

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
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THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY STUDIES

**Ethnopolitics and International Relations:
The Aromanian Identity in a South-East European
Politic and Diplomatic Context**

DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

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The Introductory Chapter includes a brief presentation of the Aromanians' place and role in the history of the Romanian people, ranging from the earliest documentary evidence provided by Byzantine chroniclers to the political and ideological censorship imposed by the communist regime in Romania, with specific reference to public information and the involvement of the Romanian state in the protection of the ethnic and cultural identity of Romanians south of the Danube.

The relevance of my research topic is provided by the implications for national cohesion of the ethnic breakaway actions triggered by overemphasizing a series of cultural, linguistic or regional characteristics of Aromanians, which in fact are a part of the ethnic majority in Romania, according to the objective criteria of ethnicity and to their predominant self-identification.. The aforementioned implications can be outlined as follows:

- rewriting Romania's older and recent history;
- creating a model which is further used for the exaltation of particularisms, seeking to enhance regional divides within the national body, as well as the prospective centrifugal tendencies of regional identities;
- obstructing Romania's involvement at diplomatic level, with a view to supporting the akin historical communities living in Romania's neighborhood.

It is from the aforementioned specifications that the twofold motivation ensues, of the usefulness of my dissertation:

- the scientific motivation, through updating, corroborating and systematizing the existing information targeting a series of aspects of the Aromanian issue and through counterpoising several pseudo-scientific approaches which seriously question the ethno-genesis of the Romanian people, literally confiscating periods of its history.
- the institutional motivation, achieved through the completion of a product which is applicable and accessible enough for the political decision-making body, so that it can understand the identity issue which has been placed under scrutiny, as well as the initiation of a series of ensuing official measures. In the 2013-2016 Governing Programme, the objective number 8 covers the "Active defense and promotion of the rights of natural persons belonging to Romanian minorities/communities living in Romania's neighboring states, in strict accordance with European standards and, where applicable, in compliance with the EU accession political

criteria.” In keeping with Action Direction number 13, promoting and defending the identity and interests of Romanians living outside Romania’s borders is achieved through the full enforcement of Law 299/2007 on the support offered to Romanians around the world, amended through Law 176/2013.

Also, the “promotion of the national identity” is included among the national objectives laid out in the Country’s National Defense Strategy over 2014-2019. (ONS 19, I.1.3.22, p.9).

In my research I started off from **the hypothesis** whereby the identity phenomenon I studied and which academician Matilda Caragiu-Marioteanu labeled “*neoaromânism*” (*Neo-Armanism*), is not an expression of Aromanians’ efforts to suit their strive for ethnic survival to the realities of today’s world, but it is form of ethnic separatism/secessionism, according to the definition provided by C.H. Williams¹.

- accordingly, *Neo-Armanist* movement occurred as a revival movement which seeks to render the group its cultural identity as a formally independent entity;
- leaders of the above-mentioned movement are adamant in advocating the uniqueness of their community’s destiny and the contribution that community may bring to the common good of humankind and its civilization.
- founding the individual and group status on a prestigious mythical origin;
- the “historical” explanation of the tragic destiny of humankind;
- overemphasizing the relevance of the three criteria of cultural separation of a minority from the majority, as follows:
 - traditions and forms of organization, typical for the minority group (with the clear purpose of strengthening the barriers against the external environment, as distinct ways of exclusion and support for specific practices).
 - linguistic specificity - the claim that the “armâna” language (actually, Aromanian dialect of the Romanian language) should be introduced in public schools across Romania as a compulsory subject for the school population of Aromanian descent:
 - religion – the claim that an independent bishopric should be established and that the right should be granted for the divine service to be performed in the “Armana” language.

In full compliance with the work of Dr. Maria Koinova, a researcher with Warwick University, we considered that ethnic secessionism is an ethnopolitical instrument, in the basic sense of the concept of ethnopolitics as it was stated by Columbia University History and Political Sciences professor Joseph Rothschild, in 1981.

¹ Colin H. WILLIAMS, *Ethnic Separatism*, Cahiers de géographie du Québec, vol. 24, no. 61, 1980: 51 sqq.

