

Aromanians in Greece: Minority or Vlach-speaking Greeks?

*by Thede Kahl**

Abstract

At the latest since the existence of the so-called "Aromanian question" are the Aromanians split into different factions concerning their identity, i.e. those who consider themselves as being Romanian, those who consider themselves as being Greek and those who consider themselves as being "purely" Aromanian. Due to increasing contacts to the Greek language as an important commercial language and by the influence of Greek culture, a growing number of Aromanians identify themselves as Greek. While activities for a specifically Aromanian identity and language can be observed mainly in the Aromanian diaspora, Aromanians in Greece refuse the classification as a minority and do not use their language in schools and the media. In Greece the national identification of most Aromanians takes place through modern Hellenism. But to belong to the Hellenes does not automatically mean being Greek. The article discusses the different meanings of the pairs of terms "Vlach/Aromanian", "Minority/Vlach-speaking Greek", "Hellene/Greek". It tries to describe the aspects which hindered the evolution of an Aromanian nationhood and analyses the contemporary situation of a minority that behaves like a majority.

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"Vlachs" and "Aromanians"

Even experts on Greek issues or Southeastern Europe have often never even heard of *Vlachs* or *Aromanians* because they appear as Greeks, Romanians, Albanians, Serbs etc.^[1] But if somebody begins to study them and to trace their footprints, he will quickly observe that there is hardly any part of the Balkan peninsula where they have not played a role.

The non-uniform use of the terms *Vlachs* and *Aromanians* requires a short definition.^[2] The term *Vlachs* is not only the more widely used of the two, but it can refer to varied groups like the so called *Meglenoromanians*, the *Istroromanians*, the *Timok Vlachs*, the ancestors of the Romanians or the *Vlach Roma*. In Greece there can be found Aromanians (known also as Aroumanians, Aromunians, Cincars, Kutsovlachs,

Macedoromanians), a small number of Meglenoromanians (known also as Meglenite Vlachs) and small groups of Vlach Roma – all of them called *Vlachoi* in Greek popular speech. Further, in all over Greece *Vlach* may simply mean shepherd. So we can find regions where even the Greek-speaking *Sarakatsans* are called *Vlachs*. In central Greece, south of the Agrinio-Karpenisi-Lamia line one may find so called Vlachs, who do not speak Aromanian but who call their regional Greek dialect *Vlach*. Most inhabitants of Athens associate the term *Vlachos* with rural, lesser civilised and uncouth people. For others, they are nothing more than good cheese-makers or lamb-producers. In other regions, *Vlacha*, *Vlachos* or *Vlachikos* is the name of a dance,^[3] so on many Aegean islands (esp. Naxos, Samos, Rhodes, Carpathos) and in Cyprus.^[4]

Vlach is the ethnonym used by the surrounding societies, while Aromanians define themselves - depending on which dialect group they belong to - as *Armâni* or *Rrămăni*, the self-characterisation, which was the base for the scientific term *Aromanian*. Speakers of Aromanian define themselves as belonging to the "fara armănescă" (Aromanian tribe), or, more rarely, to the "populu armănescu" (Aromanian people). In Aromanian there is no modern word for *nation* or *ethnic* (and, of course, neither for *minority*), but when trying to describe this term in their own language, they have quite a lot of possibilities, adopting similar words from other languages like "miletea armănescă" (from Turkish *millet*), "laou armănescu" (from Greek *laos*, i.e. people), "ginsă armănescă" (from Turkish *cins*, i.e. genus or "ghimtă armănescă" (from Albanian *gjint*, i.e. genus).^[5] Only a few Aromanians use the neologism "nație" (nation).

Most Aromanians live in northern Greece, further important settlement areas can be found in southern Albania, the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the Rhodope Mountains and the Dobrudja. The geographical concentration of Aromanians in Greece is in the Pindos mountains, its ridges and the surrounding plains in Epirus, Thessaly and Macedonia, the Vermion mountains and Mount Olympus.^[6]

From first Aromanian Movement to the "Ullah millet"

The emergence of a consciousness which can be characterised as national probably did not occur among the Aromanians before the beginning of national movements of the peoples of Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the 19th century. In the Byzantine and Ottoman period, orthodox Christians defined themselves, regardless of language and culture, as *Romans*: in Greek *Romaioi*, later *Romioi*, in Latin *Romani*, later *Români* and *Armâni*. Before Aromanians began to develop their own consciousness or to orient themselves in respect to other peoples and their national movements, the most important aspect of self-identification was mainly as belonging to a *millet* (orthodox Christians) and secondarily to a professional group (shepherds, craftsmen, merchants etc.). Due to traditional work as nomadic

herders and due to persecution (especially by Turkish-Albanian troops), Aromanians are dispersed all over the Balkans. When at the beginning of the 19th century an Aromanian movement could be observed especially in the Aromanian diaspora in Buda and Vienna, large numbers of Aromanians were already assimilated into the societies of many regions or were in the state of being assimilated. Thus we have to distinguish between the "national Aromanian movement" as such on the one hand, and their participation in other national movements on the other hand.

Most common streams of national orientation among Aromanians were and are pro-Greek and pro-Romanian.^[17] The Greek-Romanian conflict on the so called "Aromanian question" split the Aromanians into different factions, i.e. those who consider themselves as being Romanian, those who consider themselves as being Greek and those who consider themselves as being Aromanian. Since the Aromanians belonged to the Greek Patriarchate and their cultural and economic activities were bound to the Greek church,^[18] especially the wealthy urbanised Aromanians have been active promoters of the Greek language and Greek culture for a long time. Greek was already in the 17th and 18th century a *lingua franca*^[19] in large parts of Southeastern Europe. The knowledge of Greek was the key to education and to a higher social status and in this process it did not play any role if Greek was spoken as a mother or as a foreign language.^[10] A Greek was above all a peddler or merchant,^[11] so that men of wealth (also of Albanian, Vlach, Macedo-Slav and Bulgarian origin) in the 18th century normally identified themselves as such.^[12] The first written documents in Aromanian were written with the Greek alphabet and did not have the intention to teach Aromanian, but to spread the Greek language. The success of the Greek language among the Aromanians was not only caused by a few individuals promoting Greek culture, but mostly by increasing contacts with Greek neighbours and the Greek language as the most important commercial language. A lot of settlements in central Greece became hellenised without the influence of political or church activists.

