



The Vlach issue during the Late Ottoman period and the emergence of the Vlach community (millet)

«The Vlach issue during the Late Ottoman period and the emergence of the Vlach community (millet)»

by Ali Arslan

Source:

Balkan Studies (Etudes balkaniques), issue: 4 / 2004, pages: 121-139, on www.ceeol.com.

Ali ARSLAN (University of Istanbul)*

**THE VLACH ISSUE DURING THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD AND
THE EMERGENCE OF THE VLACH COMMUNITY (MILLET)**

The Balkan Peninsula became one of the major areas of the Great Powers' competition in the 19th century. They wanted to have a share in the land, which was still part of the Ottoman Empire, or to put it under their influence.

While the Russians were co-operating with the Romanians, Bulgarians and Serbs, the Austrians were more interested in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The Germans were supporting the Austrian policy but at the same time they were trying to establish a sphere of influence among the Romanians and the Bulgarians. In the meantime, the Italians were trying to benefit from the developments in Albania, while the French and the British were also working towards the establishment of their spheres of influence in the region.

On the local arena, the Serbs were making an effort to extend their borders southwards and the Greeks to the north on the areas of the Ottoman Balkans. In addition, with the establishment of the Bulgarian Principality, a third local power came into existence. The policy of each of these three states aimed at obtaining the biggest piece of Macedonia if not even to get the whole of it¹.

After the Bulgarian uprising in 1876, Russia put pressure on the Ottoman Empire for the establishment of two autonomous provinces for the Bulgarians. When this was declined, in 1877 Russia declared war on the Ottomans, which ended in March 1878 with the San Stefano Treaty. The Russians gained most of Macedonia, and forced the Ottomans to form the Greater Bulgarian Principality stretching to the Aegean. The new situation was not accepted by the other European states as it upset the existing balance in the Balkans and they interfered for the revision of the San Stefano Treaty. In the new Balkan map, which was drawn by the Berlin Treaty in July 1878, Sofia became the capital of the small Bulgarian Principality consisting of the territories between the Balkan range and the Danube, an autonomous province

* Associated Professor at the History Department, Faculty of Letters, University of Istanbul.

¹ *Daikin, Douglas*. The Greek Struggle in Macedonia. Thessaloniki, 1993, 26-27.

called Eastern Rumelia was formed to the south and Macedonia was returned to Ottoman rule although reforms were promised there under European supervision².

The Berlin Treaty triggered the struggle of the Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks in Macedonia, each aiming to extend its sphere of influence in what was left of Turkey in Europe. Another factor which contributed to the existing turmoil in Macedonia were the Vlachs who had more or less similar ambitions with the rest of the non-Muslims in the area. In addition, the Romanians who did not have any direct interest in Macedonia but were close to the Vlach community, started to increase their activities in the region in support of the Vlach cause. While Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs worked separately to turn the balance in the region to their interest, the Ottomans chose the Vlachs – a small group of population but strategically very important – as an ally in their effort to keep their sovereignty over the area. Under the given circumstances, when the Ottoman administration had to act particularly against the Bulgarians in the north, and against the Greeks in the south, the Vlachs turned to be the only Christian group in the area on whose support it could count.

THE ORIGINS OF THE VLACHS, THEIR LAND AND POPULATION

Despite Greek and Bulgarian claims that the Vlachs were respectively of Greek or Bulgarian descent, they were recorded as an individual ethnic group since the 10th century. In the 11th century Vlach soldiers' units had been established in the Byzantine army as completely separate from the Greeks and Bulgarians.

The Vlachs played an important role in the rebellion against the Byzantine Empire whose consequence was the reestablishment of the Bulgarian Kingdom in 1185. That is why its ruler, according to some sources, was called the Emperor of the Vlachs and Bulgarians.

Within the Ottoman Empire, the Vlachs were accepted as a separate ethnic group from the Greeks and Bulgarians. They had cultural and religious autonomy and were given further privileges and responsibilities by the Voynuk Laws, introduced and put into effect by Sultan Selim I in 1516.

In terms of language and culture the Vlachs were most close to the Romanians. The two nations started to realize this relationship at the end of the 19th century.

The Vlachs who had been part of the Orthodox Patriarchate since Byzantine times became subject to the Hellenization policies of the Greek Patriarchate in the 19th century.

During the Ottoman period the Vlachs lived in large numbers in Salonika (Thessaloniki), Serres, Ohrid, Skopje, Manastir (Bitola), Pindos and Kosovo, but were also to be found in other parts of the Balkans³. According to Ottoman records,

² *Tokay, Gül*. The Macedonian Question and the Origins of the Young Turk Revolution, 1903-1908. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994, p. 4.

³ *Demirtaş-Coşkun, Birgül*. The Vlachs. A Forgotten Minority in the Balkans. London, 2001, 8-12, 19. After the period of the Tanzimat they changed the cezye into soldierly tax, but started to take this tax from the named Vlachs after their residence (*Gülsoy, Ufuk*. Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni. İstanbul, 2000, 82-83).

in the beginning of the 19th century the number of the Vlachs in the Ottoman Empire was 99,000. Other records give almost the same figures⁴. Actually these figures does not give the number of all the Vlachs in the Empire, but only of the ones who considered themselves as a separate ethnic group from the Greeks⁵.

In the struggle among the Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs in Macedonia, the Church played an important role. If the people of a given settlement related themselves to a particular church in their area, this would also mean an attachment in national terms, the church being even perceived as belonging only to that particular nation. For example, if a Vlach went to a Bulgarian church he would be treated as a Bulgarian, the same would happen if he went to a Greek church.

When the Vlachs started to identify as a separate community, their demands were strongly opposed by the Greek Patriarchate but they met the support of the Bulgarian Exarchate, which saw an opportunity to weaken the Greek influence. When the Greeks, Bulgarians and Ottomans started to use the Vlach issue for their political goals, they contributed to strengthening Vlachs' identity.

THE BEGINNING OF CHANGES IN THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA

In the Ottoman Empire the non-Muslim communities were given freedom of belief and every religious sect was accepted as nation millet. The organized communities related to a church or synagogue and practiced their own laws regarding family and inheritance. However, with the increase of nationalist sentiment, the system of a nation formed around a belief started to collapse. Most affected by these developments was the Greek Patriarchate. Vlachs were also influenced by the nationalist spirit of the time and initiated their movement for separation from the Greek Orthodox Church and for establishing their own Vlach Church.

