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**Building Bridges: Culture,
Community and Inclusion in
Bucharest**

24.06.2025

Voices of Difference: Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities in the Life of the City

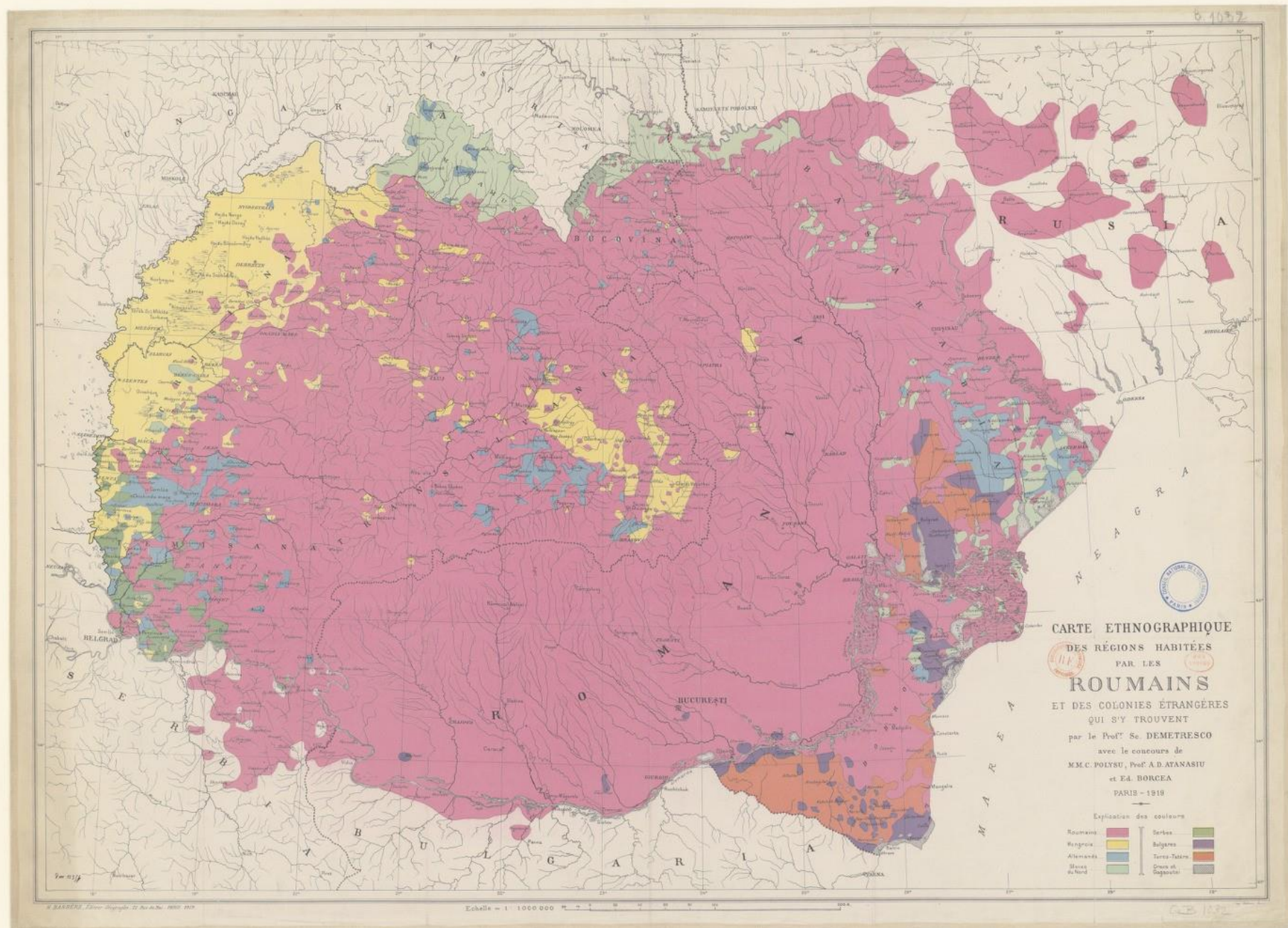
Let us see what unites us, not what divides us.

A **linguistic community** is a group of people within a given country or region who traditionally speak a language different from the official or dominant language, and who often seek to preserve their linguistic identity and rights.

