

A Brief History of Romanians in the Serbian Banat

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Abstract:

Romanian inhabitants live in nearly forty villages in that part of Banat which used to belong to the former state of Yugoslavia and which now belongs to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, i.e. Republic of Serbia. The Romanian inhabitants were colonized in the area, i.e. in the space of contemporary Vojvodina, mostly in the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century from the eastern parts of Banat. A number of villages were inhabited by settlers from other parts of Romanian ethnic space, before all from Oltenia, Transylvania and Crișana. The newcomers were settled in the places existing since the Turkish, and even medieval times, while in some cases completely new settlements were established. After the World War I and the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Banat was divided between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Romania. The status of the Romanian minority in Banat was regulated by international contracts signed after the World War I, as well as by various Yugoslav-Romanian contracts. Therefore, conditions were created for the Romanian national minority in the Yugoslav (Serbian) Banat to exercise their national rights, which enabled their survival in the region to the present day. Today, the Romanian minority is found on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Despite their significant decrease in numbers, they still have a rich cultural life and are active in different domains of the society. They preserve their identity due to the existence of schools taught in the Romanian language,

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of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as due to national mass media that have program in the languages of the minorities as well.

Keywords:

Serbian Banat, Romanians, identity, cultural movement, education in the mother tongue

Introduction

Romanians live in approximately forty villages on the territory of Banat which had since 1918 been a part of the Yugoslav state, now belonging to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, i.e. the Republic of Serbia.

The Romanian population mainly originates from the eastern parts of Banat, although, during the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century, population from other parts of the Romanian ethnic area, primarily from Oltenia, Transylvania and Crişana arrived in several villages. This newly-arrived population settled in villages that had existed since the times of the Ottoman rule and even medieval times, while only in some cases they founded completely new settlements. Depending on the origin of the population, the Romanian villages can be divided into several groups. The first group consists of villages found in the vicinity of Vrşac (Vârşet) [The names for villages and towns appearing in this paper are given in their present official form (in the Serbian language), with the name in the Romanian language in the parenthesis]¹, where the indigenous population of Banat lives and for which there are indications that they are the oldest Romanian villages in this part of Banat. The villages in question are Malo Središte (Sredişteia Mică), Markovac (Marcovăţ), Kuštilj (Coştei), Vojvodinci (Voivodinţ), Sočica (Sălciţa), Jablanka (Iablanca) and Mesić (Mesici), along with villages from the plain surrounding Vrşac, namely, Mali Žam (Jamu Mic), Vlajkovac (Vlaicovăţ) and Ritiševo (Râtişor) as well as an isolated village, Grebenac (Grebenăţ) on the edge of Deliblato Sands. The second group consists of villages found in the Banat plains also inhabited by Banat Romanians: Alibunar, Seleuş (Seleuş), Barice (Sân-Ianăş), Margita (Mărghita), Nikolinci (Nicolinţ),

Vladimirovac (Petrovasâla), Uzdin, Ečka (Ecica), Sutjeska (Sărcia) and Veliki Torak (Toracul Mare) along with some isolated village in the far south: Dolovo (Doloave), Mramorak (Maramorac) and Deliblato (Deliblata). Population from Transylvania settled Jankov Most (Iancaid), Klek (Clec), Ovča (Ofcea), Glogonj (Glogoni), Jabuka (Iabuca), and partly Banatsko Novo Selo (Satu Nou), Ečka, Seleuš, Alibunar and Lokve (Sân-Mihai). Romanians from Oltenia settled Straža (Straja), Banatsko Novo Selo and Lokve (also, partially other places), while the residents of Mali Torak (Toracul Mic) originated from Crişana. In the past centuries, Romanians also lived in other villages and towns of the western Banat in smaller numbers, but they were eventually assimilated by the numerous Serbian population, e.g. Rusko Selo (Chisoroş), Sefkerin (Sefcherin), Dobrica (Dobriţa) etc. Finally, this population was present in Banat towns, such as Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă), Kovin (Cuvin), Vršac and Pančevo (Panciova), as well as in Veliki Bečkerek (Becicherecul Mare, today Zrenjanin) and Kikinda in smaller numbers [For more details about villages with Romanian population in the Serbian Banat] (see: Măran 2009).

