

The Romanian Community in Bulgaria

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ABSTRACT *This paper presents the numerical evolution of the Romanian community from Bulgaria, the history of the Romanian communities from this country, the most important aspects of education and mass-media in the Romanian language, the church and services held in Romanian, the status of the Romanian communities in Bulgaria - legal framework but also the main recommendations for supporting the Romanian communities in Bulgaria.*

KEY WORDS *Communities, Romanians, ethnical minority, Romanian language, legal framework*

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1. Introduction

In 2007 the population of Bulgaria was of 7 322 000 and after the count in 2011 a small increase is visible - 7 351 234. At the census made in Bulgaria in 2001, from the total of 7 928 901 persons, 10 566 persons declared their origin as "Vlachs" and 1 088 persons declared that they are "Romanians". At the previous census (1992) "Vlachs" were only 5 158 persons (Aromanians included) and Romanians 21 491 persons. The in force Constitution of Bulgaria does not recognize the existence of minorities but only of "ethnical groups".

Most of the people that declared their origin as "Vlach" or "Romanian" are in Varna region (3 620 Vlachs and 440 Romanians), Veliko Tarnovo (1 066 Vlachs and 60 Romanians) and Burgas (623 Vlachs and 52 Romanians) while in Vidin (155 Vlachs and 16 Romanians) and Silistra (457 Vlachs and 19 Romanians) their number is decreasing.

The issue of minorities in Bulgaria is managed by the Ethnical and Demographical Council within the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mihail Ivanov, an expert in minority issues, has declared that a part of the Romani people declare themselves as Turks or Bulgarians. "Next to those who recognize themselves as Romani, there is a group with the same social characteristics which the rest of the population perceives as Romani", he stated.

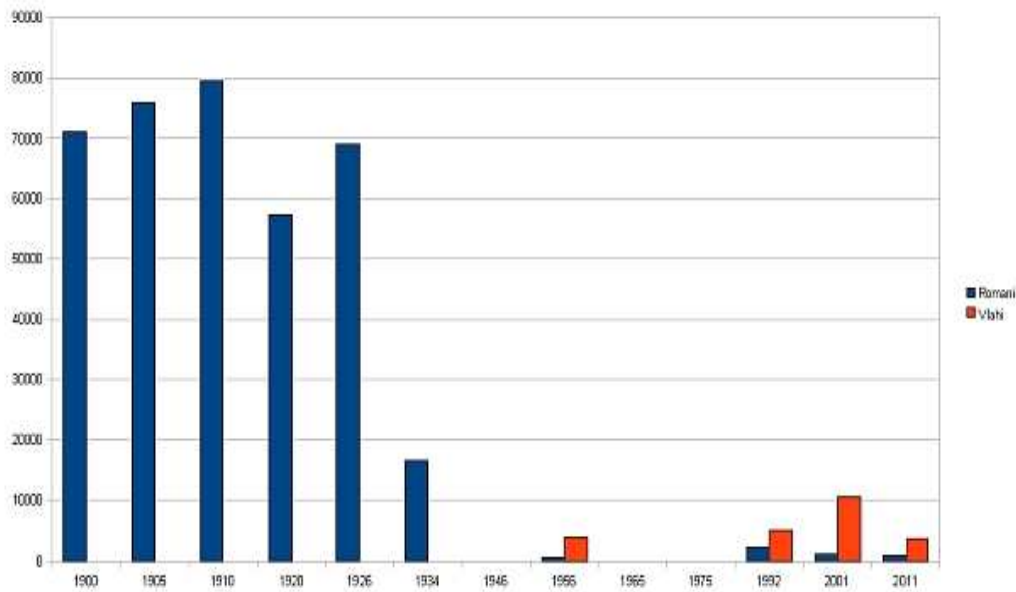
"As for the estimates, approximately 250 000 of these are defined as Turks, 100 000 as Bulgarians **and between 30 000 and 40 000 as Romanians**", he stipulated.

2. How does the number of Romanians has developed in Bulgaria

According to the first census of population in 1905, in Bulgaria lived 80 000 Romanians, the same number in 1910. In 1920 the count registers 57 312 Romanians and in 1926 - 83 746 Romanians lived in Bulgaria. The census from 1934 reduced to maximum the registration of Romanians: if in 1926 in Vidin were registered 42 414 Romanians - at the count in 1934 only 1 213 Romanians were registered. The last official note of the Romanians in the Bulgarian documents

dates from 1965 when there were registered only 6 000. The last count, from 2001, does not have the Romanian category. We have to state that at this census were registered 156 119 citizens, in “others” (69 204), “no ethnicity” (62 108) and “unknown” (24 807) categories. A bit too much for citizens without ethnical identity in Bulgaria...

