

## VLACHS' IDENTITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF WORLD WAR II

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**ABSTRACT:** During the Second World War, the Aromanians had their own, different perspectives over the combatants and the political structure in the region. Some of them willingly adhered to the Italian project, supported the fascist army and liked the idea of a political-territorial organisation (their own state, Pind, or at least an Albanian-Romanian confederation) under the patronage of Rome. The existence of multiple power centres with particular interests and zealous leaders weakened the force of the discourse and damaged from the inside a state project which was doomed to fail anyway, in the conditions in which Italy seemed to have other plans. The presence of many groups and leaders who disputed their supremacy, legitimacy and representation had consequences on obtaining cultural and political rights on the territories organised by the Italians. The interventions of the Romanian government tried to answer some specific and immediate needs regarding food supplies or teaching materials, but they did not manage efficiently the material and human resources and could not stifle the local conflicts for power and money.

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### THE PREMISIS OF THE RESEARCH

From the beginning of showing a conscience in the modern way, reflected in cultural and political projects, the Vlachs have built their identity in a dual way. They called themselves Romanians, accepting the discourse of the elite from Bucharest, but they also adhered to the cultural projects of the Bulgarians or Greeks, either because of the harsh economic context or of being under army pressure. Until World War II the Romanian government had considered them "co-citizens", providing them with material goods, giving them access to church and education in the Romanian language, and those who came into the country were considered a majority in the population assessment. The duality of the identity discourse and the cultural and political projects was emphasized by the exceptional situation of the war which burst out in the Balkans in 1940, by the extremist discourses of Germany and Italy, but also by the repressive actions on the minorities applied by the neighbouring countries. In this context the aim is to analyse the impact of the war over the Vlachs, the impact of the discourses of the countries in the region with political and identity connotation on the formation or dissolution of the communities, and the ideological and military affiliations (combat-

ants on one side or another), Romanian cultural politics regarding the Vlachs and the articulation of a propaganda system which accompanies (until identification) the cultural projects.

## POLITICAL PROJECTS

The war began in the autumn of 1940 and developed most of its hostilities on the territory inhabited by Aromanians, caught between the ever moving front lines of the Greeks and the Italians. Placed geographically in an area full of military operations and on a theatre that was disputed not only military but also politically, the Aromanians suffered the rigours of the war, and of the destruction and human sacrifice<sup>1</sup>. But not all of them were innocent spectators of a conflict that was not theirs and that transformed them into „collateral damage”. Many of them remembered the old inter-ethnic tensions in the region, the disagreements with the Greek authorities, who for decades had taken their rights and they willingly enrolled in the Italian army which, in fact, was an occupational one<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of the military operations in the Pind region, on which occasion many of the Aromanian counties among which Samarina, Baiasa (Vovoussa), Furca (Fourka), Perivole (Perivoli) and Avdela registered serious damage, a part of the Aromanian population showed enthusiasm at the „liberation” of the territory by the Italian army<sup>3</sup>.

The adhesion of a part of the Aromanian population in the region at the Italian „project”<sup>4</sup> can be explained not only through the conflicted history of this group

<sup>1</sup> The Aromanians were living in the region of the Pind mountains, Olimp, Vermion, in the cities in the center and west of Macedonia, Tesalia and Epir, such as Ianina, Grebena, Tricala, Veria, which were seriously affected by the war – see details in Lena Divani, „The Vlachs of Greece and the Italo-Romanian Propaganda”, *Thetis. Mannheimer Beiträge zur Klassischen Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, 3, Mannheim (1996): 204. The approximate number Aromanians was estimated by the people knowing the region and Balkan researchers at about 200.000 people – Letter, 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1940, fond 71 Grecia (1920-1943), vol. 88, 264, Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (AMAE), (The Archive of the External Affairs Ministry). According to the memorandum made by Vasile Stoica, ex-minister at Tirana and Sophia, for Ion Antonescu, there were 40,000 Aromanians in Albania, 70,000 in Yugoslavia, 160,000 in Greece and 60,000 in Bulgaria – AMAE, fond 71, 1920-1944, vol. 159, 12-18, quoted in Gh. Zbucea, „Problema aromânilor în timpul celui de-al doilea război mondial” („Aromanians’ issue during World War II”), *Perenitatea vlahilor în Balcani. Istorie și civilizație aromânească, (Vlachs’ existence in Balkans. Aromanian history and civilisation)*, (Constanța, 1996): 10.

<sup>2</sup> The Aromanians in the region did not have a unitarian attitude towards Germany, Italy and Greece, and the generalizations in one way or another are without a basis. Furca village, for instance, was decorated by the Greek authorities for their anti-German attitude – Zbucea, „Problema aromânilor” („Aromanians’ issue”), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1940, fond 71 Grecia (1920-1943), vol. 88, 271, AMAE.

<sup>4</sup> For some Aromanians the report was between Italians and Greeks, their adhesion being based on ethnic criteria, likeness; for others the reference point was the ideology and it was showed through the likeness for fascism through the trust vote for the „New Order”. In the case of the second group, the historic link between Romanians and Italians could accompany the political regimentation.

with the Greeks, which produced resentments, but also through the propaganda led by Rome. Italian diplomacy intensely exploited the idea of the Latin origin of the Aromanians, of their "blood relationship", to attract them into a war in which they needed all the human and material resources. They showed the liberation flag from "the oppressive Greek regime" and launched on various channels the idea of equal partnership with the Aromanians, which could benefit their own state together with the Albanians, in a confederation.

