For my doctoral thesis “Ethnicity and distribution of the Aromanians in Southeast Europe” I studied the question if the Aromanians (also Aroumanians, Aromunians, Cincars, Kutsovlachs, Macedoromanians) can be defined today as a uniform group, if they form subgroups and in what aspects they differ. For this purpose I made a detailed list of Aromanian settlements and a survey of the reasons for their present distribution. Further, narrative interviews with socio-geographical and ethnological methods were made (on methodology see Kahl 1999: 7–13). This paper, written three years after the empirical study, summarizes some of the results and adds recent developments.
Balkan states, led to further divisions. Also the divisions between rural and urban
groups, with the traditionalism and backwardness of the former, the greater
progressiveness of the latter, and the completely different form of their settlements
and ways of life, functioned as dividing elements. Because of the widely dispersed
settlements as a result of their historical and socio-economic way of life, the
Aromanians live on the perimeter of people of other ethnic origins and thus merge
with these, which leads to either a form of dual identity or complete assimilation.

From the roots of Aromanian identity to the “Aromanian Question”

The emergence of a consciousness that can be called national – whether Greek,
Romanian or specifically Aromanian – probably did not exist among the
Aromanians before the beginning of the national movements of southeast European
peoples in the early 19th century. In the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, orthodox
Christians defined themselves, regardless of language and culture, as Romans (in
Greek Romêi, later Romi; in Latin Romani, later Români and Armâni). Before
Aromanians began to develop their own ethnic consciousness or to orientate
themselves to other peoples and their national movements, the most important
aspects of identification were their belonging to a “millet” (orthodox Christians)
and, second, to a professional group (shepherds, artisan, dealers etc.); belong-
ing to Romêi, Români or Armâni was secondary, and terms like “nation” were not
known at all.

Because of their traditional cattle-breeding and because of persecutions in their
urbanized settlements, the distribution of Aromanians is very scattered. Neither
spatially nor in their self-understanding could they ever form a coherent group.
When at the beginning of the 19th century an Aromanian movement emerged,
large numbers of Aromanians were already assimilated in various regions or were
in a state of assimilation. Thus we have to distinguish between a “national
Aromanian movement” on the one hand and their participation in the national
movements of their neighbour peoples on the other hand.

The most common orientations were and still are pro-Greek and pro-Roma-
nian. The words “graecoman” and “romanizing” used in southeast European
languages carry pejorative meanings (and should be avoided). The Greek-Roma-
nian conflict on the “Aromanian question” split the Aromanians into different
factions, into those belonging to the Romanian, those belonging to the Greek and
those belonging purely to the Aromanian. Even today this conflict is ingrained in
the question of their identity, their position as a minority and their political and
cultural orientation.

Since the Aromanians belonged to the Greek patriarchate of Constantinople and
their cultural and economic activities were bound to the Greek church (Peyfuss
1970: 338), the wealthy urbanized Aromanians have been especially active as
representatives of the Greek language and distributors of Greek culture for a long
time. Already in the 17th and 18th centuries Greek was the most important language of communication in most of southeast Europe. Among many non-Greek-speaking ethnic groups (Bulgarians, Albanians, Vlachs, Jews) Greek functioned as a lingua franca (cf. Konstantakopúlu 1988: 11). The first documents in Aromanian were written in the Greek alphabet and were not intended to teach Aromanian, but to spread the Greek language (Konstantakopúlu 1988: 13), e.g. the dictionaries of Theódoros Kavalliótis (1770) and Daniîl Moschopolítis (1802). It was characteristic that in Voskopoja (Moschópolis) neither Vlach schools nor an Aromanian printing shop were established, but the Greek Néa Akadémía (14th century) and a Greek language typography (Hetzer 1982). Persons like Kosmás the Aetolian (1714–1779), Neóftos Dúkas (1762–1845), Konstantínos Kúmas (1777–1836), Metropolit Ioanníkios (1815–1854), and Dárvaris (1798) struggled for the diffusion of the Greek language among the Aromanians (Peyfuss 1970: 340).

These first activists influenced the development of Aromanian self-awareness. At the same time many other peoples in the Balkans were also in the initial phase of their national awakening. The success of the Greek language with the Aromanians was not only caused by a few persons struggling for Greek culture, but mostly by increasing contacts with Greek neighbours and by the fact that Greek was the most important commercial language. A lot of compact settlements in Central Greece, e.g. near Agrínio and Lamía, were Hellenized without the influence of political or church activists. The development of a specific Aromanian identity can be observed particularly in the early Aromanian diaspora. Especially some Aromanian grammars and language booklets document a clear awareness of the Latin base of Aromanian and were intended for other purposes than books published in Moschópolis, e.g. the works of Konstantínos Ukútas (1797), George C. Rosa (1808) or Mihail Bojadschi or Boiagi (1813). At the same time (1815), the Aromanians of Buda and Pest asked permission to use their language in orthodox liturgy. In fear of reactions from the patriarchate of Constantinople, the metropolit neglected this request. Peyfuss (1974: 21) characterizes the Aromanian movement as a "national movement typical for the 19th century". In the 1860s, soon after the establishment of the Romanian state, the Romanian national movement and its extensive educational policy in Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus began to influence Aromanian activities. Since then Aromanian activities were automatically bound to Romania. The awareness of Latin base, which spread in the (Daco)romanian population, had an influence on the Aromanian world, although with some delay and fewer consequences.

