

**CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MIGRATION:
BULGARIAN SUNDAY SCHOOLS IN ITALY**

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Abstract: In the paper we examine the emergence and the development of the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Italy and particularly the ones in Rome, Nettuno-Cerveteri and Milan, and their role as consolidation centers and translators of Bulgarian cultural heritage in migration settings. We analyze the cultural heritage, transmitted and promoted at and by Bulgarian schools in Italy, manifested in several hypostases: Bulgarian language, festive calendar, folklore, Bulgarian sites of memory – all of them actively functioning in the dynamics of interaction between Bulgarian migrant institutions in various Italian cities. Our analysis consider especially significant the process of inclusion of the Bulgarian sites of memory in Italy in event school life as a basis for transfer of knowledge and construction of national identity and belonging.

Key words: Migration, Bulgarians in Italy, Sunday Schools, Cultural Heritage, Identity, Sites of Memory

Italy is one of the European countries, characterized by increased immigration from Bulgaria, especially from the end of 20th century, which, despite the economic problems during recent years, is still so distinct and intensive after the political changes in the early 21st century, and mostly after elimination of the visa regime for Bulgarian citizens in the Schengen zone in 2001 and the entering of Bulgaria in the European Union in 2007.¹ There is no accurate information about the number of Bulgarian permanent residents in the country, while unofficial data shows different figures ranging between 100 and 150 thousand. During this period the rising of Bulgarian institutions in Italy is observed, which initially was related to the presentation and promotion of the Bulgarian culture and was organized by Bulgarians who studied in the country or migrated soon after 1990, together with interested Italians or those who have

¹ About Bulgarian migrant community in Italy see on this [Zahova, 2014: and especially 109-112].

direct contact with Bulgarians, such as the Association “Bulgaria-Italy” – Vicenza, Cultural Association “Phoenix” – Rome, Bulgarian cultural Association “Pencho Slaveykov” – Como, and others [Zahova, 2014: 113]. In 2002, after the visit of Pope John Paul II in Bulgaria, Bulgarian community in Rome procured a church and a year later the Bulgarian school was founded in the city. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church community was established also in Milano in 2005. During the last years the institutional network grows, schools were created in other Italian cities – Milano, Pescara, Anzio, Nettuno, Cerveteri, Bari; in 2014 the first school year started in the second Bulgarian school in Rome and in 2015 the Bulgarian school in Rimini was opened.

By their cultural politics migrant community’s associations construct cultural heritage. The fieldwork at the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Italy is a **part of a research of consolidation forms of the Bulgarian community abroad and the models of construction, preservation and promotion of the Bulgarian cultural heritage through them.**² Bulgarian schools in Italy are registered as non-profit organizations. They represent the type of educational institution functioning alongside with the Italian school and learning taking place in one of the weekend days. In Italy, where the Bulgarian migration is mostly new and mobile – because of insignificant geographical distance of the Apennine peninsula from Bulgaria – the choice of Bulgarian migrants to enroll their children in a Sunday school is prompted by complex reasons among which are the striving to keep the connection with Bulgaria and the Bulgarian in general, the conscious probability of remigration and respectively smooth continuation of children’s education in the next higher grade in Bulgaria without exams and additional school years.

The Bulgarian cultural heritage, transmitted and promoted by the Bulgarians schools in Italy, is focused in several directions: Bulgarian language, festival calendar, folk culture, Bulgarian sites. These markers are involved in the dynamics of interaction between Bulgarian migrant institutions in various Italian cities. Bulgarian (formal and informal) institutions in Italy interact, affect and are influenced by Bulgarian cultural heritage. Usually the school, the embassy or the consulate in the particular town become the centers for an organization of Bulgarian official or traditional holidays, focus the Bulgarian community. And the opposite process – the Bulgarian language is the reason for the establishment of Bulgarian schools abroad as well as folklore dance heritage is a cause for formation of number of folklore groups in the studied cities.

A necessary condition for the cultural heritage construction in migration is the formation of the relatively consolidated, organized and self-reproducing immigrant community. The cultural heritage is function and expression of the

² The study is the result of the authors’ field research conducted in Italy – Rome, Nettuno and Milan – in April 2015. It is conducted within the project “Cultural Heritage in Migration. Models of Consolidation and Institutionalization of the Bulgarian Communities Abroad”, funded by National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. Beyond the analysis will remain the other schools in Italy – in Pescara and Bari, and the newly opened in Rimini. Based on the methods of cultural anthropology, ethnology and social geography an interdisciplinary approach was applied to achieve the research aims and objectives.

community – such as it actually sees itself and wants others to perceive it [Elchinova, 2010]. Even more open is the role of the school as a consolidation center and transmitter of cultural heritage in migration settings.

