

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**REPORT ON CSANGO MINORITY CULTURE IN ROMANIA
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE AND EDUCATION**

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Summary

The Csangos are a non-homogeneous group of Roman Catholic people of Hungarian origin. This ethnic group is a relic from the Middle Ages that has survived in Moldavia, in the eastern part of the Romanian Carpathians. Csangos are associated with distinct linguistic peculiarities, ancient traditions, and a great diversity of folk art and culture. For centuries, the self-identity of the Csangos was based on the Roman Catholic religion and their own language, a Hungarian dialect, spoken in the family and the village community.

Today only 60,000 – 70,000 persons speak the Csango language. To try to preserve this example of Europe's cultural diversity the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage Romania to support the Csangos through concrete measures in particular in the field of education.

I. Draft recommendation

1.

Further to its report on the endangered Uralic minority cultures in Russia and the adoption of Resolution 1171 (1998) the Assembly is concerned about the situation of the Csango minority culture, which has existed in Romania for centuries.

2.

The Csangos (Ceangăi in Romanian) are a non-homogeneous group of Roman Catholic people. This ethnic group is a relic from the Middle Ages that has survived in Moldavia, in the eastern part of the Romanian Carpathians. Csangos speak an early form of Hungarian and are associated with ancient traditions, and a great diversity of folk art and culture, which is of exceptional value for Europe.

3.

For centuries, the self-identity of the Csangos was based on the Roman Catholic religion and their own language spoken in the family and the village community. This, as well as their archaic life-style and world-view, may explain their very strong ties to the Catholic religion and the survival of their dialect.

4.

Those who still speak Csango or consider it their mother tongue have been declining as a proportion of the population. Although not everybody agrees on this number it is thought that between 60,000 and 70,000 persons speak the csango language.

5.

Today in Moldavia, the language of the school and the church is Romanian. There is local teaching in Ukrainian and the study of Polish, Roma and Russian as mother tongues. Despite the provisions of the Romanian law on education and the repeated requests from parents there is no teaching of Csango language in the Csango villages. As a consequence, very few Csangos know how to write their mother tongue.

6.

The Csangos make no political demands, but merely want to be recognised as a distinct culture. They ask for assistance in safeguarding it and, first and foremost they demand that their children be taught the Csango language and their church services be held in their mother tongue.

7.

The Assembly recalls the texts which it has adopted on related matters, notably Recommendation 928 (1981) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, Recommendation 1203 (1993) on Gypsies in Europe, Recommendation 1283 (1996) on history and the learning of history in Europe, Recommendation 1291 (1996) on Yiddish culture and Recommendation 1333 (1997) on the Aromanian culture and language.

8.

Diversity of cultures and languages should be seen as a precious resource that enriches our European heritage and also reinforces the identity of each nation and individual. Assistance on the European level, and in particular from the Council of Europe, is justified to save any particular culture and is needed in the case of the Csangos.

9.

The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage Romania to ratify and implement the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and to support the Csangos, particularly in the following fields:

i.

the possibility of education in the mother tongue should be ensured in accordance with the Romanian Constitution and the legislation on education. In the meantime classrooms should be made available in local schools and teachers working in the villages teaching Csango language should be paid;

ii

Csango parents should be informed of the Romanian legislation on education and instructions should be issued on how to apply for its provisions concerning languages;

iii

there should be an option for Roman Catholic services in the Csango language in the churches in the Csango villages and the possibility for the Csangos to sing the hymns in their own mother tongue;

iv.

all Csango associations should be officially recognised and supported. Particular attention should be paid to the correct registration of the Csango minority at the next official census;

v.

access to modern mass-media facilities should be promoted. Financial support should be given to Csango associations in accordance with the availability of funds, in order to help them to express actively their own identity (in particular through the issuing of a monthly publication and the functioning of a local radio station);

vi.

specific programmes should be set up for the promotion of Csango culture in the context of raising awareness of and respect for minorities. International discussions and seminars of experts should be organised to study the Csangos;

vii.

an information campaign should be launched in Romania concerning the Csango culture and the advantages of co-operation between the majority and the minorities;

viii.

the unique linguistic and ethnographical features of the Csangos should be appropriately recorded;

ix.

the economic revival of the area should be encouraged for example through the establishment of small and medium enterprises in Csango villages.