As a result of the anti-Ottoman movement of the Serbs in the second half of the 18th century, by an arrangement from 1776, the Ottoman government limited the authority of the Serbian Patriarchate in Serbia and Macedonia. In Macedonia all the churches that belonged to the Serbian Patriarchate were joined under the authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Fener (Istanbul). After these changes, all the non-Muslim communities were put under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. During the national struggles of the different communities in the middle of the 19th century, the Orthodox Patriarchate was the dominant religious organization in Macedonia⁶.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Bulgarians who were in the early stages of their National Awakening Movement, struggled against the Orthodox Patriarchate raising the demand for their independent church. These ambitions of the Bulgarians were fulfilled in 1870 with the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, which came as a result of the Russian pressure on the Ottoman administration⁷. After the

⁴ *Adanır, Fikret*. Makedonya Sorunu. İstanbul, 1999, 5-16.

⁵ As an example of the problem of being Vlachs, but recorded as Greeks, see: The letter of the people of Acarnarliga village to Yenice Vardar, dated Kanunuevvel 1327/December 1911, BOA, DH. SYS, 62 = 2/1, Lef 25.

⁶ *Daikin, Douglas*. Op. cit., p. 10.

⁷ For more information about the establishment of the Bulgarian Majority Home and its organization in Macedonia, see: *Koyuncu, Ashkin*. Bulgar Eksarhligi. Unpublished MA Thesis. Çanakkale University. Çanakkale, 1998; *Adanır, Fikret*. Op. cit., 70-78.

establishment of the Bulgarian Principality in 1878, the Bulgarian Exarchate contributed to the escalation of the Bulgarian-Greek struggle in Macedonia. Although the Berlin treaty thwarted the existence of Greater Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Principality supported the spread of exarchists in Macedonia⁸.

In the meantime, the Ottomans tried to prevent the separatist movements of the Bulgarians in the area. Therefore, the interests of the Patriarchate and the Ottomans coincided and they started to collaborate. Within this framework, the Greek Patriarch submitted a letter to the Ottoman government declaring that the people of Eskice, Yenice and Kesriye (Kastoria) in Thrace were protesting against the pan-Slav propaganda in the area⁹. The pro-Greek policies of the Sublime Porte (The Central Office of the Imperial Government of the Ottoman Empire) encouraged the Hellenization policies of the Greeks in Macedonia. For example, there was a significant increase in the number of Greek schools in Salonika – in 1877 there were 526 schools with 10,968 students, in 1896 their number reached 907 schools with 53,633 students¹⁰.

The Hellenization policies of the Greek Patriarchate brought about a great hostility among the Orthodox Slavs and particularly Slav religious functionaries to the Greek ecclesiastical hierarchs¹¹. Parallel to the increase of nationalist feelings among the non-Muslims in the region, this was a normal development. In the nationalist struggles of the Balkan peoples, the Church had become an important factor. And this was also the case in Macedonia. During the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878 the Romanians and Bulgarians cooperated, and so did the Vlachs. However, with the intensification of the Hellenization policies of the Patriarchate, the struggle of the Vlachs began to escalate.

THE GREEK-VLACH STRUGGLE

Vlachs were under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate because of their being Orthodox. The majority of priests were Greek and the Vlachs could not conduct their services in any other language than Greek. The most important issue for the Vlachs was to have their religious ceremony in their own language.

With the escalation of the struggle in Macedonia, the Orthodox Patriarchate decided that if the Vlachs insisted on worship in their language, they would not be permitted to have their clerical head. In 1875 eight Vlach churches were closed by the personal order of the Patriarch. The clashes between the Vlachs and the Greeks almost resulted in the death of the bishop of Greben, which was only prevented in the very last minute. Although their demands were rejected by the Orthodox Patriarchate, the Vlachs succeeded to appoint their own bishop. In the meantime, they presented their claims to the Ottoman government and asked the Romanian government for assistance¹².

⁸ *Daikin, Douglas*. Op. cit., 14-6.

⁹ The letter of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul to the Sublime Porte, dated 1878; BOA, Y. PRK. TKM, 2/68.

¹⁰ *Adamir, Fikret*. Op. cit., 111-112.

¹¹ *Daikin, Douglas*. Op. cit., p. 13.

¹² Translations from European newspapers; BOA, Y. PRK, 1/13.

The hostility in the Macedonian churches reached the level of physical fight among the religious functionaries. While the Vlachs started to attack Greek teachers (*daskals*) in their villages, the Greeks ruined the Vlach church in the village of Pirayış. Also, during a religious ceremony in Krayna, a bitter fight occurred between members of the two groups¹³.

The opposition of the Greek Patriarchate to the Vlachs' insistence on worship in their native language brought about collisions in the areas with mixed populations. One of these cases took place in the village of Nijbol in the Manastir district and ended with the death of someone called Jisi, while two or three more people were wounded. In another case in the village of Maluyeşte on 20 August 1891 a person called Üstüyo was killed and four other people were wounded¹⁴.

The churches which were supposed to serve as places for worship and prayer were transformed in Macedonia since 1870 into an arena for the Greek-Vlach struggle. The conflict reached such proportions that in the end it brought forth the involvement of the Ottoman government and the Great Powers.

THE ROMANIAN APPEALS TO THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT CONCERNING THE VLACHS

When the Greek Patriarchate rejected Vlachs' demand for worship in their native language, they turned for assistance to the Romanian government. It was in 1875 that the Vlach churches were closed. Because of the negative attitude of the Greek Patriarchate and the indifference of the Ottoman government, the Vlachs had no other choice than to ask for support the Romanian government. The Romanian government asked its ambassador in Istanbul to make an appeal to the Sublime Porte concerning the demands of the Vlachs¹⁵. Thus, a new participant entered the struggle in Macedonia and a new era in the defense of the Vlach cause began.

THE RIGHT OF THE VLACHS TO WORSHIP IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

When the discussions on the right of the Vlachs to worship in their native language started, the Ottoman authorities decided to examine the issue in details. On August 9, 1891 the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations sent a report to the Grand Vizierate stating that the Vlachs had the right to worship in their own language, since those belonging to the Orthodox denomination in the Arabic lands whose mother tongue was not Greek were allowed to worship in their languages. In addition, it pointed to the fact that all the communities in the Ottoman state had the right and freedom to worship in their mother tongue. The Ministry of Justice emphasised in particular that if Vlachs' demands were not satisfied, this would bring about Vlachs to establishing their independent church¹⁶.

