
THE BULGARIANS IN TRANSNISTRIA¹

Jerzy Hatlas

Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) or *Transnistria* (Moldavian/Romanian: *Stânga Nistrului* – „Left Bank of the Dniester”) – there is a tiny piece of land situated between the left bank of river Dniester (from the West) and the border with Ukraine on the East. This territory is at about 200 km long and 12-15 km wide only. The part of Transnistria is also the town of Bendery (Romanian Tighina) situated on the right bank of Dniester and some small areas lying on the same bank of river. The whole territory is 4163 square km and it is divided into seven regions. The whole this territory constitutes the Eastern part of Republic of Moldova and such is the standpoint of international community. Nevertheless, the secession declared by Transnistria in September of 1990 created quite strange situation that central authorities in Chişinău simply lost control over this territory. There was even the civil war which Transnistria treats as the “liberation war”.

The forefather of this strange quasi-state entity had been presented by also efemeral (which functioned in 1924-1940) *The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic* (Moldavian/Romanian: *Република Аутономэ Советикэ Социалистэ Молдовеняскэ, Republica Autonomă Sovietică Socialistă Moldovenească*), with its capital in Balta and later on in Tiraspol. The contemporary authorities in Transnistria treat this republic as one of method of legitimacy of their political power (Gil 2006, 41). Stalin treated this autonomous territory as the first phase leading to annexation of Bessarabia in the first possible moment. Just after the annexation of Bessarabia by Soviet Union in 1940 some territories situated on the left bank of Dniester created the integral part of *The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic* (Moldavian/Romanian: *Република Советикэ Социалистэ Молдовеняскэ* or *Republica Sovietică Socialistă Moldovenească*; Russian:

Молдавская Советская Социалистическая Республика). Nevertheless, its area became little smaller (without Balta and its surroundings). In the final phase of the second world war such the situation returned in 1944 and functioned until 1990.

The Transnistria *de facto* gained its independence already on September 2, 1990. This territory forms the example of so-called quasi-state (Kosienkowski 2008). The international community *de iure* never recognized the independence of Transnistria. However, Russia supports Transnistria on many fields of economic and social activity (both officially and unofficially).

On January 1, 2005 Transnistria was inhabited by 555.347 persons. In the result of both low rate of birth and intensive migration during the fifteen years of its existence the number of population in *Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic* diminished even by 170.000. During the years 1992-1996 only over 300.000 inhabitants left this territory (Республиканская 2006 [19.01.2013]).

The population of Transnistria forms real ethnic mosaic. The greatest part of its population create Moldavians, who (in general population census conducted in 11-18.10.2004) form 31,9% of population of Transnistria. The second place is taken by Russians (30,3%) and the third place by Ukrainians (28,8%). The rest of population is formed by Bulgarians (2%) and also by some other nationalities (Gagauzians, Belorussians, Germans, Jews and even Poles). Nevertheless, this population census cannot be treated as fully objective because Transnistria’s authorities did not respect United Nations rules and procedures connecting with the general population census (Solak 2006, 61). And so nothing strange that central authorities in Chişinău did not recognize it. In spite of the fact that Moldavians form the greatest ethnic group living in Transnistria the Slav population together (Russians, Ukrai-

¹This article is the kind of addendum to the article presenting situation of Bulgarians in Moldova (Hatlas 2012).

nians but also Bulgarians, Belorussians, Poles) is greater. In this article I would like to present first of all the Bulgarians. There are ethnic Bulgarians and not only some persons of Bulgarian origin because in spite of long separation from its Balkan fatherland and the process of Russification later on (both during the Tsar's empire and Soviet Union) this population as a whole did not lose its ethnical identity (distant from the other people living in this territory) and did not lose its community with the Bulgarian nation. It can be estimated that on the territory of *Pridnestrovan Moldavian Republic* live at about 16 thousands of ethnic Bulgarians (Сайт села Парканы [08.08.2012]).

