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## **The Csángó Minority Culture in Moldavia**

Preliminary draft report

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The term “Csángó” (Ceangai in Romanian) is used to identify a non-homogeneous group of Roman Catholic people of Hungarian origin living in Moldavia. This ethnic group is a relic from the Middle Ages that has survived in the melting pot of Moldavia, in the eastern part of Romania. The Csángó is archaic Hungarian, in some respects centuries behind our times, with a distinct ethnicity, linguistic peculiarities, ancient traditions, and a great diversity of folk art and culture.

2. In our rapidly changing world the Csángós are helplessly exposed to the very strong influences of their environment and in particular the village priest and the Romanian local authorities. By now they have reached a late stage of assimilation. What can be done to save this unique Central European heritage, to strengthen this ethnic group and its individuals in their identity?

## **II. WHO ARE THE CSÁNGÓS**

3. The Csángós are one of the most enigmatic minorities in Europe. There is no consensus on who were their ancestors, where they came from, when they settled in Moldavia or how many they are today. Even the origin of the word “csángó” is controversial. The only undisputed feature about the Csángós is their strong Roman Catholic faith. They live in western Moldavia, near the eastern slopes of the Carpathians, in villages around the cities of Bacau (southern group) and Roman (northern group), along the rivers Siret, Bistrita, Trotus and Tuzlau, where they preserve traditional European methods of agriculture, body of beliefs, and mythology, as well as the most archaic dialect of the Hungarian language.

4. Their number ranges, depending on the definition, from as many as 260 000 (which corresponds roughly to the Catholic population in the area), even if more than two thirds of them cannot speak the language, to as few as a couple of tens of thousands (based on the fact that in the last official census only less than 3000 persons declared themselves as Csángós).

5. The Csángós are one of the best examples of the beneficial effects of European cultural diversity. The group has for centuries been living more or less isolated from other areas where Hungarian is spoken, in an area with a Romanian majority. This resulted in the development of a pocket with an individual, most specific culture, interacting with elements of Romanian culture. This is perhaps best illustrated by the folk songs and ballads, which are living and developing even today. They show Hungarian as well as Romanian elements. It is well known that many of the European ballads cross the political and ethnic frontiers. One of the last fortresses of this common European ballad-culture is that of the Csángós the study, fostering and conservation of which is therefore a very important task both for Hungary and Romania, as well as for Europe.

6. The lifestyle of this ethnic group still shows in many respects the marks of the Middle Ages. Its folklore and ornamental art flourish even today, achieving new products. The same is true for the folk-tradition, the body of beliefs and mythology.

7. This culture is today on the verge of extinction. Out of the maximum figure of 260 000 Csángós only 60 000 – 70 000 speak the Csángó dialect. Assistance on the European level is needed to save their culture.

8. For centuries, the self-identity of the Csángós was based on the Roman Catholic religion and the Hungarian language spoken in the family. This, as well as their archaic life-style and world-view, may explain their very strong ties to the Catholic religion. It is not unusual that the Csángó, to the question “What nationality are you?” would answer: “I am a Catholic”. In spite of this, there appear to be influences from the surrounding Romanians even in the practice of religion. Thus, for example, the Catholics of Moldavia follow their dead in an open coffin to the grave – an Orthodox tradition.

9. Their religious life has preserved many elements of the Middle Ages. Even elements of pagan rites may be discerned, such as traces of the sun-cult. Their body of beliefs and superstitions is extremely rich, with many archaic features.

10. The ethnic conscience of the Csángós is much weaker than that of other Hungarian-speaking ethnic groups. This may have several causes. It may reflect the weakly developed concept of nation among the settlers of the Middle Ages or the fact that their settlements are geographically dispersed, but an important factor has been the self-conscious, policy of assimilation practised over the centuries by the surrounding society and in particular the Catholic Church.

11. To my knowledge the Csángós or their associations do not express any claim for political autonomy or for the status of an ethnic minority. On the contrary they consider themselves Romanian citizens and are loyal to their country. The fact that many speak a Hungarian dialect does not mean that they feel to be “Hungarians”. Those who leave Moldavia and settle on the other side of the Carpathians or in Hungary do so more for economic than for nationalistic reasons.

### **III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

12. Historical, linguistic, as well as ethnographical research and the study of place names have resulted in different interpretations as to the origin of the Csángós. Some researchers believe that they descend from a group of Hungarians who split from the main group before it arrived in Hungary and others suggest that they descend from the Cumans, the Pechenegs or other tribes. Some Romanian authors even claim that the Csángós are in fact “magyarised” (or “szeklerised”) Romanians from Transylvania. It is however generally accepted by serious scholars that they have a Hungarian origin and that they arrived in Moldavia from the west. The first groups may have settled there as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Hungarian king, Béla IV, christianised the people of Cumania, or as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century during the reigns of Stephen the Great or Sigismund. It is also accepted that the first waves of the Csángós were settled east of the Carpathian Mountains, along the strategically important mountain passes, in order to control and defend Hungary from eastern intruders. They were later joined by other groups of Hungarians from the other side of the Carpathians, the Szeklers, who either mixed with them or settled in different villages.