The development of a specifically Aromanian identity can be observed in the early Aromanian diaspora. Especially Aromanian grammars and language booklets document a clear consciousness of latinity/romanity;^[13] in 1815 the Aromanians of Buda and Pest asked to have their language used for orthodox liturgy.^[14] Peyfuss^[15] emphasises that "this Aromanian movement cannot be reduced to activity of Romanian propaganda in Turkey", but has characteristics of a "typical national movement for the 19th century". In the 1860s, soon after the establishment of independent Romania, the Romanian national movement and its extensive educational policy in Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus began to influence Aromanian activities. Since then, Aromanian activities were automatically bound to Romania.

After the establishment of a Macedoromanian committee in 1860 in Bucharest, Romania began to train teachers for Macedonia and in 1864 the first Romanian ("Aromanian") school was established in Macedonia by Dimitrie Atanasescu in the village of Trnovo. Soon other Romanian schools followed, and at the beginning of the 20th century there already existed 100 Romanian churches, 106 Romanian schools with more than 4 000 pupils and 300 teachers in the regions of Macedonia and Epirus.^[16] At these schools only initial instruction was given in Aromanian, more advance lessons were in Romanian. Aromanian patriots such as Apostol Mărgărit, originally a Greek teacher from Avdella, and Constantin Belemace from Malovište show us that most active participants of the Romanian movement were not Romanians, but Aromanians.^[17]

I suggest characterising this movement as *Aromanian-Romanian*.^[18] It culminated in the recognition of the Aromanians by decree (irade) as *Ullah millet* (in Greek *vlachiko mileti*, often interpreted as *Aromanian nation*). With the support of the Great Powers on 22nd May 1905 they acquired from the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid all the rights of a *millet* with the exception of a religious head.^[19]

From "millet" to "nation"

The range of different forms of identity and the resulting dilemma of the division of fundamental alignments within the Aromanian communities was conditioned on the one hand by their cultural and mental proximity to the Greeks and on the other hand by the proximity of their language to the Romanian. The recognition of the "Ullah millet", the influence of different national movements, especially those of Greece and Romania, and the influence of foreign powers in the southern Balkans, led to further division and clashes. The Greek-Romanian conflict achieved its climax in the last and most violent phases of the Macedonian Struggle (1903-1908), when most Aromanian groups fought on the pro-patriarchate side, while others took sides with the pro-Bulgarian exarchists. Confrontation between differently oriented Aromanians led to bloodshed.^[20] The increased tension between the different groups in 1906 led to the breaking-off of diplomatic relations between Romania and Greece.^[21] Since then, the "Ullah millet" has been called a "Romanian minority" and the Aromanians were no longer divided into pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians, but into *Greeks* (Neo-Hellenes) and *Romanians*.

A different orientation began in 1917, when Italian troops advanced via Albania into Epirus^[22] and founded, with the help of Alkiviadis Diamantis, the "Principate of Pindos" in the area of Aromanian settlement. Italy undertook attempts to convert the pro-

Romanian Aromanians into pro-Italian, which succeeded to a small degree.^[23] Similar attempts were undertaken during the Second World War, when the Aromanian members of the "Roman Legion" fought on the side of the Italian troops.^[24] On the other hand, a large number of Aromanian villages were destroyed by Italian and German troops. In May 1941, Diamantis demanded a Vlach state with the support of the Italians and suggested putting the Romanian schools under Italian authority. With the sympathy for the Italians grew the number of philocatholics among the Aromanians, but the traditional identification with the Orthodox Church kept the majority of the Aromanians closer to modern Hellenism.

The Romanian education policy ceased to be in most Balkan countries before the Second World War, whereas most Romanian schools in Greece continued to exist until the late 1940s.

Can "chameleons" build their own nationhood?

In the case of the Aromanians there has been a significant discrepancy within their communities in terms of education and wealth. The traditionalism and backwardness of rural groups and the greater progressiveness of their urban counterparts, completely different settlement forms and ways of life were elements that divided the community. The Aromanians live, for historical and socio-economic reasons, on the community perimeters of peoples of other ethnic origin and thus merge with these, leading to either a form of double identity or complete assimilation. Usually Aromanians who had economic success as tradesmen or caravan leaders assimilated very fast to other nations, whereas the many semi-nomadic Aromanian peasants, perceived as a lower class, have not developed a national elite. The most powerful Aromanian elites, those who had the means to be a crucial element in the promotion and dissemination of a national consciousness preferred to engage in the projects of various other national movements, and thus the elites of Aromanian culture tended to play key roles in the national formation of ethnic groups other than the Aromanian.