What is typical for the Bulgarian schools in Italy is their closeness to the Bulgarian cultural heritage in the country and in particular in Rome, whose *realms (sites) of memory* (by Pierre Nora) become **symbolic toposes and elements of the Bulgarian diaspora**, actively involved in cultural, educational and tourist life of the community. **The schools construct and use the sites of memory and Bulgarian personalities**, that are connected to Rome, in their capacity of **common Bulgarian heritage** significant for all Bulgarians. Related events and rituals, significant for the community, through the symbolism and knowledge they transmit, play a particularly strong role in the identification, **reproduction of cultural identity³ and building of the national memory⁴**.⁴ Often, due to their connection with migrant festivity, the sites of memory are a mean used by the institutions to **consolidate the migrant community** on the basis of the past and the national history.

The correlation memory-heritage-identity in diaspora is considered in some foreign studies as well as in Bulgarian ones [Agnew, 2005; Klein, 2006; Bukiek & Juul, 2008; Anheier & Raj Isar, 2011; Maeva, 2006; Elchinova, 2010; Ganeva-Raycheva, 2012]. Starting from the statement of P. Bourdieu that *the school contributes in a completely decisive way in shaping identity* [Bourdieu, 2008: 111-112], in this article we will try to consider the construction and use of cultural heritage in migration through the prism of school practices as *a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present* [Smith, 2006: 8-9] as well as a factor in the building of national belonging. The emphasis will be on **the involving processes of the Bulgarian sites of memory in the school events as a cultural and symbolic capital in transmission of knowledge and construction of identities and national belonging**.

Bulgarian schools in Rome

As a capital of Italy, Rome is a city where one of the biggest Bulgarian migrant community in the country with the most varied formal and informal Bulgarian institutions is situated. The schools in the city which maintain the needs of the Bulgarian community of Bulgarian children education are two – “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” and “Asen and Ilia Peykovi”. And while the first school has many years of experience, although its existence has passed through some difficulties, the second is a brand new one – its first academic year began in the fall of 2014. However, the differences in the two schools do not concern only the time of establishment but also the system of education, transmission and focus

³ About the cultural identity in diaspora see Hall 1990 [Hall, 1990].

⁴ The term is used in the meaning exposed in the article by T. Nedelcheva on concepts of cultural memory by M. Halbwachs and J. Assmann, that the national memory is viewed as “reproducing matrix of national history elements (monuments, heroes, etc.)” [Nedelcheva, 2010: 216]. About national memory as a selectively constructing of the past – the term used by Ernest Renan in his essay from 1880, see Assman 2004 [Assman, 2004].

on the language and Bulgarian cultural heritage in all its forms – folk, historical, musical, artistic, etc.

The “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” school in Rome is the first Bulgarian school in Italy, initiated in 2003 by Paulina Tiholova, who teaches at it till nowadays. She is a founding member and longtime chairman of the church board at the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Community “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”, founded a year earlier, which gives her an institutional priority and support in launching of a Sunday school. Initially the classes started with few kids without textbooks, taxes or institutional support, focusing mainly on the **Bulgarian language**. For several years the lessons are held in a room in the church “Sts. Vincent and Athanasius”, provided to the Bulgarian Orthodox community by Pope John Paul II and situated on the Piazza Di Trevi, but after leaving the building in 2013, the school remains without place to take part and due to lack of funds delivered lessons outdoors or in private apartments of Father Kliment, who served previously in the church, and of Paulina Tiholova. In 2014 the school moved to the building of the Bulgarian Cultural Institute, established in 2006 being the successor of the Bulgarian Academy of Art and Culture “Boris Hristov” in Rome, which was situated in the villa of the famous Bulgarian opera singer, donated by him to the Bulgarian state. A major mission of the institute is the promotion of the Bulgarian culture in Italy in all art spheres, while the Academy continues its activity within its framework as well, where every year young opera singers selected through a competition receive scholarships.⁵