13. The Csángós held bishoprics and many of them held important posts in the state apparatus of the Moldavian voivodship. After the Hungarian defeat in Mohacs in 1526, the situation started to change, the Hungarian court was too far away and the Csángós were left alone. Their intelligentsia died out and their status as privileged free peasants was abolished. After the Hungarian Franciscan Order ceased being active all institutionalised forms of Hungarian culture came to an end in Moldavia. Contacts with the Szeklers in Transylvania continued, however sporadic, and some families continued to cross the Carpathian Mountains to settle in Moldavia until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### IV. THE LANGUAGE OF THE CSÁNGÓS

14. Whatever can be argued about the language of the Csángós there is no doubt that this is a form of Hungarian. This ethnic group has been isolated from the Hungarian cultural development. The Hungarian language went through a renewal in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this did not affect the language of the Csángós. Their oldest sub-dialect, northern Csángó, preserves numerous elements of the Hungarian language of the late middle Ages. It also contains new elements, specific to this language area. The geographical dispersion of the Csángó settlements and their relative isolation contributed for a non-homogeneous language although experience shows that the different dialects are mutually intelligible and that those Csángós that still speak their language understand modern Hungarian. The wide proliferation of television aerials for TV Duna, a Hungarian language channel, in Csángó villages is an indication that they understand Hungarian.

15. The Csángó dialects offer unusual possibilities for linguistic research regarding the conserving effects of isolation and at the same time, the development of innovations under such circumstances. They also provide a series of informative examples of mutual influence between two languages, belonging to entirely different language families. The Moldavian dialect of the Finno-Ugrian language was enriched by numerous lexical elements of the Indo-European Romanian language. Similarly, there are many Hungarian loanwords in the Romanian dialect of Moldavia, often pertaining to agriculture, handicraft and state administration.

**16. Today in Moldavia, the language of the school and the Church is exclusively Romanian. Correspondingly, almost all Csángós are illiterate as regards the writing of their mother tongue. The Hungarian language survived for centuries as the language of the family and the village community. The epic culture – of tales and legends – still rich among the aged people and spread by oral tradition, contributed significantly to the preservation of the language.**

**17. At present, however, the Csángó dialects face extinction and may be wiped out within one or two generations. The disruption of the village community, which in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the turn of the century, is now taking place in the villages of the Csángós. The authority of the Romanian language, learned in school, is much higher among young people than that of the impoverished Hungarian, used in the family. Romanian is in a monopoly situation ensured by the official culture and mass media so that young people no longer use the family language in communicating with each other.**

**18. Without powerful, official support for the Csángó mother tongue, a European legacy is in risk of disappearing, a legacy, which has preserved the cultural development, the elements of the reciprocal influence and of the ethnic symbiosis between Hungarians and Romanians.**

## **V. FOLKLORE AND POPULAR ORNAMENTAL ART**

19. The majority of Csángós are peasants. This fact, along with the strong persistence in the tradition of isolated cultures explains the highly traditional forms of their national costume (embroidery and weaving) and of their ceramics. In recent years, however, the replacement of traditional costumes by factory products is proceeding on a large scale.

20. The folk songs and ballads of the Csángós comprise a rich source of the most archaic strata of Hungarian folk music. Their instrumental music as well as their rich system of dance show many elements shared with those of the neighbouring Romanian villages. The couple's dance and the individual male dance that spread during the Renaissance from Western Europe towards the East did not cross the East Carpathian Mountains. At the same time as the most developed and sophisticated forms of folk dance were created in the Romanian and Hungarian villages of Transylvania east and south of the Carpathians the medieval ring dance and circle dance reached perfection. The Csángós preserve the special varieties of the folk dance of the neighbouring Romanians. There are villages in which one may find more than thirty different folk dances.

21. Among their musical instruments there are such ancient pieces as the bagpipe, lute, trump and the peasant flute with six holes, but they also use the violin, piano accordion and drum. In some villages Balkan-type bagpipes are used, in other villages an ancient type of Hungarian bagpipes to be found only in Moldavia.

22. The use of Hungarian vocal folk music, as the tradition of the folk costumes, is associated with poverty. Until recent times, folk songs and ballads of the Moldavian Csángós was the most living dialect of Hungarian folk music. It also preserved some archaic elements of the Romanian folk songs and ballads. The folklore was alive and flourishing, it was developing. There existed a specific repertoire of folk songs for weddings and other significant events, which were not performed on other occasions. New ballads were created to commemorate great events. At present, however, folklore is also on the decline.

## **VI. THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT**

23. The strong Roman Catholic faith of the Csángós has already been mentioned. It is not by chance that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest, the Inspector for religious education and representative of the Bishop of Iasi (the capital of Moldavia) and the great majority of the catholic priests in Moldavia are all of Csángó origin.

24. Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were two Hungarian episcopates in Moldavia. Their function was gradually taken over by a new episcopate in Bacau, while a Franciscan monastery was founded there as an affiliate of the Franciscan province of Transylvania. Due to wars and poverty in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries many Catholic communities in Moldavia lost their priests, some of who were later replaced by Italian monks. In 1884 the episcopate of Bacau was dissolved and an archbishopric was created in Bucharest and a bishopric in Iasi. In 1895 a law prohibited the use of bilingual catechism.

25. Today the Csángós seek the possibility to sing their ancient religious hymns (in their Hungarian dialect) in the church, as they used to until the 1950s, as well as for mass in Hungarian, which they have never enjoyed. The representatives of the Catholic Church, both in Iasi and in Bucharest, while agreeing on the need to preserve the “Csángó language”, dismiss these requests as having been “invented” by “non religious people” under the influence of Hungarian nationalistic propaganda. The main argument for the use of Romanian in church services is the fact that all the 260 000 Catholics of Moldavia understand it and not all understand the Csángó dialect or Hungarian. On the other hand the bishopric of Iasi set up a committee, chaired by Professor Despinescu, to study the possibility of making the Csángó dialect into a written language and to organise a referendum among the catholic population to find out where there is a demand for religious services in Csángó.

26. There seems to be no justification however for the fact that last year the Bishopric of Iasi forbade a Hungarian-speaking priest (from Miercurea Ciuc) to hold a mass in Hungarian in the church of a Moldavian village inhabited by Csángós, at their request. The mass in question was held in a sort of pub and was followed by almost the entire population of the village.