Demographics

When it comes to demography, it should be noted that throughout the twentieth century there was a process of continuous decline in numbers among the Romanian population in Banat, which occurred after a period of increased birth rates in the second half of the nineteenth century. The number of citizens began to decline, the first effects being visible already in the first decade of the twentieth century. The reasons are many, but we mention three that, in our opinion, had a decisive role in this process: the declining birth rate, a growing number of migrants to Western countries and Serbianization in places where the Romanian population lived together with the Serbian.

We believe that the first reason, the low birth rate, is the main reason for the decline in the number of Romanians. In fact, the main occupation of the Romanian families was mainly agriculture which meant that their entire existence was closely related to the land they cultivated, so they were reluctant to allow the land to be divided into smaller parts

which would be done if they had a large number of children. To be precise, having more children would mean the division of the estate among the male children, with the female children also receiving land for their dowry, which would, when they got married, become a part of the husband's family's land. As a result of this way of thinking, the birth rate began to decrease, the number of children in the family was usually one or two in higher and middle class peasant families, while the number of families with more than two children was small (these were usually poor peasant families). Such a situation is present to this day.

Extremely low birth rate is present primarily in the richest villages, which had the largest number of inhabitants and the best financial conditions, and this is mostly the case with the villages from the territory of the former Military Frontier, where the idea of the indivisibility of possession was held the longest.

One of the people that dealt with the problems of extremely low birth rate of the population was Doctor Gheorghe Baloş, who, in the first post-war years, monitored the demographic situation in several villages. He presented his findings from studying Uzdin, Veliki Torak, Mali Torak, Nikolinci and other Banat places by using graphs (Baloş 1954, 12-18). He considers the main reason for that to be the practice of early marriage, an issue that was placed on the agenda by the communist government in the early postwar years (Baloş 1954, 28). Propaganda against this practice was present in the press, on the radio, in literary works [The novel "Broken Youth" by Mihai Avramescu, published in 1953, considered to be one of the most successful achievements of the Romanian literature in the postwar period, was written as propaganda against premature marriages] and lectures organized in the villages.

The process of emigration of the Romanian population of Banat to North America (mainly the United States) began even before World War I, and in the interwar period, there was an increasing emigration to the United States and Canada, as a result of the unfavorable economic situation present in the Banat villages. According to certain data (Popi 1976, 93), in the period between 1918 and 1927, 367 members of the Romanian minority emigrated to America. Other sources from around the

same period (1921-1929) do not fully agree with the data from above, citing the figure of a total of 1079 Romanians that left the country (*Jadranska straža* 1930, 255). In the following decades, especially in the years after World War II, the people who left would be the support and inspiration for many individuals and families planning to leave the country and emigrate, in pursuit of happiness and the possibility of a better life on the other side of the Atlantic, at first illegally, and later legally. In the postwar decades, the number of those who went to North America, but also to countries of Western Europe and to Australia, significantly affected the overall demographic situation of the Romanian population in the Yugoslav Banat, certainly in a negative way.

We should not disregard the Romanian optants who went to the Romanian part of Banat in the twenties and whose number, although difficult to determine, is certainly not negligible. Out of a total of 105 Romanian teachers who were active before the war, 72 of them went with their families to Romania (Popi 1976, 93). In addition to the mentioned teachers, other intellectuals, mainly lawyers, civil servants and doctors, also went there, leaving the villages and towns of the western Banat almost without the Romanian intelligence. The number of those who starting from 1930 went to Dobrogea is not insignificant, amounting to a total of about 500 families of poor peasants (Popi 1976, 38).

The end of World War II also resulted in the departure of a number of Romanians to the mother country. This was mostly the case with citizens who were not able to remain at their jobs or in their homes because of their anti-communist stance or because they collaborated with the occupation authorities in one form or another, thus being subjected to persecutions on political grounds, to internment or even physical liquidation. In these cases, rather than families, it was most often individuals that crossed over to Romania. The negative aspect is that, among those who decided to continue to live in Romania, there was a large number of students, who were supposed to take the role of the intellectual elite among their compatriots in the Yugoslav Banat. This is the reason why the problem of a lack of skilled personnel in numerous domains appeared once again. However, this unfavorable situation will

soon be overcome by the emergence of new generations of graduates from Teachers Training College and Gymnasium in Vršac.