II. Explanatory Memorandum by Mrs Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa

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INTRODUCTION

1.

The term "Csango" (Ceangăi in Romanian) is used to identify a non-homogeneous group of Roman Catholic people of Hungarian origin living in Romania. 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 Csango 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 Csangos are helplessly exposed to the very strong influences of their environment and in particular the village priests 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?

WHO ARE THE CSANGOS?

3.

The Csangos 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 “csango” is controversial. The only undisputed feature about the Csangos is their strong Roman Catholic faith. They live in western Moldavia (Romania), 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 3,000 persons declared themselves as Csangos).

5.

The Csangos 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 mainly Hungarian but also 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 Csangos 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 Csangos only 60,000 – 70,000 speak the Csango dialect. Assistance on the European level is needed to save their culture.

8.

For centuries, the self-identity of the Csangos 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 Csango, 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 is extremely rich, with many archaic features.

10.

The ethnic conscience of the Csangos 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 Csangos 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 they are "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.

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 Csangos. Some researchers believe that they descend from a group of Hungarians who split from the main group before it arrived in the Carpathian basin around the year 900 and others suggest that they descend directly from the Cumans, the Pechenegs or other tribes that settled in Moldavia at the turn of the Century. All these theories are improbable as it is unlikely that any people living there survived the 1241-42 Mongol invasion led by Batu Khan, which swept the whole region.

13.

Some Romanian authors claim that the Csangos are in fact "magyarised" (or "szeklerised") Romanians from Transylvania. This theory has also to be dismissed: it is not conceivable that these "Romanians" could persist in using a "foreign" language after centuries of living in Romania surrounded by Romanian speaking Romanians.

14.

It is therefore generally accepted by serious scholars (Hungarian but also Romanian) that the Csangos have a Hungarian origin and that they arrived in Moldavia from the west. The first groups may have settled there as early as the 13th century, when the Hungarian king

Béla IV christianised the people of Cumania and founded a bishopric in Milko but, as we have seen, these are unlikely to have survived the Mongols. It is not before the mid-fourteenth century that evidence is found again of Magyar, Romanian and Saxon settlements in Moldavia.

15.

It is also generally accepted that the first waves of the Csangos were settled east of the Carpathian Mountains, along the strategically important mountain passes, in order to control and defend Hungary from eastern intruders and this could only have been done when the Mongols had lost much of their power. These settlers were later joined by other groups of Hungarians from across the Carpathians, the Szeklers, who either mixed with them or settled in different villages.

16.

Some of the forebears of the Csangos held important posts in the state apparatus of the Moldavian voivodship. The relative freedom of the Moldavian Principality and the fertility of its soil attracted Hungarians seeking their fortunes beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary. For many reasons the connections between the Hungarians of Moldavia and their original homeland were weak. Over time the 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, for several reasons, continued to cross the Carpathian Mountains to settle in Moldavia until the 19th century. A significant number of settlers came after the massacre of Szeklers in Madefalva in 1764 (the so-called "siculucidium").

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CSANGOS

17.

Whatever can be argued about the language of the Csangos there is no doubt that this is a form of Hungarian which belongs to the Finno-Ugrian family. This ethnic group has been isolated from the Hungarian cultural development. The Hungarian language went through a renewal in the 18th-19th centuries, but this did not affect the language of the Csangos. Their oldest sub-dialect, northern Csango, 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 Csango settlements and their relative isolation contributed for a non-homogeneous language although experience shows that the different dialects are mutually intelligible and that those Csangos that still speak their language understand modern Hungarian. The wide proliferation of television aerials for TV Duna, a Hungarian language channel, in Csango villages is an indication that they understand Hungarian.

18.

The Csango 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. This 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.

19.

Today in Moldavia, the language of the school and the Church is Romanian. Our former colleague, Senator Dumitrescu, informed me that the Minister of Education also organises teaching in Ukrainian and the study of the mother tongue for Polish, Roma and Russian children in Moldavia. There is however no teaching of Hungarian in the Csango villages. As a consequence, almost all Csangos 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.

20.

At present, however, the Csango 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 has occurred through the 19th and 20th centuries, unsurprisingly affects the villages of the Csangos. 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 use the family language less and less in communicating with each other.

21.

