An Analysis of the Macedo-Romanian Issue Within the Romanian-Greek Relations During the First Decades of the Twentieth Century (1900-1926)

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Trom the beginning, we should mention that the Romanian - Greek relations have followed, since the establishment of diplomatic relations, in 1879 and until the outbreak of the Second World War, a sinuous and wavering path, marked by various incidents, some of them of serious impact, even leading to a temporary break of diplomatic relations between the two states. Among the issues which have affected, in a significant way, the Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations was the situation of the Macedo-Romanians and the stand taken by Greece regarding this ethnic group. Based on the idea that Macedonia in its whole belonged to Greece, the local Greeks initiated various actions, going as far as to send over armed bands to "defend their interests" in the area, a fact which affected the local population of the area, especially the Macedo-Romanians. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Macedo-Romanians made up a considerable ethnic segment, more exactly almost a quarter of the population of Macedonia¹, within an extremely varied ethnic conglomerate which included Turks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedo-Romanians, Albanians and Jews.

Apart from the actions taken by the Greek authorities, a religious authority, namely the Ecumenical Patriarchate was also employed as a lever in order to prevent or limit the aspirations of the Macedo-Romanians for a cultural and ecclesiastic life of their own.

In 1878, an order of the Grand Vezir acknowledged the right of the Macedo-Romanians to enjoy Ottoman protection and to found their own schools. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, there were 118 such establishments, namely 114 primary schools, two business schools, a school preparing schoolmasters and a high school². Later, in 1900, 6 high schools and 113 public schools for the Macedo-Romanians were recorded in Macedonia³.

After a four year period (1892-1896) with no relations between Greece and diplomatic Romania, due to the argument over the estate left by V. Zappa, the diplomatic relations were resumed and, moreover, three more consulates were opened, at Pireu, Patras and Corfu. During the Crete crisis of 1897, although at the official level Romania assumed a neutral position, in order to avoid causing any discontent in Constantinople that could affect Romanian campaign for the official recognition of Romanian nationality in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, the Greek-Turkish war was regarded with sympathy by the authorities in Bucharest, which have supported many Greek volunteers in their action to leave for Greece.

The stand of Greece and Romania on the issue of the Macedo-Romanians was addressed at Abbazia, in the spring of 1901, during the meeting between King Carol of Romanian and King George of Greece. On this occasion, King Carol I of Romania tried to eliminate the suspicions of the Greek monarch regarding the Romanian propaganda in Macedonia, while King George promised that Greece would offer support by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and insisted on a solution to be given to the Zappa issue⁴. Despite the above mentioned meeting, the Greek authorities continued to show their irritation in relation to the Romanian actions in Macedonia, while the authorities in Bucharest were criticizing the part played by Athens in delaying a solution to the ecclesiastic issue of the Macedo-Romanians who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire³.

Once with the outbreak, in 1903, of a strong revolt in Macedonia, with assistance coming from Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, a revolt which was eventually stopped by the Ottoman troops, the authorities in Constantinople have reconsidered their attitude regarding the Macedo-Romanians

living in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, on 9/22 May 1905, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, issued an iradea recognizing the nationality of the Macedo-Romanians living in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the fact that they had equal rights with those of the other Christian subjects in the Empire (Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Albanians). Some of the Greek historians have opined that this success of the Romanian authorities in Bucharest came also as a result of the backstage plots and actions of the Romanian representative in Constantinople. Alexandru Lahovary and also due to the intervention of Austria-Hungary, Italy Germany, member states of the Triple Alliance, by the Sultan⁶. The above mentioned iradea stipulated that "His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, who, by his sense of high justice and out of concern for all his peoples, extends his blessing and favors over all his loyal subjects, no matter their race or religion, taking in consideration the request addressed lately to the Imperial Throne by his Vlach subjects, is willing to decide that, by virtue of the civil rights the aforementioned are enjoying, like all the other non-Muslim subjects, their communities are allowed to elect muhtari (mayors), in agreement with the laws in force, such as done on a customary basis by the other communities: the Vlachs should also be accepted in the administration councils, the Imperial authorities should enable the appointed teachers of these communities to inspect their schools, and allow the fulfillment of all the formalities required by the laws of the Empire so as to open schools⁷. Although Romania significant efforts that she wished to improve her friendly relation with the Greek State, and that the official document issued by the Sultan did not affect the interest of the Greek State, still, the reaction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of the Greek government was very strong and intensive8. That kind of negative attitude of the Greek authorities and of public opinion towards the iradea was fuelled by the idea that Macedo-Romanians (the Vlachs) had nothing to do with the Romanians, and that the Greeks had to defend their interests in Macedonia⁹. Despite Romanian efforts made in order to appease the discontent of Greece regarding the *iradea*, very soon a press campaign was launched in Athens, with virulent articles, criticizing the Romanian State, which determined Romanian authorities to ban, for a while, the introduction of Greek newspapers in the country¹⁰.

