

## **EMIL ȚÎRCOMNICU<sup>1</sup>, ROMÂNIA**

**Cuvinte cheie:** megleno-români, macedo-români, Dobruja, Cadrilater, islamizare

### **Aspecte istorice privind grupurile dialectale meglenoromâne din Grecia, Republica Macedonia, Turcia și România**

#### **Rezumat**

Astăzi există patru mari comunități istorice meglenoromâne: două în ținutul Meglen, în nordul Greciei și sudul Republicii Macedonia, iar alte două formate prin emigrare – una în Turcia, în zona Adrianopole, unde au fost transferați în anul 1923 după Pacea de la Laussane, iar alta în comuna Cerna din județul Tulcea, unde au fost transferați în anul 1940, după ce fuseseră împrăștiți în satele județului Durostor, începând cu anul 1925. În acest articol facem o scurtă prezentare a meglenoromânilor, punând accent pe momentele istorice care au dus la împărțirea Meglenului și la cele două emigrări.

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**Key words:** Megleno-Romanians, Macedo-Romanians, Dobruja, Cadrilater, Islamization

## **Historical Aspects Regarding the Megleno-Romanian Groups in Greece, the FY Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Romania**

### **Summary**

There are four large Megleno-Romanian communities in Europe: two in the Meglen region, one in North Greece and in the South of the FY Republic of Macedonia, and two other, which were formed by emigration – one in Turkey, in the Adrianople region (where they were transferred in 1923, after the Laussane Peace), and the other in the village Cerna, in Tulcea county (where they settled in 1940, after being given properties in the village of the Durostor county, starting with 1925). In the present paper, the author reviews the historical moments which led to the division of the Meglen region, and to the two emigrations of the Megleno-Romanians. Apart from historical sources, he also relies oral history regarding these population movements, and offer transcripts of conversation with Megleno-Romanian interlocutors from Cerna.

## Historical Aspects Regarding the Megleno-Romanian Groups in Greece, the FY Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Romania

### History, name, figures and geographical distribution

Today, the Megleno-Romanians are to be found in the historical region of Meglen (the field of Karacova), which was divided between Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1913, and is now situated on the northern border of Greece with the FY Republic of Macedonia. A Megleno-Romanian community also exists in the locality of Cerna from the county of Tulcea (Romania), which was formed through emigration to the Romanian Cadrilater (southern Dobruja) in 1925-1940, then through transfer to Cerna in 1940 and to the region of Adrianopole in Turkey (descendants of the Muslim emigrants from Nânti) in 1923<sup>2</sup>.

The northern part of the Meglen region, with three localities – Uma (today Huma), Coinsco (today Konsko) and Sirminia (today Sermenin), belongs to the FY Republic of Macedonia, while the rest of seven villages – Lugunța-Lundzini (today Langadia), Birislav (today Perikleia), Liumnița (today Skra), Cupa (today Kupa), Oșani (today Archangelos), Țărnareca (today Karpi), Barovița (today Kastaneri) – and the town of Nânti (today Notia), belong to Greece. The Aromanian village Livezi (today Livadia) also belongs to the latter.

*Megleno-Romanian* is a scholar denomination adopted at the end of 19th century for designating the inhabitants of the Mglen region, who speak a dialect of the Romanian language<sup>3</sup>. Megleno-Romanians use the endonym *Vlaș*, pl. *Vlasi* to refer to themselves and the neighbouring people also know them under this name; the ethnonym *Rumân* has been lost during time. Like Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians also use infranames, derived from their native place: *Liumnican* (from Liumnița), *Cupineț* (from Cupa), *Ușineț* (from Oșani), *Lundzineț* (from Lundzini), *Năntineț* (from Nânti), *Țărnăcot* (from Țărnareca), *Brăzlăveț* (from Birislav).

The name *Meglenit* is used rarely, as inhabitants of the Meglen region can also be of Bulgarian/Macedonian or Yuruk origin. Part of this region, with approximately 50 villages, was inhabited by these populations, while the Megleno-Romanian localities were concentrated West of the river Vardar, in the trapeze formed by Țărnareca-Sirminia and Nânti-Livezi.

In 2003, when I conducted field research in the village of Cerna, the inhabitants declared themselves Megleno-Romanians (and Macedo-Romanians). They lost the endonym *Vlaș*, and actively started using the scientific denomination.

The estimates of Megleno-Romanians, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th

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<sup>2</sup> “According to my colleague C. Noe, the Năntineți, conscient of their nationality more than of their religious connection to the Turks, asked, through the consulate, to be colonized in Romania, but, in lack of a favourable answer, decided for Turkey”, Anastase N. Hâciu writes (Hâciu 1936: 239, note 5). Their descendants can be found today in the Adrianopole zone, in the following villages, with the approximate number of families: Edirne (100), Kırklareți (100), Babaeski (70), Lüleburgas (80), Uzunköprü (100), Corlu (100), Malkara (50), Ballı (10), Gözsüzköy (50), Kalamış (50), Hoşköy (20), Mürefte (5), Şarköy (80) (Kahl 1999: 34, map 10; Kahl 2006: 186).

<sup>3</sup> Here is what Th. Capidan said about their ethnic name: “They call each other *Vlași* and are known under this name by the peoples neighbouring them; the name *Rumon*, which should have been in use, was lost without trace. It is thus understood that the new name of *Megleno-Romanians* given to these *Vlași*, in contrast to *Macedo-Romanians*, is used only by scholars and serves mainly to refer to the region where these villages are. They do not know this name, neither the name *Meglenit*, which is, again, used only by scholars, as opposed to *Romanian*, *Aromanian* and *Istro-Romanian*.” (Capidan 1925: 5).

century, vary. Gustav Weigand estimated them in 1892 to number 14,000 persons, Ioan Nenițescu in 1895 gave a number of 21,700, Viktor Kančev in 1900 concluded there were 11,960 of them, Pericle Papahagi in 1902 estimated 20,000, and Theodor Capidan in 1925 gave the number of 14,720 Megleno-Romanians.

