

THE VLACHIAN COMMUNITY (*MILLET*). THE EFFORTS FOR SEPARATION AND THE ROMANIAN CONTRIBUTION TO ITS MAKING¹

ALI ARSLAN

The Balkan Peninsula became one of the major areas of the Great Powers' competition in the nineteenth century. They wanted to have a share in the land, which was still part of the Ottoman Empire, or at least to put it under their influence.

On the local arena, the Serbs were trying to extend their borders to the south and the Greeks to the north on the areas of the Ottoman Balkans. In addition to the forming of the Bulgarian Principality, a third local power came into existence. These three local powers were aiming to divide Macedonia among themselves or even to take it all². Whereas the Turks, who were trying to maintain their sovereignty, selected the Vlachs, a small group of population of strategic importance, to be their ally in the area. Particularly the Ottoman administration in Macedonia at that time, in order to act against the Bulgarians in the north, and the Greeks in the south, needed the support of the Vlachs.

The Vlachs, who are Christian Orthodox, had been known as a separate ethnic group since the Byzantine period. After the Ottoman Empire took over the region, they accepted the Vlachs as a separate ethnic group from the Greeks and the Bulgarians. The Vlachs, who had their cultural and religious autonomy rights, were given further privileges and responsibilities by the Voynuk Laws, introduced and put into effect by Sultan Selim I in 1516.

During the Ottoman period, the Vlachs who lived massively in Salonika, Serres, Ohrid, Skopje, Monaster, Pindus and Kossovo, were also found in other parts of the Balkans³. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the number of Vlachs, according to the Ottomans records, was of 99,000 people. According to other records, the estimate was almost the same⁴. This figure did not include the whole number of Vlachs, but only those who considered themselves a separate ethnic group from the Greeks⁵.

¹ This study was supported by the Scientific Projects Unit of Istanbul University, project number: UDP-887/10102006.

² Douglas Daikin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia*, Thessaloniki, 1993, pp. 26-27.

³ Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, *The Vlachs. A Forgotten Minority in the Balkans*, London, 2001, pp. 8-12, 19. After the period of the Tanzimat they changed the *cezye* into a solidarity tax, but they started to take this tax from the named Vlachs after their residence (Ufuk Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, İstanbul, 2000, pp. 82-83).

⁴ Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu*, İstanbul, 1999, pp. 5-16.

⁵ Ali Arslan, *Vlachs of Manastir*, in "Macedonian Folklore," 62, 2004. For another example of problems of Vlachs recorded as Greeks, see the letter of the people of the Acarnarliga village to Yenice Vardar, dated Kanunuevvel 1327 (December 1911): Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (hereafter: BOA), fund DH. SYS, 62=2/1, f. 25.

The Vlachs became subject to the Hellenization policies of the Greek and the Greek influenced Orthodox Patriarchate in the nineteenth century. When the Vlachs identified themselves as a separate community, the Orthodox Patriarchate opposed their demands, but the Bulgarian Exarchate supported them just to weaken the Greeks. When the Greeks, the Bulgarians and the Ottomans, with their different approaches, started to turn the Vlachs' question into a political issue, they contributed to strengthening the Vlachs' identity.

Since the establishment of the Ottoman State, the non-Muslim communities had been able to preserve freedom of belief and religion, every religious sect being accepted as a nation (*millet*). The organized communities related to a church or a synagogue had been practicing their own laws regarding family and inheritance. However, with the strengthening of nationalist feelings, before the observation of the ethnic constructor, the system of a nation that gathered around a belief began to collapse. During this period, on the one hand the Orthodox Patriarchate had to suffer the most, and on the other hand, the Vlachs, influenced by this atmosphere, began their separation movement from the Greek controlled Orthodox Church, in order to establish their Vlachian Church⁶.

In terms of language and culture, the closest to them were the Romanians. The two nations became aware of this relationship at the end of the nineteenth century.

