

# MUSLIM MINORITIES IN A CHANGING EUROPE. A RETROSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR MUSLIM MINORITY IN ROMANIA

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## **Abstract:**

*Bringing together the actual challenges of Muslim minorities in Europe and reality appropriation of cultures that are considered remote in terms of time and geography is an important challenge. Linking the study of Muslim world with minority world is a new way of approaching the issue of cultural and educational appropriation.*

*This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the educational system of the Muslim minority in Romania.*

*This research attempts to focus on Muslim minority social issues rather than on historical and political environment, but they cannot be separated.*

*This research is based on face-to-face interviews conducted in February, July and August 2016, in order to identify the influence of indicators as – social, educational and political environment, to underline educational issues, and how they influenced community's day-to-day life.*

*The body of the paper is based on documents, which are part of the heritage of the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office), content analysis of documents with the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest and National Archives of Romania, Constanța County District DJCAN and Constanta County Library "Ioan N. Roman".*

*A special place in this paper is dedicated to the ethnic minority of Crimean Tatars and some of their social and educational challenges. Also, I identified the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages and its educational policies.*

*Finally, my paper shows the community challenges in keeping its cultural identity and emphasizes Muslim minority's struggle to protect its traditions and popular culture.*

**Key words:** *changing Europe, cultural and educational approach, educational system, Muslim minority, Romania.*

## **1. Introduction**

*Muslim minorities in a changing Europe* provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the educational system for Muslim minority in Romania, starting with 1880 to the present. Based on personal and official archives, memoirs and press writings I analyze the multiple aspects of the Muslim educational, cultural and intellectual affiliations in different time periods in Romania.

A lot of ink has been spilt on the complex issue of minority protection at international and European level, but less about the educational system for Muslim minorities. Today, there is a legal framework addressing non-discrimination and special minority rights provisions in documents pertaining to the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and to the European Union, as well.

It is not the intention of this paper to consider in depth the international and European standard-setting documents regarding the protection of minorities, as there already exists a reach literature in that respect. However, since national policies cannot be de-contextualized as they are shaped by international and European developments, there is essential a short overview on the issue of educational system for Muslim minority in Romania.

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## 1.1. Methodology

From a methodological point of view, this research is based on interpretive understanding of data gathered through qualitative methods and documentary analysis of documents, which are part of the heritage of the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office) fund Sâdaret Mektûbî Kalemî Nezaret ve Devair Evrakı (MKT.NZD.) and Sâdaret Mektûbî Kalemî Umum Vilâyet Evrakı (A.MKT.UM.) which provide information about Crimean refugees and their settlement in Dobruja. This study is based on content analysis of Romanian language press published after 1880 with Constanța County Library "Ioan N. Roman" Constanța County and the Romanian National Archives, Department of National Archives, Constanta County regarding the relations of Turk minorities.

In this study I will analyze only educational and cultural issues because they have a major influence on community's native language and on their social and cultural identity.

All these works were studied in an attempt to understand the Crimean Tatars' past and socio-educational challenges in day-to-day life. In doing so it was necessary to read as widely as possible and use examples to illustrate discovered findings. The details that follow this brief introduction provide resources for further in-depth explanations about this research method.

## 2. A short presentation on Muslim minority's history

### 2.1. Minorities - definition

It is difficult to provide one generally accepted definition of the term "minority". This lack of definition has also been acknowledged in relation to various international conventions and treaties. Francesco Capotorti, in his role as Special Rapporteur to the United Nations, proposed a definition that is now commonly used "A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language" (Capotorti, 1979: 586)<sup>1</sup>.

In the European context, all parties seem to agree on most elements of Capotorti's definition.

### 2.2. Short survey of Muslim minority in Romanian newspapers and Archives

A feature of Muslim minorities in Romania is the lack of academic publications in Romanian language dedicated to Turk minorities.

Studying the written press in Romanian language, published in Romania and Dobruja from 1877 to 1935, my research brought to light the followings: there is only one study of Gagauz Turks and Ottoman Turks of Dobruja, *Study on the Turks from Dobruja and southern Bessarabia* published by Roman M., in 1935. There aren't articles about the Nogay community. The exception is the article published in 1877 in the newspaper "Carpathian Albina" dedicated to Circassians.