Currently the school is supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science (MES) under the program “Native language and culture abroad”, but despite the years of existence, due to the sudden closure of the church board and the requirement to reregister the association “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”, newly opened at the end of 2014, it is not approved for funding under the Decree 334 of the Council of Ministers.⁶ The school accepted children aged between 3 and 17 years, who are enrolled in a relevant class according to the level of Bulgarian language proficiency. Training is consistent with the MES programs for Bulgarians abroad; Bulgarian language, literature and history are studied, with particular attention to the Bulgarian traditions and music education. For its implementation the established club “National cultural and spiritual identity”, led by Paulina Tiholova, plays an important role, an art workshop group, whose members make various items related to the Bulgarian customs as ‘martenitza’, ‘survachki’, Easter eggs, etc., and **the**

⁵ The leadership of both institutions share about the favorable environment for a cooperation, which was formed as a result of their collection in one building. Students and parents are always present at all initiatives of the Cultural Institute and in turn contribute to raising awareness among the community.

⁶ The closure of the church board is associated with both the church and intracommunity problems that are beyond the scope of this article and will not be affected. The director of the association Yana Ivanova underlines that although stamped document by the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria in Italy that it comes to the same school, in existence since 2003, the MES does not recognize the one-year implementation of the activities, necessary for financing under Decree 334.

class of music and piano, created precisely due to **the proximity and direct contact with the legacy of Boris Hristov**. The leadership seeks professional teacher with the idea to develop a folklore dances class, which are currently included in the basic level training.

The second Bulgarian Sunday school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” starts its first school year in September 2014 in the building of International Youth Center “San Lorenzo”, situated close to the San Pietro square. The school is functioning at the nonprofit Cultural Association “Parallel 43”, established in the same year, and its president is Veneta Nenkova, who together with the director Mariola Georgieva⁷ was among the main initiators and organizers of the school and its related activities. Precisely Mariola Georgieva said that the main objective of the school is to provide an opportunity for education that is consistent with the programs both in Bulgarian and in Italian schools and adapted for migrant children. According to her, very important for a large city like Rome is the school location which is specially selected to be central and easily accessible from all parts of the town. The school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” is the only Bulgarian school in Italy which currently is a member of the Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad. The first academic year begins with several children, divided into four classes – first, second, third and eighth. It is funded mainly by donations and membership fees of the Cultural Association “Parallel 43”, whose regular members are parents of the students, and in 2015 was approved for funding under the program “Native language and culture abroad”.

Although **studying and promoting the Bulgarian language is the consolidating element in the case of the Bulgarian schools in Rome**, that is just the basis on which the other activities are developed – these activities are related basically to **the use of cultural heritage**, on one hand, as **a an educational factor** and, on the other, as **means of building and maintaining the national identity and belonging**. It should be pointed out that in both Rome schools willingness to sustain “intercultural dialogue”⁸ and to involve the Italian audience – most often consisting of parents or relatives – is observed in the learning process and festivity. This intentional bilingualism due to bi-linguistic reality in which most of the students live since their families consist of more than one nationality for the representatives of the cultural association “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” became *an opportunity for the children to embrace and grow with wide knowledge and understanding of existing cultural diversity*.⁹ In the both schools in Rome extracurricular activity is highly developed, including and open classes, cultural events and celebrations of national and traditional feasts. Besides the production of the traditional ritual objects – ‘martenitsi’ for ‘Baba Marta’ (March 1), ‘survachki’

⁷ During our field research in Rome the director of the school was Mariola Georgieva, who we had the opportunity to meet and talk with. Since the middle of 2015 the director, according to the school website, is Yordanka Mineva. See <http://scuolabulgara.jimdo.com> [Last accessed: 15.08.2015].

⁸ We use the phrase used in the presentation of the association “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” in the school website. See: <http://www.scuolabulgararoma.it/association/> [Last accessed: 15.08.2015].

⁹ See <http://www.scuolabulgararoma.it/association/> [Last accessed: 15.08.2015].

for New Year feasts¹⁰ and decorated Easter eggs, with distinct festive spirit and significance the secular feasts are celebrated – their celebration is characterized by certain **national-symbolical weight**, *based on the communication on various levels of a solid set of (national) values and messages, on the coverage and maintenance in touch of different parts of the society* [Gergova, 2014: 7]. The Day of National Revival Leaders (November 1)¹¹, the anniversary of the hanging of Vasil Levski (February 19), the Liberation Day (March 3) and especially the Day of Bulgarian Education and Culture and Slavonic Literature (May 24) thus can be determined. The text pays a special attention to the celebration of **May 24** by the two Bulgarian schools as **a particularly significant celebration for the Bulgarian community in the city** and as connected with some of the most emblematic **Bulgarian symbolic sites of memory** in Rome.

