

The Vlah Minority in Macedonia:
Language, Identity, Dialectology, and Standardization*
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As a transnational, non-state-forming minority in Southeastern Europe, the Vlachs represent a unique intersection of discursive issues, e.g. autochthony, history, or numbers as sources of legitimacy, on the one hand, and language, religion, lineage, location, or occupation as sources of identity on the other.¹ In discussing the Vlachs, discourses of language endangerment and linguistic human rights intersect with theories of language contact and language shift as well as with questions of politicization, ethnicization, and globalization. Of the Balkan nation-state-forming ethnolinguistic identities, the Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Macedonian and Turkish all have, or have had, significant roles to play, but comparisons with non-state-forming identities, especially Romani, are also relevant. Thus, for example, strictly linguistic problems of Aromanian dialectology are reminiscent of those encountered in the classification of Romani dialects: Transhumance and nomadism combined with a number of forced migrations have had, apparently, a similarly complicating effect. Questions of language planning and standardization also have a role in the deployment of dialectology and identity. In this paper, I wish to engage both social scientific and linguistic perspectives on Vlach language and identity in Macedonia by examining transnational issues, issues specific to the Republic of Macedonia, and language planning phenomena manifested at both the global and the local levels.

I shall begin with a definition of ethnonymic terminology. Although the use of the term Vlah in the Balkans entered via a Gothic (and therefore Germanic) intermediary, etymologically it comes from a Celtic tribal name (Skok 1973:606-609; pace Dahmen 1982 cited in Schwandner-Sievers 1999:3 and Winnifrith 1987:1). It is recorded by Caesar as Volcae, by Strabo and Ptolemy as Ouólkai, and it was in the transfer to Gothic (as *walhs) via Latin that the ethnonym took on the meaning ‘foreigner’ or ‘those folks over there’ or ‘Romance speaker’ (and, later, also ‘transhumant shepherd’ and other meanings). The use of Vlah as a derogatory word for Serb among Croatians as well as the association of the ethnonym with Italians in Poland (Włochy ‘Italy’) and French-speakers in Switzerland (Welsch) is part of this same phenomenon of this Celtic tribal name leaving its traces through later sociolinguistic processes, long after the original referents had disappeared.² In Greece, the use of Vlahos to mean ‘shepherd’ is a transference of the ethnonym based on a profession or lifestyle commonly associated with an ethnic group. In Albanian, the opposite occurs, and çoban ‘shepherd’ comes to mean ‘Vlah’.

There is considerable confusion on the territory of former Yugoslavia with regard to the reference of the ethnonym Vlah, resulting from the use of the term to refer to both people from Wallachia (i.e. Romania south of the Carpathians) -- and, by extension, Romania as a whole --

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¹A distinct but related set of intersections is represented by the Romani populations of Eastern Europe. See especially Gheorghe et al. (2001).

²This general phenomenon is well attested, e.g. the fate of Bulgar, a Turkic ethnonym that now refers to a Slavic-speaking group.

and to Romance-speakers south of the Balkan range.³ In this paper, the term *Vlah* will be strictly limited to the Romance-speakers whose homes for centuries have been the territory that is today southern Albania, northern Greece, the Republic of Macedonia, and southwestern Bulgaria.⁴ In this sense, the term covers a population speaking two languages: Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian. In former Yugoslavia, the term *Vlah* was also used to refer to Daco-Romanian speakers in eastern Serbia around Negotin and the Timok valley. In this latter sense, it was an ethnographic term referring to a group that differed from Daco-Romanians (i.e. the Romanians of Romania proper and those identifying themselves with that nationality) not in language but in a specific set of historical circumstances that led to their settling in eastern Serbia during the Ottoman period. Former Yugoslav census figures classified these Daco-Romanian Vlachs together with the Vlachs of Macedonia, and so one must examine figures at the republic level for an accurate picture.⁵

The position of the Megleno-Romanians is itself a peculiar one and worthy of note. While Aromanians themselves use the ethnonym *Armîn* (or a related dialect form, e.g. *Râmân*, all etymologically from *Romanus* ‘Roman’ and historically involving loss of the short, unstressed /o/ and an elimination of the resulting /rm/ as an initial cluster), Megleno-Romanians designate themselves with the Macedonian form *Vla* (pl. *Vlaš*) in their own language. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Megleno-Romanian was spoken in about a dozen villages in what was the Ottoman kaza of Gevgelija, nahiye of Karadžova, on territory that was divided between Greece and Serbia [eventually the Republic of Macedonia] in 1913 (Kănčov 1900:151-153, Weigand 1892:xxvi-xxviii, Capidan 1943:16-17, Wilde 1983:5-16, Atanasov 1990:1-14; one village in the region, *Livădzi*, was Aromanian-speaking, its inhabitants having arrived in the eighteenth century [Pușcariu 1976:224]). The largest Megleno-Romanian village, Nonte or Nantă was Muslim and ended up in Greece. With the exception of a single family that converted to Christianity, of whom only a single member was still alive in 1984 (Atanasov 1984:479), the entire village was sent to Turkey during the exchange of populations in the 1920’s. Known there as *Karadžovalides*, they appear to have been assimilated (but cf. Andrews and Benninghaus 1989:103). Although mentioned by Pușcariu (1976:224) as the only Vlachs to accept Islam, Cvijič’s map (1917) shows another group in western Macedonia just north of the Greek-speaking Muslim *Vallahades* along the river *Bistritsa*.⁶ These populations

³For discussion of other alonymic forms such as *Kutsovlah*, *Karavlah*, *Morlak*, *Beli Vlasi*, *Cincari*, etc., see Poghiric (1989:9-11). We can observe here that the use of adjectives meaning ‘black’ (*kara*, *mavro-*) and white (*beli*) denote ‘north’ and ‘south’ [of the Danube], cf. the use of terms meaning ‘black sea’ and ‘white sea’ in Turkish and other languages to refer to the Euxine and Aegean, respectively (Poghiric 1989:11).