## VII. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

**27. Romanian education legislation provides that parents can choose the language of education for their children (art 180 of the 1995 Education law). There are three possibilities: education in Romanian; education in the mother tongue with history and geography in Romanian; and education in Romanian with the mother tongue as an optional subject (the latter is the one chosen by most Csángó parents). The Csángós (and their Associations) ask for their right to education in their mother tongue to be respected. It should be noted that this is much less than what other Hungarians get in Romania, be it in the departments of Harghita and Covasna, where they are the majority, or in other regions of Transylvania.**

**28. The local authorities in Bacau state that they are willing to observe European standards and to implement their own law. They claim however that the Csángó dialect (which does not exist in written form) is not a language. They claim also that it is not by introducing “literary Hungarian” that they will help the Csángós who, so they say, do not even understand it. They also claim that they do not have the financial means to provide Hungarian and that anyway the children whose parents had asked for Hungarian were among the lowest performers and would not be able to take up another subject.**

**29. Csángó being a non-written Hungarian dialect, in the same way that Alsatian or Bavarian are German dialects, it is obvious that education cannot use that dialect. The study of “literary Hungarian” will certainly not harm or replace the Csángó dialect in the same way that the study of “Hoch Deutsch” does not harm or replace the various German dialects. According to the Romanian Education Law it is for the parents to decide whether they wish their children to study Hungarian and for the school authorities to provide for it if there is sufficient demand.**

**30. Some Csángó parents have been asking for Hungarian classes for their children since 1977 and it is beyond any doubt that there is a demand for Hungarian as a subject in some villages inhabited by the Csángós. The fact that some families send their children to Hungarian speaking schools in Transylvania illustrates this. I visited one of such schools in the village of Guimes and observed that roughly one third of the (around 100) pupils were from Moldavia. Despite a clear provision in the Romanian law and the requests from parents in the last four or five years, there is no such subject in any of the schools concerned. Some parents who had asked for Hungarian classes for their children complained of pressure from the School Director and/or the priest.**

**31. It would appear that there is a lack of will (at local level) and incapacity (at central level) from the Romanian authorities to implement their own education law.**

## **VII. PRACTICAL PROPOSALS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE CSÁNGÓ CULTURE**

32. In order to encourage the Csángós to want actively to preserve those singular and, even on European terms, important cultural values, which they possess, the present situation must be changed. These values should not be associated with poverty or isolation and they should not be despised. This can only be achieved by strengthening this population culturally and economically.

- i. Parents living in Csángó settlements should be informed of the Romanian Law on Education and instructions should be issued on how to apply for its provisions concerning languages;
- ii. The possibility of education in the mother tongue should be ensured in accordance with the Romanian Constitution. In the meantime teachers working on a voluntary basis in the villages teaching the Csángó language should be paid;
- iii. There should be an option for Roman Catholic services in Csángó language in the churches in the Csángó villages;
- iv. Csángó associations should be officially recognised and included in the list of the Council for National Minorities. Particular attention should be paid to the correct registration of the Csángó minority at the next official census;

- v. Access to modern mass-media facilities should be promoted. Financial support should be given to Csángó associations to enable the issuing of a monthly publication and the functioning of a local radio station;
- vi. Scholarships should be given with the aim of developing an intelligentsia among the Csángó people and securing work opportunities in the Csángó area;
- vii. A local institute should be set up for the promotion of Csángó culture with a view to raising awareness of and respect for minorities;
- viii. An information campaign should be launched in Romania concerning the value of the Csángó culture and the advantages of peaceful co-operation between the majority and the minorities;
- ix. An international committee of experts should be established to study the Csángós;
- x. The establishment of small and medium enterprises should be encouraged in Csángó villages.

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## **REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF CSANGOS IN MOLDAVIA**

### **THE PROBLEM OF THE CSANGO HUNGARIANS**

## **APADOR-CH, THE PRO EUROPE LEAGUE**

**January 2002**

### **1. Rationale for the investigation**

Between December 20-th and 22-nd 2001, a team of the APADOR-CH and of the PRO EUROPE League carried out an investigation in the Bacau region to clarify the recent developments in the situation of the Csangos. The visit followed complaints received at the two organizations from the Association of Csango Hungarians in Moldavia (branch Pustiana) about the fact that their requirements for access to education in the mother tongue have not been met, about the obstruction of the association' s activities on the territory of county Bacau and about harassment of its members by representatives of the local authorities.

During the investigation the representatives of APADOR-CH and of the PRO EUROPE League contacted the leadership of the Association of Csango Hungarians in Moldavia, people belonging to the group of Hungarian Csangos in the villages of Cleja and Pustiana, the prefect of County Bacau, Mr. Radu Catalin Mardare, as well as other observers of the situation in the area.

Previously, in 1997, APADOR-CH had made a first investigation in the villages of Cleja, Pustiana, and Lespezi. The main observations in the report made in 1997 were the following:

- a. Part of the Csangos declare themselves of Romanian origin and speak the Romanian language on a daily basis. Another part of them declare themselves of Hungarian origin , using daily their Csango language/dialect (an archaic Hungarian language which in its turn has several dialects, according to the place where it is spoken). In this second category there are also persons who, speaking the same archaic Hungarian language, point to their Csango origin, understanding by

this that there is a difference from the Hungarians, even in only some aspects (songs, dances, traditions).

