

## **Juridical and political aspects regarding the minority of the Armâns / Makedon-Armâns in Albania and how they enjoy all the rights granted by the European and international norms**

*by Yiani Mantsu*

### *Abstract*

The Armâns (Makedon-Armâns / Vlachs) – one of the oldest European people, autochthonous in the Balkans – have always been convinced that all people they have been living together with for centuries have to have the same rights, regardless of the differences in language, political or religious beliefs.

Living among other old European people autochthones in Balkans – with their common conscience for culture, language, traditions and faith which gives them the will to assert that they are part of the same people, were and are an example for coexistence with other people.

**Moscopolis** / Voskopoje (Albania) it's the place of symbolic value for this people with a unitary language, and whose traditions have deep roots in **the ancient Macedonian** heritage.

This stateless minority is an atypical minority in Europe and especially in the Balkans – the crossroads of cultures and peoples throughout history – where they have been living for centuries and have or enjoy different status in the national states of this region.

Taking into consideration the critical situation of the Armân (Makedon-Armân) language and culture, which have been present in the Balkans for thousands of years, but face today a serious risk of extinction, the Council of Europe adopted by the Assembly, on 24 June 1997, the **Recommendation 1333** on Armân (Aromanian) Language and Culture, the most important achievement for the Armâns ever. In order to prevent such a cultural loss for Europa, the Council of Europe encouraged, through this document, the Balkan states where the Armân people live, to support their language in the fields of education, religion and the media. The base document of the Recommendation 1333/1997 was the Doc. 7728, the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (Council of Europe), rapporteur Prof. Lluís Maria de Puig.

Due to different reasons, unfortunately, the Recommendation has not so far brought significant results. One of the problems is the fact that the Balkan States, which have supported the adoption of this document by the Council of Europe, did not make any steps to implement the Recommendation and, on the other hand, is the fact that mere

associations are not able to cover the fundamental needs in the various fields of the language and culture.

The Balkan countries have supported the adoption of this Recommendation and therefore, implicitly, recognized the existence of the Armân people and of its language and culture but now, 15 years later, unfortunately, one realizes that the Recommendation has not brought any positive changes for the Armâns, not even in Albania, and the year 2013 finds them in the same dangerous situation of extinction.

In order to assure coordination, collaboration and fulfillment of all initiatives contributing to the preservation and promotion of their language, traditions and cultural values, Armân communities from Balkan countries they live in as part of their historical motherland (such as Albania, Greece, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria), as well as Armân communities living in diaspora (such as Romania and other countries), established in October 2005 the **Makedon-Armân Council** which was registered as a legal entity with the Department of Justice in Tirana, Albania ([www.makedonarman-council.org](http://www.makedonarman-council.org)).

Since its establishment, the Makedon-Armân Council has organized a lot of events in the Balkan countries where the Armâns live (such as the Great Assembly in Voskopoje / Albania, in 2010 or the Great Assembly in Krushevo / Republic of Macedonia, in 2012, which brought together thousands of citizens of Makedon-Armân origins), organized a lot of cultural activities (in Albania, Greece, Romania, Republic of Macedonia) and attended international congresses, conferences, seminars and forums on minority issues.

In Europe, the Armâns offer an example worth to follow: loyal and respectful citizens of the states they live in, they wish their politically neutral status to be respected. They act as a unifying element in the cultural mosaic of South-Eastern Europe, enabling not only peace and stability but also a cooperative climate in this region. They are not subordinate to any so-called “motherland” / “kin-state” and they wish to preserve this status rigorously.