⁴Historically, Vlachs have lived on the plains of *Myzeqe*, greater Epirus (i.e. both *Çamëri* and *Iperos*), Thessaly, and geographic Macedonia, although some small groups may still be living in the *Rhodopes*. There is also a significant Vlach population in Romania (*Dobrudja*, especially *Constanța* and *Tulcea*), but these are colonies that emigrated from the southern Balkans after World War One. *Saramandu* (1971:1353) estimates the Romanian Vlach population at 30,000, but elsewhere (1984:423) he gives the figure 80,000-100,000 of which approximately 50,000 are in *Dobrudja*. I am not including here the *Istro-Romanians*, who constitute a separate case both historically and linguistically, and are considered to have branched off from Daco-Romanian (Todoran 1977:106-107).

⁵Thus, for example, *Saramandu*’s (1984:423) figure of 30,000-50,000 for former Yugoslavia is probably based on country-level figures. Moreover, after the end of World War Two, some Megleno-Romanians were among the colonists resettled from Macedonia to *Pančevo*, *Jabloko* and other villages in *Vojvodina*, so that a more complete picture would have to examine the figures at the level of municipality (*opština* ‘commune’). These details, however, need not concern us here.

⁶The sources on the *Vallahades* are summarized by de Jong (1992), who rejects any one explanation of their origins and suggests that a combination of factors contributed, including, quite possibly, a Vlach

were also sent to Turkey after World War One. There were also Aromanian-speaking Muslims in the village of Dolna Belica (Bela di Ghios, Beala de Jos), which is now entirely Albanian-speaking. It is thus the case that those Vlachs who converted to Islam have ended up with Turkish or Albanian identity, the former in keeping with the old millet system, the latter following a more modern millet-like tendency by which -- in the Republic of Macedonia and elsewhere in former Yugoslavia -- there is a tendency to identify Albanian with Islam.⁷

Linguistically, Megleno-Romanian is heavily Slavicized (e.g. it has borrowed the prefixal system of Slavic *aktionsart*), showing evidence of long and intense contact with Macedonian (cf. also the use of a Slavic ethnonym as a self-appellation, as well as remarks by Weigand [1892:26-28] on the process of linguistic Slavicization in Barovitsa). This is in contrast to Aromanian, which, in its various dialects, shows significant influence from contact with Greek and Albanian as well as Macedonian. The chief linguistic question raised by Megleno-Romanian, however, is whether it represents the language of a population that became linguistically separated from Daco-Romanian at the same time as Aromanian or at a later date. Although Atanasov (1999) argues that Megleno-Romanian represents a later break-off from Daco-Romanian that arrived via the Morava and Vardar valleys rather than via the Rhodopes (this latter route was posited by Capidan 1943:16-17), his chief arguments rest on shared archaisms (e.g., a preserved infinitive) rather than shared innovations, and such shared innovations as are cited could represent later parallel developments.⁸ In general, shared innovations link Megleno-Romanian to Aromanian, e.g. the change of velars to dentals before front vowels (Todoran 1977:102-109, cf. also Note 8), although the separation probably occurred at an early date. For our purposes, as is the case in their own self-identification (Atanasov 1990:1-2), Megleno-Romanians will not be distinguished from Aromanians, although their language must be considered as taxonomically separate.⁹ This discussion brings us to the question Vlach origins in general.

The origin of the Vlachs is likewise an issue that is implicated in various claims to legitimacy and entitlement, despite the fact that the concrete historical facts are not determinable with certainty given our present state of knowledge, and they may never be determined unless new sources come to light. Although the questions themselves are, strictly speaking, only of historical interest, the potential answers are deployed politically as well, and we shall review them with this context in mind.¹⁰ At issue are two questions: 1) Did Eastern

element. Andrews and Beninghaus (1989:103), who are not cited by de Jong, indicate that these Muslims have retained their Greek language in Turkey.

⁷See Friedman (1999, Forthcoming) for more details on the issue of language shift influenced by religion in Macedonia.

⁸An example is the change of /d/ plus front vowel to a voiced dental affricate in Aromanian and a voiced dental fricative in Megleno- and Daco-Romanian. Examples such as Daco-Romanian *ziuă*, Megleno-Romanian *zuwă*, Aromanian *dzuwă* -- all ultimately from Latin *dies* 'day' -- illustrate the possibility of a parallel development of /dz/ > /z/ in Megleno- and Daco-Romanian and a shared innovation of /i/ > /u/ before /w/ in Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian. Moreover, /dz/ > /z/ occurs in the Gopeš-Molovište dialect of Aromanian in southwestern Macedonia, where it is clearly an independent development (Wace and Thompson 1913:251).

⁹The situation is reminiscent of the relationship of Mingrelian to Georgian. The Mingrelians speak a distinct Kartvelian language and belong to the Georgian Church (as opposed to the relatively closely related Laz, who are Muslim and now live in Turkey). Although Mingrelian is linguistically separate from Georgian, it is not a language of literacy, and Mingrelians consider themselves to be part of the Georgian ethnos or nation.