The struggle between the Greeks and the Vlachs, and the Romanian application to the Ottoman Government on behalf of the Vlachs

Among the Slavic Orthodox, especially the clergy had a deep hatred against the hierarchy of the Orthodox Patriarchate due to the Hellenisation policies of the Greek controlled Orthodox Patriarchate⁷. Due to the escalation of nationalist feelings among the non-Muslims of the region, this was obviously a natural development. Churches had become an important place, particularly for the nationalist struggle in the Balkans. This kind of struggle, with its various instances, had been put forth in Macedonia. During the Ottoman-Russian war (1877–1878), the Romanians and the Bulgarians cooperated, and so did the Vlachs. However, with the Hellenisation policies of the Patriarchate, the struggle of the Vlachs began to escalate⁸.

⁶ Ali Arslan, *The Vlach Issue during the Late Ottoman Period and the Emergence of the Vlach Community*, in "Etudes Balkaniques," 2004, no.4, pp. 121-139.

⁷ D. Daikin, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸ Ali Arslan, *Greek-Vlach Conflict in Macedonia*, in "Etudes Balkaniques," XXXIX, 2003, no. 2, pp. 78-102.

Most of the Vlachs were Orthodox, and therefore they were under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarchate. The majority of the clergy was Greek, and they were unable to perform service in any other language than Greek. The most important issue for the Vlachs was to hold their religious ceremonies in their own language.

With the intensification of the struggle in Macedonia, the Orthodox Patriarchate decided to leave the Vlachs without an ecclesiastical leader, if they insisted on worshipping in their own language. It was the order of the Orthodox Patriarch that led to the closure of 8 Vlachian Churches in 1875. This struggle between the Vlachs and the Greeks led nearly to the death of the Bishop of Greben. It was only prevented at the last minute. The Orthodox Patriarchate denying the Vlachs' demands, the latter succeeded in appointing their own bishop. In the meantime, the Vlachs placed their complaints with the Ottoman Government and asked for the assistance of the Romanian Government⁹.

When the Vlachs' demand to worship in their own language was denied by the Greek controlled Patriarchate, they applied for help from the Romanian government, given the existing ethnic kinship between the Vlachs and the Romanians. It was already in 1875 that the Vlachian churches were closed. Because of the negative attitude of the Orthodox Patriarchate and the indifference of the Ottoman Government, the Vlachs had no other choice but to apply to the Romanian government on this matter. The Vice President of Romania asked his ambassador in Istanbul to apply to the Sublime Porte, so that the Vlachs' demands should be accepted¹⁰. According to this progress, the struggle in Macedonia was provided with a new participant, and a new era began, of protection to the Vlachs not only from Romania but from her friends as well.

When discussions began on the topic of the Vlachs being able to worship in their own language, the Ottoman authorities decided to investigate the matter in detail. Eventually, the Sultan gave his approval on 23 Safer 1310 (8 September 1892), and ordered the continuation of the necessary steps.¹¹

According to the principle of religious freedom, the Ottoman Administration approved that the Vlachians could hold their religious ceremonies in their own language. The Orthodox Patriarchate was officially informed of this decision, and the problem of the Vlachs' religious ceremonies was solved. But for Abdulhamid II, the freedom of the Vlachian language could lead to a separate nation, which was liable to create a new problem for the Ottoman State. Additionally, it could bring forth a cooperation between the Greeks and the Bulgarians against the Ottomans.

⁹ A translation from European newspapers: BOA, fund Y. PRK, 1/13.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ *Irade* of Abdulhamid II, dated 23 Safer 1310 (8 September 1892): Idem, fund *İrade-i Hususiye*, 1310 S 23, no. 129.

The Ottomans, who were looking for a solution not to offend either party, were unable to satisfy both. Because the problem was not that of a ceremony language, as it appeared. It was the problem of an identity for the Vlachs, and a return of the struggle for the future inheritance in Macedonia for the Greeks. For the Vlachs, who did not want to serve the interests of the Greeks, a first solution was to establish a separate Church. For them, it was absolutely necessary to do so, in order to protect their identity.

The Vlachs' demand for the establishment of a separate Church and the attitude of the Romanian administration

Although the Vlachs were granted the right to worship in their own language, they continued to demand the appointment of a spiritual leader for themselves, mainly due to the interference of the Greek controlled Orthodox Patriarch and its representatives. They even appointed a head among themselves with the title of Vlachian Bishop, without waiting any further for the final decision of the Ottoman Government. However, the Ottoman Government did not approve the appointment of a bishop, partly due to the Greek controlled Orthodox Patriarch's hindrance¹².