The study focuses more on the overall image of Gagauz Turks, Circassians and Nogay communities in Dobruja with less information about the history or day-to-day life of communities.

It is difficult to find the correct terminology, as the Romanian sources of that time never referred to the people, which are subject of this study as refugees, fugitives or victims of war. No document with the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest (hereinafter named ANR) mentions the terms Turk, Crimean, Nogay or Circassian, excepting the document with the Interior Ministry Fund, Administrative Division, File 509/1889, page 62 ("Nici un amestec n'are Ministrul Domeniilor în viile sădite până la 1879 și nici idei nu este că viile acestea ar fi embaticare. Ast-fel discutată cestiunea, Excelență, în parlament aduse ast-fel dovedi

<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:61978CC0120&from=EN>, accessed on 14 October 2018

*lămurite asupra fie cărui fapt avansat, suntem convinși că s'ar fi specificat limpede, că viile sădite cu doi ani înaintea ocupării Dobrogei, nu sunt supuse legii noi din 7 Aprilie 1889")* about the fees that Muslim population had to pay (Ismail, 2014: 388).

Romanian documents with ANR, Fund Interior Ministry, The Administrative Division, file 265/1878, file 60/1879, file 509/1889 do not mention terms as Turk, Crimean, Nogay or Circassian. Among the refugees along with many Crimeans and Nogays were Caucasians, who to avoid military conflicts in the area fled into the Balkan region. Romanian documents with ANR, Fund Interior Ministry, The Administrative Division, file 509/1889 "Folder relative to Training Committee to investigate the needs of people of Dobruja, page 5 (*"În ședința de astăzi Joi 3 August 1889, luând în deliberațiune referatul Domnului Ministru de interne sub No.15082, prin care se spune starea în care se află populațiunea din Dobrogea (....). Consiliul, avînd în vedere cele espuse prin sus zisul referat și de acord cu părerea Domnului Ministru de Interne, decide a se instrui o comisiune compusă din delegații Ministerelor de Interne, de Finance, de Resbel, de Lucrări publice, de Justiție, de Culte și Instrucțiune Publică și de Domenii care să examineze la fața locului cu deamănuntul toate trebuințele și neajunsurile populațiunei din Dobrogea și care, ținînd compt de condițiunile economice escepțiionale în care se află acea parte a țări și de starea de cultură a diferitelor elemente din care se compune populațiunea, să propună sistemul de organizare administrativă")*) give details about shortcomings and needs of the Muslim community, herein named "*various elements making up population*", and because the Turks of Dobruja did not speak Romanian language Romanian authorities used to say "*state of culture*". Crimean Tatars and Nogays settled in Dobruja just because they had not encountered linguistic and religious problems (Ismail, 2017: 91).

### **2.3. Ottoman Turks in the early 19th century in the Balkans**

The rise in Muslim refugees, especially at the end of the 19th century and after the Crimean War between 1853 and 1856, is a sufficient issue to understand the difficulties encountered by the Ottoman State. As a result of the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878, which can be considered as the greatest defeat of the Ottoman State in the Balkans, when the Ottoman Turks were subjected to a massive massacre most of the population of the occupied territories had to leave their homes fleeing the war. Between 1806-1812, as a result of political and military situation, nearly 500,000 Muslims of the Balkans faced the refugee status (Ağanoğlu, 2001: p. 32).

### **2.4. Short survey of Crimean Tatars minority in Romania**

For this study I used Crimean Tatars, even though in documents with the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office) they are named *Kırım ahalisi* and the Nogays are named *Nogay kabilesi* because alongside with the Crimeans there are many Nogays in Dobruja, even though the Romanian census never had a separate entry for Nogays. (Ismail, 2017: 66). The Crimean Tatars living in today's Dobruja have a difficult history of tragic displacement, which makes their case unique. Their modern history is one of the most unique examples in the Eastern European history. No other ethnic minority has so obvious differences between its origins of Central Asian Turks and the secular ethnic-minority with a strong cultural identity. In accordance with the documents of the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office (BOA) we can only estimate that there was a huge volume of refugees who settled in Dobruja (on that time Ottoman territory).

