

UNIVERSITY OF SS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

*Macedonian
Historical
Review*



vol. 2
2011

The Aromanians and IMRO

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The Macedonian revolutionary national-liberation movement, organized and led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) has long provoked the interest of contemporaries and scholars of the modern Macedonian history. The interest shown by the numerous diplomats, historians, journalists and analysts has produced an enormous historiographic work which examines IMRO and the Macedonian revolutionary movement from every aspect. However, the origins, acts and goals of IMRO can naturally be viewed differently, taking into account each author's provenance and the time at which the work was published. The same can be said for the Aromanian participation in the revolutionary organization. While historians in the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria acknowledge the Aromanian contribution within IMRO, the two sides who have traditionally invested the most interest in the Aromanian question – Romania and Greece – have preferred either to ignore the Macedo-Aromanian collaboration, or to present the Aromanian involvement in the Organization as “*forced collaboration*”, under pressure from the “*Bulgarian bandits*”.¹ This stance has its roots in Romania and Greece's Macedonian policy from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The Romanian propagandistic presence in Macedonia focuses on the Aromanian population, presenting them as being part of the Romanian nation. On the one side, the future existence of this propaganda in Macedonia required the Aromanians – seen as Romania's pawn on the Balkan chess table – to remain faithful subjects of the Sultan. On the other side, Bucharest did not want to see (or simply could

¹ This stance is still present in modern Greek historiography, which claims that “*The Bulgarians used threats and murders to force the Aromanians to accept the (Bulgarian) Exarchate and join the Bulgarian movement*” (ΚΟΥΚΟΥΔΗΣ, 2001: 262).

not see) IMRO's indigenoussness, and no matter how much IMRO kept proving its independence from the Bulgarian cabinet, Romanians considered the Macedonian revolutionary movement to be spurious, fostered by Sofia, and in it the Romanian politicians saw nothing else but an extended arm of Bulgaria's expansionistic policy. For this reason Aromanian participation in IMRO complicated Romania's position, not only for the fear that Bulgaria would steal Bucharest's main trump card in its Macedonian policy, but also due to the realistic danger of disturbing amicable relations with the Ottoman Empire. The Greek Kingdom also had important plans with the Latin speaking people north of its border, and for this it gave the Aromanians a vital role in the Great Idea's fulfillment. Greece had little to worry about while the various nationalities in the Ottoman Empire were under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, but when the Slavic population of Macedonia joined the Exarchate *en masse*, the number of "Greeks" in Macedonia started its uncontrollable decrease. Were the Aromanians to follow the same example, then it is likely that Hellenism would have to completely vanish from a number of cities in Macedonia, whose presence was principally represented by the Aromanian population. If the Aromanians were shown to be Greeks, then Greece could claim to have citizens north in Bitola and Krushevo. If, on the other hand, the Aromanians were not considered to be Greeks, then Greece's claims in Macedonia were seriously threatened, with only a negligible minority living more than 100 kilometers north of its border. Hellenism would be forced to retreat south of the river Bistritsa (Haliacmon) and the Greeks would cut a poor figure among the statistics of the Macedonian races.² The Aromanians were Greece's predetermined prize and Athens could not let them fall in the hands of its arch enemy in Macedonia, the Bulgarians.

This line of thinking was the main reason for the numerous statements given by Romanian and Greek diplomats, distributed to the public in both countries through pro-governmental media, in which they deny the Aromanian involvement in IMRO and the Ilinden Uprising. Whenever the Aromanian presence in the revolutionary bands was confirmed by the Ottoman authorities, Bucharest and Athens found a convenient excuse, claiming that the Aromanians were subjects of atrocities committed by the "*Bulgarian bands*" and that they were forced to join IMRO. This is the reason for which the Greek consul in Bitola, Kypreos, claims that the Aromanian settlements

² BRAILSFORD, 1906: 176; WINNIFRITH, 1987: 52.

were under strong pressure from the insurgents to join the revolutionary movement.³ The pro - governmental media in the Romanian capital came out with similar statements that “*the Romanians from Macedonia did not take part in the Bulgarian revolutionary movement, nor did they sympathize with it, and when they did take part, they were doing so because they were forced by the Bulgarian bands*”⁴. It was claimed that “*The Romanians endure the consequences from the bitter war between the bands of the committees and the Turkish army. The Romanian settlements are occupied due to strategical or other motives and forced to... give youngsters to the bands*”.⁵ Certain Romanian newspapers were informing the public how those killed in the Ilinden Uprising in Krushevo were mostly “*Romanians who became victims of a battle with which they have nothing in common*,”⁶ while the insurgents were described as pseudo-liberators and “*Bulgarian bands who killed most of the Romanians who refused to support the rebellion*”.⁷

Not many were willing to deny the claims coming from the political circles in Athens and Bucharest, with certain notable exceptions.⁸ Those who were most informed about the Aromanian involvement in the Organization and in the Ilinden uprising, i.e the leaders and the members of IMRO, preferred not to talk about it in order to protect the Aromanian villages from the regular Ottoman army and the *bashi - bazouks*.