The improvement in the relations between Greece and the Ottoman State that occurred after the establishment of Greater Bulgaria came to an end when the Greek Government landed its troops on the island of Crete in February 1897.

Another goal of the Greek Government was Macedonia, with a huge Vlachian population. In April 1897, the Greek guerrillas, having crossed the Macedonian border, entered the Ottoman territories, and the Greek army subsequently attempted to invade Macedonia. However, the Ottoman army swept away the Greeks, and marched into the Greek territories. Having seized Volos on 11 May 1897, the Ottoman troops encountered no obstacle on their march towards Athens. However, these developments did not coincide with the regional policies of Russia and Great Britain, who intervened for a cease fire agreement. Whilst Germany was pursuing an anti Greece policy, the support given to Greece by Russia, the United Kingdom and Italy led to the conclusion of a cease-fire treaty. Although the Ottomans won the war, they found themselves with no gain in the end because of the support given to Greece by all the Great Powers except Germany¹³.

During this Turkish-Greek war, the Vlachs in Macedonia fought with the Ottomans against the Greeks. With the support of the Vlachs in the Turkish-Greek war, a new era opened in the bilateral relations regarding the Greek controlled

¹² *Irade* of Abdulhamid II, dated 10 Receb 1314 (15 December 1896): *ibidem*, 1310 B 10, no. 30.

¹³ D. Dakin, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42.

Orthodox Church¹⁴. For the Ottoman Administration, who wanted to reduce or to prevent the spread of Hellenic influence in Macedonia, the Vlachs became an important means. The Vlachs began to feel an official support in their struggle against the Greeks, and they used the opportunity to ask for the establishment of the Vlachian Church. With the improvement in the Vlachian-Ottoman relations, the Vlachs renewed their demand for the Ottoman consent to elect a Vlach Bishop and stated that the appointment of the Vlachian Bishop had not formally been recognized by the Sublime Porte due to the opposition of the Greek Patriarch. However, Abdulhamid II decreed that the formal proceedings to appoint a Vlachian Bishop should have a positive impact on the Ottoman State¹⁵. Until then, Abdulhamid II had not wished to upset the Orthodox Patriarch or the Greeks, but under the prevailing circumstances the situation was reversed. Abdulhamid II began to consider the necessity to take new action, since the good behavior towards the Orthodox Patriarchate had earned him nothing in terms of establishing good relations with the Greeks.

Moreover, the Romanian Ambassador in Istanbul, who had supported the Ottoman Empire during the Ottoman-Greek war in 1897, appeared before the Sultan and interceded for the Vlachs being allowed to have “an independent Church.” Thus, the Sultan asked for a solution to be found without any further interference by other states into the Vlachian issue. The Ottoman Government including Grand Vizier Rifat, Internal Affairs Minister Abdurrahman, State Council President Said, External Affairs Minister Tevfik, Internal Affairs Minister Memduh, and Trade and Public Works Minister Mahmud prepared an official report. Here is an outline of the opinions of the Ottoman Government: It is obvious that accepting the demands of the Vlachs, “would improve Ottoman relations with Romania and the pro-Turkish public opinion in Romania.” However, granting these rights to the Vlachs might trigger further ambitions of the Bulgarians and Serbians, which would be undesirable for the Ottoman Government in Macedonia. And the Ottomans might end up accepting their demands as well. At the same time, the states ensuring the protectorate of the Christians since the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty, and especially the states with “spiritual influence” on the Orthodox Church, would oppose these developments as well. Particularly, the carrying out of these decisions would arouse the indignation of the Greek Patriarch. While the Ottoman Government was having peace negotiations to solve these important issues without political difficulties, the circumstances were not suitable to establish an independent Church for the Vlachs. The Ottoman officials also stated that these

¹⁴ *Mazbata* of Encümen-i Mahsus-i Vükela, dated 13 Safer 1315 (14 July 1897): BOA, fund Y.A. Res, 87/68, f. 3.