Without powerful, official support for the Csango mother tongue, a European legacy will doubtlessly disappear, a legacy, which has preserved the cultural development, the elements of the reciprocal influence and of the ethnic symbiosis between Hungarians and Romanians. It should be noted that in the North Csango communities, which are the most interesting from a linguistic and ethnographic point of view, no one under the age of 40 speaks Csango.

FOLKLORE AND POPULAR ORNAMENTAL ART

22.

The majority of Csangos 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.

23.

The folk songs and ballads of the Csangos 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 Csangos 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.

24.

Among their musical instruments there are such ancient pieces as the bagpipe, lute, trumpet 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.

25.

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 Csangos 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.

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT

26.

The strong Roman Catholic faith of the Csangos 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 Csango origin.

27.

Until the end of the 16th 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 16th and 17th centuries many Catholic communities in Moldavia lost their priests, some of who were replaced by Italian and Polish monks and priests. 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.

28.

Today the Csangos 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 Csango language, dismiss these requests as having been "invented" by "non religious people" under the influence of Hungarian nationalistic propaganda. We are told by the Bishop of Iasi that those who so wish have the possibility of saying confession in their mother tongue.

29.

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 Csango 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 Csango 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 Csango.

30.

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 Csangos, 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.

EDUCATION

31.

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 Csango parents). The Csangos (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 Hungarians get in Romania, be it in the departments of Harghita and Covasna, where they are the majority, or in other regions of Transylvania.

32.

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 Csango dialect (which does not exist in written form anymore) is not a language. They claim also that it is not by introducing "literary Hungarian" that they will help the Csangos 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. All these arguments however should not be accepted as excuses for not implementing the legislation.

33.

Some Csango 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 Csangos. 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.

34.

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.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE CSANGO CULTURE

35.

In order to encourage the Csangos 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 Csango settlements should be informed of the Romanian legislation 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 and the legislation on education. In the meantime classrooms should be made available in local schools and teachers working in the villages teaching Csango language should be paid;

iii.

There should be an option for Roman Catholic services in Hungarian in the churches in the Csango villages and the possibility for the Csangos to sing the hymns in their own mother tongue;

iv.

Csango associations, such as the Association of Csango-Hungarians in Moldavia (ACHM), 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 Csango minority at the next official census;

v.

Access to modern mass-media facilities should be promoted. Financial support should be given to Csango associations to enable the issuing of a monthly publication and the functioning of a local radio station;

vi.

A local institute should be set up for the promotion of Csango culture with in the context of raising awareness of and respect for minorities;

vii.

An information campaign should be launched in Romania concerning the Csango culture and the advantages of peaceful co-operation between the majority and the minorities;

viii.

An international committee of experts should be established to study the Csangos;

ix.

The unique linguistic and ethnographical features of the Csangos should be appropriately recorded;

x.

The economic revival of the area should be encouraged for the example through the establishment of small and medium enterprises in Csango villages.

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Dissenting opinion presented by Mr Prisacaru on behalf of the Romanian delegation

1. The protection of national minorities in Romania

The question of the Csango people ("ceangăi" in Romanian) is dealt with by the Romanian authorities in the wider context of the promotion and protection of national minorities.

Romania's policies now accord the highest priority to the promotion and protection of human rights, including those of people belonging to national minorities.

Romania has acceded to most of the international instruments for the protection of human rights in the United Nations system, as well as a large number of Council of Europe conventions - the European Convention on Human Rights, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the European Social Charter (revised) - and is in the process of ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The incorporation of these international standards into domestic law is facilitated by the provisions of Article 20 of the Romanian constitution, which stipulates that, in human rights

matters, international treaties shall be incorporated into and take precedence over domestic law.

The significant progress made in recent years in consolidating the legislative and institutional framework protecting national minorities has played a part in the preservation, development and expression of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of Romania's minorities, and in the creation of a climate of tolerance and multiculturalism.

Romania attaches equal importance to the protection of all the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious minorities living on its territory, and believes that their cultures and civilisations are an important part of its national heritage.

Unfortunately, little research on the Csangos has been carried out in Romania. Specialist international publications are rather unclear, and give contradictory information about their numbers, origins, traditions, customs, language, and so on.

2. General observations about the Csangos

The name "Csango" appeared relatively recently. It was Petru Zold who used it for the first time, in 1780.