Any attempt to establish independent Aromanian churches or schools was handled like a scandal by the Greek patriarchate (Miron 1978: 136; Konstantakopúlu 1988: 45). Although the patriarchate in 1879 permitted the use of Romanian church books by Aromanians, most of the clergy did not accept Aromanian as a church language (Miron 1978: 136 f., Demírtaş-Coşkun 2001: 58).
After the establishment of a Macedo-romanian committee in 1860 in Bucharest, Romanian scouts such as Bolintineanu travelled through Epirus and Macedonia (s. Bolintineanu 1863; Chatzópulos 1982). Romania began to train teachers for Macedonia and appointed Apostol Márgárit (in Greek Apóstolos Margarítis, born 1832 in Avdélia) as supervisor of the Romanian schools. 1864 the first Romanian (“Aromanian”) school was established in Macedonia in the village of Trnovo. Other Romanian schools followed suit, and at the beginning of the 20th century there already existed 100 Romanian churches, 106 Romanian schools with more than 4,000 pupils and 300 teachers in Macedonia and Epirus². But the number of pupils at Romanian schools was moderate, because only basic instruction was given in Aromanian, while most lessons were in Romanian. Since 1865 there existed a Macedo-romanian school in Bucharest, and in 1887 first school books in Aromanian were used (Bratter 1907: 59). Somewhat later the first Aromanian text books with patriotic Aromanian poems came out. “Dimândare părintească” (“parental admonition”) by Belemace (also Belimace) of 1888 became the best-known poem. It developed into something like the anthem of the nationally oriented Aromanians. In the poem, parents who do not teach their children the Aromanian language are cursed forever (text see Kahl 1999: 155).

Aromanian patriots such as Apostol Márgárit, originally a Greek teacher, and Constantin Belemace from Malovište show that most active participants of the Romanian movement were not Romanians, but Aromanians³. I suggest that the described movements be characterized as Aromanian-Romanian (or Vlach-Romanian, as does Adanur 1979: 220).

The Aromanian-Romanian movement culminated in the recognition of the Aromanians by a decree (“irade”) as “Ullah millet” (“Vlach millet”, often interpreted as “Aromanian nation”). With the support of the Great Powers, prominently by Austria-Hungary, on May 22, 1905, they were granted by Sultan Abdul Hamid of the Ottoman Empire the right to establish their own churches as well as educate themselves (see Bossy 1959). The Greek-Romanian conflict reached its climax in the last and most violent phase of the Macedonian Struggles (1910–1913) when most Aromanian groups fought on pro-patriarchate side, while others took sides with the pro-Bulgarian exarchists. The confrontation between differently oriented Aromanians led to bloodshed⁴. The growing tension between the different groups in 1906 led to the breaking-off of diplomatic relations between Romania and Greece (Bratter 1907: 101). Since then the “Ullah millet” is called

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³ On Márgárit see Capidan 1942: 232 ff.; concerning his intentions see Avérolf 1992 and Peyfuss 1974; of Belemace there is an autobiography: Belemace 1990.
“Romanian minority”, and the Aromanians were no longer divided into pro-Greek and pro-Romanian, but into Greek (Neo-Hellenes) and Romanian.

With the peace of Bucharest in 1913 Romania did not seem to be interested anymore in the Aromanians. Romania’s reasons for a renewed intensive school policy in the 1920s are to be found particularly in Romania’s problems with its non-Romanian population. Romanians paid special attention to helping the Aromanians to feel like “Macedonian brothers” of the Romanians – with the purpose of using them for the stabilization of the Romanian element in the southern Dobrudja. This development caused a strong emigration to Romania in 1925 from all countries with an Aromanian population.

A new form of orientation began in 1917, when Italian troops moved through Albania into Epirus (Zdrulla 1929: 162 ff.). Italy made attempts to convert the pro-Romanian into pro-Italian Aromanians, a policy that succeeded only marginally (see Diváni 1996: 196, 205, Papagiánnis 1998: 21–32). Pro-Greek orientations were the strongest; already Weigand reported that most Aromanians were not only “indifferent” but even showed hostility to their own national movement (Weigand 1897: 54).

The contribution of Aromanians to the national history of the Balkan peoples

Asking for the reasons that prevented the formation of Aromanian nationhood we have to first stress their participation in the nation building of their neighbours. They may have been less successful in achieving nationhood for themselves, but they were quite successful in furthering that of other Balkan peoples. Economically and politically Aromanians had the possibility to develop their own nationhood, but the high level of spatial dispersion and ethnic intermixing were obstacles to their own national aspirations.

Within Aromanian society there were very large discrepancies with regard to education and wealth. Aromanians who had economic success as tradesmen or caravan people usually assimilated very fast into other nations, while the many semi-nomadic Aromanian shepherds and peasants as a lower class of their ethnic society were slow in developing a national elite. Thus the most powerful Aromanian elites who had the possibility to be a crucial element in the promotion and dissemination of a national consciousness preferred to engage in various other national movements, and tended to play key roles in the nation-building of other ethnic groups than their own. The “irade” which founded a coherent administrative “Ullah millet” encouraged Vlach identity in the Ottoman Empire of the early 20th century, but it did not result in the creation of a widespread Aromanian national consciousness. In other words, the “irade” came too late to help build an Aromanian nation. The assimilation of the upper class and their involvement in
other national movements were already too advanced. Not even the support of
their “relatives” in Romania furthered their unification, because most Aromanians
did not consider Romania as a patron. Even their attitudes towards the Ottomans
varied a lot. Vlachs often acted as guides for Ottoman forces (Werner 1966: 476,
Poulton 1995: 61), but on the other hand many Aromanians were fighters against
the Ottomans. A typical example of different orientations within the same popula-
don are the Aromanians of Thessaly after the Greco-Turkish war in 1881. On the
one hand they petitioned the powers to place them under Ottoman and not Greek
rule (see Eliot 1965 = Odysseus 1900: 370–379) and to make their district a
Turkish province (p. 310), on the other hand groups fought for a better life on
Greek territory like the inhabitants of the Aromanian village Kutsúflíani who
moved over to the Greek part with all their belongings (see Dietrich et al. 2001).