¹³ *Mazbata* of the Meclis-i Vükela [Council of Ministers], dated 14 Muharrem 1309/ 9 August 1891; BOA, MV, 66/102.

¹⁴ *Tezkere* to the Council of Ministers concerning the ecclesiastical struggle between Vlachs and Greeks, dated 28 Mart 1309/ 20 August 1891; BOA, Y. PRK. ZB, 11/32.

¹⁵ BOA, Y. PRK. TKM, 1/13.

¹⁶ *Tezkere* of the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations dated 12 Safer 1310/ 5 September 1892; BOA, Irade-i Hususiye, 1310 S. 15, No 109, lef 2.

With the escalation of the Vlach-Greek struggle on the Macedonian border, the commander in charge on the border turned to the Sublime Porte through the *Serasker* (the General Commander of the Ottoman army) for a solution to this matter. In 1891 the issue was discussed by the cabinet and it was asserted that Vlachs had the full right to worship in their own language. The Ottoman government came up with the decision that Vlachs had to be granted similar rights with the other non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman state. Within this framework, the Ottoman government gave orders to the governor of Yanya (Ioannina) region to punish the Greek *daskal* and priests who prevented the Vlachs from worship in their language and also those who entered in fighting among each other. The *Serasker* was also obliged to inform the government about every incident that took place in the area; at the same time the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations received the order to inform the Greek Patriarchate about these developments¹⁷.

In spite of that decision of the Ottoman government, the conflict between the Greek Patriarchate and Vlachs continued and new problems emerged. The Patriarch's orders were obligatory to all religious functionaries belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church. Claiming that Vlach priests abused this rule, the Patriarchate started to arrest them on the streets of Istanbul. On August 3, 1892 a Vlach priest was arrested on his way home and brought by force to the Patriarchate by three of the Patriarchate's men. On August 22, 1892 a committee of Vlachs applied for protection to the Sublime Porte. The committee had a meeting with the Minister of Interior and he was asked to stop the unlawful acts of the Patriarchate. Only the government had the right to arrest people on the streets and the Patriarchate had no such right, was the resolution of the Minister of Interior. But the Ottoman government decided not to take any action against the Patriarchate until a decision reached on this issue¹⁸.

Officially the issue was consigned to the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations which gave orders to the Patriarchate not to make any further illegal arrests. The Ministry declared that if the Greek Patriarchate stood against the Vlachs' desire to worship in their language and started arresting their religious functionaries, this may lead to their diversion from the Greek Patriarchate. It advised the Grand Vizier that the best solution in the areas where the Vlachs were a majority was to let them worship in their language and not allow the Greek Patriarchate to prevent them¹⁹. The Grand Vizier submitted the appeal with the Vlachs' demands to the Sublime Porte. But Sultan Abdülhamid II had fears that if the Vlachs were recognized as a separate religious community, this might lead them to asking for independence as in the case with the Bulgarians. At the same time, Abdülhamid II drew the attention to the possibility that upon the separation of the Vlachs, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the community who were loyal subjects to the Empire might be influenced and "act in alliance with the Bulgarians and cause some troubles". Under these circumstances, the Sultan stated that "such a danger could be avoided if

¹⁷ *Mazbata* of the Meclis-i Vükela, dated 14 Muharrem 1309/9 August 1891; BOA, MV, 66/102.

¹⁸ *Tezkere* sent to the Grand Vizierate by the Ministry of Interior, dated 11 Ağustos 1308/23 August 1892; BOA, İrade-i Hususiye, 1310 S. 15, No 109, lef 3.

¹⁹ *Tezkere* sent to the Grand Vizierate by the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations, dated 12 Safer 1310/9 April 1893; BOA, İrade-i Hususiye, 1310 S. 15, No 109, lef 2.

the Vlachs remained attached to the Greek Patriarchate for some time and their administration continued as it was". In addition, he pointed out that the essential matter was that "all the communities and ethnic groups" who were Ottoman citizens "should remain as citizens". He ordered the Minister of Justice and Religious Denominations to make an investigation on the problem in details and to inform him about the results²⁰.

The Grand Vizier dealt with the issue urgently and discussed it with the Minister of Justice and Religious Denominations. The following results came up. Due to the fact that worshipping was performed in a language unknown to the Vlachs, some absurd situations arose from time to time. The Patriarchate agreed that it would not object the use of religious books which were translations in the Vlach language, provided they were approved by the Greek Patriarchate²¹. At the end it was decided that in the places where Vlachs formed the entire or the majority of the population, they could perform their worship and rituals in the Vlach language and use translated religious books. In some churches would be appointed priests who knew Vlach language. Besides, it was considered that the Vlachs should give up the idea of appointing their own ecclesiastical leader because that might have bad results and that Vlach dependence on the Greek Patriarchate should remain "for ever" as the independence would pose dangers to the Empire. On September 5, 1892 the Grand Vizier informed the Sultan about these decisions. The Sultan approved them and ordered their application on September 8, 1892²².

The decision of the Ottoman administration that Vlachs might worship in their own language and that their priests should remain dependent on the Greek Orthodox Church was a certain relief to the problem but it was unsatisfactory to both sides and the Greek-Vlach conflict began to take another direction. Some problems arose regarding the distribution of churches in regions or quarters with mixed communities. Moreover, some Greek bishops attempted to prevent worship in Vlach language. For example, at the Aya Toşkar quarter in Karakaye village in the district of Salonika, worship in Vlach was prevented by the local Greek bishop, the church was closed and its keys were taken by the head official of the district (*kaymakam*). There were no other churches that Vlachs could worship in, as all were closed except for three churches used by the Greeks. Therefore, the Vlachs in the village appealed to the governor of Salonika for a solution. Again, during worship in Muluyeşte church belonging to Manastir, some Greeks came to the church upon the order the Greek Despot of Manastir, clashes began between the Vlachs and the Greeks in which few people were killed and some were injured. The governor of Manastir asked the Ministry of Interior to take the necessary measures to prevent such incidents. The Council of Ministers which convened on May 17, 1893 decided that in the conflict regions, where the Greeks had more churches than they needed,

²⁰ *Irade* of Abdülhamid II, dated 15 Safer 1310/ 8 September 1892; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1310 S 15, No 109, lef 1.