Inspired by the ethnic likeness it was invoked publicly and was attracted by the Italian project, the Aromanian elite encouraged the idea of a partnership with Rome. Among the Macedo-Romanian circles in Bucharest, that sympathized or had connections with Italy, there was a rumour, launched from early September 1940 that Mussolini wanted to create an Albanian-Romanian state in the Balkans, under the protection of Rome, a solution which these groups were willing to support. At the same time they affirmed that the idea of an autonomous Macedonia was not of interest anymore as Germany did not like the project<sup>5</sup>. The activity of these groups was systematically observed by the Security Direction from the Romanian General Police Department, especially because a part of the Aromanians in the Capital city were regimented or sympathizing legionnaires. The reports made by Security officials identified a series of perspectives supported by the community even if the common point was Rome's patronage. The group led by Naum Nance, for example, fought for the creation of a Latin entity in the Balkans under Italy's protection and rejected the idea of "repatriating" the Aromanians in the Pindus region in order to protect them against persecutions<sup>6</sup>. Another project which started polemics built around the idea of forming an independent state of Pindus. Starting from the premisis that both them and the Italians were the descendants of Rome, the Aromanian legionnaires claimed that it should not have made any difference between the two groups and they should have all to submit to the "liberating" Italy; while another group considered that it was necessary only for Rome's protection, the Aromanians being able to administrate their schools and churches which "should be led in the Romanian spirit"<sup>7</sup>.

The explicit insurances that came from Rome directly or through Albanian newspapers on the issue of the equal partner role of the Romanians in the administration of a newly extended Albania and of the large independence of Pindus reduced their intensity as the military operations were coming to an end; Macedo-Romanians' help was less necessary and Italy's projects found a favourable response in Berlin. Firm declarations of Francesco Jacomoni, General Lieutenant of Albania, representative of king Emanuel III, from 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1941, which gave assurance about the autonomy of Pindus region and the Aromanians' rights to go to church and school<sup>8</sup>, were gradual-

<sup>5</sup> Letter, 10<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1940, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar 159, 1940, 6, Serviciul Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale (SANIC) (Historical National Archives Central Service).

<sup>6</sup> Letter, 5<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1940, Ibid., 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Jacomoni was talking about primary schools in Tirana, with Romanian as the language of tuition, about renovating the church in Moscopole etc. Letter, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1941, fond 71 Albania, Telegrame și ra-

ly replaced by more prudent statements. In June, the authorities from Rome claimed that the Romanians and the Albanians "were living like brothers", the former had a role in leading the country, having a minister, a general secretary, a state councillor and deputies and they did not ask, only with some exceptions, the use of Romanian in schools and churches. The perfect integration in the Albanian state, the rights they already had and the affiliation to the educational system organised by the Italians<sup>9</sup>, justified through "con-sanguinity", were solid arguments for the confiscation of the Aromanians minority status<sup>10</sup>. The victory of the campaign in the Balkans and the major role in reorganising the region offered reasons to the Italian propaganda to claim that "the acquisition of Albania and Pind was compensation for the territories given in Yugoslavia". The exclusive competence of Rome in the area reduced the frequency of the discourses about the Aromanian community and transferred the interest from the guarantee of the Vlach minority freedom to ethnic homogeneity, from Pind's autonomy to its complete integration in Albania<sup>11</sup>.

The multitude of the opinions and interests inside the Aromanian community in the Balkans continued to remain constant in the new circumstances of the territorial reorganisation in the South-East of Europe and the alteration of the Italian discourse. On the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1941, following a meeting at Grebena, a temporary Committee, formed of teachers was created, which could represent the Romanian group in front of the German authorities. The mandate of the Pind Romanian communities was to defend their interests and lives by asking for protection from the commander of the German army. At the beginning of May, the Committee sent a letter to the military representatives in Kozani, expressing their sympathy for "the German people and their brave army", to which they declared themselves totally devoted and asked for protection<sup>12</sup>. On 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941, in a note addressed by Emanoil Popescu, the Romanian Consul at Thessaloniki, to his German correspondent Fr. Schonberg the tone was similar, the Romanian representative claiming that "the Macedonian-Romanian population that lives in compact groups in Macedonia and Thesalia show a vivid desire to adapt and collaborate with the new order established by the Reich"<sup>13</sup>. Shortly after that, Vasile Știrbu, General Consul at Ianina, showed a very different situation in a letter sent to Ion Antonescu. Making himself "the Aromanians' speech representative", Știrbu presented a real program of intentions for this community, among which there

poarte Tirana, vol. I (1935-1942), 205, AMAE.

<sup>9</sup> The Italian administration in Albania took some measure to encourage people to learn Italian by building high schools and primary schools with Italian as the language of tuition.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1941, fond 71 Albania, Telegramme și rapoarte Tirana, vol. I (1935-1942), 248, AMAE.

<sup>11</sup> N. Țimiraș told Vasile Grigorcea, special envoy and plenipotentiary in Rome, on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1941, that Italy has strategic and economic interests to include Pind in Albania, and for this reason Rome does not consider necessary the discussions about the Romanian minority, the fact that diminishes its importance and barely admits the religious and cultural autonomy of the Romanians living in Pind – Letter, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1941, fond 71 Albania, vol. 4, General, 1941, 90, AMAE.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, no date, fond 71 Grecia (1920-1940), 238, AMAE.