Since the action undertaken by the Greek partisans, and not only, against the Macedo-Romanian communities in Macedonia intensified, the diplomatic representative of Romania in Athens, Papiniu, requested the firm intervention of the Greek Government, especially as the Romanian side was convinced that most of the groups of Greek fighters were assembled on Greek territory, while the Greek authorities, although well aware of these activities, remained passive. The situation continued to deteriorate, and after the reception by the Greek diplomatic representative to Bucharest, of the official order to leave the capital of Romania, on a vacation of imprecise duration, a similar order was given to the Romanian representative in Athens, Papiniu. Before his withdrawal from the legation in Athens, Papiniu had informed the authorities in Bucharest about the memoirs addressed by the Greek Government to the Greek Powers, in which Greece was declaring that in absence of firm support to the Greek State, the break of diplomatic relations seemed almost imminent¹¹. Given the situation, the Romanian Government notified Greece that the denunciation of the commercial convention signed by the two states and of the appended protocol which offered a legal statute to the Greek communities living in Romania, were taken into consideration.

The correspondent of a Dutch newspaper to Constantinople made an excellent description of the strained relations between Romania and Greece. Thus, the issue of October 11, 1905 of the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant informed about the unfavorable position held by Greece in relation to Romania.

Given the geographical location, a war could not break out, which was all the better for the Greeks, since ,,the very-well organized Romanian army would teach them a lesson more difficult to take than the one they had been taught bz the Turks in 1897; however, Romania could inflict upon Greee huge economic losses in the areas of trade, navigation and other branches of the economy.¹².

The situation grew worse in 1906, and most of the diplomatic signals given by various European capitals seemed to approve the stand taken by the Romanian officials. The Greek side, on the pretext that several Greeks had been expulsed from Romania, eventually took the decision to break diplomatic relations, and on May 30, 1906, the attaché d'affaires of Russia to

Bucharest, Lermontov, notified George Gr. Cantacuzino, the President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, that Greece had decided to call back her diplomatic representatives, including the consuls, and that the interests of the Greek State would be further defended by Russian diplomacy¹³. Soon, Romania decided to have Italy represent her interests in Greece¹⁴.

The Greek Telegraphic Agency issued a press communicate regarding the meeting of the Greek Parliament on the subject of the official break of Greece diplomatic relations between Romania, which came as a surprise to the governmental circles and to the public opinion in Romania, due to the distorted image that was being given of the causes and evolution of the Greek – Romanian conflict¹⁵. Soon, the Romanian Telegraphic Agency presented the point of view of the Romanian party, emphasizing that the Greek government had taken violent action, "sparing no means in the effort to block the application of the Imperial *iradea*¹⁶ regarding the situation of the Macedo-Romanians living in the Ottoman Empire. The Romanian side mentioned also that several armed bands, organized on Greek soil, with financial support from an association located in Athens, had crossed the borders of the Empire on several occasions, while the Greek authorities did not try to prevent them. The above mentioned armed groups were accused by the Romanian side of ,,committing odious acts of violence and terrorizing the Romanian populations by arson, looting and murders"17. Romania underlined also that the Ecumenical Patriarchate backed the Greek action, in an "issue not in the least related to religious principles or dogmas, by odious persecution inflicted on the Orthodox priests and population using Romanian language in their churches",18