In the few historical studies that deal with the Aromanian presence in IMRO, it is indicated that the main reason which attracted the Aromanians to join the Organization were “*the terrible cruelties and injustices committed over them by the Ottoman authorities*”.⁹ This claim is correct in principle, but it is too simplified and only partially explains why the Aromanians showed solidarity with the Macedonian revolutionaries. The rationale behind why one part of the Aromanian population accepted IMRO, one part showed indif-

³ ЈОВАНОВСКИ, 2006: 11.

⁴ Cf. NISTOR, 2009: 58.

⁵ *Escoul Macedonie*, I/1, 17.08.1903, 1; See also: *Ibidem*, I/2, 24.08.1903, 3; I/4, 7.09.1903, 1.

⁶ *Румънският*, 2001: 248-249.

⁷ *Ibidem*: 128; ПОПОВ, 2004: 103.

⁸ Here we can single out a number of articles from 1903-1904, published in the newspaper *Reforme/Românul de la Pind*, edited by the Aromanian intelligentsia from Macedonia, supporting the Aromanian participation in IMRO and the Ilinden Uprising.

⁹ СИМОВСКИ, 1953: 191; СИДОВСКИ, 2005: 89.

ference and the third part refused any sort of cooperation, therefore openly showing its animosity towards the Organization, is much more complex and requires more space for analysis.

We do not aspire to write a complete analysis of the Aromanian involvement and influence in IMRO,¹⁰ so we will limit the inquiry to the reasons which resulted in a part of the Aromanian population joining the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

A large number of Aromanian and Megleno-Vlach¹¹ villages did indeed feel the weight of the Ottoman yoke. The terror inflicted by the Ottomans and the nearby Islamized village of Nonte was felt the most by the Megleno-Vlachs. When the German linguist Gustav Weigand visited Meglen in 1890, the first thing he noticed was the horrible poverty, atypical for the Aromanian villages he had previously visited. The village of Birislav was a *chiflik*¹² of Nonte and the villagers were regularly terrorized by their masters and by the soldiers.¹³ Oshin, Luguntsi and Huma were properties belonging to Turks and Jews from Salonica, while the Aromanian village of Livadi was *chiflik* of Turkish *beys* from Yannitsa. Most of the other Megleno-Vlach villages were also *chifliks*.¹⁴ Relatively isolated and yet situated in an excellent strategic position near the main road that led to Salonica, under strong influence from their Slavic neighbors¹⁵ and with little to no Greek in-

¹⁰ For more complete analysis of the Aromanian participation in IMRO see my thesis: Романската пропаганда во Македонија и ароманското прашање (1860-1903), Филозофски факултет - Скопје, presented on 17.02. 2011, p. 218-244.

¹¹ The linguists and the historians can not find a mutual agreement about the origins of the Latin speaking population inhabiting the Meglen region in south-east Macedonia. Due to the similarity of the language spoken by the Aromanians and the Megleno-Vlachs, many scientists put all of them in the same bracket.

¹² Turkish term for a system of land management in the Ottoman Empire.

¹³ WEIGAND, 1892: 15.

¹⁴ Ibidem: 16, 23; CANACHEU, 1906: 179; *Œcumenical*, 1906: 46.

¹⁵ Macedonian songs were sang in most of the Megleno-Vlach villages. In the villages Coinsko, Crna Reka and Sermenin, the youth regularly used the Macedonian language. In the village Barovitsa the kids hardly ever talked in Megleno-Vlach and communicated in Macedonian.

fluence among them,¹⁶ the Megleno-Vlach villages quickly attracted the attention of IMRO's leaders. The first article of IMRO's constitution from 1897, which allowed all unsatisfied element of the population in Macedonia and Odrin to be included in the Organization regardless of ethnicity,¹⁷ widely opened IMRO's doors for the non-Slavic population in Meglen. Argir Manasiev and Vasil Chekalarov set up the organizational foundation in Barovitsa¹⁸ and in 1897 the same two visited many villages on Mount Pajak (Paiko) after which IMRO's ideas finally reached the Megleno-Vlachs.¹⁹ Manasiev's tremendous organizational qualities soon bore their fruit. According to one of IMRO's leaders in the Gevgeli region, Sava Mihajlov, all the Vlach villages in the Gevgeli area were faithful to the Organization.²⁰ The number of IMRO band leaders (*voivods*), corporals and normal band members emerging from the villages in Vlacho-Meglen was impressive.²¹ The huts of the Aromanian nomads from Livadi and the Vlach huts on mount Kozhuf were regularly used as shelters by IMRO's bands.²²

¹⁶ Constantin Noe claims that *graecophilia* never had strong roots in Vlacho-Meglen (CORDESCU, 1906: 327).