<sup>13</sup> Letter, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941, Ibid., 265.

were: the union with Romania in case of the integration in Italy failing; the establishment of Romanian administration in the counties fully or partially inhabited by them; opening schools and churches; building a Romanian Credit Bank as the Aromanians were excluded from taking loans by the Greek authorities; having the right of property; delineating the regions inhabited by Aromanians and population exchange in order to avoid conflicts with the Greeks; fair recompensation, at the end of the conflict, for all the damage suffered by the Romanian population. The Romanian Consul also said that the Aromanians' wish was to sue those guilty of oppression during the war, among them being Constantin Filisofopoulos, ex-vice general Governor of Epir, Spiridon Vlahu, head of the church in Ianina, general Lavranos and the ex-sub secretary of the Greek External Affairs Minister, Mavroudis, who "supported and protected the excesses against the Romanian population"<sup>14</sup>. He emphasized the fact that the Aromanians were disappointed that the situation under German occupation did not get better<sup>15</sup> and it transpired that he had asked the presence of the Romanian army together with the German and Bulgarian ones<sup>16</sup>.

The multitude of the power centres, different solutions regarding the reorganisation of the region marked, in fact, the discourse and the actions of the Aromanian leaders during the war. Divided in groups, committees and councils who fought for supremacy and claimed legitimacy and representation, adhering to the Italian or German project, invoking independence or integration in Albania, the Aromanian leaders weakened the message and the force of the arguments. In these parameters goes Alcibiade Diamandi, who appeared as the Aromanians' representative in Bucharest. His project not only failed to gather a representative group of Vlachs, but was actually a dissipating factor. In his attempt to create in the Pind area a network which would fight for the independence of Macedonia under the patronage of Italy, he organized in June 1941 a debate in Thessaloniki with the aim of forming some action committees in the cities from Greece<sup>17</sup>. The unfavourable image of the opportunist, careerist and businessman<sup>18</sup> kept many Aromanians away from Diamandi's projects, and the local voices, more or less representative and legitimate, that projected parallel solutions, increased more the sense of confusion. At the beginning of August 1941, Tache Nacia, an accounting teacher at the Commerce High School in Thessaloniki, demanded, on behalf of the Aromanians in Florina, an annexation of the territory to Italy<sup>19</sup>, and in September a committee made of many Aromanians, led by Ion Mergiu in Nevasca, gave to the Commander of the Italian army more declarations signed

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<sup>14</sup> Letter, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1941, *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>15</sup> The situation could not get better as the local administration, which was in touch with the population, remained Greek.

<sup>16</sup> Letter, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941, fond 71 Grecia (1920-1944), 269, AMAE.

<sup>17</sup> Letter, 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1941, *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>18</sup> Diamandi, a good friend of the Minister in Bucharest, Ghigi, had a profitable timber business in the Balkans and the Near East, for which he used his political connections.

<sup>19</sup> Letter, 12<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1941, fond 71 Albania, *Telegrame și rapoarte Tirana (1935-1942)*, vol. 1, 287, AMAE.

by Mayors of the Romanian counties through which they demanded that their regions be occupied by Italians. Mergiu pleaded for the formation of a Macedonian-Albanian state with special political and economic rights under the protection and direct leadership of Italy. He also presented his project to the Romanian General Consul in Tirana, D. Nicolau, who advised him to harmonize his point of view with Alcibiade Diamandi<sup>20</sup>. After meetings with Italian officials, Mergiu noticed the disagreement between Diamandi's projects and the Italian perspective, the fact that made Emanoil Popescu, Consul at Thessaloniki, realize "the confusion that lies in the Macedonian-Romanian circles"<sup>21</sup>.

These gaps added gradually to the implication of more weakness from the authorities from Bucharest in the essential problem of the political and administrative organisation of the Romanians from the "old Macedonia", when the attention was focussed on the Eastern front and on the reorganisation of the alliances. Invoking the reorganisation of the region on ethnic-historic principles, Romania entered the discursive logic of Rome which predicted a Latin domination in the Balkans. The expression of this supremacy, which should "break the slavonic mass", reflected in the trans-Balkan Romanian corridor, a solution which was difficult to apply, and in the autonomy of Pind, which did not receive enough support and was less invoked in the summer of 1941, in favour of a protection system for Aromanians, inside the Albanian state.

### THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Both cultural and propaganda agents, teachers in the Romanian school system were an important milestone in Romania's action to protect communities from the South of the Danube, and also to keep strong connections among the members of these communities in order to preserve their language and traditions. Their presence in the area and the functioning of the system they were projected in, were of strategic importance both for the government from Bucharest and the Vlachs. From the perspective of the Romanian state the situation was complicated as the war made more difficult direct and fast communication with the teachers and priests from the South of the Danube, and the financial resources destined for the army left less and less funds for cultural projects. Moreover, Romania had to adjust its practices to the legislation of the new authorities and occupants of the region, as well as to the different perspectives over the minorities' status of the Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek and Albanian administrations.

At the beginning of the conflict, Romanian schools and churches in Greece were functioning on the basis of a silent agreement between Greece and Romania, these institutions belonging nor to the state neither to the Aromanian community, but to the

<sup>20</sup> Letter, 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1941, fond 71 Albania, vol. 4, 1941, 295, AMAE.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1941, fond 71 Grecia (1920-1944), 317, AMAE.

government from Bucharest with permission of the authorities in Athens. In consequence, the Greek officials did not recognise the studies made in these schools, labeling the graduates as illiterate<sup>22</sup> and practically leaving the Aromanian population without the possibility of forming its own elite. In 1940, in Greece there were 29 Romanian primary schools<sup>23</sup>, with 60 teachers and 950 students, and four secondary schools: a Commerce School for boys, a Secondary School for girls – both in Thessaloniki, a high school for boys at Grebena and a mixed secondary school in Ianina, with 54 teachers and 477 students<sup>24</sup>. The syllabus was provided by the Romanian National Education Ministry but the Greek state chose the school books<sup>25</sup>.