## **I. Brief historical view on Makedon-Armân people**

There is no other European people, not even in the Balkan area, known under so many names given by the peoples they have been living with for centuries or the peoples which wish to consider them as part of their own:

- the politicalized name “Aromân” used in Romania for about 120 years, was given by the Romanian government of that time and taken over by the European languages: Aromanian, Aroumain, Aromeno, Arumano, Aromune, etc.;
- the pejorative name “Çoban” (the meaning of shepherd, which indicates an original socio-professional specialization of a part of them) used in Albania, was given by the Albanian shepherds when they met the Armân shepherds in the mountains of Balkan area and later was taken over by the Albanian people itself;
- the very popular name “Makedon” or “Macedonean” used in Romania – name which identifies their native space;
- the name “Macedo-Român” (meaning Romanian from Macedonia – also a politicalized name) used more in Romania since the time of Romanian propaganda in the Balkan area, especially after the Second Balkan War (1912-1913);
- the name “Vlasi” (or “Cincar” / “Zinzar”) used in the former Yugoslavia and also today in Serbia and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a name which considerably makes confusion taking into account that a part of people with Romanian origin living in Serbia wishes to use this name as a self-definition, see Resolution 1632 adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- the name “Vlach” used mostly in Greece (“Vlleh” in Albania), still today and also in the old documents, different from the name “Wallach” which meant the people living in the northern side of the Danube (the present Romanians) – a name which also got a pejorative meaning;
- the name “Makedo-Romanen” used by the German scientists, is found also in “Die Makedo-Romanische Grammatik”, published 1813 in Vienna by Mihail Boiagi;

Due to these many names (exonyms) used to define this European stateless people and especially by using of the name “Vlach” / “Vlleh” / “Vlasi” – which could be met in many articles or reports published in the last years of the both century and at the

beginning of the new one, especially after the fall of communism – unfortunately prove beyond doubt the confusion which is always made by the Romanian people.

To define themselves, they use the name (endonym) “Armân” or “Makedon-Armân” as an international definition of them in the last time – a name which best identifies their native space, the ancient Macedonia.

The present Armân / Makedon-Armân predecessors were the Macedonians.

According to the continuity thesis about their origins, thesis which is supported by the most historians and linguistic scientists – excepting the Romanian linguistic scientists, the Armân / Makedon-Armân people descends directly from the Romanized population of ancient Macedonia, which had included at that time Thessaly and Epirus.

For the first time, in 168 BC and second time, twenty years later, 148 BC, when Macedonia was definitively conquered by the Romans and became a Roman Province (Provincia Macedonia), began the Romanizing process of this population, anyway about 275 years before Dacia (present Romania) was occupied by the Romans.

Macedonia, including Thessaly and Epirus, is the birth area of Makedon-Armân Language – one of the Latin-based languages in South-Eastern Europe, among Romanian, Meglen and Istrian languages – nowadays the mother tongue of over 1,5 mill. people.

Unfortunately, it is hard to understand how this Romance mother tongue of the Makedon-Armâns could have offered Romanians nationalists reasons to consider them as the part of their own people and their language as dialect of Romanian.

Also, through a kind of ethnic dissimulation, many authors writing about Armâns have shown a difficulty in distinguishing them from the Romanian nation.

Although the Armân language has a good number of similarities with Romanian, just like the other Romance languages, the same like the Germanic and the Slavic languages, it is necessary to point out that the language is not an exclusive criterion of affiliation of a people to a culture and even less to a nation.

The first document of Makedon-Armân language are the words “Torna, torna, fratre!” (Turn back, turn back, brother!), dating back to the year 587, the words can be found into the most important source from “the dark ages of Byzantium” which represents the chronicle of the monk Theophanes.

Just to talk about the old literature and the first writings in Makedon-Armân, is interesting to mention firstly, among a lot of religious writings, “The Liturgy Book” – found in Korçe / Albania, in 1939 by the scholar Ilo Mitke-Qafezezi – which dated from

the beginning of the 18-th century or even from an earlier date and it is the oldest church text existing in the mother tongue of Makedon-Armâns.

In order to cast sufficient light upon their history and to elucidate some points of view concerning the cultural history of one of the oldest people from Balkan area, especially for those “competent” people from State-government who describe the “Aromanians” – in their submitted State-Reports to Advisory Committee on the implementation of Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) – only as a “**livestock nomadic population**” (?), regardless of their own history, we consider it is essential to mention in this brief historical view on Makedon-Armâns, the main event that has marked this people in the last two centuries: **the cultural movement of Moscopole / Voskopoje-Albania**, the birthplace of the Makedon-Armân enlightenment.