The *irade*, which founded an administratively coherent *Ullah millet*, encouraged Vlach national identity in the Ottoman Empire of the early 20th century but it did not result in the creation of a widespread national Aromanian consciousness or the development of an Aromanian nationality. The assimilation of the upper class and their involvement in other national movements was already too advanced. Not even the support from their linguistic relatives in Romania helped in their unification since few Aromanians looked to Romania as a patron.^[25]

These characteristics of Aromanian identity are probably behind Nicolau^[26] calling the Aromanians "les caméléons des Balkans", which in turn led Balamaci^[27] to say that the Aromanians were "born to assimilate" and Gavrilovic^[28] that their identity is "able to melt with Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Christian-Albanian or Romanian identity". Exactly this *shifting* of identities, this "chameleonic" flexibility, made the Aromanians not only one of the most polyglot groups in Southeastern Europe but also an economically and politically very strong one. Thus, when asking for the characteristics that have hindered the formation of Aromanian nationhood, we have to observe their participation in the nation-building of their neighbouring peoples first. Economically and politically, Aromanians had the possibility to develop their own nation, but the high level of geographical dispersion and ethnic intermixing were hindering and made these national aspirations quite difficult. I suggest that their economic superiority even prevented them from developing their own nationality and accelerated their national absorption. Improving their economic and educational wealth, they adopted the languages of the majorities (especially the Greek one) and renounced their own language. Not even their religion could hinder this absorption (as in the case of the Jews) since they were Orthodox like their neighbours.

Of course, the absorption of the Aromanians by other nations was strengthened additionally by the fact that important members of their intelligentsia and elites had emigrated; predominantly the economically weaker groups remained in the homeland. Thus, since the 18th century the Aromanian diaspora outside of the Balkans has played a decisive role in the development of Aromanian identity. Even today, attempts to improve the standing of Aromanian identity, language and culture is mainly undertaken by those of the diaspora in Germany, France, the United States and Australia.

"Vlachness" and other national orientations in the Balkans today

The Aromanians have been able to reconcile the peculiarities of their ethnicity with the national identities of the states in which they live, and as a result, have not forgotten their separate Aromanian/Vlach*co-national* consciousness. In general, it is possible to say that pro-Greek orientations have been the most strongly represented among Aromanians; Weigand reported, already in 1897, that most Aromanians were not only "indifferent but even showed hostility to their national movement".^[29] While the Aromanian tradesmen and craftsmen were incorporated into Greek culture on the basis of their urban way of life and their constant contact with Greeks, we find that those Aromanians whose forefathers worked in agriculture had above all a tendency towards assimilation by agrarian Slavs (or agrarian Greeks or

agrarian Albanians). Those Aromanians who until today belong to pastoral communities, represent the most closed Aromanian societies and have retained their specific Aromanian identity and the best knowledge of their language and culture.

Aromanian identity survived predominantly in south Slavic surroundings, i.e. in the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. A large community in Albania consider themselves to be a coherent people. In Romania, the groups that immigrated in 1940 preserved their Aromanian identity while those that immigrated earlier were for the most part assimilated. Aromanians who stress their separate Aromanian identity usually dissociate themselves from any affiliation to any other nation. In Greece, most of these groups inhabit the regions of Veria, Grevena and Athens; in Albania, they live in the southwestern part of the country; and in the Republic of Macedonia, east of the Vardar River especially. In some cases an Aromanian identity survives even if no Aromanian is spoken, as among the Cincars of Serbia. In present-day Greece most Aromanians have *Greek identity* and identify themselves with the Greek culture and nation. Outside Greece many Aromanians in south Albania have Greek identity as well, shaped in the last decade by the hope of economic advantage based on this relationship with Greece. Additionally, pro-Greek-oriented families and individuals can be found in various municipalities all over Southeastern Europe. Most Greek-oriented individuals emphasised their distance from Romanian culture. The strongest *Romanian identity* and orientation towards the Romanian culture and nation can be found among the Aromanians in Romania but also in communities outside Romania, above all where Romanian schools had been built. Most Romanian-oriented Aromanians dissociate themselves from Greek culture and consider themselves to be a part of the Romanian people speaking a Romanian dialect.

Aromanians and Modern Hellenism

The image of Aromanians as a wild, pastoral people, which still prevails in Greek society as well as in neighbouring countries, is also supported by the media.^[30] Phrases such as "Oh, this Vlach" (*re ton Vlacho*), "Vlach behave" (*vlachika fersimata*) or "Even a civilised Vlach smells vlachness" (*o Vlachos ki an politevtei pali Vlachia myrizei*) can still often be heard in Greece. Their identification with Hellenism as an ancient culture makes it easy for the Aromanians to ignore this image. Two totally different self-images survive due to the described discrepancy in education and wealth within Aromanian society: the "uncouth bumpkins" and the "national heroes and maecenas".

The Aromanians' role in the history of Greece, represented in their numerous patrons, national heroes, politicians, intellectuals and clergy,^[31] is of great importance for their identity as a part of the modern Greek people. Especially their numbers among

Greek benefactors is often emphasised by politicians^[32] and historians. Indeed, the list of examples of Aromanians in Greek history is quite impressive: Aromanians are to be found among the *independence fighters*, Rhigas Feraios^[33] (1757-1798, forerunner of the Greek independence movement), Georgakis Olympios (1772-1821, member of "Filiki Etaireia", fought in the revolution of 1821), Theodoros and Alexis Grivas (1797-1862 and 1799-1855 respectively, leaders of armed bands of revolutionaries); they were some of the best known *maecenas*, Baron Georgios Sinas (1783-1856, hereditary baron and senior officer of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, founder of the Academy of Athens), Simon Sinas (1810-1876, banker, railway magnate, baron of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, first Greek ambassador in Vienna), Nikolaos Stournaris (1806-1853, founder of the Metsovio Polytechnic School in Athens), Georgios Stavrou (1785-1869, co-founder and first governor of the National Bank of Greece); and were also among the important *politicians* Ioannis Kolettis (1773-1847, Minister and later Prime Minister 1844-47), Stergios Doumbas (1794-1870, banker in Vienna), Konstantinos Zappas (1814-1892, endowed the Zappeion Hall and the surrounding gardens), Georgios Averof (1818-1899, founder of the Military Academy, restorer of the Panathenian Stadium), Nikolaos Doumbas 1830-1900 (banker), Spyridon Lambros (1851-1919, historian and politician), Athinagoras I. (1886-1972, Patriarch from 1948 to 1972), Evangelos Averof Tositsas (1910-1990, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1958-1963, Minister of National Defence 1974-1981).

