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MINORITIES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION AND LOCALIZATION: THE VLACH COMMUNITY IN BULGARIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLITICAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Küreselleşme ve Yerelleşme Çağında Azınlıklar: Siyasi ve Kültürel Coğrafya Perspektifinden Bulgaristan'daki Ulah Topluluğu

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ABSTRACT

Wallachs (Vlachs or Wallachians) are one of the most multiple minorities living on the territory of Bulgaria. This ethnos has its own colourful cultural, political and social, folklore and historical characteristics, which distinguish it from the other ethnic groups in the country. In this scientific work we are only going to dwell on some ethno-geographical and socio-cultural characteristics of Wallachs in Bulgaria, as well as to reflect some different scientific viewpoints and positions of various Bulgarian authors and researchers of Wallachian ethnos. Some significant topics discussed in this work are: history of Wallachian population in Bulgaria; political and ethno-cultural attitude of the Bulgarian state towards Wallachs; geographical distribution and number of Wallachian population in Bulgaria, and their socio-cultural characteristics. The aim of this article is to acquaint Romanian scientific society with the more significant publications on Wallachs in Bulgaria and to reflect some basic concepts and points of view of the Bulgarian researchers on the Wallachian ethnic problem.

Key words: Wallachs, Ethnos, Romanian minority, Bulgaria, Ethno-geography, Political geography

ÖZET

Ulahlar, Bulgaristan topraklarında yaşayan çok sayıdaki azınlıklardan biridir. Bu etnik grup, kendisini ülkedeki diğer etnik gruplardan ayıran kendine özgü renkli kültürel, sosyal, folklor ve tarihi özelliklere sahiptir. Bu bilimsel çalışmada, Bulgaristan'daki Ulahların bazı etno-coğrafi, siyasi ve sosyo-kültürel özellikleri üzerinde durmakla birlikte, aynı zamanda çeşitli Bulgar yazarların ve Ulah etnik grupları üzerine çalışan araştırmacılarının farklı bilimsel bakış açıları ve görüşlerini yansıtacağız. Bu çalışmada tartışılan bazı önemli konular şunlardır: Bulgaristan'daki Ulah nüfusunun tarihi; Bulgar Devleti'nin Ulahlara karşı siyasi ve etno-kültürel tutumu; Bulgaristan'daki Ulah nüfusunun coğrafi dağılımı ve sayıları ve sosyo-kültürel özellikleri. Bu makalenin amacı, Romen bilim topluluğunu Bulgaristan'da yaşayan Ulahlar hakkında bilimsel yayınlar aracılığıyla aydınlatmak ve Bulgar araştırmacıların etnik Ulah sorunu ile ilgili bazı temel kavramları ve bakış açılarını yansıtmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulahlar, Etnik Gruplar, Romen Azınlıklar, Bulgaristan, Etnocoğrafya, Siyasi coğrafya

1. MAIN FEATURES OF THE ETHNO-GEOGRAPHY IN BULGARIA

For thousands of years the Balkans have been not only a crossroad of tradesmen, wars and politicians, but also of cultures, ancient civilizations, ethnic groups and religions, a crossroad where various geopolitical and state interests have interlaced. Precisely because of these peculiarities, there is not a state with a culturally and ethnically homogeneous population on the Balkan peninsular. Bulgaria is not an exception. Numerous and small minorities live here side by side with Bulgarians. Some of them had been present on the peninsula for ages before the Bulgarian nation took shape, others settled there

during the Middle Ages, and still others – in modern times. Ethnicity is among the most important characteristics of the population of a given country. It influences the working capacity, the reproduction of the population, as well as the socio-cultural and political development of a certain country. The geographical position and the historical, political and cultural development of South-East Europe are the main reasons for Balkan countries as Bulgaria to have heterogeneous ethnic and cultural pattern.

As it is obvious from Table 1, the Bulgarians constitute the basic and most numerable ethnic group in the country. During the period of 1900-2001 their percentage in the total population of the country has frequently changed and it was lowest in the period after the Liberation from the Ottoman rule (1900 – 77.1%), and highest in the period of Socialism (1975 – 90.9%). The total portion of all the minority groups in the country is about 16%, mainly represented by the Turkish and the Roma ethnicity (table 1). The Turkish ethnic group, which occupies 9.4% from the total population of the country, is unevenly distributed – most densely populated are the Eastern Rhodopes, the East part of the Balkan Mountains, Ludogorie (Deliorman), and Dobrudja. During the last century a big part of the Bulgarian Turks emigrated from Bulgaria to the Republic of Turkey. According to A. Totev, during the period of 1880-1965 about 730,000 Turks emigrated, and according to B. Shimshir from 1893 to 1980 the number of Turkish people who migrated to neighbouring Turkey was 778,742 (Slaveykov: 2006, p.103). In other words, since 1878 to this day the total number of the emigrants from Bulgaria to Turkey amounts to about 1.3 million (Atasoy: 2009, p. 378), (Table :1).

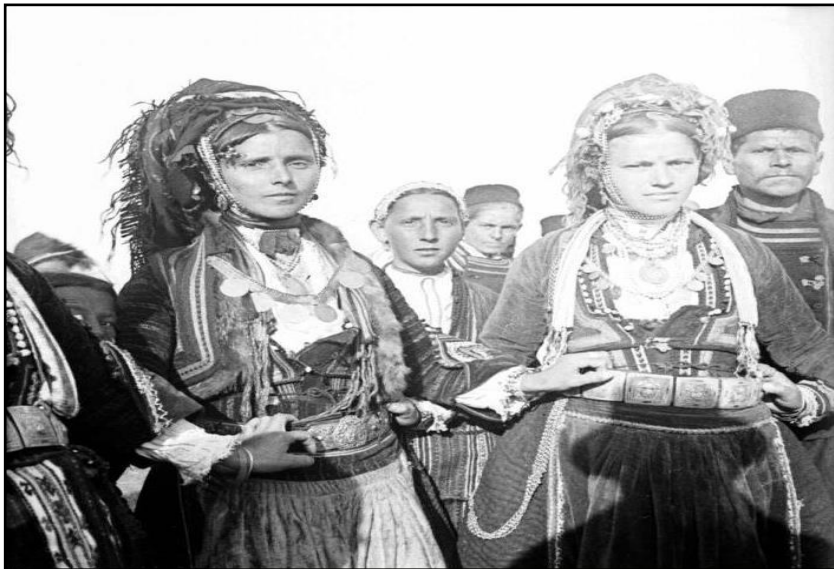
Table 1: Ethnic structure of the Bulgarian population in the period of 1900-2001 (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 99)