An **ethnic minority** refers to a community that differs from the majority population in terms of ethnic origin, language, cultural traditions or historical experience, and which often seeks to preserve its distinct identity within the broader national framework.

Ethnic Composition of Romania: 1930 vs. 2021

Ethnic Group	1930	2021
Romanians	~71.9%	~89.3%
Hungarians	~7.9%	~6.0%
Roma	~1.5%	~3.4% (likely underreported)
Germans	~4.1%	~0.1%
Ukrainians / Ruthenians	~3.2%	~0.3%
Russians / Lipovans	~2.3% (combined)	~0.2%
Bulgarians	~2.0%	under 0.1%
Turks	~0.9%	~0.1%
Armenians	~0.1% (~11,000 people)	~0.01% (~1,500 people)
Jews	~4.0% (~728,000 people)	~0.02% (~3,400 people)
Other minorities	~1.5% (Serbs, Slovaks, Greeks etc.)	~1.2%



Ethnic Composition of Romania: Evolution

- **Jews** were the third-largest ethnic minority in 1930 (~4%). Their numbers declined drastically due to the Holocaust, post-war emigration (especially to Israel), and Communist-era policies. In 2021, they make up less than 0.02% of the population.
- **Armenians**, though a smaller group, had a historically significant presence in urban centres such as Bucharest, Iași, and Constanța. In 1930, there were about 11,000 Armenians; in 2021, around 1,500 remain.
- The **general decrease** in minority populations is due to: *territorial changes* (after 1940), *the Holocaust* (for Jews and for Roma people), large-scale emigration (Germans, Jews, Armenians), cultural assimilation, communist repression and institutional suppression, and underreporting in recent censuses.

Jews in Romania: Evolution

1. Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (3rd–12th centuries)

- Archaeological and epigraphic evidence (e.g. funerary inscriptions) attests to the presence of Jewish communities in Dobruja, dating back to the Roman and Byzantine periods.

2. The Middle Ages and the Premodern Period (14th–18th centuries)

- *Sephardic Jews* (of Spanish origin) settled in Wallachia and Moldavia following their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and their refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Later,
- *Ashkenazi Jews* (from Central and Eastern Europe) began to immigrate in increasing numbers, especially from Poland and Ukraine, often fleeing pogroms and persecution.

3. The 19th Century – The Beginnings of Modern Communities

- Jews settled in large numbers in commercial towns such as Iași, Galați, Botoșani, Piatra Neamț, Buhuși, Dorohoi, and Focșani, as well as in rural areas of Moldavia and Transylvania. This period saw the establishment of synagogues, Jewish schools, printing houses, and commercial networks.

Armenians in Romania: Evolution

1. Early Middle Ages (10th–12th centuries)

- The first Armenian presences are attested in Transylvania, particularly in Bistrița and Dumbrăveni, often in connection with trade routes linked to the Black Sea. By the 11th century, Byzantine chronicles already mentioned Armenian communities in south-eastern Europe.

2. Waves of Refugees in the 14th–15th Centuries

- Following the conquest of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia by the Mamluks (1375), many Armenians sought refuge in Moldavia and Wallachia.
- The rulers of Moldavia, especially Alexandru cel Bun (Alexander the Good), granted them commercial and religious privileges. As a result, strong Armenian communities emerged in Suceava, Botoșani, Iași, and Roman.