As far as the process of assimilation in villages with a mixed population is concerned, it happened primarily due to the unfavorable position that the Romanian Orthodox Church had in Banat during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Being under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Karlowitz, the Romanian Orthodox believers were subjected to a constant process of national assimilation, especially in those places in which they lived together with the Serbian population. This was extremely detrimental to the survival of the population in many mixed villages. A typical example is the disappearance of the Romanian population in Dobrica near Alibunar, where in 1877 there were 1270 Serbs, 1236 Romanians, 82 Germans, 8 Hungarians and 63 Roma (Nikolić 2003, 78), but in the following decades the Romanian population completely disappeared as a result of an intense process of assimilation. A similar situation was present in other places, such as Rusko Selo next to Kikinda, which in the nineteenth century had a Romanian parish and school, but the population had disappeared completely. Then, there is the case of Bela Crkva, a small town in the south of Banat, which was once a powerful economic and cultural centre of Romanians (Popi 2006). Very strong process of assimilation was also present in the first half of the twentieth century in Deliblato, Mramorak, Dolovo, Omoljica, Glogonj, Jabuka, Kovin, Orešac and in the recent decades the trend has spread to the strong centres of the Romanian minority in Banat, namely, Banatsko Novo Selo, Vladimirovac, Alibunar, Ečka, Sutjeska, Margita, Vlajkovac and other places.

The two world wars, the greatest conflicts that took place in the twentieth century, had their effects on reducing the number of members of the Romanian minority, which is to be expected, especially if we take into account that just during World War I the total losses of the male population in the European battlefields were substantial. The death toll of this part of the population in the battles at Galicia and next to Piave, or on other fronts is not precisely determined, except in some places, including Seleuš (Bojin 2000, 80-84), Alibunar (Zăria, manuscript, 24-25) and Uzdin

(A total number of 225 men originating from Uzdin died on the fronts: Spăriosu Grofu 1999, 32).

During World War II there were relatively few casualties among the members of this nationality, even though they should not be completely ignored. The highest death toll was in Alibunar, where there were two deadly attacks. In April of 1941, at the time of the entry of German troops in this place, as a form of retaliation for the murder of a German officer, 53 people of various nationalities were shot, as well as a large number of citizens from other villages and soldiers, along with officers of the Yugoslav Royal Army (Samoilă 2004, 49-50). An even greater tragedy came upon Alibunar on August 7, 1944, when the US Air Force attacked a nearby German airport, also causing huge casualties among the villagers (Măran 2005, 177-181). On this occasion, 146 people were killed, of whom the vast majority were of Romanian nationality. The same day, US planes also bombed Nikolinci, the number of victims in the village being 22. There were also a lot of injured people and the material damage was significant. In other villages the number of registered human casualties was not that high.

Looking at the situation as a whole, the ethnic map of Banat did suffer significant changes as a result of the events during and after the world wars. Although the number of Romanians and Hungarians was in decline, it was not a phenomenon that could significantly change the existing general situation. On the other hand, the disappearance of the German minority after World War II which was due to them leaving Banat, as well as a noticeable increase in the number of Serbian inhabitants, which happened by means of colonization taking place after both world wars (For more details about the founding of the voluntary colonies in Banat after World War I, see: Micić 2013), created a new situation with regard to the numerical relationship among the various nations of the area.

Romanians in the western parts of Banat until the First World War

Some medieval sources indicate that the ancestors of the Romanian people lived in these areas in the time of the Hungarian conquest of the Pannonian plain, while other later sources also mention their presence in this part of Banat. The oldest, and in our opinion the most important source of its kind, is a chronicle "Gesta hungarum" written by an anonymous notary of the Hungarian King Bela III, who mentions the Vlachs, along with Bulgarians and Cumans, as subjects and allies of Glad, the ruler of South Banat, who fought for independence against the Hungarian attacks at the time of their arrival in the Pannonian Plain (*Cronica notarului Anonymus, Faptele ungarilor* 1996, 82-85) [Regarding this event, Anonimus says: "*Et cum uellent transire amnem temes uenit obuiam eis glad, a cuius progenie ohtum descendit, dux illius patrie cum magno exercitiu equitum et peditum, adiutorio cumanorum et bulgarorum atque blacorum*"]. Glad had one of his capitals in the fortress *Keuee* (Kovin). However, in the end, he was forced to surrender it to the invaders.