All these names are often used by Greek politicians and historians to demonstrate the Greek consciousness of the "Vlach-speaking Greeks".^[34] Unfortunately, when speaking about their much-admired Greekness, Greek Aromanians and Greeks often forget that such examples of well-known Vlach personalities can be found in the other Southeastern European countries too.

In Greece, the national identity of most Aromanians takes place without a doubt through modern Hellenism. From the perspective of the Greek Aromanians all monolingual populations which only speak Greek belong to the Greeks (Grec), while the Vlach-, Slav- and Albanian-speaking people can also belong to the Hellenes (Elini, in Greek Ellines). Thus, the two terms *Greek* and *Hellenic* cause problems. While almost every Aromanian considers himself to be *Hellene* (Ellinas, fem. Ellinida, pl. Ellines) when speaking Greek, he would not consider himself *Greek* (Grec, fem. Greacă, pl. Grec) when speaking Aromanian. To demonstrate this fact, let me quote Maria K. from Kleisoura. "*Of course I am proud to be Vlach, but I am much prouder to be Hellene*"^[35] were her first comments when speaking about the Vlachs in Greece. Only a few minutes later, when we switched over to Aromanian, she told me about her daughter "*You can't imagine my shock when our daughter wanted to marry a Greek! Who wants to marry their own children to the Greeks?*"^[36] To be a Hellene does not mean automatically to be Greek. Further problems are provoked if a language is used that does not differentiate between *Greek* and *Hellene*. Obviously, most Aromanians in Greece will more willingly call themselves *Greek* when speaking English than *Grec* when speaking Aromanian.

Things are quite different in the case of pro-Romanian Aromanians and those who consider themselves to be a separate people. They do not only identify themselves as Vlachs by culture and language, their Aromanian identity does not allow the parallel existence of another national identity. These tendencies can still be found in Greece, especially in those villages in which strong Romanian communities were accepted by the Greek authorities, above all in Avdella, Perivoli, Samarina, Vovoussa, Krania, Edessa, Veroia and the surrounding areas, as well as in a few settlements in the districts of Kastoria and Ioannina. On the whole they represent a minute and dwindling number of Aromanians.

The idea of "Hellenism" unites most Aromanians *in Greece* much more than their "Vlachness" so that the following comment by the mayor of a large Vlach village probably represents the opinion of most Greek Aromanians: *"How is it possible that someone calls us minority? We made the Greek state!"*^[37]

Aromanians in Greece today: Save your folklore, forget your language!

Intimidation and repression of Aromanians by local Greek politicians, teachers, priests as well as the nationalist press in the period between the civil war and the military dictatorship has led to a tabooing of minority topics in Greece. I have heard about Aromanian children who were punished for speaking Aromanian at school well into the 1970s and 1980s. Aromanians with such experiences usually maintain a strong antipathy towards the Greek policy and preserve, until today (especially in the Balkans and the diaspora), feelings of belonging to an Aromanian minority.

In the last few years optimistic activities for the preservation of Aromanian culture in Greece as well as serious indications for insufficient tolerance in Greece have increased. Demirtaş-Coşkun^[38] characterises the situation of the Vlach population in Greece as "the worst when compared with other countries", but it is not clear which situation she means (obviously not the economical) and whether the Vlachs in Greece are of the same opinion. Claims that "the Vlach community wants to have education and church services in Vlach"^[39] and "Greece refuses to give the Vlachs any cultural rights",^[40] do not necessarily represent cultural demands made by the Aromanians of Greece. Especially politicians of Aromanian descent in Greece emphasise that they do not even want to be recognised as a minority and are not at all interested in Aromanian language education.

Aromanian is still learned today in the villages, but only within the families, never in associations or schools. This continued survival of the language might show that identification with Aromanians "continues to confer advantages in diverse contexts".^[41] But the consciousness of belonging to the Vlachs does not depend only on being able to speak the Aromanian language.

The most impressive examples of this fact are the many activists in Vlach associations who do not speak any Aromanian at all! Even without speaking Aromanian, belonging to the Vlachs may have advantages. Approbation and disapprobation of Vlachness strongly depends on image: in surroundings where Vlach means "uncouth bumpkin", *Hellene* is emphasised, when speaking about maecenas and heroes, *Vlachness* becomes more important. Many Aromanians in Greece even seem to feel disturbed by their language, because it hinders them in identification with Hellenism. Many Aromanians in Greece thus do not even regret the loss of their language and would prefer to themselves rid of their "mixed idiom". Most of them are convinced that it is absolutely impossible to write Aromanian. In the Balkans and the diaspora there are about ten Aromanian magazines^[42], several homepages^[43] and radio stations^[44] using Aromanian, but none of them in Greece. A large part of the Aromanian community living in Greece is not interested in any initiative aimed at the preservation of the Aromanian language apart from its use in the family. Initiatives taken to protect the Aromanian culture are looked upon with mistrust (i.e. Minority Groups Research Centre, KEMO).^[45] In Greece there is no newspaper using the Aromanian language. Contemporary Aromanian periodicals can be divided into those that deal with Aromanian topics and occasionally print texts written in Aromanian^[46] and those local newspapers that hardly write about Aromanian subjects and are only published in Greek.^[47]