3. The Ottoman Period (16th–18th centuries)

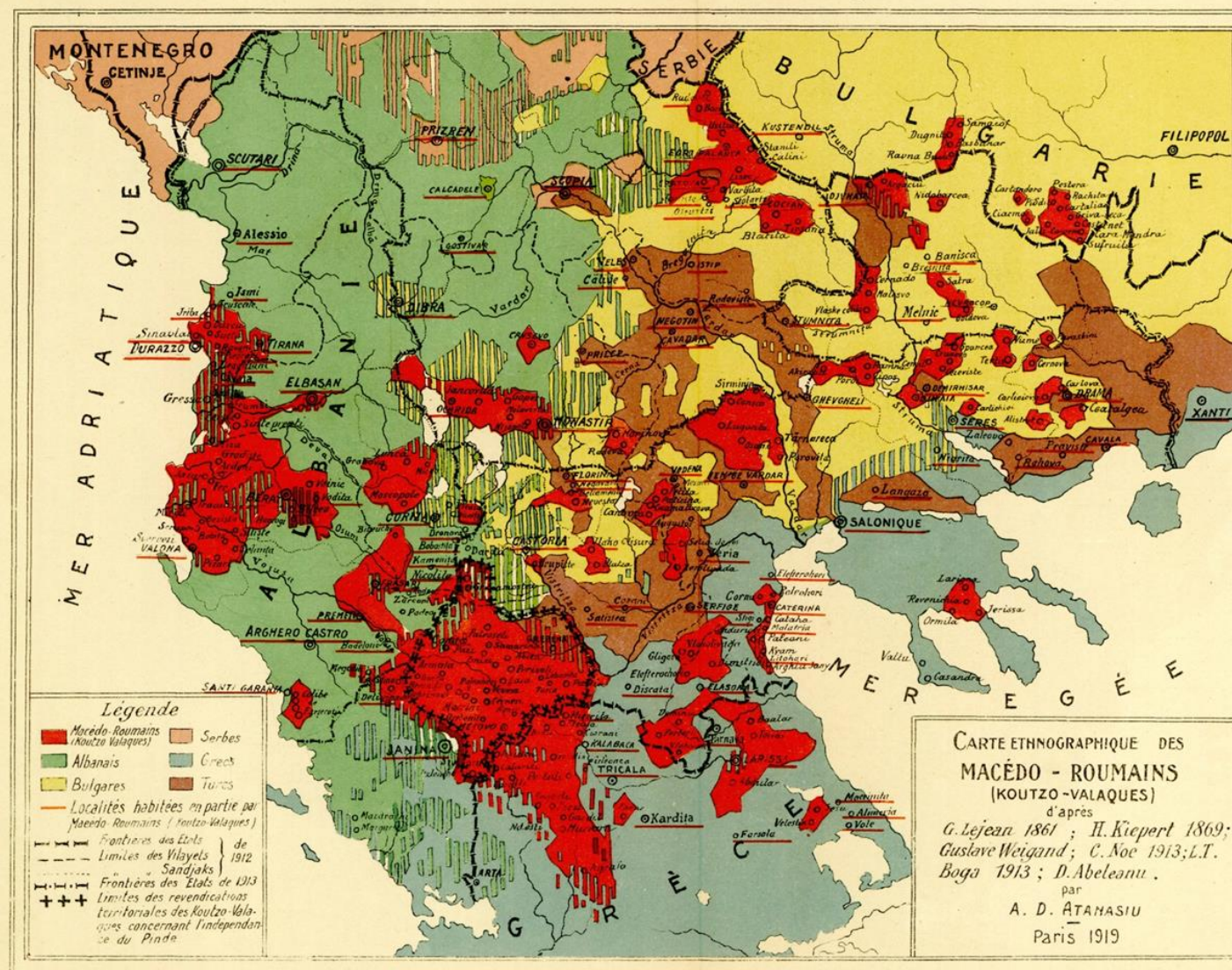
- New waves of Armenians arrived from the Ottoman Empire and Persia, fleeing conflicts and religious persecution. They became active participants in urban economic life, known as merchants, jewellers, bankers, and printers.

