

Słowiańskie przyjemności 3: Wielojęzyczność

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Multilingual or Monolingual?

The Minority Languages in Bulgaria after 1878*

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Abstract

In the first years after gaining the independence in 1878, the Bulgarian lands were divided into two parts: the Principality of Bulgaria (a Turkish vassal and a Russian protectorate) and Eastern Rumelia (an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire). In the Principality, there was only one official language – Bulgarian, whereas in Eastern Rumelia: Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek. After the unification in 1885, the whole territory used only Bulgarian in administration. However, the practice was more complicated due to the multi-ethnic character of these lands: in 1887, about 73.75% (2 326 250) inhabitants pointed out Bulgarian as their native language, 19.25% (607 331) – Turkish, 1.85% (58 326) – Greek, 0.75% (23 541) – “Jewish” (Ladino), 1.59% (50 291) – Roma etc. The users of different languages than Bulgarian had an important impact on the public sphere of the country. The paper presents the place of minorities languages in the Bulgarian reality by the examples of the parliaments (the National Assembly in the Principality of Bulgaria and the Provincial Assembly in Eastern Rumelia), local administration, elections, courts, and schools.

Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, the Bulgarian lands were not ethnically homogenous. In 1887, about 73.75% (2 326 250) inhabitants pointed out Bulgarian as their native language, 19.25% (607 331) – Turkish, 1.85% (58 326) – Greek, 0.75% (23 541) – “Jewish” (Ladino), 1.59% (50 291) – Roma etc. (Георгиев, Трифонов, 1994: 140–141). Turks lived mostly in the North-Eastern parts of Bulgarian lands, Greeks were concentrated in the Black Sea’s coast and in selected cities as Plovdiv or Stanimaka. The other minorities lived in the smaller and irregularly located communities. In the first years after gaining the independence in 1878, the territory was divided into the two parts: the Principality of Bulgaria (a Turkish vassal and a Russian protectorate) and Eastern Rumelia (an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire). They were united in 1885 and the structures of the Principality were transferred to Eastern Rumelia. The paper focuses on the place of minorities’ languages (mostly Turks and Greeks as the biggest non-Bulgarian communities in the state) in the Bulgarian public sphere by the examples of the parliaments (the National Assembly in the Principality of Bulgaria and the Provincial Assembly in Eastern Rumelia), local administration, elections, courts, and schools in the period 1878–1900.

Legal status

After 1878, in Bulgaria, the only official language was Bulgarian, which was one of the most important characteristics of the national nature of the state. The Bulgarian elites emphasized the unity between the state, nation, and language (Rudin, Eminov, 1993: 43–45). The biggest critics of that regulation were the Sublime Porte and Great Britain. In July 1879, the British General Consul in Bulgaria William Palgrave assumed that the Bulgarian constitution should recognize Turkish as second official language, and – as the result – Bulgaria

should become the multi-ethnic state instead of a national one (Destani, 2003: 466–468). The analogous point of view was represented by the British Vice-Consul in Varna Charles Brophy, who said that as long as Turkish was not the official language in Bulgaria, the Muslims would be discriminated (FO 195/1246/440–441).

The system of Eastern Rumelia was not created by Bulgarians, but by the international commission consisted of the representatives of the Great Powers and Turkey. The first project of the Organic Act of Eastern Rumelia, proposed by the Ottoman delegate, recognized Turkish as the official language, which would guarantee the continuity of the Ottoman administration and the status of imperial provincial. Whereas, the Russian delegation said that Bulgarian should be the only official language because of the population majority of that territory. However, the representative of Austro-Hungary proposed that Greek should be used by the Eastern-Rumelian administration because of the cultural and economic status of Greeks. Finally, Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek were introduced as the three official languages of the province; it was the compromise offered by the Italian delegate. Every document concerning the whole Eastern Rumelia was published in these three languages. The correspondence with the Sublime Porte, as sovereign of the province, was exchanged in Turkish. In the communes (*obshtina*), counties (*okoliya*), and departments (*departament*), the language of administration and courts was adapted to the majority (which gave an advantage to Bulgarians). In the case of territories, where two or more same numerous communities lived, their languages were recognized as official (Георгиев, Трифонов, 1994: 169–171; Стателова, 1983: 27–28).