The name Csango is used to describe two different ethnic groups:

- those concentrated in the county of Bacau (the southern group) and in the area surrounding the city of Roman (the northern group). We know for certain that these people are not Szeklers. They are Romanian in appearance, and the majority of them speak a Transylvanian dialect of Romanian and live according to Romanian traditions and customs. These characteristics suggest that they are Romanians from Transylvania who have joined the Romanian Catholic population of Moldavia.

- those of Szekler origin, most of whom settled in the valleys of the Trotuş and the Tazlau and, to a lesser extent, of the Siret. Their mother tongue is the same as that spoken by the Siculs, and they live side by side with Romanians.

As regards numbers, at the most recent census (7 January 1992) 2,062 people described themselves as Csangos (1,352 in Moldavia, 81 in Walachia, 100 in Dobrogea, 7 in Oltenia, 472 in Transylvania, and 50 in Banat, Crişana and Maramureş).

The total population recorded for the historical province of Moldavia was 3,751,783, of whom 3,691,420 were Romanian, 5,895 Magyar, 5,940 German and Polish, 1,352 Csango and 47,194 other nationalities.

It should be noted that the census recognised the right of every individual freely to declare his or her ethnic, linguistic and religious origins.

Romania guarantees its citizens the right freely to express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity in keeping with international standards. Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities stipulates that "every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not to be treated as such", and Article 32 of the Document of the Meeting of the Conference on the Human

Dimension of the CSCE states that “to belong to a national minority is a matter of a person’s individual choice”.

As regards the language spoken by the Csangos, there are no reliable figures for the number of Csangos who speak the so-called “archaic Hungarian” referred to in the report. At the 1992 census, of the 2,062 individuals who described themselves as Csangos, 1,489 spoke Romanian as their mother tongue, 403 Hungarian, 20 the languages of other minorities, and 150 “another language”. It is believed that the 150 individuals who described themselves as having “another mother tongue” speak the Csango dialect. Data from the same census shows that of the 5,895 individuals of Hungarian nationality in Moldavia, 5,270 said that their mother tongue was Hungarian, 621 Romanian, and 4 another language.

3. Education in the Csango language

The new Education Law (Law No.151/1999) guarantees the right of minorities to study and to receive instruction in their mother tongue at all levels and in all forms of education, and provides for the establishment of multicultural higher education institutions.

The Romanian authorities are concerned to provide education in the Csango language, but real difficulties exist due to the fact that:

- the Csango language is not a written language, but it is handed down orally from one generation to the next;

The diocese of Iasi has set up a study board, under the leadership of Professor Anton Despinescu, to look into the possibility of transcribing the Csango language.

- consequently, there are no textbooks in the Csango language;
- there are no suitable teaching staff;
- the small number of pupils would considerably increase the costs of teaching in Csango, costs which it would be difficult for Romania to meet in the economic conditions facing the country.

The Ministry of Education and Research (MER) has received several requests for study of the Hungarian language in a few localities in the department of Bacău. These requests came not from parents, but from the Association of Hungarian Csangos of Moldavia (in accordance with Order No.3113 issued by the Minister for Education on 31 January 2000, organisations of members of national minorities are allowed to put such requests on behalf of the persons they represent).

As a result of the challenges which have come from parents of pupils whose names appear on the lists of the Association of Hungarian Csangos of Moldavia (ACHM), the MER has set up a joint board (with representatives of the MER, local authorities, the Department for the Protection of National Minorities – currently the Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations – and the AHCM) to verify the situation in respect of these requests for study of the Hungarian language.

Following discussions with the parents on 14 and 15 September 2000, it was noted that major differences existed between the numbers and names of pupils included on the ACHM lists and the parents’ actual requests. Ultimately, only 25 requests were filed for study of the Hungarian language (13 in the village of Cleja, two in Lespezi and 10 in Pustiana).

On 4 February 2001, another request was filed, again by the ACHM, on behalf of 77 parents, with a view to obtaining a classroom in the Pustiana school for the study of the Hungarian language outside the school curriculum. The board found that the list of names of children had been drawn up and signed by the ACHM without consulting the parents.

In practice, the board found that most of the parents did not wish their children to study the Hungarian language, and the few who did so wish only requested one hour of optional study per week. The legislation provides for the mother tongue to be studied for three to four hours a week, as well as one hour of study of the history and traditions of national minorities.

The parents have shown that study of the Hungarian language represents an act of individual will, and they do not agree with the submission of their requests, where these exist, by the organisations of national minorities.