## **3. Educational system for minorities in Romania after 1878**

### **3.1. The process of Romanianization after 1880s**

The Berlin Congress (1878) decided to incorporate Dobruja to the Romanian Principalities, thus creating a new state. Romania, as state entity appears in 1881, and the

Kingdom of Romania is the creation of the 1880s. Dobruja, a former territory of the Ottoman state, had only an ethnic minority: the Romanians. During the parliamentary sessions of the late September 1878, Mihail Kogălniceanu helped the vote in favor of the annexation of Dobruja, with speeches that promised a swift process of Romanianization (Ismail, 2014: 160). In between 1878 and 1913, Dobruja had an *extra-constitutional administrative organization* and its inhabitants enjoyed a local type of citizenship. In a few years, there was a great action of Dobruja's "Romanianization". The purpose of the new government in Bucharest was to assimilate Dobruja's population, as nationalism was on the rise (Iordachi, C., 2001:130).

### 3.2. Confessional schools for Muslim minority

The aim of this part of my study is to locate the history of Muslim minority among other nationalities in Romania, to analyse the consequences of their interaction with Muslim and non-Muslim institutions and the experiences of Muslims in Romania.

By focusing on Muslims living and interacting with the Romanian society, the central focus of this research is to analyse the probable and possible coincidence of Muslims' image, social and educational conditions.

After 1878, the new Romanian regime began the process of *Romanianization*. Language and schools were the main tools to change the educational system "*Another central pillar of the Romanian administration in Dobrogea was the educational system. The school was regarded as the main institution for fostering cultural homogenization, and for overcoming the local parochialism and segregation that characterized the life of ethnic communities in the province. Under Romanian rule, the 1880 law provided for state-sponsored primary education. It also allowed the functioning of local schools in minority languages, provided that they teach courses in Romanian, too. Supported by the central administration, the network of Romanian state schools in Dobrogea increased, while that of confessional schools gradually decreased* (Iordachi, 2001: 64).

A central issue in the study of Muslim minority is education. In a close connection with religion are the confessional schools for Turk minority. Despite its acknowledged importance, the issue of confessional schools remains insufficiently explored. Minorities' confessional schools were supported and administrated by the community itself, as was the confessional school Ghazi Ali, of Babadag established in 1610 as a *vakıf* by a *Ferman* issued and signed by the Sultan himself. During the communist regime „Muslim Theological School of Medgidia” was transferred to “Vocational High School” in Constanța, where it worked out from 1950 to 1963 (Mehmet, 1997: 243).

As a result of my summer research did in 2015 with Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale (*National Archives County Departments of Constanta*), herein after named DJCAN, I found out that there was no file for “Muslim theological school of Medgidia” or “Vocational High School” of Constanța, Direcția Județeană Constanța a Arhivelor Naționale (*National Archives County Departments of Constanta*), DJCAN, fund 38, inv. 3, 1902-1916. Analysing some documents we found out that the school changed its name and its seal several time from 1903 to 1920. In 1902, they used Ottoman writing, even if the school's Principal was a Romanian citizen - Paul PAȘA. After 1907 they changed the seal and Ottoman writing with Romanian alphabet. From Fund Școala mahomedană Constanța, file 21/1920-1929, we found out that there was a confessional school for girls, *Școala mahomedană de fete, Constanța* and one confessional school for boys *Școala mahomedană de băieți, Constanța* where pupils attended classes of Ottoman and Turkish languages besides Romanian language; history and geography in Romanian language.

In 1916, my grandfather graduated „Muslim Theological School of Medgidia”, we still hold his Diploma, which was issued in Romanian language, by the Ministry of Education. Based on this personal document and archives showed above we argue that classes were performed in Romanian language, and not in mother tongue.

### **3.3. Romanian framework protecting minorities' right in the interwar period**

The First World War has enormously complicated the ethnic structure in Romania - Ardeal, Crișana, Maramureș, Banat, Dobrogea (with Cadrilater), and Bessarabia or Bucovina. The resolution of the National Assembly in Alba Iulia (18 November - 1 December 1918) stated "Full national freedom for all the co-inhabiting peoples. Each people will study, manage and judge in its own language by individual of its own stock and each people will get the right to be represented in the law bodies and to govern the country in accordance with the number of its people<sup>1</sup>". Obviously, this promise remained just another unfulfilled promise.

Romanian Constitution of March 1923 states, at art. 7: "All Romanians, irrespective of ethnic origin, language or religion, are equal before the law and are obliged to contribute without distinction to public taxes and duties<sup>2</sup>". But, in fact, these kind of written references were contradicted by the means of different laws and regulations.