National historians of the Balkan states like to point to the Aromanians as “the
best Greeks”, “the best Macedonians”, “the best Albanians” etc. Their identity,
culture and way of life has never been in conflict with the culture of the majority.
Thus they became part of the Balkan bourgeoisie while participating in national
movements and promoting their respective host states. By integrating into, or
identifying with, the host nation and taking part in its development they chose not
only a way of assimilation, but also an early way of modernization.

Many national heroes referred to in national historiography are known as
having been Aromanians. Examples in Greek history are such fighters for inde-
pendence as Georgákis Olýmpios, the well-known mæcenæs Baron Georgios Sinas
and Simon Sinas, the politicians Ioannis Kolettis (minister and prime minister),
Spyridon Lambros (historian and politician), patriarch Athenagoras or Evangelos
Averof Tositsas (minister of foreign affairs). In Albania, the famous Frasheri
Brothers are considered as important figures of the Albanian national movement.
In what is now the Republic of Macedonia, Pitu Guli (1865–1903) fought together
with the Macedonian Bulgars in the battle of Ilinden in 1903. Even the brothers
Miladinovi were of partly Aromanian origin, their maternal grandfather had
migrated from Voskopoja/Moschópolis and was a priest near Bitola (Društvó za
nauka 2002). Examples of well-known Aromanians in Romania are Moga, Şaguna
and other orthodox metropolites who participated in the struggle for Romanian
culture and orthodoxy in Transylvania. A large number of Aromanians can also be
found among well-known personalities of present southeast European countries.

These features of Aromanian identity have probably been the reason for
Nicolau (1993) to call the Aromanians “les cameleons des Balkans”, which caused
Balamaci (1995) to say that the Aromanians were “born to assimilate”, and
Gavrilović (1998: 2) that their identity is “able to melt with Greek, Serbian,
Bulgarian, Christian-Albanian or Romanian identity”. Exactly this “chameleon”
flexibility of identities made the Aromanians not only one of the most polyglot
groups in southeast Europe but also an economically and politically very strong
one. Their diffusion and their different states of assimilation are the most impor-
tant causes for the great variety of their types of identification which make them a very heterogeneous group in regard to their ethnicity.

**Present tendencies in Aromanian identity**

While the Aromanian tradesmen and craftsmen were incorporated into Greek culture, due to their urban way of life and their continuing contact with the Greeks, those Aromanians whose forefathers were engaged in agriculture have a tendency towards assimilation, above all by Slavs. Aromanians who engaged in a pastoral life represent the most closed societies and have retained their specific Aromanian identity and the best knowledge of their language and culture.

Today, the Aromanians have managed to reconcile the peculiarities of their ethnicity with the national identities in their host states, but have never forgotten their separate Aromanian *phyletic, co-national* consciousness. Today most Aromanians in the Republic of Macedonia, in Albania, Bulgaria, and Australia, but not in Greece or Greek diaspora places, have adopted May 22 as the National Day of the Aromanians.

The following types of identification can be determined:

1. **Purely Aromanian**

   Purely Aromanian types of identity survived predominantly in south Slavic settings, e.g. in the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. In Albania a large number of them consider themselves to be a coherent people. In Romania the groups which immigrated in 1940 have preserved their Aromanian identity while earlier immigrated Aromanians were mostly assimilated. Aromanians who stress their separate Aromanian identity usually dissociate themselves from any affiliation with another nation. In Greece, most of their groups live in Véria, in the Grevená area, and in Athens, in Albania in the southwest of the country, and in the Republic of Macedonia mostly east of the Vardar River. In some cases an Aromanian identity survives even if no Aromanian is spoken, e.g. among the Cincars of Serbia.

2. **Greek, Hellenic (called "grecoman" in most Balkan languages)**

   Today large Aromanian groups identify with the Greek culture and nation. Outside Greece many Aromanians in southern Albania have a Greek identity which was enforced in the last years in hope of economic advantages from closer relations with Greece. Beyond this, pro-Greek oriented families and individuals can be found in many towns and cities all over southeast Europe. Most Greek oriented persons emphasize their distance from Romanian culture.
3. **Romanian, Romanophile (called also “rumanizon”, especially in Greece)**
The strongest orientation towards the Romanian culture and nation can be found among the Aromanians in Romania. But a pro-Romanian orientation can also be found outside of Romania, predominantly in places where there were Romanian schools. Most Romanian oriented persons dissociate themselves far from Greek culture and consider themselves to be a part of the Romanian people speaking a Romanian dialect.

4. **Identification with other Balkan nations**
While the identification with the Greek and Romanian nation and culture is not limited to the states of Greece and Romania, the identification with Albanians, Slavo-macedonians, Serbs or Bulgarians can only be found in the pertinent countries.

5. **Local**
A large number of the informants stressed local identities. The Aromanian descent seemed to be less important to them and was even denied by some.

6. **Indifference**
Only a very small part of the interviewed persons displayed indifference towards their Aromanian origin.

7. **Double identities**
A large number of my informants had double identities or transitional forms between those described above.

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**The situation in the Balkan countries concerning Aromanian identity and activities**

In Aromanian groups all over southeast Europe, Aromanian education had come to a halt for decades, but since the 1980s a wave of activities (organisations, magazines, education, language courses, liturgies etc.) can be observed.