The first historical document, which attests to the presence of Vlachs in the region of Meglen is from 1094 and is kept in the archive of the monastery Great Lavra on Mount Athos. In the document, Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus replies to the monks' complaint that people on the domain of the monastery refuse to pay the yearly taxes; it details the name of the region, the occupations of the unwilling tax payers, and the legal status of the monastery's lands, as well as the obligations of the shepherds. This document also contains some of the first Romanian names, of Slavic and Latin influence, such as *Stan*, *Radu cel Șchiop* and *Peducel*. The two sheepfolds mentioned must have had considerable economic significance, as the complaint was addressed directly to the emperor. The population of a sheepfold, was a *fară* or *celnicat* (tribal organization), an alliance of *fălcări* (families), sort of a tribe formed by extended families.

It is not known whether these Vlachs of Meglen are the ancestors of the Megleno-Romanians, as historians and linguists diverge on this issue. Romanian historians Ioan Nenițescu (1895) and George Murnu (1913) considered that the Megleno-Romanians are descendants of the Vlachs from the Romanian-Bulgarian Empire. The linguists Theodor Capidan and Tache Papahagi, suggested that the ancestors of the Megleno-Romanians lived in a territorial continuum with the Daco-Romanians, on the basis of their speech and its similitude with the Daco-Romanian dialect. According to Romanian linguist Ovid Densusianu, the Megleno-Romanians were a North-Danubian population, which migrated to Meglen after the 12th century. "While history dates the presence of Megleno-Romanians in the region back to the 10th and 11th centuries, linguistics consider that they could not have arrived there until the 12th, even after the 13th century." (Capidan 1925: 65)

Megleno-Romanians crossed the Rhodopes, as Capidan asserts, which is the reason for borrowings from the local Bulgarian dialect in their speech. (Capidan 1925: 92; Saramandu 2004: 299) Ever since they settled in the North of Greece, Megleno-Romanians have had intense contacts with Slavs, as linguistic research shows, because the Slavs were inhabiting the entire Thessaloniki plain, representing the majority population in the region. Thus, the Megleno-Romanian dialect has many Slavic elements, but also Turkish ones, as they belonged to the Ottoman Empire for almost 500 years.<sup>4</sup>

Under Ottoman rule the Meglen settlements of the Megleno-Romanians, for a long time, had self governance, being led by captains who were exercising their authority through civil guards. The capitainates had to ensure peace in the mountainous regions of Macedonia, Pindus, Epirus and Thessaly, being subordinated to the Sultan. In the 17th-18th century, when conflicts between Vlach and Muslim captains arouse, people from the Meglen region, being exposed to bandit raids, in exchange for annual tribute and ensuring good order, enjoyed various privileges and freedoms. Increased taxes also led to conflicts with the authorities, with Bulgarian Muslims, as well as with the Yuruks who came from Asia Minor. After long struggles, they had to find solutions to protect their communities – they were often forced to subdue to the Ottomans, to an influential bey. Sometimes, the village itself was offered in exchange for protection. (Hâciu 1936: 237-238)

Capidan believes the Islamization of the Năntineți took place in the beginning of the 18th century, at Easter, when the Ottomans who besieged the town, forced the inhabitants to become

<sup>4</sup> According to Petar Atanasov, paper presented at the conference *Aromânii, ieri și azi*, Timișoara, May 15, 2010.

Muslims. (Capidan 1942: 28-29) Often conflicts arouse between the Muslim Năntineți, who received, in exchange for giving up their religion, privileges, and the other Christian Meglens, as Meglen songs indicate (e.g. the song of Isim Beg). Many Năntineți became beys, or lessees of land in neighboring villages.

Megleno-Romanians were farmers and silk farmers; Aromanians, however, were shepherds, dealt with transporing goods, kept busy with household textiles, fabrics, and dairy processing.<sup>5</sup> Today, in the area historically inhabited by Megleno-Romanians in Greece and the FY Republic of Macedonia, according to Petar Atanasov,<sup>6</sup> there are only around 5,200 Megleno-Romanians, half of which do not speak the language any longer. After 1950, a lot of them moved to towns or mixed with people of different ethnic origins. Atanasov's own village, Huma, was finally completely deserted, with the Megleno-Romanians moving to the town of Gevgelija and neighbouring villages. In Greece, Greek is spoken exclusively, even if the older generation still speaks Megleno-Romanian. Children do not know the dialect, when the old generation disappears, Megleno-Romanian will be an extinct language in Greece.<sup>7</sup> The situation is similar in the FY Republic of Macedonia, as all families are ethnically mixed and children learn only the state language, Macedonian.

The commune<sup>8</sup> of Cerna from Tulcea county is comprised of the villages Cerna (main village of the commune), Traian, Mircea Vodă and General Praporgescu. The population of the Cerna commune, in 2011, was 3,529 inhabitants, down from 4,227 in 2002. The village of Cerna, counted 2,427 inhabitants in 2002, the majority being Megleno-Romanians. Those older than 50 actively spoke the dialect, while some children could understand it. From 1989 to this day, the Megleno-Romanian dance ensemble *Altona* is functioning in Cerna.