... a process of mobilizing ethnicity from a psychological or cultural or social datum into political leverage for the purpose of altering or reinforcing...systems of structured inequality between and among ethnic categories. [In this process, ethnopoltics] stresses, ideologizes, reifies, modifies, and sometimes virtually re-creates the putatively distinctive and unique cultural heritages of the ethnic groups that it mobilizes ².

The fundamental tenet of my dissertation states that the identity phenomenon I studied, especially under the form I noticed in Romania, is not the outcome of a natural process of differentiation within Eastern Romance, but rather, the result of an ethnopoltical project which seeks to undermine Romanians' national cohesion and to create an artificial ethnic problem, against the backdrop provided by the clash in the 1970s and the 1980s of Western liberal democracies and the Eastern communist bloc. The Cold War ended 25 years ago, yet the *Neo-Armanist* project has been continued, having its present-day aftermath.

Against the present internal and regional backdrop, ethnopoltical forms of action can be placed under the category of asymmetric threats of an type as they were stipulated by the *Country's National Defense Strategy over 2014-2019*.

As the *Neo-Armanist* identity trend has emerged rather recently (in Romania, the first such organizations were established in 1990 and turned active with a separatist purpose in the years 2000) according to current research, the existing specialized bibliography in the field is not very rich.

For the present research, I first and foremost owe a great deal to several living Romanian scholars of Aromanian descent: Academician Matilda Caragiu-Marioteanu, Professor Nicolae Serban-Tanasoca, the Director of Romanian Academy's Institute for South-east European Studies, Professor Nicolae Saramandu, with Romanian Academy's „Al. Rosetti-I. Iordan” Linguistics Institute, Professor Stoica Lascu and Associate professor Nistor Bardu, both with “Ovidius” University in Constantza, as well as Professor Manuela Nevaci, also with Romanian Academy's „Al. Rosetti-I. Iordan” Linguistics Institute.

At various stages of their academic work and research, the above-mentioned scholars were directly involved in the debate over the fate of Aromanians living in Romania as well as outside the country's borders. In their research studies and articles, all of them provided the scientific groundwork for Aromanians' historical affiliation to the Romanian people. Furthermore, those scholars analyzed *Neo-Armanism*, some of them at a very early stage of this phenomenon. Built upon their scientific work, I carried the research further. The above-mentioned scholars have

² Joseph ROTHSCHILD, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1981: 2 sq., apud Gerd BAUMANN, *The Multicultural Riddle Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, Routledge, New York and London, 1999: 60 sq.

continued the line of academic probity which brings together the likes of George Murnu, Theodor Capidan, Tache Papahagi, Pericle Papahagi, Valeriu Papahagi, Victor Papacostea and others.

Alongside other groundbreaking contributions to the history of minorities in Romania, to identity theory and the sociology of international relations, which are fields of interest for my thesis, Professor Vasile Vese with the “Babes-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca highlighted key aspects of the separation mechanism between ethnic minorities and majorities, conceptually exploring identity boundaries as a pioneering field in Romanian research. Specifically, Professor Vese tackled the relationship between such categories as frontier/border/boundary, applied not only to the sphere of law or international relations, but also to the confessional, ethnic and linguistic areas.

The Director of the International Studies and Contemporary History Department with “Babeş-Bolyai” University’s Faculty of History and Philosophy, Professor Adrian Ivan provided essential works on the history of minority Law in Romania.

Dr. Emil Tarcomnicu with Romanian Academy’s “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnology and Folklore has provided contributions which are directly connected to the presentation of the neo-Aromanian activity. Added to that line of work are my own contributions to the field.

In Chapter III of my dissertation I extensively deal with foreign specialized literature. **As a personal contribution** included in this chapter, I mention the discussion of a series of Albanian sources, hitherto unused in Romanian research. Also **as an absolute first**, I used materials from archives belonging to several Aromanian organizations.

At this point in the abstract, I should like to highlight **the most relevant contribution of my dissertation**, which translates into a synthesis by means of which I sought to capture the complexity and scope of the ethno-political project I studied. Such a synthesis provides the baseline study for an assessment made from the standpoint of Romania’s national security interests.

While I set about writing my thesis, apart from my original contribution, I reviewed and capitalized on some of my older contributions, published in science and culture reviews, in Romanian or in foreign languages. As work on my dissertation was in progress, I reviewed some of the commentaries, views, and assessments I made in my previous contributions.