On June 15, 1999, the Council of Europe adopted recommendation 1333 (1997) on Aromanian culture and language, according to which the Balkan countries with Aromanian populations were encouraged to ratify the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and to support the Aromanians in terms of education in their mother tongue, religious services, newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes in Aromanian, and support for their cultural associations. In the following I will present some observations on how Aromanian groups have worked towards these goals.
1. Greece

The Lausanne convention of 1923 mentioned between 150,000 and 200,000 Vlachs in Greece. The last national census which differentiated between the orthodox ethnic groups showed 26,750 Vlachs living in Greece in 1940 and 22,736 in 1951. Estimates by Aromanian nationalists living in Greece of present numbers are as high as 600,000. If one takes into account all those who consider themselves to be Armăni, Râmășî or Vlași (Aromanian) and who at least understand the language, we should perhaps speak of max. 300,000 Aromanians in Greece, with a number of fluent speakers not above 100,000. The spatial concentration of Aromanians in Greece is in the Pindos mountains, its ridges and the surrounding plains in Epirus, Thessaly, and Macedonia, the Vermion mountains and Mount Olympus. The Meglenite Vlachs living in central (Greek) Macedonia number no more than 4,000 people.

Through their numerous patrons, national heroes, politicians, intellectuals, and clergy, the Aromanians have greatly contributed to the history and cultural development of Greece (see Papathanasiu 1994). This role in the history of Greece is of great importance for their identity as a part of the modern Greek nation. The image of Aromanians as a wild and pastoral folk, which still prevails in Greece and in the neighbouring countries, is nourished by the media (see Kostópoulos 1989: 205). Their identification with Hellenism as an ancient culture makes it easy for the Aromanians to change this image.

As the term “minority” is used in Greece only for religious groups, there is only one official minority group, the Muslims. Because of its connection to the Muslims, the term bears a negative undertone. Therefore most Aromanians refuse to be called a minority.

Aromanian national identity is tied to modern Hellenism. The two words Greek and Hellenic already cause problems. While almost every Aromanian considers himself to be Hellene (Éllinas, fem. Ellinida, pl. Éllines) when speaking Greek, he would never consider himself Greek (Grecu, fem. Greacă, pl. Grets) when speaking Aromanian. From the perspective of the Greek Aromanians all monolingual populations which only speak Greek belong to the Greeks (Grets), while the Vlach-, Slav- and Albanian speaking people can also belong to the Hellenes (Elini, in Greek Ellines). Because of their Neo-Hellenic consciousness the Aromanians of Greece are no threat to Greece, and this is why they are used by Greece to demonstrate its liberal attitude towards linguistic minorities (Divani 1996: 198).

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5 I will give estimates of the present numbers of Aromanians in the relevant countries. Because of missing or old data and different census methods estimating minority populations is almost impossible. Different estimates concerning their number must be compared, see Winnifrith 1987; Papahagi 1932: 79 ff.; Weigand 1895: 281 ff.; Braga 1965: 43-51; Banu 2001; Demirtaş-Coşkun 2001.
Things are quite different in the case of pro-Romanian Aromanians and those who consider themselves to be a totally separate people. They do not only identify themselves by their culture and language, but also have a certain national awareness. There are still pro-Romanian Aromanians in Greece, especially in villages in which strong Romanian communities were once accepted by the Greek authorities, above all in Avdélía, Perívoli, Samarína, Vovúsa, Kranía, Édessa, Véria and surrounding areas, as well as in a few villages in the districts of Kastoría and Ioánnina. On the whole, they are a minute and dwindling number of Aromanians.

Intimidation and repression by local politicians, teachers, priests and by the nationalists press in the period between the Civil War and the military dictatorship has led to a tabooing of minority interests. Today the removal of the taboo in Greece allows a more open and friendly discussion of the question of Aromanian identity.

The majority of the Aromanians living in Greece is not interested in any initiative towards the preservation of the Aromanian language apart from its use in the family (or in optional language education in schools). Initiatives from outside of Greece aimed at protecting Aromanian culture are looked upon with mistrust. This suspicion also concerns similar attempts in Greece, e.g. the Minority Groups Research Centre “KEMO” in Thessalonika (see Panellínia Énosi 1998). The discussions in the Council of Europe (1997) to recognise Aromanian as a minority language in Greece which must be protected met with extreme criticism from the largest Aromanian organisation in Greece (s. Panellínia Énosi 1998a), wherefore the Council of Europe repeated its decision in 1998. No fewer than 31 Vlach-speaking mayors and village aldermen signed a protest resolution against the US State Department’s annual report on the human rights situation in Greece. They complained “against the direct or indirect characterization of the Vlach-speaking Greeks as an ethnic, linguistic or other minority, stating that the Vlach-speaking Greeks never requested to be recognized by the Greek state as a minority, stressing that historically and culturally they were and still are an integral part of Hellenism, that they were bilingual and Aromanian was secondary” (Psífisma diamartyrías 2001). It is their choice and right to try to exempt themselves from the status of minority, but as a result some individuals who define themselves as minority members find it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture.

In the recent past the court proceedings against the Aromanian activist Sotiris Bletsas in Athens (on Febr. 2, 2001) revived once again the discussion about the Aromanians’ rights in Greece. Bletsas was accused of having distributed at a Vlach festival in 1995 maps of the “European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages”
which mention the minority languages in Greece. The witnesses against him included an Aromanian mayor. On Dec. 18, 2001, he was finally acquitted.