Ethnic Community	Year (%)						
	1900	1926	1946	1965	1975	1992	2001
Bulgarians	77.1	83.2	84.0	87.9	90.9	85.7	83.9
Turks	14.2	10.5	9.6	9.5	8.4	9.4	9.4
Gypsy (Rom)	2.4	2.5	2.4	1.8	0.2	3.7	4.7
Tatars	---	0.1	---	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.02
Jews	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.02
Armenians	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
Russians	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.2
Other	5.0	2.3	3.1	0.36	0.02	0.91	1.66

During the census in 2001, 746,664 people (9.4% of the total population of the country) have determined their own status as Turkish. The highest percentage of Bulgarian Turks was reported in the regions of Kardzhali (about 79%), Razgrad, Shumen, Silistra, and Targovishte (between 40% and 55%). About 33% of the Bulgarian Turks live in the cities, and about 67% live in the country (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 103).

The Gypsies (Roma) are the third largest ethnic group in Bulgaria, after the Bulgarians and the Turks. At the census in 2001 they ran to 370,908 people, or 4.7% of the country population. Most of them live in the regions of Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Sliven, and Montana. At present about more than 50% of Gypsies live in the towns, which influences and changes their outlooks, traditions and culture as well as their demographic, educational and economic characteristics.

About 2% of Bulgarian population belongs to other, less numerous ethnic communities – Russians (0.2%), Armenians (0.14%), Wallachs (0.13%), Macedonians (0.06%), Greeks (0.04%), Jews, and others (Slaveykov and Zlatunova: 2005, p. 181-182). In this scientific work we are only going to consider some characteristic features of the Wallachs in Bulgaria and reflect various scientific views and positions of Bulgarian authors and researchers of this ethnos. History of Wallachian population in Bulgaria, political and ethno-cultural attitude of the Bulgarian state towards the Wallachs, geographical distribution and number of Wallachian population in Bulgaria, and socio-cultural characteristics of Wallachian population in Bulgaria are some of the main topics discussed in this work (Picture 1).



Picture 1: Wallachs at a village wedding (Kaynak: <http://www.omda.bg/>)

2. HISTORY OF THE WALLACHIAN POPULATION IN BULGARIA

According to different scholars, the Romanian minority living in Bulgaria has different names: Aromanians, Wallachs, Tsintsars, Romanians, Kutsovlachs, Sarakatsani, Yuruk, Arnauts etc. The Bulgarian Aromanians use two ethnonyms about themselves – “Wallachs” and “Armin”. At the same time they always specify that the Bulgarians call them Wallachs and their language is Wallachian (Atanasova, 1998, p. 135).

There are many contradictory theories about the origin of the Wallachs and the Aromanians, and some mutually exclusive theories have adherents among this group too. Some scholars consider the Aromanians descendants of Roman settlers, others – of local Thracian tribes, and still others speak about Romanized Hellenes. There are Aromanian colonies in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Macedonia. (The European Council has recently approved a document which appeals for preserving the language and culture of Aromanians.) A division into “urban Aromanians”, called “tsintsars”, and shepherds (nomads) existed for a long time inside this community. The Wallachs inhabit the regions along the Danube in Bulgaria and Serbia. According to one of the theories they are Rumanian peasants that immigrated in Bulgaria, running away from the oppression of the big landowners, but according to another, they are descendants of Bulgarian emigrant families to Rumania that reimmigrated to Bulgaria because of the same reasons. The truth may be in between. Both communities are Orthodox Christians (http://www.omda.bg/bulg/narod/vlasi_arumani.html).

“Wallachs” is a common name of several separate Roman communities originating from the Romanized population of South-East, Central, and Eastern Europe. Peoples, called “Wallachs” are today’s Romanians, Aromanians, Serbo-Vlachs (Morlachs), Megleno-Romanians, and Istro-Romanians, but since the establishment of the Romanian state the term has mainly been used for the Romanian minorities living to the south of the river Danube. The Aromanians, who sometimes are called tsintsars (speaking Aromanian language) by the Bulgarians and the Serbs, live in Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria. The Serbo-Vlachs (speaking Serbo-Vlach or Vlach language) live in Serbia, in the region of the river Timok. The Megleno-Romanians (speaking Megleno-Romanian) live in Northern Greece, in the region of Moglena. The Istro-Romanians (speaking Istro-Romanian language) live in Croatia.

According to Greek researchers the Wallachs are “Romanized Greeks”. According to the German scholar Bindermann the Wallachs are Romanized Ligurians and Celts. Nowadays nearly all the Romanian scholars consider them successors of Roman colonists. P. Shafaric stands up for the thesis that Wallachs are descendants of Romanized Dacians, Moesi, and Roman colonists. According to Weigand, Wallachs inhabited the lands between Nish-Skopje and Sofia. According to some Bulgarian scholars, Wallachs descended from an ancient Romanized Thracian population which, because of the

pressure of the Slavs, has withdrawn in the mountain regions, where it has preserved itself from assimilation. The Romanian historians and linguists accept as an indisputable fact the Romanization of the population that inhabited the lands between the Adriatic, Black, and Aegean Seas, and the Carpathians, and the formation of a proto-Romanian people. On account of the political changes on the Balkans the united community of the Romanized population has split into a multitude of small communities. Thus the development of dialects of the Romanian language and the formation of various Romanian minorities in the Balkan countries began. The common point in the concepts of the Romanian scholars is that Romanians and Wallachs (Aromanians) is one and the same thing. However, there are Romanian scholars as Cicero Pogiric and Silviu Dragomir who think that the Romanians and the Wallachs (Aromanians) are separate peoples (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 128-129).

