The Aromanians from this region settled in several parts of Macedonia, namely Struga, Ohrid, Krushevo, Bitola, Magarevo, Trnovo, Nizhepole, Gopesh, Malovishta, Resen, Jankovec, Veles and Shtip.⁴

2. Aromanian community in Macedonia

After the establishment of the Macedonian state within the Federative Yugoslavia in 1944, the Aromanians had the status of an equal and a recognized community in the socialist state of that time. This tendency continued in the next period, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, when the Macedonian Constitution from 1991 mentions the Aromanian community in the preamble.

Nevertheless, during the socialist period, and even before, certain processes occurred which led to new resettlements of the population

²Гордана Љубоја, *Кратка шаљива прича, анегдота, виц. Етнички хумор XX века у хумористичкој штампи Србије*, Београд, 2001, 8-18.

³Victor A. Friedman, *The Vlach minority in Macedonia: Language, identity, dialectology, and standardization. Selected Papers in Slavic, Balkan, and Balkan Studies*, ed. by Juhani Nuoluo, Martii Leiwo, Jussi Halla-aho. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2001, 26.

⁴Александар Матковски, Крсте Битоски, Крум Томовски, Коста Балабанов, *Историја на Крушево и Крушевско*, книга прва, Крушево 1978, 17-18; Љупчо Неделков, *Носијата на Власите и Саракачаните во Македонија*, Скопје, 2009, 22-30.

mainly from the villages to the cities which certainly included the Aromanian community. The Aromanians resettled to the other Yugoslav republics, as well. This, certainly, led to the further break-up of the already weakened cohesion of the Aromanians which started even before World War II during the Serbian occupation of Macedonia. This phenomenon was also influenced by the intensive interaction, primarily with the local majority population. In addition, it seems that there existed a tendency of serbization (during the Serbian rule in Macedonia), followed by a covert macedonianization of the Aromanians (during the socialist period) with the changing of the surnames by adding “ikj”, “ski”, “ov” or “ev”, typical suffixes for the Slavic peoples. Furthermore, in the socialist period, people commonly had two first names. For example, the official name registered in the state records, stated “Blagoja”, but the relatives and friends had always known this person as “Vangju” or institutions registered a person as “Slobodan”, but friends and relatives called him “Suta” etc.⁵ After the interviews regarding this issue, we found that during the Serbian rule in Macedonia, before the World War II, the authorities enforced a policy of forcefully changing the Aromanian names with Slavic ones. During socialist times the authorities officially discontinued this policy, but the practice of two names remained, most likely, voluntarily. We think that comprises elements of certain ethnic mimicry, i.e. it aimed to hide and melt in the majority population and prevent possible stigma from the environment.

After the dissolution of SFRY, Macedonia remained as one of the poorest republics, lacking sound social structures, independent from the state, and necessary to build stable institutions, able to respond to the modern times and the new social dynamics. Instead, Macedonia inherited the political infrastructure from the previous state and from the “old regime”. In addition, after gaining independence in 1991, Macedonia faced a historically unique period: the name issue with Greece;⁶ international sanctions imposed to the remnants of SFRY, continuing the non-recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church;⁷ self-isolation of Albania as well as problems related to the broader international recognition. This bad political position of Macedonia relative to the neighboring countries adversely impacted the country’s economy, leading the strengthening of propaganda and foreign influences. Certainly this, among other things, remarkably affected the unprotected Aromanian population. Young people were offered “a way out” of the semi-recognized state through

⁵Personal field research in 2018.

⁶Jane K. Cowan and Keith S. Brown, “Introduction: Macedonian inflections”, in: Jane K. Cowan (ed), *Macedonia: The politics of identity and difference*, Pluto Press, London – Sterling, 2000, 4.

⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

granting scholarships for studies in Romania or in Greece. Various non-governmental organizations also organized free excursions to Greece or to Romania for young Aromanians, in order to bring their culture closer and establish close ties. We should bear in mind that during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, most of the Aromanians felt as Greeks or Romanians. Our informants confirmed that in that time, they organized themselves and paid private tutors after the official school classes, for their children to learn the Greek language and history.⁸

The numbers recorded in the Censuses show that the Aromanian population intensively melted into the majority population:⁹

1900	1921	1948	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	1994	2002
30000	9000	9511	8668	8046	7190	6384	7764	8601	9695

Until the World War I, Macedonia had many more Aromanians. Estimates suggest that in 1900 Macedonia had around 30,000 Aromanians or around 4% of the total population. Later some of them emigrated to the neighboring countries, mostly Greece, Romania and Serbia. After the World War II, according to the 1948 Census, there were a total of 9,511 Aromanians. In the following censuses their number was between 6,000 and 8,000 and in 2002 their number was more than 9,000 or more accurately 9,595, i.e. 0.48% of the total population. Most of them live in Skopje – 2,546 or 26.3% of the total number of Aromanians in Macedonia, followed by: the Shtip municipality with 2,974 or 21.8% of their total number, Bitola municipality with 1,270, Krushevo with 1,020 and Struga with 657, while in the other municipalities such as Ohrid, Sveti Nikole, Kochani and some other their number does not exceed 500.

3. Elements of revitalizing the Aromanian language in Macedonia

Since 1995, the study of Aromanian language, culture and history is supported through the Macedonian state budget. The “Aromanian Language and Culture”, in the 2016/17 school year, was taught as an optional subject in 11 primary schools, in 4 cities in the Republic. The coursework organization involved combined classes, i.e. groups of students from different grades or ages. Usually, students from III, IV and V grade took this course together in a group, or students from VI, VII, VIII and IX respectively. In some cities students from different schools were grouped to study this subject. The combined teaching and the application of differential pedagogy present a real challenge even for teachers with good initial and advanced training, which poses a problem for the inadequate

⁸Personal field research in 2018.

⁹Census – year 2002, State Statistical Office –www.stat.gov.mk, Skopje.

teachers of the Aromanian language. The teachers' work is complicated by the fact that the students differ in their proficiency in Aromanian language, i.e. some of the students do not speak at all, or speak their mother tongue very poorly whereas other students have good language skills in Aromanian language.¹⁰

In the school year 2008/2009 out of the total of 207,505 pupils of elementary schools (compulsory eight-year education, age level from 7 to 15) in Macedonia, 307 (0.15 per cent) reported Aromanian ethnicity. Of 14,189 teachers, 45 (0.32 per cent) declared Aromanian nationality. Seven teachers participated in the instruction of Aromanian.¹¹ The following table represents the municipal primary schools teaching the additional subject "Aromanian Language and Culture" in the 2016/17.¹²

No.	City	Municipal Primary School	Number of Students
1.	Bitola	Elpida Karamandi	21
		Goce Delchev	30
		Kole Kaninski	35
2.	Krushevo	Nikola Karev	180
3.	Skopje	Kuzman Josifovski – Pitu	12
		Krume Kepeski	10
4.	Shtip	Vancho Prke	115
		Dimitar Vlahov	
		Slavejko Arsov	
		Tosho Arsov	
		Goce Delchev	48
Total			451

Considering that no higher education institution in Macedonia produces qualified teaching staff in Aromanian language, in the past period and now, the teachers teaching the optional subject "Aromanian Language and Culture" have not special qualifications in that area. Namely, according to the normative for teaching staff stipulated in the Curricula

¹⁰Ministry of Education and science of Macedonia and Directorate for Development and Promotion of Education in Languages of the Communities, *Current State of Primary Education of Students belonging to Ethnic Communities in the Republic of Macedonia*, June, 2010, 24-33.

¹¹Leoš Šatava, "The ethnolinguistic situation of the Aromanians (Vlachs) in Macedonia: Young people in Krushevo as indicators of ethnic identity and attitude to the language" in: *Treatises and documents*, Journal of ethnic studies, No 71, Institute for ethnic studies, Ljubljana, 2013, 24.

¹²Ministry of Education and science of Macedonia and Directorate for Development and Promotion of Education in Languages of the Communities, *Current State of Primary Education of Students belonging to Ethnic Communities in the Republic of Macedonia*, June, 2010, 24-33.

(2007) in “Aromanian Language and Culture”, this subject can be taught by persons proficient in Aromanian language, possessing a training certificate and graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy – primary school teacher; Faculty of Philology – teaching department; Faculty of Philosophy – Institute for Pedagogy.¹³

The additional subject “Aromanian Language and Culture” is taught by six teachers, with incomplete number of required classes, excluding two, who completed their 20-24 classes requirement by teaching other subjects. Since in their long working history they have attended only one training course, mainly in Aromanian literacy, the teachers need methodological and didactic training in interactive learning techniques, training in implementation of Aromanian culture in their classes etc.