A closer look reveals that none of the more than 200 Aromanian organisations in Greece has an Aromanian name and that the majority of the local organisations does not even have the word “Vlach” in their names. None of them has declared the preservation of the Aromanian language to be an important goal. Their activities are restricted to cultural events. Local associations have recently founded Aromanian Cultural Museums in Sèrres and Náusa. The largest Aromanian organisation in Greece – and thus world-wide – is the “Pan-Hellenic Union of Cultural Associations of Vlachs” (Panellínia Énosi Politistikón Syllogon Vláchon Elládos) which apart from Thessaloníka has also branches in Dráma, Grevená, Métovo, Athens, and Agrínio. In 2001 it had more than 60 member associations. Apart from these associations there is an organisation for the “Aromanian/Vlach Culture” (Etería Aromanikú/Vláchiku Politismú) in Athens, which is quite active in its struggle for the Aromanian cause and distributes books with Aromanian songs as well as small information pamphlets in Greek. In the last years, Vlach Students in Thessaloníka started activities and events on Aromanian topics and founded the “League of Vlach Students”. In Thessaloníka there also exists an association of Helleno-Vlach Albanians (Syllogos Ellinovlachon Alvanías stin Elláda), whose members are Albanian Aromanians recently immigrated into the country. Since 1994, beginners’ and advanced courses in “Kutsovlach” have been offered at the Aristotle University of Thessaloníka. Documentary films about Aromanians are very rare on Greek TV, and their language can never be heard. In Métovo and other Aromanian villages festivals have taken place over the last 18 years and are, with over 40,000 participants, the largest Aromanian events of their kind in the world. In recent years, people from neighbouring countries and of the Aromanian diaspora have attended this event in growing numbers.

In Greece, there is no newspaper in the Aromanian language. The newspapers can be divided into those dealing with Aromanian topics and with occasional texts in Aromanian, and local newspapers in Aromanian areas that rarely touch Aromanian topics and are published in Greek only. While Meglenite Vlachs have

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8 With regard to Aromanian “organizations” one has to keep in mind that many of them are not officially registered and that none of the mentioned Aromanian “newspapers” has an official ISSN status.
9 See at: http://www.hri.org/Macedonian-Heritage/Museums/Folklore.html.
10 Aromaniká Chroniká, Pigi Kefalovrysou, Mnimes, Améru – Miliótika Néa, Niáusti.
not developed any specific Meglenite Vlach activities, they have, however, organised in Aromanian cultural organisations and thus left the status of a small ethnic group of only some 15,000 persons. The awareness of difference between Meglenite Vlachs and Aromanians is disappearing in the younger generations.

2. Albania

In Albania, there is no census in which the Aromanians are identified as a separate group. While Aromanian associations estimate the number of Aromanians in Albania to be as high as 250,000, estimates of Greek newspapers in southern Albania hardly reach 50,000. Official Albanian sources mention about 60,000 Aromanians (Demirtaş-Coşkun 2001: 40). The estimates depend on the discussions about the number of Greeks in Albania, which is at present considered to be 220,000 (Verémis 1995: 66). If this number for the whole orthodox minority is assumed to be correct, we can assume that at least 100,000 people of Aromanian origin are presently living in Albania. Most of them live in the districts Kolonja, Korça, Pogradec, Vlora and Fier.

Vlachs in Albania are not considered as a national, but as a linguistic and cultural minority. Contrary to Greece, the term “minority” has no negative undertones, but the image of Aromanians in Albania is also negative as that of a backward pastoral people, in spite of the fact, that particularly in Albania Aromanians have lived in urban settlements already at a time when Albanian society was still exclusively agrarian.

In Albania, the Aromanian group sets its hopes largely on the economic advantages of being able to go abroad. Romanians and Greeks use the opportunity to win the Aromanians in the poorest country of Europe for their own cause. Albanian national sentiments are apparent in many Aromanians, above all in those of the pro-Romanian groups. Many of them are followers of the Democratic Party, as the latter helped the Aromanians to get more minority rights (Schwandner-Sievers 1998: 169). Most Aromanian followers of the pro-Greek movement, however, are active members in human rights organisations such as “Omónia” which has strong ties to Greek fundamentalists (see Verémis 1995: 61). Many Aromanians in Albania see Greece as a powerful protector against the Moslem majority of Albania.

The founding of Aromanian organisations, either by individuals or by small Aromanian groups, began in the towns of Selenica and Korça. In both towns Aromanian cultural organisations were founded independently of each other in 1991, and within a short period both contacted the Romanian Consulate. The first congress organised by Albanian Aromanians took place in 1992 in Tirana, and numerous Aromanians from Central and Western Europe as well as from America participated. Before these events it was not possible to speak of a new awakening or awareness of Aromanian national identity in Albania.
In 1992 the Aromanian church in Korça was re-opened after its long closure since 1936. At the time of unrest in Albania the liturgy took place occasionally in the old Romanian School. The plans for a new church are supported mostly by the Aromanian diaspora. Liturgies, baptisms, and weddings take place in Albanian, Aromanian and Romanian. There are no services in Greek because the pro-Romanian and the Aromanian nationalists fear that this might lead to Greek ecclesiastical domination and thus to the destruction of the Aromanian church. The factual existence of an original Aromanian liturgy (Liturghier armînesc) since the beginning of the 18th century, discovered by Ilo Mitkë-Qafëzezi in Korça and published by Caragiu Marioșeanu (1962), is still little known among Aromanians. In recent years, this text has been reprinted and circulated among Albanian Aromanians with the support of the Aromanian diaspora. In Voskopoja father Thomai sings the Aromanian-language orthodox liturgy in the Church Shen Nikol (Ayiu Nicola) before offering to sing the same in Albanian.

Today there is a “Sutsata Armânilor” or “Rrâmânilor” (Association of Aromanians) in almost every town of southern and central Albania. In many places, due to different views, two organisations have emerged (not always officially registered) side by side. Notable is that the ethnic term Armâni is often used, although almost all speakers of Aromanian in Albania use the word Râmâni. The preference of this term, which had been out of use in Albania (apart from Berat), creates a feeling of solidarity with the Armâni outside Albania. It may also have been created to differentiate between the Aromanians and the Daco-Romanians (Români). Since 1995 there is also a cooperative of Aromanian women in Tirana and an annual festival of Aromanian folklore in Korça.

