

## **The discovery of new Greeks. The cases of Gagauz in Moldova and "Pontians" in Turkey<sup>1</sup>**

**Lambros BALTSIOTIS**

Adjunct Lecturer of History, Panteion University, Department of Political Science and History (Athens, Greece)  
and University of Peloponnese, Department of Social and Educational Policy (Corinth, Greece)

Senior Investigator at the Office of the Greek Ombudsman (Human Rights Department)

Email: [balts@otenet.gr](mailto:balts@otenet.gr)

### **Abstract**

This paper constitutes an effort to depict the policies exercised by the Greek State from the 1990s till the mid-2000s vis-à-vis two ethno-linguistic groups: the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Gagauz of Moldova and the Pontic-speaking Muslims of Eastern Black Sea. In addition, an attempt is made to interpret these policies, why and how they were launched, the purposes for which they were exercised and finally what they were aiming at. Our hypothesis is that the issue is not only connected to yet one more Greek-Turkish discord. We noticed that, beyond the dispute there are reasons relevant to the way the Greek nation, the national narrative and public history in Greece are constructed. That is the reason why emphasis is placed on the public discourse developing around these two groups.

**Key Words:** Gagauz, Greek Gagauz, Pontic-speaking Muslims, Pontians, Crypto-Christians, homogenis

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## 1. Introduction

The rhetoric regarding Greek "brothers" may not have been considered as a particularly emotive argument after 1974, but by the mid-eighties there has been a clear change. With the collapse of the Eastern bloc and throughout the 1990s, the media and politicians, discover a series of co-ethnic [*homogenis*]<sup>2</sup>, different Greeks. The largest population groups are co-ethnics from the Soviet Union and Albania. In these two cases, relocation of these populations to Greece, demystifies them, but also confirms their existence. The fact that a large portion of these populations did not speak Greek, as well as the difference in cultural attitudes, created reservations and delayed their acceptance in the nation, rather transiently however.

The remaining groups of "Greeks" are either closer to the concept of *Hellenism*, such as the Sarakatsani of Bulgaria, and share links with Greece, i.e. a common language, the same historical concepts, or are far away, i.e. Tourkokritikoí (literally Cretan Muslims)<sup>3</sup> and retain their exoticism, because they are invisible in everyday life and public space. These distant "Greeks", both in terms of effective links with the country, and of the current Greek concepts of *Greekness*, constitute an interesting field of research in shaping Greek historical narrative and identity.

The first strange "Greeks" are the Greek-speaking populations of Southern Italy. From the 1980s they are gradually receiving institutional interest from individuals and government agencies. In contrast, another group, the Tourkokritikoí of Hamidié (Al-Hamidiyah) village in Syria, despite their moving "discovery" at the end of the 1980s, is subsequently lost, unable to get its symbolic position next to Southern-Italians, despite the initial excitement caused by these "forgotten Greeks"<sup>4</sup>. Many groups, invisible to the official discourse, such as the residents of Beloiannis settlement in Hungary, once consisting entirely of refugees from the Greek Civil War, mainly Slav-speaking and until rather recently without Greek citizenship, tended gradually to join the official discourse, while others joined the nation in secret, only to be partially eliminated later, such as the "Antiochian" Arabic-speaking Orthodox Turks (Baltsiotis 2013).

The next steps evolve as an avalanche. Especially after 1990, the Greek society is exposed to a series of populations considered as related to the Greeks, Greeks of a different category, although in principle, they do not seem to meet the usual "criteria" of national affiliation. Swinging between metaphysical search, ancestor worship, extraterrestrials and orthodox faith, "researchers" discover the forgotten Ancient Greeks in Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Pamir, Sudan and Spain. Due to the fascination they exercise, the "forgotten Greeks", with government support and acceptance by the media, become established as a fact of modern *Hellenism*<sup>5</sup>. The

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<sup>2</sup> The usual translation of "homogenis" is co-ethnic Greeks. The text will use in certain cases the term *homogenis*, which it reflects a vaguer categorization, meaning persons "from the same genos", a term associated with millet.

<sup>3</sup> Mostly known in Turkey as Girit Türkleri.

<sup>4</sup> Why the case of Tourkokritikoí weakened later is the object of a more specific research. We note only that the issue of their *Greekness* became more complicated when apart from Syria and Lebanon (as well as Libya) "it was discovered" that most of them lived in Turkey

<sup>5</sup> For example, in the 1990s Dimitris Manolesakis directed documentaries on the public TV channel ET1 (possibly within the frame of Educational TV) with the partnership of the Ministry of Education and the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, see indicatively Macedonian News Agency, 27 July 2003, *Eleftherotypia* (daily), 3 January 2004. In the article, signed by G. Kioussis, published in the latter, it is accepted, without the slightest doubt, that "he discovered hundreds of descendants of soldiers of Alexander the Great."

boundaries between serious and comical (such as in the case of "fair-haired Kalasha Macedonians» and the town of Elche (Elx) in Spain), politics and nationalism, science and propaganda become blurred, addressed in a public where the *Greek origin* and *Greek Diaspora* (ancient and modern) are key components of the national imaginary. The rooted notions of a huge Greek *space*, in the east and the west, and of Diaspora, are commonplace. Ministers, academics and journalists simply reflect what everyone believes<sup>6</sup>. Implausible narratives, clumsy lies and pseudo-scientific approaches embrace during the 1990s a part of those involved in "tradition", local cultures, "national issues", and the old Greek refugees, especially those from Turkey<sup>7</sup>.

This paper will concentrate on the discovery and management of two groups of "new Greeks", the Gagauz of Moldova and the Turkish "Pontians" (the Greek-speaking Muslims and the alleged «Crypto-Christians»). They have been selected as directly related to political choices, unlike other cases, such as the Kalasha, where the political dimension of the Greek involvement is not at all obvious, at least at first glance.

Our interest focuses on the attitude of the Greek state and the political system vis-à-vis these groups and the official or unofficial policies followed. Since the true picture of the Greek state interventions is currently impossible to be revealed through archival sources, we will be limited to other reports, mostly journalistic. We will also examine how the Greek population perceives these groups and how journalistic discourse presents itself as the producer, but mainly as the expresser of historical perceptions and discourse of public history. Moreover, specific aspects of the new discoveries are studied, from the political dimensions of Pontic-speaking and "Crypto-Christians" of Turkey, to the Greek-Turkish antagonism for Moldovan Gagauz. Through these descriptions, an attempt is made to detect the reasons for recourse to these policies, as well as the reason why the carriers of Greek nationalism demonstrate a need to discover forgotten brothers, and what is considered Greek and what foreign/alien today. How do stake holders and politicians, (semi-) official state agencies, journalists and Greek nationalists interact? Is it possible that they all perceive in the same way concepts such as *race*, *nation*, *origin*, Hellenism, history? These two examples, which lie beyond the ordinary and institutionally-covered discoveries of co-ethnic Greeks<sup>8</sup>, helps us identify the boundaries of the (Greek) nation and the role which *ethnic origin*, language, religion and historical perceptions play in it.

Is it ultimately a confirmation of historical perceptions and their easier reproduction through "new discoveries" or a way of determining, consolidating, and, why not, renegotiating the inclusion in the nation and the boundaries of the nation itself?

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<sup>6</sup> A characteristic example is the "3rd World Congress of Greek-speaking and Greek-origin (hellenogenón in Greek) Peoples", held in 1997, "under the auspices of the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs." For the journalist "In Palestine there are also Greek villages [...] The people called Rum Orthodox and Greeks of Asia Minor", while "hellenogeneis" are also the inhabitants of Elche in Spain, a Greek colony in antiquity, who "were not discovered" by our ministries and embassies until 1989 "(Demetra Kroustalli, The ends of the Greek language, *To Vima tis Kyriakis*, Sunday 5 October 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Indicative is the following case: The President of a Pontian Association in a book-journey in Asia Minor also includes his general viewpoints. He talks about a "Global Hellenism» involving Greeks and "hellenogeneis" throughout the earth-from the Libyan "Benda" until the "Malan[a]" of India, irrespective of religion, a modern Greek Islam which appears in many Central Asian countries, and calls for the convening of the World Council of Hellenes (N. G. Fotiades 1996: 18-20, 246-259, 268-269).

<sup>8</sup> The common element of the two groups is identified with their non-acceptance as co-ethnic Greeks in legal terms from the official state.

## A. Gagauz<sup>9</sup>

This is a Turkish-speaking Orthodox-Christian group, localised mainly in the area of today's Bulgaria. A significant part of the group moved in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the then tsarist Moldova<sup>10</sup>, while a smaller one, which had moved to Eastern Thrace, came under the Greek-Turkish population exchange, as Greek Orthodox who belonged to the Greek-Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and settled mainly in the prefecture of Evros in Greek Western Thrace. It is understood from the above that, for more than a century before the population exchange, there was no contact between the two groups, while the Greek Gagauz were rather familiar with the existence of the group in Bulgaria<sup>11</sup>.

In the past, the Gagauz of Bulgaria, but even those in Moldova, were acquainted with Bulgarian nationalism and in some cases identified with it<sup>12</sup>, in contrast to the references in Turkish historiography. Thus, a theory developed about Gagauz being a Bulgarian group which gradually shifted to Turkish.

The Soviet Union, as in most cases, followed a policy of decoupling of ethnic groups from potential kin-states. This resulted in the development of the linguistic theory that the Gagauz language is not Turkish, specifically a variety close to north-eastern Bulgaria Turkish, as accepted by most linguists, but a separate language (in terms of structural linguistics), which, «due to the profound impact of Slavic and Romance languages, differs significantly from the Turkish languages» (Pokrovskaya 1966: 112).<sup>13</sup>

The declaration of independence of Gagauzia and the later awarded autonomy as an entity with separate territorial and administrative status in the state of Moldova, and Russian as its official language (Ihrig 2005)<sup>14</sup> took place after to collapse of Soviet Union. Likewise, procedures were developed that could be characterised as nationalising and, as we know from

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<sup>9</sup> Gaga (v) uzos/-zis (masc), Gaga(v)uza (feminine) in Greek (plural Gaga(v)uzi/-zēs or Gaga (v) uzidēs), Gaga(v)uz in Turkish.

<sup>10</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union a considerable part of the population was found within the borders of Ukraine, while in 1910-1914 Gagauz settlements were established in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian areas. The older Soviet statistics counted 156,000 Gagauz in total, of which 124 000 in Moldova (Isayev 1977: 115-116). The standardization of the language in Soviet times followed that group of "small ethnicities" which did not have the brief blossoming of the first Soviet years. Only in 1957, and given the change of language policy in the Soviet Union and the imposition of Russian, the written form of Gagauz language was introduced by Decree of the Supreme Soviet of Moldova, without success in its transmission (ibid: 116). The publishing activity did not last more than fifteen years after 1957.

<sup>11</sup> From what we can conclude, the existence of «indigenous» Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians in the district of New Zihni of Serres and secondarily in Rhodopi has gradually become known only in recent decades.

<sup>12</sup> With regard to the conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate for the Gagauz of Varna region, and the former's greater acceptance see Tonev 1984. For the limited influence of the Exarchate in a Gagauz village in Eastern Thrace before the population exchange, see the testimony of George Alexiadis in Alexandrou 2005: 175-186.

<sup>13</sup> It is true though that the comparison of Moldova Gagauz variety with standard modern Turkish –and not the varieties spoken in north-eastern Bulgaria-, shows differences to a certain degree, but mutual intelligibility is still persisting.

<sup>14</sup> Besides the political reasons for the adoption of Russian as an official language, it must be noted that there is a major language shift to Russian..

similar examples, these procedures are characterised by a high degree of instability of their ideological constructions, all the more in small ethnic groups<sup>15</sup>.

The Turkish interest in the Gagauz was maintained throughout the course of the 20th century, especially reflected in the fact that scientists, such as Kemal Karpat and Ahmet Caferoğlu<sup>16</sup> worked on them. Of course, the interest was limited and this is because of the religious affiliation of Gagauz, the general policy of Turkey for *Turkish populations* outside the Turkish borders until the 1980s, and the fact that they were found in the Eastern Bloc<sup>17</sup>.

On the contrary in Greece, the scientific community as well as the national literature chose to ignore the Gagauz who settled in the country as a result of Greek-Turkish population exchange, in contrast to the various Turkish-speaking Orthodox groups from Asia Minor. In the few cases that the Gagauz are mentioned, they are connected to their Greek origin and the legendary dilemma during Ottoman times, -a wide spread myth in various Christian and Muslim ethno-linguistic groups in the Balkans- whether to "maintain their language or their faith" (Ktenides and Theodosioglou 1969: 107-145)<sup>18</sup>, although previously, even in the late 1920s, their *Greekness* was not unquestionable<sup>19</sup>. However, Greece monitored and tried to prevent the settlement of Gagauz in Turkey in late Interwar period, since she feared repercussions on the Patriarchate<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Note that apart from the linguistic shift to Russian, few are the cultural elements that could differentiate today between Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Gagauz of Moldova (see Chinn and Roper 1998: 90, which refer to an unpublished study of Hülya Demirdirek)

<sup>16</sup> The title of the article published by the latter in *Türk Kültürü* 21 (1964) is characteristic: *Sovyet Rusya idaresindeki esir milletler* [captive ethnicities in Soviet Russia].