Sources from the Ottoman period (1552-1718) that mention the presence of the Romanian population in the western region of Banat are quite scarce, but they do exist. There are some sources from the seventeenth century that provide us with evidence of the presence of the Romanian population in western Banat. We mention the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, who travelled through this region in 1662 and found Vlachs, Bulgarians and Serbs (Čelebija 1957, 84) in Jabuka, a village near Pančevo, thus showing that even in this period, just as today, Banat was a typical multi-ethnic environment. The Katastihos of Peć from 1660 and 1666 also contains valuable information about the population in the villages of the western Banat, which belonged to "the Vlach Nahia" (Popović and Matić 1933, 17), where we find Romanian names (Popović and Matić 1933, 37) [In the village of Veliki Nikolinci in 1666, among other, the Romanian family name Cinci is mentioned, which exists to this day in the village].

When the Austrians conquered Banat in 1717, they found a decline in population and adverse living conditions in these areas. By becoming a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, conditions in Banat became favourable for economic, demographic and cultural recovery of the area, which

suffered a visible stagnation under the Ottoman rule. During the 18th century, the Austrian authorities undertook a series of measures to restore the devastated Banat. It was imperative to drain the wetlands and convert them into arable land, to develop crafts and trade and to reconstruct agriculture. In order to do this in the most successful way and in order to organize the defense of the Turkish incursions from the south, one of the most important measures was certainly the colonization of various nations, including Romanians, in the sparsely populated western part of Banat. During the 18th century, beside Romanians, Banat was settled by Serbs, Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Czechs, Bulgarians and to a smaller degree by other nations.

The western parts of Banat were colonized mainly by Romanians from the eastern parts of the province, but also from Transylvania, Oltenia and Crișana. The largest villages inhabited by Romanians were founded on the territory of the Banat Military Frontier, in the vicinity of Pančevo, where the headquarters of the German-Banat Regiment no. 12 was (Mileker 1926, 22-58). Some of these villages have existed in the period of the Ottoman rule (for example, Alibunar, Seleuš, Nikolinci, Sveti Mihajlo), so the newly-arrived population encountered the indigenous population here, while other villages were founded at the time of the colonization (Banatsko Novo Selo, Uzdin, Vladimirovac, Ovča, Mramorak etc.). Some of these villages had exclusively Romanian population, while in others the Romanians lived together with the Serbs or Germans (in the case of villages with German and Romanian population, Germans mostly inhabited a special part of the village and were separated from the Romanians, as is the case in Glogonj, Sarča and Ečka). The largest Romanian villages were located in the vicinity of Vršac, but when the number of villagers is concerned, they were considerably smaller than the villages in the Military Frontier. They had a larger number of the indigenous Romanian population, but colonization happened here as well. Apart from a few exceptions (Vlajkovac, Margita), these were compact Romanian villages, but with a worse financial position than the population in the Military Frontier. Several larger Romanian villages were also founded in the central region of Banat, near Veliki Bečkerek (today

Zrenjanin) (such as Veliki Torak and Mali Torak, Jankov Most). The Romanian element existed in towns, but it was numerically and materially weaker than the German and Serbian citizenship.

Being a predominantly rural population, Romanians were mostly involved in growing crops and raising livestock. In the economic sense, the population living on the territory of the Military Frontier lived in better conditions, which had a significant impact on the cultural development of the mentioned population. Still, the abolition of feudal relations on the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy created conditions for people in the provincial parts to move faster towards economic and cultural emancipation. The abolition of Bach's absolutism (1860), and then of the Banat Military Frontier (1872) contributed to the acceleration of this process. In the last decades of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, involvement in the wider socio-economic, political and cultural processes characteristic of Europe and the whole world was present among the Banat Romanians as well.