Much has been written about this movement. Unfortunately no depth research work has been done on this European Balkan cultural phenomenon. What is the character of this movement? Is it only Greek, as the Greeks claim? How much of it was Makedon-Armân? – considering the fact that it was founded and developed by Makedon-Armâns. And more promising, it is to see in this movement an initial beginning of the European spirit in the Balkans. Just as Byzantium had not been only Greek, although Greek was the main language of writing, likewise, the cultural movement of Moscopole could not bear witness to only one culture. Moscopole gave birth to a multicultural movement. Here lived together Makedon-Armân, Greek, Albanian, and Slavic cultures. All academics were Makedon-Armâns though! They became aware of the need of communication, of a spiritual community of all the Balkan peoples. For this modern European Balkan spirit (ideal) Moscopole was highly praised by many foreign Western! In his work “*Untersuchungen über die Geschichte der östlichen europäischen Völker*”, Leipzig 1774, Johann Thunmann wrote that, “*everyone in the city spoke Armân, many also spoke Greek, the language used for commerce*”.

It is hard to understand why the important information on a minority – not even considered a national minority, but a linguistic minority – is totally hidden in most reports submitted by State-governments to European institutions.

After the Second Balkan War (1912), when Macedonia was divided and later, after the establishment of the national states at the beginning of 20-th century, the lifestyle of the Makedon-Armâns was totally disturbed by the political and social changes in the Balkans. The newly founded nation-states colonialized their territory and so the political borders became impermeable for them. This historical moment had and still has a lot of residual effects in contemporary politics, especially concerning the Makedon-Armân people.

The “Armân” subject was always a controversial subject between Greece and Romania. If someone asks the Romanian Academy, who are the Armâns, the answer will be simple and clear: part of the Romanian people.

If someone asks the Greek Academy, who are the Armâns, the answer will have the same simplicity and clearance: part of the Greek people.

Where is the truth? The answer is neither Greek, nor Romanian: the Makedon-Armâns are a people, different from any other Balkan people, with deep roots in the Ancient Macedonia.

Due to the nationalist Romanian Balkan policies competing with those of Greece, the Armâns themselves were split in a non-constructive conflict, between a pro-Romanian and a pro-Greek orientation, which led finally to an escalating violence as a reaction to Romanian propaganda activities by supporting a lot of ethnic schools on Greek territory – conforming with the agreements of Bucharest Treaty from 1913, after the Second Balkan War – in which the teaching first begun in their mother tongue and after a while changed to Romanian language. That’s exactly the same thing that Romania is trying today – after the fall of communism – to continue its nationalist Balkan propaganda activities, for a hundred years, the pre-communist pro-Romania movement among Balkan Armâns, especially in Albania, where Romania tries and hopes to make true its old dream, by all the means, to become the “motherland” or the “kin-state” of the Armân minority. Has the Romanian government changed its strategy by not mentioning the Armân question in Greece? Could be that an unofficial agreement between the two countries about the extinction of Armâns?

## **II. Some salient issues regarding the Armâns/Makedon-Armâns in Albania. Juridical and political aspects of rights granted by the European and international norms.**

In order to ensure, in the member States of the Council of Europe, the effective protection of national minorities and also an effective protection of the rights of those persons which belong to them, two important legally documents – the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) – have been adopted by the Council of Europe.

The Framework Convention is the first legally binding instrument meant to protect the national minorities. Its aim is to specify the legal principles which State-Parties should

respect, in order to ensure the protection of the national minorities, within the legal order.

According to its fundamental concept, State-Parties are determined to implement the principles set out in the Framework Convention through national legislation and appropriate governmental policies and – in conformity with the instructions of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers – have the duty to submit, in regular periods, State-Reports on implementation of Framework Convention.

Albania signed June 1995 the FCNM, which was ratified four years later, June 1999, by the Assembly of the Republic of Albania with the Law 8496 (came to effect on January 2000) and submitted the first State-Report in 2001.

In this first State-Report the minority of Armâns / Aromanians was described as a “**livestock nomadic population**”.

Unthinkable this limited information which seems to be a rather **discriminating treatment**, or an attempt to **marginalization** of this minority or, simply said, a willful confusion, and that, in a State-Report sent to an European institution! It is true that a part of them, long time ago, preserved their socio-professional identity and continued to practice **transhumant pastoralism**, which has nothing to do with nomadism. The Makedon-Armâns have never been a homeless people.