¹⁰Fine (1987:12-13) demonstrates that from the point of view of the medieval historian, it is difficult to determine exactly what is meant by the term *Vlach* when it begins to appear in existing sources, and the current debate is more a projection of twentieth-century concepts of nation and ethnicity back to the eleventh. He writes (Fine 1987:13): "There is no evidence of any 'national' conflict or rivalry between

Balkan Romance form north or south of the Danube (or both),¹¹ and 2) What is the origin of Romance spoken south of the Jireček line?¹² At issue in the first question is the competition of the modern Romanian and Hungarian nation-states over claims to Transylvania, while the second refers to Vlah claims to autochthony as a legitimizer for modern-day rights. Owing to the absence of textual sources from the Early Middle Ages, it is unclear whether modern Daco-Romanian descends directly from the language of Roman colonists and Romanized Dacians from the relatively brief Roman occupation of Dacia (107-271 CE), as the name Daco-Romanian implies, or whether Romance speakers evacuated Dacia entirely with retreating Roman armies and settled south of the Danube, only to cross back into the territory after the arrival of the Magyars at the end of the tenth century. In the former scenario, Romance speakers would have survived centuries of wars and migrations across ancient Dacia by retreating into the mountains and would have been present in Transylvania when the Magyars invaded. Although more than a thousand years have passed since these events took place, the differing scenarios are still deployed by nationalists advancing conflicting territorial and other claims (cf. DuNay 1977:1-32, Verdery 1983:181-269).

Neither scenario, however, addresses the origin of Vlah, which is spoken almost entirely south of the Jireček line. This latter issue is not quite as problematic as it might first appear, however, since it is entirely reasonable to argue that Roman roads south of the Jireček line were lined with Roman guard posts thus providing a source of spoken Latin in a region where Greek was still the language of inscriptions. It is worth emphasizing, too, that the language of inscriptions need not necessarily correspond to the vernacular actually in use. According to this argument, the Vlachs are descendants of Romans and Romanized indigenous peoples in the south Balkans who, with the arrival of the Slavs, retreated to the mountains and became pastoralists (or, in the case of Romanized earlier inhabitants, may have already been pastoralists). One version of this theory sees the Vlachs as Romance-speaking descendants of whatever peoples were attested on the given territory in classical times. In Albania, the special connection between Albanian and Romanian (the existence of small number of basic words that appear to come from a common Indo-European but pre-Greco-Roman source, see also Hamp 1982) is deployed by Vlachs in Albania to argue that they, too, are descendants of Illyrians (Schwandner-Sievers 1999:10).¹³ In Macedonia, this same discourse of autochthony

these two people [Slavs and Vlachs] at this time. Thus the modern academic controversy, being over an issue of little relevance to the Middle Ages, is probably best dropped.”

¹¹Eastern Balkan Romance (the ancestor of Daco-, Istro-, Megleno-Romanian and Aromanian) is distinguished from Western Balkan Romance (the ancestor of the now extinct Dalmatian) by a number of features, of which the most often cited is the treatment of clusters of the type velar+dental, where velar > labial in Eastern Balkan Romance but not in Western (both developments are reflected in Albanian borrowings, e.g. *luctus* ‘war’ > *luftë* but *directus* ‘straight’ > *drejtë*; cf. Scărlătoiu 1979:27).

¹²The Jireček line, named for the historian C. Jireček, is a boundary that begins on the Adriatic at Lesh and runs south of Shkodër in Albania then north to Prizren, then south of Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia, south of Niš and Bela Palanka and north of Pirot in Serbia, then north of Sofia, and across the Danubian plain in Bulgaria to the Black Sea. Based on the evidence of inscriptions, it represents the boundary between Latin and Greek as the dominant language of literacy in the Balkans, although Latin inscriptions occur as far south as a line beginning at Vlorë and running through Ohrid, south of Skopje to Sofia and along the Balkan Mountains to Varna (Rosetti 1964:35-36 and Maps II, III). The zone defined by the difference is generally taken to have been the principle area of bilingualism.

¹³The theory that the Vlachs and Romanians on the one hand and the Albanians on the other represent linguistically related populations one of whom became completely Romanized while the other barely escaped Romanization has significant historical linguistic support (Hamp 1982). What does not have adequate support, owing to the paucity of reliable data, is the notion that the ancestral language of Albanian was Illyrian. Aside from the arguments that support the possibility of a Thracian ancestry (cf., e.g., Fine 1984 10-11), the data we have for Illyrian are utterly meager and speculative: We have only

has occasionally surfaced in claims that the Vlachs are descendants of Romanized Ancient Macedonians (cf. Risteski 1996, Dimčev 1996). In all of these cases, claims to legitimacy and/or sovereignty are being advanced on the basis of reconstructing a situation prior to the Slavic invasions of the Balkan peninsula, which we do know occurred during the Early Middle Ages. What we do not know was the ethnolinguistic make-up of the region between the fall of the Roman Empire and the establishment of various Slavic political units.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the combination of linguistic and historical reconstruction that postulates an East Balkan Romance unity both north and south of the Danube that was broken up sometime between the Slavic invasion and the first textual references to Vlachs in Byzantine sources (eleventh century) seems reasonable.

The separation of Vlach from Daco-Romanian raises the old language versus dialect debate.¹⁵ Among Romanian linguists, there is a disagreement between those who recognize Aromanian as a separate Balkan Romance language and those who consider it a dialect of Romanian despite the many differences and the fact that the two have been separated for about a thousand years. See Ivănescu (1980:30-46) for a summary of the debate, cf. also Savić (1987), Bacou (1989), Peyfuss (1994), Jašar-Nasteva (1997). This debate and the passions it arouses can be compared to the differentiation of Macedonian and Bulgarian (cf. Lunt 1984).¹⁶ The fact remains, however, that Aromanian is being used and codified as a distinct language in the Republic of Macedonia (details are given below).¹⁷