Wallachian population to the south of the river Danube has been recorded by historians, geographers, travellers, and linguists. It is considered that the origin of the Wallachs is immigrant, and the fact that most of the towns and villages where this population settled have Bulgarian names supports the idea that the Wallachs are new-comers to the lands south of the Danube. During the Middle Ages the name "Wallachs" was used to signify the nomad population on the Balkans regardless of its ethnicity, but with certain obligations towards the central authorities of the Byzantine or the Ottoman Empires (Karahasan Çınar: 2005, p. 58).

A Wallachian population south of the river Danube was recorded as early as the last quarter of the 19th c. in the well-known books of Felix Kanits and Marin Drinov. According to Marin Drinov, in the Bulgarian lands between the Danube and the Balkan mountains Wallachs can be found in the eparchy of Vidin, in Dobrich, and along the middle reaches of the rivers Vit, Iskar, and Osam (Drinov: 1971, p. 326-327).

Felix Kanits pointed out for the first time that one of the main reasons for the migration of Wallachs south of the Danube was the big landowners' oppression in the lands north of the Danube. Another reason, which was favourable to the migration, was the policy of the Ottoman authorities who encouraged the colonization of deserted agricultural areas not only to preserve their revenues from these fertile lands, but also because of the well estimated benefit of the fact that this population was alien to the Slavs and thus would stand aloof from the striving for consolidation of the Bulgarians and their struggle for freedom. The Ottoman authorities succeeded in using the ethno-cultural peculiarities of the Wallachs for their own political purposes – to divide culturally and ethnically the Bulgarian nation. By reason of its reticence the Wallachian population could hardly be assimilated by other ethnic groups, and at the same time it showed eminent assimilatory skills, especially towards the Slavs (Kanits: 1876, p. 305-311).

At the end of the 18th c, as a result of the devastating wars of the Ottoman Empire with Austro-Hungary and the local rebellions, the area between the river Timok and Morava was ravaged and almost depopulated. This enabled the flock of new migratory waves, mostly from Wallachia, Transylvania, and Banat. To the west of the river Timok, along the Danube, spreads the area Krajina, where the Wallachs predominate. According to Romanski, who had travelled over those places, and according to Serbian statistic data the total number of Wallachs west of the river Timok was about 200,000. The political border between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire (1833) and between Serbia and Bulgaria (1878) divided the Wallachian population into two on both sides of the river Timok. In this way the main part of the Wallachian population south of the Danube remained within the borders of Serbia (Romanski: 1926, p. 36-68).

In ethnographical aspect, at the beginning of the 20th c the Wallachian population in the regions of Vidin and Kula was subdivided into three groups: *vugleni* "dolentsi", situated in the villages around the town of Vidin, *kumpeni* "polyantsi" – in the villages to the west of the first group, and *pudureni* "goryani" – in the villages along the Serbian boundary. This differentiation was first made by the Romanian writer E. Bucuta, who travelled over those areas. He also published a map of the distribution of these Wallachian ethnic subgroups which he thought came to the region of Vidin from various places north of the Danube. The third subgroup, i.e. the *pudureni* came from Serbia to the region of Vidin (Bucuta: 1923 and Mladenov: 1925, p. 125-127), (Picture 2).



Picture 2: Wallach Women in Traditional Outfits (Kaynak: <http://www.omda.bg/>)

There are not records or information about a special attitude of the Bulgarian state to the Wallachs before the wars between 1912 and 1918. The Wallachs during that period were nationals equal to all other ethnic groups of the state. In the mid 20s the Romanian cultural propaganda among the Wallachs in Bulgaria gained strength. During the period between the two World Wars the Wallachian community in Bulgaria became a minority problem (Niagulov: 1995, p. 52). According to Vaseva, during that time a hostile image of Bulgarians took shape in the Romanian educational literature and fiction. The idea to stimulate the creation of Romanian national identity among the Wallachian population in Bulgaria became a goal of foreign policy of the Romanian state (Vaseva: 1998, p. 176).

In 1926 a Romanian general consulate was established in the town of Vidin. In 1933 pupils from the Danube regions, which were inhabited by Wallachs, started their studies in the Romanian school in Sofia along with the Aromanians. In 1934, at the inauguration of the new school building (named Romanian Institute) the Romanian minister plenipotentiary V. Stoica announced that the school had to become “a propaganda centre for Romanian culture and science and for conscious Romanian education of our fellow-countrymen in Bulgaria, and especially of those from the region of Vidin and Danube area” (Niagulov: 1995, p. 68).

According to the Romanian diplomatic reports from Sofia, the Wallachs’ petitions between the two World Wars were caused by the following discriminatory measures taken by the Bulgarian authorities (Niagulov: 1995, p. 63):

- ✓ A prohibition to speak their mother tongue – Romanian – in public places
- ✓ A prohibition to wear their traditional costumes and folk garments
- ✓ A prohibition to execute their own folklore, traditions, and customs
- ✓ Prevention of the distribution of Romanian secular and religious literature and its confiscation
- ✓ Lack of Romanian school in the region of Vidin
- ✓ Persecution of pupils and students in Romania and their parents
- ✓ Restriction of public worship in Rumanian language at the churches
- ✓ Impediments to contacts with Romania and its citizens
- ✓ Forcing the Wallachs to adopt Bulgarian family names and use Bulgarian names to christen their children
- ✓ Attending obligatory courses for studying Bulgarian language
- ✓ The repressive actions taken by the Bulgarian authorities, pointed out in Romanian sources, were arrests, maltreatment and interning the Wallachian families from their region

After 1927, Romania initiated deportation of Wallachs living in the regions of Timok and Danube from Bulgaria. A special society “Timocians” was set up to forward the deportation of these Wallachs to the region of South Dobrudja. A campaign aiming this migration took place in the villages around Vidin. However, it hardly had any results – up to 1933 only 200 Wallachian families emigrated from Vidin area (Niagulov: 1995, p. 69).