In Albania, the legal system of the Romanian schools was founded, until 1935, in the Declaration from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1921 signed by the Albanian representative in front of the Council of the Nations Society and approved on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1922. In article five it stated that ethnic minorities had the right to maintain or create schools by their own means and to use freely their native language. Contrary to this declaration, the Albanian constitution from 1933 decided to close all private schools, that is those going to article five. At the recommendation of the Nations Society, the Albanian authorities published on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1935 a Regulation regarding the schools of the minorities, through which they gave them the right to set up private schools. According to this Regulation, in Albania, in 1941, seven public primary schools functioned with Romanian as the language of tuition, at Corița, Dișnița, Moscopole, Nicea, Șipsca, Lunca and Grabova, with eight teachers and 485 students<sup>26</sup>. In all the other localities more than half of the Aromanians could not study in their native language. The official syllabus was Albanian and the subjects were taught in Romanian, except History and Geography. The teachers were paid by the government from Tirana which offered them 300 Albanian francs per month, the Romanian state offered them a supplementary wage of 1,200 lei (30 Albanian francs) per month.

When the war between Greece and Italy started in October 1940 and Yugoslavia was invaded in April 1941, most of the Romanian schools in the Balkans were closed, the buildings being requisitioned by the German-Italian army or occupied by the Greek combatants. In Albania all the schools ceased their activity, leaving the 20,000 Aro-

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<sup>22</sup> Gh. Zbucea, *O istorie a românilor din Peninsula Balcanică (secolul XVIII-XX)*, (A history of the Romanians in Balkans), (București, 1999): 202.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, 31<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1940, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1314, 1940, 135, SANIC.

<sup>24</sup> Letter, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1444, 1941, 5v, SANIC.

<sup>25</sup> On the occasion of a verification in Romanian schools, Greek authorities forbade the use of Reading school books for grades III and IV written by Maria Biciulescu, Ion Tasi and Iosif Gebrea Simionescu because they contained fragments which criticized the glory of Greece. The reaction of the National Education Ministry was to remove those pages from the books which referred to the reign/domination of Fanariots and Tudor Vladimirescu, promising that in 1940-1941 they would publish new materials, adapted to the context.

<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the Greeks had 55 primary schools – SANIC, fond Ministerul Educației, dosar 1444/1941, 3-4, quoted in Zbucea, „Problema aromânilor”, („Aromanians' issue”), 14; see also Letter, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1444, 1941, 6v, SANIC.

manians in the region<sup>27</sup> without educational institutions. In December 1940, the headmaster from Grebena High School informed the Ministry of National Education that the four buildings of the boarding schools were occupied and the goods were stored in a few rooms, after the Italian army had broken the doors and had not allowed enough time to reorganise the space<sup>28</sup>. In June 1941, the government from Bucharest was informed that the building of the school from Poroï was transformed into hospital, suffering serious damage as the furniture and the teaching materials were destroyed by the Greek army<sup>29</sup>. In the spring of 1941, the Germans occupied the buildings of the Commerce School and the Secondary School for girls from Thessaloniki, and in September 1943, the Bulgarian army took by force the High School from Bitola to set up their troupes<sup>30</sup>.

Romania initiated official actions to stop the abuses and reintegrate the affected institutions in the system in the autumn of 1941. The actions continued until 1943, the success depending on the strategic importance of the place, the need for spaces for the army or the administrative staff, and the availability of some clerks from the central or local administration to answer favourably to the Romanians. In September 1941, as a consequence of the discussions between Radu Djuvara and German and Italian officials, the buildings of the schools and boarding schools from Ianina and Grebena were given back, but they were in a bad state. Some of the furniture had been destroyed, other had been confiscated in turn by the Greeks and Italians, and the buildings were damaged by bombings. The Romanian diplomat asked many times for the return of the furniture and payment for the damage but without success. At Thessaloniki the German military authorities did not want to give it back to the Romanian schools saying that they needed space for the Commander in the region, but they offered other temporary locations, so on 16<sup>th</sup> November 194 schooling began<sup>31</sup>. The persistence of the Romanian official in Athens, Radu Arion, succeeded to get, in March 1942, another building for the Commerce School in Thessaloniki. Through the German representative the supply of the Romanian schools and boarding schools was resumed, but the restitution of the goods seemed to be a compromise because the receipts from the requisition were missing<sup>32</sup>.

Blaming the war, the Bulgarian authorities constantly refused to allow the reopening of the Romanian schools, the decision being part of a larger strategy which wanted the annulment of the rights for the ethnic minorities and the "bulgarisation" of the mixed areas. A good example is that of the school from Poroï whose headmaster did all the necessary procedures in compliance with the Bulgarian police, which admin-

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<sup>27</sup> From almost 40,000 Romanians in Albania, 20,000 were concentrated in the Corcea region which was formed out of Corcea, Moscopole, Şipsca, Grabova, Pleasa, Boboşita, Fraseri, Viteuchi, Luşnia, Nicaea, Pogradeţ and Dişniţa.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, fond Ministerul Educaţiei Naţionale, dosar 1444, 1941, 124, SANIC.

<sup>29</sup> Letter, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1941, *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1943, fond Bulgaria, vol. 81, 1942-1944, 441, AMAE.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1941, fond Problema 15, vol. 56, 78, AMAE.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1942, *Ibid.*, 83.

istered the region after the retreat of the German army, to resume the activity. The refusal was based on the authorities' decision to not open any school in the region<sup>33</sup>. Neither the discussions of the Romanian minister in Sophia, Gheorghe Caranfil, with the director from the Ministry of External Affairs had any result. "Sarafov told me plainly that it would be better for the moment to cease any action and to stop asking questions as the Ministry could be in the situation of not being able to answer. He gave the following explanation: the Italian government is taking care of a certain number of cultural institutions from Macedonia, whose propagandistic activity is becoming more and more unpleasant for the Bulgarian government which decided to close them. The reopening of our schools and churches not only would make the situation harder but also would make it impossible for the fulfilment of the intentions of the Bulgarian government"<sup>34</sup>.