The Vlachs constitute the smallest constitutionally recognized national and linguistic minority in the Republic of Macedonia. According to the extraordinary census of 1994, out of 8,601 people declaring Vlach nationality, 7,036 declared Vlach as their mother tongue (approximately 0.36% of the total population of 1,935,034 [Antonovska 1996a, 1997b]). When compared with the figures from 1953, when 10,751 people declared Vlach nationality but only 8,180 declared Vlach as their mother tongue (Latifić et al. 1970), the recent figures indicate that the language as spoken in Macedonia has the status currently referred to as endangered in

four words identified explicitly in ancient sources as *Illyrian* (Polomé 1982:866-67) and do not have a single sentence. All other speculations are based on onomastics or on Messapic, both of which involve assumptions that cannot be verified. We cannot even be certain that the term *Illyrian* refers to a single language as opposed to being a cover term used by the Romans and Greeks for various tribes they encountered, much less to the ancestor of modern Albanian (Hamp 1993-94:1665). Cf. the popular use of *Australian Aborigine* -- including a Langenscheidt Lilliput Dictionary and an episode of the British television series "Dr. Who" -- as a single language name that in fact refers to over 200 different indigenous languages. This does not mean that the ancestor of Albanian was not spoken in the Balkans in very ancient times, only that we cannot be sure which ancient language it was.

¹⁴Even prior to the fall of the Roman Empire, our knowledge of the ethnolinguistic situation is sparse and speculative, as indicated above.

¹⁵The question of literary Moldovan/Moldavian is moot, since the official language of the Republic of Moldova is now Romanian. Even during the Soviet period, however, Literary Moldavian was not based on Moldavian dialects but on the same Wallachian dialectal base as Standard Romanian (see Dyer 1996).

¹⁶In addition to this debate there has been an attempt in Greece to describe the Vlachs as "Romanized Greeks", supported by the linguistically naïve work of Lazarou (1986); see Kazzakis 1996 for a cogent assessment of this work.

¹⁷According to Cunia (1999:68), a Vlach-language class in Albania (presumably Korça) began in 1998, and Schwandner-Sievers (1999:9) reports on the existence of Aromanian language classes in Korça and Tirana. In Albania, relationships to Greece and Romania inform attitudes in accordance with availability of resources (see Schwandner-Sievers 1999). The recognition of Vlach as a distinct millet in the Ottoman Empire on 9 (O.S.)/22 (N.S.) May 1905, i.e. as a distinct church, is now treated in Macedonia as the Aromanian national holiday. Like all Christian and most Muslim minorities in Greece, Vlachs have no language rights in that country, although Vlach folklore is occasionally published and publicly performed, and linguistic studies have been published (see Katsanēs 1996-98 for a large bibliography).

human rights discourse. The details of the correspondence between declared language and declared mother tongue for the earliest and most recent comparable censuses for which we have data (1953 and 1994, respectively) are given in Table One. Absolute numbers for declared nationality and percentage of the population of the Republic of Macedonia are given in Table Two.

1953										
Nationality Declaring Vlah Mother Tongue										
Macedonian	Albanian	Turk	Rom	Vlah	Muslim	Yugoslav	Other			
2565	1	10	1	8130	•	4	31			
Total Non-Correspondence of Nationality and Declared Mother Tongue										
2621 = 24.4%										
Total Declaring Vlah Nationality: 10,751										
1994										
Nationality Declaring Vlah Mother Tongue										
Macedonian	Albanian	Turk	Rom	Vlah	Serb	Muslim	Bosniac	Bulgarian	Egyptian	Other
259	@	0	@	6747	@	@	0	@	0	30
Total Non-Correspondence of Nationality and Declared Mother Tongue										
less than 329 = 4%										
Total Declaring Vlah Nationality: 7036										

•=not listed as a category in that census, @=Under 10

TABLE ONE

Difference between declared nationality and declared mother tongue for the six main languages of the Republic of Macedonia: 1953, 1994
Sources: Latifić et al. 1970, Antonovska et al. 1996a

These figures also help illustrate the tendency observable in Macedonia in general for an increasing one-to-one correspondence between declared nationality and declared mother tongue (for the Vlachs, 75.6% in 1953, 96% in 1994). In terms of absolute figures over time, Table Two shows the total number of declared Vlachs and their percentage of the population of Macedonia for each census since World War Two.

1948	%	1953	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%	1994	%
9511	0.8	8668	0.6	8046	0.6	7190	0.6	6384	0.3	7764	0.4	8730*	0.4

TABLE TWO

Vlach numbers and percentages of the total population in the Republic of Macedonia since World War Two
(percentage rounded upward where necessary)

Sources: Antonovska et al. 1996a, Latifić et al. 1970, Pekevski et al. 1973, Savezni Zavod za Statistiku 1954, 1981.

*This 1994 figure is not the official figure according to the definition used for the 1994 census, which is 8601 (p. 19). This figure was used to provide a basis for comparison with previous censuses. It includes persons living abroad for more than a year, persons with a residence permit living in Macedonia for less than a year, refugees, and others.

When examined, demographically rather than in terms of absolute number of speakers, Vlach also counts as an endangered language/identity in Macedonia. For all the other nationalities, the youngest reported age-group (15-29) represents the demographic peak, whereas for the Vlachs there are more people in the 30-44 age group than in the 15-29, and likewise the 45-49 group is almost as large as the 30-44, which is not the case for age distribution among the other nationalities (Antonovska 1997a). In terms of geographic distribution, the largest single concentration of declared Vlach mother-tongue speakers in Macedonia is Štip (1888), in the

east, followed by Skopje (1742), the capital, and then Kruševo (735), Bitola (797), and Struga (400), all in the west. Other districts with over 100 Vlah-speakers are Sveti Nikole, Veles, Kočani, Ohrid, Vinica, Gevgelija, and Kumanovo.¹⁸