The association “Aromunet e Shqipërisë” (Aromanian of Albania, Tirana), which unites eight south Albanian organisations, is the largest association of Albanian Aromanian. The Association of Helleno-Vlachs of Albania in Korça also has many members. Both Aromanian newspapers (Frația Vellazëria, Fratsilia), founded in 1992 and printed in Tirana, appear only irregularly. The activities of the pro-Greek Aromanians in the newspaper of the Greek minority (Popullorë, Ta Néa tis Omônias) are quite extensive. In 2001, the “Unia tinirească a nvitsalilor armânil dit Arbinishii” (Union for young Aromanian scholars in Albania) was founded. There is no Aromanian radio or television programme and no official education in Aromanian, while there were 73 state-funded Greek language schools in southern Albania in 1993 (Demirtaş-Coşkun 2001: 40 f.).

3. The Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

The present Republic of Macedonia is the only country in which Aromanians are constitutionally recognised as a minority. According to the national census of 1994, 8,462 people consider themselves to be Vlachs, a term synonymous with Aromanian in the country. The “League of Vlachs” estimates that there are some
80,000 Aromanians in Macedonia, but it seems more realistic to put the figure at 25,000, including those who only understand the language but do not speak it. Their geographical concentration is in the area of Prespa-Ohrid, Pelagonija (Pelister villages, Kruševo, Struga, Belica) and in the plains east of the Vardar river (Știp, Sveti Nikole, Vinica); Meglenite Vlachs live in and around Gevgelija.

Problems arise with the use of the term “Macedonian” for self-identification, as Aromanians considered the (Slav) Macedonians still as Bulgarians (Vârgăhi), at least the older generation. Therefore many Aromanians feel that they are Macedonians only geographically. When an Aromanian speaks of himself as being Macedonian, this can mean that he considers himself as belonging to this nation, but it can also mean that he considers himself as Macedonian because he is an Aromanian who lives in Macedonia.

The recognition of the Aromanians as a separate “millet” in 1905 is celebrated by many Aromanians in Macedonia as a national day. The song “Dimândare părintească” has been declared a national hymn by the “League of Vlachs” and can be heard at many Aromanian events. As a consequence of the Aromanians’ recognition as a national minority, an Aromanian can become a member of the Macedonian parliament. In 2001, an Aromanian party was founded (Partia Armânilor ditu Machidunie PAM), with its president Mite Kostov-Papuli in Skopje; in 2002, a second Aromanian party was founded.

In the time of the Aromanian-Romanian movement some of the most important Aromanian magazines like Lumina were published in Macedonia. After a pause of over 80 years, Aromanian school books, poetry books, song books and newspapers come out in larger numbers than in any other country in southeast Europe. In 1997, a series of books called “Biblioteca natsională armânească Constantin Belemace” (National Aromanian Library Constantine Belemace) was founded in Skopje which publishes books in Aromanian only. The same is true for the magazine “Fenix” (1993) and for other magazines such as “Grailu Armânescu”, “Lândurică”, “Armânj Machidunits”, and “Armâna Makedona”. Compared to their small number, the Aromanians in Macedonia develop the most vigorous cultural and political activities world-wide.

There is a state TV station with an Aromanian language program called Scanteauă (“Spark”) which broadcasts twice a week half an hour Aromanian news from around the world, and there is an Aromanian radio station which broadcasts 30 minutes daily in Aromanian. They broadcast interviews with older Aromanians about the past, deal with the contributions of Aromanian poets or artists, offer information about initiatives by Aromanians, always closing with a musical or dance performance. The dialect used in TV and radio is that of the eastern Vardar region and not the more “literary” dialect of Bitola and Kruševo. The use of Aromanian in the mass media raises the prestige of the language. Since 1995 it is

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12 For a complete and annotated bibliography on Aromanians after 1990 see Kahl 2002.
possible to learn Aromanian in some elementary schools in Bitola, Kruševo, Štip and Skopje. 12 local Vlach organisations belong to the “League of Vlachs”. The league organises Aromanian activities and sometimes also works with the Romanian government and embassy, which helps by arranging educational stays of Vlach school children in Romania. Those receiving these benefits must be from Aromanian parents and must have a good knowledge of the Aromanian language. Important organisations apart from the league are the “Organisation of Aromanian Women” (Sutsata a muljerlor Arâmâni, Skopje), the “Aromanian Organisation Mbeala” (Sutsata Armânească Mbeala, Struga), and the “Aromanian Organisation of Crushuva” (Sutsata Armânească Crushuva, Kruševo). In Bitola, Aromanian groups founded the “World Association of Aromanians” (Liga mundeală Armâñilor) in 1996 which is focuses on cultural events and the edition of books in Aromanian. There are also folklore activities, like publishing of Aromanian tapes and organizing festivals like the “Fântâna di malamâ” since 2001.

Aromanians with a Greek identity can be found in Kruševo and Bitola. A (small) part of the Aromanians are enthusiastic speakers of the Greek language and still give their children Greek names. The organisation “Mochópolis” in Skopje whose members consist almost exclusively of Aromanians from Kruševo showed pro-Greek feelings. It split off from the organisation called “Pitu Guli” (Skopje) in 1999. The presence of some pro-Greek Aromanians in Kruševo and Bitola on the one hand and the vehement rejection of Greece and Greek culture by the other Aromanian communities can be explained by their migration history. The Aromanians of settlements in south-western Macedonia had migrated from the urban Moschópolis and had been exposed to Greek culture for a long time, while all other Aromanians in Macedonia have settled down only a few decades ago and have retained their Aromanian culture and a strong Aromanian identity.