¹⁵ *Irade* of Abdulhamid II, dated 10 Receb 1314 (15 December 1896): Idem, fund Irade-i Hususiye, 1310 B 10, no. 30.

demands should be taken into consideration after the signing of the Turkish-Greek Peace Treaty, and a skillful conclusion should be reached, according to the political conditions occurring after the agreement. It was important to do so, in order to avoid internal and external upheavals.¹⁶

Well aware that Serbia and Bulgaria would be offended by the decision to allow the creation of the new Vlachian Church, which could be seen as a favor made to Romania, the Committee of Ministers recommended that such a decision should be taken after the peace treaty was signed. Referring to the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty, the Committee of Ministers stated that the establishment of the Vlachian Church would draw forth the reaction of Russia as well. Thus, the political authorities (the Committee of Ministers) recommended the establishment of a Vlachian Church after the peace was settled. In this way, the establishment of the Vlachian Church became not only an internal issue of the Ottomans, but an important international issue as well.

This official report of the Committee of Ministers was presented to the Sultan by the Grand Vizier on 14 July 1897¹⁷. However, Romania kept on her demands that it was just time for the Vlachs to have their independent Church. The Romanian Ambassador in Istanbul had appeared before the Padishah and stated that the Romanian Government was inclined to make an agreement with the Ottoman Government. The Romanian chargé d'affaires stated that if the Vlachs were granted these rights, the Romanian Government would be willing to sign a treaty of alliance with the Ottoman Government. However, the Padishah believed that the Greeks and the Bulgarians might cause some problems after the Vlachian Church was established, and the Romanians might lose their interest in a formal alliance with the Ottomans once the Vlachian question was solved. Abdulhamid II passed this issue on to the Porte for further discussion. Opinions mentioned below were emphasized in the official report of the Committee of State Ministers dated 25 September 1897: An agreement with Romania was not yet definite, and the offer made by the Ottoman Government would only be answered after the Romanian King returned to Bucharest. The establishment of the Vlachian Church should not be put into effect unless a treaty was signed with Romania. The demand for a Vlachian Bishop could be carried out even if an agreement with Romania was not made. But the center should not be Istanbul, and the spiritual attachment to the Orthodox Patriarch would be permanent. Thus, the Greek Patriarch should not object to the Vlachian Bishopric. The Ministry of Justice should be assigned the task of meeting with the Orthodox Patriarch and concluding the negotiations¹⁸.

¹⁶ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 14 July 1897: Idem, fund Y.A. Res, 87/68, f. 3.

¹⁷ *Tezkire* of the Sadaret, dated 13 July 1897: ibidem, f. 1.

¹⁸ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 25 September 1897: ibidem, 88/115, f. 2.

This official report of the Committee of State Ministers was presented to Padishah Abdulhamid II on the same day¹⁹.

Meanwhile, the appointment of a Vlachian Bishop became a prerequisite for the defensive alliance between Romania and the Ottoman State. Besides, the Romanian chargé d'affaires in Istanbul informed the Ottoman Government that if a Vlachian Bishop was assigned before the Romanian Council was opened, this would have a positive impact on the Romanian-Ottoman relations. The Ottoman Government agreed upon the appointment of a bishop for the Vlachs, but the latter was to be under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarch²⁰. And the Grand Vizier presented this official report to Abdulhamid II on 5 October 1897²¹.

The Ottoman Government abandoned all attempts to establish a Vlachian Bishopric because the military agreement including a “defensive alliance” with Romania was not materialized. However, even then, during his audience to the Sultan, the Romanian Ambassador in Istanbul expressed his desire for a Vlachian Bishopric to be created²². So, the Sultan demanded that this Vlachian Bishopric issue should be reexamined by the Committee of Ministers²³. While negotiations for an agreement with the Romanian Government were taking place, the Porte discussed this issue, and stated that the Ottoman Government was willing to accept a bishop “of their own kind,” but an official promise was not yet given to the Romanian Government. After the failure of the agreement with Romania, the Ottoman government decided that it was not necessary to make a definite decision on the Vlachian Bishopric, and explained to the Romanian Ambassador that the time was not right²⁴.