Such, then, are the official figures for self-declared language-use and ethnic affiliation within the Republic of Macedonia. Taken in a larger context, we immediately run into the problem of counting and manipulation. Greece has not recorded the Vlachs as a separate census category since 1951, when the official figure was 22,736 (Winnifrith 1987:3). Aromanian, like all minority languages in Greece, remains proscribed for any kind of official discourse. The last figures distinguishing Vlachs from Romanians in Bulgaria is from 1926 (1,550; Winnifrith 1987:6), Romanian figures cited from Peyfuss in Winnifrith (1987:6) give 3,156 Aromanians and Macedo-Romanians in Romania, with the caveat that these figures are under-representative. (Saramandu 1971 estimates 30,000.) Winnifrith (1987:4) estimates the number of Aromanian speakers in Albania at “over 10,000” and elsewhere (Winnifrith 1987:7) he estimates 30,000 in Greece. Niessen (2000) estimates a total of 50,000 (about 33,000 in Greece) using Vlah as their “preferred language” and 20,000 in “the other four Balkan countries” (Albania, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, Romania). Winnifrith’s recent claim of 200,000 Vlachs for Albania by including everyone who might be of Vlah descent (cited in Schwandner-Sievers 1999:2) tells us nothing about language use, and, given the sense of multiple descent (cf. The New York Times 11 March 2000 on multiple race categories in the U.S. census), it also fails to differentiate between those who consider themselves to be Vlachs and those who might have a Vlah parent, grandparent or great-grandparent. Schukalla (1993:512) cites figures estimating the number of Vlachs in Albania as 100,000 prior to 1945, 50,000 in the 1950’s, and 10,000 in the 1960’s. Vlachs were not enumerated as an ethnic category in the 1989 census (Schukalla 1993:509), and the 2001 Albanian census eliminated both ethnicity and religion as categories of enumeration.¹⁹ In 1911, the Encyclopedia Britannica (Vol. 28, p. 166) estimated a total Vlah population of 500,000, of whom 90,000 lived in (geographic) Macedonia (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 17, 217), which latter figure corresponds very closely to Kǎnčov’s (1900:289) 80,767. Interestingly enough, 90,000 is the figure currently cited for Macedonia by Vlah activists (Talabac 1993:48, Dimčev 1996 and personal communication). Wace and Thompson (1913:10) write that the Greek estimate was 600,000 “before political troubles began [...] later Greek estimates give usually a much lower figure.” They also judge Weigand’s estimate of 373,520 as “err[ing] on the side of moderation.” Saramandu (1984:423) gives the numbers for Greece as 250-300,000, Albania

¹⁸The figures given here are for the 30 pre-1996 municipalities (with Skopje divided into five districts). The numbers for the post-1996 municipalities vary slightly, since the reform created 123 districts out of 34. Because most Aromanian-speakers are concentrated in or near the towns that served as the pre-1996 administrative centers, however, the pre-1996 administrative divisions give a better sense of the general geographical distribution. Only Bitola, Gevgelija, Sveti Nikole, and Štip had more than 100 Vlachs living outside the towns themselves (Antonovska 1996b). Although question 13 of form P-1 of the 1994 census distinguished three categories -- a) mother tongue, b) usual tongue (*voobičāen jazik*) defined as ‘a language that the person speaks fluently or frequently in the current household’, c) ability to speak languages other than those designated under a) and b) -- only data for 13a and 13c were published. An additional 2,096 persons declared knowledge of Vlah in addition to their mother tongue (Antonovska 1997a), of whom the majority lived in the same towns as those with the largest concentration of Vlah mother-tongue speakers: Skopje (493), Bitola (574), Struga (216), Kumanovo (170), Gevgelija (142), Kruševo (116). Interestingly enough only 65 persons in Štip declared Vlah as a second language. The overwhelming majority were from the west, while the figure for Gevgelija probably represents Megleno-Romanians.

¹⁹Both Macedonian and Greek organizations in Albania announced a boycott of the 2001 Albanian census as a result (see MILS 12 April 2001 and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines Vol. 5, No. 72, Part II, 12 April 2001; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/search/>).

70,000-100,000, Bulgaria 10,000-15,000 (as with Yugoslavia, this figure might include Daco-Romanian-speakers), and 80,000-100,000 in Romania for a total of 400,000 to 600,000.

While the satisfied position of Vlachs in Macedonia described by Winnifrith (1987:3) is a bit over simplified, especially if one speaks to the publishing political and cultural activists whom he does not cite (e.g. Dimo Dimčev/Dina Cuvata), even the most critical activist who is a citizen of the Republic of Macedonia acknowledges enjoying a higher degree of rights and freedoms than anywhere else in the Balkans (or outside it, for that matter).²⁰ It is an irony of history that Balkan Vlachs have the highest degree of linguistic rights in the country where they are least numerous and constitute the smallest minority. Thus, for example, in accordance with article 35 of the census law promulgated for the extraordinary Macedonian census of 1994 (see Friedman 1996b for details), instructions for enumerators as well as the census forms had to be made available in the six major languages of the Republic of Macedonia, including Aromanian (see below).