It has also been found that most of the requests were put forward by parents under pressure from members of the ACHM (threats to remove children studying without payment of fees from the schools in the departments of Harghita and Covasna, promises of financial assistance for the treatment of children who are ill, gifts, incorrect information about study arrangements relating to the mother tongue, rather than as an optional subject, as the parents had understood, and so on).

We are concerned to preserve the Csango language, which represents a real asset for the European cultural heritage. We cannot, however, agree with the idea in the report that teaching in the Hungarian language will be the answer.

A similar initiative existed after World War II, when teaching in Hungarian – and not in Csango – was introduced in a few villages of Moldavia. This initiative was rapidly dropped, because a large number of people did not know Hungarian or even Csango.

4. Religious identity

Most Csangos are Roman Catholics and are members of the diocese of Iași.

According to the 1992 census, 1,306 of the 1,352 Csangos in Moldavia are Roman Catholics.

In Moldavia, 245,137 individuals described themselves as Roman Catholics. 233,632 (95.3%) of these are of Romanian nationality.

There are sufficient documents attesting that, from the very beginning of the process by which the inhabitants of Moldavia became Catholics, most of the believers were Romanian, although some people have nevertheless tried to identify the Catholic population of Moldavia as a whole with the population of Hungarian origin.

In Romania, religious groups are independent of the state. They are governed by and carry out their work according to their own statutes. Religious denominations are allowed to use their followers' mother tongues in their ceremonies.

The same difficulties as for teaching in Csango, arising from the fact that there is no written form, apply to the religious lives of Csango-speaking Csangos.

It should be noted that most Csangos say that they belong to a religious rather than an ethnic minority, and describe themselves as “Catholics” or “Romanian Catholics”. The Romanian scholar prince Dimitri Cantemir said that Catholics in Moldavia described themselves “as Catholics as much because of their parents as their religion”. Many of them regard the name Csango, given to them by Hungarian scholars at the beginning of the 18th century, as pejorative.

As we have shown, most Catholics in Moldavia are of Romanian nationality.

Catholics are known to have lived in Moldavia since the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 13th century the diocese of Comania, in Milcov, was directly answerable to the Holy See, but was destroyed by the Tatars. The influence of Dominican and Franciscan monks led to the foundation in 1371, during the reign of Latcu Voda, of the Catholic diocese of Siret.

The catholicisation of the Romanians in Moldavia has continued, with varying intensity, down the centuries. Romanian Catholics have always lived peacefully alongside Saxons and Siculs who have settled in Moldavia and Romanians from Transylvania.

5. Comments on the proposals made in the report for the protection of the Csango culture

We welcome many of the practical proposals made at the end of the report: the preservation of the Csango language, the creation of small and medium-sized businesses in these areas, co-operation between the majority and the minorities, job creation, and so on.

When Csango also exists as a written language, it will be possible to achieve other aims relating to its use in teaching, religious worship and the media, if the demand exists among those who speak Csango.

The law on the organisation of public administration and the general rules on local autonomy, recently adopted by the Romanian Parliament, guarantees that the Csango language may be used in public administration and that bilingual signs may be sited at the entrances to places where more than 20% of the total population speak Csango.

The Education Law provides for elementary-level teaching in minority languages, so that Romanian history and geography are taught in pupils’ mother tongues at this level. At secondary level, history and geography are taught in Romanian.

It should be noted that these provisions were adopted after lengthy debate in parliament, and were approved in this form by the representatives of the national minorities.

The new Education Law meets the relevant European standards. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities considers it to be one of the most progressive education laws in Europe as regards respect for the rights of individuals belonging to national minorities.

Some proposals have already been implemented. A Csango association has been founded in Sfântu Gheorghe (in the Department of Covasna) and transferred to Bacău, and has been officially recognised by the Romanian authorities. This is the Association of Hungarian Csangos of Moldavia.

This, however, does not fulfil the conditions for membership of the Council for the National Minorities, since, in keeping with the regulations governing its foundation and running, the Council is made up of the organisations of the national minorities represented in parliament or organisations which, though not represented in parliament, were founded before 27 September 1992.

It should be noted that Romanian law (Article 59 of the constitution and Law 68/1992 on the election of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) provides for the allocation of a seat in the Romanian parliament to each national minority organisation obtaining 5% of the votes needed to elect a deputy.