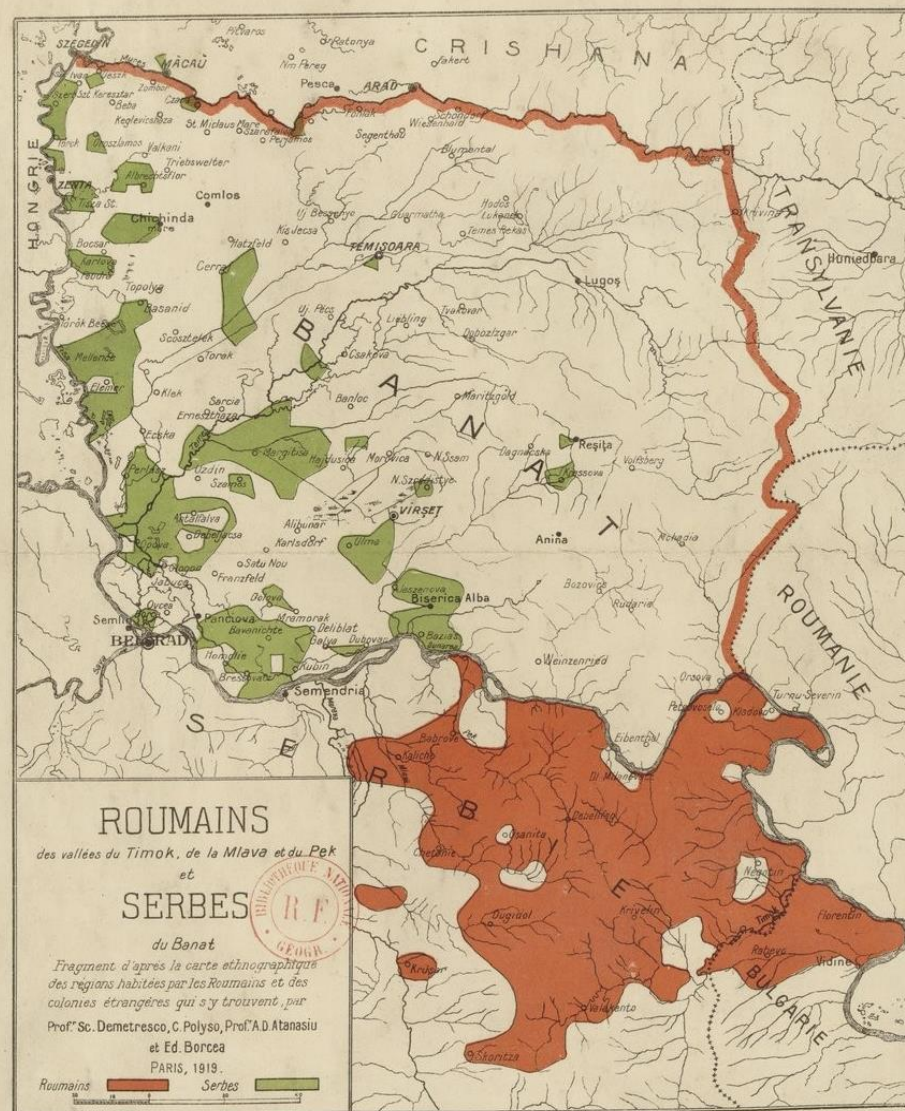
4. The 19th Century – Emancipation and Integration

