

***AROMANIANS IN THE ROMANIAN-GREEK RELATIONS IN THE FIRST PART OF
THE 20th CENTURY***
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The thesis, *Aromanians in the Romanian-Greek relations in the first part of the 20th century*, aims at revisiting a subject which has been extremely popular in the pre-war and inter-war period, but has subsequently fallen in disgrace during communism when it was considered almost a taboo. It was only recently that the subject returned to the attention of historical analysis, but this happened from challenging perspectives.

Although our primary interest was to assess the manner in which the international relations on the Bucharest-Athens axis unfolded in the beginning of the 20th century, the paper could not overlook the educational, cultural, and ecclesiastical valences of the Aromanian community. In fact, in the pre-war Balkan context the political-educational-ecclesiastical spheres merged to such an extent they nearly overlapped. The red thread of nationalism was nonetheless the vector which coordinated the way in which these three fields converged.

Thus, the paper had to operate numerous incursions not only in the fields of historical and political science, but also in the fields of ecclesiastical and cultural history. Methodologically, the paper is situated in an interdisciplinary horizon, often appealing to comparisons, prosopography, and national imagology. As breaking the context threatened to affect the complexity of the Aromanian question, we made constant references to the international circumstances, to the Romanian and Greek foreign politics, and to the domestic situation of the Aromanian communities. We believe that only by taking into consideration these three plans the dynamics of the ethnic identification processes which appeared within this south-Danubian Romanian group could be emphasized in a convincing manner.

Considering that even nowadays the status of the Aromanian communities is creating nationalistic fervours in some of the South-Eastern European countries, we presented the principal Balkan and international historiographical positions on the subject, while noting the areas of conflict, but also the areas of convergence between the various theories circulated by historians.

After establishing the larger framework of the Aromanian question, we evaluated the inedited sources we found in the diplomatic archives, national archives, or in the special collections of various libraries. Thus, we analysed the Romanian-Greek diplomatic relations beginning with the second half of the 19th century, in particular following the Russian-Turkish War of 1877/78 – referred to in the Romanian national historiography as the War of Independence. More often than not, the dialogue between Bucharest and Athens turned towards the chancellery in Constantinople. The field of competition between the Kingdom of Romania and the Kingdom of Greece had generous grounds of dispute and the Aromanian communities represented a high stake for both camps – albeit a stake localized within the borders of the Ottoman Empire until 1913.

The involvement of Romania in the Aromanian question represented an inedited for its foreign policy. Whereas in the case of Transylvania or Bukovina, the officials in Bucharest were involved in supporting a cultural nationalism which unfolded in various forms and at various intensities, in what the South-Danubian Romanians were concerned, the support had to be offered to some communities with which Romania had no direct geographical continuity. This support sparked a surprised and suspicious reaction from the Great Powers and caused immense anxieties to its neighbouring states, in particular Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria – states which did

not understand the underlining reasons behind the actions of Romania. Not once, Romania's involvement in the region was perceived as having a detonator effect on the Balkan political arena, which was anyway complicated by subsequent waves of radicalised nationalisms. In a region used to function and position itself vis-à-vis the common Ottoman 'enemy', thus prone to ideological crusades against the infidels, the ethnical and confessional fragmentation strongly destabilised the Balkan world.

The year 1905 represented a moment of fracture in the region. The diplomatic success acquired by Romania – that of having a new ethnic community recognised by the Ottoman Empire within its territory – represented a signal of the ever more consolidated efforts of King Carol I's chancellery in what concerns the Macedonian and Epirote provinces. The insertion in an official document of the ethnical denomination of 'Romanians' applied to an Ottoman territory meant the sanctification of Romania's legitimacy of action – Romania could now intervene for the Aromanian communities from a position of 'mother-nation'.

In this context, the Romanian-Greek relations became increasingly tense, until the diplomatic dialogue was eventually annulled. This matter further complicated both the involvement of Bucharest in supporting the Aromanian communities at the south of the Danube, and the involvement of Athens in supporting the Greek communities which resided in Romania.

These declarations of hostility between the two states were complemented by a war of propagandas. Through this media, both camps sought to win European supporters for their divergent and to energise their own citizens by assuring them of the justness of their respective national ideals.

The Balkan Wars brought an end to the organisational impetus which had appeared within the Aromanian communities as a result of a several years-old Ottoman legislation which offered them the possibility of proportional representation within the structures of local and central government. The possibility of creating an Aromanian elite was permanently compromised following the results of the 1912-1913 military conflagrations. The aggravation of the situation in the region determines Romania to adopt a new strategy in what the Aromanian question were concerned: support for the incorporation of these communities within the new state which was springing on the geopolitical stage of the Balkans – Albania. The geographical continuity between the regions inhabited in majority by Aromanian and the presumed borders of the future Albanian state convinced the Romanian diplomacy that this was the most inspired

solution for the weakly bound Aromanian community. However, the First World War and the difficult geopolitical situation it generated brought a formidable regress for these ethnic communities. Within their new national states, these communities could no longer find the support which a multinational and multi-confessional Empire had been eager to offer at the turn of the 20th century. Trapped between the egos and the nationalistic projections of the region, the Aromanians believed their best survival strategy was emigrating to Romania. Thus began the settling process in the south of Dobrogea. This represents the upper limit of the issues tackled by this thesis, the implications of the immigration phenomenon being outside the object of our research.

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