During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Balkan leaders mobilized a notion of civilization to solicit financial, diplomatic, and even military support from West European, particularly French, patrons. “Civilization-speak” functioned as the crux of a discursive strategy meant to underline Orthodox Christians’ place in a European community. As often as Balkan notables deployed “civilization-speak” in written works and speeches intended for Francophone audiences, they seldom used it in texts meant for one another. Only in the late 1830s and early 1840s did the concept of civilization begin to gain currency in regional discourses. When Balkan writers and politicians inserted “civilization-speak” into this context, however, it was not to appeal to a universal, European ethos. Rather they employed it to articulate nascent nationalist agendas. Focusing on educational discourses, this paper traces out how Balkan leaders used “civilization-speak” when addressing different audiences over the course of the period.

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