The social stratum of Romanian citizenship and intelligence is formed and it is this social stratum that stands at the head of all the national aspirations of Romanians and becomes their leader in the struggle for national rights. In the last decades of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century the first joint-stock companies were established, primarily credit-money institutions, whose shareholders were recruited from the ranks of the small Romanian bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the rich peasantry. The most famous Romanian credit-money institutions were "Luceafărul" from Vršac, "Sentinela" from Banatsko Novo Selo, "Steaua" from Vladimirovac, "Concordia" from Uzdin, "Dunăreana" from Kovin and "Panciovana" from Pančevo.

Despite all of this, the majority of the Romanian people from this territory was still living in economic and cultural backwardness, not giving up on the traditional way of life, full of prejudices and superstitions. However, it was this conservatism, to some extent, that contributed to the survival of the population in these regions in the form of a separate ethnic element. Folklore is, therefore, one of the most important factors that enabled the Romanian population in Banat to preserve their national

particularities, in a situation where this area was located within other countries, Romanians being only a national minority. Western Banat Romanians have never lived within the borders of the home country, but despite this, primarily due to the preservation of centuries-old traditions, they have survived as a people.

Most Romanians living in the western Banat were Orthodox. When Banat became a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, they were passed under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate based in Karlowitz. In a period of national revival, this hampered the independent national development. It was not until the end of 1864 that the independence of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy was recognized and Andrei Şaguna was appointed as the Romanian Metropolitan. He spent a part of his working life in Vršac, where he worked as a professor at the Serbian-Romanian Clerical School (Gavrilović 1983, 99-100). The believers living in the southern part of Banat passed under the jurisdiction of the Caransebeş Eparchy, while those from the Middle parts of Banat were under the jurisdiction of the Arad Eparchy. Obtaining ecclesiastical independence enabled a faster national and cultural process of emancipation. On the other hand, a smaller part of the population accepted the union with the Catholic Church, which led to the emergence of two Uniate parishes in the region of the Western Banat, namely, one in Markovac and one in Jankov Most. In the last decades of the nineteenth century there were also Neo-Protestant movements, primarily the Nazarene, which was first mentioned in sources from Banatsko Novo Selo, near Pančevo, in the year 1872 (The archives of the Romanian Orthodox Protopresbyterate in Pančevo, Banatsko Novo Selo, no. 7/1872), from where it spread to the neighboring villages, but also to the entire Romanian ethnic area. In the first decades of the twentieth century there were other Neo-Protestant movements - Adventist, Baptist and Pentecostal, which have to this day been part of confessional reality of Romanians living in the Serbian Banat (For more details about the Neo-Protestant communities of Romanians from the Serbian Banat, see: Đurić-Milovanović and Maran and Sikimić 2011).

The political organization of the Romanian population after the abolition of Bach's absolutism and the signing of the compromise was going in the direction of the joint struggle with the Serbs and Slovaks towards achieving full national rights. The joint Serbian-Romanian participation in the parliamentary elections during the first decades of parliamentary life in Hungary resulted in the selection of Serbian-Romanian candidates in the Hungarian Parliament. It is important to mention the victory of the Romanian political champion Vincentiu Babeş in the electoral district of Bela Crkva in 1873, as well as the victory of the Serbian politician Mihajlo Polit Desančić in the elections in Pančevo and Uzdin districts (in 1874, 1875, 1878 and 1881), largely because of the votes from the Romanian voters. Finally, similar successes were achieved by the Romanian landowner George Mocioni in Moravița district, where most of the villages from the vicinity of Vršac were found, in the elections in 1865, 1869 and 1872 (*Biserica si scol'a* 1887, 104).

The situation in culture

As far as the cultural development is concerned, in addition to the national, traditional culture, the nineteenth century also marks the beginning of the development of cultural movement that reflects the general cultural trends in the territory of the Habsburg Empire and beyond. While in the beginning only individuals were involved in this cultural movement, in late sixties of the nineteenth century and the following decades, it becomes more popular, which leads to a large number of amateur cultural societies being established in most towns. The kinds of activities of these societies are usually choral singing, theater arts, and folk dances and in the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I there was even one Romanian village (Kuštilj) that had the first brass band.