Parliaments

The presence of the minorities (mostly Turks, who usually held 5–9% of the mandates) in the parliament of the Principality of Bulgaria (the National Assembly) caused a series of problems in its functioning, one of the most important was the language issue. The Temporary Election Regulation of 1879 assumed that every candidate for a deputy should be older than 30 years, have full civil rights, and be literate (Дневници: 242; Назърска, 1999a: 200–201). There was an ambiguity in the case of the last requirement. Already, during the discussions in the Legislative Assembly (February – April 1879), some of the deputies pointed out that it was not clear what it meant: the ability to write and

read in Bulgarian or in any other language (Дневници: 189). At that moment, it was interpreted as literacy in the official language of the state (БАН ф. 3 оп. 1 а.е. 1115 л. 24–26). During the 1st National Assembly (November – December [October – November old style] 1879), among the deputies of the Liberal Party, there were groups of Muslims elected in the Silistria District, who did not know that the parliament functioned only in Bulgarian – the language which they did not know. Some of the liberals (among others, Stefan Stambolov) wanted to cancel their mandates and replace them with the other candidates of the party from Silistria. The leader of the Liberal Party Petko R. Slaveykov and deputy Petko Garbanov appealed to allow giving speeches by Turks in their native language in the National Assembly. However, the president of the parliament Petko Karavelov opted for the first pointed of view and many Muslims' mandates were canceled because they were considered as illiterate (Назърска, 1999b: 6). The language question was not regulated by the novelizations of the suffrage in 1881 (1880 old style), 1889, and 1897 (Петков, 2002: 190, 203–207). It was linked to the attitude of the Bulgarian government, which preferred to have a free hand in the interpretation of that regulation to its own advantage. Also, that question was quite complicated – some deputies said that they could write and read in Bulgarian, but in many cases, it meant that they only could sign with a name (Иванов, Куманов, 1995: 86–87).

In Eastern Rumelia, the minorities had guaranteed places in the parliament – the Provincial Assembly. However, also in that case, they disappointed quickly. The speech given by the General Governor Aleko Bogoridi (Aleko Pasha) in Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek on the opening of the first session of the parliament was the last exemplification of the official status of the minority languages. The 1st Provincial Assembly was dominated by Bulgarians (there were 36 Bulgarians, 6 Turks, 2 Greeks, 2 Jews, 2 Armenians, 2 Catholics, and 1 Protestant) and it worked only in Bulgarian. The Greek deputies appealed to use the three languages in accordance to the law, but the initiative did not get any support from Muslims and it failed (Гешов, 2008: 130–131; Маджаров, 2015: 105–108). As the result, there were not many fragments of the parliamentary stenographs, where we can see the activity of the minorities' deputies (whose words were usually translated or the speeches were given in Bulgarian). It is significant that the Muslim deputies usually started a speech with words: “Supposing I understand everything correctly in Bulgarian...” (ЦДА ф. 20к оп. 2 а.е. 5, л. 33, 108–109).

Local governments

In the Principality, there was only one official language so the local institutions: governors of districts (*okrag*) and counties (*okoliya*), mayors in communes (*obshtina*), and the councils in these three levels, should work only in Bulgarian (БАН ф. 3 оп. 1 а.е. 1115 л. 18). However, in the multiethnic regions, there were the implementation of the function of the deputies of a governor or mayor, who represented the interests of a minority group (it was required literacy in any language, not only official one) (ДА-Варна ф. 519к оп. 1 а.е. 5 л. 4). Neither the constitution nor any other official document mentioned about the post – it was the government's gesture towards the minorities, mostly Turkish ones. Additionally, the Stambolov regime (1886–1894) was a time of cooperation between the government and Muslim deputies, a result of which were the other concessions to minorities. There was the introduction of a rule that mayors should be literate in Bulgarian or in any other language (Иванов, Куманов, 1995: 203, 232–233).

Moreover, in the case of the multiethnic regions, there were a lot of unregulated practices linked to the usage of a minority language in the local institutions. In the communes in the East, where only the Turks lived, the councils were dominated by Muslims, for example, in many communes of the Provadiya County after the War of 1877–1878, or the Aytos County in 1890. In these cases, the regulations about the official language were a dead letter of the law, and the Turkish councilors worked in their native language (but the stenographs were translated into Bulgarian) (cf. ДА-Варна ф. 852к оп. 1 а.е. 7). While, in the case of the multiethnic councils (of a commune, county, or district), the proceedings were translated. For example, in the District Council of Varna, after the presentation of a case in Bulgarian, there was a translation into Turkish for the Muslim councilors. Next, a discussion took place, in which representatives of the minority could participate with the help of a translator. At the end, the councilors voted (cf. ДА-Варна ф. 717к оп. 2 а.е. 1).

The local administration of Eastern Rumelia was organized due to the interests of the three biggest communities (Назърска, 1997: 113). Among the first prefects of departments, there were 5 Bulgarians and 1 Greek, and among the governors of counties: 22 Bulgarians, 3 Turks, and 1 Greek (Маджаров, 2015: 199–200). Also, the minorities were widely represented in the communes' institutions. There were many Turkish and Greek mayors in the villages, where

only the minority lived; they worked in the native languages of councilors. In the multiethnic communes, when Bulgarian became a mayor, there was a mayor deputy, who represented the interests of the minority of the area (Стателова, 1983: 96). After the unification in 1885, the local administration was adapted to the standards of the Principality: many Turks and Greeks were fired from their posts and the minority languages lost the official status (FO 388/45 no. 26, 29).