<sup>17</sup> During the period 1931-1944, when Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver was ambassador in Bucharest, Turkish is taught for some time at the schools of 26 settlements and a limited number of young people are transferred to Turkey to continue their studies. Some returned and some remained (Güngör & Argunsah 1998: 9). According to various estimates, they were approximately fifty people, in any case not more than a hundred. Subsequently, there was an attempt those residing in Turkey to join the rapidly declining Church of Papa Eftim, along with the few (mainly Turkish-speaking) Greeks and Orthodox Albanians (personal research in Istanbul 1996, 2001). This effort seems to have left its traces: While the Turkish authorities initially fail to rank the Gagauz in Turkey regarding religion and ethnicity, and they record them as "Hristiyan Ortodoks", ultimately by a decision of 1943, they are recorded as "Türk Ortodoks" (ibid). Note that Suphi was against the exchange of Turkish-speaking Karamanlis, whom he considered *genuine Turks* (see Alexandris 1983: 194). The idea to include immigrant Gagauz in the Turkish-Orthodox Church existed from the beginning: In 1935, when for the first time the possibility of their mass migration to Turkey is discussed (see below), the "People's Turkish Christian Union" is established, under the guidance of the Turkish Ministry of the Interior as an advisor to their settlement, and the lawyer Triantaphyllos, secretary and former partner and adviser of Papa Eftim is appointed General Secretary» (Confidential Note of the Ecumenical Patriarchate 12 August 1935, as attached in document of the Directorate B of Political Affairs, Turkish Department 11423/B/8/T, 26 August 1935, Historical Archive of the [Greek] Ministry of Foreign Affairs [hereinafter HAMFA], 1935, A/4/9/3).

<sup>18</sup> The Greek language historiography can show only one noteworthy article till the mid 1980s, where there is multitude of non-Greek literature references (Iordanoglou 1984-1985).

<sup>19</sup> With the excuse of the Greek-Bulgarian dispute over the property of the Orthodox community of Varna, "V. Papadopoulos, Plenipotentiary of the Greek religious community of Varna, distinguishes the Greeks from the Gagauz: "it is known that the Gagauz are not Greek" (Papadopoulos 1942-1943: 145, see also: 140-141). The Gagauz were a major part of the Orthodox community of Varna, and identified with either the Greeks or, later, -from the end of the 19th century- mainly with the Bulgarians.

<sup>20</sup> The Greek Ambassador to Turkey K. M. Sakellaropoulos sounded the alarm by saying that "Hamdoulah Saphi" engages in active propaganda aiming at "Christian and Muslim Turks" to immigrate to Turkey (Embassy of Greece in Turkey to MFA, Istanbul, ref. n° 2042, 26 July 1935). The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs asks for a recommendation to the Romanian Government for the concerns of the Patriarchate and notes that the Romanian-Turkish agreement took place without the knowledge of the Romanian Foreign Ministry ([Greek]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Gagauzia's ("Gagauz Yeri") attempt for independence, Turkey is culturally and economically implicated in the region. The language, through which the attempt is made to define the Gagauz from other nationalities, enables for a significant intervention: The first newspaper in Turkish *Ana sozu*, supports Gagauz-Turkish relations and later Turkey undertakes the production of literature in the Gagauz language. However economic penetration in the country encounters serious problems of internal acceptance, especially by pro-Russian elites (Neukrich 2002). Nevertheless, economic, cultural and political influence of Turkey, have become very important<sup>21</sup>, although the effort for religious intervention results in complete failure<sup>22</sup>.

The corresponding movements of intervention on behalf of Greece take place in the late 1990s. Schematically, the starting point can be defined in 1999: "Moldova is the only country in the Balkans, in which we have no embassy. [...] In addition to the approximately 4,000 Russian-speaking Greeks who are there, there are the so-called "Gagauz", who are Turkish-speaking Greeks Orthodox, who aspire to Greece and have started cultural exchanges of a significant extent, youth and children exchanges, and this is an important reason why our Embassy there should show particular interest"<sup>23</sup>. The teaching of Greek as an optional course, at the University and the «Pedagogical College» of Gagauzia begun in the year 2001<sup>24</sup>. In 2004, the Moldovan (Romanian) and Greek Literature Department is established, and the Greek language course becomes mandatory at the Pedagogical College (Lukas 2005). According to Nikolaos Loukas, in 2005-2006, Greek courses at the University are attended by approximately 90 people, mostly college and high school students, while at the Pedagogical College, the course is attended by 80 freshmen and 80 second-year students (ibid)<sup>25</sup>.

Classes take place with the support of the Consulate of Greece in Odessa, the Embassy in Kiev and "the Office of Educational Coordination there" (ibid). Apart from the courses, however, "[...] dozens of college and high school students, participants in these programmes, have repeatedly taken part successfully in summer Greek Language seminars at the Universities of Ioannina, Crete, Ionion (Corfu), Macedonia and AUTH [Aristotle University of Thessaloniki], in six-month seminars organised by the World Council of Hellenes Abroad

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Embassy in Bucharest, 5267 / B / 8 / T, 27 August 1935). The Patriarchate sends special envoy to Romania to investigate the situation (Confidential Note of the Ecumenical Patriarchate 12 August 1935, in document of the Directorate B of Political Affairs, Turkish Department 11423/B/8/T, 26 August 1935). Finally, the Romanian Ambassador in Ankara assures his Greek counterpart that he will not facilitate the migration of "Orthodox Turks" (Greek Embassy to MFA Ankara, N. 3062, 11 November.1935. See also the relevant confirmation, Greek Embassy to MFA, Istanbul, prot. no 2433, 30 August 1935) (all documents in the HAMFA, 1935, A/4/9/3)

<sup>21</sup> In this way even the government of the self-declared state of Northern Cyprus has concluded cultural cooperation protocol with Gagauzia (*Simerini* (daily, Nicosia), 4 September 2006).

<sup>22</sup> When in the 1990s Gagauz economic migrants arrived in Turkey a short-lived attempt was made to establish relations with the already flockless "Türk Ortodoks Patriarchate". However, both the objective situation of the Turkish Orthodox Church, and the relatively strong Russian ecclesiastical presence in the mid-90's invalidated the effort, which has not since been repeated (fieldwork Istanbul 1996, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> The MFA Theodoros Pangalos at the Standing Committee on Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Parliament during the debate of the bill for the establishment of diplomatic and consular authorities, 17 February 1999. The discussion is available at: [http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Nomothetiko-Ergo/Anazitisi-Nomothetikou-Ergou?law\\_id=7133f9b5-74be-483d-8ab9-1562ce861e29](http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Nomothetiko-Ergo/Anazitisi-Nomothetikou-Ergou?law_id=7133f9b5-74be-483d-8ab9-1562ce861e29), last accessed 30 October 2014. All the sites that are mentioned below were (last) accessed 30 October 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Greek languages courses were not part of the curriculum in the case of the University (Lukas 2005).

<sup>25</sup> To view the current situation, see the University of Comrat website, available at: <http://www.kdu.md/ru/facult-nats-kult.html>.

in cooperation with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, in Greek Language and Culture International Summer Schools organised by the Thrace Treasury (Xanthi), as well as in various educational camps in Greece". "[T]hese programs will be financially supported mainly by the Greek NGO "Oikoumenikotis"<sup>26</sup>. The website of the Centre for Greek Language states that Comrat University "supports the teaching of respective optional subjects [of Greek language] in two other educational institutions of the city of Comrat, which are the State Pedagogical College «Mihail Çakir» and the Public School «Gavril Gaydarji». Since 2006, among the local teachers, there is a Greek teacher seconded from the Ministry of Education of Greece<sup>27</sup>, a number later increased to four.<sup>28</sup> In the academic year 2006-2007 it appears that the relevant Schools of University had 34 enrolled students (Schools of Romanian-Greek and German-Greek literature)<sup>29</sup>. The Thrace Treasury, an NGO funded and supported mainly by the Greek state, continues its special relationship with Gagauzia until today<sup>30</sup>.

It is since the mid-1990s that relations began to develop and visits were exchanged, more or less formalised, particularly among Gagauz communities in Evros and Moldovan Gagauz<sup>31</sup>. As it is clear from the research, it would be wrong to state that these visits of Greek Gagauz were planned foreign policy in the beginning, but subsequently they were used or possibly encouraged by various "centres" connected with the state, if not by the state itself. Children from Gagauzia were sent to Greek summer camps and an attempt to consolidate their dependence on Greece is a fact since the early 2000s. In 2004, 40 children are accommodated at a summer camp in Avdira, Xanthi, which was preceded by a similar hosting during the previous three years. These students were enrolled in Greek courses<sup>32</sup>.

Other activities include visits of missionaries from Greece and Cyprus, funding of construction of churches and their equipment, distributing religious books-including a special edition of the New Testament in Russian (Alexandrou 2005: 208), small privately funded editions<sup>33</sup>, and religious books for school ages<sup>34</sup>. As of 2002, the Association of Friends of

<sup>26</sup> Alexandrou 2005: 365 About this NGO we read: "Oikoumenikotis, Chair: Leontis N., Founding members: Nikiforides D., Malkides Th., Sotiropoulos P., Kalodemides P., Papavasileiou St., Dapergolas A., Karaiskos K. (unsigned), All the people of non-governmental organisations, *To Paron tis Kyriakis*, 3 July 2005).

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.greek-language.gr>. This posting is no longer accessible. In all these cases, the last access was in early 2009. For the posts not currently valid, only the link on the homepage is given.

<sup>28</sup> For the academic year 2013-2014 see <http://edu.klimaka.gr/arxeio/ekpaideytikoi-apospaseis/exwteriko-apospaseis-axiologikos-pinakas-a1-klimaka.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> See Yorgos Kiouisis, Greek language in Gagauzia, *Eleftherotypia*, 19 November 2007.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.tamieion-hellas.eu/programs.php?id=3>.

<sup>31</sup> Author's research in the district of Orestiada 1997, 2004, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Some children were accommodated in the Orthodox Christian Brotherhood «[Blessed] Lydia i Filipissia", Asprovalta Kavala), while P. Emfietzoglou, a prominent businessman, financed the hosting of children who excelled in Greek courses (Melahroini Martidou, Warm hospitality of the children from Gagauzia to Askites !, *O Hronos* [daily, Komotini], 2 September 2004). For earlier hosting at "Greek culture schools" of Thrace Treasury, see *O Hronos*, 28 February 2002. See also the event for «Turkish speaking Romioi [Rums]», with the participation of Gagauz hosted in Thrace, held in Komotini at Thrakiki Etaireia. The event was attended by "Cappadocian" Prodromos Emfietzoglou, Cappadocians and Turkish speaking Tsalkalidēs "neoprosfyges" [new-refugees] (*Antifonitis* [Komotini], 18 July 2006). Tsalka is a mainly Turkish-speaking Orthodox region of Georgia, whose larger part of the population migrated gradually in Greece, most of them since 1990.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. financing the reissue of a prayer and psalms book by the priest and scholar Mihail Çakir (Alexandrou 2005: 152-153).

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Olga Radova Karanastas, Moldovan Academy of Sciences (May 2007)

Gagauzia "Agios Dimitrios" based in Thessaloniki<sup>35</sup>, gets involved in these activities. Since 2005-2006, the Association has engaged in providing scholarships to high school and college students, with an emphasis on attending the Church High-School at Kilkis and Theological (University) Schools. By 2011, 16 students had graduated from this high school, of which 11 were admitted to the Theological School of Thessaloniki.<sup>36</sup> In parallel priests' studies were subsidized<sup>37</sup>. That is to say, it constitutes a political effort to create a clergy elite.

As it is obvious, the connection with the Greeks is made through the Turkish language (see also footnote 32) and for this purpose not only Greek Gagauz but also Turkish speaking Karamanlis are recruited. As it is stated: "[Gagauz] are Turkish-speaking, but Orthodox Christians who are looking for their roots and their contact with the Turkish-speaking Cappadocians is a golden opportunity to realize that Hellenism has no borders"<sup>38</sup>. The prerequisite for connection is of course the "common faith." Multiple generic contacts are based on it, beyond the activities mentioned above. In this context, for example, non-clergy members too participate in the religious visits<sup>39</sup>.

In his book published in 2005, D. Alexandrou sets out a series of proposals on Greek interventions: extending the Greek language courses, teacher secondment at the University, youth visits to Greece, establishment of a "Centre for Greek Language and Culture", grants to specific disciplines, "promotion of scientific research", "publication of scientific books" [our quotes], recording of popular culture, strengthening the relationship with the Greek Gagauz and the Greeks of Ukraine, strengthening the Orthodox morale by creating specific media, visits organising etc., assistance from the EU, broadcasting Greek satellite channel, development and humanitarian aid supply, and finally creating in Gagauzia a Centre, which will be able to coordinate some of these activities<sup>40</sup>.

From the information we have at our disposal we can assume that the direct involvement of the Greek State in the area has been preceded by semi-official individual interventions, either in the form of associations and societies, or more systematic, such as the one by the construction company "Mechaniki" of P. Emfietzoglou<sup>41</sup>. The State maintains this attitude of discreet intervention, and most activities move in this grey area of agencies related or funded

<sup>35</sup> See Alexandrou 2005: 267-268. According to the author, main sponsors are Xeropotamou, Vatopediou and Philotheou Monasteries of Mount Athos (ibid). For all the supporters of the Association's activities, see ibid: 276. Apart from visits to Greece, the Association undertakes the hospitality costs of some of the students, the coordination of visits and the publication of religious books and temples equipment (Ibid: 268-275).

<sup>36</sup> For the purposes and hitherto activities of the Association see <http://www.pemptousia.gr/2011/05/%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%B6%CE%BF%CE%B9>.

<sup>37</sup> Author's research 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *O Hronos*, 2 September 2004.