²¹ For the term *Tasdik* (approval), see *Tezkere* sent by the Minister of Justice and Religious Denominations to the Office of the Grand Vizier, dated 12 Safer 1310/5 September 1892; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1310 S 15, No 109, lef 2.

²² *Irade* of Abdülhamid II, dated 23 Safer 1310/8 September 1892; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1310 S 23, No 129.

they should be allocated to Vlachs to carry out their religious services. Also, in order to prevent these conflicts, it was decided to inform the Patriarchate and to require an order from the Ministry of Interior that would hinder arguments between Vlachs and Greeks about churches that would entail death casualties²³.

In accordance with the religious freedom in the Empire, the Ottoman administration approved that the Vlachs could perform their religious ceremony in their own language. When the Greek Patriarchate was officially informed about this decision, the problem of the Vlach religious ceremony was actually solved. But Abdülhamid II was still anxious that the freedom of use of the Vlach language in worshipping might lead to a separate nation, which would create a new problem for the Ottoman state. There was also the fear that the Greeks and the Bulgarians might start cooperating against the Ottomans. Searching for a solution that would not offend both parties, the Ottomans did not manage to satisfy either of them. In fact, the problem was not the language of the religious ceremony as it appeared at first, but the identity of the Vlachs. Not willing to serve the desires of the Greeks anymore, the Vlachs saw the only solution in the establishment of a separate church and for them this became an absolute necessity for the protection of their identity.

THE VLACHS' DEMAND FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE CHURCH AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE OTTOMAN ADMINISTRATION

Due to the intervention of the Greek Patriarch or of his representatives in their affairs, although Vlachs had achieved the right to worship in their own language, they continued to demand strongly the appointment of a clerical head for themselves. They even chose one to act as Vlach bishop before a decision was taken by the Ottoman government. However, to avoid conflicts with the Patriarch, the Ottoman government refused to recognise this official²⁴.

The improvement in the Greek-Ottoman relations which occurred after the establishment of Greater Bulgaria came to an end when the Greek government landed its troops on the island of Crete in February 1897.

Another target of the Greek government was Macedonia with its huge Vlach population. In April 1897, the Greek guerrillas, after crossing the Macedonian border, entered into the Ottoman territories and the Greek army subsequently attempted to invade Macedonia. However the Ottoman army swept away the Greeks and on its turn marched through Greek territories. Having seized Volos on May 11, 1897, the Ottoman troops encountered no barrier to entering Athens. However, these developments did not correspond with the regional policies of Russia and Britain and they intervened for a ceasefire agreement. While Germany was against Greece, Russia, Britain and Italy supported her. As a result a cease-fire agreement was signed. Although the Ottomans won the war, they gained no profit²⁵.

²³ *Mazbata* of Meclis-i Vukela, dated 5 Mayıs 1309/ 17 May 1893; BOA, MV, 74/122.

²⁴ *Irade* of Abdülhamid II, dated 10 Receb 1314/ 15 December 1896; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1310 B 10, No 30.

²⁵ *Daikin, Douglas*. Op. cit., 40-42.

During this Ottoman-Greek war the Vlachs living in Macedonia sided with the Ottoman troops against the Greeks and that was the beginning of a new era in the Vlach-Ottoman relations as regarding the Greek Orthodox Church²⁶. The Ottoman administration wanted to reduce or stop the spread of Hellenic influence in Macedonia, and the Vlachs became an important instrument for that effort. The Vlachs on their part started to be aware of the official support of the Ottoman government in their struggle against the Greeks and seized the opportunity to ask for the establishment of a separate Vlach Church. With the improvement in the Vlach-Ottoman relations, Vlachs also appealed for the Ottoman consent to the appointment of a Vlach bishop insisting that he was not officially recognized by the Sublime Porte only due to the opposition of the Greek Patriarch. However, Abdülhamid II declared that the formal proceedings to appoint a Vlach bishop would have a positive impact on the Ottoman state²⁷. Until then, Abdülhamid II did not want to upset the Greek Patriarch and the Greeks but under the new circumstances, the attitude was reversed. Abdülhamid II started to consider a change in the policy as the benevolent attitude towards the Greek Patriarchate earned him nothing in the terms of achieving good relations with the Greeks.

Moreover, the Romanian ambassador in Istanbul, who supported the Ottoman Empire during the Greco-Turkish war in 1897, appeared before the Sultan and insisted that the Vlachs should have “an independent church”. The Sultan asked his government to find a solution to the Vlach issue without any more states interfering into it. The Ottoman government prepared an official report. Here is an outline of the ideas which stood behind the report of the Ottoman government:

It was obvious that accepting the demands of the Vlachs would improve Ottoman relations with Romania and would raise pro-Turkish public opinion in Romania. However, there were concerns that granting such rights to the Vlachs might trigger further ambitions of the Bulgarians and Serbs, which was quite undesirable for the Ottoman government in Macedonia for it might end up accepting their demands as well. At the same time, the government was aware that the states - protectors of the Christians since the Kuchuk Kainarji treaty and especially the states that had a “spiritual influence” on the Orthodox Church would oppose these developments as well. The implementation of these decisions would arouse particularly the indignation of the Greek Patriarch. While the Ottoman government was in the process of peace negotiations, the situation was not suitable for the establishment of an independent church for the Vlachs. Ottoman officials also stated that in order to solve the problem without political difficulties and without causing any internal and external upheavals, the government had to put aside Vlachs’ demands until the signing of a peace treaty with Greece and to act very skilfully according to the political conditions that would occur then²⁸.

²⁶ *Mazbata* of Encümen-i Mahsus-i Vükela, dated 13 Safer 1315/ 14 July 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 87/68, lef 3.

²⁷ *Irade* by Abdülhamid II, dated 10 Receb 1314/ 15 December 1896; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1310 B 10, No 30.

²⁸ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated July 14, 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 87/68, lef 3.