The approach of my topic is a functional and multidisciplinary one. To that end, I took up on identity and social representations theory, which I used to describe patterns of identity cleavage for the population group I studied. My line of research also included historical argumentation and discourse analysis, with specific reference to elements of law and elements of international relations theory, minority Law and so on.

I structured the argumentative material according to thematic and chronological principles, for Chapters I and II.

In keeping with the nature of my documentation, Chapter III was structured in country presentations, gradually provided according to internal evolutionary trends which are relevant for the Aromanian issue. The way I structured the material renders all those presentations their synoptic characteristic.

Chapter One of my dissertation includes an overview of the multi-dimensional (internal, regional, and international) and multi-layered approach (public communication and mass media, internal policy and non-governmental organizations, cultural, educational and religious institutions) by means of which the organizations belonging to the separatist movement I studied pursue their objectives. Also, we should mention that their line of action is grounded in program documents those organizations adopted in 2005 in Romania and in 2010 in Albania.

In **the second chapter** of my dissertation, diachrony is approached the other way round along the axis, in order to identify the sources the *Neo-Armanist* movement used in order to structure its ideology and take over its methods: groups of Aromanians who immigrated to the West during the communist regime, political and territorial projects dating from World War Two, fuelled by older claims Balkans states have laid against each other. Also, such methods include mythical geographies and folklorized histories, tailored to suit political interests, influences of some contemporary Western academic theories denying the fact that Aromanians, Dacian-Romanians, Megleno-Romanians and Istro-Romanians belong to a linguistic and ethnic *continuum* during the Proto-Romanian stage (the stage of the primitive Romanian, the common Romanian language) of the ethno-genesis of the Romanian people and language, on both sides of the Danube.

Chapter II also presents the activity of several forerunners of *Neo-Armanist* activism, as well as early reactions to that breakaway pattern that occurred within the Aromanian community in Romania.

The third chapter presents the stance of the relevant South-east European States (Greece, Albania, Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria) as regards the identity issue I placed under scrutiny in my work. Specifically, such a stance includes those countries' general policy targeting minorities and the type of action those states took as regards Aromanians living on their territory, against the backdrop of bilateral relations marred by interethnic issues.

The Conclusions of my dissertation provide a strategic and prospective assessment of the issue.

In proclaiming the status of regional people, with no kin state, Neo-Armanian leaders presumed the likelihood of capitalizing on a series of opportunities offered by an alleged weakening of the central

authority in nation-states. On a foreign policy level, that translates into conceding some of the sovereignty prerogatives to EU institutions, while internally, that pertains to decentralization.

Other South-east European states are facing similar problems: the Slavic-Macedonian minority activism in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Minority activism in the Republic of Macedonia. In the last decade, a trend of thought has begun to take shape in Kosovo, whereby the Albanians inhabiting that Albanian territorial and political entity allegedly developed a national identity which is different from that of the people from Albania.

Far from being a dialogue factor and a linking bridge just as its supporters present it, the *Neo-Armanist* movement provides a medium and long-term contribution to an increasing amount of suspicion among states, a degradation of relations between them and the disparagement of the international organizations supporting the above-mentioned identity phenomenon.

Such a negative role stems from the lack of real legitimacy and is enhanced through the action of other breakaway movements of the same category.

Some of the experts and political decision-makers of the interwar period viewed the immigration to Romania as the only solution to rescue some of the Aromanians. However, because of the course of action *Neo-Armanism* took at an internal, regional and international level, such an option could be now unaccomplishable: the alienation of Aromanians from Romania as regards Romanian-ness de-legitimizes our country's interest to protect the Aromanians' identity in the realm of their home countries, even if the affiliation to the Romanian cultural streak was personally and voluntarily assumed by the respective individuals, in keeping with Article 7 of Romanian Constitution and Law 299/2007.

Neo-Armanism is a form of ethnic fragmentation. Also, it is a treat of the asymmetrical type included in the Country's National Defense Strategy over 2014-2019.

The scope of the actions *Neo-Armanists* took at all authority levels, the state, the regional and European levels included, the resources at stake and the foreign support are parameters which contribute to the relevance of that kind of separatism from the perspective of Romania's foreign and security interests.