<sup>39</sup> See for example: Unsigned, Speaking to "Th" about Orthodoxy and their relations with the Church of Greece. Gagauz too at the Inter-Balkan [Orthodox] Congress, *Thessalia* (daily, Volos), 7 December 2007. The contacts of the Parliament of Gagauzia with international Orthodox fora began in 2000 (Alexandrou 2005: 208). For visits to Greece and Cyprus and participation in events of "scientists, intellectuals and politicians" from Gagauzia see ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid : 211-213. From the text style we assume that the author has copied the text (probably a report to a Greek authority), as is the case with other parts of the book. Essentially an even more intense intervention policy is proposed, which largely appears to copy the corresponding Turkish one.

<sup>41</sup> See similar references to a relevant event, with the presence of Emfietzoglou (*Antifonitis* (Komotini), *ibid*).



and supported by the state<sup>42</sup>. The official assistance to Moldova, not exclusively channelled in Gagauzia, remains comparatively high, and from 2008 to 2012 is increasingly education-oriented<sup>43</sup>. All these policies are presented as “innocent” private initiatives: In relation to the Greek language courses of the NGO “Aerpos”, it is written that “The initiative does not come from an official Greek state agency but belongs exclusively to the private initiative of a group of Thessalonians”<sup>44</sup>. Ultimately, however, the purpose of these activities is difficult to pass over in silence<sup>45</sup>. From mid-2000s it is accepted and cannot be hidden that they are part of the country’s foreign policy: “In Comrat, we were also met with a surprise. We met Mr. Nickos Kafantaris, representing the Development Agency of KEDKE [Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece]. He said that he was in the area monitoring the implementation progress of a programme in the region, amounting to EUR 220 000 under the auspices of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Public Administration”. “The programme comprises repairs of university halls, supply of modern equipment, modern heating and hot water systems installation at Koptsak city hospital, as well as providing an ambulance and a cardiograph for the local first aid station,” said Mr. Kafantaris ”.<sup>46</sup>

The Greek economic crisis possibly upset further ambitious plans. But it seems that the strong presence had begun to decline already by the late-2000s<sup>47</sup>. Today, Turkish presence is clearly stronger than the Greek one, while in parallel new ideological forms are shaped in Turkey which include the Gagauz in Balkan Turks narration<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Indicative of how things worked is the following article excerpt entitled “Great work performed by Aerpos in spreading Greek language in the Balkans”: “The association for the dissemination of the Greek language “Aerpos” found a strong supporter in the face of the Minister of Employment and Social Protection, Kilkis MP [of Nea Demokratia party] Savvas Tsitouridis, who helped this summer to create an intensive Greek language course. Places in summer camps of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food at Sounion were given to “Aerpos”, where for 20 days 25 people from Moldovan Gagauzia, Bulgaria, Romania and Skopje [sic] attended Greek language courses and seminars on the Greek culture”, *Imerisia* (daily, Kilkis), 29 September 2006. See also the issue of 23 February 2007. Even Theodoros Pangalos gets a relevant report, which he files with the Parliament. See Parliamentary Minutes, 8 June 2007: «the MP of Attica Mr. Theodoros Pangalos filed a report, in which the Monastery of Holy Transfiguration of Jesus in Sohos Lagkada calls for cultural and national support of Orthodox Christians in Moldovan Gagauzia” (available at: <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Praktika/Synedriaseis-Olomeleias?sessionRecord=62682c73-d77e-4dc7-b135-134d0b102066>).

<sup>43</sup> See in detail the amounts and areas of aid per year (2001-2012) in <http://www.hellenicaid.gr/etesies-ektheseis/udas/etesies-ektheseis-udas.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Yota Myrtsioti, “Great interest in Greek language. School halls of neighbouring countries hosting tutorials to learn the language”, *I Kathimerini* (daily), 10 March 2007.

<sup>45</sup> “Some students need to travel daily up to 15 kilometres to come and attend Greek language lessons” says the researcher Nikos Loukas from Cyprus who lives in the area and is working to strengthen the Greek influence.” (Nikos Bardounias, The house - headquarters of Filiki Etaireia. It was turned into a museum - International conference in Moldova on the subject, *I Kathimerini*, 8 July 2006).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> From 2000 until 2005 15 children from Gagauzia, of which 11 already enrolled in Theological Schools, were granted scholarships for Church High Schools (Alexandrou 2005: 208). The author states that 5 more children would come for 2005. But in the next years only one scholar will come (see the text above).

<sup>48</sup> See indicatively in a web page of the Turkish-Muslim minority in Thrace: Nurten Remzi, Her halk önce ana dilini, sonra devlet dilini, daha sonra da yabancı dilleri öğrenir, available at: <http://www.rodopruzgari.com/item/4021-her-halk-%C3%B6nce-ana-dilini,-sonra-devlet-dilini,-daha-sonra-da-yabanc%C4%B1-dilleri-%C3%B6C4%9Frenir.html>.

The inclusion of the Gagauz in the Greek nation may not be direct; however, they constitute a "dormant" part of it<sup>49</sup>. Quite representative is their representation in the broadcast "Anichnefseis" by Pantelis Savvides in channel ET-3, where they were referred to as Greeks; during the TV crew visit in the area, Greek flags were distributed, the national anthem was sung, and efforts were made to extract statements of Greek identity<sup>50</sup>. In 2005 the book of Dimitris Alexandrou "Gagauz, the unknown Rums of Moldova, Reliable Testimonies"<sup>51</sup> is published, attempting to include the Gagauz in the Greek nation, since they constitute "a part of the Rum community." Their language differs from Turkish (Alexandrou 2005: 106, 190, 226-228), which appears as an acquired language thus it must fade out in favour of their "real language «Anna dili (mother tongue) »[Ana Dili, written in the Greek alphabet]» to "restore" the Greek language (ibid, 189, 197, 200). At the same time the Turkish factor appears as a threat for the community and its identity (ibid, passim).

We should not underestimate the fact that the Gagauz of Greece, used, especially in the early years, as a link and alibi for these interventions<sup>52</sup>, made their way up the hierarchy of local ethno-linguistic groups in Thrace. In the northern part of the prefecture of Evros, where most of them reside, the Gagauz are, among Christians, the group with the lowest prestige, due not only to Turkish mother tongue, but also to other socio-economic characteristics and embedded prejudices<sup>53</sup>. But the involvement of the Gagauz from Chryssochorafa, and the "indigenous" Gagauz of Nea Zihni of Serres in the Gagauzia, both of which share a higher prestige between ethno-linguistic groups of Serres prefecture<sup>54</sup>, leads us to the hypothesis that, beyond the upgrading and the emergence of local actors, this was an "internal" upgrade procedure of the

<sup>49</sup>So they took part, along with folk ensembles from all over Greece, including one from Pomak villages, in Folk Winter Evening in Thessaloniki (see Macedonian News Agency, 18 February 2005)

<sup>50</sup> Anichnefseis, ET-3(Northern Greece Public TV), 27 September 2006. Since then, in a number of nationalist sites they are referred to as "Turkish-speaking Greeks", indicatively see <http://olympia.gr/2010/12/28/%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%B6%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%BE%CE%AD%CF%81%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B5-%CE%B1%CE%BD-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%BC%CE%B5-%CF%8C%CF%84/>, <http://greek-minorities.blogspot.gr/2010/12/blog-post.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Erodios editions, Thessaloniki. We must separate, from the spirit and logic of the book, the texts of N. Loukas contained on pp. 136-148. The latter tries to establish a more balanced Greek-friendly narrative towards the issue. Both texts were posted in 2011, available at: <http://www.pemptousia.gr/2011/05/%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%B6%CE%BF%CE%B9/>, <http://www.pemptousia.gr/2011/06/%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%B6%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B4%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%BC%CE%BF/>.

<sup>52</sup> At the presentation of the book by Alexandrou, at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, danced the Cultural Association of Chryssochorafa in Serres, a settlement populated partly by Gagauz (see the online newspaper *Noiazomai*, 33, Oct.-Nov. 2005, <http://www.noiazomai.net/33.html>). The invitation stated that the event is organized by the cultural association "Makednos" and will be greeted by "representatives of cultural associations of Gagauz villages in Greece".

<sup>53</sup> On the contrary speaking Albanian does not prevent the Arvanites in Evros to hold a high position in the local hierarchy.

<sup>54</sup> Those of Nea Zihni, because they constitute a non-Slavic speaking "indigenous" group without the stigma of the past, those of Chryssochorafa, because they constitute one of the many historically non-Greek speaking refugee groups of the prefecture, i.e. Bafralis, Karamanlis, Arvanites etc., without being identified with negative stereotypes.

undervalued language and self-image of the group itself<sup>55</sup>. We do not think it is a coincidence that the first book on the Gagauz of Greece is issued only in 2009 by a member of the community<sup>56</sup>.

But why does the official Greek state care for this small population in one of the poorest areas of the poorest country in Europe? The purpose of business penetration must be excluded, as we have seen in the examples of the Balkan states, in which communities associated with Greece were used in a supplementary way and only in the beginning. We believe that beyond the supposed foundations created by this policy and possible reflexes to the Turkish intervention, "Turkification" of Gagauz, shakes the exclusive relationship between *Hellenism/Greekness* and Orthodoxy. A Christian Orthodox Turk dissolves the edifice of national identity and historical narrative. As it is referred to in various publications, emblematically and repeatedly, "Greek names are encountered" in Gagauz. The establishment of the (hypothetical) "Michael Portokaloglou", "Nikos Cakir[is]", and a similar entire community, as Turks, according to the Greek perceptions, constitutes historical perversion, reverses the Greek historical narration. Unconsciously perhaps, it is seen as a historical threat, regardless of the fact that "Turkish aggression" is put forward as a cause for the interventions. Another cause could be an irrational fear that the inclusion of these "Greeks" in the Turkish nation could lead to disconnection from the Greek nation of other orthodox populations, within Greece, who speak or used to speak a different language.

Greece and Turkey have gradually established their competition over Gagauzia, emerging as the dominant forces assisting the development of the region<sup>57</sup>. In recent years, however, it seems that the amounts spent by Turkey are very high and she has now acquired a privileged position. In any case, the Greek interest seems to have subsided<sup>58</sup>. So this is another "battle of Hellenism". The peculiarity lies that is carried out away from any publicity.

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<sup>55</sup>Typical are the lyrics of a new song performed by the Association of Ano Oinoi, Orestiada (in Evros prefecture) during their visit to Gagauzia in September 2009. Among other things, the lyrics said "we and you are Gagauzian brothers, we are waiting for you in our Greece" (see. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2JtG2j4JGo>).

<sup>56</sup> Christos Kozaridis, *We Gagauzians*, Paratiritis tis Thrakis, [Komotini], 2009.

<sup>57</sup>See the extremely revealing interview of the President of Gagauzia Mihail Formuzal «Moldova: The Example of Gagauz-Yeri as an 'Unfrozen Conflict' Region» at Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty on April 5, 2007 (available at: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/04/e3dc919f-38ea-4f73-bbc7-4468bae6aa7a.html>). Turkey is mentioned as a country, which helped more than any other, whereas now, Turkish investments are exempt for five years from all taxation. Greece is indicated as a country that helps a lot, specific reference is made to language classes and the "cooperation" to improve infrastructure is praised. The President did not forget to emphasize the "natural reasons" for which Greece shows interest: «As you know, in Greece, there are many communities and villages where the residents are Gagauz or Greeks of Gagauz origin. In some villages, people [...] still speak Gagauz ». Note that Bulgaria is also involved in the cultural life of Gagauzia (Turkish language teaching, university textbooks, etc.). The whole competition is more reminiscent of the early 20th century.

<sup>58</sup>It is significant that the last visit of the active cultural Association "To Krasochori", based in Ano Oinoi, Orestiada, to Moldova takes place in November 2009 (see <http://krasochori.gr/tm/%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%8C%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B5%CF%82/2009-2/>). Certainly a different approach might begin as the Association participates in a Gagauz festival in Odessa in 2013 and the presumed leader of the Gagauz of Ukraine (before recent political developments) visits Orestiada in the same year (see <http://krasochori.gr/tm/%CF%83%CF%85%CE%BD%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B5%CF%82/video/%CE%B5%CE%BC%CF%86%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%B7-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CF%80%CE%AC%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1/>, <http://dimchoglo.com/?p=530&lang=en>).