- b. The priest and the police officer are the main authorities for the Csangos. They put constant pressure on the Csangos who have identified themselves as of Hungarian origin to determine them to give up this self-identification.
- c. Several requests have been submitted in time to the Roman-Catholic Bishopric of Iasi or the Roman-Catholic Deanship of Bacau to be secured a minimum of religious service in the mother tongue. This has been denied to them, although in the period 1947-1959 the Hungarian Csangos currently used their mother tongue in their religious service.
- d. More inhabitants required that their children be given the possibility to learn literary Hungarian language, similarly with their learning of foreign languages - two classes a week. The requests to the School Inspectorate of County Bacau were declined. Consequently, some children were sent to study the Hungarian language in counties in Transylvania, primarily Harghita. Classes of studying the Hungarian language privately were also organized. The result of such initiatives was the treat of authorities by authorities and Roman-Catholic priests.
- e. The local authorities' hostility to Csangos who do not consider themselves Romanians was manifest and continued the policy of the communist regime, very elaborated in this respect.
- f. The census of 1992 was manipulated, the number of Csangos officially registered being much below the number of those who identified themselves as such.

The recent complaints from the Association of Csango Hungarians of Moldavia (ACHM), the Pustiana branch, that reached APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League, included harassment and intimidation of their members, violation of individual rights and the rights of the national minorities in the case of some persons and groups that identify themselves as Csango Hungarians, as well as rejection of the request put up by over 200 citizens to the the Roman-Catholic Bishopric of Iasi on April 5-th 2001, "to perform the service also in the Hungarian language in the church of Pustiana".

Since the investigation of APADOR-CH of 1997, the demands of the members of the community of Csango Hungarians to be ensured studying of their mother tongue have been analyzed also by the central authorities. Thus, a government team consisting of Messrs. Attila Barna Santha, advisor to Secretary of State of the Ministry of National Education, Stanciu Traian, inspector in the Control Body of MNE, Constantin Sergiu, expert in the Legislation Division of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities, Bunghez Marian, general deputy school inspector at County School Inspectorate Bacau, Năstase Anghel, school inspector, Stoica Liviu, director at the Bacau Prefecture carried out an investigation in the area and drafted a report (September 14-th-15-th 2000) , that had no follow-up till this day.

On August 9-th 2000, the US Ambassador to Bucharest, James Rosapepe paid a visit to Cleja.

It is worth mentioning that the authorities' failure to solve the claims of the Csango Hungarians, as well as the refusal of the local Roman-Catholic church to perform the service in the mother tongue also drew the attention of the Council of Europe which signaled the danger of the disappearance of this ethnic minority community.

The report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council, drawn up by the Finnish Liberal parliamentarian Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa, former minister of culture, has led to adoption of Recommendation 1521/2001, including a wide package of concrete proposals meant to prevent the fading away of this minority group " of an exceptional value for Europe". Up to the date of our visit to the region, the central and local authorities had not undertaken any of the measures recommended by the Council of Europe. More than that, the persons in the official circles met by the authors of the report seemed to ignore the content of this recommendation.

### **1. The pressure on the Csangos that have assumed a different identity than the Romanian one**

The discussions of the authors of the report with the representatives of the leadership of the Association of Csango Hungarians of Moldavia (ACHM) and with persons belonging to this community have shown an increase in the pressure on the Csangos that have assumed an identity that is different from the Romanian one, that is, the Hungarian identity. As of 1996 several parents of Cleja and other villages of county Bacău have filed numerous applications for the optional introduction of the study of the Hungarian language in the local public schools. Under Order of the Ministry of National Education nr. 3113/31 January 2000 and the „Methodology for the application of the instructions on the study of the mother tongue by the pupils belonging to the national minorities that attend Romanian schools" nr. 30257 / 06.04.2000 the prerequisites necessary for starting this type of education had been provided.

In spite of the Report of the Inter-ministerial Commission which found, on the occasion of the visit to County Bacău, on September 14-th to 15-th 2000, that in the villages of Pustiana and Cleja a group of study of the Hungarian mother tongue has to be set up, this measure continued to be delayed by the County Bacău School Inspectorate. In parallel, pressure on the signatory parents, doubled by a campaign of intimidation masterminded through the local authorities by the representatives of the Interior Ministry and the written media have determined part of the parents to withdraw their applications for the organization of optional education in the Hungarian mother tongue.

Thus, the parents' requests have yielded no results, just as the memorandums or reports submitted along the years to the Ministry of National Education and the Department for the Protection of National Minorities or the assessments of various bodies of the civil society.

In a last attempt of partnership with the Bacău School Inspectorate, on 09.02.2001 ACHM made a request to Bacău County School Inspectorate, on behalf of 77 parents of village Pustiana, to be approved the use, in the afternoon, when the classrooms are free, of a classroom in the Secondary School of Pustiana for their children to learn the Hungarian language. They also committed themselves to take care and adequately equip that classroom.

On 05.03. 2001, the mayor of commune Pîrjol (to which village Pustiana belongs) gives a no answer to the parents' request for optional classes of Hungarian language to be held in the Pustiana School also promising that subsequently the possibility would be discussed of giving a space for this at the Pustiana House of Culture, which actually happened.

Following this refusal, as of September 2001, ACHM launched a program-course of initiation and study of the Hungarian language in private. Thus, ACHM undertook the task of making up

for the refusal of the public institutions to offer tuition in the mother tongue by organizing, in seven villages, groups (called circles) of teaching of the Hungarian language by a number of 12 specialized teachers. In commune Cleja, for instance, these circles, that follow the school curriculum, in three private spaces adequately equipped, are attended by about a hundred children, which proves the community's interest and the parents' confidence in the activities carried out by ACHM.

In the new context, authorities have started a wide scope action of harassment, intimidation and reprisals against ACHM as well as against the parents, children and owners of the private spaces where the courses of Hungarian language were held. Thus, on 09.11.2001 intimation signed by three school principals in the commune and the president of the parents' council of Cleja was registered at the Bacau County School Inspectorate showing that ACHM set up in the commune a parallel system of education in the Hungarian language.