At the end of 19th and early 20th century in this part of Banat there were three branches of the cultural association "Astra" that were established that had headquarters in Vršac, Pančevo and Veliki Bečkerek (today Zrenjanin). Members of the "Astra" were intellectuals and prominent peasants, and its activity consisted of organizing literary

evenings, lectures, opening rural public libraries and distributing literature in the mother tongue, especially the press, calendars and brochures with literary and historical content. Literary and publishing activity had its first results when the first newspapers in the Romanian language were published (“Convorbiri pedagogice”, “Steaua”, “Educatorul”, “Familia”). Even though their publishing was short-lived, they still represent a proof that in this field something was being done. At the same time, during this period several books in the Romanian language were also published (we mention The monograph of the municipality of Alibunar by Teodor Petrișor and The monograph of the Roman-Petre /Petrovoselo/ municipality 1808-1908 by Nicolae Pența) and some journalists and writers published their works on the pages of publications that were coming out in various cities of the Monarchy, such as Budapest, Sibiu, Brașov, Arad, Timișoara, Lugoj.

Although the activity of the majority of cultural workers and activists was limited to the mother land, the Romanian population from the territory of the Serbian Banat still gave a few names that were significant for the entire nation, who made contributions important for the overall development of the national movement of the Romanians on their entire ethnic area. Here we will mention names like Ștefan Popovici Neagoe – a teacher in Budapest, a fighter for the national rights of the Romanians in the Habsburg monarchy, the author of several calendars, Procopie Ivacicovici – a Bishop, Metropolitan and Patriarch, Petru Broșteanu - writer and publicist, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Teodor Filipescu, a chemist and an ethnographer and others. Because of these figures, the Romanians from Serbian Banat gave their contribution to the overall national development of the Romanian people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the same time, for a shorter or longer period other famous people important for the Romanian national revival were active in the domains of culture and education, but also religion and politics. Here we mention the following names: Paul Iorgovici, Constantin Diaconovici Loga, Andrei Vasici, Andrei Șaguna and Nicolae Tincu Velea.

Among school institutions in the Habsburg period where classes were held in the Romanian language, the most significant is certainly the Serbian-Romanian Clerical School in Vršac (For more details see: Gavrilović 1983), which existed in the period between 1822 and 1865. It prepared clerical staff for the needs of parishes on the territory of the Vršac Eparchy. After the separation of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate in 1865, the classes held in the Romanian language, i.e. the entire department that had Romanian as the teaching language in the Clerical School in Vršac was moved to Caransebeș, the headquarters of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese.

As part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The division of Banat between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS), on the one hand, and Romania, on the other, which happened after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had as a consequence that the Romanian population of the western part of Banat became a part of the newly formed Yugoslavia. The delineation of Banat between the Yugoslav and the Romanian state was a complex issue, because both sides claimed their right to the entire territory. However, this issue was resolved by compromise, after arduous negotiations that took place in the post-war international peace conferences, as well as by means of bilateral agreements between the two neighboring countries. The delineation of Banat between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania was finally completed in early 1924, when an exchange of the last border towns was done. Because of mixed population living on this territory, in the Romanian Banat a significantly large Serbian minority remained, while on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat, there were around 40 villages inhabited by the Romanian population.

The first census in the Kingdom of SCS done in 1921 showed that in this country there were 69,078 people who declared themselves as Romanians, of whom 67,675 lived on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat.

In the field of politics, the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat organized themselves in 1923 by forming the Romanian party in the Kingdom of SCS, which, in the parliamentary elections of that year, received the first

Member of Parliament, Dr. Ioan Jianu, a lawyer from Alibunar (Popi 1996, 91). Despite the initial unity in action, eventually, discord appeared among the leadership of this party, which had the effect of weakening the party and its failure in the parliamentary elections of 1925 and 1927. When the "January 6th" Dictatorship was established in 1929, this party was banned, as well as all the political parties in the country. The Romanian national minority in this area was not able to organize itself again until 1935, by establishing the Romanian Central Committee, which replaced the former Romanian party. In the parliamentary elections of 1935, Dr. Alexandru Butoarcă, the leader of the Romanian Central Committee, became a member of the Senate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Popi 1996, 119).