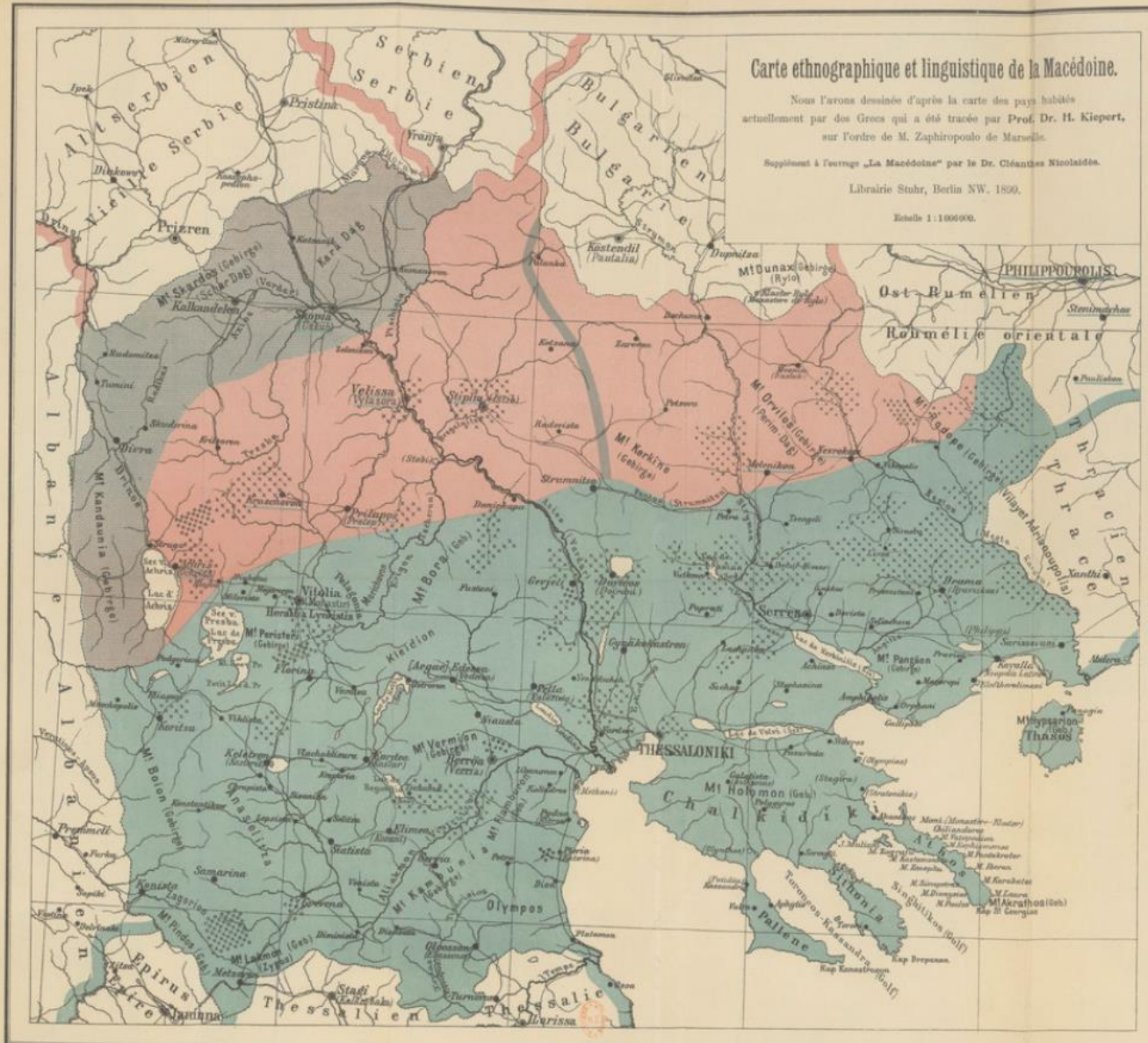
- Armenians were well integrated into the commercial and cultural elites, especially in Moldavia, Transylvania, and Dobruja.

Origins and Identity of the Aromanians (Macedo-Romanians)

- The Romanian people were formed through the synthesis of the **Thracian-Geto-Dacian** and Roman elements.
- The Thracian bloc north of the **Jireček Line** (Skopje – Ohrid – Sofia – northern Balkans – western Black Sea) became part of Eastern Romanity, the cradle of Romanian ethnogenesis.
- In the 5th–6th centuries, the early Slavs entered the Romanised Daco-Roman space, bringing minor linguistic changes.
- The collapse of the Byzantine Danubian frontier (602) under Avaro-Slavic pressure forced the Balkan Romanic populations to retreat into the mountains of the interior.
- Those who remained **north of the Danube** contributed directly to the formation of the Romanian people. **They speak the Daco-Romanian dialect – the principal dialect that underlies modern standard Romanian.**
- Some Romanic groups crossed north of the Danube; others remained in the Balkan highlands and became known as: **Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians, Istro-Romanians.**







The Macedonian Question and the Aromanians in the 19th and beginning of 20th Century

- ❑ **The Macedonian Question** refers to the political and territorial struggle over the region of Ottoman Macedonia, claimed by emerging Balkan nation-states: **Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia.**
- ❑ The Aromanians (Macedo-Romanians), a Latin-speaking minority scattered throughout the Balkans, found themselves caught in this conflict of national agendas.
- ❑ As each state sought to expand its influence, schools, churches and cultural institutions became tools of national propaganda:
 - ✓ Greek authorities claimed the Aromanians as Hellenised Orthodox Christians.
 - ✓ Bulgarians targeted them via the Exarchate and education.
 - ✓ Romania responded by opening Aromanian-language schools and offering scholarships, aiming to reinforce a shared Latin identity.
- ❑ Romanian diplomacy advocated for the recognition of Aromanian rights in the Ottoman Empire, culminating in the 1905 Irade (Sultanic Decree) granting them minority privileges.
- ❑ The Aromanians became both beneficiaries and victims of the Macedonian struggle:
 - ✓ Beneficiaries: through Romanian support and cultural revival.
 - ✓ Victims: due to violence, pressure, and nationalistic retaliation from neighbouring factions.