In spite of the fact that Bulgarians live on the whole territory of Transnistria there is only one village dominated by Bulgarians i.e. the village of Parkany (in Bulgarian *Паркан* or *Паркани*). For instance, in the town of Bendery Bulgarians form only at about 3% of population and in the town of Tiraspol even 1,2% (in the year of 1989). The village of Parkany has over 10.000 inhabitants (10.200 among them Bulgarians form at about 80%) (Сайт села Парканы [08.08.2012]) or even at about 10.500 inhabitants (81% of Bulgarians). The rest of its population is formed by Russians (1330 persons), Ukrainians (570 persons) and Moldavians (166 persons) (Симеонов 2004, 304). The village of Parkany can be treated as the greatest Bulgarian colony situated West of Dnester. And so, this village had been presented many times in older publications (for instance Клаус 1869, 298). Nevertheless, there is quite strange (especially for someone living in Central-Eastern Europe) that in spite of quite big population this settlement point has the position of village and not of small town. However, there was quite common to establish some big village in Bessarabia or in so-called Southern Russia inhabited by some colonists migrated in the end of 18th and in 19th century from Balkan Peninsula (first of all Bulgarians and Gagauzians). Some of these villages later on gained even the position of town, as for example Komrat – the capital of *The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (Gagauz Yeri)*. However the village of Parkany is situated outside the territory of Bessarabia but very near (on the left bank of Dnester) and so in its character this village is quite similar to some villages situated on the right bank of Dnester.

In the past Bulgarians migrated from the area of Balkan Peninsula on some territories taken (or at least controlled in some way) by Russia mainly voluntarily because of some promises of nice and peaceful life in the Tsar's Empire. Certainly, some disturbances in the Ottoman Empire (some bandits and perhaps also some religious problems in case of non-Muslim population) also influenced the decision of emigration. This process took place first of all in the first half of the 19th century. This movement had been connected also with many conflicts between Russia and Turkey at that time. It had been presented in many publications, starting with the oldest ones (for instance: Скальковский 1848; Клаус 1869; Занетов 1895; Державин 1914).

Unfortunately, we did not know the exact date of creation of the Parkany village. We know that in the first half of 18th century on the left bank of Dnester both Nogaj Tatars and Cossacs had been presented. On this area settled some representatives of many nationalities (mainly Ukrainian, Russian, Moldavian but also Jewish and other), mainly former fugitives. In 40-ties of 18th century there were created many settlements of mixed population (Аствацатуров 1995а, 14). Parkany in the middle of 18th century formed one of such the settlements. In the beginning of 19th century settled in Parkany first Bulgarians. However, we do not know the exact date. Perhaps it was 1803 but the most of scholars favorite rather 1805 (Аствацатуров 1995 б, 133; Аствацатуров 2006, 27). But some opinions present 1806 or even 1811 (Симеонов 2004, 304). The village of Parkany is situated just 5 km West of Tiraspol. Its name derives from the Ukrainian language and means the wooden fence.

During the first half of the 19th century Bulgarians in Parkany had its own names. Afterwards the Russian authorities changed them into Russian ones. Moreover, the very difficult question is to establish from which part of the Balkan Peninsula came the Bulgarians to Parkany. Thanks to the one opinion some Bulgarian colonists came to Parkany from Macedonia and the other group came from the vicinity of Sofia. We do not know how big were these two groups. These two groups of Bulgarians settled in two separate parts of Parkany (so called *mahaly*). In many situations Bulgarians emigrated to Bessarabia as the whole village and preserved even the old name of the vil-

lage. But there is not the case of Parkany. Some families settled there in quite different periods of time and most probably descended from some different regions of the Balkan Peninsula. And so, there is very difficult to establish the place of origin of Parkan's Bulgarians (Астѡацатурѡв 2006, 45).

The Bulgarians who settled down in Parkany were active mainly in agriculture (also in sericulture). Nowadays many of them work in the industrial enterprises in some towns near by. In the situation of emigration some Bulgarians colonists tried to preserve (as long as possible) their own language, some customs and other signs of their ethnical identity. The school lessons in Bulgarian language formed the very important problem. After 1917 in the primary school in Parkany started some lessons in Bulgarian language and such the situation continued until the school year of 1936-1937. Then it were the worst years of terror. During the Stalinist repressions in 1937-1938 at about 500 inhabitants of Parkany lost their lives. (Симеонов 2004, 306). Also during the second world war some inhabitants of Parkany lost their lives. In the center of this village there is a park where the monument had been created in the memory of some inhabitants of Parkany who were killed in the years 1941-1945.

Bulgarians, both on the Balkan Peninsula and abroad, in spite of almost five centuries of Turkish subjugation, generally preserved the Orthodox faith (not counting some small groups like Pomaks in Rodopy mountainst who had the islam faith). And so, every village wanted to have its own Orthodox church. Also the Tsar's authorities wanted to join the Bulgarian colonists by the Russian Orthodox church in order to connect them with the new country and to assimilate them in the future. And so, it would be useful to present the Orthodox Church in Parkany as the place connected with the spiritual culture of its inhabitants.

