



ИЗВЕСТИЯ НА БЪЛГАРСКОТО ГЕОГРАФСКО ДРУЖЕСТВО JOURNAL OF THE BULGARIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

web-site: www.geography.bg e-mail: journal.bgs@geography.bg



Origin, development and modern state of bulgarian ethnic minority in Albania

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ABSTRACT

Key words:

Bulgarian ethnic minority, Albania, population

Bulgarians and Albanians cohabitations together more then 13 centuries. From a historical point of view this is a period, that covers the domination of two empires – Byzantine and Ottoman. The subject of the Bulgarian ethnic minority has existed for years. This issue also arises with the creation and recognition of an independent Albanian state in 1912. But only in 2017, the Albanian parliament in Tirana approves of the Minority Protection Act, in which the Bulgarian-ethnic population officially obtains their minority status.

Already with the creation of an independent Albanian state, the main argument of the Bulgarian government is the presence of such an ethnic population. Our country was among the first to recognize the Albanian state in 1913, and in 1914 to establish diplomatic ties with it. It was not until 2017 that the Albanian Parliament in Tirana approved the Minority Protection Act, in which the Bulgarian-ethnic population officially received their status as a minority. Despite their eternal cohabitation, the relations between these two nations are still not of particular interest, and the idea of this topic, which is part of a dissertation, is to characterize the moments of the formation of the Bulgarian minority in Albania. To trace its development over the centuries, its ties to the Albanian ethnos, and the modern state of the Bulgarian minority on the territory of the Albanian lands. The current dimensions of the "Albanian phenomenon in the Balkans" are determined by both its territorial integrity and the lack of a Slavic substrate. The long-term tendency of the Balkans is that all peoples are claiming territorial coverage. National, cultural and religious identity, as well as several centuries-old history of nations, provoked not only a few conflicts. It is indisputable that Albanians have had (in a number of periods of the millennial past in the Balkans) and continue to play a significant role in historical events.

The subject of the study is the Bulgarian minority on the territory of present-day Albania, in particular Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo and Gora. Focus is the ethno-cultural integrity and specificity of the Bulgarian population. Medieval Bulgaria has several times dominated the lands of the ancestors of today's Albanians, which in turn will be the object of a study of several centuries of relations between Albanians and Bulgarians and between Illyrians and Slavs.

The aim is to analyze the current state of the Bulgarian minority in the territory of Albania and to follow its ethno-cultural ties with present-day Bulgaria. Of great importance are also the relations of the Bulgarian minority and the Albanian ethnicity.

By analyzing the current situation of the Bulgarian minority in the three areas - Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo and Gora, we aim to improve the quality of communication and the exchange of good practices, focusing on education and science. One of our ultimate goals is to educate students from Albania with Bulgarian or

Albanian self-consciousness in Bulgarian universities. It is also important to attract quality work to improve the country's economic performance. It is not excluded the idea of a monthly journal in Bulgarian to reach as many Bulgarians as possible in the territory of Albania and especially to the isolated settlements in the three areas inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians. The so-called "library on wheels" is a good option for the Bulgarian minority, which is between 50 and 100 thousand people, to be able to obtain Bulgarian literary sources. At this stage, Bulgarians in Albania also need adequate exposure to information about their socio-economic privileges as a minority. The deepened interest in Bulgarian identity documents is the result of the difficult political situation in Albania, the deepening economic crisis and the high unemployment rate. All these actions should be adequately coordinated with the Bulgarian government.

Back in time, in-depth analyzes of the ethno-cultural identity of the Bulgarian minority in two of the three main areas - Golo Brdo and Gora, with the author Veselka Toncheva. In the theoretical first part of the work titled "The Unknown Forest", an overview of the history of the area is made. It also presents the views of the forests themselves about their own origin and history, about the migrations of the community, about the old and the new livelihood - hunting, gurbets, profitability, including confectionery, etc. At the end of the first part is presented the traditional culture of the forest in Albania. Ethnological describes the calendar and family rituals, the traditional music and dance of the gorges from several settlements. The second part of the book is made up of applications containing terrain materials collected in the village of Shishtsvetz, interviews on various topics, short verbal forms, and songs (partially recorded), which are first published in Bulgaria and on the Balkans. The Bulgarians in Albania are also mentioned in the work of Svetlozar Eldarov - "The Bulgarians in Albania", as well as many analyzes and reports on the historical formation and development of the Bulgarians on the territory of Albania by many other Bulgarian authors. A Slavic-pagan population on the western Balkans is also mentioned in literary sources by the author Serzh Mate ("The History of the Albanians" 2007). Miranda Vickers worked as a political analyst at the International Crisis Group and was the author