The slow and syncopated process of material restitution affected by the nationalistic and restrictive politics and by the abuses of the local authorities, which delayed the application of the central decisions<sup>35</sup>, triggered Ion Antonescu's reaction. In November 1942, he ordered immediate interventions on the German authorities to leave all the buildings and give all the furniture back to the Romanian schools from Greece. He also demanded to start discussions with the governments from Germany, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania for the reopening of the closed schools and their authorisation, and also to sign a convention with the military authorities from Thessaloniki for the use, twice a week, of the phone line between the General Administration of the Romanian Schools and Churches and the Presidency of the Ministers Council or the National Minister of Culture<sup>36</sup>.

Between 25<sup>th</sup> January and 25<sup>th</sup> February 1943, the primary and secondary schools in the Balkans resumed their activity<sup>37</sup>, but the lack of materials and staff affected their structure.

The repressive politics of the local administration and the occupational authorities, Aromanians' implication in ethno-political movements, assuming either an Italian perspective or rather an anti-Greek reaction for which individually or collectively have suffered sanctions, and also the war damage, accompanied the systemic problems of the Romanian school system in the Balkans. Some of the teachers, accused of collaboration and treason, were arrested or deported, others took refuge in Romania<sup>38</sup>, the teachers who kept their jobs were too few for the schools to function normally. In May 1941, the General Consul in Skopje demanded from the authorities in Bucharest

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<sup>33</sup> Letter, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1941, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1444, 1941, 103, SANIC.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, 21<sup>st</sup> Febr. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 22 (1897-1944), 229, AMAE.

<sup>35</sup> In the case of the reopening of the schools from Oșani and Lumnița it was necessary, the quick intervention of the Greek government on the local authorities which did not put into practice the decision taken in Athens was undertaken – Letter, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1942, fond Ministerul Culturii Naționale și Cultelor, dosar 1722, 1942, 318, SANIC.

<sup>36</sup> Letter, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 56, 107, AMAE.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, 25<sup>th</sup> Febr. 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 34, 377, AMAE.

<sup>38</sup> Zbucea, „Problema aromânilor”, („Aromanians' issue”), 13.

to provide enough teachers<sup>39</sup> but, in the context of the war, of the material and transit difficulties on the front lines, of the pressure that came from the Greek and Bulgarian authorities<sup>40</sup>, it was unlikely that the National Ministry of Education could send qualified staff or train urgently local people.

Personal disagreements, the rivalries inside the Aromanian communities, or the lack of interest of some teachers, were issues that deepened the crisis. The Romanian officials noticed that in Giuamaia the headteacher "didn't know how to attract students", the effect being the depopulation of the school<sup>41</sup>, and "the difficult character of the locals who live in disagreement with themselves and with the Bulgarian local authorities", together with the pressure put on by the later ones on the parents to not send their children to the schools financed by Bucharest, could be reasons for closing the school. "More for our prestige than for the Aromanian local people, who show Romanian feelings only when they think they can gain some advantages, I believe we can make another try to revive the primary school", wrote G. Caranfil to the National Ministry of Culture<sup>42</sup>. The flow of students to the school from Thessaloniki, whose number raised from 35 to 105 students, was due to the material help that was sent by Romania. "the parents heard that Romania offered 300 wagons with corn for the poor Aromanian population from Greece, and rushed to enrol in the Romanian community and send their children to primary school", said the general administrator of the schools<sup>43</sup>.

## CULTURAL PROJECTS VS. PROPAGANDA

Having this complex picture of the situation in Macedonia, the Romanian state tried to compose a strategy for the promotion of cultural rights and control of the Aromanian community through the educational system. It was projected as a centre of "resistance through culture", prepared to face the opposition discourses, but also to be a vector of the propaganda messages spread by the Romanian authorities with the aim of legitimizing the political interventions in the region.

The government from Bucharest had developed during the war a series of policies destined to promote the cultural rights of the Aromanians, to offer material support and train teachers. Among these actions there was the reopening of the Romanian

<sup>39</sup> Letter, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1941, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1444, 1941, 52, SANIC.

<sup>40</sup> The parents who sent their children to Romanian schools were terrorized, fined or fired from work – Georgeta Penelea Filitti, „Școlile aromânești în timpul celui de-al doilea război mondial” („Aromanian schools during World War II”), *Perenitatea vlahilor în Balcani. Istorie și civilizație aromânească (The perenity of Aromanians in the Balkans. Aromanian history and civilization)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Constanța: Editura Fundației „Andrei Șaguna”, 1996), 82.

<sup>41</sup> After replacing the head teacher Florica Ciunga with teacher Negrea 10 students enrolled – Letter, 28<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 46, 325, AMAE.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, 28<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1942, Ibid., 324.

<sup>43</sup> Letter, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1942, fond Ministerul Culturii Naționale și al Cultelor, dosar 2444, 1944, 10, SANIC.