Within the Studies in Ethnology and Anthropology at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, the subjects “Aromanian Language” and “Ethnology of the Aromanians in Macedonia” were accredited in the 2001/2002 curricula, as optional subjects. However, the subject “Aromanian language” has never been really introduced, due to a lack of teaching staff, thus it was discontinued with the following accreditation procedure. The subject “Ethnology of the Aromanians in Macedonia” on the other hand is still one of the most popular subjects among the students.

The additional subject “Aromanian Language and Culture” is realized according to curricula prepared by Bureau for Development of Education, selected on a public call for hiring external collaborators and Bureau for Development of Education advisors and approved by the Minister of Education and Science of R. Macedonia. Textbooks for III, IV, V and VI grades were prepared, printed and distributed, based on the curricula while the manuscripts of the VII, VIII and IX grades textbooks have been adopted but the textbooks have not been printed or published on the Ministry of Education and Science website yet. However, it is expected that these textbooks will be provided in the upcoming months. This requires the preparation of a teacher handbook for the additional subject “Aromanian Language and Culture” that will help them achieve the teaching goals and achieve better results in the teaching process which, in turn, will motivate the students even more.¹⁴

Starting from 9th January 1991, the Macedonian Radio and Television (MRTV) encompasses a Program for Aromanian language. This program aims to promote, affirm, and advance the Aromanian language, culture, tradition and history. MRTV until 2017 was the only national television in the world broadcasting a show in Aromanian language. Since

¹³*Ibid*, 24-33.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 24-33.

2017, it also started in Albania. At the beginning, the station broadcasted the 15-minute show once a week and this soon extended to 20 and 30 minutes. At the beginning the show aired on the first program service, and now it airs on the second service three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) for 30 minutes with an additional one hour of programming every fourth week. An area of concern relates to the fact that twelve people realized the Aromanian TV program initially, but now this number dwindled to three. Therefore, now, the shows no longer feature subtitles and are understandable only for the ones who speak Aromanian, unlike the previous years when the shows had subtitles, so the people who do not speak the Aromanian language could also understand them. The average audience comprises around 15,000 people and the greatest measured audience comprised around 40,000. The Aromanian program at the MRTV radio has also three staff and broadcasts shows in Aromanian language 30 minutes per day.¹⁵

Nowadays, Macedonia has at least a dozen active civil sector organizations aiming to protect the Aromanian cultural heritage. We would like to mention only some of them: The League of Aromanians from Macedonia Skopje, Union for Culture of Aromanians from Macedonia Skopje, VKUD “Pitu Guli” Skopje, VPG “Gramosteanji” Skopje, VPG “Pirifanj Armanji” Skopje, ZK “Punte” Struga, ZV “Halchu Al Broza” Kumanovo, ZG “Moscopole Kavalioti” Skopje, ZPH “Integra nau” Skopje. The Aromanians also have two organized parties: Democratic Union of Aromanians from Macedonia and Party of Aromanians from Macedonia.

4. Conclusion

Seemingly, based on the above elements, favorable for the revitalization of the Aromanian language in Macedonia, the situation is not extremely bad. However, in general, this small ethnolinguistic community in Macedonia seems to lose the battle for its identity in the Macedonian society. Maybe the reasons lie in the overly late implementation of mechanisms which may influence the revitalization of the Aromanian language. The number of young people who do not speak their mother tongue grows. The recommendations should seek to induce greater engagement of the schools in the promotion of the additional subject “Aromanian Language and Culture” and improved information dissemination to the students and parents about the subject and timely implementation of surveys about the additional subjects. The teachers also require continuous trainings in order to meet the challenges arising from learning the Aromanian language and culture. Regarding the television programs in Aromanian language, MRTV Aromanian Language Program aims to

¹⁵*Ibid*, 24-33.

translate all the shows into the Macedonian language and to achieve daily broadcasting of 30 minute programs. However, the question still remains whether the revitalization of the Aromanian language will be successful, having in mind the fact that this community is rather small and scattered at the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, showing compactness in only few Macedonian towns.