However, for Abdulhamid II, it was not only the wrong timing, but also the important effect that the establishment of a Vlach Bishopric would have made on the Orthodox Patriarch. It could even lead to the transfer of the Patriarch to Greece, since they would be “subjected to difficulties under the administration of the Ottoman Government.” In this case, the Ottoman Greek citizens would be under the influence of Greece, and would become a serious threat to the Ottoman Empire. As to the benefits the Ottoman Government would derive from an agreement with Romania, and to the latter following the policy of the Ottoman Government under any circumstances, Abdulhamid II stated that he did not believe that Romania would support the Ottoman Government. Especially as during the Turkish-Russian War (1877–1878), Romanian forces had joined up with the Russian army and

¹⁹ *Tezkire* of the Grand Vizier, dated 25 September 1897: *ibidem*, f. 1.

²⁰ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 5 October 1897: *ibidem*, 89/9, f. 2.

²¹ *Tezkire* of the Grand Vizier, dated 5 October 1897: *ibidem*, f. 1.

²² *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 27 November 1897: *ibidem*, 90/2, f. 2.

²³ *Tezkire* of the Grand Vizier, dated 27 November 1897: *ibidem*, f. 1.

²⁴ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 27 November 1897: *ibidem*, f. 2.

attacked the armies of Osman Pasha. The Sultan decided to emphasize the difficulty in giving an answer to the establishment of the Vlachian Bishopric²⁵.

However, the Vlachs had supported the Ottomans during the war and in the struggle in Macedonia, and besides that, the Ottoman Administration was looking favorably on the desire of the Vlachs to have their separate Church. Nonetheless, they did not give them permission to establish their own Church, being hesitant as to the reaction of the Russians, who were supporting the Serbs and the Bulgarians in the Balkans. The Ottoman Government put forth that they did not want to ruin their relations with the Orthodox Patriarchate. Moreover, if the Vlachian Church was to be established, it would certainly be tied to the Orthodox Patriarchate. In addition, Abdulhamid II pointed out to the danger that if the establishment of the Vlachian Church led to the relocation of the Orthodox Patriarchate to Athens, the Ottoman citizens who were related to the Orthodox Patriarchate would fall under the influence of the Greek Government. In short, because of the various international concerns, the establishment of the Vlachian Church was obstructed, the good relations between the Ottomans and the Romanian Government being not a strong enough factor to enable it.

The Vlachs' desire to become a separate community

The Vlachs postponed their ambitions of having an independent Church from the Greek Patriarch, and put forward their demands differently. They asked for representatives in the local governments. In the application of 28 June 1904 to the Sublime Porte, they stated that the Greek controlled Orthodox Patriarch did not allow them to worship in their own language, although the Ottoman Government had granted them this right. They wanted to be separated from Greeks as soon as possible, and the Vlachian community to be "officially recognized" by legal arrangements. They also wanted to have representatives in the provinces, as well as in the smaller units. Besides, the Vlachian community should have a major demonstration in Istanbul, just like the Protestant and Roman communities, to manage its works within the Ottoman Government. This would help the Vlachian community to manage its works easily, and this would also help to calm down the Vlachs. If the Orthodox Patriarch maintained the same attitude, this would not only be detrimental to the Orthodox Patriarch, but to the Ottoman Government as well²⁶.

Another demand of the Vlachs was the election of governors for Vlachian villages and wards. The Macedonian Inspector General Huseyin Hilmi, who studied their complaints, stated that it would cause too many difficulties, particularly in places where the Greeks and the Vlachs lived together. And,

²⁵ *Irade* of the Padishah, dated 28 November 1897: *ibidem*.

²⁶ Translation of the *mazhar* given to the Sublime Porte on 28 June 1904: *ibidem*, 127/62, f. 3.

according to the 54th article of the Province Regulations, assigning an independent self-governor and a village council for the Vlachs would cause much less difficulty²⁷.

To protect their existence, the Vlachs, who had failed to protect their religious organization, now wished to become a separate self-governing community under the local Ottoman Administration, and be allowed to elect their own *Mukhtar*. The most important supporter of the Vlachs in their struggle to become an independent community was of course the Romanian Government.

Romania's efforts towards an independent Vlachian community

It became a state policy for the Romanian government to assist the Vlachs in becoming an independent community. The Romanian King even admitted a Vlach on one of his mixed/inter-communal commissions, which pleased the Sultan²⁸.