Already in 1792 started the construction of the stone Orthodox Church in Parkany, i.e. even before the Bulgarians came to this village (Астѡацатурѡв 1995а, 121). The priest in this new Orthodox Church became Yakov Dobrilov (in some sources his name is presented in form of Dobrilovski). Iliya Dragutin fulfilled the role of psalmist. We do not know nothing on their nationalities but their names testify Serbian – Bul-

garian origin. The Orthodox Church in Parkany was not finished because at that time the inhabitants of Parkany migrated en masse to Tiraspol. And so did the clergy. In that matter the clergy took the former Orthodox Church (*Suklejskaja Nikolaevskaja cerkov'*), which in 1797 became the sobor, the first Orthodox Church in the history of the town.

Only in 1811 when some Bulgarians colonists already came to Parkany the wooden house for prayer had been built. Its patron became Saint Michel (*Svyatomihajlovskij*). As its priest functioned the local colonist (Nikolay Nikolov Delov), who had not theological education. Nevertheless, he started the whole "dynasty" of Orthodox priests on this area because many of his descendants became Orthodox priests. The building process of Orthodox Church started in 1818 but in 1826 this building had been finished and consecrated. Nevertheless, some additional works were conducted until 1829 when the whole area had been surrounded by the wooden fence. In the year of 1912 after the great repair it became obvious that the building was simply too small. And so, the new Orthodox Church had to be built. The building process started in 1915 on the place of an older Orthodox Church. The altar had been preserved and placed on the same place. Unfortunately, after the October Revolution the Orthodox priests' house had been confiscated and change into state's border post and the Orthodox Church had been closed and changed into club. During the second world war Romanians opened the Orthodox Church. This Orthodox Church was active until late 50-ties of the 20th century but some Orthodox priests fluctuated very often and the building started to demolish. At least in 1960 together with the new wave of fight with religion in the Soviet Union this Orthodox Church had been blown up.

During the Soviet times some Bulgarians, although they preserve their native language, they also assimilated many Russian and Ukrainian words and so their language became rather the kind of local dialect. In that times in Parkany the so-called "house of culture" had been built but its scope was not the preservation of Bulgarian culture but rather to create the new "Soviet man" speaking only Russian. Also in school the lessons were in Russian only. And so, the younger gener-

ation more frequently used the Russian language even in the ordinary life.

Nevertheless, after the proclamation of secession by Transnistria from central authorities in Chișinău inhabitants of Parkany found themselves in some new political (or even state) entity but this entity is very difficult to present. In the administration way the village of Parkany is under the Slobozia sub-district.

However, some members of the local communities supported the new political authority and during the military conflict with the Moldavian army even fought (as volunteers) supporting the Transnistrian's side. In these fights seven inhabitants of this village were killed. In this new political situation Bulgarians in Parkany tried to revive their national identity. First of all they tried to reestablish the possibility of learning in school in their native language. Fortunately, these efforts finished with success. In the 90-ties of 20th century in two schools situated in Parkany started lessons in Bulgarian language. There were established some contacts with the old country. Moreover, the political authorities in Bulgaria try to support Bulgarians living in some post-Soviet territories in many ways. Of course, such is also the situation of Parkany village. One important form of such the support is the invitation to study in the Republic of Bulgaria. And so, in every year some five to seven young persons study in the country of their forefathers. The teacher from Bulgaria (Atanas Stoev) came to Parkany in order to teach the Bulgarian language and literature. He was active on many fields of social and cultural activity among local Bulgarians and he died in Parkany. Nowadays, school No 1 in Parkany bears his name (Българинът 2006, 198). Moreover, the Bulgarians in Transnistria became active in some non-government organizations. In spite of the fact that their number is not too big (especially in comparison with the rest of the territory of Moldova under the jurisdiction of political authorities in Chișinău), such the initiatives should be positively valued. For instance in the town of Rybnica in 1994 The Bulgarian Cultural Association in the town of Rybnica (*Българско културно дружество в гр. Рибница*) had been established. On the other hand, in 1990 in the capital of Transnistria (Tiraspol). The City's Social Organization Association of Bulgarian Culture „*Suyastno cvete*” (*Градска обществена организация*

Общество болгарской культуры „Свястно цвете”) had been organized. In 2005 The Public University in Tiraspol enabled to act on its territory and the so-called “Bulgarian Club” was organized – The Bulgarian Cultural Club by The Public Transnistrian University [name of] T.G. Shevchenko (*Български културен клуб към Приднестровски държавен университет “Т.Г. Шевченко”*). The head of it is Evgeniya Ivanovna Peykova. Together with the university in Tiraspol functions also the cultural-historical center (connected also with defense of law) „*Bulgaria*” (*„България”*) organized during the conference on December 1, 2005 (ДАБЧ [08.08.2012]). Also in Tiraspol on December 19, 2008 had been opened the Bulgarian cultural center – with some help of the organization “The Association of Bulgars in Ukraine” (*Асоциация на българите в Украйна*) and of “Ukrainian Center of Cooperation in Tiraspol”. In the ceremony of opening took part for instance the ambassador of The Republic of Bulgaria in Moldova. The chief of this new Bulgarian organization became Evgeniya Peykova who works on the university of Tiraspol.