The question, nevertheless, is this: How can the demographic evolution be explained from the chart below?



	1900	1905	1910	1920	1926	1934	1946	1956	1965	1975	1992	2001	2011
Romanians	71063	75773	79429	57312	69080	16504	0	487	0	0	2491	1088	891
Vlachs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3749	0	0	5159	10566	3684

It is about the numbers of the Bulgarian censuses over a period of 100 years. An extremely odd demographic history and who is lacking any kind of reasonable explanations!

3. Historical presentation of Romanian communities and organizations

The Romanian element on the Bulgarian present territory has its origins in ancient times of the formation of the Romanian people, by the joining of the Thracian- Gatae - Dacian population with the Romanian one. The historical proofs and the Romanian toponymy constitute the absolute argument for the Romanian element continuity in these territories. Until the Second World War, the Romanian minority had kept some of the rights, being recognized by the other minorities, having Romanian churches and schools.

“The Vlachs Association from Bulgaria” (AVB)

“The Vlachs Association from Bulgaria” has been founded in September 1991, being registered in April 1992 through the Decision no. 48 of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, only after this had been rejected by the decisions of the Court House and Regional Law Court from Vidin. AVB has more territory branches, with a member number estimated to approximately 1 000 persons.

Since 1993, The Vlachs Association prints the bilingual magazine "Time" (Romanian and Bulgarian), at its publishing contributing the Romanian Community in Bulgaria too, but, nowadays, due to its financial problems, this magazine is published periodically. In Bulgaria there are many non-governmental organizations, for example, in 2003 was established the Romanian Ethnical Union from Bulgaria (AVE). The main objective of the AVB activity is to raise awareness in the Vlach people to their belonging to Romanians (now, it is estimated, that over 80% of the Vlachs consider themselves to be Bulgarians). In order to accomplish this challenge they try to open branches in as many towns with Vlach population, they try to bring intellectuals in the association's activities, to extend the broadcasting of the "Time" magazine, to organize artistic-cultural shows with international participation, to improve relations with companies, foundations and associations from Romania. In Vidin there is also the Romanian language magazine "AVE", published by the Romanian Ethnical Union in Bulgaria - due to the same financial issues, having the same periodic editing.

Through the Romanian Embassy in Sofia they try to act in order to determine the leaders of the Vlachs Association to accept collaboration and a unification of activities with the Romanian Community in Bulgaria (CRE), with headquarters in Vidin and with the Union of Romanian Ethnical Youths in Bulgaria (AVE), founded in 2002, having as President Mr. Ivo Gheorghiev.

The Cultural Society of Vlachs, established in 1997, has no notable activity or visibility inside the Romanian community in Bulgaria. In 2002 The Vlach Association from East Bulgaria and the Rudar Vlach Association in Bulgaria were registered, organizations that have as purpose maintaining the ethnical and linguistic identity of the Romanian speaking Rudars and also the development of the spiritual, historical and cultural values of the community which they represent, estimated to be a few tens of thousands persons.

"The Union", Aromanians Society (Suțata Armânjilor), was founded in 1894 by the members of the important Aromanian colony in Sofia, coming back in business in 1992 as a branch of the Vlach Association in Bulgaria. They went on their own in 1995. It has its headquarters in Sofia and branches in most of the cities with Aromanian population (Pestera, Dorkova, Velingrad, Rakitovo, Dupnița). In 1999, at the initiative of the Aromanian Society, The Center for Aromanian language and culture in Sofia was established, which published many belletristic papers (dictionaries, conversation manuals, "The History of the Romanian Collony in Sofia (1900-1999)" and publishes the "Aromanian Bulletin."

Education and mass-media in the Romanian language

The Bulgarian law allows education in mother tongue for the Romanian communities, but, sadly, this thing has not happen until now, there is no Bulgarian support from the authorities. The Bulgarian Constitution stipulates (art. 36, 2nd paragraph) that: "citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian have the right to study and to use the own language alongside the obligatory study of Bulgarian language." Also, the Law of Education states (art. 8, 2nd paragraph) that: "Pupils that have other mother tongue than Bulgarian, beside the obligatory courses of Bulgarian, have the right to study in their native tongue outside state school premises of the Bulgarian Republic under the protection and control of the state."