¹⁷ ДИМЕСКИ, 1982: 204; ЃОРЃИЕВ, 2003: 219.

¹⁸ ШЛАДДЕВЪ, 1931: 15.

¹⁹ ЃОРЃИЕВ, 2003: 240.

²⁰ *Движението*, 1927: 94.

²¹ The *voivod* in the Kriva Palanka region, Shteriu Canacheu-Yunana was from the Aromanian village Livadi in Meglen (НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 133). The Gevgeli regional *voivod* Ioan Vani Somo and the local *voivod* Tanciu Giambazi were from the Megleno-Vlach village Liumnitsa (Ibidem: 152; ЧОТИ, 2008: 21). The local band of IMRO in Oshin was led by Avram Dzega (ЧОТИ, 2008: 21; МЛАДЕНОВЪ, 1936: 55). The Vodena and Gevgeli regional *voivod* Todor Sermeninski was from Sermenin while the Gevgeli *voivods* Hristo Gyupchev and L. Konstantinov, as well as the local *voivod* Hristo Trtev were from Barovitsa (НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 39; ЧОТИ, 2008: 21 ; МЛАДЕНОВЪ, 1936: 55). The villagers regularly joined the bands. Argir Manasiev's band formed in 1901 was consisted mostly of "Exarchist-Vlachs" (ДАКИН, 1993: 166; *The Events*, 1993: 30). Many Megleno-Vlachs joined Apostol Petkov's band and cruised the villages Cupa, Livadi, Birislav, Luguntsi, Oshin, Huma and Liumnitsa (КАРТОВ, 1966: 173). More detailed lists and events which include the names of the Megleno-Vlach revolutionaries can be found in: *Борбите*, 2005: 51-53, 70-71, 74, 85-88, 90, 96, 100, 102-107, 118, 133-137.

²² СИМОВСКИ, 1953: 195.

The living conditions of the Aromanians in *kaža* Kastoria were not too dissimilar to those in Vlacho-Meglen. It is enough to read Vasil Chekalarov's diary to confirm the Aromanian presence in Koreshtata and Nestram (Kastoria region) and the participation of the Aromanians from this area in the revolutionary battles.²³ Few in numbers, some comprised of five, others of ten or fifteen houses in a particular village, the life of these Aromanians was no different than the life of their Macedonian neighbors. They attended the same schools, went to the same churches and suffered the same torments. The coexistence and sharing of mutual problems produced a trust between the two cultures, to the point where the IMRO makes no distinction between the Macedonians and the Aromanians in the Kastoria region, the latter being included in IMRO's lines since its early beginnings in this area.²⁴

²³ Chekalarov mentions by name most of the Aromanian *voivods*, band members, cronies of the bands and arms traffickers from Smrdesh, V'mbel, D'mbeni, Konomladi, Gabresh, Zhelin, Galishta etc (ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: passim).

²⁴ Mitre Pangiaru, better known as Mitre the Vlach, was a member of the first revolutionary band in the Kastoria region, formed by Pavel Hristov in May 1900. "The fearless band leader Mitre the Vlach", former illiterate shepherd, got his education in the bands and he always carried revolutionary literature in his bag. His courage earned him legendary status in the Kastoria area. In 1901, together with his brothers Atanas and Nume, Mitre is a member of Chakalarov's band. In January 1902, during Goce Delchev's mission in Kastoria region, he was appointed military head of one of the two regional bands, acting mostly in Koreshtata. Shortly before the Ilinden Uprising Mitre was appointed as band leader in the same area, leading a band of 150 fighters. (МАРТИНОВА-БУЦКОВА, 1994: 33; *Спомени*, 1997: 168, 236; *Македонија*, 1978: 504; ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: 45; ДИМЕСКИ, 1982: 405; СИЛЯНОВ, 1983: 302; *АО ИИИИ*, КОНОМЛАТИ: 16). Other Aromanian *voivods* from the Kastoria region worth mentioning are the Kastoria regional *voivod* Shterio Shteriovski from Smrdesh (ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: 182; НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 182; МАРТИНОВА-БУЦКОВА, 1994: 102), the Prespa regional *voivod* Vanghel Budina from Gabresh (НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 182), Shterio Tashkov from Zhelin, who led the regional band in the Kostenaria area (Ibidem: 165; ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: 210), the local *voivod* in Galishta Steriu Lacu-Lakov (НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 92) etc. The villages Smrdesh, Gabresh, D'mbeni, Breznitsa, Zhupanishta, Drenoviani and Zhelin, as well as the towns Vlaho-Clisura, Kastoria and Hrupishta gave many chetniks (band members). Mentioning all of them will require lots of space. For more information see: СИМОВСКИ, 1953:

If the researcher carefully follows the memoirs of the IMRO leaders and the historical documentation of the time, they will notice that apart from the Megleno-Vlach and Aromanian villages in Gevgeli, Yannitsa and Kastoria, the Aromanians who were most open to IMRO were those living in the Krushevo and Bitola regions. What pushed these Aromanians from western Macedonia towards the Organization partially differentiates from the events which forced the villagers from Vlacho-Meglen, Koreshtata and Nestram to join the revolutionary battle. Granted, the living conditions in Krushevo and Aromanian villages near Bitola were far from ideal. These Aromanians were feeling the Ottoman pressure as well. However, issues of a different nature strongly contributed to speeding up their access to IMRO. Divided into pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians, the Aromanians from the Krushevo and Bitola regions started a period of hostility long before IMRO's appearance. Organically weaker, without its own religious hierarchy, far from the state - protector and with no greater illusions to being liberated by a force outside the Ottoman Empire, the pro-Romanian group was forced to seek an ally for their educational-religious battles. The only natural partner for these Aromanians were the Macedonians and the Exarchate. The same religious allegiance of the Macedonian exarchists and the Aromanians who accepted the religious jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarch, as well as the mutual enemy – Greek propaganda – increased the mutual trust of these two elements and facilitated the approach of the so called “*romanized Aromanians*” in IMRO. It was not a mere coincidence that most of the Aromanians in IMRO were former students of the Romanian educational institutions of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵

passim; ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: passim; *АО IIIII*, НЕСТРАМ-КОСТУРСКО, 16-17; *АО IIIII*, Д'МБЕНИ-КОСТУРСКО, 18-26; *АО IIIII*, ЖЕЛИН-КОСТУРСКО, 3-4. It can be noticed that most of these names are given in their Slavic form, due to the provenance of the authors who wrote about them.

²⁵ The most prominent Aromanian *voivods* in the Krushevo-Bitola region were educated in Romanian schools: Ioryi Mucitano graduated from the Romanian school in Sofia, Alexandar Coshca graduated from the Romanian Lyceum in Bitola and continued his education in Bucharest, while the family of the famous *voivod* from the Ilinden Uprising, Pitu Guli, belonged to the Romanian commune in Krushevo (НИКОЛОВ, 2001: 111; ТОПУЗОВСКИ, 2003: 20). Todor Boriar, who took part in the Ilinden Uprising, makes a clear distinction between the Greek and the Romanian supporters in Krushevo. No mat-

Unlike their compatriots from Krushevo, Bitola, Kastoria and Meglen, the Aromanians from other parts of Macedonia rarely approached the Organization. Although the Aromanian population from Ohrid, Struga, Lerin, Resen and Kajlari was oppressed in the same manner as their fellow countrymen from the above mentioned areas, IMRO did not manage to attract the same great number of these Aromanians. The probable explanation for this lack of success should be sought in the weaker organizational qualities of IMRO's activists who were operating in these zones. As in the case of the Aromanians from other regions in Macedonia, the majority of the Aromanians in IMRO from Ohrid, Blatsa, Pisoderi, Neveska, Resen etc were exarchists or "romani ζ ed".²⁶