Elections

One of the most basic problems linked to the participation of the minorities in the elections was the language of voting cards. Many of Turkish and Greek citizens could not read and write in Bulgarian (some of them even did not know the spoken language), which prevented using one of the most important right in the democratic society – voting. During the first parliamentary elections in the Principality, the cards could be only in Bulgarian; using the exemplars in the other languages (or in two languages) could become an excuse to cancel results of voting in a district. However, before the elections to the 2nd National Assembly (January – February 1880), Petko R. Slaveykov appealed to accept cards in the minority's language. That idea was accepted by the government. It was linked to the pacification policy in the Eastern parts of the state, where there was a huge activity of the Turkish partisans fighting with the Bulgarian army and police. By that step, the authorities wanted to show their good attitude towards the Muslim minority (Иречек, 1995: 154; Назърска, 1999b: 8). That practice was used in the later elections, but there was a lot of inconsistency: still, the cards in a language different than Bulgarian could be an excuse to cancel voting results, if it was profitable to the authorities (БАН ф. 19к оп. 1 а.е. 153 л. 2–7; Назърска, 1999а: 207–208). Also, after the upheaval in 1881, Prince Alexander Battenberg implemented the new amenities for the minority voters: the illiterate people could vote by a seed, which color symbolized a supported candidate. No such problems occurred in Eastern Rumelia in 1879–1885 – the voting cards could be in the three official languages: Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek (Назърска, 1999b: 9–10).

Courts

The language of courts in Eastern Rumelia was adapted to the majority of the unit as in the case of the local administration. In Bulgaria, until the end of the 1880s, they worked only in Bulgarian. However, in the territories, where the minorities were concentrated, there was an unofficial post of the “honorable member” of a court, who helped a citizens, who did not know the official language. During the rule of Konstantin Stoilov (1894–1899), the situation changed in favor of the minorities. In 1889, there was the novelization of the Courts' Organization Law – when a defendant did not know Bulgarian, he could ask for a translator (however, the costs were covered by him). In that case, the protocols were still prepared only in the official language. The trials could be in another language only if the all sides and the judge agreed to that (ДБ 1899: 5–13).

Schools

Until 1885, the minority schools in the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia entirely functioned in the native languages. In Eastern Rumelia, they were state schools and the education in Turkish and Greek was guaranteed by the law. In the Principality, there was the compulsory education of Bulgarian languages in every school in the state, set by the Constitution and the Education Law of 1880 (ДБ 1882: 3). Nobody respected that, mostly because the minority schools had the private status. It meant that the government did not donate them, neither controlled their school programs, and the minorities could organize the education as they wanted.

After the unification in 1885, the authorities in Sofia started to pay more attention to the question of learning of Bulgarian language among the minorities. The most important tactic in that matter was linked to the financial support for the schools, which taught Bulgarian properly. For example, in 1891, one of the Armenian school in Varna asked the District Council for the donation. They got the direct answer that the aid depended on the level of the learning of the Bulgarian language in the school (ДА-Варна ф. 717к оп. 2 а.е. 1 л. 150). However, until the Balkan Wars, that duty was commonly ignored by the minority schools (Павлова, 1992: 49–51). The most unwilling institutions were Greek ones in the southern part of the state. After 1885, they regularly sent the petitions in that matter to the government in Athens. They protested

against learning the Bulgarian language in their schools and demanded the restoration of the Eastern-Rumelian educational autonomy (FO 78/4442/1–2; FO 371/15/223–224).

Conclusion

There was a big difference between the official status of languages and the real practice in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century. The constitutional articles about the one official language in the case of the Principality and the three in Eastern Rumelia do not close the topic about the language reality of the Bulgarian public sphere after the Revival. The examples of the functioning of minorities in the parliaments, local institutions, courts, schools and election system show that the authorities accepted the use of a language other than Bulgarian, only if it was not contradictory with their interests. As a result, there were a lot of legal loopholes freely used by the government, which can be illustrated by the cases of canceling mandates or voting results because of the language issue. The concessions in that matter were made to get the support of the numerous Muslim minority (like during the regime of Prince Alexander Battenberg in 1881–1881, Stefan Stambolov in 1886–1894 or Konstantin Stoilov in 1894–1899). In other examples, the law became less important than the practice. It is worth to point out that long after 1878 the *lingua franca* in the East of Yantra river was still Turkish, and in the West – Bulgarian (Grannes, 1990: 224–225). Finally, we cannot say that the Bulgarian authorities led an assimilative policy regarding the minorities – the place of Bulgarian language in the public sphere was not linked to the nationalistic purposes, but to the practical matters.

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