Institute for Studies in Albania<sup>44</sup>. Opened in 1938, it was closed in November 1940<sup>45</sup> because of the military confrontations which affected its normal program. During the hostilities between Italy and Greece the building was occupied by the Greek army, which transformed it into a hospital, and from April 1941 it passed under Italian administration. The building was severely damaged because of the bombing, and the inventory of about a million lei<sup>46</sup> disappeared<sup>47</sup>. Aware of the potential such an institution could have – an area inhabited by Aromanians, the government from Bucharest made investments to repair the building and render its function<sup>48</sup>. Besides research, the Institute was also given the task of controlling the schools and churches in the region<sup>49</sup>, the director Dimitrie Beciu having a mission to spread Romanian propaganda in Albania through books and brochures<sup>50</sup>. As proof of its interest in the region, the Romanian government sent, in October 1942, a delegation led by the same Dimitrie Beciu, to establish measures for repairing the building and rendering to the system the school from Saranda<sup>51</sup>, and in March 1943, he was thinking of the possibility of a direct and secret deal with the Albanian government regarding the opening of a high school in Tirana, in exchange for an Albanian school in Bucharest<sup>52</sup>.

In the same area was the action of the Finance Ministry which, in November 1942, offered an extraordinary loan of 5,000,000 lei to the Ministry of National Culture, for the acquisition of teaching materials and books<sup>53</sup>, and allocated to the Ministry of National Propaganda 4,100,000 lei to print some weekly papers in Thessaloniki, to build Houses of Culture, museums for schools, make traditional clothes and religious brochures<sup>54</sup>. From the accounting data of the Ministry of the National Culture it can be seen that the monthly funds for the schools and churches in the Balkans went up to a few million lei. Most of the funds were destined for institutions in Greece.

The government from Bucharest organised special transport with teaching materials, especially school books, using the consulate and diplomatic network from the Balkans. In November 1942, Ion Antonescu decided that the manuals should be giv-

<sup>44</sup> „Monitorul Oficial” („Official Monitor”), partea I, nr. 111, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1943, 4289.

<sup>45</sup> „Monitorul Oficial”, („Official Monitor”), partea I, nr. 258, 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1940, 2850.

<sup>46</sup> The budget of the National Ministry of Culture was in 1942 11,196,200.000 lei - ”Monitorul Oficial”, („Official Monitor”), partea I, nr. 78, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1942, 2,582.

<sup>47</sup> Letter, fond Problema 15, vol. 65, 18, AMAE. Teacher Dimitrie Beciu proposed, at the beginning of 1943, the repairing of the building which the Italians had not used since May 1941. He also asked the Romanian government for an intervention to reopen the Romanian primary schools, the building of a high school and total funds of 1,2 million Lei for the budgetary exercise of 1943-1944 to repair the schools and the Institute – Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> The Romanian government took advantage of the decreasing Italian influence in Albania. During 1941-1943 Italy was against reopening the Institute. It was considered a serious competitor of „Italian propaganda” in the region where Italy wanted a total monopoly – Letter, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1943, Ibid., 172.

<sup>49</sup> „Monitorul Oficial”, („Official Monitor”), partea I, nr. 111, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1943, 4289.

<sup>50</sup> Letter, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 63, 28, AMAE.

<sup>51</sup> „Monitorul Oficial”, („Official Monitor”), partea I, nr. 249, 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1942, 9333.

<sup>52</sup> Letter, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 63, 17, AMAE.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 56, 108, AMAE.

<sup>54</sup> Letter, 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1942, fond 71 Grecia, vol. 87, 1941-1944, 165a, AMAE.

en with a discount of 20% to the poor students, then, at the end of the school year, they had to give them back. The money from the selling of the books and notebooks were used to create a fund to build at Thessaloniki the first Romanian Cooperative of Supply and Consum<sup>55</sup>. There was also transport with donations, but not consistent enough for the demands and the number of students. In February 1943, the Ministry of National Culture agreed to send 200 Alphabet books and Reading books for the poor students from Macedonia<sup>56</sup>, and in 1943 the priest C. Balamaci received, at the address of the Consulate in Tirana, two boxes with books for the schools in Albania<sup>57</sup>.

Until November 1942, the Finance Ministry allocated 4,100,000 lei for the activities assumed as propaganda in Macedonia. Among them there was the building of Cultural houses, printing weekly papers in Thessaloniki, making traditional clothes, printing religious books<sup>58</sup>. Intense activity was also put into place by the Ministry of National Propaganda. Until February 1943 it forwarded documents for the acquisition of a printing machine in Thessaloniki, provided the high schools from Thessaloniki, Ianina and Grebena with three libraries, sent another 50 for the villages, photos, postcards, and also subscriptions to magazines and newspapers.

Compared with the occupied Transylvania, the Direction of the Propaganda from the same Ministry sent monthly, starting with May 1942, 20 libraries with 110 books each, 20 monthly subscriptions to magazines and newspapers and one library to the Unite Episcopate in Oradea and one to the Orthodox Episcopate in Cluj<sup>59</sup>. In April and May 1943, the Ministry of National Propaganda sent out 20,000 calendars, and 4,500 books to 50 libraries in Macedonia<sup>60</sup>. The Ministry results from July of the same year indicated a sum of 4,410,000 lei allocated to Romanians from Macedonia, compared with about 2,000,000 lei for Banat and Timoc and 2,800,000 lei for occupied Transylvania.

Starting with the summer of 1943 (1-8 July) the Administration of Romanian Schools and Churches from Macedonia organised training courses for primary school teachers in the building of the Commerce High School in Thessaloniki. Invitations were sent to all the primary school teachers except those from Epir and Thesalia and from the total of 79 people invited only 55 came<sup>61</sup>. In the program there were classes for each subject taught in primary schools, with an emphasis on the development of practical competences and the stimulation of the ethos<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Letter, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 34, 366, AMAE.