A different and more specific category of Aromanian collaborators with IMRO were the Aromanian nomads. These endogamous communities, organized in a kinship-based shepherd community (*taifa*) and headed by the wealthiest and most authoritative member (*chelnik*), lived on the mountains, together with their large flocks of sheep. Those same mountains were regularly visited by outlaws, for which the Aromanian huts were the most natural shelter from the authorities and the inclement weather. Refusing to grant hospitality was not an option: the shepherds could have been killed, while the flocks, their only property, could be destroyed. Welcoming the IMRO bands was one of the most delicate problems. To be on good terms both with the revolutionaries and the authorities seemed highly improbable; this is why we will accept with reserve Georgi Bazhdarov's and Jane Sandanski's statements that the Aromanians from Pirin supported IMRO.²⁷ Cooperation certainly existed, but it would be incorrect to talk about certain deep beliefs among the transhumance Aromanians in IMRO's ideas, nor about the strong wish to be liberated from Ottoman rule. The contact these Aromanian nomads had with the authorities was minimal, and to them it did not matter

ter if the Greek supporters were Aromanians or Macedonian Patriarchists, he calls all of them Greeks, while the Romanian supporters are called Vlachs. When he talks about the Aromanian revolutionaries in Krushevo, Boriar always uses the terms "Vlachs" and "Vlach groups", clearly highlighting their allegiance to the Romanian party (*AO IIIII, TOAOP BOPJAP*: passim).

²⁶ Such is the case of Tashco Arsov from Ohrid, *voivod* in the Krushevo region, who attended the Romanian elementary school for boys in Ohrid (APCOB, 1983: 13-14).

²⁷ www.kroraina.com/knigi/gb/gb_1_5.html; *Движението*, 1927: 30

who would rule the country, as long as they would be able to preserve their traditional way of life. The cooperation between the Aromanian nomads and IMRO can only be explained by a mutual need to help each other. The bands needed food and shelter, while the Aromanian nomads needed IMRO's protection from those who might steal from them.

Another form of cooperation between IMRO and the Aromanians was the supply of weapons to bands in west Macedonia, regularly conducted by Aromanians. Experienced merchants and muleteers, harmless nomads and fluent Greek speakers, the Aromanians were the most natural choice to supply the western Macedonian regions with weapons from Greece. In *kaşa* Kastoria the arms trafficking was conducted by the Aromanians Hristo Gyamov, Nako Doykov, brothers Todor and Kicio Levenda from Kastoria, brothers Ioryi and Mitre Bijov from Hrupishta, Vasil Mitrov and Ioryi Vasilev from Smrdesh and Naum Pangiaru from Konomladi.²⁸ The guns in Krushevo were transported from Greece by the local Aromanians: Cola Boiagi, Tega Hertu, Petre Pare, Vanghiu Beluvce, Vanghiu Makshut, Tachi Liapu and Tachi Ashlak, as well as Zisi Mihali, Steriu Tanas, Steriu Taho and Andrea Kendro from Trnovo (near Bitola).²⁹ In some cases these gun smugglers were devoted workers of the Organization. Some of them, though, worked strictly for profit. However, we will emphasize what the Lerin regional *voivod* Mihail Chekov said about the Aromanian "smugglers". After the disastrous ending of the Ilinden Uprising, Chekov paid two Turkish *lira* to three Aromanian nomads from Blatsa to take him over the Greco-Turkish border. After numerous vicissitudes, when the *voivod* had been at times dressed in female clothes, hidden among the horses and presented as their shepherd, the three Aromanians successfully transported Chekov to Greece. Impressed by the risk taken by his saviors, the *voivod* said: "On the road I understood that the *Vlachs* weren't helping me for the two *lira*. They helped me because they sympathized with us".³⁰

²⁸ *Спомени*, 1997: 205-206; СИМОВСКИ, 1953: 193-194; ЧЕКАЛАРОВ, 2001: 18, 27, 38, 46. Sometimes the attempts to smuggle the weapons had a tragic ending. Naum Pangiaru, Vasil Mitrov and Ioryi Vasilev were discovered by the authorities and killed near Grevena.

²⁹ СТОИЧОВСКИ, 1970: 213-215; ГЕОРГИЕВ и ТРИФОНОВ, 1995: 87, 90, 126; АО IIIII, ТОДОР БОРЈАР: 8.

³⁰ *Спомени*, 1968: 264-265.

IMRO could not penetrate into some Aromanian settlements until 1906. These were primarily Aromanian villages in Veria and Grevena, on the Vermio and Pindus mountains. Despite the fact that a large number of these Aromanians were supporters of the Romanian party which, as discussed, was not an impediment to Aromanians wishing to join IMRO, these people lived far from the territory where the Organization operated and they did not have an opportunity to establish closer relations with IMRO's leaders. Therefore, with some small exceptions, there is no data about the level of participation of Aromanians from Veria and Grevena in the Macedonian national-liberation movement in its earlier stages. Turkish sources report of a battle that took place on June 14th 1903 between the Ottoman army and a "*Bulgarian band led by Oani Papa Arghir from Veria*", in which the only casualty was "*Nikola, Vlach from Selia*",³¹ but this short note remains the only source of information about the Aromanian involvement in IMRO's pre-Ilinden actions in south-west Macedonia. A similar situation is recorded in Macedonia's south-eastern territories. According to Hristo Kuslev the entire Aromanian village Ramna (Demirhisar *kaşa*) joined IMRO,³² but unfortunately he does not mention any names or give additional data.