### **The Romanian school in Meglen and the reasons for emigration to Turkey and Cadrilater**

There have been two attempts, after 1865, of opening Romanian language schools and schools in the Megleno-Romanian dialect in the Meglen area. I. Popa-Gheorghe, known as the "Silversmith", an Oșani native, learned Romanian at the Romanian hermitage Prodrom on Athos Mountain and, when he came back to Oșani as a priest, started performing the religious service in

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<sup>5</sup> Foremost writers and researchers on the Megleno-Romanian population were I.G. von Hahn, *Reise durch die Gebiete des Drin und Wardar*, in the chapter „Die Landschaft Moglena”, Wien, 1867; Gustav Weigand, *Vlaho-Meglen, eine ethnographisch-philologische Untersuchung*, Leipzig, 1892; Nicolae Popilian, *România din Peninsula Balcanică*, București, 1885; Apostol Mărgărit, in the journal „Convorbiri Literare”, year VIII, Iași, 1874; Ioan Nenițescu, *De la România din Turcia Europeană*, București, 1895; B. Nicolaides, *Les Turcs et la Turquie contemporaine*, Paris, 1852; I.C. Jireček, *Über die Wlachen von Moglena*, Leipzig&Berlin, 1893; Viktor Kančev, *Mekedonien*, Sofia, 1900; Ovid Densusianu, *Histoire de la langue roumaine*, vol. I, Paris, 1901; Pericle Papahagi, *România din Meglen*, București, 1900, *Meglenoromânia. Studiu etnografico-filologic*, vol. I-II, Bucharest, 1902; George Murnu, *Istoria românilor din Pind. Vlahia Mare (980-1259)*, Bucharest, 1913; Th. Capidan, *Meglenoromânia, Istoria și graiul lor*, București, vol. I-III, 1925, 1928, 1935; Tache Papahagi, *Originea Muloviștenilor și Gopeșenilor*, Bucharest, 1935; Theodor Capidan, *Macedoromânia. Etnografie, Istorie, Limbă*, București, 1942 etc. After 1970, a new generation of researchers started dealing with the study of this ethnic group, among which: Petar Atanasov, *Le mégléno-roumain de nos jours. Une approche linguistique*, 1990, *Meglenoromânia astăzi*, București, 2002, *Atlasul lingvistic al dialectului meglenoromân* (2 vol., 2008, 2013), as well as G. Pascu, Andrei Avram, Nicolae Saramandu, Matilda Caragiu-Marioțeanu, Elena Scărlătoiu, B. Conev, Johannes Kramer, Wolfgang Dahmer, Beate Wild, Liliana Ionescu Ruxăndoiu, Thede Kahl, Virgil Coman, Mirela Kozlovsky etc.

<sup>6</sup> Paper presented at the conference *Aromânii, ieri și azi*, Timișoara, May 15, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> According to Petar Atanasov (see Atanasov 2008: IX).

<sup>8</sup> In Romania, *commune* refers to the smallest administrative division, consisting of several villages and being governed by a mayor and communal council.



Romanian and teaching children Romanian. At the Greek bishop's pressure, he stopped. Later, priest Gușu Goga, also from Oșani, taught himself Romanian and, with the bishop's approval, managed, for a short time, to perform worship services in Romanian in Meglen villages. After 1890, teachers Mihai Nica from Perlepe, Gușu Goga and Nicola Marcu from Lugunța tried to cultivate Romanian. (Capidan 1928: 9-12)

November 10, 1895, the priests Popa Mandi, Popa Dionisi, Sachelarie Popa Dimitri, Popa Christu, Popa Gheorghe Arginteanu, from the Oșani commune, asked the Romanian consulate in Thessaloniki to pay them salaries to teach Romanian in their commune. March 28, 1897, teacher Chistu Noe from Lugunța submitted a letter to the inspector of the Romanian schools in Turkey, Apostol Mărgărit, requesting money for the rent of the building they used as school, and complained about discrimination of the authorities towards Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians. (Berciu-Drăghicescu, Petre 2004: 122-124, 134-135)

Thus, in the last decade of the 19th century, Romanian schools and churches opened in the Megleno-Romanian localities Birislav, Cupa, Liumnița, Lugunța, Oșani, Gevgelija, Țărnareca, Huma, and in the Aromanian village Livezi. After 1905, beside Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians are also exposed to attacks of Greeks, who were fighting for the "emancipation of Macedonia". During the Balkan wars, many Megleno-Romanian leaders resettled in Romania, because of nationalistic Greek pressure. Megleno-Romanian leaders and priests, who chose to remain in their

villages during the wars, were sometimes executed:

“Until 1909, our cultural action from Meglen has succeeded to introduce Romanian schools in all the communes inhabited by Romanians, except for the town of Nânti. The fight was not easy. Greek propaganda agents used here, as well as in Macedonia, unimaginable brutal means, assuming this would force nationalist Romanians to give up their Romanian cause. But this time the murders, common in all Macedonia, were not directed only towards adults, but also towards children. I can clearly remember the horror with which priest Steriu Mitri, my guide in these regions, showed me the place where 14 children between the age of 10 and 12 were murdered, on the way which goes from Luguņa to Huma. This poor priest fell victim to the same cruelty, in 1912!” (Capidan 1925: 13)

“I remember that, in that time, when I found myself in their neighbourhood, working for the success of our cause, there was a moment – the only one in the entire period of cultural agitation of the Romanians in the Balkans – when the ideal of our action was reached, in one corner of Macedonia. This corner was the region of Meglen. The Meglens, whose national consciousness woke up so late, after an activity of only a few decades, succeeded to replace the Greek language by Romanian, in all schools and churches in their communes. That was a real triumph of our cause.