The Current Situation of the Macedo-Romanians

❑ Greece:

- ✓ Officially considers Aromanians part of the Greek nation.
- ✓ No minority status is granted;
- ✓ Aromanian is not taught in public schools.
- ✓ Cultural associations are allowed but must avoid ethnic or separatist claims.

❑ Albania:

- ✓ Recognises Aromanians as a national minority (since 2017).
- ✓ Cultural rights exist in theory, but implementation is limited.
- ✓ Aromanian is taught in some schools, often with Romanian support.

❑ North Macedonia:

- ✓ Recognised as a minority, with some educational and media access.
- ✓ Aromanian-language programmes exist on public television.
- ✓ Political representation through small parties or minority lists.

❑ Romania:

- ✓ Aromanians south of the Danube are considered part of the "Romanians abroad".
- ✓ The Romanian state offers scholarships, media funding, and church support, especially in Albania and North Macedonia.
- ✓ According to the Romanian Academy, the Aromanians are an integral branch of the Romanian people, and their language, Aromanian, is classified as a dialect of Romanian.

What Unites the Aromanians, Armenians and Jews?

- ❑ **All three were distinct minority communities in the Ottoman Empire and later in Balkan states:**
 - ✓ Armenians and Jews were recognised as part of the *millet* system, enjoying religious and educational autonomy.
 - ✓ Aromanians were not formally a millet, but the 1905 Imperial Irade (Decree) granted them recognition for cultural and religious rights, largely supported by Romania.
- ❑ **Cultural Identity through Education and Culture:**
- ❑ **Urban Presence and Economic Roles:**
 - ✓ Merchants, bankers, craftsmen, lawyers, doctors, teachers.
 - ✓ Strong economic migration, strong political migration.
- ❑ **Balance between Tradition and Integration:**
 - ✓ These groups survived by balancing *cultural resilience* with *adaptation*: Preserving *language, religion* and *customs*. While also adopting *bilingualism (multilingualism)*, *civic involvement*, and *professional integration*.
- ❑ **Intellectual and Civic Solidarity (19th–20th c.):**
 - ✓ In modern Romania, their elites often intersected in: freemasonry, cultural societies, press, and the national modernisation project.
 - ✓ Joint efforts in defending rights, publishing, and participating in public life.

Historical Stages in the Migration of the Macedo-Romanians

- ❑ **The Macedo-Romanians were engaged in transhumant pastoralism across the Balkans**, a practice that soon led to economic growth and the necessity to manage and trade surplus goods. Their second major occupation was commerce, supported by **caravan** routes that linked the ports of the Ionian and Mediterranean Seas with both Eastern and Western Europe.
- ❑ **Key Aromanian urban centers:** Moscopole (11th–18th c.) – the most important cultural and commercial center of the Aromanians, with a printing press (established in 1731), academy, and 72 churches. Its destruction in 1769 and again in 1788 triggered a **major wave of migration** toward the Habsburg Empire, Transylvania, and the Romanian Principalities.
- ❑ **Modern Migrations (19th–20th centuries):**
 - ✓ **Economic and cultural migration** toward the mother country, in order to pursue education and integrate into the national community, the late 19th century.
 - ✓ **Macedo-Romanian Colonisation in Quadrilateral (Southern Dobruja)** – starting 1925, due to ethnic persecution and assimilation pressures – in Greece, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria (closure of Romanian-language schools, acts of violence, and religious/cultural discrimination) and destruction of traditional Aromanian communities, as a result of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913): 35.000-40.000 people.

A Case of Mistaken Identity: Aromanians or Greeks?

- ❑ “They were Greeks by name, but Aromanians by origin.”
- ❑ In the 18th–19th centuries, many Aromanian merchants were mistaken for Greeks – both by authorities and the wider public – due to:
 - ✓ **Use of the Greek language** in business, church, and education (Greek was the lingua franca of Balkan trade).
 - ✓ **Shared Orthodox religion:** in the Ottoman Empire, all Orthodox Christians were administratively included in the Greek Orthodox Millet, which was subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This classification did not define **ethnic or national** identity, but rather religious affiliation. It was a system of belonging **that granted certain administrative and commercial rights** to Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire.,,
 - ✓ A significant number of Macedo-Romanians amassed substantial fortunes and became key supporters of Romanian national causes, while also contributing actively to the educational and cultural development of their host societies.
 - ✓ Some among them actively supported and identified with both Romanian and Greek cultural and educational institutions.