The Ilinden Uprising and the information taken from the battlefields as to the massive Aromanian involvement in the insurrection (confirmed by the insurgents, the foreign diplomatic representatives and the Ottoman military authorities) undermined every attempt of Romanian and Greek politicians to prove that the Aromanian presence in the revolutionary movement was insignificant, it was on an individual basis and as a result of the pressure put on them by the "*Bulgarian bandits*". However, news arriving from Macedonia gave a completely different picture, in which Aromanians took part in attacking and capturing towns and villages, in the set up of the local administration in the newly captured territories, as well as in defending their conquered land. In Krushevo, Kastoria and Bitola, as well as the regions that did not massively rise and continued the guerilla warfare, "*the Vlachs did not only show compassion with the revolutionary struggle, but they actively took part in it ; they accepted all the difficulties and risks for achieving the common goal*".³³

³¹ Турски, 2007: 50.

³² Движението, 1927: 110.

³³ СИЛЯНОВ, 1983: 67-68.

The new post-uprising reality created excellent conditions to further develop the collaboration between the Aromanians and IMRO. The Ilinden Uprising and the Mürzsteg reforms gave credence to the Macedonian question internationally. For the neighboring Balkan states it was a clear signal that in more favorable international circumstances the Macedonian question could have been solved against their will and against their interests, hence the change in their propagandistic policies. The educational and religious propaganda became militaristic. Bands from Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria were sent to Macedonia, with the clear task to defend the obtained positions and later, if possible, to attempt and further expand them. It was at this point that an unofficial civil war started in Macedonia.³⁴ In it, the contingent of the Aromanian population which stubbornly refused “to be Greek”, found itself under strong fire from the Greek guerilla groups. What started with threats and orders to close the Romanian schools and return to the “Greek flock”, ended with a horrific terror, killings on the roads, as well as the attacking of farms and burning of Aromanian villages after the Sultan recognized the Aromanians as separate nation, *Ulah Milet*, with the *Irade* from May 1905.³⁵

Faced with extermination, the pro - Romanian faction began to arm itself. The first bands worked independently. Later, the Aromanian bands worked under IMRO’s flag. The early local Aromanian bands were formed spontaneously, as a direct consequence of the terror committed by the Greek bands. These groups suffered from a lack of coordination, and were hindered greatly by the fact that their radius of movement was far too limited, and thus most of them could not fulfill the task for which they were formed. The first acting bands were those of Mihail Handuri from Livadi and Hali Joga from Gramatikovo.³⁶ Certain Nesho from Livadi, supported by the nobility in the Vlacho-Meglen villages, formed a band independent from

³⁴ ГОРГИЕВ, 2010: 363-365.

³⁵ More about the atrocities committed by the Greek bands over the so called romanized Aromanians see in: *Documente*, 1905: passim; NISTOR, 2009: 167-217; БИТОВСКИ, 2001: 170, 176, 225; ДАКИН, 1993: 188, 218, 253, 257, 312; ЛИТОКСОВ, 2004: 89 and especially ПАПАНACHE, 2011: 55-79, as well as the contemporary newspapers published in Bucharest i.e the newspapers *Românul de la Pind*, *Vîpera*, *Adevêrul* etc.

³⁶ *Дневникот*, 2002: 7; In his memoirs Costu Dabija refers to Handuri as Handuli (See: АО ІІІІІ, КОСТУ ДАБИЖА: passim).

IMRO, but after a short illegal life he turned himself in to the Ottoman authorities.³⁷ In 1906 Apostol Petkov sent his corporal Shteriu Canacheu – Yunana with ten Aromanian fighters to cruise the Megleno-Vlach villages and protect them but, influenced by the “*Aromanian agitators*” and the Romanian propagandists, Yunana soon became a separatist.³⁸ The *voivod* from Livadi did not act independently for too long, soon returning to IMRO, and in 1907 he was appointed regional band leader in the Kriva Palanka area, leading a band of 13 fighters.³⁹ The pro-Romanian group in Krushevo tried to separate from IMRO as well, and to form an independent band led by Vanciu Gione, but were not even allowed to start the

Preparations since their plan would have further decomposed the front against the various foreign propaganda in Macedonia.⁴⁰

A much more effective organization of Aromanian bands can be noticed after the Aromanian committees in Bucharest (led by Alexandar Coshca and Steriu Milior) and Sofia (led by Ioryi Mucitano)⁴¹ got in touch with IMRO’s leaders who were stationed in the Bulgarian capital. Organized by Gjorce Petrov and led by Ioryi Mucitano, the first Aromanian band in IMRO arrived on Macedonian soil on August 29th, 1906, coming from Sofia via the post in Kyustendil, with logistic help from IMRO’s local committees.⁴² In cooperation with the other IMRO bands, Mucitano’s band, later

³⁷ ШАЛДЕВЪ, 1930: 5.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ *Chemume*, 2003: 99.