In the years after the World War II, there are no records that any ethnical restrictions of the kind before the war were exercised towards the Wallachian population. There were not observed any bans for speaking the Wallachian language at home or in public places, and the traditional culture evolved in a natural way. The official amicable relationships with socialist Romania served as a base for that generally tolerant attitude. However, it is evident from the information based on field-work that even during the socialist period most Wallachs preferred not to manifest their “Wallachian origin” for they were conscious of a certain negativism from the Bulgarians in everyday and in public life (Vaseva: 1998, p. 178). Not all the authors and scholars, however, share this opinion. According to Hugh Paulton, during socialism Bulgarian Mohammedans, Turks and Romani people, as well as Wallachs were put to assimilatory policy and compulsory Bulgarianization by the communist rulers and leaders. According to the same author, there is evidence for political pressure on the Wallachian minority in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 70s. He also thinks that in the near future Wallachs will be totally assimilated by the Bulgarian ethnos and will lose their language as well as their cultural and ethnical identity (Paulton: 1993, p. 143-144).

3. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND NUMBER OF THE WALLACHIAN POPULATION IN BULGARIA

The Romanians are the fourth largest ethnic group in Bulgaria, after the Bulgarians, Turks and Roma. Detailed data about the number and distribution of the Romanians in Bulgaria are included in the published results from all the official censuses in Bulgaria after the liberation of the Ottoman yoke. At the first census in 1881 the Romanian minority was denoted as “Wallachs”, and in the later censuses the ethnonyms “Romanians”, “Kutsovlachs”, “Tsintsars”, and “Aromanians” were used, but the common thing is that their mother tongue is Romanian (Vaseva: 1998, p. 173).

The first census of the population in the Principality of Bulgaria was carried out on the 1st of January, 1881. It was specified at that census that the Wallachs were about 50,000, i.e. about 2.44% of the total population of the country. Nearly half of the Wallachs in Bulgaria live in the region of Vidin – 23,845. According to Sarafov, 86.5% of all the Wallachs live in the western part of Bulgaria, and some 13.5% - in the eastern one. Another important piece of detail is that 96.2% of all Wallachs live in the five districts along the river Danube – Svishtov, Pleven, Rahovo, Lom, and Vidin. According to the same census from 1881 most of the Wallachs living in the eastern part of the country were situated in the districts of Rouse and Silistra (Sarafov: 1884, p. 60).

That first census disclosed presence of Wallachs in 16 out of 21 existing in 1881 districts in Bulgaria. In one century it became extinct in many of the districts where it wasn't numerous, due to mixed marriages with Bulgarians and their voluntary assimilation. In 1900 the German scholar G. Weigand pointed out that at the end of the 19th c in Bulgaria were registered 86,000 Wallachs, 11,708 (about 15%) of which were born “north of the Danube”, i.e. in today's Romania (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 59-60).

In the census in 1910 about 80,000 people were recorded as “Romanians”, and the total number of people with Romanian mother tongue was 96,502 (the highest figure for a Romanian-speaking population ever given in the Bulgarian statistics). After that census their number started to decrease. After the Balkan War and the World War I the number and territorial distribution of Wallachian population changed drastically. One of the reasons was the annexation of South Dobrudja to Romania and to the western outlying parts of Serbia. According to the data from the census in 1920 “the Romanians” within the post-war borders of Bulgaria were 57,312, and the people with “Romanian mother tongue” were 75,065. In the next census in 1926 the issued data showed that 69,080 “Romanians” lived in the country, and the number of people with “Romanian mother tongue” were

83,746, including about 5,000 “Aromanians”, nearly 4,000 “Kutsovlachs” and 1,500 “Tsintsars” – most of which had come to Bulgaria from Macedonia during the last decades. About 42,000 Romanian-speaking people lived in the region of Vidin at that time (Vaseva: 1998, p. 174).

After the coup d'état on the 19th of May, 1934, the number of Romanian-speaking people dropped off to 16,405 people, 2,771 of which lived in the region of Vidin. During the 30s of the 20th c the Wallachs in Bulgaria suffered repressions and their Romanian mother tongue was banned. After the Treaty of Craiova signed in 1940, the number of Wallachs in Bulgaria continued to fall (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 60).

According to Valentina Vaseva, the Romanian publications have increased the number of Wallachs in Bulgaria almost three times (Vaseva: 1998, p. 174). Romanian specialists claim that “the Wallachs” are “a Romanian minority” which lives within the borders of Bulgaria. According to the statement of the Romanian minister plenipotentiary Grigore Balcescu, made in 1928 in Sofia the Romanians in Bulgaria numbered about 120,000 people. In a special investigation of this population published in French it was stated that it numbered 150,000 people, 120,000 of which lived in the valley of Timok (Noe et Popesco – Spineni: 1939, p. 86-88). According to other calculations made by a representative of the Timocian Wallachs who immigrated to Romania, the Romanians in Bulgaria around the year of 1940 were over 250,000 (Florescu: 1940, p. 13).

According to Bulgarian scientific researchers, the increased rate of Wallachian population in Bulgaria in the period 1920-1926 was not only due to the natural high growth in this population, but also to the intensified Romanian self-identification as a result of the Romanian political and cultural propaganda. Nevertheless, the census data from 1926 could be considered relatively most objective (Vaseva: 1998, p. 174-175).