The Bulgarians took with them from the Balkan Peninsula to the village of Parkany not only their native language, some traditions, customs, culture, folk things but also their own mentality and the organization of agriculture. They also introduced some cosine's traditions (like banica). Unfortunately, many folk traditions (in the situation of long living away of their fatherland) had been forgotten. Only some elderly people know many songs and folk stories. However, they quite rarely transmit these cultural traditions to some members of the younger generation. These traditions could be forgotten unless it could be researched and analyzed (Аствацатуров 2006, 143).

Fortunately, some researches on Bulgarians living in the post-Soviet territory have been intensified in recent years. There emerged many publications analyzing the folk traditions, history statistics and many aspect of their daily life (Станчев 2009). Nowadays, the most of Bulgarians abroad live in two (but in practice even three) countries situated not far from Bulgaria i.e. Ukraine and Moldova. The greatest area of Bulgarian-Gagauzian settlement is situated in Southern Bessarabia (the so-called Budjak) consisted with Southern part of Moldova and the Eastern part of Odessa district in Ukraine (especially the town of Bolgrad

and its territory where the Bulgarians dominate on this area). After the collapse of Soviet Union the Bulgarian-Gagauzian settlement in Bessarabia had been cut by the state's border. And so, quite different is the modern history of Bulgarians in these two countries. Moreover, the secessions of Transnistria from Moldova creates some new divisions. One new border (existing in reality although do not recognized by Moldova) separates some Bulgarians living on the left bank of Dniester from these living in Chişinău and in Taraclia region. In spite of such the situation some signs of the national revival of local Bulgarians can be observed. The Bulgarians live not only in Southern Bessarabia (the so-called Budjak) or in Transnistria but also on the Crimea and in the vicinity of

Azov Sea. We can find many Bulgarians also in big towns of Ukraine and Moldova (especially in Odessa, Kiev and Chişinău). There are many publications on Bulgarians living in Moldova and Ukraine (in the historical Bessarabia) but at the same there is only few publications on Bulgarians living in Transnistria. Even in Poland there are some scientific publications on the political problem of Transnistria (Solak 2009; Kosienkowski 2012; Oleksy 2012) but there is no information (even quite basic) on Bulgarians living in this quasi-state – do not recognized by the international community. And so, this article should inspire some new researches on this important subject connected with the history of Bulgarian nation and its members living abroad.