There are a number of prestigious national institutes in Romania studying the different aspects of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics of the minorities which live on Romanian territory. These include, among many others, the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Institute of Human Rights, the Institute for Ethnic Studies, the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, the Targu Mures Institute for Socio-Human Studies, etc.

Attention also needs to be drawn to the foundation, in the near future, of the Institute for National Minorities. Some of these institutes have studied the Csango culture, but we agree that this research must be continued and must go into greater depth.

With a view to the forthcoming census, scheduled for 2002, an inter-ministerial committee has been set up to find ways of ensuring that the ethnic, linguistic and religious structure of the population of Romania is reflected as faithfully as possible, in pursuance of every person's right freely to declare his or her membership of an ethnic, linguistic and religious group.

The practical aspects of asserting, developing and promoting the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of the national minorities are being dealt with by several ministries and departments, notably the Department for the Protection of National Minorities, headed by a representative of the Hungarian minority. The large number of members of national minorities who work for and hold positions of authority within these institutions is a demonstration of Romania's concern to protect its national minorities. We are convinced that this can make an important contribution to the study of the Csango culture, and above all of the archaic Hungarian dialect spoken by some Csangos, which is seen as playing an important part, from a linguistic point of view, in the history of Hungarian culture.

We are pleased to note that concern to study the Csangos has grown in recent years, both nationally and internationally.

One example is the study of the Csangos carried out by Prof. Jean Nouzille, objectively presenting the information that exists about the ethnic origin of the Csango language and its use in religious services and in education.

The situation of the Csangos has been studied by international organisations, such as the UN and, in particular, the Council of Europe. Representatives of the Committee on Culture

and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have made several visits to Romania.

Also noteworthy is the interest expressed by several personalities and politicians from Hungary, who have, during their visits to the communities of Catholic Romanians and of Csangos, have offered gifts of books in Hungarian, assistance, scholarships at Hungarian schools, and so on.

We take the view that the main aim of all our activity must be the preservation and development of this community's cultural, linguistic and religious identity, and that this issue must be addressed without any political connotations.

Reporting committee: Commission on Culture, Science and Education

Reference to committee: Doc. 8713 and Reference N° 2501 of 16 May 2000

Draft recommendation adopted by the committee on 26 April 2001 with 3 votes against

Members of the committee: MM. Rakhansky (Chairman), de Puig, Risari, Billing (Vice-Chairmen), Akhvlediani, Arzilli, Asciak (Alternate: Debono Grech), Bartumeu Cassany, Berceanu, Berzinš, Birraux (Alternate: Bockel), Mrs Castro, MM. Cherribi, Cubreacov, Mrs Damanaki, MM. Dias, Dolazza, Duka-Zólyomi, Fayot, Mrs Fernández-Capel (Alternate: Mrs Agudo), MM. Galoyan, Goris, Hadjidemetriou, Haraldsson, Hegyi, Henry, Higgins, Irmer, Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa, Mr Ivanov (Alternate: Mrs Poptodorova), MM. Jakic, Kalkan, Mrs Katselli, MM. Kofod-Svendsen, Kramaric, Mrs Kutraité Giedraitienė (Alternate: Mrs Mikutiene), Mr Lachat, Mrs Laternser, MM. Lekberg, Lemoine, Lengagne, Libicki, Liiv, Mrs Lucyga, MM. Maass, Marmazov, Mateju, McNamara, Melnikov (Alternate: Gostev), Mignon, Minarolli, Nagy, Mrs Nemcova, MM. Nigmatulin, O'Hara (Alternate: Mrs Cryer), MM. Pavlov, Pinggera, Plattner (Alternate: Mrs Nabholz Haidegger), Prisacaru, Rapson (Alternate: Hancock), Roseta, Mrs Saele, Mr Saglam, Mrs Schicker, MM. Schweitzer, Seyidov, Shaklein (Alternate: Ustiugov), Sudarenkov, Symonenko (Alternate: Khunov), Tanik, Tudor, Turini (Alternate: Martelli), Urbanczyk, Vakilov, Valk, Wilshire (Alternate: Jackson), Wittbrodt, Wodarg, Xhaferi.

N.B. The names of members present at the meeting are printed in italics

Secretariat of the committee: Mr Grayson, Mr Ary, Mrs Theophilova-Permaul, Mr Torcătoriu