In response, on 14.11.2001 a commission set up of the deputy school inspector, two specialty inspectors, joined by the mayor and deputy mayor, the principals of three schools in the commune, as well as the local representative of the Police went to Cleja. The commission, which also included representatives of the Bacau written media known for their hostile attitude towards the claims of the Csango Hungarians summoned to the city hall the landladies of the houses where courses of Hungarian language are held, putting them, for more than two hours, to a humiliating investigation, during which the two women were accused of violation of the state law, being threatened with search, fine and being told several times that if they wanted to learn the Hungarian language, they should immigrate to Hungary.

This incident did not take place without the knowledge of the Bacau Prefecture, because on 16.11.2001 the Prefect's head of office went to commune Cleja, he summoned to the City Hall the coordinator of the programs for Hungarian language study of ACHM then inspected the private spaces where the courses are held. As a matter of fact, an order of the Bacau Prefecture nr. 7862/09.11.2001 was at the basis of the visit to Cleja of a representative of the Public Sanitation Inspectorate (Sanepid) of Bacau who, following the control of three of the spaces where the courses of Hungarian language were held, disposes of on the spot, without any notification, on the basis of minutes nr. 3452, 3453, 3454, the suspension of the activity held there. Worth mentioning is that in an official address, in response to the request of daily Kronika (Cronica) of Cluj, the Health Ministry mentioned that 223 schools operate in County Bacau without the approval of Sanepid (Public Sanitation Inspectorate).

Actually very serious are the psychological pressure and the humiliation to which the children who dare take part in the optional circles of Hungarian language organized by ACHM are subject to. This is a systematic practice of some teachers to scold the children before the colleagues, anathematizing the Hungarian language and making threats to the pupils. In some cases they went so far as to give them a lower mark for conduct.

The authorities hostile to the activity carried out by ACHM do not hesitate, as it was seen, to involve the press in the strategy of harassment of the parents who claim optional education in the Hungarian language. A real press campaign accompanies systematically the measures undertaken by the Prefecture or the County School Inspectorate. The dailies « Monitorul » and « Deșteptarea » sow suspicion about exercising the right to tuition in the Hungarian language, by

apocalyptic headlines: « Irredentist attacks under the shelter of school », « The Hungarian language is taught with beating », « The Hungarian phantom haunts at Pustiana, too ». This press does not give any space of expression to the incriminated persons or associations or to present their opinions.

The discussion with the Prefect of County Bacau showed that the prefect, although knowledgeable of the situation, considered legitimate the conduct of the local authorities, of the County School Inspectorate or the Police. The Prefect, when analyzing the whole situation, set out from the axiome of the Romanian origin of the Csangos and hence draws the conclusion, in complete hisharmony with the law, that the requests for learning of the Hungarian language are not legitimate. Likewise, the Prefect considers that the public pressure and the stand of the Roman-Catholic church is a serious obstacle in the protection, by his institution, of the rights of a restricted number of people that identified their origin as Hungarian and require optional education in the mother tongue. The Prefect rejected the upholding that ACHM or its members would have been harassed, showing his readiness to listen to their discontents, if the latter ask for a hearing.

### **3. A premeditated process of assimilation of the Csangos of Hungarian language**

Statistics and the opinions expressed by representatives of the clergy or people belonging to the community of Csangos indicate that out of a number of about 240,000 Roman-Catholics of Moldavia only a small percentage call themselves of a Hungarian origin, talk and understand the language/dialect of Csango and show special interest for preserving this identity. A series of external factors - psychological pressure, the danger of social marginalization, the campaigns of intimidation, immigration - have led to a sharp decrease in the number of those who call themselves Csango Hungarians and ask for optional study of the literary Hungarian language or using the mother tongue in church.

Even if early in the '50-ties there was the possibility of learning the Hungarian language in some public schools, this possibility was gradually restricted and the communist national regime developed a systematic policy of assimilation, bringing the community of Csango Hungarians almost to extinction. The refusal of the institutions to meet the requirements related to language rights was permanently hidden by debates on the origin of Csangos, a pretext serving in time the same purpose of assimilation. The theory of the Romanian origin became the official doctrine and has enough supporters so that the more and more restricted group of Hungarian Csangos is refused the constitutional right to protection of the assumed identity.

In spite of all the assimilation pressure, it is obvious that there is among the Hungarian Csangos the firm will to preserve their identity and from the human rights perspective, on which the authors of this report rely, this community, even numerically restricted, has the constitutional right to protection from the state.

As a matter of fact, the approach from the perspective of human rights was also present at an official level with certain empathy in the period 1996-2000. The Order of the Ministry of National Education nr. 3113/31.01.2000 as well as the „Methodology of application of the instructions on the study of the mother tongue by the pupils belonging to the national minorities

that attend Romanian schools”, nr. 30257/06.04.2000 stands proof in this respect. These actions, carried out at a central level, for giving a favourable solution to the claims of the Hungarian Csangos have however been systematically undermined at a local level, thus producing no effect.

At present we witness an intensification of the campaign of intimidation and harassment of the persons that have identified themselves as Hungarian Csangos, the obstruction by all means of meeting their legitimate requirements, which runs counter to the constitutional guarantees of human rights protection.

Together with the state, the Roman-Catholic church of Moldavia, by setting up the Iasi Bishopric (also in the communist dictatorship period) did nothing but participate in this process of assimilation. There are numerous proofs that the Roman-Catholic priests put severe pressure on those believers who identified themselves as Hungarian Csangos, going as far as excommunication and threat of denial of the religious service. None of the requests of approving a religious service in the mother tongue was considered by the Roman-Catholic bishops of Moldavia. Recently, the request of over 200 citizens who required the Roman-Catholic Bishopric of Iasi, on 05.04.2001 to "celebrate the service also in the Hungarian language in the church of Pustiana" was denied.