Traditional way of life and cultural heritage



Manakia Brothers, 1905



„Călușari“ dance,
Romania



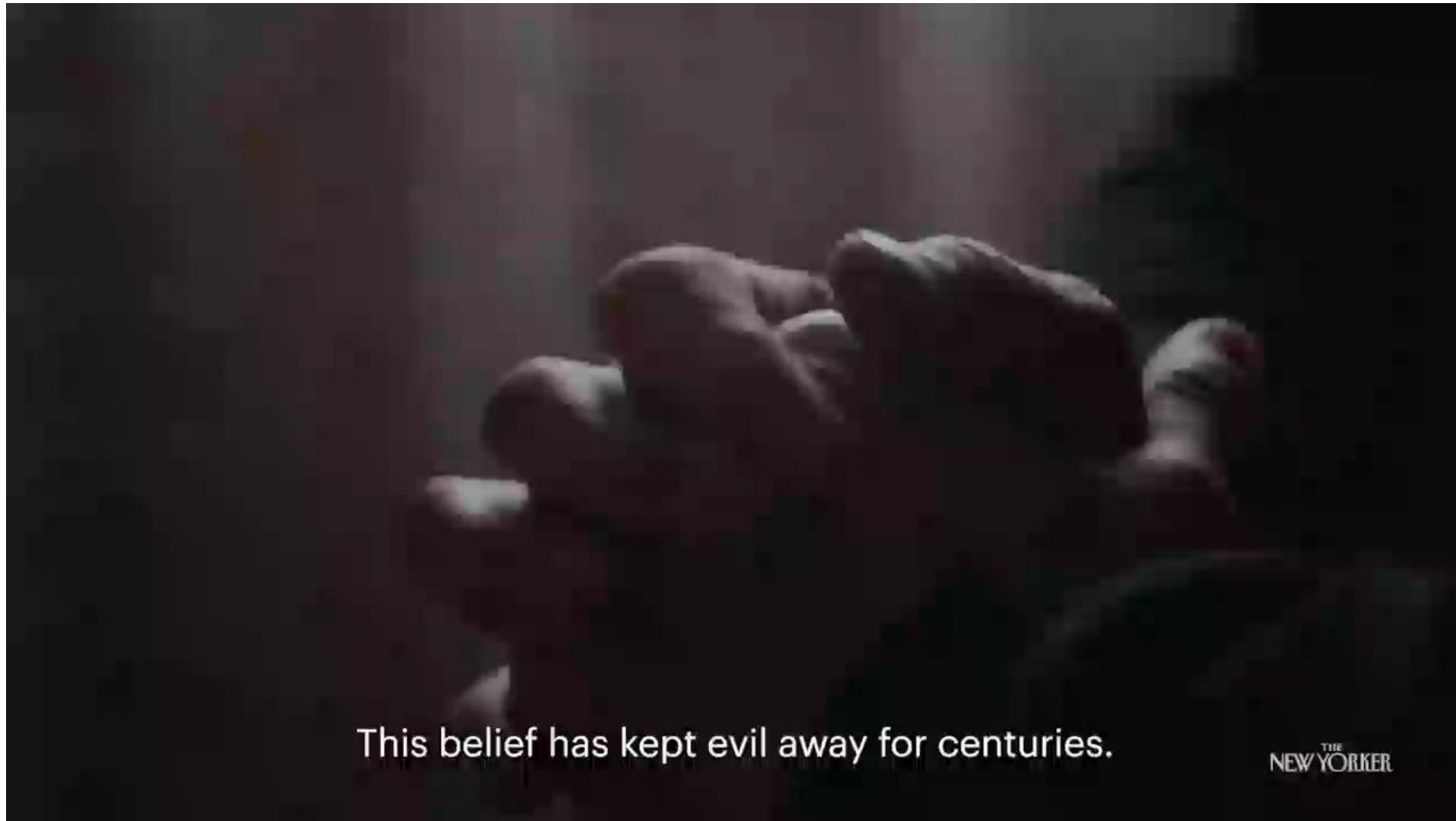
Rougkatsia from Macedonia and Thesalia, Greece



Zvončari of Croatia (Kastav Region)



New Year's Parade in Neamț County, Northern Moldova (Romania)



This belief has kept evil away for centuries.