When examining identity choices and the transnational implications of those choices, we see an intersection of language, religion, nation-state boundaries, and resource management strategies for cultural capital. Vlachs are faced with the following primary choices in the deployment of identity: 1) independent, 2) Romanian, 3) Greek, 4) Albanian, 5) Macedonian.²¹ Discourses of autochthony intersect with potential identities in complex ways that depend on the nation-state context. Thus, for example, in Albania, Greece, and Macedonia, one historical choice is the claim of descent from a Romanized indigenous population (rather than an imported Roman population; Schwandner-Sievers 1999:10). This choice represents a variant on independent identity that attempts to identify with the nation-state and, in the case of Macedonia and Greece, also outbid its constituent nationality in terms of legitimacy based on autochthony.²² Greek identity is deployed in both Greece and Albania. In the former it coincides with the nation-state, while in the latter it allies itself with the most powerful minority in terms of both history (as the defining factor for the Orthodox Christian millet of Ottoman times) and modern politics and economics (as the only Balkan member of the EU, i.e. modern Europe's current Western Great Power structure; cf. Gal (1993) on German identity in Hungary). Given both the assimilationist nature of Greek policies and Greece's hostile stance toward the Macedonian minority on its territory, Greek identity does not constitute an attractive alternative for those Vlachs currently living in the Republic of Macedonia. Rather, many Greek-identified Vlachs moved to Greek state territory after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent upheavals. Macedonian identity is a viable option only in Macedonia given that country's socioeconomic and sociopolitical situation. While Albanian identity does not encounter the type of international contestation occasionally aimed at

²⁰Vlachs in Western Europe, North America, and Australia are free to pursue cultural activities, and a number of groups and individuals are quite active. Moreover, this Aromanian diaspora is an important factor in the fostering of Vlah language and identity, as seen in Cunia (1999). Owing to their small numbers and the language policies of the diaspora countries, however, Vlachs do not have the public visibility and public support accorded to them in Macedonia (cf. Balamaci 1991).

²¹I am omitting here the data for Bulgaria and Turkey, which are inadequate. I am also excluding the diaspora, which can reflect one of the "homeland" choices but also has the alternative of assimilating to the relevant non-Balkan state where they live. This latter type of assimilation is that found among any immigrant population and does not constitute as specifically Balkan case. Issues of Romani or Muslim identity raised by the 1994 Macedonian census involve potentially interesting individual cases, but are probably not generalizable, while Turkish identity indicated in Andrews and Beninghaus (1989:103) is more a case of immigrant assimilation.

²²Lazarou's 1986 attempt to describe Aromanian as relexified Greek is intended not only for Greek assimilationist nation-building but also to counter such claims. From the point of view of the methodology of historical linguistics, the work is silly (see Kazazis 1996), but from the viewpoint of identity politics it documents a specific type of discourse.

Macedonian, Albanian identity for Vlachs is basically limited to Albania for socioeconomic and sociocultural reasons: It is not a desirable option for Vlachs living in Greece, although it is worth noting that some Muslim Vlachs in Macedonia have adopted Albanian identity.²³ Interestingly enough, in all three countries, Vlachs have been or are credited with a significant role in nation-state formation and political structure. In Macedonia, it is well known that the early twentieth-century national heroes Pitu Guli and Nikola Karev were Vlachs (see Gołąb 1984:23, also Brown 1995), and many university professors and other intellectuals are of Vlach or part-Vlach ancestry.²⁴ Vlachs were also among the leaders of the nineteenth century Greek struggle for independence. In Albania, Vlachs together with Macedonians (described derogatorily as *Shule* literally ‘blockheads’) were blamed by Ismail Kadare as being disproportionately represented in communist power structures and responsible for its excesses (cited in Schmidt-Neke 1993:187). On the other hand, during recent (1997) contestations between Macedonia and Albania over each country’s treatment of the other’s respective minority, one Albanian ploy to avoid responsibility for its Macedonian minority was the claim that “all the so-called Macedonians are really Vlachs” (Christopher Hill, p.c.).

Romanian identity is completely transnational, like Vlach identity itself. Albeit with its own assimilationist ends (cf. Jašar-Nasteva 1997), Romania supported the formation of a separate Vlach Orthodox church in 1905 (see Note 17). With the upheavals of war that followed shortly thereafter, the church became dormant and only within the last decade has there been a move to revive it, especially in Macedonia. With the transition of the 1990’s, Romania has again occasionally taken the stage as the defender of Vlach interests outside its borders, e.g. when Macedonia was seeking admission to the Council of Europe (as reported in *Puls* 29 September 1995 reproduced by MILS 3 October 1995). In general, Romanian identity represents an alternative to Albanian, Greek, or Macedonian identity that seeks to avoid assimilation by identifying with a linguistically related by geographically distant nation-state that also represents a route of potential socioeconomic upward mobility. It is not without significance, however, that Macedonia rather than Romania has been the site of the most recent language planning activities.²⁵ This brings us to the issue of Aromanian language and its role in Vlach identity.

Although a revival of language planning activities for Aromanian began with the Aromanian diaspora in Germany and the U.S. in the 1980’s (Cunia 1999:66; see also Schwandner-Sievers 1999; see Jašar-Nasteva 1997 on the Ottoman period), it was not until the 1990’s that serious progress was made in Macedonia, and if the number of elementary schools

²³In the 1994 Macedonian census, 7964 (92.6%) of those declaring Vlach nationality declared Orthodox Christian religion, 443 (5.2%) declared simply “Christian”, the remainder chose among other options (Protestant, Atheist, unknown, etc.), but none who declared Vlach identity declared themselves as Muslims or as Catholics (Antonovska 1996a). Although there is an independent Albanian Orthodox Church, the connection between Greek Orthodoxy and Greek identity in Albania is much older and stronger. The Albanian Orthodox Church was not founded until the 1908, and began as a diaspora phenomenon in the United States. Although a movement for such an action pre-dated the founding, the crucial incident was the refusal of a Greek Orthodox priest to conduct a funeral for a young Albanian activist in Massachusetts in 1907 [see Skendi 1967:161-162].

²⁴From a linguistic point of view, it is worth noting that Aromanian has had significant influence on the Macedonian dialect of Bitola (Koneski 1967:148), which is the second largest urban center in Macedonia and during the Ottoman period was both the capital of a vilayet and an important site for western consular offices. For some general considerations of Macedonian-Aromanian bilingualism see Gołąb (1984:12-15, 135).