This part of my paper is dedicated to information about the policy of *Romanianization* executed by the Romanian government beginning with the mid-1890s. The process reflects the strategic importance of establishing an educational infrastructure in the national language, as mentioned in the article *Limba* published in *Gazeta Dobrogei*, nr. 349/7 noiembrie 1893. *Romanianization* institutionalized the right to seek education in Romanian language and made it mandatory for the non-Romanian citizens to take distance from their own confessional schools.

## **4. Educational policies in Romania in the mid. 20<sup>th</sup> century**

### **4.1. Historical memory during the communist regime**

How did they survive to communist regime? What do we know about their collaboration with the communist rulers as long as some Romanian ideological works about nationalities alike demonstrate that a sense of nationhood among the minorities was forged entirely during the communist years? Another important issue to explore about Muslim minority during communism regime is the unique manner in which communist rulers used a mix of 'emancipatory' measures that furthered the diffusion of modernity, development and progress on the one hand, and ideological control and co-optation on the other hand, in order to get the loyalty and support of the Turk Muslim communities, as we noticed with DJCAN, fund Comitetul Democrat Turco-Tătar, file 5/1948 which includes files referring to 1948-1952, the beginning of the Communist regime.

During communist regime properties were confiscated, all intellectuals and people with a good financial situation were sent to prison. Many people became informers, and no one could trust anyone, even relatives.

Around 1960s many people moved from village to town, to find a job and their situation became even worse.

### **4.2. Educational policies in Romania during the communist regime**

There are some information for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the Communist regime. At the beginning of the Communist regime, Muslim minority faced the beginning of a gradual reduction period, when the collective rights of the national minorities and the institutions designed to foster their cultural specificity had to face many changes. All the events started with the reforms in education, the Law of Education, 1948, 175 Decree. There were many unbearable deeds, but among them was closing the "Muslim theological school" of Medgidia, which performed its classes for the last time in 1949-1950. Later it was transferred to "Vocational High School" in Constanța, where it worked out from 1950 to 1963 (Mehmet, 1997: 243).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cimec.ro/Istorie/Unire/rezo\\_eng.htm](http://www.cimec.ro/Istorie/Unire/rezo_eng.htm), accessed on 15 October 2018

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.hp\\_act\\_text?idt=1517](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.hp_act_text?idt=1517), accessed on 15 October 2018

At the beginning of the school year, 1949-1950 the new Communist regime opened schools in Tatar language in addition to those in Turkish, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education. Beginning with 1951 up to 1955, the Ministry of Education brought textbooks from the Soviet Republic of Kazan, for students attending courses in the Tatar language. However, the textbooks were issued in Kirill alphabet, and soon they had to give them up.

During my stage research, summer 2016, with DJCAN, fund 28/1955-1956, inv. 450, I found out that between 1953-1956, for a short time *Școala pedagogică Mixtă tătară* opened its doors for Muslim children with the purpose to instruct teachers for primary schools in Tatar language, but it soon closed its doors. Very interesting, classes were performed in Romanian language and Russian language.

In 1956, the Institute of History together with the Romanian Institute of Linguistics and the Ministry of Education established a committee of scholars, who delivered a new alphabet for the Crimean Tatars. The new established alphabet for Crimean Tartars used the Latin alphabet, in accordance with the Romanian and Turkish alphabet. The new alphabet compared with Turkish language alphabet had some differences, was accepted by the Romanian Academy of Science (1956-1959), and it was named the alphabet of Crimean Tatar language. That alphabet was the foundation for the textbooks issued in the Crimean Tatar language for primary and secondary schools.

In 1957, the University of Bucharest, the Faculty of Oriental languages started new departments, one for Tatar language and literature and another one for Turkish language and literature. In accordance with the new Law of Education, the department of Tatar language and literature was closed in 1972.