The Romanian Government had good relations with the Vlachs, and used every opportunity to support the Vlachs. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the Ottoman Embassy in Bucharest on 24 August 1904, and stated that the "Vlachs' interests coincided with those of the Ottoman Government," and that the Romanian King and the Government were concerned about the Vlachs being continually sacrificed owing to the continual attacks by Greeks. He also stated that, with the good intentions of the Ottoman Government, the Vlachian demands to have their own schools and churches should be accepted, and the Vlachs should be included in the administrative councils. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs further stated that they supported the existing status quo in the Balkans. However, in their struggle with the Greeks, the Exarchists were assisting the Vlachs, and this would have negative consequences in the Balkans²⁹.

In the meantime, the Romanian Government continued their efforts in support of the Vlachian demands. Being aware that the Ottomans were not willing to establish an independent Vlachian Church, they started to advocate for the election of a Vlachian governor (*mukhtar*) and the opening of Vlachian churches in some areas. The Grand Vizier informed the Sultan about these demands, but Abdulhamid II decided to ignore them, so as not to cause any further political conflicts.³⁰ Thus, owing to the decision of Abdulhamid II, the Vlachs were unable to achieve their goal in 1904.

²⁷ Telegraph of the Rumelia Public Inspector Husyein Hilmi, dated 17 August 1904: *ibidem*, f. 5.

²⁸ *Irade* of Abdulhamid II, dated 19 August 1904: *Idem*, fund *İrade-i Hususiye*, 1321 B 13, no. 63.

²⁹ Telegraph of the Ambassador of the Ottoman Government in Bucharest, dated 25 August 1904: *Idem*, fund Y.A. Res, 127/62, f. 7. Official message of the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs about the demands of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs: *ibidem*, f. 6.

³⁰ *Irade* of Abdulhamid II, dated 21 September 1904: *Idem*, fund *İrade-i Hususiye*, 1322 B 13, no. 91.

The Ottoman Government became concerned about losing Macedonia and the status quo in the Balkans, while Romania, who wanted to make it clear that the needs of the Vlachs and the interests of the Ottomans were going together in the same direction, was trying to make the Vlachs into a formal community. However, Abdulhamid II stressed on the Romanian-Austrian talks and, considering that the subject of the Vlachs becoming a separate community was an international political maneuver, dismissed the idea.

Germany's influence, the Romanian factor and the Ottoman Government's measures in giving the Vlachs an official community status

With the rejection by Abdulhamid II of the idea of the Vlach community as an international political issue, and under the pressure of the Greek monks and gangs, the Vlachs turned to the Bulgarians. This development came as a result of the Ottoman Administration policy not to support the Vlachs' demands. The Vlachs' choice was influenced by the fact that the Bulgarians were closer in terms of religion and social life, and unlike the Greeks, more understanding of the Vlachs' need for service to be held in their mother tongue. This development, which increased the influence of the Bulgarians in Macedonia, alarmed the Ottoman Administration.

In the political struggle which took place in the Balkans, Germany, according to the tradition, took stands against England, and became strategically interested in the Vlachian issue. With the intensification of the Great Powers' struggle in Macedonia, the Vlachian Question became an issue on the international arena as well³¹.

The German officials, who did not want any opposition against them in the Balkans, made some attempts to support the Vlachian demands in 1905. In relation to the problems of the Vlachian schools at Janina, the German Ambassador in Istanbul visited the Ottoman Minister of Foreign affairs and put forward some proposals to improve the well-being of the Vlachs in that province: "The Vlachs should be permitted to elect their own self-governor according to the civil law, just like the Greek, the Bulgarian and the Serbian communities. In other words, rights given to other communities by the Ottoman Law should also be given to the Vlachs." The German Ambassador's proposals were forwarded to the Grand Vizier by the Minister of Foreign Affairs³².

In this manner, by means of Greece, the increase in England's activity and its opposition by the Germans, who became a partner of the Ottomans in many

³¹ A.G. Tokay, *The Macedonian Question and the Origins of the Young Turk Revolution 1903–1908*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1994, pp. 103-109.

³² *Tezkire* of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 18 May 1905: BOA, fund İrade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, no. 20, f. 3.

political issues, Germany applied directly to the Ottoman Government for the Vlachs to be accepted as a separate group.