of "Albanians - Contemporary History" - 2000. In her literary work, Miranda characterized the ethno-cultural identity of the Albanian ethnicity within the boundaries of the historic Albanian lands and its present state. It also emphasizes the relations, political ties and cooperation of the Albanians with the other peoples of the Balkans, including the Bulgarians.

From the chronological point of view, at the end of the 6th century, mass settlements of Slavic tribes began in the lands of today's Albania. Today there are three historically distinct areas. Slavic-speaking population. Population with a different mother tongue than that of ethnic Albanians. The three regions are isolated from one another and have a difficult communication with each other. The Albanian lands are no exception, and the settlement of the southern Slavs in the lands of present-day Albania takes place when it is settled in the rest of the Balkan Peninsula. The first significant Slavic invasion noted by the chronographs was in the far 548 AD, when the Slavs reached the Adriatic city of Epidaurum (today's Durres). As at the end of the sixth century the Slavs took over all southern Greece. One of the most crucial moments for the formation of today's minority in Albania is the period of enlargement of the Bulgarian state to the Adriatic coast. Already around the middle of the 9th century, the regions of Western Macedonia and all of Southern Albania, areas populated by Slavs, fall under Bulgarian rule. Special attention should be given to the rulers Simeon and Samuel, as during their reign a period of greatest territorial expansion of the First Bulgarian Kingdom occurred in the lands of today's Albania. Historical references indicate that even in Khan Presian (836-853) the Bulgarian land extends to the west, reaching the territories that now belong to Albania. It is reported that during the First Bulgarian Kingdom Bulgarians hid in the Mount Tomor in present-day Albania ("History of Bulgaria, Volume 2 First Bulgarian State", Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia 1981). In the reign of Tsar Ivan Assen II there is again an extension of the Bulgarian lands to the Adriatic coast. Ethnic Bulgarians locate on the territory of present-day Albania in wooded and hard-to-reach areas. Today they are between 50 and 100 thousand people, all of whom are a Slavic-linguistic population, considering their mother tongue Bulgarian. A nation of foreign territory that respects the Bulgarian traditions and sings Bulgarian folk songs. Of these, 2/3 are Muslims, and 1/3 are Christians. All of them represent the westernmost part of the Bulgarian ethnic and linguistic territory of the Balkan Peninsula. During the Renaissance, they are an integral part of the Bulgarian people and the emerging Bulgarian nation.

Mala Prespa is one of the three areas where today there are 5 to 7 thousand ethnic Bulgarians. The area is easily accessible and is located on the western shore of Lake Prespa. The borders of Albania were drawn on 17 December 1913 by the International Diplomatic Conference in Florence. However, the final design of the border takes place a few years later, especially in the areas north of Ohrid and south of Prespa Lake. This is the reason why the Bulgarian settlements and the size of the Bulgarian population in Albania before and after the First World War are not the same (Eldarov, S., 2000). Today, in the territory of Mala Prespa are 9 Bulgarian villages. The characteristic of Mala Prespa and the surrounding area is that 99% of ethnic Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians. The language they speak is a Bulgarian dialect. And although the villages are entirely orthodox among them, there are also those bearing Albanian names and those bearing Bulgarian names - Gorna Goritza, Dolna Goritza, Tuminec, Globobani, Shulin, Tserer, Zernovko, Leska and Pastec. A major factor for the mass depopulation of villages is the migration process. Today there are also Albanians and Macedonians registered in the villages. Despite the strong assimilation of the inhabitants with Bulgarian self-consciousness, they successfully preserve their

language and traditions, which are characteristic of many modern Bulgarian villages. One of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian minority in the area of Mala Prespa is that they call their language "frozen Bulgarian".