The vanguard of the Greek army, which was formed exclusively of Komitadji,<sup>9</sup> had as its main task to take revenge against Romanian headmen who showed hostility to the Greek cause. Some targeted Romanians abandoned their homes and moved to the Country. But most of them stayed, and had to suffer all the cruelties of an army, which hurried up to install itself in the Romanian communes of Meglen, only to take revenge. Now the Romanians from this miserable area were not secretly followed in the woods any longer, but shot in the middle of the village, so everybody could witness it.” (Ibidem: 14)

In addition, the villages Liumniņa, Cupa, Oşani, Luguņa, Birislav and Nânti found themselves on the Bulgarian front line in World War I. A significant part of the population was deported to Bulgaria, others were relocated in the Thessaloniki region by the Greek administration. When they returned home and saw that their assets had been destroyed, they understood they could not longer live there. After the Greek-Turkish war in 1923, the Nântineţi were forced to move to Turkey. In 1925-1940 a significant number of Megleno-Romanians from Greece moved to Cadrilater. In 1929, representatives of the Nântineţi established in Turkey asked, in a memorandum, the Romanian government to accept their settling in Cadrilater. (Coman 2012: 215)

After the Bucharest Peace Treaty of August 1913, a forceful population exchange between Balkan countries was intended to solve some national problems in territories inhabited by national groups which originated from neighbouring countries. The Treaty between Turkey and Bulgaria of September 29, 1913, stipulated population exchange in the border zone, 15 km deep in both countries. The Neuilly Treaty (November 27, 1919) between Bulgaria and Greece led to the exchange of 50.000 Greeks and 70.000 Bulgarians. After the war between Greece and Turkey, on the basis of the Lausanne Treaty (January 20, 1923), in what was to be the largest population exchange, 500,000 Turks had to move to Turkey and 1,200,000 Greeks were deported from Asia Minor. A significant part of the Greeks from Asia were moved to Macedonia and Thracia, so the population density of these areas inhabited by Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians increased.

In a country undergoing a severe economic crisis, the consequences of these massive population displacements were immediate. The Macedo-Romanians witnessed huge groups of

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<sup>9</sup> Rebels, members of the Internal Dobrujan Revolutionary Organisation, who, in the inter-war period, have fought for recovering Dobruja by Bulgaria.

different nationalities leaving for their former home countries, the closing of schools and demolishing of churches, daily uncertainty and economic disaster, therefore a national current favourable to their relocation in Romania was formed. This idea crystallizes between 1923-1925, and the main centres of emigration were Meglen, Veria, Vodena and Katerini, zones where the pressure of the Greeks who came from Asia was more important.

For the region of Meglen, Constantin Noe, the president of the Meglenia Cultural Society and secretary of the Macedo-Romanian Cultural Society, played an important role in their relocation: "In this region, the national movement, during the Ottoman rule, took off to such an extent that the followers of Greek culture and church almost disappeared. But during that time there was a war to the knife between the Balkan states for the conversion of Christian populations to their culture. The Greeks were fierce in conquering this region. The Meglen Romanians opposed them with heroic resistance. There were trials, gang attacks, murders on both sides. The region gained, in the eyes of the Greeks, the reputation of an anti-Greek center, ruled by unsubdued enmity. When after the war in 1913 and after World War I, the Greek authorities came to rule over this region again in 1918, a merciless prosecution against Meglen Romanians started. This prosecution represented the impetus for the relocation of several Meglen villages in Romania. Meanwhile, the Romanians of Macedonia witnessed Bulgarians returning to Bulgaria, Turks to Turkey and so on. Thus the desire to emigrate to their country, Romania, awoke in them, as the supreme way of salvation." (Noe 1938: 125)

The years 1923-1925 were decisive for convincing the authorities in Bucharest about the emigration of Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians. On November 30, 1924, a big congress took place in Veria, with more than 400 delegates, which debated immigration. On January 3, 1925, the Initiative Committee for the Emigration of the Macedo-Romanians was formed (Ibidem: 131).

A month after the foundation of the Committee, representatives from four regions in Greece came to Bucharest: The delegates of the Meglenia region were Iancu Cepi (for the Aromanian village Livezi), C. Noe and Hr. Iuffu (villages Lundzini, Oşani, Cupa); Stere Hagigogu represented the region Veria; region Vodena had a mission from four communes, made up of George Celea, George Cuşa, Dumitru Cuşa, Tacu Celea (Gramaticova commune), Nicu Zdru (Cândrova commune), Gheorghe Popescu (Paticina commune), Dumitru Caţara and M. Bajdechi (Vodena commune); the region Katerini was represented by George Colimitra and Nicolae Puiu (Caterina commune), Stere Buciumană and Mihali Guli (Kitros commune). The Initiative Committee was supplemented by representatives of the Macedo-Romanian students, N. Parizor and N. Ionescu, as well as by two representatives of the Meglenia Society, Christu Iuffu and Demetru Kehaia.