<sup>56</sup> Letter, 24<sup>th</sup> Febr. 1943, *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 8, 1908-1943, 49, AMAE.

<sup>58</sup> Letter, 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1942, fond 71 Grecia, vol. 87, 1941-1944, 165a, AMAE.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, 20<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1943, fond 71 Iugoslavia, dosar 57, 1941-1943, 88-89, AMAE; Letter, 24<sup>th</sup> Febr. 1943, *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1943, fond Ministerul Propagandei Naționale, vol. II Propaganda, dosar 2707, 18, SANIC.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 56, 151, AMAE.

<sup>62</sup> The syllabus included items such as: „Vrăjmașii bisericii ortodoxe și ai neamului românesc” („The enemies of the orthodox church and Romanian people”) (Religion), „Morfologia limbii române” („Romanian morphology”), „Istoria literaturii române în secolele XIX-XX” („The history of Romanian li-

The actions of the Romanian authorities for the reopening of the schools was a strategic means. It was completed in particular cases by the favourable answer offered by the Ministry to the request to include in a school program the children from isolated communities or those with special needs. This was the case of the decision from April 1943, to send the primary school teacher Radu Preda, the head teacher of the Romanian school in Giurmaia de Sus, to the village of Ciacalița<sup>63</sup>, to organise, during the summer, literacy courses for 17 boys and girls, aged between 8 and 11 years old, whose parents, because of their itinerant jobs, could not offer them the conditions to go to a stable school<sup>64</sup>. This initiative was not new, in the past there were similar summer schools for Romanians from Argaciu and Hârșova<sup>65</sup>.

The organisation of the educational system and the reopening of the schools after diplomatic interventions, the allocation of financial resources to support the families that enrolled their children to Romanian schools, food supplies or the free distribution of books, all this propaganda effort did not have the expected effects in attracting and raising the school population. The war, the abuses of the local authorities, the restrictive policies, the nationalistic legislation and the temporary cessation of the educational process because of the military conflicts, were factors which largely contributed to the decrease of the number of students. After resuming classes and ceasing the hostilities in the region, there was a small increase in the number of students, but not enough compared with the Aromanian population in Macedonia. In the spring of 1942, there were primary schools in 16 counties from the former Greek Macedonia, and in many of these the number of the families who did not enrol their children to these institutions was higher than those integrated in the system financed by Bucharest. There were also cases, more numerous, in which entire communities did not benefit from school although the number of the Aromanian families was considerable.

Neither the situation of the buildings and the materials was satisfactory everywhere. In Vodena, Greece, an inspection by Romanian officials discovered a complicated situation under both a material and human aspect. The school building, Romanian property since 1934 and existing for 38 years, had rotten floors, the ceilings were cracked and the walls were weak. In 1940-1941 there were 53 students, in 1941-1942, 60 students and in 1942-1943, 83 students, in the conditions in which from the total of 17,000 inhabitants 7,300 were Greeks, 9,000 Bulgarians and 700 Romanians,

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terature in the XIX-XX centuries”) (Romanian), „Importanța limbii grecești în școlile noastre” („The importance of Greek in our schools”) (Greek), „Nașterea poporului român” („The formation of Romanian people”), „Domnitorii din Muntenia și Moldova” („The kings from Muntenia and Moldavia”), „Regatul” („The Kingdom”), „Războiul mondial până în ziua de astăzi” („The world war until nowadays”), (Romanian History). There were also classes of Greek history, Romanian Geography, Housework, Music, Drawing, Calligraphy, Greek Geography, Pedagogy – Letter, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943, fond Ministerul Culturii Naționale și al Cultelor, dosar 2444, 1944, 216-217, SANIC.

<sup>63</sup> Letter, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 46, 343, AMAE.

<sup>64</sup> Letter, 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1942, Ibid. 339.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov. 1942, Ibid. 340.

from whom only 320”embraced the Romanian cause”<sup>66</sup>. Gheorghe Papagheorghe, the general administrator of the Romanian Schools and Churches in Macedonia, wrote in a report to the Ministry of National Culture that the results obtained by the schools financed by Bucharest were incomplete, the buildings were inadequate, the school books and the teaching materials were insufficient, and the teachers few and ”of low quality”<sup>67</sup>.

In June 1944, the situation of the educational system got better in the way of raising the number of the students and opening new schools in some cities with Aromanian populations, but the process did not show a spectacular increase. Two months before the Romanian state stopped sending help to schools and, consequently, these ceased their existence<sup>68</sup>, there were 1492 students in institutions.

### RELIGIOUS ISSUES

A difficult way with systemic problems, marked by the indecision of the authorities from Bucharest and the pressures from the neighbouring countries, had the Romanian churches, too. In Greece from 1940 there were eight churches, in Selia, Xirolivad, Doliani, Fetița, Gramaticova, Hrupiște, Turia and Grebena<sup>69</sup>. In the Albanian and Bulgarian administration the regions of Macedonia did not function well with all of the churches under Romanian ownership. In Bitola the church was closed because the Bulgarian government did not allow the presence of a Romanian priest; in Crușova the church needed urgent repairs and could not be used; in Gropeș the Holy Mass was held by a Bulgarian priest, the same situation being in Veleș and Ohrid<sup>70</sup>. The Romanian communities from Corcea, Șipsca, Pleasa, Grabova, Nicea, Lunca and Elbasan had functional churches, the priest belonging to the church in Tirana and being paid by Bucharest, with the silent agreement of Albania<sup>71</sup>.