Aware that Serbia and Bulgaria might also be offended by the decision for establishment of a Vlach Church which would be considered as an act of favour to Romania, the Committee of Ministers recommended the decision on this issue to be postponed until the signing of the peace treaty. Referring to the Kuchuk Kainarji treaty, it pointed out that the establishment of Vlachs Church would draw forth Russian reaction as well. Thus, the issue was not only an Ottoman interior matter anymore, but it also became an important issue with international implications.

The official report of the Committee of Ministers was presented to the Sultan by the Grand Vizier on July 14, 1897²⁹.

However, Romania kept insisting that it was just the appropriate time for the Vlachs to receive the right to have their independent church. The Romanian ambassador in Istanbul appeared before the Sultan and stated that if the Vlachs were granted this right, the Romanian government would be willing to sign a treaty of alliance with the Ottoman government. But the Sultan was afraid that after a Vlach Church was established, the Greeks and Bulgarians might cause some problems and also that the Romanians might lose their interest in a formal alliance with the Ottomans once the Vlach issue was solved. Abdülhamid II brought the issue to the Porte for further discussion.

The following points were emphasized in the official report of the Committee of State Ministers dated September 25, 1897: agreement with Romania was not yet definite and the offer made by the Ottoman government would be discussed only after the return of the Romanian King to Bucharest; the establishment of a Vlach Church should not be put into effect unless a treaty was signed with Romania; the demand for a Vlach bishopric could be accepted even if an agreement with Romania was not signed, but its centre should not be Istanbul and it should be permanently affiliated to the Greek Patriarch so that he would not object it; the Ministry of Justice had to assign a meeting with the Greek Patriarch and conclude the negotiations³⁰. This official report of the Committee of State Ministers was presented to Sultan Abdülhamid II the same day³¹.

Meanwhile, the appointment of a Vlach bishop became a prerequisite for the defensive alliance between Romania and the Ottoman state. Besides, the Romanian ambassador in Istanbul informed the Ottoman government that if a Vlach bishop was appointed before the opening of the Romanian Council, this would have positive impact on the Romanian-Ottoman relations. The Ottoman government agreed upon the appointment of a Vlach bishop but provided he was under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarch³². The Grand Vizier presented this official report to Abdülhamid II on October 5, 1897³³.

The Ottoman government abandoned the idea of establishing a Vlach bishopric because the military agreement including “defensive alliance” with Romania was not accomplished. However, when the Romanian ambassador in Istanbul was

²⁹ *Tezkere* of Sadaret, dated 13 July 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 87/68, lef 1.

³⁰ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 25 September 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 88/115, lef 2.

³¹ *Tezkere* of the Grand Vizier, dated 25 September 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 88/115, lef 1.

³² *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated October 5, 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 89/9, lef 2.

³³ *Tezkere* of the Grand Vizier dated 5 October 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 89/9, lef 1.

accepted to see the Sultan, he expressed Romanian desire for the establishment of a Vlach bishopric³⁴. The Sultan brought the issue to the Committee of Ministers for re-examination³⁵. While agreement negotiations with Romanian government proceeded, the Porte discussed the issue and stated that Ottoman government was willing to appoint a bishop to the Vlachs “of their own kind” but an official promise was not yet given to the Romanian government. After the failure of reaching an agreement with Romania, the Ottoman government decided it was not necessary to make a definite decision on the issue of a Vlach bishopric and explained to the Romanian ambassador that the time was not suitable³⁶.

However, for Abdülhamid II the problem was not only the timing but also the fact that the establishment of Vlach bishopric would have an important effect on the Greek Patriarch. He was afraid that it might even lead to the transfer of the Patriarch to Greece for he could claim that the Greek Patriarchate would be “subjected to difficulties under the administration of the Ottoman government”. In this case, Ottoman Greek citizens would fall under the influence of Greece and that might pose a serious threat to the Ottoman Empire. The only benefit for the Ottoman government would be an agreement with Romania, both “TEDAFÜİ and TECAVÜZİ” and in case Romania assumes the obligation to follow the Ottoman policy under any circumstances. Abdülhamid II stated that he did not believe Romania would support the Ottoman government, as during the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-78 Romanian forces joined the Russian army against the troops of Osman Pasha. The Sultan decided to emphasize the difficulties regarding a decision on the issue of the establishment of Vlach bishopric³⁷.

Although the Vlachs had supported the Ottomans during the Ottoman-Russian war and in the struggle in Macedonia and the Ottoman administration was looking positively to their desire for a separate Church, Vlachs were not issued such permission because of the Ottoman concerns about the reaction of Russia who was supporting the Serbs and Bulgarians in the Balkans. The Ottoman government stated clearly that it did not want to ruin its relations with the Greek Patriarchate, and that even in case a Vlach Church was established; it would certainly be affiliated to the Greek Patriarchate. Besides, Abdülhamid II pointed to the danger that the establishment of a Vlach Church might lead to transferring the Greek Patriarchate to Athens and losing Ottoman influence on those citizens of the Empire who were related to the Greek Patriarchate. The international anxieties proved to be more important for the Ottoman government than the prospects for good relations with Romania, and thus Romania could not play a decisive role for satisfying Vlachs’ demand..

VLACHS’ DESIRE TO BECOME A SEPARATE COMMUNITY

The Vlachs postponed their ambitions for having their independent Church

³⁴ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 27 November 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 90/2, lef 2.

³⁵ *Tezkere* of the Grand Vizier, dated 27 November 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 90/2, lef 1.

³⁶ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 27 November 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 90/2, lef 2.

³⁷ *Irade* by the Padishah, dated 28 November 1897; BOA, Y.A. Res, 90/2, lef 2.

from the Patriarchate and put their demands in a different way. They wanted to have their representatives in the local administration. On June 28, 1904 the Vlachs made a complaint to the Sublime Porte that the Greek Patriarch prevented them from worship in their own language even though they were granted this right by the Ottoman government. They further insisted they wanted to be separated from the Greeks as soon as possible and the Vlach community to be “officially recognized” by legal arrangements which would allow them to have representatives in the provincial administration as well as in smaller administrative units. Besides, they claimed that the Vlach community should have a special representative in Istanbul just like the Protestant and Catholic communities to manage its affairs within the Ottoman government. They believed this would help Vlach community to manage easily its affairs and would calm Vlachs. It was also pointed out that if the Greek Patriarch kept behaving the way he did, it would not only cause troubles to him but to the Ottoman government as well³⁸.