²⁵In the US diaspora, which seems to reflect the situation in Greece, the contending parties are Greek and Romanian, although independent identity is also an option for many, and diaspora Vlachs from Macedonia and Albania sometimes bring with them the same sense of options that they had before emigrating.

with Aromanian classes can be taken as indicative, the other countries where Aromanian is spoken all lag significantly behind. Public school classes are currently available in Skopje, Štip, Bitola, Kruševo, Kumanovo, Struga, and Ohrid. In Macedonia, the monthlies Fenix and Lutseafire began publication in Skopje and Kruševo, respectively, in 1992, the bi-monthly Grailu Armănescu began publication in 1998.

Non-print media represent major sources of language status, legitimization, and sites of normativizing practices. The decade of Macedonian independence and the ensuing privatization have resulted in a significant increase for all languages. We shall take public television as illustrative. In 1989 only Turkish and Albanian were represented on Macedonian public television. In 1991 TV programming in Romani and Vlah was begun: Fifteen minutes of news on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively. By 2000, Vlah (and Romani) each had two half-hour national public TV slots per week. Additional Aromanian language programming is available on local public television (Kumanovo). There are also public and private radio stations with some Aromanian programming in Skopje, Struga, and Štip. It should also be noted that television is a much more pervasive medium than radio. According to a survey conducted by Kolar-Panov, Van den Haute, and Marković (2000:86), 71.3% of those surveyed said they watch television regularly every day and an additional 18.9% said they watch almost every day, while the comparable figures for radio listening were 33.3% and 18.7%, respectively. The only other country with regular state-supported Aromanian programming is Romania, whose international service has daily programs in Aromanian.

Public usage and language planning activities require a consideration of the given language's dialectal situation. In the case of Aromanian, like that of Romani, diactological taxonomy is complicated owing to patterns of transhumance (see Wace and Thompson 1913:250-55) and migration -- particularly the forced migrations beginning in the late eighteenth century with the burning of Moscopolis (now Albanian Voskopojë) and other Aromanian towns by Ali Pasha of Janina. These were followed by successive waves influenced by economic and political conditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (See Marković 2000:2-5 Golab 1984:17-21). Although there are many subdivisions, according to Saramandu (1984:427) a basic distinction can be drawn between the dialects of the north -- especially of the Fărșeroții, Moscopolenii, and Muzecheari of southern Albania -- characterized by a neutralization of a distinction schwa/high-back-unrounded vowel (<ă> vs <î> or <â> in Romanian orthography) - and the dialects of the south -- especially those of the Grămostenii and Pindenii of northern Greece -- which distinguish schwa from the high back unrounded vowel. Owing to patterns of migration over the past two centuries, followed by the hardening of borders in the twentieth century, which altered or eliminated the traditional patterns of transhumancy, these differences are realized in Macedonia as an opposition West/East. The southern group, represented by the Gramostenii, are found east of the Vardar, while west of the Vardar is a mixture of various northern groups. Thus, for example Saramandu (1984:427) distinguishes Bela (near Struga) as well as Gopeš and Molovište (Bitola region) as distinct within the northern group, but Bela is actually divided into two groups: Măbalot and Fărsherot (see also Friedman 1994).²⁶

Since the international congresses for Aromanian beginning in the 1980's and a Symposium for the Standardization of the Aromanian Writing system, which was held in Bitola 24-30 August 1997 (see Cunia 1999), practice in Macedonia has been mixed although basically consistent with recent orthographic developments. Thus, for example, the Aromanian translation of the 1994 instructions to census takers (Dimčev 1994) were noteworthy not only owing to the fact that, as with the Romani materials, they represented a first in bureaucratic

²⁶As already mentioned, Megleno-Romanian speakers are concentrated around Gevgelija, but many have moved to other towns.

official usage, but, uniquely, they concluded with a special page addressing orthographic issues. Although earlier Aromanian orthography was based on Romanian, there have been two basic types of recent modification: First, digraphs are favored over diacritics for consonants (e.g. <sh> and <ts> rather than a cedilla under <s> and <t>, respectively, also <lj> and <nj> for the palatal sonorants), and second, a distinctive diacritic over <a> is used for schwa and the high back-unrounded vowel has no special sign.²⁷ The preferred diacritic for schwa is the tilde, but the 1994 census materials used a grave accent, and Cuvata (1995) used a circumflex (except the cover and title page, which had tildes; the Skopje periodical Grailu Armănescu uses both; the dieresis [used also for Romani by Kepeski and Jusuf 1980] and the breve [which is the Romanian choice] have also been used). On the other hand, Romanian digraphic conventions are also used (e.g. <ci> for /č/ except before front vowels), and there is still competition among orthographic representations of vowel reductions and diphthongs, e.g. variant forms of 'is': easte, (Ianacheshi-Vlahu 1993 and Fenix), iaste, (also given in Ianacheshi-Vlahu 1993), easti (Dimčev 1994, Cuvata 1995, Cogeabashia 1995, Grailu Armănescu, Rivista di Litiratură shi Studii Armăni), iasti (Cuvata, Garofil, and Papatsafa 1994)²⁸ and variants meaning 'I': eu, io, mine, mini (the first set of examples show different representations of the rising diphthong and vowel raising, the second contrasts competing dialectal forms in which the first is identical with Romanian, the second is etymologically Aromanian and favored in the east, the third represents the generalization of accusative for nominative, and the fourth represents the generalized form with vowel reduction, both of which are typical of the west), cf. the spelling Machedonia 'Macedonia' used in Fenix, Dimčev (1994), Cuvata (1995) but Machidunia in Grailu Armănescu and Makidunia in Cuvata, Garofil, and Papatsafa (1994). Another issue is the spelling of interdental fricatives and the voiced velar fricative borrowed as such from Greek by some dialects but neutralized to stops in others (cf. Cunia 1999:72-78).