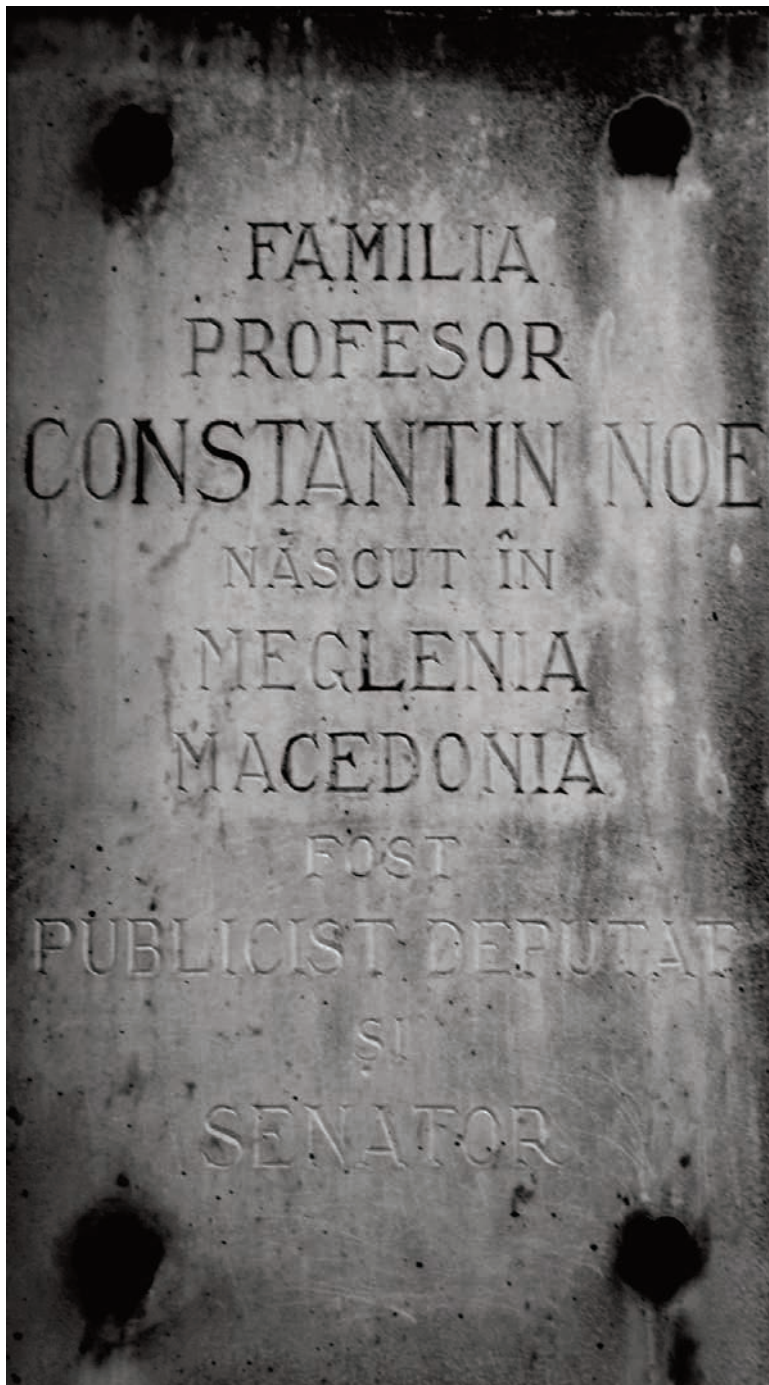
A memorandum was sent to the First Minister, describing the difficult situation in Greece and the benefits Romanian society would get from the influx of Macedo-Romanians. The region Meglenia asked permission for the immigration of 371 families (Livezi – 150 families, Cupa – 60, Lundzini – 66, Oşani – 95). Minister of Agriculture, Al. Constantinescu decided every immigrant would get 10 hectares of land within the county and 15 hectares in the border zones, in the two counties from Cadrilater, Durostor and Caliacra.<sup>10</sup>

The Meglenia Society sent Demetru Kehaia, chief of service at the railroads, as a delegate for the organization of immigration, to Greece. The negotiations with the Greek government have lasted for two months.<sup>11</sup> Demetru Kehaia ended his mission with a trip to the Megleno-Romanian

<sup>10</sup> According to the Register no. 1698 from June 13, 1925.

<sup>11</sup> He left Bucharest on July 12, 1925, to be at the General Consul of Romania in Thesaloniki on July 14.





villages, where he talked about emigration with the community leaders. (Noe 1938: 136)

In Romania already existed a group of Megleno-Romanians, who had fled during the Balkan wars (1912). Many were war veterans and had volunteered in the 1913 campaign, being decorated with the Military Virtue with swords. Their families settled in Cocina commune, in 1925; most of them were born in Liumnița and Oșani.

The settlement of Macedo-Romanians started in October 1925, when the boat "Iași" brought the first 200 families to Constanța. Other settlers arrived by train: 70 families from Pleasa (Albania), which settled in Susurluc village. Thus, the end of the year 1925 represented for Macedo-Romanians, a new beginning in the "Mother Country".

March 5, 1926, many Megleno-Romanians from Lundzini and Birislav and Aromanians from Livezi arrived, while on April 15, 160 families from Cupa, Oșani and Liumnița came. Several waves of Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians followed. Most Megleno-Romanians came in 1925-1926 and settled in villages of Durostor county: Cocina (35 families from Liumnița and Oșani), Cazimir (27 families from Cupa), Capaclia (70 families from Lundzini and Birislav), Bazarghian and Aidodu (114 families from Oșani), Strebărna (40 families from Liumnița), Vischioi (30 families from Liumnița), Cadichioi (35 families from Liumnița), Haschioi (40 families from Liumnița), Sarsanlar (40 families from Liumnița), Doimușlar. In 1926, in these ten villages there were 431 Megleno-Romanian families (if we assume that a family had an average of five members, this means 2,155 persons). Until 1938, their number probably increased by 3-400, through family reunions, so we can speak of roughly 2,500 Megleno-Romanians who resettled in their former home country. These villages were placed near the Danube, being thus protected against the conflicts caused by the Komitadji in the border area.