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OBSAH • CONTENTS

Úvod (Leoš ŠATAVA) <i>EDITORIAL</i>	7
Vzdelávanie maďarskej menšiny v období po vzniku Československej republiky (Silvia BARNÓVÁ – Slávka KRÁSNA) <i>EDUCATION OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN THE PERIOD AFTER ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC</i> <i>ŽIDIA V PROPAGANDE SLOVENSKEHO ŠTÁTU</i>	9
Protižidovská propaganda v dobovej tlači (Matej BERÁNEK) <i>JEWS IN THE PROPAGANDA OF THE SLOVAK STATE. ANTI-JEWISH PROPAGANDA IN SLOVAK PERIODICALS</i>	15
Procesuálnosť v minoritách enklávneho a diasporálneho typu (Ján BOTÍK) <i>PROCESSUALITY IN MINORITIES OF THE ENCLAVIC AND DIASPORIC TYPE</i>	29
Multikultúrna výchova a vzdelávanie ako súčasti dynamiky a kultúry života spoločnosti (Ján DANEK) <i>MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND EDUCATION AS A PART OF THE DYNAMICS AND CULTURAL LIFE OF A SOCIETY</i>	39
Vybrané otázky dokumentácie dejín, kultúry a jazyka rómskej národnostnej menšiny na slovensku múzejnými prostriedkami v súčasnosti (Adriana DANEKOVÁ) <i>SELECTED QUESTIONS ON DOCUMENTATION OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE OF ROMA MINORITY IN SLOVAKIA BY MEANS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM TECHNIQUES</i>	51
Entwicklung emotionaler Intelligenz bei Kindern im Vorschulalter im Rahmen der multikulturellen Bildung und Erkennung der Abhängigkeit von der Ebene emotionaler Intelligenz des Lehrers, um Fremdenfeindlichkeit zu reduzieren (Dominika DOKTOROVÁ - Andrea BARANOVSKÁ) <i>DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND DETECTING ITS DEPENDENCE ON THE LEVEL OF THE TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO REDUCE XENOPHOBIA</i>	65

The Aromanian ethnic community in the Republic of Macedonia: ethnographic and ethnolinguistic characteristics (Joana HADŽI-LEGA HRISTOSKA – Davorin TRPESKI)	81
Podoby binárnych opozícií my a oni v prokremel'ských diskurzoch o migrácii (Štefan IŽÁK) <i>WE AND THEM. THE FORM OF BINARY OPPOSITIONS IN THE PRO-KREMLIN DISCOURSES ABOUT MIGRATION</i>	94
Prvá generácia kubáncov na slovensku: problémy identity (Terézia KOPČÍKOVÁ) <i>THE FIRST GENERATION OF CUBANS IN SLOVAKIA: IDENTITY ISSUES</i>	116
K etnokultúrnej diverzite, kontinuite a revitalizácii minorít (Ladislav LENOVSÝ) <i>ABOUT THE ETHNO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY, CONTINUITY AND REVITALIZATION OF MINORITIES</i>	131
Komunikatívna a kultúrna pamäť ako konštitutívny faktor identity menšín na príklade namíbijských Čechov (Pavel MIŠKAŘÍK) <i>COMMUNICATIVE AND CULTURAL MEMORY AS A CONSTITUTIVE FACTOR FOR IDENTITY OF MINORITIES ON EXAMPLE OF NAMIBIAN CZECHS</i>	152
Etnojazyková revitalizace – vize salonních vědců či reálný jev? (Leoš ŠATAVA) <i>ETHNOLINGUISTIC REVITALISATION – A CLOISTERED SCHOLARS' VISION OR A NATURAL PHENOMENON?</i>	163
Pohľad vysokoškolských študentov na multikultúrne vzdelávanie (Mariana SIROTOVÁ – Veronika MICHVOCÍKOVÁ) <i>MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE VIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS</i>	174
Minulosť a súčasnosť chorvátskej menšiny na Slovensku (Andrej SOLÁR – Beáta ZÁMEČNÍKOVÁ) <i>THE PAST AND THE PRESENT OF CROATIAN MINORITY IN SLOVAKIA</i>	184
The Aromanian ethnolinguistic and cultural community in the Republic of Macedonia: Anthropology of a small community losing its struggle in society (Davorin TRPESKI - Joana HADŽI-LEGA HRISTOSKA)	194

Moravian Croats – a Betrayed Nation. A history of a Minority in the Czech Republic (Miroslav VÁLKA)	202
Zoznam autorov príspevkov	
<i>LIST OF AUTHORS</i>	214