However, disagreements among the leaders of the Romanian national movement once again appeared in the second half of the thirties, which certainly did not have a positive effect on the position of the Romanian minority in the Yugoslav Banat. The Romanian intellectuals divided into two factions, the first of which supported Dr. Alexandru Butoarcă and was gathered around the weekly "Nădejdea", and the other, composed mostly of Orthodox priests and was gathered around the association "Astra". This division was not overcome until the end of the interwar period.

Education in the Romanian language in the interwar period, especially during the twenties, went through a serious crisis which was caused by the departure of the majority of teachers to Romania. Due to the lack of teaching staff, the classes in the twenties were not held in the students' native language in many elementary schools, or alternatively, the teachers that did teach in Romanian did not know enough of the Romanian language for the education to be of high quality. This issue was finally resolved when teachers from Romania came who had contractual employment, on the basis of the Yugoslav-Romanian academic convention signed in 1933. One of its postulates was that the members of the Romanian minority in the Yugoslav Banat should have their classes in their mother tongue, and vice versa, the members of the Serbian minority in the Romanian Banat should have them in the Serbian language. First

contractual teachers arrived to Romanian schools in the Yugoslav Banat in 1935, which finally created conditions for overcoming this crisis.

It is significant to mention the establishment of the lower classes in the Romanian language in the Gymnasium in Vršac (in the school year of 1934/35) and classes in the Romanian language in the Teacher Training College, also in Vršac, in the school year of 1935/36, as well as the Romanian dormitory in Vršac in 1935 for male students, and from 1936 for female students, too (For more on the problems of education in the Romanian language in the interwar period, see: Popi 1976, 92-123).

In religious terms, the Orthodox Romanians living on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat belonged to the Caransebeş Eparchy (the Southern Banat), respectively, to the Arad Eparchy (the Central Banat) and they were divided into three Protopresbyterates, based in Vršac, Pančevo (Banatsko Novo Selo) and Sarča. Given the small number of Romanian intellectuals, the Orthodox clergy played a significant role in the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the Romanian villages in the region (Măran 2012, 116).

As for the cultural development of the Romanians in Yugoslav Banat between the two world wars, it continued to go in the same direction, despite the new conditions. Since the division of Banat led to their loss of a direct connection to the strong cultural centres in the eastern Banat and Transylvania, the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat were left on their own, which also had its effects on the cultural movement of the population. One of the big losses was that the intellectual elite, namely, teachers, lawyers, doctors, left the country and went to Romania, which had occurred at the beginning of the twenties of the last century as a result of their aspirations to live on the territory of the mother country after the division of Banat between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania.

The Romanian cultural societies continued their tradition that had begun during the Austro-Hungarian rule. The activity of these cultural societies included primarily choral activity, followed by theater groups and folk ensembles, and during the twenties and thirties, most cultural societies also established their brass orchestras. The activities of cultural associations usually consisted of organizing events, where they performed

choir compositions, recited poems, performed plays, monologues, dialogues, played folk games such as “Călușarul” and “Bătuta” and later in their activity, they added instrumental compositions to their repertoire, which were performed by brass orchestras. These societies were governed by local intellectuals - priests and teachers, as well as enthusiasts from among the more emancipated peasantry. In addition to performances, these cultural societies were present in many other cultural, political and religious events.

When “Astra” was founded in 1936, the Romanian minority received the first association that was registered with the state organs, which allowed, at least for a short period of time, a more organized cultural activity in the Romanian villages.

The literary and publishing activity was modest. In addition to the weekly “Nădejdea” in Vrșac, which was published uninterruptedly in the period between 1927 and 1944, all the others were published for a short period of time. In the same period, only one book was published, along with several calendars and several school textbooks.

The assistance that Romania as a country of origin gave for the cultural needs of this population consisted primarily in the shipments of books and other publications, which mostly came from the library “I. G. Bibicescu” of Turnu Severin to all Romanian parish libraries in the Yugoslav Banat (see: Chipurici 1995), but also in organizing excursions and visits of peasants, pupils and students to different parts of Romania. A special form of assistance sent by the mother country involved contractual teachers who came to the Yugoslav Banat and who, in addition to activities in the field of education, contributed to the improvement of the quality of cultural societies (primarily by being choir leaders, conductors of brass bands and managers of drama sections), while some of them were also writers and publicists (Mihai Avramescu, Teodor Șandru and others).