## B. The Pontic-speaking population and "Crypto-Christians" in Turkey

In some areas of the wider region of Trabzon (Trapezounda in Greek), there are small or larger Greek-speaking regions, speaking the Pontic Greek dialect, quite distinct from standard (modern) Greek. Today, due mainly, but not exclusively, to internal immigration, the language is spoken elsewhere as well, mostly in the neighbouring urban centres and Istanbul. In some settlements, the language preservation is exceptional, even some children are fluent speakers, while in most places, fluent speakers are found only among the elderly<sup>59</sup>. In the 1990s, and partly until the end of the 2000s, this group constituted the subject of Greek foreign policy and specific political actions. In this case too, the pilgrimages of Pontian Greeks to their places of origin, gave rise to these actions. More and more they encountered people speaking the same language and living in the same ancestral lands. In late eighties, when travelling thickened, another factor was added: partial linguistic deculpabilisation of non-Turkish-speaking inhabitants of Black Sea. A number of factors led some communities of North East Turkey to this partial change of attitude towards their language. The stereotypical perception in Turkey on Laz, term which includes all residents east of Sinop and Samsun, regardless of language, usually tolerates partial differences in language and culture. This viewpoint, which does not deny the *Turkishness* of those subjects, but constitutes part of their Turkishness, became grounds for a generation of young people to object to linguistic depreciation. Immigration to Germany allowed some of them to act without fear, among which the Laz ethnic group is the most characteristic example<sup>60</sup>. Additionally, liberalisation in Turkey and greater tolerance to the linguistic-cultural otherness, somehow embedded the expression of linguistic diversity in the region. Also in several occasions, a left political background triggered the interest in linguistic and religious diversity in Turkey. In the case of Greek-speaking Muslims of *Kara Deniz*, we do not encounter a particularly harsh language

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<sup>59</sup>They are about 60 villages spanning in five regions. For a description of the group, but also a list of settlements, despite all its shortcomings, see Peter Alford Andrews (compiled and edited) with the assistance of Rüdiger Benninghaus 1989: 145-147, 373-374. Valuable information and bibliography is also available at: <http://www.romeyka.org/>. To calculate "how many" speak the Pontic dialect is extremely difficult, not only because of the great migration, but also due to the significant differentiation in language shift at each settlement. This would require a long-term sociolinguistic research. Based on the 2000 census, the total population of Greek-speaking villages-assuming that everyone speaks the language, which is not the case-, counting in addition a number of speakers in the adjacent urban centres, could not in any case exceed 30.000, number that allows us a first general approach of an alleged ceiling of fluent, terminal and last semi-speakers. With an extremely arbitrary approach, taking into account the birth rate in Turkey from 1960s to 1990s, it could also be argued that the number of 60,000 more fluent, terminal and last semi-speakers could be a ceiling, if the language was maintained outside settlements, and indeed outside those which presented a significant language shift already since 1960s. Of course, this is also not the case. However, little evidence can be detected by the census of 1965 in which 4,535 Greek-speakers were counted in the region (ibid: 145). Indicatively, we mention that in the same census, 35,097 Greek speakers were counted in Istanbul, and in the entire Turkish territory 53, 520 Albanian speakers, 85,108 Laz speakers and 722,398 Arabic speakers (ibid: 130, 142, 148 and 176). The Pontic-speaking Muslim group was already known to the academic community and the Pontic Greeks. Researchers like Peter Mackridge and Samuel Baud-Bovy studied the dialect and music of the Pontic speaking Muslim group respectively.

<sup>60</sup>See indicatively, Makis Selamazidis, The Pontian "Woodstock", *Eleftherotypia*, 1 July 1998, which refers to the presence of an "Islamised Pontian from Tonya" at the annual Festival of Pontic Dances and Songs in Wuppertal.

policy, while the partial tolerance of language as a regional characteristic, allows for limited acceptance in the public space<sup>61</sup>.

In this context, when in the 1980s, every Greek Pontic association organises visits to Pontus, what is probably contemplated is the possibility to develop a policy of approaching the local Greek-speaking population and in the same time taking advantage of its existence. Little is known about the origins of this policy, or if the original initiatives were related to Pontian Associations of Greece<sup>62</sup>, however, we can claim that this policy is visible in the late eighties.

In 1990 for the first time articles speak of "national awakening" of "Crypto-Christians" in Pontus<sup>63</sup>. A 12- page unpublished essay by Vlassis Agtzides, entitled "Report on the "Crypto-Christians" and Islamised Greeks in Turkey today," is written in November 1991.<sup>64</sup> We are not in the position to know the recipients of this report, but in any case we believe it should be included in those proposals that shaped the policy followed. The author claims that the existence of the phenomenon of "Crypto-Christians is an indisputable fact", he lists the figures of Panaretos Topalides (see below) for "Crypto-Christians and Islamised Greeks", mentions a few cases of Crypto-Christians<sup>65</sup>, and concludes that they are Greeks "based essentially on their historically verified Greek origin, and secondly on the awareness of this origin"<sup>66</sup>. The text ends with a few suggestions, summarised below: a. To strengthen travels of Pontian Associations in Pontus, with the purpose of tightening their relationship with Greece b. to increase broadcastings of ERA5<sup>67</sup> in Pontic in "Islamised" areas. c. To publish books in Turkish, to publish a grammar for Pontic spoken in Turkey and print texts d. To assemble the group of "fugitives" [from Pontus] in Greece around a Pontian club and give them residence and work permits (ibid: 11). In April 1992, the PASOK (Socialist Party) MPs, then in the opposition, Lefteris Constantinides, Harris Kastanides and Theodoros Katsanevas submit a question in the parliament about Crypto-Christians. Th. Katsanevas stated that "The existence of 300,000 or more Greeks, Rums in Turkey, Crypto-Christians or Islamised, surely must be retrieved from oblivion in our foreign policy, when at the same time Turkey speaks about alleged repression of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. It is proposed here to investigate the possibility of opening a new consulate or transfer the consulate from Edirne in

<sup>61</sup> One could compare Turkey's policy with that of Greece vis-à-vis the linguistic groups, if we exclude the clearly different case of Kurds. Anyhow, the Turkish policy, just because it did not feel threatened by the Greek-speaking Muslim population, did not proceed with hard linguistic repression, as opposed to the Arabic-speaking Muslims, or like Greece towards the Macedonian/Bulgarian speaking Orthodox group..

<sup>62</sup>The use of the Pontic dialect, the stories of relatives who stayed behind in the Population Exchange and the promotion for decades of Crypto-Christians in Pontic literature, created the foundation on which many Pontians saw real "brothers" beyond politics. The gradual reconciliation of Turkey with past, which is inaugurated at the time, allows for the increasingly visible presence of Pontians in the area: "In May 1993, for the first time since 1461, the walls of St. Eugene reverberated from the melodic chanting. By kind permission of its current curator, the Pontic-speaking hoca [imam] Mustafa, the priests, archimandrite Pavlos Apostolides, hegumen of the Monastery of Panagia Soumela [in Greece] and Father Stephanos Xanthopoulos, chanted in the current mosque, in chorus, the apolytikion [Dismissal Hymn] of St. Eugene " (Andreades 1994: 38).

<sup>63</sup> See Vlassis Agtzides, Who's afraid of Islam?, *Eleftherotypia*, 20 August 1990. Yorgos Andreades (1994: 135) also speaks about 'awakening', although in the book there is no conscious concealment of reality and the "Turkish consciousness" in local populations is presumed (ibid: 133).

<sup>64</sup> Author's personal archive.

<sup>65</sup> More remarkable is the one found at the HAMFA and concerns the case of a group that requested to move in Greece before the 2nd WW. K. Fotiades (see below) also cites this case.

<sup>66</sup> pp. 8-9 of the Report and passim. It is indicative of the character of the document that Agtzides mentions the following "fact": "In the Black Sea there are secretly acting priests even currently " (p. 10).

<sup>67</sup>ERA5 is a public radio station broadcasting in medium and short waves for "Greeks abroad".

the areas of Tonya, where most of these Greeks reside". Harris Kastanides refers to "minority policy which should include a significant number of people who are characterized as Crypto-Christians in today's Turkey. If Greece wants to internationalise such issues and cause problems similar to which others are trying to cause to her, then a serious foreign policy and especially a serious minority policy should collect data on the utilisation of the issue of Crypto-Christians". Finally Lefteris Constantinides, among applause from the wing of PASOK, refers to "Greek children" in Turkey<sup>68</sup>. In 1994 Drama prefecture MP Anestis Saatsoglou, says that "Over 200,000 Pontians have not been included in the exchange of populations and remained mainly in the mountainous villages of Pontus, resulting in their violent conversion to Islam". He concludes among applause from the wing of PASOK: "I stress that there are no lost homelands. There are unredeemed and enslaved homelands"<sup>69</sup>. Some years later in 1999, the establishment of a consulate in Trabzon is proposed to the Standing Committee on Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Greek Parliament. The Rapporteur of the majority (PASOK) Kyriakos Spyriounis specifically states "I believe that the opening of a Consulate there constitutes a wise act, because I think there is still Greek soul beneath Crypto-Christians and under all pretexts imposed by history." Surprisingly enough the Rapporteur of left wing Synaspismos states that "We have no objection as to the purposefulness of the establishment of the Consulate in Trabzon". Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos answers to the surprise and the reluctance of the Rapporteurs of the Nea Dimokratia and the Communist Party. Among others, he states that "all reasons, which historically and culturally associate us with this place are existent and have revived in various forms". In the end all Rapporteurs vote in favour of every provision of the bill<sup>70</sup>.

Obviously these views of the MPs are the basis of the policy to be followed in the subsequent years; therefore that policy was invented in principle in intelligence service corridors, but established by the political system of the country.

Part of this policy since then is to create a seemingly scientific literature merging Pontic speakers with Crypto-Christians. Nowadays a big part of Pontian activists, but also of politicians, as well as of those dealing with historical issues on the edges of academia, is convinced that in Black Sea there are numerous Crypto-Christians<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup>The relevant question was a query regarding "palinnostoundes" (co-ethnic Greeks from the ex-Soviet Union) migrated to Greece). The newspaper reproducing the debate mentions "a numerous Greek minority living in Turkey" and rebukes the then Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Virginia Tsouderou, who merely responded that the issue is known and monitored, even though "they themselves [the supposed Greeks] tried to keep a very low profile", and now television and radio broadcasts "get them in contact" (see. ΠΔ' Meeting of the Greek Parliament, 30 March 1992, available at: <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Praktika/Synedriaseis-Olomeleias>). One newspaper only highlighted the issue (see Unsigned, What's going on with the Greek 'Crypto-Christians' of Pontus, *To Pontiki* (weekly), 7 April 1992).

<sup>69</sup>In the same session of Parliament, the Lesvos MP D. Vounatsos also referred to Crypto-Christians still existing in Turkey (Parliamentary Proceedings, ΕΘ' Meeting of 24 February 1994, available at: <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d / 24021994.doc>. Note that the applause is recorded in the minutes). See also Kostopoulos 2007: 267.

<sup>70</sup> See The Greek Parliament, Legislative Work, including the diversified introductory report and the adopted Law, available at: [http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Nomothetiko-Ergo/Anazitisi-Nomothetikou-Ergou?law\\_id=7133f9b5-74be-483d-8ab9-1562ce861e29](http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Nomothetiko-Ergo/Anazitisi-Nomothetikou-Ergou?law_id=7133f9b5-74be-483d-8ab9-1562ce861e29).

<sup>71</sup>One student originating from the Pontic-speaking enclaves in Turkey and studying in Greece says: "Most Greeks upon arriving in our villages, begin to ask us if we are oppressed by the Turks, where are our secret churches, that we must feel Greeks, and so on "(Stelios Vradelis, I lived the midnight express, *Ta Nea* (daily), 21 November 2005).

But the Greek State went beyond the rhetoric, into concrete actions. In the early 1990s, an attempt is made to establish a regular contact with Pontic-speaking populations and pave the way for the settlement of some of them in Greece<sup>72</sup>. The culmination is the granting of scholarships to over fifty Pontic-speaking individuals for Greek universities. Turkish sources vary in the figures of these scholarships: from 30-35 to 50 or even 87 people. The same sources though converge on the role played by the then Intelligence officer Savvas Kalenterides<sup>73</sup>. From the data we collected, the first students were sent to Universities in Thessaloniki and later in those of Athens. A safety net surrounds these students initially, but also later, when policy changes towards more moderate directions<sup>74</sup>.

This policy became known in Greece from the press much later. Here's how it is described on the occasion of the detention of one of the students by Turkish authorities: "The secret of choosing him [as a student], may be explained by a plan allegedly prepared by the National Intelligence Service (EYP), after the Imia military crisis, aiming at "awakening" 300,000 Pontians in Turkey: in the years '97 - '98. Fethi's path was followed by 50 Turkish students. Their common point of reference was that they all came from the region of Pontus"<sup>75</sup>. However, apart from our own research in Turkey, other evidence suggests that the policy of creating a minority had been established before the early 1996 Imia crisis: In 1995, at least 30 Greek speaking Muslims were residing in Greece and found the "Cultural Association of persons originating from Black Sea [Μαυροθαλασσιτών in Greek]"<sup>76</sup>. The most coordinated and well-organised action seems to take place a few months after the Greco-Turkish crisis. On August 14, 1996, a special Olympic Airways flight to Trabzon transfers representatives of Pontian associations from Greece and abroad, of certain Greek political parties and local authorities, of the "Cultural Capital of Europe Thessaloniki-1997", of the EIYAPOE government body<sup>77</sup> and others, as well as representatives from Greek associations from ex-Soviet Union, a total of more than 200 people, "to celebrate by a mass (liturgy) the

<sup>72</sup> Within this framework, visits of Greek officials take place in the region. At least one visit was conducted by the consul of Smyrna in Tonya, and promises were made for providing work permits in Greece (author's research, Tonya region, July-August 1995).

<sup>73</sup> See indicatively, unsigned, İstanbul'da Pontos operasyonu, *Radikal* (daily), 15 October 2002, which refers to a monthly grant of five hundred dollars. In Öztürk (2008), in the chapter «Pontosçuluk», pp. 197-202, depending on the source, three different numbers are given, 30, 35 and 50 students. For Kalenterides's role see V. Agtzides, Kalenterides as "super agent of the Hellenic Intelligence Agency [EYP]" and Pontian Greeks of Turkey, *Pontos and the Left* (website), 13 January 2010, available at: <http://pontosandaristera.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/kalenteridis/>.

<sup>74</sup> The Rector of Panteion University in Athens Yannis Vavouras says about a student: "Because he is of Pontian origin, coming from the Greek-speaking villages of Trabzon, Panteion University has exempted him from tuition fees and gives him free meals and accommodation. He is also a fellow of State Scholarships Foundation IKY and the Federation of Pontian Associations "(Georgia Dama, We are deporting to Turkey a Pontian, excellent student of Panteion, *Eleftherotypia*, 6 October 2000). When later the student is temporarily detained in Turkey due to his studies in Greece, there are recurring articles such as: *Eleftherotypia*, 24 January 2003, 5 November 2002, S. Vradelis, *ibid*, *Eleftherotypia*, 26 October 2002 where OPSVE (ΟΙΣΒΕ, Federation of Pontian Associations of Northern Greece) reports that thousands of Pontians were studying in Greece under the Sultan and now they cannot. See also announcements on the occasion of student deportations, Michalis Charalambides and OPSVE for "descendants of Diogenes, Strabo and Ypsilantis" (*Eleftherotypia*, 29 January 2001).