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As it was mentioned above, the festive and cultural calendar of Bulgarian schools in Rome is strongly connected with Bulgarian sites of memory in the city, which, due to school practices, are valorized and became significant locations, forwarding to the national past, heroes, symbols. The tomb of St. Cyril in the Basilica of “San Clemente” in the capital is among these symbolic toposes – its importance is manifested both on national and political level and in European and supranational context. For the unofficial Bulgarians visitors and pilgrims, whether tourists or representatives of the Bulgarian community in Italy, this is the place in Rome with the most prominent role for the formation and expression of national pride. The visit at the grave and the tribute to the saint by the official Bulgarian government delegation and the audience with the Pope have been central to the celebrations of May 24 for decades.¹² The other location

¹⁰ The topic of the Christmas celebration in 2014 in the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” was the Orthodox traditions in Bulgaria and especially those about Christmas Eve. For this purpose costumes for children were sewn, ‘survachki’ were made, ‘Koleduvane’ is presented, a ritual table is organized. In the Christmas concert the children from the piano class. The event was held in the hall of the Bulgarian Cultural Institute and in order to attract more parents from the Italian side it was announced as an Open doors day for the school.

¹¹ The first significant event for the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”, after its moving into the building of Bulgarian Cultural Institute, was the celebration of the Day of National Revival Leaders, which took place on November 2 instead of first due to the coincidence with the Sunday. The program included an open lesson, organized by the Club of the national cultural and spiritual identity. The emphasis was again on personalities, left traces in Rome or those whose work is marked Italian capital. The Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Vatican and Order of Malta prof. Kiril Topalov had also a lecture.

¹² The first celebration of May 24 in Rome is by initiative of L. Miletich in 1924. Two years later is founded the Bulgarian society “St. Clyment”, which organized a tribute to Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the eponymous basilica. In 1929 on May 24 memorial plaque at the grave of St. Cyril was placed. The Bulgarian celebrations in Rome continued after that and their participants were mostly Bulgarians catholic clerics and political emigrants in Italy, rarely guest from Bulgaria. Prof. Alexander Bozhkov played an important role in the development of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius celebration in Rome in the early 1970s; he initiated creating of a museum in the basilica and placing of the mosaic panel in the tomb. He initiated also placing a memorial plaque at the grave of Bishop Petar Parchevich in the basilica “Sant’Andrea delle Fratte”

included in the pilgrimage route is the basilica “Santa Maria Maggiore” and the memorial plate, which marks the place where in the 9th century Pope Adrian II received the Holy Apostles Cyril and Methodius and sanctified the first Slavic written texts. Accompanying events often are presentations of flowers to the monument of Ivan Vazov at the Thorvaldsen square and to the one of Captain Petko Voyvoda at the Gianicolo hill.

The program for the celebration of May 24 at the two Bulgarian schools in Rome is similar but in significantly less official form. Around the festival in 2015, which was the first for the school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi”, by the initiative of the Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad (ABSA) and Petya Tsaneva – founder and director of the First Bulgarian Sunday school “St. John of Rila” at the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Madrid and member of the Board of the ABSA, was organized a worship to the tomb of St. Cyril with the participation of students, parents and teachers from eighteen Bulgarian Sunday schools from eight European countries with the main idea to start uniting not only Bulgarians and their schools abroad but also all Bulgarians at the “holy for our nation places”.¹³ The host of the initiative was exactly the school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi”, which organizes a program with title “On the Bulgarian traces in Rome”. The visited places were the Captain Petko Voyvoda’s monument, Ivan Vazov’s one, the basilica “Sant’Andrea delle Fratte” with the memorial plate of Petar Parchevich, “Santa Maria Maggiore” and the memorial plate, the basilica “Santa Prassede” where Sts. Cyril and Methodius supposedly have lived. The culminating moments were the worship at the grave of St. Cyril and the audience with Pope Francis at the Piazza San Pietro, ended with the singing of the anthem of the Bulgarian education “Varvi, narode vazrodeni” (“March Ahead, O Revived People”) and a Bulgarian dance ‘horo’.¹⁴ Closeness to the grave of St. Cyril, the official celebrations on May 24 and the fact that the brothers from Thessaloniki were proclaimed by Pope John Paul II in 1980 for co-patrons of Europe, identify St. Cyril and Methodius as “nationally significant figures and emblems of national” for Bulgarian migrant community, whose feast represents “an expression of collectively shared and experienced belonging” [Dimitrova, 2014: 48].