Did not the designated competent rapporteurs have enough information in order to be capable for a short historical view about this minority, ignoring totally the history of Moschopolis (Albanian “Voskopoje”), the birthplace of the Makedon-Armân enlightenment and the major city in the Balkans during the 18-th century, counting ca. 60.000 to 70.000 inhabitants, most of them Makedon-Armâns?

It is also to mention that, exactly 200 years ago, in 1813, in Vienna was published by the Makedon-Armân Michael Bojadjchi – **the first Modern Grammar in the Balkans**, written in Makedon-Armân language and in two other languages, Greek and German language – an “official document of a language of a European people”, even though it is a “livestock nomadic” one, which also gave a lot of personalities for the Albanian nation.

Analyzing all submitted Albanian State-Reports, the opinions of the FCNM Advisory Committee and the comments of Albanian-government on these opinions, we wish to focus this analyze on three salient juridical and political aspects with regard to the Armâns / Makedon-Armâns minority, expressed in these reports: **national and linguistic minorities**, **minority language education** and **census on minorities**.

## **1. National minority and linguistic minority**

After World War II, when South Serbia – the Serbian small gain after Macedonia was divided (after Second Balkan War and Bucharest Treaty, 1913) – received suddenly the name “Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” within the territory Yugoslavia and its Slavic population received suddenly the name “Macedonians” – the Albanian communist regime at that time, in order to play the role as an exemplary defender of the national minorities within its territory in conformity with the provisions of the peace treaties reached after World War I, pursued a favorite policy for the national minorities in Albania, for the Greek and so called “Macedonian” minorities.

Analyzing all three State-Reports submitted to FCNM by Albanian authorities, on July 2001, May 2007 and January 2011, it should be good to notice that Albanian authorities make a strict difference between national minorities and linguistic minorities and apply different treatment by more involving and taking more care on a national minority than on a linguistic minority, even if a linguistic minority could surpass in number a national minority.

It is also good to point out that this fact could be a reason for discriminating or marginalization of a non-recognized linguistic minority as a national minority, caused only by the simple fact of a non-existence of the “kin-state” or “motherland” for a linguistic minority, as the Albanian Armân minority is. This discrimination is also clearly expressed in the Albanian government comments on FCNM Advisory Committee opinion.

The classification of all Albanian minorities into (i) national minorities and (ii) linguistic minorities leads implicitly to a different treatment in enjoying of certain rights by persons belonging each of these linguistic minorities, especially in the fields of media and education. The related measures in all submitted State-Reports, in fields of media, education, etc., refer mostly to national minorities.

Although, indeed, there is no Albanian legislation which could allow or not reject the appearance of this fact and, notwithstanding the many democratic changes in this country, Albanian authorities continue to apply favorite policies for the recognized national minorities, like former communist regime before did. That may lead to a total assimilation of this minority, if we take into consideration the following statements made in its State-Reports submitted by the Albanian authorities with regard on Armân minority:

*“...whereas the younger generation in cities speak this language very little, not to say at all, clearly proving that the Aromanians have reached a certain level of their integration into the local majority people...”*



*“...most of them in our country do not distinguish themselves from the rest of the population... they do not present the question of treating them as national minority. They are integrated to such an extent in the life of the country that it can be said that it is difficult to distinguish the dividing border with the rest of the population. Their integration in the bosom of Albanian society has reached such an extent that it cannot be treated as minority but as a constituent part of the population...”*

Or, does not this integration mean the extinction of their mother tongue? Did not this so called “integration”, or “road of modernization” is going to become a “road of assimilation” for this minority?

The refuse of the Albanian authorities to grant them the status of national minority is based on the assumption that they have no “motherland” or “kin-state” or based on the above reported statement:

*“they do not present the question of treating them as national minority”.*

Indeed, they do not have any “kin-state” and are not subordinate to any Balkan state, wishing to preserve this status rigorously. They have their own language and culture and have no ethnic ties to any other Balkan people which are majority in their states and are also explicitly against a paternalistic stand, like that official expressed recently by the Romanian president at the last visit in Albania and during the winter session of Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council on January 2011 or, recently, also expressed by Balkan nationalist circles.