During the reign of Enver Hoxha, the borders of Albania are closed and, besides, the state becomes atheistic, the dictator stops the link between the population of Albania and the rest of the world. This few years of isolation has managed to make ethnic Bulgarians preserve their identity even more. A proof of this is that many of the Prespa homes are still home to the first Bulgarian editions of Renaissance books written in the Old Bulgarian language. Today in the villages of Mala Prespa as architectural monuments can be seen Christian temples, which were burned or converted into a barn at the time of Enver Hoxha. These are, for example, the cave church "St. Virgin Mary" from the 15th century in the village of Mali Town. An Orthodox rock church is located in the village of Globovachi, bearing the name "Holy Annunciation". Near the village of Tominets was built the monastery "St. Dimitar ". With help from Canada, the church "St. Atanas" was restored in the village of Pouzetz. An inseparable part of the First and Second Bulgarian Kingdom is the town of Berat. Today, the city is a city-museum and is included in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Table 1. The population of villages in the area of Mala Prespa. Source: Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT).

Villages in Mala Prespa	Population, 2007
Pustec	1500 people
Tuminec	1000 people
Gorna Gorica	700 people
Shulin	650 people
Dolna Gorica	550 people
Globocani	350 people
Leska	350 people
Zrnovsko	300 people
Cerie	Under 10 people

Already with the creation of Albania within its borders are two large Bulgarian villages southeast of the region of Korca - Drenovo and Bobosthitsa. It is also in Korcha the oldest Bulgarian colony where an attempt was made in the 1980s to open an Exarchian school (Eldarov, S., 2000).

Golo Brdo district has a population of 10,000 people. In their confessional structure, they are both Muslims and Christians. And, by its identity, the Bulgarian community in the region is one of the best preserved autochthonous areas abroad. In the 23 villages are spoken in Bulgarian, with 17 villages entirely Bulgarian and the rest are mixed. Physically and geographically, the villages are mountainous and difficult to access. Prof. Vesselka Toncheva was previously mentioned as an author who described and analyzed the population of Golo Brdo, focusing on the ethnographic details and specifics of the traditions and especially the weddings made in the villages of Golo Brdo. Weddings in Golo Brdo contain all the elements of a traditional Bulgarian wedding. The folk folklore I performed in Golo Brdo is defined as Bulgarian and is legitimated by Bulgarian origin. In the Albanian cultural context, the musical instrument bagpipe was not accepted too well because it is an instrument of "ethnic" origin. Fortresses, churches, monasteries, icons, frescoes unique in their kind are preserved in the territory

of Golo Brdo. While women in Golo Brdo are the bearers and guardians of traditions, men have been and still are gurbetti. (Toncheva, V., 2017). What is observed in every village is that on the tombstone the names of the deceased are written in Old Bulgarian. Hristo Miladinov - the father of Miladinov brothers was born in the village of Steblevo. Nowadays, there is the association "Prosperity Golo Brdo", founded in 2000 and aimed at preserving, developing and studying the Bulgarian customs and traditions of the Golo Brdo area. The company is working more and more with the Republic of Bulgaria, thanks to the association and the joint work with Bulgaria, in the capital of Tirana today operates a Sunday Bulgarian school - "Hristo Botev". The chairman of the association is Hadji Prushishi, who says Bulgaria for the Bulgarians in Albania is much more holy than many Bulgarians in Bulgaria.

Table 2. The population of the Bulgarian villages in the Golo Brdo.
Source: "Bulgarians from Golo Brdo, Albania - Territory, Cultural Heritage and Identity", Veselka Toncheva, IEFEM - BAS; 2010.