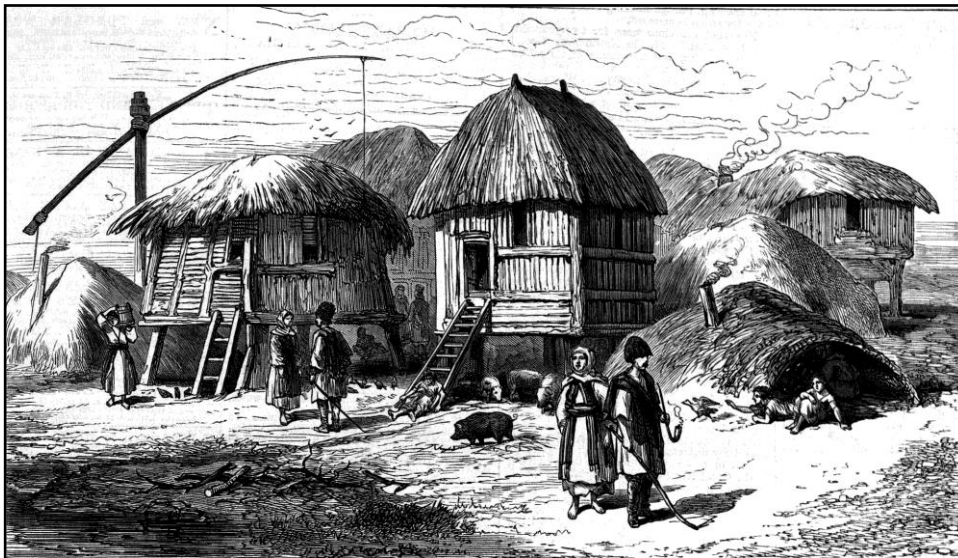
It is difficult to say what the exact number of the Wallachs in Bulgaria is nowadays, for their number is not specified, thus only rough guesses could be made. But it is evident that their number is going down. According to the censuses in Bulgaria, in 1910 their number was 80,000, but in 1992 it was 5,159 (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 133). The data from the 1992 census did not give a precise numerical picture either, because the “Wallachian” or “Romanian” ethnicity was not present in the counting cards, and there wasn't a denomination for “Wallachian” or “Romanian” mother tongue. In the empty column for ethnic groups that were not in the list the number of people who declared to belong to the Wallachian ethnic group were 5,159, and those of the Romanian ethnic group – 2,491; totally – 7,650, i.e. 0.09% of the total population in Bulgaria (Niagulov: 1997, p. 90).

In the last census conducted in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2001, in the ethnic group column 10,566 people determined their own status as Wallachs and only 1,088 people – as Romanians. In general, the total number of the Romanian minorities in Bulgaria in 2001 was about 12,000 people (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 60-61). In the period between the last two censuses (i.e. from 1992 to 2001) there is a significant growth in the number of the Romanian minorities (from 7,600 to 12,000), which cannot be explained biologically, i.e. with an increase in their birth-rate. One of the main causes for this numerical change is the increasing ethnical self-awareness and minority memory, the increasing Romanian ethnical identification of Wallachs, as well as the democratization in the inter-ethnical political life in Bulgaria during the post-socialist period.

Today the Wallachs in Bulgaria live mostly in the valley of the river Danube and its affluents. Along the valley of the Danube, from Vidin to Silistra a lot of towns and villages are inhabited by Wallachs – the towns of Kozlodui, Oriahovo, Belene, Rousse, Tutrakan, Silistra; the villages of Baikal, Krushovene, Somovit, Gulyantsi, Zagrajden. Many villages in the region of Vidin have a typically Wallachian image – Tyanovtsi, Deleina, Kosovo, Kapitanovtsi, Slanotrún, Gomotartsi, Rabrovo, Pokraina, Drujba, Gumzovo, and the town of Bregovo. Their living is connected mainly with the river Danube (fishing, shipping) but in the villages the Wallachs also make their living by apiculture, viniculture, animal husbandry, carpentry etc. Separate representatives of the Wallachian ethnic minority are also found in Byala Cherkva and Beloslav town in the region of Varna (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 61)

According to prof. Slaveykov, there are “Aromanians” in the following Bulgarian regions: Blagoevgrad, Dupnitsa, Velingrad, Dorkovo village, Peshtera, Rakitovo, Bratsigovo, Pirdop, Anton village, Pazardjik. One of the biggest groups of west-rhodopean Aromanians lives in the town of Peshtera – they settled there in 1820 and founded the neighbourhood Pane (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 130).

The Wallachian ethnic group in the region of Varna – the so called “Rudars” raises a special interest lately. The knowledge about their history and ethnography is the result of the efforts of the scholar Ivan Tsankov from the village of Aksakovo, Varna region. “The Wallachs Rudars” is the most numerable minority in that area: about 25,000-30,000 people. Villages like Izvorsko, Vuglen, Lyuben Karavelovo, and some others in the area of Dolni Chiflik town have 90% Rudars-Wallachian population. Each of the towns of Beloslav, Devnya and Dolni Chiflik has a population of about 2,000-3,000 Rudars. The Bulgarian scholars are still in debt of this ethnic group, who speaks and sings in Romanian dialect but unfortunately is put into the “Gypsy category” (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 61), (Picture: 3)



Picture 3: A Wallach Village Settlement in the Ottoman Period (1877), (Kaynak: <http://www.omda.bg/>)

4. SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WALLACHIAN POPULATION IN BULGARIA

According to Valentina Vaseva, the basic markers for a collective identity of the Wallachs in Bulgaria are:

1. The self-appellation, i.e. the endonym of this ethnic group;
2. The sense of common origin;
3. Common language and culture;
4. Collective self-portrait and self-determination, i.e. altogether four ethnic and cultural features, which distinguish them from the rest of the population in the country. The above-mentioned ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Wallachs in Bulgaria are described on the next pages (Vaseva: 1998, p. 179-188).