For the Romanian party was even more outrageous the fact that Rhallys, the President of the Greek Council of Ministers, after being informed about the situation, had retorted that he could not advise the Patriarch, but if he were to advise him, he would have asked him ,,to be consistent in his stand"¹⁹. Rhallys declared even that he did not recognize the existence of Romanians in Macedonia, and had no knowledge of the ,,existence in Athens of a secret association organizing the bands operating in the neighboring provinces of the Ottoman Empire"²⁰. The Greek Government, through its Minister of Foreign

Affairs, had declared in the Greek Parliament, in early June, that the Romanian party, in its boldness, was accusing the Greek State of acts "which are being undertaken abroad, Ottoman territory, and against some Ottoman subjects, acts that have nothing to do with the Greek State",21. As for the activity of the Patriarch in Constantinople, the Greek party declared that it could not interfere within a strictly religious matter, and that it waved all the responsibility for the relations between , the autocephalous church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the populations under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire",22. Moreover, the Greek Parliament believed that the pretensions of the Romanian State were "completely absurd and unfounded" and that their rejection by the Greek party led to the retribution against the Greek population living in Romania, "long concocted by the Romanian State",23.

The Romanian officials have replied that they were not reproaching Greece with not exerting control on the Ottoman territory, but rather with "closing an eye" to the organizing and supporting on her territory of various bands or armed groups undertaking repeated raids into Macedonia and committing crimes, often under the leadership of Greek army officers²⁴. The authorities in Bucharest decided to react to the "violent actions leading to violent crimes", so they denounced the Trade Convention and even expel some of Greeks established in Romania, whose presence was deemed "incompatible with public order and security"²⁵.

We should also mention that both Romania and Greece experienced the unpleasant effects of the denunciation of the Trade Convention signed in December 1900. Thus, Romanian imports from Greece fell from 1 653 997 lei in 1905 to 944 788 lei in 1906, and to 497 706 lei in 1907²⁶.

At the beginning of 1911 it seemed the things were getting better regarding the future of the Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations. Thus, the head of Italian diplomacy, San Giuliano, which represented Romanian diplomatic interests in relation with Greece, stated in January 1911 that a reconciliation between Greece and Romania was important "for the interests of the both states"²⁷. Eventually, on April 1906 diplomatic relations were resumed A.F.Florescu was appointed the new Romanian representative in Athens, while Caruso was appointed as Greek representative in Bucharest.

Thus, the Romanian – Greek diplomatic relations, interrupted in 1906, were resumed five years later, in the spring of 1911.

Subsequently, before and during the Balkan wars, new Romanian - Greek arguments reoccurred in relation to the many excesses committed by some Greek armed bands, or even regular troops, against the Macedo-Romanian population living in Macedonia and the Epirus. Thus, a first signal of alarm was given by the General Consul of Romania to Salonika, who, in a report dated 21 July 1911, was informing the authorities in Bucharest about the intensification of the activity of the Greek bands, which had crossed over into Turkey "in their Evzoni uniforms, and under the command of army officers"; this had made roads dangerous, and had forced the Vlach population ,, either not to travel at all, or to take great precautions when going from one place to another"²⁸.

Another report sent to Bucharest by the General Consulate of Romania in Monastir, dated 31 January 1912, the assassinates "against the Romanians were committed after the instructions of some Greeks of Grevena, who call in a band head established in Greece, in the villages near the border", as declared to the Romanian consul by the Head of the Gendarmerie of the vilayet himself, Colonel Iusuf Bey²⁹. The Romanian Consul G.C.Ionescu also noted in his report that the measures taken at the border by the Turkish authorities would have been effective if the Greek authorities had acted in a similar way, "arresting the band heads, and punishing their host on Greek territory"³⁰. There were also various memoirs addressed to the diplomatic representative of Romania in the Empire, such as the report of 18 July 1912, by which the Macedo-Romanian inhabitants were complaining about having their lives threatened by Greek bands, unless we give up our mother tongue, that is eliminate it from schools and churches"31.