The grave in “San Clemente” is the central consolidating site focusing also the celebration on February 14 – the Assumption of St. Cyril. That not so formally celebrated date in Bulgaria and by the Bulgarian institutions abroad takes an important place in the institutions’ event calendar in Rome. On this date in 2015 the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” organized pilgrimage to

and erecting a monument of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the yard of the Bulgarian embassy in Rome. Most of these ideas were implemented in relation with the upcoming delegation of high-level government, led by Todor Zhivkov, Lyudmila Zhivkova and Petar Mladenov in 1975 and their audience with Pope Paul VII. [Eldarov, 2014: 63-64].

¹³ The quotation is an excerpt from an interview with Petya Tsaneva, broadcasted on BNT2 on 5/24/2015. See: http://bnt.bg/part-of-show/balgarskite_uchilishta_po_sveta_se_sabirat_v_rim_za_24_maj [Last accessed: 17.08.2015].

¹⁴ See more **Georgieva 2015; Nenkova 2015**. Celebrations program see at <http://24mai.jimdo.com/npozpama/> [Last accessed: 17.08.2015].

the grave, which includes placing of flowers and a lecture by Paulina Tiholova about the architecture and wall decoration of the basilica as well as the images of the brothers from Thesaloniki. The Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria in Rome Marin Raykov, the Bulgarian priest Father Emil and other representatives of the Bulgarian institutions in the city also attended the event. The celebration continues on the next day at the school after the regular classes with a lesson and a lecture on the deed of Sts. Cyril and Methodius presented by the teacher Radka Tiholova and by Prof. Cyril Topalov. 1146th anniversary of the death of the saint is celebrated also in the other Bulgarian school, where a lecture by Krassimir Stanchev, a professor at the University of Rome “Roma Tre”, is organized.

Functioning not just in the Italian capital but in the capital of the Catholic world, close to Vatican city, the Pope and many cultural and historical sites, the schools in Rome have interesting and attractive surrounding for organizing and running various cultural events for their students and representatives of the Bulgarian community in the city as well as in collaboration with other schools and institutions in Bulgaria and abroad. Veneta Nenkova from the school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” monthly organizes city tours for parents, students and other interested people and the tour often includes the so called “Bulgarian places”. The same locations are also a part of the program of the visit of the guests from the school “European Bridge” at the Municipal Children Complex – Varna at school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” in March 2015. The general audience with Pope Francis at the Piazza San Pietro and the waving of the Bulgarian flag when the head of the Roman Catholic Church mentions them during the blessing was defined as the most exciting experience for the guests.¹⁵ It is impressing that “the meeting with the Pope” during the general audience is perceived as **an important and memorable moment for Bulgarians, loaded with certain symbolism not focused on the religiosity**. In this case, the Orthodoxy, although confessed by the majority of the representatives of the Bulgarian community and their guests, is **not interpreted as a marker of a national belonging and identity but this role is assumed by the national symbols**.

No less attention is also paid to other **sites, related to the Bulgarian cultural heritage, personalities from the Bulgarian history and national heroes**. The school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” every year organizes an event about such a “Bulgarian” site. In recent years the end of the school year’s celebration was held at the **Ivan Vazov’s monument**, often the students go to **Captain Petko Voyvoda’s** one as well. Trips to such places outside the city are taken, for instance the visit of the lake Como and the house where **Pencho Slaveykov** died, or the excursion to Assisi and a pilgrimage to the grave of **the Bulgarian Queen Giovanna of Savoy**.¹⁶ An initiative of the Bulgarian Sunday school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” is the planting of an olive tree by students in the yard

¹⁵ See more: <http://www.odk-varna.com/уко̀ла-ѐбponèцкy-мocm-б-пyм-у-бамyк/>; http://www.scuolabulgararoma.it/news_det/ponte-verso-leuropa-news [Last accessed: 20.08.2015].