Although we might refer to a systematic “closure” of Crimean Tatars schools from the 1950s onwards, there are no archival data or policy statements offering details on how the measure was executed. This suggests that the closure of confessional schools, or conversion into vocational ones, was a gradual process and the momentum came from local officials, rather than from Bucharest. Romanian local press refer to how the socialist system granted them the possibility of selecting what was often the only available option. However, it was vital for the Crimean people to be fluent in Romanian in order to not be seen as illiterate people. In Amzacea village, Constanta County, near the Mosque of Amzacea in the Tatar neighbourhood, once there was the confessional school with tuition in Tatar language. Currently the land is unused, and is invaded by weeds. During communist regime were many unbearable deeds, but among them was the abolition of the Muslim theological school of Medgidia (*Mecidiye Medresi*), which performed its classes, for the last time in 1949-1950<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4.3. Educational policies for minorities in Romania after 1990**

Romanian Ministry of Education and Scientific Research by its Department for Education in Minorities Languages, I. Department for minorities states “(2) In the context of the Government’s strategic options for education, the Department for Education in Minorities Languages pursues the following priority objectives of the current education: ensure effective access of children and youth of national minorities to different forms and types of education for minorities; ensuring equal opportunities in education (*În contextul opțiunilor strategice ale Guvernului României, pentru domeniul educației, Direcția Generală Învățământ în Limbile Minorităților urmărește realizarea următoarelor obiective prioritare ale învățământului actual: asigurarea accesului real al copiilor și tinerilor din rândul minorităților naționale la diferitele forme și tipuri de învățământ pentru minorități; asigurarea șanselor egale la educație*); (3) In order to achieve these objectives, the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Burhan Abduraman, b. 1932, Grăniceru village; B.A. couldn’t graduate “Muslim theological school”, as in 1949 the courses were suspended and the school closed.

Department for Education in Minority Languages has responsibilities in the following areas:  
**1. Organizing** education in minority languages at all levels and forms of education and native language in schools with tuition in Romanian language or other than mother tongue (where there are requests) (*În vederea realizării acestor obiective, Direcția Generală Învățământ în Limbile Minorităților are atribuții și competențe în următoarele domenii: 1. Organizarea învățământului cu predare în limbile minorităților naționale la toate nivelurile și formele de învățământ și a predării limbii materne în școli cu limbă de predare română sau alta decât limba maternă, (unde există solicitări)*)<sup>1</sup>

Between brackets is mentioned “where there are requests”, and because there are no requests for Crimean Tatar or Turkish language we do not have schools in our native language. As regarding the public instruction, starting with the primary school up to high school or higher education it is performed in the official language of Romania, in Romanian language. Nowadays only people with a certain age, older than 45 years, speak the Crimean Tatar language. The young generation do not speak either Crimean Tatar or Turkish, neither at home nor at school, and many of them are ashamed of being different from the majority.

In conclusion, was the Romanianization process a success? Is the life that these people have today worth the price they paid, the price of losing their homeland and becoming refugees? What would have happened if their ancestors had stayed in Crimea. Would they have survived the Russification process and the Soviet Union? They have substantial concerns about the conditions in which Crimean Tatars across the border are living, even if they do not have relatives there.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is difficult to understand Muslim community’s educational changes without taking into account the capacity of the society to be opened to outside cultural penetration.

During communism period the state attempted to monopolize all the responsibilities and to create a genuine paternalism. The communism regime has deeply affected the evolution of the Muslim community in Romania. Effective participation has only recently become the focus of debate on minority rights, and it is firmly rooted in the standards of international human rights law.

In Romania, for Muslim community, the full and effective participation in political, cultural, economic and social life can be considered a “next generation” minority right.

Muslim community’s participation to social life is essential to ensure that their particular concerns are taken into account and to enable them to influence the general direction of the development of society, while their participation in cultural and economic life enables them to take care of their needs through their own active contribution. Effective social participation is needed in the allocation both of opportunities and of benefits. There is a wide range of mechanisms in Romania in connection with minority participation and representation, adjusted to the relevant situations in practice. These mechanisms vary from proportional electoral systems and guaranteed minority seats in parliament and on advisory boards to various committees and commissions.

By studying the processes of culture transfer and border crossings of Muslim in Europe, this study offers a more global understanding of the European educational system past, one that goes beyond the histories of defined entities such as nations or ethnicities. Such an approach widens our sense and scope of educational system and social history by producing a more dynamic history of all those who identified themselves - or have been identified against their will - as “Muslims” within Europe and leads to a deeper reflection on their place in European and global history.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/c23>, accessed on 21st, October, 2018



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**Interviewer**

Burhan Abduraman, borne in 1932, Kanlıçukur village, Constanta County, Romania.

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