Under the circumstances, the adoption on la 21.11.2001 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of recommendation 1521 on the culture of the minority of Csangos in Romania is welcome. The document contains a package of important recommendations, encouraging Romania to ratify and implement The European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and to give support to the Csangos in domains like:

- The possibility to be educated in the mother tongue, securing for this purpose the necessary spaces and teachers;
- Informing the parents about the Romanian legislation in the field and working out the application norms
- Creating the possibility to opt for the Roman-Catholic service and singing religious songs in the mother tongue
- Official recognition and support for the associations of Csangos, granting special attention to the correct registration of the Csango minority at the forthcoming census
- Access to mass media for the active expression of identity, including by allocation of funds, support for the publication of a monthly magazine and for a local radio station
- Starting of special programmes meant to promote the culture of Csangos, organization of international seminars and debates on the study of the Csango community
- Launching of a campaign in Romania for making known the culture of Csangos, with special stress on the benefits of cooperation between the majority and the minority
- Registration of the unique language and ethnographic characteristics of Csangos
- Encouragement of the economic revival of the area by setting up of small and medium sized enterprises in the Csango communes

The application in good faith of this package of measures could stop the extinction of the Hungarian Csango community, provided the dispute around their origin should not ocult the emergency of active measures, without which one of the oldest minorities in Romania and Europe might disappear for ever.

For the time being, the way of individual and minority rights is refused even from inside the Romanian legislative forum. Senator PSD (The Social-Democracy Party) Ghiorghe Prisăcaru member of the Romanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe made public his reservations about the competence of the Council of Europe, upholding in a written communique sent to Mediafax news agency on 12.12.2001: "It is not the competence of the Council of Europe - a political body - to pronounce itself on the origin of the Csango language and culture but concerned specialists, with preoccupations in the field should approach these issues from scientific positions". This approach announces a comeback to the official stands that deny the people's right to self-identification and, implicitly, the continuation of the assimilatory policy.

### **3. The language/dialects of Csangos as a regional language (minority language)**

The status of the Csango language/dialects is not only significant in itself but constitutes an important dimension of the protection of minority Hungarian Csangos.

The topic of the language has no connection with the dispute around the origin of Csangos: Hungarianized Romanians or Hungarians settled in a region with Romanian population? According to linguists, the Csangos speak numerous dialects of the Mediaeval Hungarian language, depending on the area inhabited and influenced by the Romanian environment in which they live. "The diversity of Csango dialects created such a situation that some are not understood by the others" (...) In spite of this, all the Csango dialects have common traits that differentiate them from the dialects spoken in the Hungarian Carpathian Basin".

The relevant philosophy for approaching the topic of the Csango language/dialects is the one coming from the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages. Romania has not yet ratified this document. But it signed it and this means that the Romanian state is still drawing up its strategy on Part III of the Charter, this complex instrument allowing for an option from among versions of measures in favour of using the regional or minority languages. But Romania cannot contest the basic principles of the European Charter without by doing this to place itself out of the values that underlie the Council of Europe.

Is the European Charter applied in the case of dialects spoken by Csangos? According to this document, "Regional or minority languages " mean:

"(i) Used in a traditional way in a certain zone of a state by the citizens of that state who constitute a group that is numerically smaller than the rest of that state's population and ii. Different than the official language(languages) of that state; it does not include either the dialects of the official language (languages) of that state or the languages of the migrants".

"A zone in which a regional or minority language is used" means the geographical area where this language represents the way of expression of a number of persons justifying taking protection and promotion measures provided for in the current Charter.

Considering the number of persons that speak the Csango dialects and the traditional character of the communities in the regions of Bacau and Roman towns the dialects spoken by Csango

correspond exactly to the subject of the European Charter. Consequently, they enter the domain covered by the Charter. On this basis, they enjoy the protection of the principles that underlie the treatment of linguistic problems in the zone of the Csangos settled in Moldavia.

The European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages stipulates that "protection of regional or minority historic languages in Europe, out of which some risk, in time, to disappear, contribute to the development of traditions and cultural wealth of Europe ". Likewise, it underlined that "the right to practice a regional or minority language in private and public life represents an inalienable right " and that "protection and promotion of regional or minority languages ....constitute an important contribution to building a Europe based on the principles of democracy and cultural diversity".

The Parties have made a commitment to base their policy, legislation and practice on the following objectives and principles:

- "a. recognizing regional or minority languages as an expression of cultural richness;
- b. observance of the geographical area of every regional or minority language so that the current or new administrative partitions should not be an obstacle for promoting the respective regional or minority language;
- c. the need for determined action for promoting regional or minority languages for safeguarding them;
- d. facilitating and/ or encouraging the using orally or in writing of the regional or minority languages, in the public or private life;
- e. maintaining and developing relations, in the domains provided for by the Charter between the groups using a regional or minority language and other groups of the same state that speak a language that is practised in an identical or close form.....";
- a. Establishing of forms or adequate means of tuition and study of regional or minority language, at all the adequate levels " a.s.o. (Art. 7, 1).

According to these principles not only the Romanian state should have a policy of recognition of the Csango dialects but also one of encouragement, of promotion of using this language. In this case the problem arises of the population's attitude on the language it speaks. The investigations made so far show that there are two distinct themes:

- b. The use of the Csango dialects in the religious services;
- c. The study of the Csango dialects in school.