¹⁶ See more: http://www.scuolabulgararoma.it/news_det/viaggio-ad-assisi-visita-della-tomba-di-giovanna-di-savoia-regina-bulgara-news [Last accessed: 21.08.2015].

of “Sant’Andrea delle Fratte” in relation to the 340th anniversary of the death of **Petar Parchevich**, who is buried in the crypt of the church.¹⁷

As it is obvious from the name of the school “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” two other Bulgarians, connected with Italy and Rome, are precisely the two brothers who had lived in the city until the second half of the 20th century. Several places in the city are connected with their names – **Asen Peykov** is the author of the statue of Leonardo da Vinci at the International Airport of the same name, of a bronze relief in the considered to be the oldest Rome’s cafe – “Greco”, his name was given to a small square next to the Coliseum and in 2007 another square has been named after **Iliya Peykov**. The name of the school is selected with the idea “to keep the memory of these two Bulgarian artists who have left a deep mark in the European and world culture alive”.¹⁸ The ambition of the school leaders does not stop there – it develops also the idea for restoring the sculpture studio of Assen Peykov at “Via Margutta”, which has been closed for years along with all his left works, and for its transformation into a Bulgarian cultural center or gallery for Bulgarian art. Mariola Georgieva says that the place is very suitable for this purpose since it is located in the artistic neighborhood near Piazza di Spagna, in a central and accessible location and it is not far like the house of Boris Hristov.

The Bulgarian schools outside Rome

The school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”, Nettuno-Cerveteri

Nettuno and Cerveteri are small towns at the Tyrrhenian Sea coast, close to Rome. According to unofficial information, Bulgarian migration in Nettuno is approximately 18 000 people and in Cerveteri – 2-3 000.¹⁹ As a regional Bulgarian migration the groups of Vidin and Montana could be distinguished – they oriented to the West after the closure of the industrial plants in Northwestern Bulgaria after 1989. The Sunday school in Nettuno-Cerveteri interacts with other Bulgarian institutions, due to the nearness of Rome the school started activity as an affiliate of the Roman School “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” and subsequently became independent, but new merging with the same school is forthcoming. Bulgarian priest Emil, who serves in Rome, every Saturday delivers liturgy at the local church in Nettuno. Situated near Nettuno, a Bulgarian food store and Bulgarian restaurant – centers of the Bulgarian community – encourage the promotion of the school activities and the attraction of Bulgarian children, respectively – the construction, maintenance, and preservation of Bulgarian cultural heritage.

The Bulgarian school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” in Nettuno is founded in 2011/2012 and started its activity with a mixed class of 10 children, but the number of the students increased 3.5 times by the end of the school year. Started in

¹⁷ See more: <http://scuolabulgara.jimdo.com> [Last accessed: 21.08.2015].

¹⁸ The quotation is form the school presentation on their website. See <http://scuolabulgara.jimdo.com/за-нас/братя-неїкову/> [Last Accessed: 18.08.2015].

¹⁹ According to our respondents in Nettuno.

the premises of the local church, the Bulgarian school in Nettuno grew and in the next year – 2012/13 – after negotiations the city municipality provided it with the building of a social center for elderly people without paying rent. In this way the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” acquired the ability to have spaces that are adapted for classrooms as well as a garden, basketball court, offices. During the 2012/13 school year a new affiliate was found in Cerveteri, where is formed a mixed class with 11 students. The classes were held in the building of the local church with donations from the parents. During the school year 2014/15 the total number of students enrolled in Nettuno and Cerveteri was 84. The pedagogical team consists of a school leader, six teachers and a head of extracurricular activities. The school educates children in the preparatory group and all grades of primary education. It works on the project “Bulgaria in our hearts”, funded by the “Native language and culture abroad” program by MES and enjoys the support of the municipal authorities in Nettuno in organizing events. The education takes place on Saturday at Cerveteri and on Sunday in Nettuno. At the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” national and traditional holidays are celebrated: Christmas, ‘Baba Marta’ (March 1), March 3, Easter, May 24. ‘Koleduvane’, ‘Iazaruvane’, workshops for ‘martenitsi’ and painted eggs are organized. In the school yard a fruit tree is adorned with ‘martenitsi’ by the children.

Learning of the Bulgarian language as a consolidation marker and an element of the cultural heritage is emphasized in the school. Due to the different family strategies, some students do not use Bulgarian language at home which reflects upon the level of its understanding and speaking. In our conversation the teachers said that children of the whole school know and sing the national anthem of Bulgaria.