It appears that the organized Aromanian groups in Macedonia have adopted a moderate, pro-government position. Even a presidential candidate of the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, looking for votes in the 1994 elections, described Vlachs as “100% loyal” to the nation (MILS News 10/5/94). In an earlier meeting with the Council of Europe in May 1994, a representative of the League of Vlachs is said to have “expressed satisfaction with the rights and status of the Vlachs in Macedonia” (MILS news 05/25/94). The foreign minister of Romania “expressed his positive opinion about the Constitution of Macedonia which respects the rights of the minorities” (MILS news 03/11/96).

It is notable that the Aromanian newspapers and books circulate widely in informal ways and seem to be absent from the public space, so that the majority of Macedonians are not aware of their existence.
4. Bulgaria

Due to the mass exodus of Bulgarian Aromanians to Romania in 1923–1940, only some 3,000 Aromanians live in Bulgaria today (Rakšieva 1994), mostly in the western Rhodope, the Rila Mountains, and in Sofia. The Aromanians have no official status as a minority group and thus have no schools of their own. Those Aromanians whom I interviewed, admitted that most of them had registered as Bulgarians in the last census, few of them as “Vlach” and even fewer as “other”. The data from Bulgarian censuses do not differentiate between Aromanian and Romanian, both groups are called ’Vlachs‘.

It is necessary to distinguish between those Aromanian craftsmen and tradesmen who migrated to Bulgaria in the 17th century, and the herdsmen who migrated from the Grámos in the 18th century. Today, descendants of the Aromanian traders and craftsmen have largely been assimilated, but cultural characteristics and a specific Aromanian identity can still be found among the descendants of the Aromanian herdsmen. None of the first group will probably consider himself to be Aromanian, if so, only in the form of a double identity in which the Bulgarian ranges before the Aromanian. Among the descendants of the herdsmen one can often meet people who consider themselves primarily as Aromanian; in the younger generation, however, only exceptionally.

In accordance with the low number of Aromanians in Bulgaria, the number of ethnic organisations is low. The Romanian Church in Sofia (Holy Trinity) plays an important role in the organising of Aromanians in Bulgaria and is used by both Aromanian and Romanian Timok-Vlachs. The initiative for the founding of Aromanian organisations began in Sofia. Aromanians who went to school with Romanians at the Romanian school in Sofia constitute the strongest supporters of the Aromanian Association in Sofia (Suţa Armănilor Sofia) since the political changes of 1989; they are the ones who work hardest for the conservation of Aromanian culture and language. The publication of the newspaper “Armânlu” (the Aromanian) in 1998 was meant to achieve this goal. There are also Aromanian organisations in Peštera, Velingrad and Dupnica. The low number of Aromanians in Bulgaria, rather than the low number of Aromanians in the organisations, makes cultural activities almost impossible. The existence of these organisations can be seen as a last attempt to rescue the Aromanian identity, and not as pro-Greek or pro-Romanian movements in search of benefits.

In most of the settlements with Aromanian inhabitants an Aromanian folklore group was founded. The state’s attitude to the Aromanian minority is liberal (Demirtas-Coşkun 2001: 42–43); in the socialist period there had been a degree of repression.
As in the case of other Balkan countries, the participation of Aromanians in the Bulgaria liberation movement plays an important role in the identity of the Aromanians (see Popescu et al. 1995).

5. Yugoslavia (Serbia)

The Aromanians living in Yugoslav cities had migrated there as an already urbanised population. It is estimated that almost 3,000 Aromanians settled in Belgrade after the destruction of Moschópolis (Plasković 1996: 38).

As a result of their assimilation first into the Greek and later into the Serbian culture it is no wonder that in modern Serbia the term “Cincar” (as the usual term for Aromanian) can also mean prosperous Greek tradesman. In Serbia the term “Vlach” is used for Romanian people of eastern Serbia who are of Romanian descent. Even today, to be a Cincar means to be a descendant of an aristocratic elite. Many call themselves Cincars without knowing who the Aromanians are or what language they speak or spoke. The Aromanians of Yugoslav cities are widely assimilated to the Serbian language and culture; those who have migrated from other Serbian cities (e.g. Niš, Prizren) no longer have any knowledge of the Aromanian language. Only a small group of migrants from what is now Macedonia declares an Aromanian identity and speaks Aromanian.

The Cincars of Yugoslavia stress their important position as successful businessmen, patrons, intellectuals, politicians, and fighters in the first Serbian revolution of 1804. Because of their Serbian identity there is no identity conflict between pro-Romanians and pro-Greeks.

In Belgrade there is only one Aromanian organisation with about 450 members (Plasković 1996: 56) by the name “Serbian-Cincarian Association” (Srpsko-Cincarski Drustvo), which publishes the “Lunjina. Bilten srpsko-cincarskog društva” (Light. Bulletin of the Serbian-Cincarian Association, Belgrade 1994 ff.). Its members are mostly Aromanian who have recently migrated from the south of former Yugoslavia. Only a few belong to the descendants of the urban population with its history in Belgrade of 300 years (see Gavrilović 1998).

6. Romania

In the census of 2002 the Aromanians could identify themselves as either Romanian (Români), Aromanian (Aromâni) or Macedonians (Macedoneni) (Peyfuss 1984: 313–319). 25,053 considered themselves Aromanians, and 1,334 Macedonians. Many registered as Romanians; Aromanians who had immigrated from 1923 to 1940 numbered around 30,000 (Saramandu 1976: 185).