A suggestive image of the persecutions suffered by the Romanian population is given in a report by the Royal Consulate of Romania at Janina, dated 8 March 1913, which includes a list of Macedo-Romanians who had been murdered, or had had their houses looted and burned down, or again had been forced to take refuge in Romania, as a result of the persecutions suffered from the Greek bands and troops³². In their turn, fleeing Macedo-Romanians, upon their arrival in Romania, addressed memoirs to the Romanian

authorities, such as the one filed by schoolmaster Nicu Balamotti, who noted that, "the Greek atrocities assure the Government that they are not laying a finger on the authorities Macedonian Romanians". Balamotti requested the Romanian Government to intercede by the cabinet in Athens, "so that they should put an end to the systematic persecution of the families of my co—nationals, otherwise I will be forced to take revenge on the Greeks established in the country".

The intercessions of the Romanian party at diplomatic level were made as early as 1912, through approaches to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in protest against the treatment dealt to the Macedo-Romanians. The Greek party, more exactly Foreign Minster Koromilas seemed somewhat irritated by the fact that the Romanian representative to Athens, Florescu, had accurate information on the developments in Macedonia and the persecution of the Macedo-Romanian subjects³⁴. The talks between Florescu and the Foreign Minister in Greek Government gave the Romanian representative the conviction Koromilas was ,the most arrogant xenophobe", with "a biased and hostile attitude towards us"35. As a rule, the talks between Florescu and Koromilas would begin with the considerations on the origin of the Macedo-Romanians, source of new arguments between the two diplomats, such as mentioned in a report sent by Florescu to Bucharest. According to this report, Koromilas had asserted population referred to by Florescu as Macedo-Romanian was, in fact a Hellenized Latin population that had nothing to do with the Romanians, "such as the French, albeit of Latin origin, were not Romanian"³⁶.

As to the protests of the Romanian party against the actions of the Greek bands against the Macedo-Romanian populations, the Greek Foreign Minister, after having denied for some time the existence or the nature of their activity, tried to persuade the Romanian representative that the armed groups in question would vanish. Which did not prevent the Romanian diplomat from noting in his report to Bucharest that, "now, that the project to assassinate so many prominent Romanian leaders has almost been carried through, and the terror has served its purpose, the bands can indeed vanish".

The question of the Macedo-Romanians would be settled, to some extent, at the end of the second Balkan War, when by the peace Treaty of

Bucharest (more exactly by a series of pledges made by the delegations of the Balkan states and included in several letters appended to the peace treaty), the Greek State bound itself to observe the rights of the Macedo-Romanians. In fact, during the negotiations, Eleftherios Venizelos had exchanged letters with Titu Maiorescu on the future of the Macedo-Romanians. Thus. Venizelos mentioned, in his letter, that "Greece consents to offer autonomy to the Koutsovlachic schools and churches existing in the future Greek territories and to allow for the constitution of a committee for the Koutsovlachs, while the Romanian Government may sponsor under the supervision of the Greek Government the existing or future religious and national institutions"38. The above mentioned development was possible due to the fact that Greek diplomacy (Venizelos) wanted to assure Romania's support in various unsettled issues, of great importance for Greece, such as the future of Kavala or the status of the Aegean islands.

Despite this big step forward regarding the rights of the Macedo-Romanian population, the putting into practice of these stipulations would be long and difficult. Thus, assaults and acts of violence on a number of communities continued to occur during the First World War. Moreover, during war operations. a number Koutsovlachic villages such as Megala Livadia, Koupa, Archangelos have been evacuated and suffered huge damages. During the first years after the end of the First World War, the stand taken by Romania regarding the issue of the Macedo-Romanians softened and Romanian authorities discouraged the Macedo-Romanian communities on the basis that many of the reports they were receiving were based on exaggeration of actual facts³⁹. Another moment of tension regarding the situation of the Macedo-Romanian communities occurred once with the settlement of the refugees, after the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey⁴⁰. Soon, the idea of migrating in Romania, as a way of solving the situation, gained support among Macedo-Romanian communities in Greece, although at the beginning, the authorities in Bucharest did not offer a positive answer to this proposal.