<sup>75</sup> See Vradelis *ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> See Makis Selamazidis, Vahit Tursun. A Pontian from Turkey: I came to the "foreign" place of my ancestors, *Eleftherotypia*, 28 June 1996. The article refers to "Islamised Pontic Greeks" who came "to the land of their ancestors."

<sup>77</sup> A state sponsored and administrated institution that took care of the integration of Pontians migrating from ex-Soviet Union..

Assumption of the Virgin Mary at the Monastery of Panagia Soumela and visit the Greek-speaking areas of northern Turkey”<sup>78</sup> The Turkish authorities prohibit the liturgy, which obviously the guests knew would happen, since the Monastery is an established museum-monument and permission by the authorities had not been asked. The liturgy takes place at the entrance of the monastery, where the group sang the symbolic «To Thee, the Champion Leader» under the barrels of the Turkish arms”<sup>79</sup>. A few days later, appears the notorious article of the “Pontian” Vahit Tursun in *Eleftherotypia* with the characteristic title "From Pontians to Romans"<sup>80</sup>, along with another article of Vlassis Agtzides entitled "The Islamised Greeks in Turkey today." The second article presents the semi-official Greek viewpoint on the whole issue: in modern Turkey there is "a multiform Greek population, consisting on the one hand of the native Islamised people and the Crypto-Christians of the Black Sea and on the other by those who were expelled from Greece"<sup>81</sup> (meaning those exchanged with the Lausanne Convention. This population is large: Although the author mentions 300,000 Greek speaking (Muslim) “Pontians”, as the number given by themselves<sup>82</sup>, he essentially increases it, when he claims, without mentioning his source, that in 1914 "the Greek population of the region amounted to 929 595 people, and was distributed as follows: a) Greek Orthodox: 696 495 b) Muslim Greeks: 190,000, c) Crypto-Christians: 43,000". Finally, according to Agtzides, this population constitutes a Greek national minority, although dormant: "The youth today has overcome the old religious bias which was indifferent to national characteristics. They begin to seek their national origin". The fact that these were manipulated publications results from the tone and content of some of them such as "Mohamet with the Greek heart. The descendants of Marbled King are struggling to keep their roots. Shocking evidence from Crypto-Christians". All the above is the title of a two-page main article in a main stream right wing newspaper, a few days after the operation-pilgrimage in mid-August 1996<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>78</sup>See Vlassis Agtzides, Greek language in Pontus, in the shadow of MIT, *Eleftherotypia*, 20 August.1996. The "pilgrimage" was attended by Parliament Members Gregorios Niotis (PASOK) and E. Kourtides (ND, Xanthi) (see Vangelis Moysis, Mohamet with the Greek heart, *Eleftheros Typos* (daily), 22 August 1996). The first MP served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs until January 1996 and from 25 July 1996 took office as Secretary of the Department of Hellenes Abroad of PASOK. Participants even visited the area of Tonya.

<sup>79</sup> See Agtzides, op. cit.. It seems that then, only the nationalist party MHP had reacted to the visit (see Ahmet Şefik, Trabzon'da buluşan Rumlar Sümela'da dini ayin yaptı, *Cumhuriyet* (daily), 16 August. 1996).

<sup>80</sup>*Eleftherotypia*. 26 August.1996, also see below. Rums (Romioi in Greek) is a vernacular linguistic form of Romans (Romaioi in Greek).

<sup>81</sup> As “expelled from Greece” Agtzides means those exchanged with the Lausanne Convention, who, according to him, were Greeks.

<sup>82</sup> This number is adopted by Ömer Asan too (see Vlassis Agtzidis, 300,000 Greek-speaking search for identity, *I Kathimerini*, 30 January 2000). There are of course ... higher numbers: Fanis Malkidis calculates 600-700 thousand Greek-speaking persons (see <http://www.euxintv.net>, reproducing an interview of the then lecturer of the Democritus University of Thrace in the newspaper of Alexandroupolis “Apopsi”), Nikos Doukas counts "300 Greek-speaking villages in Pontus" (Nikos Doukas, Pontian Muslims in the target of Turkey, available at: <http://www.e-grammes.gr/article.php?id=1179> (the website of Ellinikes Grammes), 24 February 2002). The literature on the huge number of Pontians prior to population exchange and the migrations, is currently, so commonly accepted that it leads to major misunderstandings. For example, Yorgos Andreadis counts 75 000 orphans left behind in Pontus, except those adopted abroad or sent to Greece (see. Relevant statement to TV broadcasting *Fakelloi*, MEGA , 3 January 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Vangelis Moysis, op. cit.. According to the author, the one that had replied that his name was 'Mohamet' when “cameras and microphones have been removed”,\_confided: "At home they call me Yorgos [Στην οικίαν Γιώργον με λεν]" [emphasis in the original]. The unfortunate attempt to imitate the Pontic dialect leaves little doubt about the fact, a statement allegedly made publicly at that moment. Probably the reporter was “inspired” by a similar reference to a cabdriver's alleged testimony to the wife of Panagiotis Tanimanidis, a prominent



That same year, a significant fact that has impact both inside Turkey and in Greek politics, takes place: The book by the Pontic-speaker Ömer Asan "Pontos Kültürü" is published in Turkey<sup>84</sup>. While contributing to the relevant nationalistic literature and discourse in Greece, it is an important milestone for the revelation of the existence of this linguistic community in Turkey, unlike others for which a number of publications had already appeared.

Over the years the perception of a quasi minority is embedded: As highlights one of the Pontic-speakers who now lives in Greece: "So we, a small group of modern Black Sea inhabitants, now live in Greece and we argue that this people is co-ethnic with the Greeks"<sup>85</sup>. This position is also accepted by those involved in the case, and the Greek media do not hesitate to adopt it<sup>86</sup>. And if the meaning of "co-ethnic" [homogenis] is vague, the reporter can be clearer: "Most [Islamised "Pontians"] have Greek national consciousness"<sup>87</sup>. Their appointment as counterbalance-minority is clear: "About 2,000 students from Thrace study in the best Turkish universities. The Turkish state gives them [...] We have not yet managed to find a solution to the problem of eight Pontian students from Trabzon [...]"<sup>88</sup>.

Turkey reacts at the end of the decade, through the press and respective "national" associations<sup>89</sup>, making reference to Pontian guerrilla warfare and separatism<sup>90</sup>. On the contrary, a part of the Turkish press and intellectuals discovering the linguistic diversity of Turkey at that time, are positive to the "revelation" of the Greek speaking "Pontians", seeing it as another opportunity of Greek-Turkish approach and restatement of Turkish history. The first public expression samples of linguistic and cultural otherness and the challenge of the

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member of Pontian Associations, who told her "in Pontic dialect that:" In my home they call me Yorgos "" (Fotiadis 1993: 528).

<sup>84</sup> Belge Publications, İstanbul, 2nd edition 2000. This book, the result of amateur, but rather systematic research of a member of the Greek-speaking group, offers a different historical narration for the community, although equally imaginary with the national Turkish one.. The book contains texts, grammar and vocabulary of the dialect spoken at the author's village. It was published three years later in Greek with a preface by Neoklis Sarris (*Culture of Pontus* (1999), Thessaloniki: Kyriakides Bros).

<sup>85</sup> He continues: "However, brothers with the peoples of Asia Minor too. So if you [Greeks], because of the Muslim religion, challenge that they [Pontic-speaking community] are co-ethnics with the Greeks, how can you be Greeks as Orthodox, since the ancient Greeks were pagans? And we ask, which ethnicity will include the atheists who are on both sides and those in Greece that believe in the twelve Gods? And if we are Turks because we are Muslims, then the Arabs, Pakistanis, Persians, what are they? And the Orthodox Bulgarians, Gagauz, Russians and Georgians, what are they?" (See [www.vahittursun.com](http://www.vahittursun.com), first published in *Eleftherotypia*, 26 August 1996).

<sup>86</sup> In Nea Makri Attica on July 20, 1996, a Pontic musical evening was organised, with the participation of members of the Muslim pontic-speaking community. Prior to the music events there were speeches by Nikos Amanatides (President of the Federation of Pontian Associations of Southern Greece) and Vlassis Agtzides. The second speech was dedicated to "our co-nationals [ομοεθνείς] who remained in Pontus, who were Islamised" (*Eleftherotypia*, 20 July 1996).

<sup>87</sup> A.St., We are united by Pontus, *Eleftherotypia*, 22 July 1996.

<sup>88</sup> see G.D., They must save them, *Eleftherotypia*, 7 February 2001. The same article mentions in a flattering way that they came to Greece "with the contribution of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs". For juxtaposition with Thrace, see also the communication of the Centre for Pontic Studies (which was led by Michalis Charalambides (see below)) in *Eleftherotypia*, 19 November 2002.

<sup>89</sup> The first relevant reports leaks in Turkish newspapers for "Agitation around the Pontian issue" appear in the autumn of 1997 (Aris Ambatzis, Pontus targeted, *Eleftherotypia*, 21 January 2002).

<sup>90</sup> More careful, the brigadier of Jandarma and military commander of Giresun refers to secret Greek plans when speaking about "20 to 30 poor students in Greece from the provinces Tonya and Sürmene», for the desire of Greece to open a consulate in Trabzon and the "frequent tours of the General Consul of Greece in the Eastern Black Sea" and advises people to "be careful with these activities" (Aris Ambatzis, Ankara discovered Greek plans for Pontus!, *Eleftherotypia*, 6 December 2001).

public history in Turkey are visible that time<sup>91</sup>. The National Security Council in a report in 2000 expresses its concern over the "Pontian issue"<sup>92</sup>. At the same time the Turkish state blackmails the students who came to Greece through refusals of handing them official documents or even arrests<sup>93</sup>, while banning the entry in Turkey of author Yorgos Andreades, holder of İpekçi prize<sup>94</sup>. In 2002 the book of Asan will be banned temporarily in Turkey and the author will face prosecution<sup>95</sup>, although the case will be dropped after a few months.

Greece gradually modifies her policy after 2000. But this change brings even more publicity to the "Pontian issue", since the non-renewal of residence permits for Pontic-speaking students mobilises a network to support them<sup>96</sup>. Visible results of this more lenient policy is non-renewal of the residence permit of at least some of the students<sup>97</sup>, or the difficulty of the permit renewal, which occurs at the same time to other Pontic-speaking Turks as well<sup>98</sup>. Their "protection against Turkey and Greece" becomes now an issue undertaken by Pontian organisations and unions<sup>99</sup>. These associations undertake hereafter the promotion of the alleged "requests by the Pontic-speakers" in general<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup>In this context, for example, it must be examined the relevant Turkish discussions on the Internet, which some people in Greece consider as ...evidence of the collapse of the Turkish identity (see Vlassis Agtzides, Turkish society and genocides, *I Kathimerini*, 18 June 2000).

<sup>92</sup>See Aris Ambatzis, Now they are threatened by the Pontian issue as well, *Eleftherotypia*, 2 December 2000.

<sup>93</sup>See above the case of Fethi Gültepe.

<sup>94</sup> Celal Başlangıç, Yorgo için kampanya, *Radikal*, 13 December 2004. This was a rather misguided reaction to his actions at the Black Sea.

<sup>95</sup> See also Vlassis Agtzides, The Greek speakers of Turkey in the dock, *I Kathimerini*, 21 July 2002. Note that the indictment was based more in the preface of Neoklis Sarris.

<sup>96</sup>See also above.

<sup>97</sup> See, indicatively the articles of Georgia Dama, Pontians rose up for Yildiz, *Eleftherotypia*, 14 October 2000, where in a communication of the Federation of Pontian Associations of Northern Greece, the student is referred to as 'of Greek origin' [ελληνικής καταγωγής], Humanism with ... expiration date, *Eleftherotypia*, 7 October 2000, where the author adopts the Greek origin of the student and Pontian excellent student of Panteion deported to Turkey, *Eleftherotypia*, 6 October 2000.

<sup>98</sup> As it appears from complaints with the Greek Ombudsman, an activist Pontic-speaker, faced difficulty to renew his residence permit on the same period (complaint no 18480/2001); another's applications for family reunification, i.e. the residence of his wife in Greece, was not authorised, (complaint no 14714/2002). In cases of 'national interest', expatriates, etc. the Ministry of Public Order has the legal possibility to issue special residence permits, which was not activated in this case.

<sup>99</sup> Thus the 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Pontian Hellenism adopts a resolution on the arrest of Gültepe (*Eleftherotypia*, 29 October 2002).

<sup>100</sup> On the occasion of the visit of Mesut Yilmaz to Greece, the Centre of Pontian Studies "addresses" to him, inter alia, the following questions: "What about your current neighbours Islamised Pontians, holdovers an age-old historical, national identity? Why the physical extermination has been succeeded by white genocide? Why that use of violence onto Pontian children in Turkish schools in Trabzon?" (*Eleftherotypia*, 1 January.2000). The Federation of Pontian Associations of Northern Greece calls on the Turkish government, "if it wants to join the EU", to stop the "political violence and terrorism against the Pontian people" to introduce the language teaching in schools calls upon the E.U. to include it along with Kurdish in the criteria for E.U. membership (*Eleftherotypia*, 10 January 2002). A year later in the letter of the President of the Panhellenic Federation of Pontian Associations [this is one of the Federations. (author's note)], Stephanos P. Tanimanides to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, in view of the visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister in Greece, the question of "Pontic-speaking Muslims" arises. In the letter, the President supports the right "to speak their native dialect, learn about their history, defend their culture, proclaim the Pontic origin" (*Eleftherotypia*, 22 October 2003). In 2004, the Federation of Pontian Associations of Southern Greece posts on the Turkish embassy a resolution urging "Stop the persecution of Greek Muslims of Pontus and allow them freedom of expression" (*Eleftherotypia*, 24 May 2004).