4.1. Self-apellation (endonym)

According to Bulgarian scientific society, the Wallachs settled in the Bulgarian lands before the establishment of the modern Romanian state and nation, hence their lack of Romanian national self-awareness. That's why the endonym “Romanians” hardly ever occurs in present days, even after the periods of intensive Romanian national propaganda among them. Besides, the Wallachs are predominantly rural and agricultural population which is remarkable for its strong attachment to their own land, language, way of life and religion. By reason of their continued and free of conflicts coexistence with Bulgarians, the latter have strongly influenced Wallachian speech, traditional culture

and ethnical self-awareness which, in certain periods, gained intermediate (borderline) character (Niagulov: 1995, p. 53).

Some Wallachs have double ethnic identity, i.e. they define themselves both as Bulgarians and Wallachs and some even determine their own status as Bulgarian solely. The self-identification of some Wallachs as “Bulgarians” is often explained with the fact that it is written in their passports and they live in the state of Bulgaria. I.e. there is an obvious confusion in the ethnic and civic identity among the Wallachs. The typical answer to the question “*Who are you?*” given by the inhabitants of Vidin and Oryahovo regions during the 90s was the following: “*I am Wallach, but I am also Bulgarian*”. “*We are Bulgarians. We are pure Bulgarians but we know one more language. (or: We speak Wallachian language.)*”. One of the reasons why the endonym “Wallach” is avoided in the present is that sometimes Bulgarians and other ethnic groups put a certain pejorative connotation into it and the Wallachs are aware of that: “*They call us Wallachs...wet Wallachs...It's offending.*” I.e. the haughty and mocking attitude of Bulgarians towards the Wallachian ethnic origin made them hide their ethnicity and despite their unwillingness to do so, they say they are Bulgarians. The use of such pejoratives as “mongrels”, “mules”, “taratori”, and “tsintsars” is one of the reasons for the marginalization of the Wallachian minority in Bulgaria. In other words, most of the Wallachs feel inferior and not equal to the other citizens of Bulgaria. The pejorative connotations which Bulgarians put in the denomination “Wallachs” is one of the main reasons why the members of this minority, when being out of their family or settlement, do not manifest their self-identity and hide their ethnic descent as well as the cultural signs of their ethnos (Vaseva: 1998, p. 180-181), (Picture 4).



Picture 4: A Wallachian Peasant Drawn by the Artist Theodore Valerio (Kaynak: <http://www.onda.bg/>)

4.2. Oral versions of common origin

Among the Wallachian population in Vidin and Oryahovo regions have been registered very similar concepts about the origin of this ethnic group which mostly have characteristics of kin memory, and their realization as a collective historical experience has mosaic spread. Because of this they do not function as an element of cultural identity. These mosaic (fragmentary) ideas on a daily level create a sense of community due to the well-known mechanism of mythologization of some separate historical realia, in the first place – the migration itself (the migration of the Wallachs across the Danube). According to the first version about “the double migration across the Danube”, the Wallachs are a local Bulgarian population, which fled from the Ottoman tyranny beyond the Danube and learned the Wallachian language there. Because of the strong oppression and exploitation of the villagers by the big landowners, they ran away back to Bulgaria. The combination of various details in the stories outlines the attitude of local people to the event and gives it legendary and mythical character. The stress is put on the dramatic escape across the Danube from Romanian to Bulgarian strand: “...*We are Bulgarians. They say that during the Ottoman times they fled to Romania and stayed there years on end...And later, when they came back to Bulgaria they had some irregular speech, unlike the Romanian one. We are Wallachs too; they started from here and then came back here again because of the war.*” This version about their origin is especially popular in the villages around Vidin but it was also registered in Oryahovo area, for example in the village of Sofronievo (Vaseva: 1998, p. 181).

The second oral version about the origin of the Wallachs supports the idea of the mixed nature of the population. According to this version, in each village there are local people as well as new-comers from Romania. This idea is especially popular in the villages around Oryahovo, where the kinship ties across the Danube are a common phenomenon. The practice of contracting mixed marriages in the region of Oryahovo proceeds to this day, while in the villages around Vidin only certain families or people are known for sure when they settled here and from which Romanian regions they came. These are mostly the villages around Bechet and Calafat in the close proximity of Vidin and Oryahovo. The Wallachs in Vidin region and especially in Oryahovo region have a clear idea of the mixed nature of the population, and that also refers to the Bulgarians living in the neighbourhood as they came to these lands from different places – from the Balkan Mountains, from the region of Bosilegrad, from Macedonia. Since most of the migrations have a common historical frame, the conviction that it is them who are the local population in that area has occurred among the both ethnic groups. This idea goes well with the highly popular in Romanian publications thesis that the Wallachs are descendants of an autochthon Romanized population, with succession of the inhabited for centuries territory south of the Danube (Vaseva: 1998, p. 181-182).

Today most of the researchers agree that the north-to-south migration across the Danube started in the second half of the 18th c and it was highly intensive during the first half of the 19th c. This continued migratory stream was caused by economic and political reasons: escape of entire groups of rural population because of the big landowners’ exploitation which increased to a great extent during the regime of the Phanariotes; escape from the obligatory military service which was introduced in Wallachia principality in 1831. The migration continued during 19th and the beginning of 20th c, especially in the region of Oryahovo and in Dobrudja (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 59).

4.3. Common language and culture

Language is the most clearly distinguishable sign of ethnical identity. The majority of the Wallachs from Vidin and Oryahovo regions define their language as “Wallachian” in conformity with the self-appellation of this ethnic group and they accept it as their mother tongue. And it is pointed out in the ethnic group as its cultural value, inherited from their forefathers and possessing an important role of sustaining the integrity of the ethnic group. They are aware of the fact that “the Wallachian” is a spoken language, but it is not standard and official and is not taught at school. The similarities and differences between it and the Romanian language are pointed out; the ignorance of the Romanian script is taken into account. The Wallachian speech in all towns and villages is the basic sign of self-determination and it marks the borders of the ethnic group both in ethno-cultural and territorial aspect (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 63), (Picture 5).