The difficult situation in which there were Romanian churches was caused mainly by the pressures that came from the Greek and Italian authorities, ecclesiastic and non-ecclesiastic, which, after the tradition of a few decades, tried either to eliminate opponent structures, or to convert the orthodox Aromanians and Albanians to Uniatism<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Letter, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1943, fond Problema 15, vol. 73, 1895-1943, 292, AMAE.

<sup>67</sup> Gh. Papagheorghe considered that the insufficient training of the teachers was caused by the poor possibilities to select, improve, co-ordinate and control – Letter, fond Problema 15, vol. 56, 142, AMAE.

<sup>68</sup> Zbucea, „Problema aromânilor” („Aromanians’ issue”), 13.

<sup>69</sup> Letter, May 1940, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1317, 1940, 180, SANIC.

<sup>70</sup> Letter, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 93, 275-277, AMAE.

<sup>71</sup> The priest Balamaci was paid monthly with 5,600 lei, which is 120 Albanian francs, the other priests having a salary of 100 francs. N. Timiraș noticed the poor material situation of the Romanian priests, saying that in Tirana a servant received more than 200 francs – Letter, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1941, fond 71 Albania Telegrame și rapoarte, vol. 1, 235, AMAE.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 245.

To this was added the insufficient number of priests<sup>73</sup>, low professional preparation<sup>74</sup> and the lack of a hierarchy that should represent their interests. In November 1942, Ion Antonescu asked the Ministry of External Affairs to interfere in Greece to create legitimate conditions for a superior ecclesiastic authority: episcopate, vicar or at least bishop<sup>75</sup>, but the reserves from the Romanian Orthodox Church<sup>76</sup>, and the resentments of the authorities from Athens, led to the failure of the project.

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The war that erupted in autumn 1940 between Italy and Greece, Germany's attack in the spring of 1941, drawing new borders and establishing a "New Order" in the Balkans profoundly marked the evolution of the Aromanian communities. Being in the middle of the conflict, on a territory disputed by Greece and Italy and successively occupied by the two armies, the Aromanians had their own, different perspectives over the sides and the political structure in the region. Remembering the old problems they had with the Greek authorities and antartes, some of them willingly adhered to the Italian project, supported the fascist army and liked the idea of a political-territorial organisation under the patronage of Rome. But their affiliation attracted persecutions from the Greek authorities which, in some cases, extended these measures over entire communities. Fascinated by Italian propaganda, by the illusion of a better destiny in a Latin formula which could bring them advantages, the Aromanians projected their own state, Pind, or at least an Albanian-Romanian confederation, both of them under the protection of Italy. The existence of multiple power centres with particular interests and zealous leaders weakened the force of the discourse and damaged from the inside a state project which was doomed to fail anyway, in the conditions in which Italy seemed to have other plans. The presence of many groups and leaders who disputed their supremacy, legitimacy and representation had consequences in obtaining cultural and political rights on the territories organised by the Italians. Until 1943

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<sup>73</sup> The General Consul from Skopje sent two times addresses to Ion Antonescu asking for priests for the churches in the Romanian communities – Letter, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941, fond Problema 15, vol. 22, 1897-1944, 202 AMAE; Letter, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1941, *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>74</sup> In January 1940, in Greece there were two priests with seminary studies and eight with incomplete primary school education – Letter, 27<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1940, fond Ministerul Educației Naționale, dosar 1317, 1940, 8, SANIC.

<sup>75</sup> Letter, 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 34, 61, AMAE.

<sup>76</sup> Ion Antonescu sent letters three times to Patriarch Nicodim and Saint Synod asking for an Episcopate. In the end, in December 1942, the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church transmitted to the Presidency of the Council of the Ministers that the Patriarchy could not interfere directly for economic reasons and because the Aromanians were in the jurisdiction of a foreign church, but he suggested the creation of an Episcopate in Salonic and that the religion teachers from Greece should be made priests, having the duty to organize the Romanian communities in Macedonia – Letter, 19<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1942, fond Problema 15, vol. 22, 1897-1944, 254, AMAE. The Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks had their own hierarchy led by at least one Bishop.

these leaders offered the illusion of a territorial project made by Mussolini, in which the Aromanians played an important part, even when there were clear signs that a big Albania governed by Albanians was the only option accepted by the fascist leaders.

Having multiple functions, of coagulation and formation factor, cultural and propaganda relay, with a special mission in the context of the war and competition for political rights and ethnic-territorial projects, the Romanian education system and ecclesiastic structures in the Balkans had a difficult task. Closed by the authorities who administered the region, as a consequence of nationalistic politics, or requisitioned by the occupying army, the schools were given back to the educational system gradually and after repeated interventions of the government from Bucharest. Reopening the schools did not necessarily mean they were functioning normally as the lack of teachers, their poor professional training, the destruction of the materials and the absence of school books were a recurrent phenomenon. The interventions of the Romanian government were not consistent enough, they tried to answer some specific and immediate needs regarding food supplies or teaching materials, but they did not manage efficiently the material and human resources and could not stifle the local conflicts for power and money. Romania allocated every year large sums of money from the total budget to the schools and churches from the South of the Danube, but the inefficient management caused many problems. It offered food and school books, but the lack of materials from schools, few teachers, the abuses of the local authorities, the repressive politics in the region and the military conflicts led to a relatively small number of students enrolled in the system financed by Bucharest. A preoccupation of the same intensity was to keep an active propaganda in the region, realised by the resort Ministry, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of External Affairs, through books, magazines, newspapers, radio and cinema. The stimulation and financing of thematic works for the Aromanians, broadcasting radio shows on historic themes, the printing of tens of newspapers and calendars, the allocation of important funds compared to those for the occupied Transylvania, for example, demonstrate Romania's major interest in the Aromanian communities.