Indeed, they have not a “mother-state”, but they have a historical “motherland” – Macedonia, before this was divided, 1913 after the Second Balkan War – it is the common historical “motherland” of all Makedon-Armâns living in Balkan established national-states – Albania, Bulgaria, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, the space of ancient Macedonia, the native space where they have their own multi-millenary habitat.

In Albania, they represent in fact a **traditional national minority**, an **autochthonous minority**, a status “de facto” which can become a status “de jure” they merit – an important issue for reaching a consensus on the definition of the term “national minority”, an issue which has to be re-examined and be taken into consideration by the Albanian authorities.

## 2. Minority language education

After the fall of communism, the change in the political systems in Southeastern-Europe together with human right changes in all of Europe and even the whole world brought about the freedom of assertion and promotion of the identity of each people.

Therefore the largest part of Makedon-Armân nation understands its uniqueness and proclaims itself as a people belonging historically and culturally to a definite region with its own well-settled cultural features and at the same time aware of its own identity and differences with relation to others with whom they share the native space.

Considering the fact that every Armân living in Albania is naturally bilingual and exercises dual ethno-cultural identity, the Armân identity should be acknowledged and granted the necessary rights proper to a national minority: **education for their children also in their own language and for their own culture, within the public system and within the Monday-through-Friday educational time in the credit system, as an immediate solution.**

The danger of extinction, which the Armân language and culture is confronted with, was brought to the attention of the Council of Europe, who, in 1997, following up a report presented by the Spanish Member of Parliament Lluís Maria de Puig, approved the Recommendation no. 1333. This one proposes actions that governments should take wherever the Armâns live, also in Albania, in order to prevent the imminent disappearance of their language and culture. Albania has supported the adoption of this Recommendation and therefore implicitly recognized the existence of the Armân people, of its language and culture. Now, over 15 years later, we realize, with disappointment, that the Recommendation no. 1333 of The Council of Europe has not brought any positive changes for the Armâns in Albania, and the year 2013 finds them in the same dangerous situation of getting extinct as a culture and language.

The lack of reaction to the several requests for dialogue-meetings, on issues regarding education in mother tongue, made to the Albanian government by the Makedon-Armân Council, makes us believe that there is no proper information about the Armân realities and, as a result, the Albania government continues to exercise a policy lacking clear-mindedness and openness to the future.

Albania's refusal to grant the Armâns in Albania the status of "national minority" which will give them same rights in fact as the recognized national minorities already enjoy, proves lack of tolerance from the part of its authorities and lack of political vision towards its minorities, which comes in contradiction with the new European requirements.

It is indeed not understandable the responsibility of the Albanian authorities for this really critical situation which the language and culture of this almost ignored minority is confronted with. Even in regions of Albanian territory, rather populated by the Armâns, for example Korçe district, populated by over 15.000 Armâns – just to mention one of many districts, cities or villages populated by Armâns – no attention is paid for

the most concerning problems, **the lack of support to their language in the fields of education, religion and the media** (Radio, TV, etc.).

Merely Albanian government reported to Advisory Committee of FCNM the following: “... *Albanian state undoubtedly should take measures and encourage the preservation of these features. It is not easy for Albanian Government to realise the return of the historical assimilating processes happened in centuries, but anyhow it supports the remaining elements of their linguistic identity, e.g., the Ministry of Culture, based on recommendation 1333 of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, supports the activity of some Aromanian folk groups in Korça city*”.

If we are talking about the Recommendation 1333, than, merely supporting the activities of some folk groups does not mean supporting, particularly, in the following fields: education in their mother tongue, religious services in their mother tongue, newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes in their mother tongue – as mentioned into Recommendation 1333.

With other words, concerning the safeguarding their language, a lot of things have still to be done by the Albanian authorities.

Instead of this, Albanian authorities opens a “free line” for Romanian authorities who wish to impose its will and take steps with a view to making possible the recognition of the **status of Romanian minority to the Armâns from Albania(?)**.