However, this period is marked by both the structured "counter-attack" of Turkey accusing Greece of attempting to establish a Pontian state<sup>101</sup> –let us not forget the rumours of Pontian guerrilla warfare circulating then- and the consolidation of fear for Greek movements in significant parts of the Turkish elites. Approximately since 2000, a series of books and articles appear in Turkey, usually penned by local scholars, journalists and even academics, who focus not so much on the Greek "threat" as on the justification of the existence of Greek speakers, the Turkish origin of Pontic speakers and the *Turkishness* of the region. These publications, reminding similar Greek ones, are part of a broader trend of publications against the "external threat"<sup>102</sup>. The "Pontian issue" now means a set of enemy movements, from the recognition of "Pontian Genocide" to the effort of hellenisation of Pontic speakers and constitutes part of the wider Pontic issue involving other ethno linguistic groups of Turkey, residing in the entire Black Sea region<sup>103</sup>. Even in the mid-2000s, the "Pontic threat" had not disappeared from the public debate in Turkey<sup>104</sup>. Thus, in 2005, reference is made to the 1997 plan of "incitement of 300,000 Pontians in Turkey"<sup>105</sup>. Meanwhile, the "Pontic threat" is associated with the action of the Christian (mainly various evangelical) missionaries and proselytising, which is considered, by both the nationalistic discourse, and by part of the population, as one of the greatest threats for modern Turkey<sup>106</sup>. In Greece, the few times the issue of Turkish objections and views is presented, it is simply perceived as "one more Turkish provocation": "The neighbours are cooking a new Greek-Turkish tension"<sup>107</sup>. However, the intensity in the publications in Turkey had begun to subside in late 2000s, although the need for alertness was pointed out<sup>108</sup>.

The discovery, management and discourse on Pontic-speakers has a particular aspect, that of "Crypto-Christianity". More generally, it constitutes a course of action subsequent to the discovery, of Greek-speaking populations on the one hand because of the Greek language - only Christians speak Greek- and the other because of the 'Greekness' of soils Greek-speaking

<sup>101</sup>Extensive presentation of relevant publications in Turkey is cited in Ambatzis (ed.) ([2003]): passim.

<sup>102</sup>These risks may extend from the issue of the Armenian genocide to the Christianisation of youth resulting from the lessons and knowledge of English.

<sup>103</sup> See indicatively, M. Bilgin (2008 [1<sup>st</sup> edition 2007]), Greece's policy towards the "Pontian issue" and Pontic-speaking group is described in chapter "Doğu Karadeniz'de Pontosçuluk ve Etnik Gruplar Oluşturma Faaliyetleri", pp. 149-184, see also pp. 204-205, 244-245. Despite the political commitment of the book and the distortions, deliberate or not, there is a certain amount of documentation. Its importance however, consists in that it enables the Greek side to understand how the opposite side conceives the relevant Greek policies.

<sup>104</sup> Our personal experience is characteristic. On the sidelines of a conference in Istanbul in early 2007 in response to the topic of my paper, I was approached by listeners, retired senior officers and retired ambassadors, who anxiously asked to find out my opinion on the actions of Greece in Pontus, on the recruiting of executives from the Pontic-speaking community, and whether they constitute a priority of Greek foreign policy.

<sup>105</sup>Taki Berberakis, Atina'dan Pontus planı. Yunanistan'ın 1997 yılında "Türkiye'deki 300 bin Pontusluyu kışkırtma planı" uyguladığı ortaya çıktı, *Millyet* (daily), 22 November 2005.

<sup>106</sup>See M. Öztürk, op. cit.. Note that the justification for the murder of Catholic priest in Trabzon was proselytism, and it was considered that one of the goals were the Pontic-speaking villages (see the broadcasting of Mehmet Ali Birand on the Kanal D, which examined the causes of murder, part of it was dedicated to "indignation" for proselytising ("“Rumca” konuşulan İskenderli beldesinde halk misyonerlik iddialarına ne diyor?”, in unsigned, Trabzon'da silahlar neden susmuyor ?, *Zaman* (daily), 16 February 2006)

<sup>107</sup>Article of Sophia Voultepsi, an actual Nea Demokratia MP, in, *O Typos tis Kyriakis*, Sunday 28 September 2003.

<sup>108</sup> A local scholar depicts it: After stating the belief that the Black Sea soils belong to Turkey and were won with blood, he concludes that the exchanged visiting their ancestors' lands perform a "human duty" and that during their visit they should be welcome as guests ["bizim misafirlerimizdir"] "depending on compliance of these visitors with Turkish laws, it is our duty to take care and honour them" (Albayrak 2007: 121).

Muslims come from<sup>109</sup>. The sporadic cases of people who were left out of the exchange of populations (especially in Turkey), the appeal of these cases both in Greece and Turkey and the literature developed around these issues, further obfuscate reality<sup>110</sup>. Of course, Greek-Orthodox who were subject to the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate remaining in Turkey were no more than a few hundred and this is due both to the mandatory nature of the population exchange<sup>111</sup>, and the stringent requirements posed by the legal framework of the agreements for exceptions from the exchange, such as marriage and/or change of religion some time earlier etc<sup>112</sup>. In most cases, those excepted were isolated individuals and, seldom, larger groups (e.g. some families in a settlement)<sup>113</sup>. Connecting and mixing the historical phenomenon of Crypto-christianity, which appeared in the Pontus region<sup>114</sup> also, with those remaining from the exchange and converted to Islam<sup>115</sup>, a literature is created, which, in its turn, creates total confusion, occasionally deliberate, to obscure reality. Authors 'dedicated' to the defence of *Pontian and national issues* had created the seemingly-scientific garment of Crypto-christianity as a fact in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Professor Konstandinos Fotiades in his book *The Islamisations of Asia Minor and Pontus Crypto-Christians* (Kyriakides Bros, Thess/niki 1993), devotes a large chapter on "Crypto-christianity today." Regressing between an effort of

<sup>109</sup>Indicatively we give the following examples: Former Minister of Cyprus Patroklos Stavrou, not only considers the *linopambakoi* of Cyprus as Crypto-Christians today, but also refers to some of the settlers from Turkey in Northern Cyprus (*Eleftherotypia*, 24 January 2001). For a wider inclusion of Greek-speaking and non Greek-speaking Turkish Cypriots in Crypto-Christians see Vlassis Agztides, Turkish Cypriots: A group of Greek Muslims, *I Kathimerini*, 26 January 2003. Several of the Greek-speaking Turkish Cretans are also considered Crypto Christians (Yorgos Conostas, Reunited 74 years later or after 74 years, *Ta Nea*, 5 April 2002), as well as the residents of Al-Hamidiyah: "Muslims, but essentially Crypto-Christians" (The musician Mariza Koch in the TV show of Lefteris Papadopoulos *Synantiseis*, NET (Public Television) 25 January 2008).

<sup>110</sup> Films like those of Yesim Ustaoglu *Bulutlari beklerken* (2002), and books as *Tamama, the missing person of Pontus* (Gordios, 1993, 10 editions to date) and *O Thodoron* (Gordios, 1995) by Yorgos Andreades, served as examples of a supposedly mass phenomenon, especially to refugees who had heard of similar cases. Let us not forget the respective movies of Nikos Xanthopoulos several decades ago.

<sup>111</sup>Although the calculation implies a research in each settlement (and urban centre) inhabited by Greek Orthodox, the data available to us do not support numbers that exceed several hundred throughout Anatolia. If one collects the oral testimonies and references to books of local interest a relatively clear picture can be formed. Alexis Alexandris refers to at least 500 families who remained and converted to Islam (Alexandris 1982: 281). Our field research in some districts of inner Anatolia and Black Sea supports the above remarks for limited numbers.

<sup>112</sup> About the rigor and universality of the population exchange see The decisions of Mixed Commission for the Exchange 22/1924, 29/1927, 35/1938, 52/1930, especially the 55/1930, 57/1930, 60/1931, 62 / 1931 63/1931, and the Arbitral Decision of the Joint Committee Neutral Members of 12 June 1934. The only possibility of legal exclusion essentially concerned those who had acquired a foreign citizenship and came from specific regions of Turkey since exclusively Ottoman/Turkish citizens were exchanged.

<sup>113</sup> Unlike the Armenian communities, where in many cases even whole villages joined Islam, a process that continued well into the 1980s.

<sup>114</sup> To our knowledge, there is no evidence to indicate the presence of Crypto-Christians in the Greek-speaking Muslim communities in the 19th century in the areas which concern us (see indicatively Bryer 1983), some of which are known for their imams throughout the country. However, in most cases the conversion of these settlements to Islam seems to have taken place in the 17th century. The Ottoman records inform us that already in 1583 a quarter of the inhabitants of the Of valley were Muslims, as opposed to the 2% recorded as such in 1515. Since 1645 the Of Episcopal see is no longer referred to the Episcopal lists, and already the 1694/1695 contribution of the region to soldiers advocates for a largely Muslim area (Poutouridou 1997-1998).

<sup>115</sup> For two cases, where individuals tried to take advantage of their families' Christian past, but in which it is abundantly clear that there are no memories of religious practices or connection with the previous religion, see Lambros Baltsiotis, *Expert report*: [U.K.] a) In the Immigration Appellate Authority, Between: SA and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (HX / 26839/2003) b) In the Immigration Appellate Authority, Between: Ö. M. and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (HX / 04863/2003).

more sober approach and what could be called a "national duty" without basic methodological rules, he includes narratives of refugees, a relative of whom was not included in the population exchange, marriages with Muslims, the much-publicised case of the Stavri village, views of various agents –without any evaluation of them and of his own research results, leaving the final impression that there are currently many Crypto-Christians although of reduced Christian religiosity<sup>116</sup>. It must be noted here that, although he mentions the supposedly violent islamisation of Of and Tonya, as far back as in the mid-17th century (Fotiadis 1993: 524-525), he highlights the existence of many Crypto-Christians in these areas (ibid: 526-528, 540)<sup>117</sup>.

If ignorance of the issue and left-wing interest on the alleged or actual disturbance of linguistic communities in Turkey is added to "national science" then we can explain the approaches that often appear<sup>118</sup>. The interest of the Left is of particular significance, since the then left-wing daily *Eleftherotypia* appears to host a very large number of articles, some of which signed by journalists of left and ostensibly anti-nationalistic profile<sup>119</sup>. The islamisation

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<sup>116</sup> Several of the testimonies (for the entire Pontus) are of dubious authenticity, for example the following: A Muslim Greek-speaking family offered to host some trippers from Thessaloniki. At home a chest was opened "with solemnity and surprisingly the foreigners saw in it, candle cups, icons and the Greek flag" (Fotiades 1993: 528). Furthermore, the author does not distinguish between phenomena of religious syncretism and the possible existence of Crypto-Christians. An exhaustive review of this section exceeds the intentions of this article. Nevertheless it is worth noting some of the highly problematic key passages of this chapter. The author argues that "The Treaty of Lausanne was formulated in such a way that after the population exchange there would certainly be Crypto-Christians [...] As is known, the wording preferred was such that only a "Greek Orthodox minority" was required to move" (Fotiades 1993: 515). This view contrasts with the texts of the Convention (and not the Treaty cited in the text), extremely strict regarding the right of individuals not to be exchanged (see footnote 112). Additionally K. Fotiades, like V. Agtzides in other publications (see above), accept as accurate the imaginative figures cited in the early 20th century by the once hegumen of the St John of Vazelon Monastery Panaretos (Topalides) on "697,000 Pontians, 190,000 Mohamedan Greeks and 43,000 Crypto-Christians" (Ibid: 517-518, 540). For this "game of implausible numbers" and the much more down to earth estimates of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Patriarchate see Kostopoulos 2007: 252-265.

<sup>117</sup> It is difficult to say whether it is unjustified neglect of the author or deliberate misrepresentation: Referring to Turks from Of region speaking "Pontic fluently" he mentions German estimates of 15,000 Christians from Turkey living in the then West Germany (ibid: 525 -526). The reader thus considers that the West German authorities had recorded the Oflis as Christians, while, of course they are mostly "Assyrian" immigrants (Suriani, Keldani etc.) from Southeast Turkey and Arab Orthodox of current Hatay. Evidence for the presence of Greek Orthodox Crypto-Christians in the Black Sea after 1960 -when scientific preoccupation with linguistic-cultural diversity in Turkey began, does not exist in international academic literature.