⁴⁰ This is what Nikola Kirov-Maiski says about this event: “*The Vlachs formed a committee without consulting us and they managed to find money from Romania to form an independent band. They planned to appoint Vanciu Gione as a leader of this band. The members of the committee Vanghiu Petrescu and Nicolachi Baliiu asked for my permission, promising that (Vanciu Ghione’s band) will fight against the Serbs and the Greeks out of Krushevo, while a band based in Krushevo, led by Vanghiu Petrasbinciu will fight (against the same enemies) inside the town. In the name of the Organization I told them that the Vlach element is plotting against IMRO with this action. (I told them that) IMRO protected them all this time and if they do not disband their organization right away, they are throwing us the glove and they are opening a front against us... My threat scared the Vlachs and they disbanded their organization*” (КИРОВЪ-МАЙСКИ: 50-51).

⁴¹ BUJDOVEANU, 1997: 139.

⁴² This band was consisted of: Ioryi Mucitano, Costu Dabija, Tachi Dincea and Namum Petrushevski, all four from Krushevo, Unciu Damash and Ioryi Gachi

led by Mihail Handuri, acted for almost two years in the Vodena, Yannitsa and Veria regions.⁴³ According to one of the band members, Costu Dabija, the band carried a seal with the words “*Vlach Veria – Vodena band of IMRO – Centralists*”.⁴⁴



Mihail Handuri's band. Standing from left to right: Mihail Handuri, Ioryi Gachi Dodu, Costu Dabija, Nachi Cuzman, Hrista Presh, Tachi Dincea, Unciu Damash and Nicola Macri.

Dodu from Gopesh and Nachi Cuzman from Malovishta (AO IIIII, КОСТУ ДАБИЖА: 7-11). In *Чемуме*, 2003: 75, the names of the band members are given in Slavic form.

⁴³ Detailed description of the band's movements and actions can be found in: AO IIIII, КОСТУ ДАБИЖА: 8-46; In 1907 eight new members joined the band: Mihail Handuri from Livadi, Hrista Presh from Negovan, Nicola Macri and Musha Darlaiani from Doliani, Cola Nicea and Iancu Pendifunda from Veria, Hristo Chicea Rosho from Paticina and Mita Zdru from Candrova. Instead of one big band, two smaller bands were created, one of them acting in the Vodena region while the other in Veria and its surroundings.

⁴⁴ Ibidem: 33.

On April 27th 1907 two more Aromanian bands entered Macedonia via the Kyustendil post. The first one, led by “*the chief leader of the Macedo-Romanian bands*”, Alexandar Coshca, was sent to act near Bitola, but after a month it was destroyed by army forces. Four of the Aromanian fighters, including Alexandar Coshca, were killed in action.⁴⁵



Ioryi Mucitanu and Alexandar Coshca's band

The second band, led by Steriu Milior Apostolina, was IMRO's most advanced; posted in the south it acted in Kastoria, Grevena and Pin-

⁴⁵ The members of this band were: Alexandar Coshca and Mita Gega from Gopesh, Steriu Domenicu, Tashcu Sharcu, Alexo Nane and Nastu Stoianov from Crushevo, Tashcu H. Goli from Malovishta and Nicola Mona from Vlaho-Clisura (*Чемуме*, 2003: 83). After they destroyed the band, the Turkish soldiers searched Coshca's body and they found lists with names of local inhabitants who were assigned to give logistic help to Coshca and his fighters, as well as a seal with the words “*Chief leader of the Macedo-Romanian bands*” (*Македонија*, 2006: 159). Ottoman sources claim that the band was consisted of 12 members. Four of the band members, including Coshca, and one Ottoman soldier were killed in the battle that took place on June 5th 1907 near the villages Kurbinovo and Slivnitsa (*Турски*, 2007: 314-315).

dus.⁴⁶ According to the Ottoman authorities, in 1907 there were four Aromanian bands in Macedonia fighting against the Greek bands.⁴⁷