Another demand of the Vlachs was the right to elect governors for Vlach villages and wards. The Macedonian inspector general Huseyin Hilmi who investigated their complaints stated that this would cause too many difficulties, particularly in places where the Greeks and Vlachs lived together. And he also pointed out that according to the 54th article of the Province Regulations, assigning an independent self-governor and village council for the Vlachs would cause much less difficulty³⁹.

To protect their existence, having failed to protect their religious organization, the Vlachs now wanted to be recognized as a separate community under the local Ottoman administration, to elect their own governor (*mukhtar*) and to have their self-government. The biggest support to the Vlachs in their struggle to become an independent community came again from the Romanian government.

ROMANIA’S EFFORTS TO MAKE THE VLACHS AN INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY

It became a state policy for the Romanian government to assist the Vlachs to become an independent community. The Romanian King even admitted a Vlach member to one of his mixed inter-communal commissions, an act which pleased the Sultan⁴⁰.

The Romanian government was in really good relations with the Vlachs and used every opportunity to support them. On August 24, 1904 the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the Ottoman Embassy in Bucharest and stated that “Vlachs’ interests coincided with that of the Ottoman government” and that the Romanian King and government were upset by the fact that the Vlachs were constantly sacrificed in the continuing attacks of the Greeks. He also insisted that with the good intentions of the Ottoman government the Vlachs’ demand of having their

³⁸ Translation of Mazhar given to the Sublime Porte on 28 June 1904; BOA, Y.A.Res, 127/62, lef 3.

³⁹ Telegraph of Rumelia Public Inspector Husyein Hilmi dated 17 August 1904; BOA, Y.A. Res, 127/62, lef 5.

⁴⁰ *Irade* by Abdulhamid II dated 19 August 1904; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1321 B 13, No 63.

own schools and churches should be fulfilled and Vlachs should be included in the administrative councils. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs said that Romania supported the existing status quo in the Balkans and he also emphasised that in their struggle with the Greeks, the exarchists were assisting the Vlachs which would have bad consequences in the Balkans⁴¹.

In the meantime, the Romanian government continued its efforts to accomplish Vlachs' demands. Aware that the Ottomans were not willing to establish an independent Vlach Church, it started demanding the election of a Vlach governor and the opening of Vlach churches in some areas. The Grand Vizier informed the Sultan about these demands but Abdülhamid II decided to pay no attention to them in order to avoid political conflicts⁴². Thus, in 1904 the Vlachs could not achieve their aims.

In a situation when the Ottoman government was quite anxious about losing Macedonia and a change in the status quo in the Balkans, Romania tried to convince it that the needs of the Vlachs and the interests of the Ottomans were going in the same direction, thus it should formally recognize the Vlachs as a separate community. But Abdülhamid II paid special attention to Romania-Austria's talks and perceived the issue of the Vlachs becoming a separate community as an international political manoeuvre, and so he rejected the idea.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE GREEK PATRIARCH AND GREECE TOWARDS THE VLACHS

The movement of the Vlachs to separate from the Greeks and to become a community was contrary to the wishes of Greece and opened the door for a strong reaction from both the Greek Patriarchate and Greece. Thus, the Greek Patriarch strongly opposed Kochu Vlachs' demand of worshipping in their language in 1904. He stated that the demands of Sinodu Kochu Vlachs were mainly political and national rather than religious and also that the Vlachs were a very small minority in Macedonia⁴³. Similar to the Patriarch, the Greek government also opposed granting any privileges to the Vlachs⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, the number of the Greek bands in Macedonia increased and in 1905 it reached 12 guerrilla groups, each composed of 100 people. The main purpose of these guerrillas was fighting against Vlachs and others who left the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate⁴⁵.

Although the Greek Patriarchate had caused some problems, it gave a permission to the Vlachs to conduct their religious services in their own language. But

⁴¹ Telegraph of the Bucharest ambassador to the Ottoman government dated 25 August 1904; BOA, Y.A. Res, 127/62, lef 7. Official message of the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs about the demands of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs; BOA, Y.A. Res, 127/62, lef 6.

⁴² *Irade* by Abdülhamid II, dated 2 September 1904; BOA, *Irade-i Hususiye*, 1322 B 13, No 91.

⁴³ Translation of article of *Independent* published in Bucharest in December 1904; BOA, Y.A. Res, 129/47, lef 7.

⁴⁴ *Tezkere* of Grand Vizier presented to Abdülhamid II, dated 23 December 1904; BOA, Y.A. Res, 129/47, lef 1.

⁴⁵ *Adanir, Fikret*. Op. cit., p. 235.

when the Vlachs expressed their demand to be recognized as a separate community, the Greek Patriarchate strongly opposed and even started preventing them from worship in their language. Although the issue of recognizing the Vlachs as a separate community was an Ottoman interior problem, the Greek government declared its opposition to the idea. Moreover, it began to encourage the Greek gangs to act against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians in Macedonia.

THE ANXIETIES OF THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT VLACHS' JOINING THE BULGARIAN EXARCHATE

In 1904 another development in Macedonia caused further worries to the Ottomans. Some of the Vlachs, tired of Greeks' constraints began to co-operate with the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian Exarchate was ready to accept the Vlachs who wanted to convert or even assist them in establishing their own church. An example of such cooperation was experienced in 1904 in Manastir. When the Greeks prevented the Vlachs from worshipping in their language, Vlach priests joined the Bulgarian Exarchate where they could freely do this⁴⁶. Priests were not the only ones who cooperated with the Bulgarians. Some Vlachs in the area joined the Bulgarian "bandits" and became members of their bands. The Ottoman government was agitated about the possibility of the Vlachs leaving the Greek Patriarchate with their priests and going to the Bulgarian Exarchate. Abdülhamid II ordered measures to be taken in order to prevent the Vlachs from joining the Exarchate⁴⁷. With the increase in the activities of the Greek bands in Yanya, Manastir and Salonika, Abdülhamid II gave orders to the Military Commissions to use forceful means⁴⁸.

When Vlachs' demand to be recognized as a separate community was rejected by the Sultan, and being put under the pressure of the Greek monks and gangs, Vlachs turned towards the Bulgarians. This development came as a result of the policy of the Ottoman administration not to support Vlachs' demands. The fact that the Bulgarians accepted Vlachs' needs to conduct religious services in their mother tongue played a major role in Vlachs giving a preference to them. This increased the influence of the Bulgarians in Macedonia which frightened the Ottoman administration.