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13 For further information on Bulgaria’s Aromanians see Kahl 2000.
The early Aromanian groups and individuals in the trading centres of Moldavia, Wallachia, Transylvania and Banat have largely been assimilated, whereas the newer groups retain their Aromanian character. The first Aromanian families who migrated to Romania from the southern Balkans in 1923 settled in the southern Dobrudja, but in 1940, when the southern Dobrudja became part of Bulgaria, were forced to move to the northern Dobrudja (districts Constanța and Tulcea) where most of them live until today. They were totally unfamiliar with the natural environment (steppe, plains) and were forced to work in agriculture, having to give up their traditional semi-nomadic pastoral economy. Although a large portion of them considered Romania to be their country and many had hoped to improve their economic situation, but the very different natural and environmental conditions in Dobrudja fostered a mental divide between them and the “Mucăni”, as they call the (Daco-)Romanians with a negative undertone.

The history of Aromanian-Romanian organisations in Romania is relatively long. Many of the early organisations were founded to represent the Romanian position in the Aromanian question. The Bucharest “Macedo-Romanian Cultural organisation” (Societatea de cultura Macedo-Româna) holds a special position, as it initiated most of the newsletters and newspapers, as well as the Meglenite Vlach’s Cultural Organisation “Meglenia” (Societatea de cultura Meglenia), whose aim is also the promotion of the Romanian movement (Peyfuss 1974: 54–56). At the time of the Aromanian-Romanian movement, numerous Aromanian newspapers already existed there. After a long pause of Aromanian activity there are new newspapers in Romania now, some of them exclusively in Aromanian. In the 1990s new Aromanian organisations have been founded, most of them with the goal of preserving Aromanian identity, language, traditions and folklore. In nearly every village with an Aromanian population there are active folklore groups. There are regular Aromanian conventions, dances, concerts and publications in the Aromanian language. Some of the leading supporters of the pro-

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14 E. g. the Almanahul Aromanesc, Flambura Pindului, Revista aromânească, Grai Bun, Macedonia, Peninsula Balcanica.

15 The most active organizations today are the “Suţața armâncă din Dobrogea Picuraru de la Pînd” (Aromanian Association of Dobrudja, “The Shepherds of Pindus”), “Comuna Pinderă” (Community Pindus), “Sutsata Arămânilor Andrei Şaguna” (Association of Aromanian Andrei Şaguna, Constanţa), “Sutsata culturală armână” (Cultural Aromanian Association, Bucharest), the “Societatea de Cultură Macedo-Română” (Macedo-Romanian Cultural Association, Bucharest) and the student club “Aromanian Youth” (Giunămea Armanească, Constanţa).

16 The best known groups are the Pilişteri (in Bucharest), the Ansamblu di Sarighiol di Deal (in Sarighiol, Tulcea), the Muşata Armâncă and La Steaua (in Kogălniceana).
Romanian movement of the communist period are now active in purely Aromanian movements.

Groups and individuals that consider themselves as a minority and therefore have objections against identifying as Romanians are at least aware of their Romany (or Latin) background and recognise the Romanians as being closely related (see Lascu 1993: 1, 16). This attitude is reflected in Aromanian publications and can be seen in the orthography.

Since 1991 there is an Aromanian Radio service and in 2001 a local TV station (Neptun) in Constanța began broadcasting in Aromanian. Since 1999 and 2001 there is Aromanian language instruction at primary schools in Constanța and Bucharest. The survival of Aromanian in Romania is surprising in view of the law of linguistics that minority languages are most at risk when they are close to the majority language of the host state.

7. The Diaspora

The Aromanians of Croatia, Bosnia and Hungary are, on the whole, assimilated. The few Aromanians living there have neither active communities nor their own organisations or representatives.

Since the 18th century the Aromanian diaspora outside of the Balkans has played a decisive role in the development of the awareness of Latinity of the Aromanians. Even today, the struggle to improve the standing of the Aromanian language, culture and identity, is mainly supported by the diaspora Aromanians. The most important organisations are in France, North America, Australia, and Germany. The activities of Aromanians who emigrated later often differ from those of the earlier groups, e.g. Aromanian migrant workers from Greece established their own associations in Germany (e.g. the Sýllogos Vláchon in Menden or Panelladikós Sýllogos Vláchon Monáchu in Munich), which have no contact with other Aromanian associations.

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Summary

Even if some publications have occasionally voiced opinion that may have been considered politically dangerous by some governments, today none of the Aromanian newspapers or organisations supports independence for Aromanians. The activities of most Aromanians living in Western Europe focus on the maintenance of the Aromanian language, culture and identity. In their countries of origin, however, their success has been rather limited. The most active members in Aromanian Internet discussion groups\(^{19}\) are diaspora Aromanians.

Some Aromanian groups in southeast Europe and in the diaspora have begun to intensify Aromanian activities. Whether these groups of activists will succeed in consolidating a permanent national identity based on a “dzua natsiunală” (national day), a “limba ahoryea” (coherent language) and minority status in several countries of Europe, or if they will be totally assimilated into other cultures, is to be seen. Aromanians will continue to have difficulties in finding a way between Greek, Romanian and other orientations. Most pro-Romanian Aromanian activists with their anti-Greek position exclude the most numerous and developed segment of Aromanians, while most of pro-Greek activists with their xenophobic attitude towards Romanian propaganda exclude all activities aimed at improving the status of the Aromanian language. Thus, even in the case of guaranteed minority rights, the promotion of language instruction and of cultural meetings, no lasting survival of Aromanian can be guaranteed. To reach this aim it would be necessary to improve the image of Aromanian, to decide on a uniform orthography accepted by Aromanians in all countries and, above all, to increase the ability for compromise and co-operation among all Aromanians in the Balkans. It is unclear, though, if the majority of the southeast European Aromanians would consider these as their goals.

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