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Why Pomak will not be the Next New Literary Slavic Language
and Why This Matters

Following the major political changes in the early 1990s and the Yugoslav wars, the map of the Balkans has been profoundly reshaped. Based on a complex set of religious and ethnic criteria, new States have been formed. In most cases, the independence of these States has been closely linked to the political will and subsequent action to create new literary languages in accordance to the “one-State/one-language” model.

Among the least vocal political movements for minority rights’ recognition in the Balkans, one can single out the Pomak movement in both Greece and Bulgaria (see support statements by the European Free Alliance). Pomaks, who are speakers of Balkan Slavic varieties, have been traditionally living in the Rhodope Mountains and they have been for centuries Muslims, both Sunni and Shia (see among others Steinke & Voss 2007, Demetriou 2004).

In this talk, I will first present the linguistic background with respect to Pomak (Adamou 2009, 2011, 2013). I will then discuss the sociopolitical context blocking language policies in favor of Pomak and address the relevance of creating a literary Pomak language. Lastly, I will show how the lack of political action is shaping the language attitudes and language practices of the Pomaks and is leading to language shift in Greece (Adamou 2010, Adamou 2012) and dialect levelling in Bulgaria and therefore to the loss of a precious linguistic inheritance.

References

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