None of the more than 200 Aromanian organisations^[48] in Greece has an Aromanian name and the majority do not even have the word "Vlach" in their names; none of them have declared their support for the preservation of the Aromanian language as an important goal. Local associations recently founded Aromanian cultural museums in Veria, Serres and Naousa.^[49] The largest Aromanian organisation in Greece - and thus world-wide - is the *Pan-Hellenic Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs* (Panellinia Enosi Politistikon Syllogon Vlachon Ellados) which apart from Salonika has branches in Drama, Grevena, Metsovo, Athens and Agrinio. It currently (2003) has about 80 member associations. Apart from these associations, there is a small organisation for the *Aromanian/Vlach Culture* (Etaireia Aromanikou/Vlachikou Politismou) in Athens, which is the only one active in the effort to protect and promote the Aromanian language and distributes books with Aromanian songs as well as small information pamphlets in Greek. In the last years Vlach Students in Salonika initiated activities and events on Aromanian subjects and founded the "League of Vlach Students". In Salonika there exists further an *Association of Helleno-Vlach Albanians* (Syllogos Ellinovlachon Albanias stin Ellada), whose members are Albanian-Aromanians who have recently immigrated to the country. Between 1994 and 1999 beginner and advanced

linguistic courses for "Koutsovlach" have been offered at the Aristotelis University of Salonika. Finally, documentary films about Aromanians are very rare on Greek television; their language is never heard.

In contrast to the language, the maintenance of Vlach folklore in Greece is excellent. In Metsovo and other Aromanian villages, festivals have been taking place over the last 20 years and are, with over 40 000 participants, the largest Aromanian happenings of their kind in the world. Recently, people of neighbouring countries and of the diaspora have begun to attend this event with growing interest. Even if some publications carried the occasional opinion that might have been seen by the governments of the states in which Aromanians live as politically dangerous, none of the Aromanian organisations desire to achieve any form of independence for Aromanians. Because of their extremely loyal Neo-Hellenic consciousness, the Aromanians of Greece do not represent any "danger" for Greek national concerns and are thus used to demonstrate Greek progress in handling its linguistic minorities.^[50]

Activities after the "Recommendation on the Aromanian culture"

On June 15th 1999 the Council of Europe adopted recommendation 1333 (1997)^[51] on Aromanian culture and language. According to the recommendation, Balkan states with Aromanians populations are encouraged to ratify the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and to support the Aromanians in terms of providing education, religious services in the churches, newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes in Aromanian and support for their cultural associations. The decision met with extreme criticism from the largest Aromanian organisation in Greece,^[52] whereby the Council of Europe repeated its decision in 1998.^[53] Positive attitudes were only expressed by NGOs such as *Greek Helsinki Monitor* and *Minority Rights Group Greece*.^[54]

In 2001, no fewer than 31 Vlach-speaking mayors and heads of village signed a protest resolution against the US State Department Report on the human rights situation in Greece. They complained "against the direct or indirect characterisation of the Vlach-speaking Greeks as an ethnic, linguistic or other minority, stating that the Vlach-speaking Greeks never requested to be recognised by the Greek state as a minority, stressing that historically and culturally they were and still are an integral part of Hellenism, they would be bilingual and Aromanian would be secondary".^[55]

On 2nd February 2001, the trial of the Aromanian activist Sotiris Bletsas in Athens revived again the discussion about the Aromanians' rights in Greece. Bletsas was accused

of distributing maps printed by the *European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages* (EBLUL),^[56] which showed the minority languages in Greece, at a Vlach festival in 1995. The witnesses for the prosecution against Bletsas included an Aromanian mayor.^[57] On 18th December 2001 he was acquitted as innocent. Bletsas' acquittal paved the way for the EBLUL meeting on 26th January 2002 in Salonika, which was arranged for representatives of the linguistic minorities of Greece. The 1st International Conference of the EBLUL has been held in Salonika on 15th November 2002.^[58] During the conference more than 100 persons demonstrated against the intentions of the conference.^[59]

On 28th May 2002, an incident occurred at the Book Exhibition of Salonika involving around 100 right-wing militants who stormed the stands where publications from Balkan countries were being displayed. They exercised their own variety of censorship by removing and burning books from those Balkan countries, the content of which was considered by some persons to be insulting. A large number of these books were Vlach literature from the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).^[60] Another example of insufficient tolerance is the publishing (or non-publishing) of books with Aromanian subjects. It is typical that most classical scientific literature on the Aromanians has yet to be translated into the Greek, whereas there are translations in nearly every other Balkan language. The Greek edition of M. D. Peyfuss' thesis "Die Aromunische Frage" has to date not been possible although the translation has been finished for time. My own Greek translation of Gustav Weigand's "Die Aromunen" has been edited and commented on in the most abominable way^[61] by the right-wing secretary of the "Information Center of Ethnic Problems," Achille Lazarou.

Most recently, on 18th August 2003, the *Pan-Hellenic Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs* issued again a strong protest^[62] on the occasion of the direct or indirect characterisation of the Vlach-speaking Greeks as an ethnic, linguistic or other type of minority, a position expressed in the latest report issued by the American organisation "Freedom House".^[63] The classification as belonging to a minority may for some people be a compliment or a privilege, for others it is disturbing and suspicious. As the term *minority* in Greece is officially used only when speaking about Muslims in Western Thrace, this expression has a negative undertone for Christian groups. Furthermore, Greece's minority policy often interpreted the linguistic and cultural otherness of Aromanians, Arvanites and Slavomacedonians as not-Greek, anti-Greek or disloyal towards the Greek state. Most Aromanians in Greece will for these reasons continue to refuse being called a minority. If one describes them as a minority in Greece, regardless of their protests against this classification, one has to call them a minority in the Balkans too; if one calls them Greek one has to call them at least partially Albanian, Serb, Romanian etc. in other countries. And everybody who uses the term *Vlach-speaking Greeks* should realise that they became *Greek-speaking Vlachs* some time ago.