Following its nationalist Balkan propaganda activities, practiced beginning with the period after the Second Balkan War, Romania – now after the fall of communism, retakes these activities and makes efforts to build and maintain centers of support in Albania (ex. the new created pro-Romania party in February 2012, “Alliance for European Equality and Justice”) through which tries to extend its political influence in this area and shows its offensive position through some of its organisms or some ultra-nationalist circles by supporting of activities in fields of education, religion or media for Armâns, not in their mother tongue but on the contrary, in Romanian language.

We express our concern and alertness to this undertaking, considering it a dangerous violation of the constitutional right of expression of someone’s own identity.

### 3. **Census on minorities**

The census on minorities enables the persons belonging to national or ethnic minorities to assert their ethnic identity.

To have a fair census on minorities is an essential right in any democracy. A fair census could be considered to be the most important feature for the national or ethnic-linguistic

minorities and leads to the interests of them in fields of education in their native language.

The statistical data on minorities is also a determinant factor for the monitoring and the design of policies in the relation to national and ethnic-linguistic minorities.

After the democratic changes in Albania, the percentage of national minorities (including also the ethnic-linguistic minorities) given by the Albanian authorities – based on data from LSMS (Living Standard Measurement Survey), was estimated at 1,4 percent – the most surprising result Albania could deliver.

A number of possible factors could have undoubtedly contributed on the result of the last census on minorities:

- In general, the media has not paid enough attention to inform the minorities and to give advises;
- Various information tools, such as newspapers and radio-television operators, were not available;
- Training of persons belonging to minority groups, about the methodology and technical methods of the census process was totally missing;
- More opportunity for persons belonging to minority groups to receive a lot of information on census in their own language;
- Concrete measures for the information of minorities on census were missing;
- Insufficient measures which had been undertaken to prevent manipulation of census on minorities;
- Responsible authorities on census on minorities did not cooperate with minority associations;
- The State Committee for Minorities (established in March 2004) was not itself enough involved;
- in order to allow the persons belonging to minority groups to assert their ethnic identity through the census;
- Preparation of persons belonging to minority groups in order to be self involved in census activities was missing.

At the last census in 2001 were reported only three – four thousands Armâns living in Albania.

Many authors and researchers, after repeated travels through Balkans, estimate a number of over 200,000 (two hundred thousand) Armâns (Makedon-Armâns) living in Albania. The number estimated by the Armân associations of Albania, surpasses 300,000 (three hundred thousand), that means about 10,0 of Albanian population. This figure surpasses even the largest national minority in Albania, the Greek minority. From the national Greek point of view, Religion – the Greek Orthodox religion – is an important criterion to consider the Albanian Orthodox Armâns as part of Greek minority, therefore the figure given by the Greek official statistics of Greeks in Albania is even more than three hundred thousand.

In spite of the unrealistic figures of the results of census on minorities, although the census results undoubtedly play an important role and therefore are very necessary, the result of census **could be best supplemented by rigorous studies on minorities.**

### **III. Conclusions**

Always, when we talk about minority rights and about the monitoring and mechanisms for the protection of minorities, it is easier to understand, that **a lot of things have still to be done.** A clear State-Parties minority policy is necessary, more than even.

The regular reports which are prepared and submitted to the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, **do not contain enough substance** and do mostly not reflect the real existing problems of the national or ethnic-linguistic minorities.

It is indeed to appreciate each of the both legally Council of Europe documents, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) – although insufficient for a clear and real protection of minorities – which constitutes only a passive minority protection. **An active approach, that is what minorities have been waiting for.** A social cohesion based only on economic development could not solve all minorities problems.

In Albania, the Makedon-Armâns, represent in fact an **autochthonous minority**, a status “de facto” which can become a status “de jure” they merit – an important issue for reaching a consensus on the definition of the term “national minority”, an issue which has **to be re-examined and be taken into consideration by the Albanian authorities.**

The natural need of a human being to assert and exercise freely their ethnic identity, without restrictions, means to the Makedon-Armâns, a guarantee of a better understanding of common values that they share with the majority among whom they live, **but not by melting into their host nation** and become “**the best Albanians**”, “**the best Greeks**”, “**the best Romanians**”, “**the best Bulgarians**”, etc.

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