Picture 5: A Wallachian Shepherd from the Banat Territory Drawn by the Artist Auguste Raffet (Kaynak: <http://www.omda.bg/>)

The Romanian language is a standard of purity for the Wallachian one. The usual contacts with relatives, friends or business partners in Romania, as well as the fact that Romanian TV and radio are watched and listened to all over the Danube valley are the base for juxtaposition and corrective of the level of proficiency in the language. Among a large part of Wallachians knowledge of Romanian language - written and spoken, is grounds for pride, since it is recognized as a mark of higher cultural and educational literacy and of stronger ethnic identity (Karahasan Chinar: 2005, p. 63).

The existing among the Wallachian population oral versions about the origin of their language, are pretty similar to the versions and myths about the origin of the ethnic group itself. The version about the double migration across the river Danube in reference to the language sounds like this: *"We stole Romanian language during the Ottoman period."* The version about the mixed nature of the Wallachian population along the banks of the Danube reflects on the idea of the origin of the language too. *"People in the river valley of Danube have often been in contact with these Romanians, that's how they've learned this Wallachian language."* (Vaseva: 1995, p. 103).

According to the oral narratives of the Wallachs from Vidin and Oryahovo regions, in the years before the World War II the local authorities exerted pressure upon the Wallachian population and the things primarily attacked were the tokens of "otherness" – language, costume, folklore etc. *"We had a great fight with the state authorities about the language! They cut fur caps and tore shirts! Times were severe then ... they believed that they had to combat the Romanian language!"* The witnesses emphasize the fact that there were not such bans after 1944: *"At first there were a few prohibitions ...*

but we didn't have problems – to go to prison for speaking Wallachian ... then it wasn't interesting any more to forbid such things” (Nikolova and Rakshieva: 1995, p. 117).

Nowadays speaking Romanian in family environment is a process determined by age. While older Wallachs in family environment still speak Romanian (Wallachian) language, bilingualism is strongly expressed among the representatives of the middle generation, i.e. they speak both Romanian and Bulgarian language. Part of the youth and children understand and communicate in Wallachian in family environment. Another considerable part of them show negative attitude. They openly declare their unwillingness to communicate in Romanian (Wallachian) language and admit they cannot speak it. I.e. the voluntary cultural assimilation of younger Wallachs and their Bulgarianization is an irreversible process in their cultural life. These examples are an indication of the complicated and controversial course of the integration inter-ethnic processes in the macro-society. We can say in conclusion, that nowadays the bilingualism and double cultural identity continue to be typical of the whole Wallachian minority in Bulgaria (Vaseva: 1998, p. 183).

There was a Romanian college in Sofia, which was closed in 1948 due to the political situation. During the 30s of 20th c another school was active in Blagoevgrad but its destiny was even shorter. After a half-century suspension the Wallachs in Bulgaria already have their own school – in 1999, a specialized secondary school with intensive learning of Romanian language was established in Sofia under an agreement between Romania and Bulgaria, and the notable poet Mihai Eminescu was chosen to be the school's patron. Since 1999 the town of Vidin has hosted the International Folklore Festival of Wallachian and Romanian Song and Dance. The Association of the Wallachs in Bulgaria (AVB) and the community of young Romanians in Bulgaria (AVE) are the organizers of this festival. An ensemble for folk songs and dances “Apa Vie” (Life-giving Water) was established under the management of the association. Its director is Ivo Georgiev and he is a very good violin and trumpet performer. Apart from the festival, AVB organizes other cultural events too, including exhibitions in the field of art, ethnography, literature, photography etc. The organized museum collection of the Wallachian and Romanian style of living in the village of Borlovets (“Raducanu” museum) raises great interest; it is a result of the ideas and initiative of Lyudmil Rakucanu. In this museum one can see rare vessels, tools, textiles, paintings and other exhibits, which are inseparable from the history and culture of Wallachian ethnos (Karahasan-Chunar: 2005, p. 64-66).

In 1991 in the town of Vidin was registered the Association of Wallachs in Bulgaria (AVB). Its main goal is “identification of the ethnic self-awareness” through acquaintance, development and enrichment of historical and cultural heritage of the Wallachs. One of the demands of this ethnic association is that the Bulgarian government should provide education in Romanian mother tongue (Vaseva: 1998, p. 188). The Association of Wallachs in Bulgaria and its chairman Thomas Kjurkchiev work hard; they issue the newspaper “Timpul” (“Time”) and the articles in it are written both in Romanian and Bulgarian language. The association organizes summer school camps in Romania which conduct training in Romanian language. The same company has issued Wallachian-Bulgarian dictionary and a school aid in Wallachian. In 2000 was printed “History of Wallachs and their relations with Bulgarians” whose author is Thomas Kjurkchiev (Slaveykov: 2006, p. 132).

4.4. Collective self-portrait and self-determination

In their prevalent majority the ethnic community of Wallachs is characterized by a harmonious blend of Wallachian ethnic identity with Bulgarian citizenship identity. On the one hand Wallachs openly and sincerely declare a sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation and devotion to their motherland Bulgaria, and on the other hand Wallachs like the Romanian folklore and are positively disposed to Romanian culture and history. With gratitude and a sense of pride they tell about the bravery of Romanian soldiers, their participation in the liberation of Vidin region for which there are songs and myths. The Wallachian attitude towards Bulgarians is positive as a whole; their benevolent attitude towards mixed marriages today speaks for it. The Bulgarians on the other hand see Wallachs as part of the Bulgarian people, which has its own cultural characteristics – differences in speech and folklore on the first place, bigger piety, and different marital model. Despite these differences the Bulgarians consider Wallachs more kindred and closer to them than to Romanians. Today the Wallachian ethnic

group is integrated to a great extent into the Bulgarian nation as well as into Bulgarian culture and policy. Marriages between Bulgarians and Wallachs are a common thing and are preferred by both ethnic groups. They are not even considered as mixed marriages, as those with Gypsies and Turks. What also counts is the fact that Bulgarians consider Wallachs richer, that's why men are not troubled to live in the house of their parents-in-law in a Wallachian family (Vaseva: 1998, p. 185-187).