Footnotes:

[1] Due to this fact, to the lack of older data and to different census methods, estimating the Aromanian population is nearly impossible. The last Greek national census that differentiated between different orthodox groups, showed 26 750 Vlachs living in Greece in 1940 and 22 736 in 1951. The Lausanne convention of 1923 mentioned between 150 000 – 200 000 Vlachs in Greece. Today's estimates are as high as 600 000 Aromanians living in Greece. If one takes into account all potential speakers who consider themselves belonging to the Vlach/Aromanian nation, we should perhaps speak of a maximum of 300 000 Aromanians in Greece and a number of fluent Aromanian speakers as not above 100 000. For further estimates see: Bogdan Banu, *The Aromanians in the Balkans*, at: www.aromanian.net; Sevold Braga, *Die Rechtslage der romanischen Minderheit in Griechenland*, *Noul Album Macedo-Român 2*, (1965), S. 37-136; Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, *The Vlachs. A Forgotten Minority in the Balkans*. London, Portland 2001; Thede Kahl, *Ethnizität und räumliche Verteilung der Aromunen in Südosteuropa*. *Münstersche Geographische Arbeiten 43*. Münster 1999; Tache Papahagi, *Aromîinii. Grai, Folklor, Etnografie. Cu o introducere istorică [The Aromanians. Language, Folklore, Ethnography. With a historical introduction]*. Bucureşti 1932, 79-81; Gustav Weigand, *Die Aromunen. Ethnographisch-philologisch-historische Untersuchungen über das Volk der sogenannten Makedo-Romanen oder Zinzaren*, Bd. 1, Land und Leute. Leipzig 1895, 281-283; Tom Winnifrith, *The Vlachs of the Balkans: A Rural Minority Which Never Achieved Ethnic Identity*. In: *Roots of Rural Ethnic Mobilisation: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe 1850-1940*. Vol. 7. Ed. David Howell. New York, Dartmouth 1992.

[2] Unfortunately some authors use these terms as synonyms, e.g. Demirtaş-Coşkun [fn. 1]; Tom Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People*. London 1987.

[3] Alkis Raftis, *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του ελληνικού χορού [Encyclopedia of the Greek Dance]*. Athens 1995, 92-95.

[4] The immense diversity in defining the word "Vlach" can be seen in the following excerpts from my interviews:

"Everybody who has animals is a Vlach."

"Vlachs are the persons we go to at Easter to buy some lamb."

"There are no Vlachs anymore. They have gone."

"My parents were Vlachs."

"They are Romanians. But we have Vlachs here too."

"A Vlach is a bad major."

"They are the purest Greeks, the proudest race!"

"We do not have any Vlachs here. We are pure Greeks."

[5] All examples in Tache Papahagi, *Dicţionarul dialectului aromân. General şi etimologic [Dictionary of the Aromanian dialect. General and etymologic]*. Bucharest 1974.

[6] For details on distribution see Vasilis Gounaris, Asterios Koukoudis: *Από την Πίνδο ως τη Ροδόπη: αναζητώντας τις εγκαταστάσεις και την ταυτότητα των Βλάχων (From Pindos to Rhodopes: searching for the settlements and the identity of the Vlachs)*. *Ίστωρ* 10(1997), S. 91-137; Kahl [fn. 1]; Johannes Kramer, *De Aromoenen in Griekenland*. *Tetradio - Tijdschrift van het Griekenlandcentrum 11*, Universiteit Gent 2002, 55-72; Rudolf Windisch, *Die lateinisch-romanischen Aromunen auf dem Balkan*. In:

Europäische Regionalkulturen im Vergleich. Eds. Eva Leitzke-Ungerer, Andrea Pagni. Frankfurt a.M. 2002, 123-141.

[7] Because of their pejorative meaning I would like to avoid terms like "graecoman" and "romanising" used in Southeastern European languages.

[8] Max D. Peyfuss, Rom oder Byzanz? Das Erwachen des aromunischen Nationalbewußtseins, Österreichische Osthefte 12/6 1970, 337-351, here 338.

[9] Angeliki Konstantakopoulou, Η ελληνική γλώσσα στα Βαλκάνια 1750-1850. Το τετράγλωσσο λεξικό του Δανιήλ Μοσχοπολίτη [The Greek language in the Balkans 1750-1850. The dictionary in four languages of Daniel Moschopolite]. Ioannina 1988, 11.

[10] Ioannis Zelepos, Die Ethnizisierung griechischer Identität 1870-1912. Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 113. München 2002, 56, 267.

[11] Ulf Brunnbauer (ed.): Umstrittene Identitäten. Ethnizität und Nationalität in Südosteuropa. Frankfurt a.M. 2002, (Einleitung, 11-29, here 19).

[12] For some Greek scholars this identification with the Greeks is enough to draw the conclusion that they are of Greek origin, see Christos Zafeiris, Βαλκάνιοςπραματευτής. Οδοιπορία μνήμης σε ελληνικές κοινότητες και παροικίες [The Balkan merchant. Tracing the Greek communities and colonies], Athens 1998, 25, 139-141.

[13] E.g. Konstantinos Oukoutas, Νέα παιδαγωγία ήτι αλφαβητάριον εύκολον του μάθειν τα ρωmano-βλάχικα γράμματα εις κοινήν χρήσιν των Ρωmano-Βλάχων [New easy fible for learning the Romano-Vlach writing for the common use of the Romano-Vlachs]. Vienna 1797; Gheorghe Constantin Rosa, Untersuchungen über die Romanier oder sogenannten Wlachen, welche jenseits der Donau wohnen. Pest 1808; Mihail G. Boiagi: Romanische oder Macedonowlachische Sprachlehre / Γραμματική ρωμανική ήτοι μακεδονοβλάχικη. Vienna 1813.