In the meantime, there has been a significant change on the Greek political arena, namely, Greece became republic. After the moment in which Romania had recognized this political change in Greece, and a new representative of

Romania took his office in Athens, in autumn 1924, the issue of the Macedo-Romanians was again raised, by the Romanian minister, Constantin Langa Rășcanu. During the very first meeting with the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, G. Roussos, the Romanian diplomat told Roussos that the only thing which could jeopardize the future of Romanian - Greek relations was precisely the "situation of the in Ellada",41. The Romanian Aromanians diplomat stressed that it was for the benefit of the Greek government ,,not only to protect the Romanian minority, but also to offer it all the assistance in order to improve its situation", especially since unlike Bulgarian, Serbian or Albanian minorities, Aromanian population was the only one with no irredentist feelings",42. Roussos answered that he never contested the fact that "some local Greek authorities, too zealous or even overstepping their duties, have committed actions that affected Aromanians^{7,43}, although, in his opinion, many of the complaints were unfounded. Given the situation, Roussos committed himself to take rapid action in order to "heal the bad things and protect Romanian communities". 44 Soon, the Romanian diplomat met with "the father of Hellenic Republic", Papanastasiou, and during the meeting he brought into discussion, once again, the issue of the rights and the treatment of Macedo-Romanian population, stressing that, although they were "the most peaceful and hard worker population, the Greek clergy and school masters were agitating the Hellenic population against them"45.

In the meantime, the idea of migrating into Romania gained more and more support, and as a result of the pressure coming from various Macedonian–Romanian Committees, the Romanian government decided to take into consideration a solution consisting in offering to all those who wished to settle in Romania lands within the area of Dobrudja. According to an article of the Romanian newspaper Lupta⁴⁶, the Romanian government had promised to give 10 acres, a building -plot, timber and bricks for building a house worth 50000 lei, a pair of oxen, a plow and seed to every family that wished to migrate to Romania, with a period of pay-off consisting of 30 years. After the moment in which the Romanian government had asked the Greek government to allow the migration of those Romanians who wished to settle into Romania.

Although the exact number of the people who left is not known, T. Capidan assessed that about 12000 Koutsovlachs have settled in regions in Dobroudja, but they were coming not only from Greece, but also from Albania and Bulgaria⁴⁷. However, there are documents attesting the arrival and the settling of these populations in Dobroudja. Thus, professor M.Pinetta, described, in an article written in the autumn of 1926, the arrival of a group of Macedonian colonists in Dobroudia. According to professor Pinetta, the colonists were

welcomed at Silistra by a warm and numerous public and by representatives of Romanian authorities, willing to offer them full support in order to diminish their suffering and help them integrate easier, on Romanian soil⁴⁸.

During the next years, the issue of the Macedo-Romanians continued to be on the agenda of the Romanian-Greek relations, although in a lesser extent than before, while the bilateral relations continued to improve along the interwar years.

NOTES:

¹ Al. Rubin, Les roumains de Macédoine, Bucarest, 1913, p. 98.

² Ibidem, p. 282.

³ Th. Capidan, Les Macédo-Roumains. Esquisse historique et descriptive des populations Roumaines de la péninsule Balkanique, Bucarest, 1937, pp.66-67.

⁴ Michel Lhéritier, L'évolution des rapports gréco-roumains depuis un siécle (1821-1931), Paris, 1933, p. 585.

⁵ Ihidem.

⁶ See, for instance, Spyridon Sfetas, Cadrul istoric al relațiilor greco-române 1866-1913, în Interferențe româno-elene în secolele XV-XX, Iași, 2003.

Ibidem, pp. 202-203.

⁸ Constantin N. Velichi, "Les relations roumano-grecques 1879-1911", in "Revue des études sud-est européennes, t. VII, 1969, 3, p. 535.