### **Oral history data regarding the emigration of Megleno-Romanians**

When the Megleno-Romanians arrived in Cerna commune, through the forceful population exchange between ethnic Romanians from Cadrilater and ethnic Bulgarians from North Dobruja, as agreed upon in the Treaty of Craiova, September 7, 1940), they were given houses deserted by the Bulgarians. The village of Cerna, which is today the residence of Cerna commune, until 1940 was almost exclusively inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians. Aromanian families also came to this village, but, gradually, moved to other villages in Dobruja counties, where their relatives had already settled.

It was 2003 when I conducted field research in this locality and interviewed several villagers born in Greece. Although they were only children when they emigrated to Cadrilater (between 1925 and 1933), they could clearly remember, or retell from the stories of their parents, about the atmosphere when they left Greece, and in their new home in Romania. Traian Mîsir was born in 1926 in the village of Bazarghian from Durostor, the year of his parents' emigration from Oșani (Greece). Hristu Noice was born in 1925 in Lugunța (Greece), and his parents emigrated with the entire family in 1926 to Doimușlar commune from Durostor. Gheorghe Simiti was born in 1910 in Liumnița (Greece), and emigrated in 1926 to the village of Haschioi from Durostor. Atanase Suca was born in 1915 in Liumnița (Greece), and emigrated in 1926 in the village of Vischioi from Durostor. The Megleno-Romanians were given properties in several villages of the county of Durostor, but at the moment of their displacement they were assigned to the same village, the criterium being belonging to the same dialectal group. The ethno-folcloric and dialectal survival of this group on the territory of Dobruja is due to this fact; settling among Aromanians and Daco-Romanians would have led to a rapid assimilation.

The Megleno-Romanians of Cerna, looking for similitudes with other groups in the Romanian historical regions, realized they had a lot in common with the Oltenians, and so concluded that they left Oltenia.

**Transcript 1:**

“We were under the Turks and inhabited the region all to the Vardar river. Beyond Vardar, the Thessaloniki region started. We, in our village, under the Turks, had a Romanian school, a Romanian church. My grandfather, my mother’s father, was a priest. When he came here, to Romania, in 1926, my grandmother got a pension. After 1912, when the Turks left, the Greeks came. And the Greeks closed down Romanian schools, destroyed churches and brought over Greek staff.

*[A letter was signed between Venizelos and Titu Maiorescu.]*<sup>12</sup>

Venizelos was in 1921. In 1921 the Turks fought against the Greeks. And then there was Venizelos. And there was population exchange. And then our [people] left and came to Romania. And they founded a Megleno-Romanian organization here. A society [Meglenia, a.n.]. They made an association in order to attract the Meglens from there to their true country. Because we, our forefathers, left Romania, I mean Dacia, when it was devastated.

*[Let’s clarify the problem a bit. What are the Megleno-Romanians?]*

Megleno-Romanians are like this: the communes Țărnașca, Liumnița, Lundzini, Cupa, Oșani, Birislav and Nânti. Those from Nânti used to be all Megleno-Romanians, but, under the Ottomans, they became Turks. But they did not give up their language. Nor their attire. But they changed the form. We went to a Greek school. I know Greek, I can write and read, I finished three grades there.

*[What other languages do you speak?]*

I know Bulgarian, I can open my mouth in Turkish, and our Romanian language.

*[Who are the Megleno-Romanians, where do they come from?]*

Megleno-Romanians come from Oltenia. We have a lot in common with the Oltenians. We say «ai» for garlic and they also say «ai» in their Oltenian speech. When a child ate «ai» and it pinched him [Rom. Ustura, t.n.], he started yelling «Mă ustură, mă ustură!», and this is where «usturoi» comes from. But many from Oltenia still call it «ai». I think they come from the Oltenia region. Aromanians come somewhere from Maramureș. They have similar customs.

*[Megleno-Romanians dealt with agriculture?]*

Yes, but they were in the mountains, in the mountains. Not that much agriculture, but they were breeding silkworms, livestock. Men would go in search of work wherever they would find something. Only women would take care of the cocoons, because silkworms come out until June, the cocoons are ready then. Then buyers would come and buy them.

*[How many children were there in a family?]*

Four, five. In our family there were seven. Three boys and four girls. I didn’t get to know my eldest brother, who was named Cuza, from Alexandru Ioan Cuza [Prince of Moldavia, Wallachia, and later ruler of the Romanian Principalities in 1859, t.n.]. He died, I didn’t have the chance to meet him. The second brother, Iancu, from Iancu de Hunedoara [John Hunyadi, t.n.].

*[But didn’t the godfather give him the name?]*

The boy who was born would receive the name of his father’s father. If the baby was a girl, she would get the name of her mother’s mother. This was the custom. The godfather would not interfere. The child was supposed to inherit the name. My grandfather was called Cuza. My father was also

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<sup>12</sup> Eleftherios K. Venizelos, the best known political personality of modern Greece, Greek prime minister, during the negotiations for the Bucharest Peace Treaty, has exchanged letters with the prime minister of Romania, Titu Maiorescu, concerning the future of the pro-Romania Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians in Macedonia (t.n.).

called Cuza. My uncle's son, Cuza. The other son, Cuza. When the Turks left, the Greeks came to rule. «From now on, you are Greeks! Everything that moves on land is Greek, be it man, animal or bird! Even the sun that shines over Greece is Greek!» And then we went to the Greek school, after 1924. And there were the Greek Komitadji. And there were, in Meglenia, people who kept their language and fought against Komitadji.

*[Whom were they fighting against?]*

The Greeks. Greeks wanted to conquer them, but they didn't. It's bandits, in Romanian. There are songs about it. There was one, Isim Begu, he was their leader. And they killed him, our people, the Meglens." (Atanase Suca)

### **Transcript 2:**

*«[When Megleno-Romanians came to Cerna, I noticed that they settled by communities, by their old villages.]*

Those from Liumnița, because they were a lot, 130 families, they inhabited half the village, from up onwards, and in the other part, those from Oșani and Lundzini.