Despite all these laws there is no continuous form of teaching the Romanian language for Bulgarians of Romanian origin.

Nowadays, in Bulgaria, there is no primary and secondary schools in Romanian. Starting with 2003, the Romanian Community in Bulgaria (CRB) alongside "Petko Slaveikov" High school in Vidin, organized Romanian courses, two days a week (Saturdays and Sundays, with a group of students different in age). Romanian particular courses have been organized since 2003 and by CRB Branch from Silistra. Moreover, there is a permanent danger of closing the public schools with Bulgarian teaching from the villages inhabited by Romanians. The Bulgarian authorities wanted to close the schools from Delaina and Rabrovo, villages inhabited by Romanians, arguing that there are not sufficient pupils for keeping open these institutions. There is, still, the possibility for the Romanian ethnicity in Bulgaria to attend faculty courses in Romanian at Vidin, this due to a partnership signed in 2010 with "Spiru Haret" University from Bucharest.

The norm based on which the above mentioned courses were organized, is Directive no. 4 from the 27th of October, 1994, added and modified in the 8th of June, 1998, regarding education in mother tongue, issued by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria; with the addendum that learning the mother tongue, other than Bulgarian, depends on the City Hall's possibilities and of local schools for ensuring the material and human resources necessary for the teaching process.

In 1999, after a pause of 51 years, the Romanian High school in Sofia started to function again and, at the initiative of the embassy, the high school received the name of the national poet of Romania, Mihai Eminescu, and it functions as a school unit for the intensive study of the Romanian language, from the same time with the re-opening of the Bulgarian High school in Bucharest.

The refusal of the Bulgarians still lingers for the acceptance of the Romanian proposal to sign an agreement between the Ministries of Education of both countries, agreement which will regulate all the aspects (buildings, material support of students, curriculums, number of Romanian classes, respectively Bulgarian classes, personnel).

Within the "Kliment Ohridski" University in Sofia, the Faculty of Romanian Language and Literature functions, within the Romanic Languages and Literature Faculty, with 7-10 students in each year.

Scholarships offered by the Romanian state represent a progress for the Romanian ethnicity.

Mass-media in Romania

The Bulgarian legislation allows the existence of press into the native tongue of the national minorities - article 12 of the Radio and Television Law stipulates that: "Radio and television programs will be broadcasted in the official language as stipulated by the Bulgarian Constitution and may be transmitted in other languages if (...) are destined for Bulgarian citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian." Article 49 of the same law states that: "National radio and television will broadcast national and regional programs (...), programs addressed to citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, including their native tongue." Despite all these legal provisions, in Bulgaria there is no radio or television program in Romanian, destined for the Romanian communities.

Steps have been taken, by the representatives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (MAE), through the Abroad Romanians Department (DRP) - to the Government and to the management of the Romanian Television Society (SRTV) in order for the Romanian channel, International Romania,

to be free broadcasted by the cable operators in Bulgaria with the purpose of being received by more Romanians in this country.

Regarding the press, the bilingual (Bulgarian and Romanian) "Time" magazine has been monthly published by the Vlach Association in Bulgaria and the Romanian Community in Bulgaria in a circulation of 1 500 copies. It was intended that in the editorial office to be representatives of the Union of Romanian Ethnical Youths in Bulgaria. "Time" magazine was issued in all the towns that has AVB branches and in other towns with registered population of Romanian origin. The AVE magazine, published by the Ethnic Union in Bulgaria, is published in Vidin but it comes out rarely due to lack of funds.

The "Aromanian" Bulletin was published 6 times a year by the Center of Aromanian language and culture, in a circulation of 1 000 copies, with financing from the Internation Center for minority problems and cultural collaboration. The bulletin is distributed to branches of the Aromanian Society in Sofia and also to the Aromanian organizations from the Balkan states, Western Europe, America and Australia.

Romanian Church in Sofia

The in force legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria does not prohibits, expressly, the exercise of religion in the mother tongue, but, until recently, the religious service in the Romanian language, was not possible. The attempts of holding the service in Romanian of father Valentin Tvetanov from Rabova were opposed by the religious authorities in Sofia. Starting with 2007, Domitian, the Metropolitan Bishop of Vidin, has granted the liberty to Romanian services in churches under his jurisdiction, churches were there are Romanian communities.

The sole Romanian religious institution from Bulgaria is the Orthodox Church "The Holy Trinity" in Sofia, property of the Romanian state and subject to the Patriarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The church building was finished in 1908, and the consecration in 1923. The church has been renovated at the Romanian Embassy initiative with funds from the National Bank of Romania, The Romanian Commercial Bank and Eximbank and was re-consecrated in 2000 by the Romanian and Bulgarian Patriarchs.