⁹ Spyridon Sfetas, op.cit, p. 203.

Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (from now on, AMAE), Fund 71/1900-1919, file 71/1905

¹¹ *Ibidem*, file 71/1905 M, f. 32.

¹² Ibidem, ff.101-106, the article Les Koetzo-Vlacques, in "Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant" of October 11, 1905.

¹³ AMAE, Fund 71/1905, letter M, ff. 4-10.

¹⁴ Ibidem, f. 22.

¹⁵ AMAE, Fund 71/1900-1919, file 71/1906, letter M2, p. 30.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem,

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ AMAE, Fund 71/1906, M 2, pp.44-62.

²² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Comerțul extern al României și mișcarea porturilor în 1910, Bucharest, 1912, pp. 6-7.

²⁷ AMAE, Fund 71/R/100, p. 25.

²⁸ AMAE, Fund 71/1900-1914, R 4, Vol. 94, Report no.927 of July 21, 1911, by the General Consulate of Romania at Salonika, pp. 78-79.

²⁹ Ibidem, Report of the Romanian Consulate, Monastir, 31 January 1912, p. 110.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibdem. Memoir addressed to the General Consul of Romania at Salonika, included in report no. 776/18 July 1912, pp. 119-122.

AMAE, Fund 71/1900-1919, B/17 is, Report no. 44, of 8 March 1913, addressed to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers by the Royal Consulate of Romania at Janina, pages not numbered.

³³ Ibidem. Memoir addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on May 16, 1913, by the schoolmaster Nicu Balamotti. ³⁴ AMAE, Fund 71/1900-1919, Vol. 19, Report no. 645 of December 5, 1912. From the Romanian Legation in Athens, pp. 172-173.
³⁵ Ihidem.

³⁶ Ibidem, Report no. 682 of the Romanian Legation in Athens, dated 19 December 1912, pp. 200-203.

³⁷ Ihidem.

³⁸ E. Averoff, Ή πολιτική πλευρά του Κουτοβλαχικου Ζητήματος (*The political side of the Koutsovlachic Question*), Athens, 1989, pp. 65-66.

³⁹ See Vlasis Vlasidis, Consequences of the demographic and social rearrangements to the Vlach-speaking element of Greek Macedonia, in the "Revue des etudes sud-est europeennes, Danube-Balkans-Mer Noire, Tome XXXVI, 1998, Nos. 1-4, pp 155-171.

⁴⁰ Many reports describe the above mentioned situation, which affected communities such as Dovra, Turcohori, Kustohori, Lujiti, Cumanita, Topleani, Târcoviani and so on. See, for instance, the report issued by P. Marcu, the Head of Romanian Schools and Churches Service from Balkan Peninsula, addressed to dr.C.Anghelescu, Minister of Public Education of Romania. The report mentioned that due to the settlement of Greek refugees coming from Asia Minor, the Macedo-Romanians were dispossessed of their private properties. (See AMAE, Fund 71/Greece, Vol. 84, Note 55869/923 of June 22, 1923 addressed to the Ministry of Education- The Service of Romanian Schools and Churches from Balkan Peninsula, pp. 25-26).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, Report 1286, of 17 September 1924, from the Romanian Legation in Athens, signed Constantin Langa Răşcanu, p. 47.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*. Roussos even asked the Romanian representative to forward any future complaint directly to the Office of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so that this way, to solve rapidly any situation.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, Report 1523, of 26 October 1924, from the Romanian Legation in Athens, signed Langa Răşcanu, p. 55.

⁴⁶ See newspaper Lupta, issue of August 7, 1926.

⁴⁷ See T.Capidan, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-73. All those Macedo-Romanians who decided to Migrate into Romania lost their Greek citizenship and were erased from the Municipal Records of the towns and villages in which they had been registered.

⁴⁸ See Mihail Pinetta, *Coloniști aromâni în Cadrilater*, în "Tribuna românilor de peste hotare", Bucharest, II, issue 9-12. September-December 1926, p. 37.

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