The festive calendar of the school “Sts. Cyril and Methodius” in Nettuno is rich. Opening and the closure of the school year, March 3, May 24, as well as the feasts of the traditional calendar were celebrated. On March 3, a march from the school building to the central part of the city was organized and the children paraded in traditional Bulgarian costumes, waving the Bulgarian flag. For May 24 2015 the students visited the church “San Clemente” in Rome to place flowers on the grave of St. Cyril and recited poems dedicated to the first teachers Sts. Cyril and Methodius. The event is an element of already mentioned major initiative of the director of the First Bulgarian School in Madrid Petya Tsaneva – students from different schools in Europe to gather in Rome, visit “San Clemente”, meet the Pope and wave Bulgarian flags on the Piazza San Pietro. The teachers train the children to distinguish traditional and national feasts: the family holidays²⁰, insofar include rituals performed in a family setting are defined as a traditional. In the school the traditional holidays are celebrated with organized workshops for ‘martenitsa’, wreaths of ‘Iazarki’, ‘survachki’, decorating eggs. An indicator of the value of tradition is the fact that Cornel wood sticks for ‘survachki’ are shipped from Bulgaria. School celebrations are accompanied

²⁰ Said by Iveta Stefanovska, teacher in “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”, Nettuno-Cerveteri (Iveta Stefanovska, 6.04.2015, Nettuno, recorded by M. Borisova, Y. Gergova, K. Mihaylova).

by culinary feasts, including dishes considered to be Bulgarian: stuffed peppers, stuffed vine or cabbage leaves – ‘sarmi’, meatballs, popcorn, breads. In 2014 the teaching staff organized production and donation of ‘martenitsi’ in the center of Nettuno, promoting it in the host society as a Bulgarian tradition.

The school’s festive calendar is connected also to the Bulgarian sites in Italy. Besides the basilica “San Clemente” with St. Cyril’s grave, the monument of Ivan Vazov in Rome is also a site related to Bulgaria, where students from the school (and their parents) in 2014 celebrated June 2, reciting Botev works. A joint event for teachers, parents, students is the organized picnic on the bank of Lake Como with children’s games – dodgeball, ribbing, ‘dama’. It includes also a visit to the house where Pencho Slaveykov has died.

The extracurricular activities are focused on the folklore as an element of the cultural heritage: at the school the folk dance group “Zdravetz” operates and it is led by Natalia Nikolova. With traditional costumes, obtained, thanks to the program “Native language and culture abroad” by MES, children do celebrations ‘lazaruvane’ and ‘koleduvane’ and present folk dances at the school.

The school “Peyo Yavorov”, Milano

Milan is the focus point of a new migration: Bulgarian students and a regional Bulgarian migration. A distinguished group of migrants is the one from Dupnitsa.²¹ Bulgarian church “St. Ambrose of Milan” operates in the city and in 2014 the Bulgarian General Consulate resumed its activity. In 2013 the Association of Bulgarian culture in Milano is established with activities in two directions: the folklore dance group “Nashentsi” (since 2013) and the school “Peyo Yavorov” (since 2014). There is also a football team “Marek”, a bar-restaurant, a food store. The Bulgarian institutions in Milano are in dynamic interaction.

The school “Peyo Yavorov” launched classes in January 2014 with eight children, but in April 2015 involved 25 children with Bulgarian origin, divided into three classes according to the level of knowledge of the Bulgarian language. The school is still operating without a license from MES, housed in an office room. It has a library, currently unusable due to lack of space. The disciplines which are taught are Bulgarian language and literature, the classes are held on Sunday. The directions of transmission, use, promotion of the cultural heritage in the school “Peyo Yavorov” are also related to **the Bulgarian language, festive calendar, folklore and Bulgarian sites**. The teaching is carried out with textbooks for Bulgarian children abroad. The Bulgarian language learning is a priority, especially according to the fact that most of the children were born in Italy and the Bulgarian language is their second one. The director Gergana Hristova said that the school is mostly an institution of parents who often spend their only day off to bring their children to the Bulgarian school. Some of the children travel to it from neighboring cities.

Like the calendar of the other Bulgarian schools, this one in Milan is rich of national and traditional celebrations and events. Organized on 3rd March

²¹ The city of Milano with its nearby towns is often called by the Bulgarian migrants in Italy “the new Dupnitsa”. See [Zahova, 2014: 117].

2015 the school concert includes a recital, songs, and performances of the folk group “Nashentsi”. The school “Peyo Yavorov” takes part in collaborative celebrations with other Bulgarian institutions in Milan. The concert for the opening of the Bulgarian consulate in December 2014, whose guest is the Bishop for Central and Western Europe Anthony, includes “Galena Bogdanka”, a fairy tale scene presented by the students, Christmas songs, competition and auction for ‘survachki’. As a representative of the Association of the Bulgarian culture in Milan, Gergana Hristova is involved in the popularization of the Bulgarian tradition to give ‘martenitsi’ for March 1st. which takes place in the Milan’s center. The school is also included in the celebrations organized on May 24 in Rome. The folklore is also among hypostases of the Bulgarian cultural heritage: school children dance in the folk group “Nashentsi”. Visits of important Italian and Bulgarian cultural heritage places are organized for the students – the Museum “La Scala” and Lake Como as the place where Pencho Slaveykov died. Thus, through the school activities the intercultural relationships are encouraged, the students get accustomed to understand and appreciate the European cultural achievements.