Status of the Romanian Communities in Bulgaria - legal framework

The in force Constitution of Bulgaria does not recognizes the existence of minorities.

With the occasion of affirmation, in 1998, of the Frame Convention of the Europe Council regarding the protection of minorities, in the Bulgarian Parliament was a dispute, based on the attempts of the government party, The Democratic Force Union, to proceed to the affirmation but with a reserve regarding the lack of national minorities in Bulgaria.

Because of the pressures made by the Turk minority parliamentary those reserves had not been stipulated and, only in 2003, within the Rapport issued to the Europe Council (art. 25, 1st paragraph from the Convention regarding the security of national minorities), was stipulated the intention of transforming the Council for Ethnical and Demographical Issues attached to the Bulgarian Government into a State Agency fro Minorities.

As for the Romanians in Bulgaria, the authorities still show reserve in the recognition of those as a national minority, with the support of the idea that Vlachs and Aromanians, whose associations are recognized, their representatives being part of the Council for the Ethnical and

Demographical Issues, are ethnic groups different from those of the Romanians in Bulgaria. In support of this idea the results of the censuses from 1992, 2001 and 2011 are used.

The main players of the Bulgarian government in the establishing and implementing the measurements regarding the security of minorities are the groups represented in the Minority Council regarding the Ethnical and Demographical Issues, in which are also the Vlachs and the Aromanians.

As for the issues of the minority communities, difficulties were encountered, for example, for obtaining headquarters. So, Aromanians requested, for many years, with no success, the reinstatement of their cultural center in Sofia and also the permission to use again the original building of the Romanian secondary school in Sofia.

On the other hand, in mass-media the number of magazines distributed to the national minorities has increased, including for the Aromanians, although for their issuing the Bulgarian state does not give any kind of support, the magazines depending entirely on the resources of the respective communities.

Regarding the education in the minority tongues, there are schools in which Romanian is taught. Nevertheless, the possibility offered to Vlachs to study Romanian in two municipal schools in Vidin was not included into the curriculum.¹

Recommendations for supporting the Romanian communities in Bulgaria

The main recommendation for the promotion of the interests of these communities are: the ensuring of a common headquarters for the three Romanian organizations in Vidin (Vlach Association, Romanian Community and Union of Romanian Ethnical Youths in Bulgaria), with the creation of a real and efficient collaboration between those, for the deployment of activities of keeping and preserving the ethnical, cultural and linguistic identity.

Between the Vlach Association in Bulgaria and the Romanian government and non-government institutions was established a permanent contact. Representatives of Vlachs participated in different manifestations organized in Romania for the abroad Romanians and especially for those established in the neighborhood countries (symposiums, congresses, forums, language, literature and Romanian civilization courses).

For the preoccupations and attributions for strengthening the connection with abroad Romanians, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Romanian Embassy in Sofia, joined by other official institutions, maintains a permanent dialogue with the leaders of The Vlach Association in Bulgaria and grants the proper attention to the solution of the requests and to the sustaining of the steps regarding the recognition and the affirmation of own Vlach identity.

For the efficient support of the Romanian community in Bulgaria the following steps have to be taken: approaching, in official conversations, of some aspects regarding the recognition of some rights of the Vlachs from Bulgaria at the level of those ensured for the Bulgarian minority from Romania, inviting the representatives of Vlachs and Aromanians to the activities organized by the Romanian Embassy in Sofia, offering of important book donations: spelling books, dictionaries, audio and video support, receiving groups of children in the summer camps organized in Romania.

Ways in which the Romanian authorities could meet the requests for support and expectations of the Romanian communities could be: more efforts from the Ministry of Foreign

¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_1st_OP_Bulgaria_en.pdf
www.hrmars.com/journals

Affairs and from the Abroad Romanians Department within the Romanian Government in order to sustain the actions initiated by the Romanian organizations from Bulgaria and assembly of the Romanian community representatives in order to start a permanent and efficient dialogue for solving the issues with the establishing of an action program and short-term, medium and long-term objectives.

4. Conclusions

In the regions in which there are the most towns with compact Romanian population, the pressures of the local authorities over the Romanian community were the most intense, having as purpose the discouragement both of the affirmation of own identity and of organizing intentions for the activities of this ethnicity. A certain “fear” of declaring their nationality is still present between the members of the community.

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