There is permanent request from some Csangos for religious services in the mother tongue. It became recurrent in the personal dialogues of the priests with the believers but also in "official requests", with hundreds of signatures. There is a net policy of rejection, by the Roman-Catholic Bishopric, of the requests, although there are many priests who come from the very Csango community so there is the possibility to meet these requirements.

APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League draw attention on the fact that although the Roman-Catholic Church is an autonomous entity, it remains obliged, just like any other private or public entity, to observe the basic principles of human rights, that include also the protection of national minorities. On the basis of its obligations to the citizens of Romania, in particular, on

the basis of art. 1 (3) of the Constitution, the Romanian state has a right to ask the Roman-Catholic Church to meet the requirements related to protection of the rights of the Csango population. The continued involvement even today of the Roman-Catholic Church in the policy of assimilation of the Csangos in Moldavia - after having systematically exercised this policy before 1989 - is incompatible with the domestic laws and with the values today accepted in the Council of Europe but also with the documents of the Vatican, notably those that encourage « inculturation » (adaptation of the ritual to the local language and tradition).

As far as the study of the Csango dialects in the educational system is concerned, there is no requirement to this effect. Some Csangos asked for the study of the Hungarian literary language. (A parallel can be made with the study by the Seklers and Swabians of the German literary language, as a unifying linguistic vehicle). There are pedagogues that lay stress on the importance of tuition in the mother tongue and maintaining the youth in their community. In this context, the public authorities are kept, in the sense of the European Charter, at least not to discourage the use of the Csango dialects in the private or public life and to encourage the use of the mother tongue when there are requests in this respect.

Item 2 al Art. 7 says the following:

"The parties commit themselves to eliminate, if they have not done this already, any distinction, exclusion, restriction or unjustified preference related to the use of a regional or minority language and whose purpose is discouraging or putting in danger maintaining or developing it. Taking special measures in favour of regional or minority languages meant to promote equality between the speakers of these languages and the rest of the population is not considered an act of discrimination against the speakers of the more wide spread languages."

And item 4 of Art. 7 adds:

"In determining the policy on regional or minority languages the parties commit to take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by the groups that use these languages. They are encouraged to create, if necessary, bodies with an advisory role on all the matters related to regional or minority languages".

There are numerous complaints of the Csangos in Moldavia - verified during the APADOR-CH investigation of 1997 and of the investigation of December 2001 - on the pressure that is put on them - primarily by the authorities - to give up the Hungarian dimension of their own identity, this being closely linked to the use of Csango dialects.

### **3. The group of Hungarian Csangos as a national minority that must be recognized as such and protected**

What are the Csangos: a national minority or an ethnic group? In Romania's Constitution there is no difference between "national minorities" and "Ethnic groups". The Constitution guarantees the "right to preservation, development and expression of identity"...of the members of the national minorities (art. 6 (1)) and likewise excludes discrimination for reasons of ethnic origin, having in view that Romania "is the common and indivisible country of all its citizens,

regardless of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language etc (art. 4 (2))". There is no law recognizing a community as representing a national minority entitled to the subsequent rights or as an ethnic group (ethno-cultural) whose members be subject to anti-discriminatory legislation. Consequently, the recognition de facto of national minorities came after some administrative acts such as the census and registration on the election lists. It can be said that the "last" recognition of the status of national minority of a community is made by representation in Parliament and in the Council of National Minorities - that distributes also the state funds necessary for "preserving, developing and expressing identity" of the persons belonging to national minorities.

Although in the census sheet the "Csangos" appear as one of the "nationalities" it is not yet clear if they are considered or not a national minority. Due to the differences in the way in which the Csangos present their own identity it is not clear whether we can speak of self-assuming this status (of national minority) - compulsory for being able to talk about a national minority.

In this respect, APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League uphold the following:

As there is no special legislation on recognition of national minorities, the Romanian state is kept, in its interpretation in this matter, by the application of those internal norms that are relevant for national minorities. From among them, Recommendation 1201 has the capacity to include a definition of "national minorities" considered: "a group of people in a state who: a. live on the territory of that state and are its citizens; b. maintain long term, solid and permanent connections with that state; c. manifest distinct ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics; d. are sufficiently representative, even if in smaller numbers than the rest of the population of a state or a region of that state; e. are motivated by the concern to keep together what constitutes their common identity including their culture, traditions, religion or language." (art. 1).

The above definition of national minorities correspond to what traditionally is considered to be "historical minorities". Having in view the status of an internal law of Recommendation 1201, it can be said that the Romanian state has the obligation to recognize at least the historical minorities. (This would not hinder Romania to accept a definition less restrictive of national minorities).

Do Csangos represent a historical minority? Two issues are raised here. One is that of representativity. Having in view the long existence of this minority on the territory of Romania, the only restriction could be a numerical one. Invoking numerical limits -rational - can only be reasoned if the Csangos were less in number than the less numerous groups accepted today as national minorities: Armenians (2.023), Slav Macedonians and Ruthenians. But, even if the figures given by some authors - 240.000 persons, and the local observers with whom the discussions were held during the APADOR-CH investigation of 1997 talked about tens of thousand of persons - are not considered and the numbers of the 1992 census are accepted, that is, 2,165 Csangos, this figure exceeds the ceiling figure.

The problems remains therefor open of the Csangos' preoccupation to keep together what constitutes their common identity: their culture, traditions, religion and language. A basic component of all the Csangos, directly linked to their identity is the religious identity (Roman-

Catholic). But as regards the recognition of their origin and especially of using the language the population that identifies itself as Csango is not homogenous. The question rises whether we could speak in this sense of three categories: Romanian Csangos; Csango Csango; Hungarian Csangos?