Bibliography

- Gil 2006:** A. Gil, Geneza Mołdawskiej Autonomicznej Socjalistycznej Republiki Radzieckiej. In: Konflikt niskiej intensywności w Naddniestrzu (Lublin 2006), 41-50.
- Hatlas 2012:** J. Hatlas, Bułgarzy w Republice Mołdowy. In: (Red. J. Derlickiego) Między etnicznością a lokalnością. Pogranicze bułgarsko-gagauskie w Besarabii (Warszawa 2012), 25-41.
- Kosienkowski 2008:** M. Kosienkowski, Pojęcie i determinanty *quasi-państwa*. Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 6, 2008, 121-130.
- Kosienkowski 2012:** M. Kosienkowski, Continuity and Change in Transnistria's Foreign Policy after the 2011 Presidential Elections (Lublin 2012).
- Oleksy 2012:** P. Oleksy, 20 lat po wojnie Gogola z Kusturicą. <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/31,0,76866,1,artykul.html> [19.01.2012.].
- Solak 2006:** M. Solak, Struktura etniczna Mołdawii i Naddniestrza jako uwarunkowanie bezpieczeństwa w regionie. In Konflikt niskiej intensywności w Naddniestrzu (Lublin 2006), 51-67.
- Solak 2009:** M. Solak, Mołdawia. Republika na trzy pęknięcia. Historyczno-społeczny, militarny i geopolityczny wymiar „Zamrożonego konfliktu” o Naddniestrze (Toruń 2009).
- Аствацатуров 1995a:** Г. Аствацатуров, Очерки истории села Парканы. Часть первая. (Бендеры 1995).
- Аствацатуров 1995b:** Г. Аствацатуров, Заселването на българи в Паркан. Население, 1995, 1-2, 133-137.
- Аствацатуров 2006:** Г. Аствацатуров, Болгары – 200 лет в Парканах, ч. 1 (Бендеры 2006).
- Българинът 2006:** Българинът от Паркан. Интервю на Пенка Ньотева с Петър Жеков. Родолюбец 7, 2006, 195-198.
- Державин 1914:** Н.С. Державин, Болгарския колонии в России (Таврическая, Херсонская и Бессарабская губернии). Материалы по славянской этнографии. В: Сборник за народни умотворения и народопис, кн. 29 (София 1914), 1-204.
- ДАБЧ:** Държавна агенция за българите в чужбина. <http://www.aba.government.bg/>.
- Занетов 1895:** Г. Занетов, Българските колонии в Русия, В: Периодическо списание на Българското книжовно дружество в Средец, 48 (София 1995), 849-898.
- Клаус 1869:** А.А. Клаус, Наши колонии. Опыт и материалы по истории и статистике иностранной колонизации в России, вып. 1 (Санкт Петербург 1869).
- Республиканская 2006:** Республиканская комиссия по переписи населения подвела итоги переписи населения Приднестровской Молдавской Республики 2004 года. http://www.minjust.org/web.nsf/News_Arhiv/6CB348356270F9A4C225719300469D65 [19.01.2013.].
- Сайт села Парканы:** Сайт села Парканы. Новости, фото, видео, музыка. с. Парканы. <http://parcani.at.ua/>
- Симеонов 2004:** И. Симеонов, Българите от село Паркан. Алманах Родолюбец, 6, 2004, 303-308.
- Скальковский 1848:** А.А. Скальковский, Болгарские колонии в Бессарабии и Новороссийском крае (Одесса 1848).
- Станчев 2009:** М. Станчев, Болгары в Российской империи, СССР, странах Балтии и СНГ, т. 1 (1711-2006). Статистический сборник (София 2009).

Bulgarii în Transnistria

Rezumat

Populația Transnistriei reprezintă un adevărat mozaic etnic. Majoritatea, conform recesământului din anul 2004, o constituie moldovenii (românii) – 31,9%, urmați fiind de ruși (30,3%) și ucraineni (28,8%). Restul populației o reprezintă bulgarii (2%) și reprezentanți ai altor etnii, inclusiv polonezi.

Cei mai mulți bulgari locuiesc în satul Parcani, amplasat la 5 km spre vest de Tiraspol. Populația localității este de peste 10 mii (10,2 mii), dintre care 80% sunt bulgari. Satul Parcani a fost întemeiat prin anul 1740, însă, bulgarii s-au stabilit aici cu traiul la începutul sec. XIX (probabil, în 1803 sau 1811, posibil chiar și în 1806). Comunități bulgare sunt, de asemenea, înregistrate și în orașele Tiraspol și Râbnița.

Începând cu anii '90 ai sec. XX, în cele două școli din Parcani este predată limba maternă (bulgară). Un mare sprijin în această direcție acordă guvernul Bulgariei. La fel, pentru populația de etnie bulgară din Transnistria au fost create posibilități pentru instruirea în universitățile din Bulgaria.

Болгары в Приднестровье

Резюме

Население Приднестровья представляет собой настоящую этническую мозаику. Наибольшую группу составляют молдаване (румыны) – 31,9% согласно переписи населения 2004 года. За ними следуют русские (30,3%) и украинцы (28,8%). Остальную часть населения составляют болгары (2%), а также представители других национальностей, в том числе поляки.

Больше всего болгар проживает в селе Парканы, расположенное в 5 км к западу от Тирасполя. Население села составляет более 10 тысяч жителей (10,2 тыс.), из которых 80% – болгары. Село Парканы было основано около 1740 года, но болгары поселились здесь в начале XIX века (возможно, в 1803 или 1811, или даже в 1806 году). Болгары, так же проживают в Тирасполе и в Рыбнице.

Начиная 90-ми годами XX века в двух школах Паркан стали преподавать болгарский язык и в этом большую помощь оказывает правительство Болгарии. Так же, у болгарского населения Приднестровья появилась возможность для обучения в вузах Болгарии.

28.02.2013

Dr. Jerzy Hatlas, University of Adam Mickiewicz, Poznań, ul. Ratajczaka 38/40, Poznań 61-816, Poland, e-mail: jurekhatlas@yahoo.com