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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

The Romanian Discourse on the Macedonian Aromanians (1860-1902): the Construction of a National Identity

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**The Romanian Discourse on the Macedonian Aromanians
(1860-1902)
- the Construction of a National Identity -
(Final Report: Abstract)**

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Vladimir Crețulescu**

The testimonials of foreign travelers (in our case, English and French travelers) which cross the Balkans in the time span between 1800 – 1860 bring to light the following identity markers of the Aromanian ethnicity, as they were before the intervention of Romanian propaganda in the Balkans:

- Roman origins;
- The endogenous ethnonym „rămăn / armân”, which constitutes a part of the boundary of the ethnic community;
- Linguistic latinity;
- Heroic figures of the ethnic past, entered into the collective memory;
- The institution of the celnikate, which is mobilized as part of the ethnic community’s boundary;
- The social practice of endogamy, which also functions as a part of the community’s boundary;
- The local particularism of Aromanian collective identities, which produces an ethnicity sundered by multiple internal fractures;

Part of the reason for the existence of these fractures within the Aromanian ethnic identity is to be found in the fact that Aromanians lack a national discourse of their own (for them to unite around), as well as their own national movement (to spur them to action in the pursuit of a common goal).

After 1860, Romania shall offer the Aromanians just such a national discourse, paired up with a mobilizing national movement.

The unification of the Romanian Principalities (Valachia and Moldavia), in January of 1859, represents a partial fulfillment of the Romanian national ideal. In that same year, Dimitrie Cazacovici publishes a summons directed towards the aromanians living in the Romanian Principalities, asking them to gather funds for the creation of Romanian schools in the Balkans. A year later, in 1860, Cazacovici manages to establish, in Bucharest, a Macedo-Romanian

Committee. The first point on the agenda of the freshly-founded committee is the publication of a call to action directed towards the Aromanians living in European Turkey.

The Macedo-Romanian Committee's summons do not go unheard. Dimitrie Atanasescu, an Aromanian 25-year-old taylor, comes to Bucharest on the 20th of July 1861, resolved to study here, in order to return in his native town as a Romanian teacher. Once invested as teacher of Romanian language in Macedonia, on July 2nd 1864 he proceeds to open, in his native town of Trnovo, the first Romanian school South of the Danube. This first school shall, in time, be followed by many more: on July the 28th 1865, The Romanian Ministry of Public Instruction allocates 20.000 Lei out of the State Budget towards the establishing in Bucharest of a boarding school for Aromanian children, which would be trained to become teachers in the future Romanian schools to be created in Macedonia.

As a consequence of the international acknowledgement of Romania's independence in 1878, Romanian-Greek diplomatic relations are initiated in 1879: a Romanian diplomatic legation is established in Athens. Unfortunately Romanian-Greek relations would, from the very start, be poisoned by the Aromanian Question: having been heavily Hellenized ever since the XVIIIth century (if not earlier), the Aromanians were seen in Greek circles as part of the Hellenic people. Particularly in the context of the "demographical war" opposing Greeks and Bulgarians – a "war" in which the nationality of the majority of Macedonia's population is at stake – the sudden awakening of Aromanian national feeling in Macedonia represents, from a Greek standpoint, a very unwelcome surprise.

The diplomatic conflict between Greece and Romania has its roots in a struggle for the discursive hegemony over Aromanian identity. By analyzing Apostol Margarit's text, *Réfutation d'une brochure grecque*, we were able to bring into focus, *in nuce*, some of the main „hot spots" of the Greco-Romanian conflict pertaining to the Aromanian Question.

For the purpose of analyzing Margarit's *Réfutation*, we have employed a methodological approach known as *critical discourse analysis* (or CDA). Briefly put, critical discourse analysis (as used for our purposes) is an interdisciplinary approach seeking to apply methods of language analysis (as taken from various fields of linguistics) in the social sciences.

The guiding thread of our entire enterprise is to be found in the recurring themes of the Roman origins and linguistic Latinity of Aromanians, read as vectors of their natural belonging to the Romanian people. These two discursive hubs articulate Romania's entire institutional and propaganda effort, by way of which the country is, in the second half of the XIXth century, beginning its attempt at taking the Aromanian population of the Balkans as its own.