*[The village was deserted, were there any inhabitants?]*

Well, no, because they left for Bulgaria, because of the population exchange. The Bulgarians left, we came." (Atanase Suca)

### **Transcript 3:**

*«[Now, how do you think Megleno-Romanians define themselves?]*

(Hristu Noice): We are Romanians.

*[Romanians from where?]*

(Hristu Noice): What is going on... Our history goes like this: We, Romanians, all of us left from Oltenia, because during the Barbarians we have lived 500 years under the Turks in Greece. In Greece, they have lived under the bey.

*[I am also Oltenian, does this mean we are relatives?]*

(Hristu Noice): Yes, yes.

*[Why are you Oltenian, which is the connection?]*

(Hristu Noice): «Apu» for «apă». «Pâni» for «pâine». Do you understand, 500 years under the Turks and under the Bulgarians, the Romanian language received some other words also.

*[But why Oltenians and not Moldavians?]*

(Hristu Noice): Sir, it is like this if you look at the attire. My parents, when they came here, they were watching people dancing and there were Oltanians, eh...

*[They realized it after they came to Romania?]*

(Hristu Noice): No, our people were also dancing in Greece, but when we came, the Oltanians were dancing also.

(Mihai Liveanu, a nephew from Bucharest, steps in): By logical deduction, we have more in common with the Oltenians, than with the Moldavians or any others.

[*What about Aromanians?*]

(Hristu Noice): Aromanians, Sir, they were emigrants, these Aromanians were in Yugoslavia, and then in Bulgaria, they were wondering with sheep. They were not farmers.

(Mihai Liveanu): Transhumance.

(Hristu Noice): We used to be farmers. We were not travelling through villages, but these Aromanians had 5-6.000 sheep, the woman had a gun here and he had one there, they would cross the border back then, you see. If you said something, bang, they would shoot you. I asked one of us, he was in Bucharest: «Sir, why are Aromanians so brave and we, Megleno-Romanians, are not?» And this guy replied: «Our parents and children, when they make a mistake, bang, bang. Authority. Go, man, hit him, beat him, well done!» Do you understand? They had guts.

(Mihai Liveanu): Megleno-Romanians were mainly agricultors, more peaceful, stable. Agricultors, and they lived under the bey, they became serfs.

[*Did children use to become sworn brothers?*]

(Hristu Noice): What is going on? You are a father, I am a father. You have a daughter, I have a son. Let's become relatives!

[*This was among the Megleno-Romanians?*]

(Hristu Noice): No, among Aromanians. This did not exist in Meglenia. What is going on? Even if the boy was blind, the girl would still marry him. This was their custom.

[*To marry, the parents to decide about marriage. But I asked about something else. Was there the custom that the boys become sworn brother, to help one another all their life?*]

(Hristu Noice): Yes, yes.

(Mihai Liveanu): Within the Meglen community or only with the Aromanians?

(Hristu Noice): Sir, only with the Aromanians.

[*Why did the Megleno-Romanians come to Romania? What happened in Greece?*]

(Hristu Noice): After the war, you understand, the Turks surrendered [in fact, the war in Asia Minor ended with a disaster for the Greeks, a.n.] and the territory got divided: One part was taken by the Bulgarians, another by the Serbs, and we fell under the Greeks. The Romanian state sent Romanian priests, Romanian instructors, and they had teachers, my uncle who came was a teacher. What happened? When the Greeks came, they said: «Sir, from now on there is no Romanian language, nor Romanian church any longer.» And they burned down everything, our parents saw that they lost their books, their church, they wrote a memorandum to the Romanian state and sent it to Bucharest, who wanted to go to Romania. They said this one and this one and this one... They sold their houses back there and they came by boat, on the sea, to Constanța and [the Romanian government] moved them to Durostor. Durostor has been Romanian from 1914, when they took it from the Bulgarians. They threw us there, to Turks and Bulgarians, and we had to fight for 15 years with the Turks and Bulgarians, with the Komitadji. They gave us land, 10 hectares...

(Mihai Liveanu): Who were the Komitadji?

(Hristu Noice): Komitadji were all the sons of the Bulgarians who left for Bulgaria, they became communists and fought to free Durostor.

(Mihai Liveanu): You know Piti Pobina, you saw him, I also met him, he used to tell me about the fights with the Komitadji and I wouldn't understand a thing."

**Transcript 4:**

“They came from Greece. They received 10 hectares of land, until the '40s. In the '40s, when the Germans started the war, you see, what happened? We gave Durostor away to the Bulgarians, the Hungarians took Transylvania away, and the Russians took Bessarabia. After that we were evacuated to Călărăși, in Ialomița county. Three months later our parents came to Dobrogea, to Cerna.” (Hristu Noice)

**Transcript 5:**

“[*What's your name?*]

Simiti Gheorghe.

[*When are you born?*]

In 1910, in the village of Liumnița, now it is called Skra, in Greece.

[*What is your education?*]

Four grades.

[*Romanian or Greek school?*]

Greek. Because we were prosecuted, the Greeks dissolved the Romanian school. And they forced 70 year-old women to learn Greek. It was like this.