The immediate post-war years

The Romanian minority in Banat after World War II shared the fate of other citizens of the country; Yugoslavia became a communist country, led by Josip Broz Tito. Repressive measures were undertaken by the

communist authorities towards the rich peasants; forced collectivization, nationalization and other similar undertaken measures also applied to the Romanian minority in Banat. On the other hand, the Romanians had their representatives in government, from the local to the federal level. The Informbiro (Information Bureau) Resolution of 1948 was a difficult period for the members of the Romanian minority who were involved in the government of socialist Yugoslavia, primarily because Romania was one of the countries that took part in carrying out the policy of strong pressures to which People's Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was exposed.

In the early postwar years, the overall cultural activity of the Romanian minority in Vojvodina was coordinated by the Romanian Cultural Association, founded in 1945 with the goal to implement cultural policies of the country's new government. From 1948 onward, the cultural activities of the Romanians in Vojvodina would be the responsibility of the newly formed Alliance of Cultural and Educational Societies of Vojvodina (ACESV), which was responsible for the entire amateur activity on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, founded in the heat of conflict with the Information Bureau.

Regarding the theater activity, it is important to mention the establishment of the Romanian National Theatre in Vršac in 1949, which would significantly improve the quality of theatrical life of this minority.

Within the cultural life of the Romanians in Vojvodina, musical amateurism played perhaps the most important role when it comes to the impact on the preservation of national identity. The activities of choirs and fanfares, and even more of folk orchestras and folk ensembles, were far more popular and prevalent in the everyday life of rural Banat than any other form of cultural activities.

The weekly "Libertatea" is the first publication in the Romanian language in Vojvodina that appeared after World War II. The editorial policy was partially changed depending on the changes at the head of the editorial board, as well as on the internal and international political circumstances. As with the overall cultural activity in those years, the activity and editorial policy of the magazine for literature, art and culture "Lumina" was orchestrated by ACESV. In the early post-war years,

publishing in the Romanian language in Vojvodina was largely reduced to printing books with ideological content. The program of Radio Novi Sad began to be broadcasted in 1949. Despite their propagandist character, the shows on Radio Novi Sad would significantly influence the development of culture and national consciousness of the Romanians in Vojvodina.

The introduction of a new government system also meant the establishment of a new school system, which was based on the Marxist worldview. As recently as 1945 the Law on compulsory seven-year schooling was adopted. Starting with the school year of 1951/52, the elementary school was extended to eight years (Spăriosu 1982, 9). Since the school year of 1948/49, the classes held in the Romanian language in the Vršac Gymnasium had been separated into a separate Romanian Gymnasium, which existed in that form until 1956. The Teacher Training College in Vršac also had classes in the Romanian language (For more see: *Instruirea învățătorilor și a educatorilor în limba română la Vârșeț* 2013).

Conclusion

Once the process of liberalization of all spheres of social life started, this created conditions for the Romanian minority in Vojvodina to take advantage of the new situation. The standard of living has increased since the fifties and sixties, which has resulted in creating an ambience favourable for the development of agriculture, which still represents the main economic branch of this population. As a result of the cultural and national policy led by the communist authorities, which was aimed at spreading the communist ideology and integration of all minorities into the socio-political system introduced in the country, the school system in minority languages, including Romanian, started showing evident improvement. This resulted in the emergence of numerous Romanian intellectuals, who would become the main force in all activities at the national, cultural, scientific, economic, political and other levels. In the domain of culture, there are significant achievements: the Festival of Music and Folklore, the Libertatea Cup, Theatre Days etc. In the last half century, numerous societies and organizations have been founded that

still operate, whose main task is to preserve the Romanian language and identity in Vojvodina and Serbia: Society of the Romanian Language, the Romanian Society (Foundation) for Ethnography and Folklore, the Community of Romanians from Yugoslavia (Serbia), Institute of the Culture of Vojvodina Romanians, and the National Council of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia as the main representative body after the democratic changes in Serbia, which began following the events of October 2000.

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