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Romedi Arquint

SPEECH AT THE FIRST BELGRADE CONFERENCE ON ARMANS

It's an honour and it's a personal *plaisir* to attend this seminar which records me many visits and unforgotten remained experiences with the arumanian people. I was surprised of the will to obtain guaranties and recognition by the state, and I was fascinated also about the dances and songs, heritages of an old history and culture. But there is another reason to be mentioned.

It has without doubt to do with elementary similarities between the retoromansh and the arumanian people.

1. The mountains are the first element. The peoples in the mountains had during centenaries to fight for securing the existence. Hard work, realistic view and few time for song and music. **2.** Both are the result of the roman empire strategy where the military routes conducted westwards to the retoromansh and eastwards to the arumanian, **3.** Both peoples developed a language some a blending between the autochthonous peoples and the influence of the most advanced Latin world. **4.** The assimilation strategy of the nation states had the consequence that the number of speakers diminished, both peoples are in danger of extinction. **5.** The last very important common element is the historic tradition, the high valorisation of the culture.

But there are differences, too. The crucial one is, that the retoromansh lives in a political tradition of tolerance and respect and that the federal system promotes a such to say luxurious treatment. Your own situation I worse and you all know the difficulties.

I'll share with you general impressions which, of course, are shaped by personal and professional experience accumulated over the last 50 years. Let's start with the WORDS, the TERMS, the NOTIONS, which became familiar the last 150 years for our topic.

Before the French Revolution a difference was made between the “state” as an administration body and “nationalities” which meant peoples living in a specific area. The construction of the notion of the “nation state”

Today used as a synonym for what we call a “state”.

marked the beginning of 200 years of catastrophic ethnic and political struggle and confrontations. The term *minority* is the legitimate child of the nation-state ideology, an ideology which measures the characteristics of people in percentages and defines quantity, not quality.

The associated adjective *national* is meant to emphasise the affiliation of these communities to a kinstate, which opens the door wide to the danger of political instrumentalization by the bigger nation-states. We, those present here, we don't like to live in a nation-state, and we are not national minorities! We are communities with a linguistic and cultural heritage, we are unique in the world. It may be useful for the debates to point out four aspects as basic elements for our communities. The first basic element is representation. It hinges on the question: Does our community represent our people? My experiences in this field are arbitrary. After the collapse of communism, the new states of Central and Eastern Europe started to introduce democracy. Representation of national minorities was something that seemed to find consensus, but it was the President himself who elected the representatives of the communities. As such, it was purely a token gesture. In the traditional democratic states in Western Europe most of the communities are civil society organisations; this represents a kind of degradation of the communities because it puts them on a par with organisations like the Jodlerverein, a yodelling club or a Schwingerverband, an Alpine Wrestling Association. Often, they are run by individualists with great involvement, often they represent a linguistic, cultural, or folkloristic background, but what is lacking is a political and economic presence. I would wish that the arumanian organisations could organize a census, which would demonstrate that the people exist – in reality.

A second, crucial point is Democracy, the rules of law, democratic structures, and transparent procedures. Democracy and representation open the door to political activity. On the high political level, I'll only stress the holy principle of territoriality entered in the legal regulation system of the minority communities. I think we must add to this principle the one of the personal principles. How absurd would it be to build a fence around a rare species and protect only those living inside that space?

This would totally contradict any principle of biodiversity. Inevitably, in times of mobility, speakers move beyond their traditional territory, and it's about saving endangered languages and not about territoriality. I'm sure that other important points of the negotiations between our communities and the state, regional and

local authorities will be debated in the seminar, like financial support, official recognition and so on.

The third basic element is Activity. Only activity will make us visible. The research shows interesting and creative examples. Activity can be realised in two different ways, which are both complementary. The first way is to revive the traditions, the language, and the culture. This is obviously one of the highlights, The second is to promote young people with their own – global – sight of the world. It's obvious that the education of the mother tongue is at the first place combined with projects, festivities and camps, literature and song festivals, a wide field for exchanges. A helpful tool and a new way for activities which some of you are already using are the social media.

The last basic element is Visibility. That is why I'll end my contribution with a quotation from the ROMA Become more visible – and we don't put in the centre of the seminar the question WHAT SHALL THE OTHERS DO FOR US but WHAT IS UP TO US TO DO! The core element of the arumanian people is their history, language, and the many cultural flowers as music, which builds a great feeling of community and it's more than a casualty that we today can be witness of an international recognition of this element of identity of a people. One big step happened in Uppsala, few days ago. This is the result of a long engagement of the arumanian poets and a special thanks goes to one person, Lila Cona!

I'll congratulate you, wishing all the best for the future of the arumanian people, concluding with what we heart already: Soyez multiculturels- soyez disponibles pour les autoes - et les autres pour vous!

Romedi Arquint

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