<sup>118</sup> Typical is the question addressed by the journalist Georgia Dama to Ömer Asan: «Really, how did so many Pontians survive the Asia Minor Catastrophe?» To get the disarming answer that religion was the criterion for the exchange (*Eleftherotypia*, 1 October 2000). Even when the speaker, in this case Yorgos Andreades, completely excludes the presence of Crypto-Christians today, impressions from the title of the article, the mystery and charm of the issue, the article's preface against globalisation (in the form of cultural homogenisation) alter the perception of the reader (Anna Stergiou, *The Crypto-Christians of Pontus*, *Eleftherotypia*, 13 January 2001)

<sup>119</sup> See for example, Dina Vagena, *Women of Pontus*, head of Greek Women Memory Path, *Eleftherotypia*, 21 May 1996, where is reproduced a text-Declaration which states inter alia: "In Pontus today, Islamised Pontian women claiming a Rum identity, resist new forms of *paidomazoma* [Greek for *devşirme*], Janissaries' practices and genocide [...]". *Eleftherotypia* always deals with the question: "Still today Pontic-speaking Muslims [...] run out to Panagia Soumela" (*Eleftherotypia*, 27 November 2003). For similar approaches see related profile journalists, i.e. Maria Delithanasi, *Neither Turks nor Greeks*, *I Kathimerini*, Sat-Sun 28-29 October 2000.

is perceived as violent and recent<sup>120</sup>, thus creating the reasonable impression that there are subjects that need to be rescued, either by national or by left "internationalist" duty. It is not without significance that the term originally adopted is "Islamised Greek-speakers" [εξισλαμισμένοι ελληνόφωνοι]<sup>121</sup>. Perhaps Crypto-Christians as a historical fact, even as a "national" adventure, do not form a very emotive issue<sup>122</sup>. However, their alleged existence here and now, where, both as a mystery of the East and power of "Hellenism to resist", in conjunction with their manifestation as a "secret" and the "Turkish barbarism" therein, bring together a wonderful recipe, most welcome by the public, whether it be "concerned citizens", or the Academy of Athens<sup>123</sup>.

The results of this policy were uncertain as to the outcome of their objectives. They relate to the partial disclosure and debate around the issue<sup>124</sup>, the exploitation of jerky reactions of Turkey<sup>125</sup> and its sporadic use by Greece in the debate on Turkey's accession to the EU, although there is no European acceptance of Greek objections<sup>126</sup>. It is difficult to argue that the political exploitation of the issue brought about significant changes in the policy of the Turkish government towards the Pontic-speakers, though there is lack of thorough research. Some pressure on those culturally active and their relatives in Greece is a fact, as is the higher overall cautiousness with which the *pilgrimage travels* are treated by authorities and citizens. In other cases we traced a form of self-censorship<sup>127</sup> and reluctance by the Pontic-speaking

<sup>120</sup> See indicatively: unsigned, The Pontian Greeks and Mavrothalassites (Islamised Pontians) from Turkey, *Eleftherotypia*, 20 July 1996. *Mavri Thalassa* is the Greek for Black Sea, thus *Mavrothalassites* are those originating from the Black Sea.

<sup>121</sup> See indicatively Vlassis Agtzides, The solid bridges of friendship, *Eleftherotypia*, 24 July 1996.

<sup>122</sup> A book published in 1997 (Yeorgios Th. Printzipas, *The Crypto-Christians*, Ellinika Grammata), will find little acceptance besides a place in school libraries after the approval of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>123</sup> In 2000 Yorgos Andreades is awarded a prize by the latter "for his writings, but also for awakening of the remaining islamised Black Sea Pontians" (Zogia Koutalianou, Greeks and Turks are seeking their roots, *I Kathimerini*, 19 April 2008).

<sup>124</sup> For example, on 2 June 2006, Tasos Stafylides, Left Wing MP (Vänsterpartiet), put a question to the Swedish Parliament on the recognition of "Pontian genocide" in which he includes the "cultural genocide of islamised Pontians who remained in Pontus. Even today the Turkish regime oppresses Pontians deprived of the right to speak the Pontic language" (see also *Eleftherotypia*, 6 June 2006).

<sup>125</sup> Asan's persecution provoked questions in the European Parliament by Stavros Xarchakos (Nea Demokratia) and Alekos Alavanos (left wing party Synaspismos), a Spaniard and a German MEP (V. Agtzides, The Greek-speakers of Turkey in the dock, *I Kathimerini*, 21 July 2002). At the same time, through the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, headed in Greece by Michalis Charalambides, of Pontian heritage and an ex-PASOK high rank member, a report is handed to the UN Secretary General about 'Islamised Pontians', which refers to terrorizing of the Greek-speaking children in secondary education from right-wing groups, linguistic oppression etc (see the full text in *Eleftherotypia*, 7 May 2002: "Ongoing repression of the Pontic Greeks in Turkey"). See also unsigned, The "Grey Wolves" terrorize students, *To Ethnos tis Kyrikis*, Sunday 19 May 2002. The appeals at the UN by Charalambides were issued in a book in English (M. Charalambides (2004), *The Pontian Question in the United Nations*, Athens: Gordios).

<sup>126</sup> The only-extremely dubious- success of Greek policy is impressed in the non-legislative Resolution of the European Parliament of 27 September 2006 (EP/T6-0381/2006) which, referring to the facilitation of researchers, intellectuals and academics on research of Armenian genocide adds: «A similar position should be adopted for the cases of other minorities (e.g. the Greeks of Pontos and the Assyrians)". Thus, the wording of the text, but perhaps inadvertently, can read that there is a Greek minority in historical Pontus today.

<sup>127</sup> Characteristic is the following example: Before or in the year 1989 a high-profile and sales music cassette from the Black Sea is released, in which the best known artists of the area are involved. It contains an entire song in Pontic (Necmettin Yılmaz: Omuzda tüfeğim) and one with the chorus (only), and the title on the cover, in the dialect (Yusuf Kemal Keskin: Of Of korzobom) (*Konuşan Karadeniz Konser 1*, Foneks- Karadeniz Müzik Üretim, Unkapanı-İstanbul). In 2002 or early 2003, when the cassette is released again, the entire song is missing (same title, Karadeniz Müzik Üretim, Unkapanı-İstanbul) (research 1989 and 2003, author's archive). It

population itself. Nevertheless, the linguistic assimilation policy in Turkey, as shown at the school, and the discouragement by administrative authorities and officials for the use of languages, is an overall issue and concerns the whole of Turkey, but also all the non-Turkish languages of the wider region of Black Sea. The language shift in recent decades from Pontic Greek to Turkish is not so much the result of state repression, but that of changes in the socio-economic profile of the communities and the overall perception of the Turkish national discourse, in which the nation speaks a unique language and other languages are discredited; in addition, other languages become vehicles of backwardness and possibly reduced national identification. On the other hand, the presence of less used languages in the public space is a reality actually relatively tolerated in recent years, and this takes Pontic Greek along too<sup>128</sup>.

In the last eight years the publicity of the issue is in recession in Greece and propaganda publications<sup>129</sup> appear only occasionally, although there is no lack of relevant references. Several Pontian and nationalist organisations maintain these references, in milder or not so mild forms<sup>130</sup>, whereas the attempt to cover their efforts under a scientific layer continues<sup>131</sup>. Highlighting the issue and nationalistic anti-Turkish discourse are sometimes involved in the power games between Pontian organisations and their establishment in the public sphere, but also in the tendency of some of them to identify with the nationalist far right<sup>132</sup>. It can be

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could be argued that the production of cassettes and CDs containing one or more songs in the language remains limited throughout the 2000s, in contrast with the highly upward production in Laz, and to a lesser extent in Georgian and Armenian (Hemşince) (research in Turkey from 1989 to 2008, author's archive).

<sup>128</sup> Illustrative of the new climate is the release of two songs in 2005 by Seyfettin Çakıral (*Yamalı Kızlar*, Cinan). This is a more elegant production with different targeting. Thus, the special supplement contains the lyrics in the dialect (though with very poor transcription) and the source of the song (the narrator and related settlement).

<sup>129</sup> The most important of them, reproduced in many websites (nationalist and of Pontian associations), is about the presentation of former lecturer at Democritus University of Thrace Fanis Malkidis "The Pontic-speaking populations in Turkey today." All known notions are included in this text: Crypto Christianity (referred to as "Greek speaking Crypto-Christians" remained after the "genocide" without contact with the Church) and Greekness ("currently maintain Greek consciousness elements"). On various websites, the above text appears reproduced from a presentation made at the "6th World Conference of Linguistics: The dialectal forms of the Greek language from ancient times until now» (Corigliano d' Otranto, Puglia, October 2005), see indicatory <http://clubs.pathfinder.gr>, <http://pontoswold.com>, *O Hronos* (Komotini), 12 December 2005.

<sup>130</sup> Typical is the reference of the site of Pontian Movement of Greece Association (founder is the famous comedian artist Vasilis Triantafyllides (Harry Klynn)), which bears the motto "Free Pontus" (2007): Today [...] with moderate calculations Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking Muslims Crypto-Christians, who have Greek consciousness, in Pontus, exceed 1,000,000" (see <http://el-pontos.blogspot.com>). In contrast, for a more balanced approach, after a decade of presence in the Greek press, see Vahit Tursun, Greek-speaking Pontians in Turkey, *I Kathimerini*, 24 November 2007. Let us not forget the views of millions of forcibly converted to Islam in Turkey who do not "have lost their national identity and temperament": "Plus or minus 100,000 it was proved that 15 million Greeks live in Turkey" (Dionysis Makris, Why MIT and Turkish generals are afraid of Fanari [Fener], *Stylos Orthodoxias*, [www.orthodoxia.gr](http://www.orthodoxia.gr)).

<sup>131</sup> For example, the presentation of Fanis Malkidis, Society and language of Pontian Greeks in Turkey today, at the "International Conference" Language and Society "of the Faculty of Philology, University of Minsk, Belarus (1-2 October 2006)» ( *Πατριδες/ Patrīdes* (monthly, Toronto), Dec. 2006). The paper comprises the known viewpoints on Crypto-christianity. See also the references in his book (2006), *National and international dimensions of Pontian Question*, Athens: Gordios,.

<sup>132</sup> Such, we believe, is the case of "All-Pontian Association Argo" located in Kallithea Athens. Amid an anti-Turkish text, we read: "In Historical Pontus, the Turkish regime continues to persecute the indigenous culture fiercely, terrorizes and imprisons residents, prohibits communication in Pontic -the only still alive body of ancient language-, destroys the cultural, historical, physical identity of millennia in the region" (see brochure entitled "Genocide of the Greeks of Pontus" (in Greek, English, French and Russian, May 2007, author's

argued that it has now been established as one of the issues of Pontian interest, albeit minor, but with relative political gravity towards Turkey, each time it appears in the press or is set as Greek-Turkish dispute<sup>133</sup>. The positive shift of the Turkish elites and part of the press with respect to linguistic-cultural diversity in Turkey, beyond a small share of the Turkish left, “supply” publications in the Greek press, presented or read at will<sup>134</sup>. Moreover, the perception of some Pontic-speakers, and not only them, that they originate from Rums, and the partial acceptance of linguistic diversity in the region<sup>135</sup>, maintain the dominant views in Greece, because they are construed as statements of Greekness. Although interpersonal relationships have developed through travels, it is mainly the musical exchanges in recent years that have made the existence of Pontic-speakers known to a large portion of Pontians and inhabitants of Northern Greece in general. Several Pontic-speakers are invited to perform in Greece, while at least two CDs released in Greece, one of the Association “Momogeri” and the second sponsored by Panagia Soumela Monastery in Northern Greece<sup>136</sup>. This “brotherhood” and acceptance<sup>137</sup>, may certainly conceal yet another attempt to prove Greekness of Pontic-speakers<sup>138</sup>, although the boundaries between a conscious choice of

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archive) and a two-page leaflet under the same title where Western Thrace is involved (May 2008, author’s archive).

<sup>133</sup> For example, the “13th National Conference of Pontian Associations for National Self-awareness” held from the 14 to the 16 of December, 2007, under the auspices of the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace, with the presence of representatives of the then two major parties, greetings by Prime Minister Konstandinos Karamanlis, Dora Bakoyanni and Yorgos Papandreou and participation of 220-230 associations, unanimously adopted a resolution which, inter alia, states: “Respect for human rights of Pontic-speaking Muslims in Turkey” (see indicatively <http://iparemvasi.wordpress.com>, *Proïni*, (daily, Kilkis), 20 December 2007). The former member and MP of the populist right wing LAOS Kyriakos Velopoulos adjudicated in his broadcasting -repeating an older fabrication- that exists today in Pontus guerrilla warfare from “Pontian Greeks” (see Teleasty (TV channel), 2 July 2006). This TV show was also reproducing the interview of a resident from the Pontic-speaking settlement İskenderli).

<sup>134</sup> Thus the publication, on the first page of the insert of *Radikal*, of the article of Vahit Tursun, Anadolu'nun “Romeyika”si ölüyor, (*Radikal*, Sunday 25 February 2007), is reproduced in the Sunday edition of *I Kathimerini* on March 4, 2007: “In Pontos they do not speak Romaiika anymore! ”.

<sup>135</sup> Indeed many of the Greek-speaking, as well as the Turkish-speaking neighbouring settlements consider a lineage from the “old” Rums and thus a Christian past, possible. These statements, made before the issue had attracted attention, can sometimes benevolently be taken as signs of a latent Christianity (see Lena Papadimitriou, In Pontos balothies [rifle shots for celebratory purposes] and kementzedēs, (in an interview with the photographer Kostas Sakellariou, *To Vima*, Sunday 29 September 1996), or be included in a more general unsubstantiated assumptions on “Greekness”. For the acceptance and justification of linguistic difference on behalf of the communities, see indicatively: <http://www.uzungol.org/tarih/haci-sakir-yazici-soylesi-uzungol-tarihi-hakkinda.html> where there is specific reference to the language (Mustafa Öztürk, Rumca Gerçeği, <http://www.uzungol.org/kultur-anamenu/rumca-gercegi.html>), [www.zisino.cjb.net](http://www.zisino.cjb.net), where there is a small vocabulary and <http://www.visir.iwarp.com> where the influence of the Turkish dialect by the Greek language is accepted and an article about research on the use of dialect: “Trabzon’un Çaykara ve Tonya ilçelerine köylerde yapılan sosyolojik alan araştırmasına göre bölge halkının yüzde 100’ü Türkçe yüzde 32’si Rumca yüzde 3’ü Yunanca ve yüzde 5’i de İngilizce konuşuyor” (see Erkan Acar, Pontus bölgesindekiler Yunanca bilmiyor, *Zaman*, 10 August 2002).