[14] Radu C. Miron, Kirchliche Unabhängigkeitsbestrebungen der Aromunen. Dacoromania. Jahrbuch für östliche Latinität 4 (1977/78), 135-145, 136.

[15] Max D. Peyfuss: Die Aromunische Frage. Ihre Entwicklung von den Ursprüngen bis zum Frieden von Bukarest (1913) und die Haltung Österreich-Ungarns. Wiener Archiv für Geschichte des Slawentums und Osteuropas, Vienna 1974, 21.

[16] Exact data varies; for details see the map in Marius Z. Țigoiu, Școli și biserici românești în Macedonia [Romanian Schools and Churches in Macedonia]. București 1938, and the following sources: Teodor T. Burada, Cercetări despre școalele românești în Turcia [Survey on the Romanian School in Turkey]. Bucuresci 1890; Lena Divani, The Vlachs of Greece and the Italo-Rumanian Propaganda. Thetis. Mannheimer Beiträge zur Klassischen Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands 3, Mannheim 1996, S. 195-206; Mitu Dona, Cum s'au înființat întâile școli naționale în Albania [How there were the first national schools in Albania made], Graiul Românesc 2/9, București 1928, S. 156-162; I. Goschin, Școlile românești din Peninsula Balcanică [The Romanian schools in the Balkan Peninsula], Graiul Românesc 5/1, București 1931, S. 3-10; Ion Ordeanu: Școli românești în peninsula Balcanică [The Romanian schools in the Balkan Peninsula], Graiul Românesc 2/6, București 1928, S. 101-105; Peyfuss [fn. 15], 106; Gustav Weigand: Die Aromunen. Ethnographisch-philologisch-historische Untersuchungen über das Volk der sogenannten Makedo-Romanen oder Zinzaren, Bd. 1, Land und Leute. Leipzig 1895, 306-308.

[17] On Mărgărit see Theodor Capidan, Macedoromânii. Etnografie, istorie, limbă [The

Macedoromanians. Ethnography, history, language]. București 1942, 232-234; on his intentions see Evangelos Averof-Tositsas, Η πολιτική πλευρά του κουτσοβλαχικού ζητήματος [The political aspects of the Aromanian question]. Reprint Trikala 1992 (1st edition Athens 1948) and Peyfuss [fn. 15]; on Belemace see the autobiography by Constantin Belemace: Dimândarea părintească [Dimand of the parents]. New York 1990.

[18] Or Vlach-Romanian as does Fikret Adanir, Die Makedonische Frage. Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908. Wiesbaden 1979, 220.

[19] R. V. Bossy, Un succes diplomatique românesc: "Iradeaua" din 1905 [A Romanian diplomatic success: the irade of 1905], Noul Album Macedo-Român 1 (1959), S. 167-169.

[20] On discrimination, persecution and other conflicts between pro-Greek and pro-Romanian Aromanians see Adanir [fn. 18], 217-222; C. A.

[21] Bratter, Die kutzowlachische Frage. Hamburg 1907, 61, 65-76, 111-120; Demirtaş-Coşkun [fn. 1], 17-22, Divani [fn. 16], 200; Constantin Papanace, La persecution des minorités aromounes (valaques) dans les pays balcaniques. Le probleme macedonien. Biblioteca verde 3. București 1951; Peyfuss [fn. 15], 90. Bratter [fn. 20].

[22] Nicolae Zdrulla, Mișcarea aromânilor din Pind în 1917 [The movement of the Aromanians in Pindos in 1917], Revista Aromânească 1/2, București 1929, S. 162.

[23] See Divani [fn. 16], 196, 205.

[24] Stauros A. Papagiannis: Τα παιδιά της λύκαινας. Οι 'επίγονοι' της 5ης Ρωμαϊκής Λεγεώνας κατά την διάρκεια της Κατοχής 1941-1944 [Wolf children. The 'descendants' of the 5th Roman Legion during the occupation 1941-1944]. Athens 1998, 21-31.

[25] Details: Thede Kahl, The Ethnicity of Aromanians after 1990: the Identity of a Minority that Behaves like a Majority, Ethnologia Balkanica 6 (2002), 145-169.

[26] Irina Nicolau, Les caméléons des Balkans. Civilisations En Quete d'identité XLII/2 (Université Libre de Bruxelles), 1993, 175-178.

[27] Nicholas Balamaci, The Balkan Vlachs: Born to Assimilate?, Cultural Survival Quarterly, Summer 1995 (also at http://www.farsarotul.org/nl18_1.htm).

[28] Ljiljana Gavrilović, Kir-Janja - Stvarnost ili stereotip [Kir-Janja - Reality or stereotype]. Belgrade 1998 (unpublished), 2.

[29] Gustav Weigand: Die nationale Bewegung unter den Aromunen (Rumänen der Türkei). Globus 71/4, Braunschweig 1897, S. 53-55.

[30] Ilias G. Kostopoulos, Η Εθνική συνείδηση των Βλάχων και ο ρόλος τους στη συγκρότηση του Νέου Ελληνισμού [The national consciousness of the Vlachs and their role in the unity of Modern Hellenism], Trikalina 8 (1989), 207-240, here 205.

[31] See Giannis Papathanasiou, Ιστορία των Βλάχων [The history of the Vachs]. Salonika 19942.

[32] For example Salonika's mayor, Vasilis Papageorgopoulos, emphasised in 2000 that "almost all the great benefactors of modern Greece [...] were Vlachs"; see Community of Nymfaion (ed.), Armani - Distinguished Greeks Vlachs. Catalogue of the Nymphaion Museum of Gold and Silverkraft exhibition. Nymfaion 2000, 11-12.