While the northern/western dialect group is perceived by many Macedonian Aromanians as being more prestigious than the southern/eastern group owing to the fact that the former are historically more associated with urban populations while speakers of the latter are more traditionally pastoral, the codification movement in Macedonia is dominated by activists from the east (e.g., Dina Cuvata is from Ovče Pole), and publications general show eastern dialect influences, albeit with some western compromises (e.g. the use of a six-vowel system and the exclusion of interdental fricatives). Thus, for example, eastern suntu 'they are' is favored over western sāntu (except in Ianacheshi-Vlahu 1993) but western nostru 'our' (masc.) rather than eastern nostu (except Cuvata, Garofil, and Papatsafa 1994), also Romanian and eastern eI rather than western nās 'he/it'.

The issue of Daco-Romanian influence in general remains salient, as does the question of vocabulary building. Atanasov (p.c. 97.05.23) has pointed out that the dialects that are now spoken in different nation-states have many differing lexical items as a result of contact with different modern national languages. The situation and the possibilities are much like those for Romani, i.e. vocabulary enrichment through neologisms, internationalisms, borrowings from

²⁷As with Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, and other languages, the Greek alphabet was sometimes used for Aromanian by Orthodox Christians during the Ottoman period owing to the connection of religion with both literacy and nationality classification (the millet system). Mention should also be made here of a competing orthography that continues Romanian principles (Caragiu Marioțeanu 1997:XXVII). In addition to excluding digraphs and using only diacritics (cedilla for the obstruents, apostrophe or acute for the sonorants), this orthography distinguishes schwa from the high back unrounded vowel and has two graphemes for the latter: <î> in initial position and <â> elsewhere. In the orthography in use in Macedonia (and elsewhere) initial <î>, which occurs exclusively before nasals and in some dative clitics, is spelled with the letter for schwa.

²⁸Another Aromanian variant of 'is' is e.

related languages with older traditions are all possibilities. An important difference is that Aromanian is closer to Daco-Romanian than Romani is to either Hindi or Sanskrit.

Another option, however, is the use of colloquial items, often of Turkish origin, that are used in all the Balkan languages but have been stylistically lowered to the colloquial level in languages with established literary norms. This option was followed by both Romani and Aromanian translators of the 1994 Macedonian census materials. Thus, for example, among the items to be enumerated in the census were the number of baths and toilets in each dwelling. All those languages with established elaborated norms used euphemistic neologisms or recent borrowings as their official terminology on the census forms (P-2, VI.8 and 9 in Dimčev 1994): Macedonian banja, klozet, Albanian banjo, nevojto, Turkish banyo, banyo-ayakyolu, Serbian kupatilo, klozet. Except for the Serbian deverbal noun meaning 'bathing place' all the words for 'bath' are Latinate borrowings. The Macedonian and Serbian words for 'toilet' are from the British [water]closet, while the Albanian and Turkish are neologisms that can be glossed as 'necessarium' and 'bath-footplace', respectively. The Vlah documents, however used the Turkisms hàmami and hale, respectively.²⁹ Hamam is the standard Turkish word for 'bath' but has come to mean 'Turkish bath' or 'public bath', while the word hale, which began as a euphemism, is now considered vulgar in Turkish as well as in the other Balkan standard languages. Similarly, 'household' was translated in Aromanian by taifa (from Turkish taife 'tribe, gang').³⁰ These terms serve as clear and concrete examples that the function of Turkisms in Aromanian is following its own path of development and is more resistant to stylistic lowering (see Friedman 1996a).

The past ten years have made a dramatic difference for Aromanian planning and status in Macedonia, arguably even moreso than for Romani. The rise in publications and educational and cultural activities has been unprecedented. Also, as with Romani, Vlah language and status planning are taking place in an international context but with a focus on local uses and issues. For both languages, the slogan "think globally but act locally" seems to be the best characterization. For Vlah, as for Albanian, another orthography congress has been proposed for 2002 (Cunia 1999).³¹ In general, language planning activities for Vlah are more vigorous in Macedonia than in any of the other countries where Vlah is a non-diasporic language.

The Vlachs of Macedonia are simultaneously linguistically both endangered and protected as a minority in a manner unique among the countries in which they live. Recognized officially at the highest level, despite the paucity of their official numbers, a combination of historical circumstances has placed the Macedonian Vlachs in a unique position to engage in identity-preserving language planning. These efforts have potential effects in neighboring countries, where Aromanian-speaking populations are considerably larger and at the same time lacking in the same level of identity-preserving resources. In all the Balkan countries, the deployment of different types of identification is used as a means of achieving upward mobility. At the same time, the effects of the old millet system continue to be felt. For Muslim Vlachs, this has meant complete assimilation to another language group, while for Orthodox Vlachs, options of choosing a nation-state based national identity coincide with religious identity in Greece and Macedonia. In Albania, these same routes are used to gain access to economic opportunities available in other states (Greece, Romania). In Romania, Aromanians are in the peculiar position of being separate from but subordinated as part of the

²⁹The Romani used hamami and kenefi, respectively.

³⁰Here Romani used kherutne-familijengoro, a combination of neologism and Western (via Macedonian) borrowing.

³¹The congress planned for 2002 in Albania marks the thirtieth anniversary of the unified Albanian orthography of 1972, but contested issues might also be discussed.

nation-state.³² The Western diaspora, especially in the 1980's, has had a significant effect on Vlah language and identity issues, but it is remarkable that precisely Macedonia has been the center of the most vigorous language planning activities since the Republic of Macedonia became independent.

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³²Cf. note 21 on Bulgaria and Turkey.

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