Wallachs have double appurtenance: from a territorial, political and civic point of view they know that they are part of Bulgaria and Bulgarian nation, but from an ethnic, spiritual and cultural point of view they feel bound through invisible threads to Romania and Romanians north of the Danube. When asked who they are, without a moment of hesitation they answer that they are Romanians; the Romanian language is considered a mother tongue, and the Bulgarian one – a language which is taught at school, i.e. the official state language (Karahasan-Chinar: 2005, p. 62).

Wallachs have a positive attitude towards most of their cultural, social and psychological characteristics. The positive image they have built up about themselves is not denuded of self-criticism, realism and credibility. Diligence is first in their scale of values. Wallachs think about the earth as rich and “golden”. It provides them with good incomes which stand at the base of Wallachians’ fabulous diligence and fortune. Nowadays the changed attitude towards labour is grounds for inter-generation problems and negativism inside the group and towards other ethnic groups as well. The Wallachian negativism toward Gypsies, for example, is due to their opinion about the Gypsies as lazy and thievish. Similar shades are also found in their attitude towards Romanians which the Wallachs along the Danube consider a poorer and lazier people, and their villages – slummy and slatternly. The judgement about diligence is also a base for an inter-group distinction: the Wallachs from the flat country around the Danube are pointed out as more industrious, wealthier and more enterprising, while the Wallachs from the hilly river valley of Timok (the highlanders) are more backward in their economic development and are therefore judged as “wild” and not so wealthy and cultural (Vaseva: 1998, p. 185).

Wallachs are Orthodox Christians; one of the spiritual guides of today – Patriarch Cyril (1901-1971) – is a Wallach by birth. Up to 1923 the public worship in Wallachian villages was officiated in Romanian language; later, their mother tongue was banned and the old bibles were collected and confiscated by force by the Bulgarian authorities; still in some separate places the liturgy is officiated in Romanian language. The word of the Lord reaches the hearts of Wallachs thanks to the efforts of such priests as Valentin Georgiev from the village of Rabrovo, father Nikolai from the village of Antimovo, and father Adrean Aleksandrov from the Romanian church “The Holy Trinity” in Sofia. The Orthodox Romanian church “The Holy Trinity” was built about a century ago; it was first started with donations from Romanian community in Bulgaria and finished later with funds from the Republic of Romania. With respect to its size and originality of the construction, this is one of the most remarkable churches which the Romanian patriarchate maintains abroad. The church is in the very centre of Sofia and during its 100 years of existence it managed to create good cultural and religious traditions as well as to attract the believers – Romanians, Wallachs, Aromanians, Bulgarians etc. (Karahasan-Chinar: 2005, p. 62).

5. CONCLUSION

Wallachs, Tsintsars, Aromanians and Kutsovlachs are the biggest Romanian minority groups living in the territory of today's Bulgaria. To this day there is still lack of a clear and explicit consensus between Balkan scientists about the origin and historical past of these minorities as well as about their denomination. Greek, Romanian, Serbian and Bulgarian researchers have approached this problem from different points of view – according to their historical and political aims and by reason of this the national geo-political interests have raised different historical and ethnographic versions of Wallachian problem. In this work Wallachs and their socio-cultural and geographical characteristics are viewed through the prism of Bulgarian scientists and researchers. That is to say that this work reflects only the official Bulgarian version of the problem. For instance, while the Romanian scientists stand up for the thesis that Romanians, Wallachs and Aromanians are one and the same ethnos, according to the

Bulgarian scientists they are different minorities living in Bulgaria. Some important conclusions that can be made at the end of this article are:

- ✓ Wallachians have double appurtenance: from a territorial, political and civic point of view they know that they are part of Bulgaria and Bulgarian nation, but from an ethnic, spiritual and cultural point of view they feel bound through invisible threads to Romania and Romanians north of the Danube. I.e. Wallachs are characterized by a harmonious blend of Wallachian ethnic identity with Bulgarian citizenship identity. On the one hand Wallachs openly and sincerely declare a sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation and devotion to their motherland Bulgaria, and on the other hand Wallachs like the Romanian folklore and are positively disposed to Romanian culture and history. The pejorative connotations which Bulgarians put in the denomination “Wallachs” is one of the main reasons the members of this minority, when out of their families or settlement, not to manifest their self-identity and hide their ethnic descent as well as the cultural signs of their ethnoses.
- ✓ According to their Bulgarian neighbours, Wallachs are more religious, more industrious, wealthier and more enterprising. Bulgarians consider Wallachs more kindred and closer to them than to Romanians. Marriages between Bulgarians and Wallachs are a common thing and are preferred by both ethnic groups. Tolerance and mutual respect are the main standards in the relationships between Wallachs and Bulgarians. However, despite these good neighbourly relations, sometimes there are ethno-social and ethno-cultural discrepancies although they hardly ever lead to negative treatment and discrimination. According to Hugh Paulton, during socialism Bulgarian Mohammedans, Turks and Gypsies, as well as Wallachians were put to assimilatory policy and compulsory Bulgarianization by the communist rulers and leaders.
- ✓ While in 1910 the total number of Romanian minorities in Bulgaria exceeded 96,000, in 2001 their number was 12,000. For a period of about one century a high decrease in number of Wallachs and Romanian-speaking minorities in Bulgaria can be observed. The main reasons for this decrease are: the low birth-rate and natural increase, the migrations abroad and the fast Bulgarianization of young generation. The voluntary cultural assimilation of younger Wallachs and their Bulgarianization is an irreversible process in their cultural life during the past years.

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