GERMANY'S APPEALS TO THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT IN FAVOUR OF THE VLACHS

In the political struggle which took place in the Balkans, for Germany being as usual on opposite sides with Britain, the Vlach issue became a matter of strategic interest. With the intensification of the Great Powers struggle in Macedonia, the Vlach issue received international importance as well⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ *Tezkere* of the Ministry of Justice sent to Sadaret, dated 30 September 1904; BOA, Y.A. Res, 129/47, lef 16.

⁴⁷ *Irade* by Abdülhamid II, dated 28 Rebiülahir 1322/ 12 July 1904; BOA, Irade-i Hususiye, 1322 R 28, No 169.

⁴⁸ *Irade* by Abdülhamid II, dated 18 Ramazan 1323/ 16 November 1905; BOA, Irade-i Hususiye, 1323 N 18, No 37.

⁴⁹ *Tokay, Gül*. Op. cit., 103-109.

The German officials who did not want any opposition to occur against them in the Balkans made some attempts to support Vlachs' demands in 1905. Germany paid attention to the problems of the Vlach schools at Yanya. The German ambassador in Istanbul visited the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs and put forward some proposals aimed to improve the well-being of the Vlachs in that province: Vlachs who held Ottoman citizenship to be allowed to worship in their language and the Ottoman officials to help them on that matter; the Vlachs should be affiliated to the Greek Patriarchate and if somebody wants to go to Greek churches, he should not be prevented; the Vlachs should be permitted to elect their own self-governor according to the civil law just like the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian communities, in other words, rights given to other communities by the Ottoman Law should also be given to the Vlachs; Vlach inspectors should be appointed for the opening procedures and inspection of the Vlach schools but meanwhile, inspectors demoted by the governor of Yanya should not be re-appointed and new inspectors should take their place; to preserve the good relations between the Ottoman government and Romania, the governor of Yanya should visit the temporary Romanian consul and put forward his apologies, but that visit should be done on the birthday of the Romanian King so that not to look as if its only aim was to apologize. The proposals of the German ambassador were conveyed to the Grand Vizier by the Minister of Foreign Affairs⁵⁰.

In this way, to counter the increase British activity in the region, Germany who had already established itself as a partner of the Ottoman Empire on many political issues, appealed directly to the Ottoman government to accept the Vlachs as a separate group. Germany even made a recommendation regarding the worsened relations with the Romanian government, which was irritated by the behaviour of the governor of Yanya. That was clear evidence that the Germans were following the development of the Vlach issue very closely.

THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT GIVES THE VLACHS AN OFFICIAL COMMUNITY STATUS

When Abdülhamid II was informed about Germany's demands, he turned immediately to the Porte to find out a solution on the Vlach issue. The Porte decided that the Vlachs could be allowed to worship and be educated in their language, and that they could also elect their governor and work with their own inspectors and teachers as long as they did not harm the authority of the Greek Patriarchate. But, the Porte stated that the Romanian Embassy and consuls did not have any right to intervene on behalf of the Vlach community whose members were Ottoman citizens. It was emphasized in particular that after the Vlach community appointed its teachers and inspectors to the Vlach schools, it should inform the Ministry of Education. The inspectors who were expelled from Yanya could return to the province but new inspectors had to take their place. The Porte also pointed out that the dispute between the governor of Yanya and the Romanian consul should be settled

⁵⁰ *Tezkere* of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 18 May 1905; BOA, Irade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, No 20, lef 3.

down as previously ordered and that the Minister of the Interior should be informed about the election of the members of the administrative council. Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was made responsible for publishing these decisions in a newspaper in Istanbul and the decisions related to schools and churches had to be sent to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice⁵¹.

On May 19, 1905 the official report of the Committee of State Ministers was presented to Abdülhamid II⁵², he approved its decisions and ordered their implementation⁵³. Orders were sent to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice on May 20, 1905, and to the Ministry of Interior on May 27, 1905⁵⁴.

Before Germany's appeal to the Ottoman government in favour of the Vlachs, the Ottoman government had already given orders regarding the election of a Vlach member to the administrative council, but this was never put into practice. Abdülhamid II, who overruled similar demands put forth by the Romanian government one year ago, made concessions to the Vlachs only after the intervention of Germany. The consent of the Ottoman government to accept the German proposal on the Vlachs becoming a separate community was indicative for its relations with Germany and the extent of Germany's interference in the internal matters of the Empire.

Although the Ottoman government has accepted to recognize the Vlachs as an independent community, on September 17, 1905 the Greek Patriarch published a diplomatic note on the Greek-Vlach issue where he emphasized that the Patriarchate considered the Vlachs as Greeks⁵⁵. It was obvious that the recognition of the Vlachs as an official community offended both Britain and Greece.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY OF THE VLACHS

The Vlachs were satisfied once they were accepted as a community like the other non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. Although they were still a part of the Greek Patriarchate⁵⁶, they began to work in local governments as representatives of their own community. While the Vlachs did not have any problems in areas where

⁵¹ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers which consisted of the Grand Vizier, the Sheikh al-Islam, the Minister of Justice, the General Commander, the State Council President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Maritime, the Manager of Tophane-i Amire, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Evkaf, the Minister of Education and the Undersecretary of SADARET, dated 19 May 1905; BOA, Irade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, No 20, lef 2.

⁵² *Tezkere* of the Grand Vizier, dated 19 May 1905; BOA, Irade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, No 20, lef 1.

⁵³ *Irade* by the Padishah, dated 20 May 1905; BOA, Irade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, No 20, lef 1. see, another sample of the Decree of Abdülhamid, II; BOA, Irade-i Hususiye, 1323 RA 17, No 52.

⁵⁴ Information on the back side of *Tezkere* of Sadaret; BOA, Irade-i Dahiliye, 1323 RA 17, No 20, lef 1.

⁵⁵ *Adanir, Fikret*. Op. cit., p. 236.