Once Abdulhamid II was informed about Germany's demands, he required the Porte to find a solution to this issue. The Porte decided that the Vlachs could worship and could be educated in their own language. They could also elect their governor and work with their own inspectors and teachers, as long as they did not harm the authority of the Orthodox Patriarchate. But, the Porte stated that the Romanian Embassy and Consuls did not have any right to interfere with the Vlachian community, whose members were Ottoman citizens. It was especially emphasized that the Ministry of Education should be notified as soon as teachers and inspectors for the Vlachian schools were assigned by the Vlachian community. The inspectors who were exiled from Janina could return to the province, but new inspectors had to be appointed in their place. The Porte also stated that the dispute between the governor of Janina and the Romanian Consul should be settled, and as previously ordered, that the Minister of Interior should be notified about the election of the members of the Administrative Council. Additionally, the responsibility to have these decisions published in a newspaper in Istanbul was given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, all decisions related to schools and churches were to be sent to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice³³.

This official report of the Committee of State Ministers was presented to and accepted by Abdulhamid on 19 May 1905³⁴. The Sultan gave the necessary orders for implementation³⁵. Also, the necessary orders were sent out to the Ministries of Education and Justice on 20 May 1905, and to the Ministry of Interior Affairs on 27 May 1905³⁶.

Before Germany applied to the Ottoman Government on behalf of the Vlachs, the Ottoman Government had given the order about the Vlachs' election of Administrative Council members. However, the decision had not been carried through. Abdulhamid II, who had overruled similar demands by the Romanian Government one year before, eventually yielded to the intercession of Germany.

³³ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers consisting of the Grand Vizier, Shaikh al-Islam, Minister of Justice, General Commander, State Council President, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Interior Affairs, Minister of Maritime, Manager of Tophane-i Amire, Minister of Finance, Minister of Evkaf, Minister of Education and Undersecretary of Sadaret, dated 19 May 1905: *ibidem*, f. 2.

³⁴ *Tezkire* of the Grand Vizier, dated 19 May 1905: *ibidem*, f. 1.

³⁵ *İrade* of the Padishah, dated 20 May 1905: *ibidem*. See another sample of the Decree of Abdulhamid II: *Idem*, fund *İrade-i Hususiye*, 1323 RA 17, no. 52.

³⁶ Information on the back side of the *tezkire* of the Sadaret: *Idem*, fund *İrade-i Dahiliye*, 1323 RA 17, no. 20, f. 1.

Conclusion

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Vlachs who lived in Macedonia achieved an international strategic importance never matched before in their history since the time of the Byzantine Empire. At the end of the nineteenth century, there was on the one hand a major rivalry among the Great Powers in the Balkans, and on the other hand a struggle among Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria, who had expansionistic designs in the Peninsula. In the nationalistic struggle taking place in Macedonia, the Christian Vlachs, whose number was relatively small in comparison to other non-Muslim communities, became considerably important, owing to their contribution to promoting the interests of one party or another. After the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in the nineteenth century, the Vlachs started to demand similar privileges from the Ottoman authorities. In the first place, the Vlachs wanted their religious ceremonies to be performed in their mother tongue and to be able to have their own bishops. After this goal was reached, the second step was to establish the Vlachian Church and community. It was an important means to protect the existence of Vlachian ethnicity and culture.

The Ottoman Government accepted the demands of the Vlachs and granted them in 1892 the right to worship and to have education in their own language. With the recognition of this right, the promotion of the Vlachian language and culture became possible.

Despite these developments, the Vlachs' problems did not come to an end due to the hostility of the Greek controlled Orthodox Patriarch, and the Vlachs began to work towards the establishment of an independent Church. The Vlachian demands to become a separate community, to select their governor and to be included in the administrative councils were denied by Abdulhamid II in 1904

Although the Vlachs were granted the status of separate community, they were still under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate. The right to use Vlachian in religious ceremonies, against the will of the Greek Patriarchate, and further on, the right to become a separate community, both granted by the Ottoman Administration, were undoubtedly important contributions which enabled the continuation of the Vlachian language, culture and ethnic constructor.

The Vlachs' demands to worship in their own language, to establish an independent Church, and to become a separate community received continual support from the Romanian Government.