[*Occupation?*]

Farmer. In 1921-22, there was a war between Turks and Greeks in Asia Minor. And Greece lost the war. And there were a lot of Greek ethnics in Constantinople, Izmir, I don't know. And they exchanged populations. All the Turks, who lived with us went in their place, and the Greek came to us. But they couldn't speak Greek. One Turkish word, one Greek. They were Greek by origin. And they started prosecuting us, because we were Romanians. Our guy went to the army, you are Kutzo-Vlachs, they called us like that, Kutzo-Vlachs, lame. «Kutzo» means lame in Greek. Hey, sir, we went to the army, we died on the front, we were wounded, what are they doing to us?! And they wrote a letter to the Romanian Legation in Thesaloniki, the legation sent it to the Romanian government, to Bucharest. And then the Romanian government accepted them into the country. Not all of us left. Those who fought in the war could not stand the prosecutions. And we came to the country. When we arrived in the country, in the spring of 1929, we spent Easter in Constanța. What happened? All our property belonged to the Greek state. We only took what we were wearing at that moment. Houses, vineyards, everything was gone – it was a wealthy area. The state gave each of us five hectares of land. They issued a selling contract, to pay in rates.

[*Where?*]

We were in Haschioii commune, Doimușlari county. I got married in 1927. And I was living near my sister, I had to, my wife's father had died, she had a stepfather. And I left, I got married to her. We built a house, the Romanian state, that society [Meglenia, a.n.] gave us 4,000 lei for the workers, to build. And to use adobe for building. Adobe is made as we know it, ground with straw, not clay mixed with chopped straw, which is used here. And we built the house. In 1940 we gave up Cadrilater. Did we give it up in the war? No. They allocated us to Ialomița. The state gave us 16,000 lei. The Legionaires were ruling back then, the state took care of us so the Bulgarians

didn't kill us because if the bandits got you, they would kill you. The Bulgarians were pretty barbaric. The Slavs are not like our Romanians. The Bulgarian Komitadji.

[*Who were they?*]

Bulgarians. They came from Bulgaria and attacked us because we took Cadrilater.

[*You came here to Cerna. How did people grouped themselves?*]

Megleno-Romanians came from Liumnița, Oșani, Birislav, Țărnareca, there were seven villages, all Meglen. Then they brought us to Cerna, gave us land. But it was not fair, it was not according to the properties we had, but each grabbed his share, because we are like this. And we settled here in Cerna.

[*But how did they settle, street like?*]

We settled according to the villages we came from. We from Liumnița, those from Lundzini on the other side, people from Oșani somewhere else and those from Muntenia in a corner, because they were only a few. And we would not get along at all. People would make distinctions. «Hey, you are from the mountains, you are Macedonian!» «Hey, we are not Macedonians!» «Yes, you are!» «We are Romanian!» Not everybody knew what Romanian meant, what Macedonian meant.

[*How many types of Macedonians are there?*]

We are Macedonians, born in Macedonia.

[*But there are two types, Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians.*]

It's the same thing. We, Megleno-Romanians, are closer to the Romanian dialect.

[*But I understood that the Megleno-Romanians say that they are Oltenians.*]

Pretty much like this. I have a niece in Italy. «Grandpa, I think we come from Oltenia. The Aromanians, if we judge by their attire, are probably from Transylvania.» (Gheorghe Simiti)

### **Transcript 6:**

“Under the Turks they closed down our church. Not the school. About 17-18 Romanian women plus 150 persons from Liumnița protested and went to Thesaloniki by foot. It was around 1900. Two days and two nights. They slept on the road. When they arrived there, the pasha came down, the leader of the counties: «What's up with you?» Țociu, my mother-in-law's sister, had a gun at her belt: «We are Romanians! We want school and church! How is it possible for you to rule, there isn't a law in this world, you are a wise, big country!» «It's not possible!» And when she grabbed the prefect, he tore his clothes off. «When you see her, shoot her!» She went to a hospital. Those people did not know her. Next day they would beat the drum in the town. «Măria Ștefu Belu Hristu», this was her father's family name, she was not married. «She was so brave to tear my clothes off. She's forgiven.» She went there: «It's me.» «You are free, but build the church in the basement, and the mosque on top of it.» Yes. This is how we suffered. We suffered a lot. Ours suffered a lot. But they preserved their language.” (Gheorghe Simiti)

**Transcript 7:**

“*[Did women use to tattoo a cross on their foreheads?]*”

This custom: an aunt of my mother-in-law, five Turks came and took her from where they were dancing, on the Easter day. She was there with her fiancé. They were armed and they just took her to a Turkish village. They used to pour hot oil on her head, her hair fell off, to force her say she was an odalisque. And she did. She had four children and she was sending a candle when there was a holiday. She was crying for her religion. And her brothers would come and say: «Dalila, in Turkish, we get you out of here.» She used to say: «I have children. I will die an odalisque, I have no choice». Ours tattooed crosses on their women's forehead. The Turks, when they saw a cross, would run like hell. If they saw she had a cross, they would shoot her. There were bands in Bulgaria. They would come with cartridges, bombs and attack the Turks. And the Turks were frightened. They could not defeat these gangs. They got scared of them. What did they do later on? In 1913, the Balkans got united: Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria united and threw the Turks out of Greece. They left for Thracia. And ours got free. The Greeks came and divided Macedonia. Serbia was stronger, they took more. Greece took the part near the mountains. Bulgaria occupied more of Thessaloniki [The exit to the Aegean Sea, Aegean Thrace with Thessaloniki port was an obsession for both Bulgarians and Serbs, a.n.]. Of course, Greeks considered it a Greek territory. And king Constantine of Greece took it back for Greece. This is the biggest port in Greece, Thessaloniki. This was the heart of Greece. Thousands of boats go there. Then a Gypsy shot him [the king, a.n.]. And they chase the Bulgarians away and it stayed in Greece.” (Gheorghe Simiti)



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