The cultural heritage on which the activities of the Bulgarian schools are focused in Nettuno-Cerveteri and Milano is the learning of **the Bulgarian language**. As a prerequisite for cultural continuity, the festive calendar unites the Bulgarian community in the respective settlement, and often **the school is** in the role of **initiator**. The folk culture also functions as a source of identity. The Bulgarian sites, places of worship for mentioned Sunday schools in Italy, have overlapped and the most remarkable point of worship is the basilica “San Clemente” with the grave of St. Cyril. As translators of cultural heritage, the Bulgarian schools abroad operate also as powerful social and communicative centers.

* * *

The Bulgarian schools in Italy come together with the rest of the Bulgarian institutions in formal and informal interactions. Where is possible there are organized preschool groups to facilitate the process of early learning of the Bulgarian language. Through the activities in the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Italy, the children born in Bulgaria, as well as those who are second generation migrants, acquire knowledge of the Bulgarian history, geography, folklore, literature in Bulgarian language, develop skills, are trained in team work, create friendly ambience. By the mastering of the Bulgarian language and knowledge of the country of origin, the children build skills over the acquired ones in the Italian schools, increase their existence in the host society, and build self-confidence of European citizens.

The cultural heritage is seen as an enlightening factor, as well as a tool for building and maintaining national identity. The Bulgarian schools in Italy follow the educational programs of MES with the textbooks for children abroad specific for elementary level; respectively follow the state policy on the cultural heritage in the educational system. Perceived as Bulgarian cultural heritage, it is assimilated, involved in use, popularized by the pledged in the curriculum, through extracurricular activities (mainly workshops for **folk skills and danc-**

ing), by means of **festive calendar**, culinary code, as well as emblems of the Bulgarian as **Bulgarian language, anthem, flag**.

Due to the school practices, the children are taught to recognize and venerate the Bulgarian sites of memory, concentrated mainly in Rome, which are the basilica “San Clemente” associated with Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the memorial plaques in the churches “Santa Maria Maggiore” and “Santa Prassede”, as well as the memorials of Ivan Vazov and Captain Petko Voyvoda, the studio of Asen Peykov and all toposes connected to him and his brother Iliya Peykov, and some places outside the capital like the house where Pencho Slaveykov died by the Lake Como, the grave of Queen Giovanna in Assisi, even the town Celle di Bulgheria and the mountain Bulgheria in Southern Italy. The significance of these Bulgarian sites of memory is consequence of their inclusion as ritual sites in the festive and event calendar of the schools. However it is important to note that they are perceived rather as **signifying markers** more for the **Bulgarian**, while the person behind them remains in the background. This is especially noticeably observed in the monuments of Ivan Vazov and Captain Petko Voyvoda in Rome and the house of Pencho Slaveykov at the Lake Como, which often take the role of Bulgarian sites in a number of celebrations but rarely in their existence as site of memory for the person. As the most valuable Bulgarian place can be distinguished the grave of St. Cyril in the basilica “San Clemente”, which actively is included in the festive calendar of the schools and the community in general, and May 24th respectively – as the most symbolic and significant event and their significance is largely reaffirmed by the visit of the state delegations. In this sense the policies of valorization of the sites of memory and their inclusion in the Bulgarian cultural heritage strongly correspond with the national traditions and contexts. And although in this case the person of St. Cyril (or the persons with regard to the Day of the Saint Brothers) is not completely in the background, here the essential function of the celebration as *feast-message*, connected with the Bulgarian, with *the historicity and the great work, inscribed in the world civilization history* is highlighted as well [Gergova, 2014: 13].

The construction, the maintenance and the valorization of the symbolic toposes in emigration, associated with events and personalities significant for group identification, and preserving the memory of them, are part of the school practices for **consolidating the migrant community on the basis of past and history**. It can't be claimed that the schools implement the function of the largest consolidating institute for the Bulgarian community abroad, but definitely are emerged as a major one. Their role in the popularization and transmission of the Bulgarian cultural heritage as a factor in the building of national identity and cultural belonging of the future generations is extremely important.

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