All the above mentioned reasons which attracted the Aromanians to IMRO were of practical and unromantic nature. The Aromanians needed an ally and a protector, while IMRO had no objections to seeing the army of Greek supporters losing a very important tactical piece. After all, for both the Aromanians and IMRO a friendship was much more profitable than vengeance. Still, there is one other reason which has much more of an ideological as opposed to a practical usage. Unlike the various propagandists in Macedonia attempting to create “*pure Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians or Romanians*”, IMRO always had Macedonia’s autonomy and freedom as its goal and never divided the people in Macedonia, widely opening its doors for all the unsatisfied elements in the country.⁴⁸ At the beginning, large sections of the Aromanian people, especially those educated in Greek schools where they learned to hate the “*inferior Slav*”, could not see IMRO’s indigenoussness and feared the Bulgarian influence in the Organization. However, IMRO’s actions, the protection it offered, its ideas for freedom and autonomy, as well as the clearly underlined support given by IMRO’s leaders to the Aromanians to be allowed self-determination, had a magnetic effect on the Aromanian youth.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ This band included Steriu Milior Apostolina, his son Nachi Apostolina, Mica Fusca and Steriu Nibi, all four from Perivoli. The fifth member was Simo Craja from Samarina (*Чемуме*, 2003: 83). According to Vasile Diamandi-Aminceanul, the band included more fighters from the Pindus area, among which Captain Mihali Teguiani, Leon Constantinescu, Nuli Shamanicu, Gheorghe Shamanicu and Apostolache, all from Perivoli, Nicu Balamoti from Biasa and the Farsherot Aromanians: Cota, Gheorghe Butashi, Vasile Butashi, Zicu Tsatsa, Gheorghe Tsatsa, Scuprei and others (DIAMANDI-AMINCEANUL, 1938: 190).

⁴⁷ *Македонија*, 2006: 159-160; Costu Dabija claims that the Aromanian bands were financed by the committees in Bucharest and the money were received via the local IMRO committees (*АО IIIII, КОСТУ ДАБИЖА*: 22).

⁴⁸ See: ЃОРЃИЕВ, 2005: 257-264.

⁴⁹ When he worked in Bitola, Dame Gruev was regularly convincing the Aromanian Patriarchists to become fighters for free Macedonia. When asked by some Aromanian if it is required to subscribe in IMRO as a Bulgarian, Gruev’s answer was clear: “*We are not interested what you are. All we want is to work and libe-*



Steriu Milior Apostolina and Alexandar Cosbca's bands

We believe that the above lines clearly show how all the accusations as to the Aromanians being forced to join IMRO were tendentious and nothing more than a failed attempt to discredit IMRO's indigenusness and its final goal, contrary to the expansionistic politics of the Balkan states. And while the knowledge that many Aromanians voluntarily joined the Organization can be confirmed in various sources, like the memoirs of IMRO members and in several contemporary diplomatic exchanges, the fact that lots of Aromanians became regional or local leaders of IMRO, something which surely would not have happened had they been forced to join the movement, is something that has been frequently overlooked. In actuality, those who were loudest in their accusations at the time about "*forced Aromanian involvement in the Bulgarian committees*", unofficially admitted that the truth is different from what they have been saying in public. In a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, sent on April 30th 1904, Ioanniki-os, the Metropolitan of Meglen, confirms the firm bond that exists between

rate Macedonia. When Macedonia is liberated, you can divide yourself however you want" (Cf. ПАНДЕВСКИ, 1987: 180).

“*The Vlach propagandists*” and “*the robber Committee (IMRO, N.M)*”.⁵⁰ On July 26th 1903 the Romanian consul in Bitola, Alexandru Padeanu, informed his superiors that the Aromanians from Jankovec, Resen, Gopesh, Magarevo, Trnovo and Krushevo were sick of the terror from the Turkish *bashi-bazouks*, and that they had armed themselves and voluntarily joined the “*Bulgarian bandits*”.⁵¹ During the Ilinden Uprising, the Greek consul in Bitola, Kypreos, reported that “*the Vlachophones*” took part in the uprising because they wanted to live in freedom, not because the uprising is Bulgarian.⁵² It is with these words from the Greek consul that we can see the principle idea that attracted so many Aromanians to IMRO, and we can see the clearest proof that the Aromanians did voluntarily join the Organization.

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⁵⁰ *Ecumenical*, 1906: 42.

⁵¹ *Македо-Романско*, 2002: 159.

⁵² ЈОВАНОВСКИ, 2006: 11.

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