Self-identification is a fundamental right that cannot be questioned. Hence, having in view the attitudes of Csangos in the region of Bacau, as they were identified in 1997 and confirmed in 2001, one can talk about the existence of the three categories. Things are more restrictive when about the request by members of some communities of special measures of protection of the community as a whole - in case of the affirmative measures - and not only rights of the community members. Parliamentary representation and allocation of amounts from the state budget by means of the Council of National Minorities represent such affirmative measures. The character of the mother tongue, folklore identity, historical tradition define in the case of the Hungarian Csangos the attributes specific for a national minority, entitled to affirmative measures.

Another aspect that has to be evinced results from the basics of the doctrine of national minorities. The international law on national minorities (of people belonging to national minorities) as well as the internal law developed in this framework have in view groups of persons in numerical inferiority as against the rest of the population and **non-dominant**. The last word is in bold letters in order to identify the fact that the existence of international law in the field is motivated by the need to protect some communities whose numerical inferiority produces fragility in relation to the majority. **The more a minority community is threatened the more its recognition as a national minority is motivated, reasoned, and urgent and therefore, legitimate.**

In this respect, the problem of the recognition of the Csangos as a national minority is acutely posed in the case of the Hungarian Csangos. Consideration should be made in parallel of the assimilation pressure from the central and local authorities and the manipulation of some of the Csangos against the will of the Hungarian Csangos to be recognized an identity linked to language/Csango dialects (Hungarian language). This could lead to a strategy of assuming the representation of Csangos **against** those who want to defend their language and traditional folklore. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League consider that the recognition of "Hungarian Csangos" as a distinct national minority represent a necessity of protecting this community. It however belongs to the will of the Hungarian Csangos and of the leaders who uphold the symbolic values of the community to show their solidarity, motivation and preoccupation "to keep together what constitutes their common identity, including culture".

#### **4. The problem of the census**

Considering those mentioned above, it comes out that the 2002 census can have a decisive impact on the future of Csangos in Romania. The obvious manipulation of the census of 1992 and the current conduct of the central and local authorities constitute reasons of concern about what is going to happen in 2002. In this respect APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League

underline the illegal, criminal character of the infringement of the right of people to define their ethnic identity.

At the same time it is important that the Csango organizations should monitor the activity of the operators in the field. We suggest that their members ask to take part in the census . A way of giving bigger certainty to the 2002 census is to carry out parallel statistics, at least in the localities where most of the Csangos live. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League consider that before starting the census it is desirable that the Hungarian Csango organizations - the minority the most jeopardized in the region - should carry out a campaign of information and raising awareness of the population on the need of an option as regards self-identification. In particular, the implications of assuming the identity of "Hungarian Csango" should be debated. The persons that want to identify themselves as such should be encouraged to insist that operators put on the census forms exactly this name. (Because in the proposals for the forms of 2002, the "list of ethnic groups that are to be encoded" make reference only to "Csangos" and not to "Hungarian Csangos", it is possible that operators insist on filling in the box with the term "Csango". These persons have a right to insist on writing down the whole name "Hungarian Csango".

Preparation of the census by the oerorganization/s of Hungarian Csangos could become an exercise for their participation in the 2004 elections. If an organization of "Hungarian Csangos" will be able to obtain, at the next elections, over 1,500 votes, then it will be able to introduce a representative in Parliament and will be part of the Council for National Minorities. From that moment on, the capacity of the Hungarian Csangos to protect themselves against attempts at assimilation will increase considerably. An estimation, in the coming months, of the number of those who consider themselves and are ready to declare themselves Hungarian Csangos is crucial for the future of this community.

## **5. Conclusions**

The investigation of the representatives of APADOR-CH and of the PRO EUROPE League of December 2001, together with the results of the previous investigations and monitoring of the written press prove the following:

- a. The declarations of AHCM and of some members of the community of Hungarian Csangos in the area on: (i) the refusal to be granted legitimate rights on the study of the Hungarian language and holding religious services in the mother tongue; (ii) the pressure and harassment of the Csangos who assert their Hungarian identity are confirmed entirely.
- b. The pressure on the children subject to a treatment that can be traumatic causes a special concern. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League protests against these conducts of some teachers and ask the competent institutions to take the measures required in such cases.
- c. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League insist on the fact that the autonomous status of the Roman-Catholic Church does not mean that it can escape the duty to observe human rights - that include also the rights of the minorities - the values of respect for otherness and tolerance.
- d. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League ask for observance of the right to association, this including observance of the activity of ACHM, giving up its harassment. APADOR-CH

and the PRO EUROPE League draws attention that stopping the courses of Hungarian language held by this association, invoking the regulations of the Law on education is arbitrary. The courses of Hungarian language cannot be equaled with the activities regulated by Law nr.84/1995 (re-adjusted), which regards „the organization and operation of the national education system.” (art.1).

The protection of the Csangos in the region of Moldavia is right now the problem of the protection of the Hungarian Csangos. In order to stop the assimilation of the Hungarian Csangos it is necessary, on the one hand, to observe the rule of law, and, at the same time, to apply some affirmative measures. The legitimacy of these measures results from the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and from the internal and international provisions on the protection of national minorities. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League consider that for the future of the Hungarian Csangos it is vital to have their status of a national minority recognized. For this it is however necessary that the persons who assume the identity of Hungarian Csangos should make it openly and cooperate for creating some representative organizations. APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League consider as a key moment in this process the 2002 census. The representatives of the Hungarian Csangos should monitor if the registrations made by the operators are correct, after having assured a wide debate on the legitimacy of the identity of the Hungarian Csangos.

Therefore, APADOR-CH and the PRO EUROPE League ask the state authorities to observe the minorities' rights, as they are guaranteed by the Constitution and the internal legislation, by the conventions in the field of the Council of Europe, OSCE and UN and the resolutions on the situation of Csangos in Romania.

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