THE
NEW YORKER

Kukeri from Bulgaria



IN CAP AND BELLS. A VLACH MASQUERADER AT VERRIA

A Vlach Masquerader at Veria, in A.J.B. Wace, *The Nomads of The Balkans*, London, 1914.



Ceremonial mask from the Macedonian highlands (Dharma/Kavalla, Greece) and „Babougeroi“ from Serres/Flampouro, Greece



“Arapides” from Kavalla, Greece



"Arapides" from Kavalla, Greece



Traditional Ritual Masks from Bulgaria and Romania



- ❑ **"On Our Flag Is Written Unity" – A Romanian Song with an Albanian Legacy**
- ❑ **"Pe-al nostru steag e scris Unire" ("On our flag is written Unity") is a famous Romanian patriotic song that briefly served as the national anthem of Albania during the country's formative years.** 📄 **Origin in Romania: Lyrics by: Andrei Bârseanu Music by: Ciprian Porumbescu Composed in 1880, the song became a symbol of the Romanian national awakening and the ideal of national unity. Its powerful lyrics express solidarity, struggle, and hope for a united Romanian nation.****Modern Migrations (19th–20th centuries):**
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Voiesce și vei putea

ANUNCIURI.

Linia de 30 litere petit, pagina IV 40 bani
 Deto " " " " III 2 lei — "

A se adresa:

IN ROMANIA, la administrațiunea ziarului.
 IN PARIS, la Havas, Laffite et C^{ie}, 8 Place de la Bourse.
 LA LONDON, la G. L. Danbe et C^{ie}, 130, Fleet Street E. C.
 LA VIENNA, la dⁿⁱ Haasenstei et Vogler, Wallfischgasse 10.
 LA FRANCFORT, S. — M. G. L. Danbe et C^{ie}, pentru Ger-
 mania, Belgia, Olanda, Elveția și America.

— Scrisorile nefrancate se refușă —

ROMANULU

REDACȚIUNEA ȘI ADMINISTRAȚIUNEA

14, STRADA DOAMNEI, 14

Luminează-te și vei fi.

ABONAMENTE:

In Capitală și districte, un an 48 lei; șase luni 24 lei;
 trei luni 12 lei; o lună 4 lei.
 Pentru toate țările Europei, trimestrul 15 lei.

A se adresa:

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 LA PARIS, la Havas-Laffite et C^{ie}, 8, Place de la Bourse.
 LA VIENNA, la d. B. G. Popovici, 15, Fleischmarkt.
 IN ITALIA, la d. dott. Cav. Gustavo Croce, Via San Fran-
 cesco da Paola (N. O.) 15, Genova.

— Articolele nepublicate se ard —

*
 *
 *
 Ziarul *Buk. Tagblatt* primesce din Cernăuți
 știrea despre succesul ce l'a avut
 concertul societății române de cântări „Ar-
 monia“. Mari aplauze a căpătat *Cucuruz
 cu frunza 'n sus*, cântec poporâr de W.
 Humpel; această bucată a fost cântată de
 două ori.
 *

The newspaper *Bukowinaer Tagblatt* receives from Cernăuți the news about the success of the concert held by the Romanian choral society 'Armonia'. The song *Cucuruz cu frunza 'n sus*, a folk tune by W. Humpel, received great applause; this piece was performed twice.,

Wilhelm Humpel

Born: 1841, in Bukovina (then part of the Austrian Empire).

Profession: Teacher in Chernivtsi (Cernăuți), musician, conductor, and folklorist.

He collected, arranged, and harmonized Romanian folk songs, which he introduced into choral and orchestral repertoires.

He was highly respected by the local Romanian community, despite not being ethnically Romanian himself.

Among his most famous arrangements is the folk song "Cucuruz cu frunza-n sus", which enjoyed great popularity at the time — as mentioned in the press excerpt you provided.