<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that in the inserts of the two CD, especially in that of Stathis Efstathiades (sponsored by the Monastery of Panagia Soumela), the texts are careful and far from the usual rhetoric, while attempting a kind of “togetherness” of the two communities (Christian and Muslim).

<sup>137</sup> It is significant that the Pontian Cultural Association “Alexios Komnenos” in Alexandroupolis, during the annual dance of the January 2008 not only hosts exclusively only two Pontic-speaking artists (Adem Beşköylü and Kerim Aydın), but the poster advertising the dance released in the city is simply the cover of the last album of the two artists, where of course the names and the title appear in Turkish (author’s archive).

<sup>138</sup> In 2007 we got hold of a CD circulating between Pontians - perhaps a live recording-, probably featuring the above artists. Leaving the possibility of it being a commercial idea of the artists, this recording contains songs



nationalist character, a sense of community and the presentation of an attractive exotic "commercial product" are often blurred<sup>139</sup>.

However, the policy of the 1990s is questioned in the last few years even by some who seem to have participated in its formation. From this point of view, we find extremely interesting a text by Vlassis Agtzides, allegedly written in February 2006, from which we present an extended excerpt: "Pontians of Turkey: The most sensitive issue of the Pontian community today is that of the Greek speaking groups in Turkey, and especially Pontians. All our actions will be judged, not on the ideological wanderings and emotional expressions of Pontians of Greece, but in the scope of actions of the Turkish services and the manipulative approaches of Grey Wolves. The Group<sup>140</sup> will be heavily accountable for the exploitation of the Greek-speaking communities' presence in northern Turkey, especially in the region of Trabzon, with the aim of serving its own goals. First, on an ideological level, the Greek-speaking populations of northern Turkey were not treated equally and respectfully, but as a deluded population, or at best a minority, which should be salvaged by some Greeks from Greece. It is interesting how Mr. Charalambides and Fotiades present this population. For Mr. Charalambides they are "Islamised Pontians". The term "Islamised" refers mostly to the first generation of apostates and contains the presence of violence. However, these populations are not "Islamised" but "Muslims". They were islamised three centuries ago. The new religion has been completely embedded since and a new entity was created: the Greek-speaking Muslims. At the time of the final Greek-Turkish conflict in Pontus, which actually was a Christian-Islamic conflict, Greek-speaking Christian and Muslims were stood on opposite sides. Mr. Fotiades thinks, even more arbitrary and obsessively, that these populations are Crypto-Christians. So, based on this viewpoint of its leaders, Group policy aimed at correcting the historical error. Thus, it tolerated, if not even promoted, the intervention of the Greek secret services in the relations with this population. To wit it implicated from the beginning the population in the eyes of the Turkish secret services which at that time were at war with the Kurds. For the Turkish nationalists, the deep state, but also the powerful secret services of our neighbour, the Greek-speaking communities were transformed to potential Greek agents. The indifference to the fate of the population was incredible. The frequent mention in their political party daily press that there is guerrilla warfare in the Greek-speaking area (implying ethnic, i.e. Pontian guerrillas) reveals to Turkish agents the naive aspirations of the group.

On the other hand, with the glamour of a western impresario, the Group promoted conversions to Christianity and, to a certain extent, imposed them on some of the Greek-speaking young people it managed to recruit. The Group -under the various forms it survives until today- managed in this way to create a disruption within the Greek-speaking community of northern Turkey, dividing it into Christianised and Muslims. Thus it offered the worst

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that try to follow the *koine neo-Pontic* dialect as spoken in Greece today, one narrative of preparation of a Pontic dish-again in *koine*-, and songs such as «Ekáen ké to Tsámbasin» [Çambaşı is burnt down], i.e. those which are only part of the Christian heritage.

<sup>139</sup> On August 27, 2008, the Prefecture of Kozani and the Municipality of Kozani held in Kozani a big Pontian concert with the participation of "Kerim Aidin and Adem Beskioglou [Beşköylü]". The advertising of the event was making reference to a show in which "beats the heart of *Pontic Hellenism* " "with the participation of Pontic-speaking artists of Turkey " (Radio Akrites , 24 August 2008. This is a radio station of Thessaloniki – sponsored by the Stavroupolis Pontian Association- with Pontic music and sometimes broadcasts in the Pontic dialect).

<sup>140</sup> He means here Michalis Charalambides (former member of the Central Committee of PASOK and active in Pontian issues) and Professor Kostas (Konstandinos) Fotiades.

service that could be offered in the self-consciousness processes of this population! The indifference of the Group for the fate of Turkey's Greek-speaking community evidenced in the case of the writer Omer Asan. [...] And while the writer himself had warned the Pontian Greeks against trying to turn this issue into a Turkish-Greek one, the Group - cynically violating the will of Asan- began to collect "signatures of support" under a text that represented the persecuted author as a Pontian Ocalan<sup>141</sup>. Of course, looking at the later texts of Charalambides, we can see a more pragmatic view<sup>142</sup>, in contrast to those of Fotiades insisting for the establishment of a Greek Consulate in Trabzon and obscuring the data in an ineffable way: "if I have a rough multiplication of 10 by 243 thousand, you can understand which number of Greek-speaking/pontic-speaking Muslims- can are talking about. I'm not saying that over the course of 80 years many of them have not lost their way, a lot has definitely lost it, but others remain"<sup>143</sup>..

One can risk the conclusion, on the grounds of the number of publications, broadcastings etc., that especially in 2006-2007 there is a wider accentuation on the issue in relation to the immediately preceding years. Even if that is not the case, statements like those of former PASOK Minister Michael Chrysochoides, that according to "scientific assessments" there are "two million Greek Muslims or Crypto-Christians in Turkey" are bound to maintain a tension around the issue<sup>144</sup>. Since the late 2000s, however, there is lack of any coherent or government supported policy. The "competition" of various Pontian associations or organisations continues though, sometimes with extreme behaviours<sup>145</sup>. The approach to the Pontic-speakers in other cases gets or possibly is enclosed in a purely cultural nature<sup>146</sup>. But usually there is a nationalistic conception, which leads to the emergence, such as public TV

<sup>141</sup> See Agtzides 2006. The shift of Agtzides to milder positions also becomes visible at the TV programme of Alexis Papahelas, Tassos Teloglou and Sophia Papaioannou, *Fakeloi*, MEGA, 3 January.2006, where, among others, he estimated that pontic-speaking will not constitute a minority (he means national) and castigated the fact that "brainless people" with various actions in Pontus and the rhetoric on the Crypto-Christians helped Turkey's policy. We think that the reference on rift between Christianised and not Christianised within the Muslim communities is exaggerated. Those who converted to Christianity in Greece do not exceed ten to twenty people coming exclusively from 2-3 settlements. With this data we cannot support the existence of a faith disruption in the communities.

<sup>142</sup>Michalis Charalambides. Neither Scylla nor Charybdis - Multicentre Anatolia (about Pontian Genocide) (Speech at the unveiling of the monument of the Pontian Genocide in (Nea) Philadelphia), *Antivaro*, September 2006 ([http://palio.antibaro.gr/national/\\*xaralampidhs\\_genoktonia .php](http://palio.antibaro.gr/national/*xaralampidhs_genoktonia.php)).

<sup>143</sup>See Melahroini Martidou, A Greek Consulate has to be established in Trabzon, *O Hronos* (Komotini), 14 July 2005.

<sup>144</sup>Interview to Tassos Teloglou, *Fakelloi*, MEGA, 3 January 2006.

<sup>145</sup> See for example: unsigned, 3 saatlık "turisler" tartışma yarratı, *Hürriyet Gündem*, 3 January 2009, available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/10765023.asp>.

<sup>146</sup> Indicatively see Michael Goudis, Children of the same Sea, Pontus, reunited, 30 April 2010, available at: <http://tvxs.gr/news/%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%80%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC-%CE%BD%CE%AD%CE%B1/%CF%84%CE%B1-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%AC-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%82-%CE%B8%CE%AC%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B1%CF%82-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%80%CF%8C%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%BE%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%BC%CE%AF%CE%B3%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BD>

ET-3 broadcastings (especially programmes *Diaspora, Repo* and others). Undoubtedly, there are still marginal efforts to rekindle the issue<sup>147</sup>, or politically exploit it<sup>148</sup>.

The perception of the issue, regardless of intent, as a field of Greek-Turkish confrontation and national vindication, guarantees its presence in the future and indicates the way it will continue to be represented.

## 2. Concluding Remarks

Notions like common origin and common ancestry constitute a fundamental element in the national narrative. Even in this case where there is linguistic affinity, proof of the common origin is a prerequisite. The pontic-speakers are seen as a part of the Greeks who went astray, and since *origin [καταγωγή]* brings an eternal essence of Greekness, this deterministically will appear: "they were once Greeks", but "Turkey has been working hard not to let them understand who they are"<sup>149</sup>. In particular, stemming from the Ancient Greeks is once again precondition for being Greek<sup>150</sup>.

The linguistic and cultural assimilation, or even linguistic oppression applied and, perhaps, still partially implemented in Turkey, is not placed in its historical context, especially in the case of the Muslim population, excluding Kurds who constitute an issue of a different level. The group undergoing the pressure is shown as having a "dormant" stable and firm "identity", "consciousness", i.e. Greek in this case, which will emerge inevitably, if conditions permit it: "Turkey must admit that they have their own identity", Turkey must let them "to be able to discover themselves, find their identity"<sup>151</sup>.

If, in the cases examined, Greek-Turkish competition can be seen as a possible starting point for the formation of "new Greeks" in others, such as the Kalasha, for example, there seems to be no visible "enemy" or "national interest" that dictates the policy pursued and partially still exercised. We believe that the reasons of the policy of discovering new Greeks, the acceptance and reproduction of these obsessions in a dominant way in Greece, shapes a different type of interpretation. *Hellenism* can usurp to what is considered as containing Greek origin and cultural affinity –preferably ancient Greek but also modern-, what is considered as historical Greek space. Greek imaginary space can be in Pakistan (because of Alexander the Great and his descendants), Pontus, all the historical lands of of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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<sup>147</sup>See for example, the event that took place in 2014 in Thessaloniki on "Crypto-Christians of Pontus" (<http://pontos-genoktonia.gr/%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%BA%CF%81%CF%85%CF%80%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%87%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%AF-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%80%CF%8C%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85>).

<sup>148</sup>Hence, the former president of one of the two Panhellenic Federations of Pontians, not only frequently refers to the issue (e.g. <http://www.karfitsa.gr/2014/04/05/oloi-epithymoyme-tin-enosi-toy-pontia/>), but additionally this federation organised an event in Brussels in March 2014, which was presented in a way to leave the impression of linkage with the European Parliament ([http://epontos.blogspot.gr/2014/03/e-Pontos\\_18.html](http://epontos.blogspot.gr/2014/03/e-Pontos_18.html)).

<sup>149</sup>Alexis Papahelas in programme *Fakelloi*, MEGA, *ibid*. The entire programme was dedicated to pontic-speaking communities in Turkey, including remarks on "genocide and extermination of 350,000 Pontians" (Sophia Papaioannou, *ibid*).

<sup>150</sup>See the references of Sophia Papaioannou in the same broadcasting, one of which was that the Greeks constituted "the oldest nation in the Black Sea."

<sup>151</sup>See characteristic excerpts of Alexis Papahelas comments in the beginning and the end of the above broadcasting. Indeed, exclusion from the population exchange is latent as a historical faux pas, since "they did not return to Greece" (emphasis added).

Just because this imaginary Greek space is based on *Greek origin*, but also in alleged cultural behaviour, *Hellenism* may include pagans, Turkish-speaking or Tatar speaking communities, Muslims and everything else. In other words, the perception of Greekness, extremely rigid and usually "brotherless", based solely on orthodoxy, is apparently bendable, as long as it contains one of the elements that make up the national imaginary. The greatness of Hellenism and the Greek Orthodox tradition, namely Ancient Greek origin and the Ecumenical Patriarchate allow groups which "encompass" one of the above, to have a legitimate claim on pure, absolute and immaculate Hellenism, i.e., claim for inclusion in the nation. The dominant shape of school history for the Greek nation, not only disallows the explanation of historical phenomena, but necessarily leads to interpretative schemes such as those examined above. If French is one belonging to the political community of France and German is someone who speaks or even spoke German, Greek is the one having ancient origin, and somehow is related with the historical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. This potential umbrella can therefore accommodate a huge crowd. In our opinion, these population "discoveries" are not influenced by the geopolitical foundations and the current political context, though in some cases they are used to serve them. It is the very nation-building concept that resorts to the discoveries to confirm its schemes, and whether the "discovered" will manage to join the nation or not, is indeed, irrelevant. This is how, we think, the apparent contradiction is solved: Extremely rigid national boundaries, in which orthodoxy is still a precondition, but abundance of candidate Greeks. Discovery of the existence of various "Greeks" is a different matter to the eventual inclusion in the nation. The 19th century schemes about Pelasgians and Illyrians functioned in a similar manner: The *common ancient origin* of Albanians and Greeks has not led eventually to the embodiment of (the non-Orthodox) Albanians in the Greek nation. However, the case of Pontic-speaking Muslims, despite its totally limited use, constitutes the most important deflection of potential inclusion of non-Orthodox in the nation, after the, apparently, extremely more important one of the Albanians, in the third quarter of the 19th century.

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