Villages in Golo Brudo	Population, 2001
Vrubnica	15 people
Ginovec	10 people
Goleishta	No information
Golemo Ostreni	1200 people
Zaborie	No information
Izviri	No information
Kamen	No information
Klenie	140 people
Koiovec	200 people
Ladomerica	400 people
Leshnichani	90 people
Malo Ostreni	540 people
Orjanovo	80 people
Pasinki	300 people
Radoesha	300 people
Steblevo	120 people
Trebishta	2000 people
Trubchanishta	No information
Tuchepi	140 people

Population with Bulgarian self-awareness is also located in the Gora area. Historically, under the name of Gora, there are 27 villages. Upon the establishment of the state border between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Albania, the Gora region is divided into two parts. Today, 9 Croatian settlements are located in the territory of the Republic of Albania and 19 settlements are in Kosovo. There are a number of hypotheses about the origin of the forest, but also Prof. Anastas Ishirkov writes that "the Pomak population in the Gora region is Bulgarian." (Ishirkov, A., 1996. The western ends of Bulgarian land). The population is fully Islamic, and the largest village in the area is Shishtevets - 1500 people. (Toncheva, V., 2013). The internal vocabulary of Gora is Goran or also known as "native" language. A number of experts claim that the gorges are settlers from Eastern Bulgaria from the time of the Bogomils. There

are Gorean songs that sing for the Black Sea. There is a version that the famous Bulgarian song "Boryano, Borkanke" was created by the forests in the village of Borje on the territory of present-day Albania. It is said that the song was later transferred to Bulgaria. (Toncheva, V., 2013). Today ritual singing in Gora is still alive and functional. The level of conservation of traditional knowledge and culture among the forests in Kukarská Gora (Albania) is still quite high, the patriarchal model is still alive, the calendar and family rituals are preserved, but the opening of the community to the world, modern gurbet and migration are the cause for the gradual loss of trades in the Forest. Today, there is still a strong memory of Bulgaria in the Albanian part of the country, which was known among "natives" as "old mother". A well-known expression among the forests is "mother mother Bulgaria," and this is indicative, but during the regime of Enver Hoxha, the prohibitions have also eliminated this knowledge. The opening of the community to the world, the influences of the media and the modern world at large, as well as modern gambling and migration are the reason for the gradual loss of traditions, and here is the focus of this work - reviving, maintaining and integrating the ethno-cultural identity of the Bulgarian ethnos of forgetting traditions and culture.

Albania and the Albanian ethnic group are becoming more and more relevant among their European neighbors because of their desire to join the European Union and the Kosovo issue, a topic that has been affected during the historic EU-Western Balkans Summit held on 17 May 2018. in Sofia. In its report on the Western Balkans, the European Commission has recommended starting negotiations for the accession of Macedonia and Albania. Albania is a developing country with a modern open market economy ready to meet foreign investors. In this line of thought we can summarize that the topicality of the topic is growing. Today, there is a minority protection law in Albania that restores a justice based on massive historical testimonies. Bulgaria's social and economic relations with the Bulgarian minority in Albania will be facilitated by the official status, as the main objective of the study is to analyze the contemporary state of the Bulgarian minority on the territory of present-day Albania and its ethno-cultural relations with Bulgaria. In all three areas - Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo and Gora, different activities are being undertaken to preserve the identity, culture and traditions of the population. And Hadji Prushishi (Chairman of the Prosperity Golo Brdo Association) and Ervis Talluri ("Bulgarian-Albanian Society") work on integrating and preserving the ethno-cultural identity of the Bulgarian minority. The contacts with the President of the Bulgarian-Albanian Society discussed the possible actions that would lead to the fulfillment of the final goals of this work. In Albania there is a population census, after which the number of Bulgarians will be officialized. So far, ethnic Bulgarians have been entered in the "Other" column since they were only minority in 2017 and are the ninth minority officially recognized by the Albanian government. Last but not least, I would also like to draw attention to the forthcoming review with the local authorities in the three areas about the realization of a Bulgarian school, as the population that speaks Bulgarian dialect begins to study Albanian in school, but not the language that all ethnic Bulgarians consider it a mate. It is clear that education is of great importance for the Bulgarian minority in Albania and its role in the development of the newly recognized minority.

Through interviews, interviews and observation, empirical material has been collected from different settlements in the three areas populated by ethnic Bulgarians, which gives us information on the ongoing political and social processes both among Bulgarians and Albanians in Albania.

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