[33] The following names are given in their Greek form; outside of Greece some of them are better known by their Vlach forms: "Dumba" instead of "Doumbas".

[34] For example the deputy mayor of Larisa, Panos Sapkas, emphasised in 2000: "When modern Greece came into being, Vlach benefactors filled Athens with buildings,

enduring evidence that their hearts and minds were wholly Greek"; see Community of Nymfaion [fn. 33], 17-18.

[35] " Βέβαια είμαι περίφανη που είμαι Βλάχα, αλλά πιο περίφανη είμαι που είμαι Ελληνίδα, καυχίεμα!"

[36] "Lele, cātā yinati ān yinea cāndu feata noastrā ș-aflā un grecu! Cari di noi va s-da cilimeañli la greț? "

[37] "Πώς τολμούν κάποιοι να μας βγάλουν μειονότητα στην Ελλάδα αφού εμείς κάναμε την Ελλάδα! "

[38] Demirtaş-Coşkun: [fn. 1], 29.

[39] *ibid.*, 53.

[40] *ibid.*, 54.

[41] Muriel D. Schein, When is an Ethnic Group? Ecology and Class Structure in Northern Greece, *Ethnology* 14 (1975) Pittsburgh, 83-97, here 93.

[42] Some of them can be read online, i.e. Bana Armânească at <http://www.geocities.com/armanasca/>, Farsarotul at <http://www.farsarotul.org>, Zborlu a nostru at <http://www.geocities.com/zborlu/>

[43] <http://membres.lycos.fr/armanami/ta/habari.htm>.

[44] Broadcasting from Bucharest (see <http://www.rri.ro>), from Skopje (see <http://www.maccinema.com/makedonija.asp>) and Kruševo (see <http://www.soros.org.mk/zjlrn/mk/krusevo/programa.htm>).

[45] Pan-Hellenic Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs (Panellinia Enosi Politistikon Syllogon Vlachon Ellados): Ὑποπτα αλλά κερδοφόρα σεμινάρια για Βλάχους [Suspect but Lucrative Seminars on the Vlachs]. *Apogevmatini tis Kyriakis*, 9th August 1998, Athens.

[46] Such as Armanika Chronika, Pigi Kefalobrysou, Mnimes, Amerou - Miliotika Nea, Niagousti.

[47] Such as Avdela, I oraia Samarina, I Nymfi, Gardiki, To Greveniti, Kallarytes, Kleisoura, Metsovo, Flambourioika Nea, Laistina Nea, Livadiotika Nea, Pindos, Palmoi tis Kranias, To Syrrako, Pisoderitika, Vovousiotika, Zagoriaka, Koutsoufliani.

[48] When speaking about Aromanian "organisations" in this section, one has to consider that a lot of them are not officially registered; none of the mentioned Aromanian "newspapers" has an official ISSN number.

[49] For Naousa see

http://www.museumsofmacedonia.gr/Folklore/Laografiko_Blaxvn.html, for Veroia <http://www.vlahoi.gr/index.asp>, for Serres <http://users.otenet.gr/~vlah-ser/olymp.htm>, for Almyro <http://www.geocities.com/lsvea2001/>, for Livadi http://www.dynamiki.gr/livadi/lao_mousio.htm, for Nymfaio http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Museums/Folklore/Mouseio_Nymfaioy.html, for Kefolovryso <http://www.geocities.com/mentis2s/>, for Metsovo <http://www.epcon.gr/metsovo/>, for Samarina <http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/HellenicMacedonia/en/C3.8.html>.

[50] Divani [fn. 16], S. 198.

[51] Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly AACR 18.97, 1403-24/6/97-1-E and AS (1997) CR18 Doc. 7728 provisional edition, ordinary session report, eighteenth sitting, 24 June, appendix: Recommendation 1333 (1997) on the Aromanian culture and language (see www.coe.fr/cm/dec/1999/674/71.htm and <http://fargo.itp.tsoa.nyu.edu/~mihai/aromanians1333.html>).

[52] Pan-Hellenic Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs (Panellinia Enosi Politistikon Syllogon Vlachon Ellados): Letter from 5th March 1998 for the Council of Europe Concerning the Resolution 1333 about Aroumanian Language and Culture, Drama (copy in the possession of the author).

[53] Council of Europe: Draft Opinion of the Steering Committee of Human Rights (CDDH) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1333 (1997) on the Aromanian Culture and Language. 1st meeting 17-20 March 1998, Human Rights Building, Strasbourg 1998.

[54] See respectively <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr> and <http://www.incahellas.com/kemo>.

[55] Resolution of protest by 31 Vlach-speaking mayors and heads of village at http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=174455; cf. US Department of State at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/769.htm> and http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/.

[56] See <http://www.eblul.org/gp/resolution-en.zip>.

[57] See details in Minderheiten in Griechenland. Pogrom - Zeitschrift für bedrohte Völker 31/209 2001; also at <http://www.gfbv.ch/>

[58] Details at <http://www.mhrmc.ca/news/02/eblul3.html>

[59] See http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=306693

[60] Greek Helsinki Monitor 2002, "Serious Allegations about Burning of Books at the Book Exhibition of Thessaloniki by Extreme Right-Wingers Following Incitation by a Television Program, see press release from 30 May 2002" at http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/special_issues/aromanians.html.

[61] Thede Kahl, Gustav Weigand in Griechenland von den Schwierigkeiten einer Rezeption. Südostforschungen 61/2002, 1-13; Thede Kahl: Οι Βλάχοι και η ιστορία τους. Η έκδοση ενός βιβλίου και μερικές απορίες από τον μεταφραστή του [The Aromanians and their History. The Edition of a Book and some Remarks by its Translator]. Eleftherotypia, 5th August 2002, 35.

[62] See http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=366995 or in Greek 366991.

[63] See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.