⁵⁶ Christian religious affairs usually came to the Ottoman administration through the Greek Patriarchate. For example, in 1906 when they wanted to add some building to the Vlach church they took the permission through the Greek Patriarchate, the permission of the Grand minister dated 1 Cemazilelahir 1324, and *Irade* by the Padishah, dated 1324 (July 23, 1906); BOA, Irade-i Adliye ve Mezahib, 1324 C 27, No 21.

they were a majority, they encountered some problems in multi-communal areas. The most important of these problems was a result of the existing rule that the representative of the Greek Patriarch joined the administrative councils as a spiritual president. Even in areas where the Vlachs were a majority, the Greek spiritual president had a permanent membership in the administrative councils. Other non-Muslim communities also had representatives in the local councils consecutively if they had a certain number of inhabitants in the area. An example of this was experienced in Gevgeli where Greek and Vlach representatives have worked in turn as members of the administrative council⁵⁷.

Still, the Vlach community did not completely benefit from these rights. Especially the Vlachs living within the areas of the Greek-Bulgarian struggle were facing difficulties and these problems increased due to the lack of efficiency of some administrators. Military commanders, who realised the strategic location of the Vlachs in Macedonia and considered security important, made some attempts in favour of the Vlachs. For instance, the Commander of the Army Corps in Manastir informed the *Serasker* that "it was vital that the Vlachs should benefit from rights such as opening their own schools in their villages and appointing representatives in the churches and members in the local administrative councils. This was necessary for the Ottoman state."⁵⁸ Once the Ministry of Defence informed the Ministry of Interior, the necessary steps were taken in Manastir on this issue and the Ministry of Interior asked for information on the matter from Manastir⁵⁹.

Despite the efforts of the Ottoman officials, the Vlachs could never be relieved completely. The main reason for this was the fact that they did not have an independent church. During the Second Constitutional Period, an appeal was made to the Ottoman government for the establishment of a spiritual authority for the Vlachs. The Ottoman government ordered the Ministry of Justice and Religious Denominations to take the necessary steps on that matter⁶⁰. However, the whole issue was dropped from the agenda with the beginning of the Balkan Wars. The Ottoman government lost the regions where Vlachs lived⁶¹.

The recognition of the Vlachs as an official community became an important basis for preserving their identity. The existence of the Vlach community was bound to the interests of the Ottoman government in Macedonia. When the Ottoman government lost Macedonia, the Vlachs in Macedonia also suffered a great loss. After the establishment of a national government in this region, the Vlachs were not able to protect their identity any more.

⁵⁷ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated May 12, 1907; BOA, MV, 115/107.

⁵⁸ *Tezkere* sent to the Ministry of Interior from the Ministry of Defense, dated 12 October 1910, Shevval 1328; BOA, DH-SYS, 19/70, lef 2.

⁵⁹ *Tezkere* sent to Manastir from the Ministry of Interior, dated 15 October 1910; BOA, DH-SYS, 19/70, lef 1

⁶⁰ *Mazbata* of the Committee of State Ministers, dated 4 July 1911; BOA, MV, 154/36.

⁶¹ For this period see, *Jelavich, Charles and Barbara*. The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920. Washington 1997, 216-221.

CONCLUSION

Throughout their history since the time of Byzantium the Vlachs in Macedonia, have never had such an importance from international strategic point of view, as the importance they achieved between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. At the end of the 19th century, on the one hand there was a major rivalry among the Great Powers in the Balkans and on the other hand there was the struggle between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria which their expansionistic aims in the Peninsula. In the nationalist struggle in Macedonia, the Christian Vlachs, whose number was relatively small in comparison with the other non-Muslim communities, became also important as they helped the interests of the ones they sided. Ethnically, the Vlachs were similar to the Romanians, but they were under the authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. After the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in the 19th century, the Vlachs started to demand similar privileges from the Ottoman authorities. The Vlachs in the first place wanted to be allowed to do their religious ceremony using their mother tongue and with their bishops. After attaining this aim, the second step was to form the Vlach Church and community. These would be an important way to protect the existence of the Vlachs' ethnicity and culture.

The most effective instrument for the Hellenization of the Vlachs in Macedonia was the church. The Greek Patriarch strongly opposed Vlachs' demand to use their language in religious ceremony and education. Moreover, the Patriarch preferred to close the churches instead of permitting the Vlachs to use their language while worshipping. As a result, violent incidents started to occur in the churches in the areas where the Greeks and Vlachs lived together. Thus, the places designed for worshipping and peace were transformed into fighting arenas.

The Ottoman government accepted Vlachs' demands and in 1892 they were granted the right to worship and have their education in their own language. But the Vlachs continued to be a part of the Patriarchate and the Vlach translations of religious books had to be approved by the Greek Patriarch. Thus, for the first time in their history, the Vlachs gained the possibility to do their religious ceremony in their mother tongue. The recognition of this right was very important for the Vlachs to become conscious of living with their language and culture.

Despite these developments, Vlachs' problems did not come to an end due to the hostile attitude of the Greek Patriarch. The Vlachs began to work for the establishment of an independent church and chose a Vlach bishop before an approval by the Ottoman government. During the Ottoman-Greek war of 1897, the Vlachs joined the war on the side of the Ottoman army, but the Ottoman government had already given up the idea of allowing the Vlachs to establish their own church because of the concern that it might cause the transfer of the Patriarchate to Athens.

With the escalation of Greek pressure on the Vlachs, they started to cooperate with the exarchists in Macedonia which posed a serious threat to the existing status quo in the Balkans. The Vlachs' demands to be recognized as a separate community, to be given the right to select their governor and to be included in the administrative councils, were rejected by Abdülhamid II in 1904. However, in 1905 with German interference Abdülhamid II agreed to fulfill the demands of the Vlach community in the Ottoman domains. Supported by England, Greece undertook reli-

gious, political and even gang activities against the Vlachs who played an important role in destroying the status quo in the Balkans. In the beginning of the 20th century the maintenance of the status quo in the Balkans became equivalent with the existence of the Vlachs. For this reason, the Ottoman administration accepted at once the German proposal the Vlachs to be recognized as a separate community.

Although the Vlachs were granted the status of a separate community, they were still under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate. However, the problems between the Greek and the Vlach community continued until the division of the Macedonian lands among the Balkan states at the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913. With the end of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, the Vlachs once again lost their community status and were scattered around in the new Balkan map. However, in spite of the opposition of the Greek Patriarchate, that by granting the right of using the Vlach language in religious ceremony, and after recognizing them as a separate community, the Ottoman administration contributed much to the continuation of Vlach language, culture and ethnicity.