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DISCRIMINATION against Csángó Hungarians

“The Csángós 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. Csángós are associated with distinct linguistic peculiarities, ancient traditions, and a great diversity of folk art and culture. For centuries, the self-identity of the Csángós 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 Csángó 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 Csángós 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 Csángó minority culture, which has existed in Romania for centuries.
2. The Csángós 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. Csángós 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 Csángós 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 Csángó 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 Csángó 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 Csángó language in the Csángó villages. As a consequence, very few Csángós know how to write their mother tongue.
6. The Csángós 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 Csángó language and their church services be held in their mother tongue. (...)

The case of Csángó-Hungarians of Moldova, Romania has been in the attention of international public opinion since the Romanian change of regime, in 1989. On behalf of the Council of Europe, Mrs. Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa elaborated the cited report regarding the Hungarian minority in Moldova. This report was adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 23 May 2001, and gave a series of recommendations regarding how the main components of the Csángó identity, as follow:

“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 Csángós, particularly in the following cases:

- I. the possibility to be educated 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 the Csángó language should be paid;
- II. Csángó 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 Csángó language in the churches in Csángó villages and the possibility for the Csángós to sing hymns in their own mother tongue;
- IV. all Csángó associations should be officially recognised and supported. 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 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 Csángó culture in the context of raising awareness of and respect for minorities. International discussions and seminars of experts should be organised to study the Csángós;
- VII. an information campaign should be launched in Romania concerning the Csángó culture and the advantages of co-operation between the majority and minorities;
- VIII. the unique linguistic and ethnographical features of the Csángós should be appropriately recorded;
- IX. the economic revival of the area should be encouraged, for example, through the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises in Csángó villages.”

Roca Silvia, President of the Association of Csángó-Hungarians in Moldova reported on the situation of Csángó-Hungarian minority in Moldova following the thematic structure of Recommendation 1521 of Council of Europe:

- I. *In the educational area, the aim was to introduce optional mother tongue language courses in those state schools where the language of curricula is Romanian. In the year 2001-2002, thirty-two children of two Csángó villages (Cleja and Pustiana, both in Bacau county) started the new school year with an extra subject: Hungarian language courses, three times a week. This was resulting from their parents' notarised request. Although the methodological order of optional courses does not prescribe this as a rule, they needed to do so, as previous experiences showed that the parents' requests were either not registered at the schools or were withdrawn verbally by the petitioners themselves as a result of intimidation. Since then, the number of children who opted for mother tongue courses within the Romanian language school curricula, has grown to 725. These positive results are due to the persistent struggle of the Association of Csángó-Hungarians in Moldova. According to their research, there are approximately 9,500 children who speak the Csángó dialect of Hungarian, as a result of family background knowledge, and who should benefit of mother tongue language courses in schools.*

- II. *The Association undergoes periodical campaigns regarding to the possibilities of the introduction of mother tongue language courses. However their campaigns have been harshly impeded by school leaderships and local authorities. Moreover, there were a series of negative campaigns against the Hungarian language in the local media. The centre of the press' attacks consisted in the "misrepresentation" of the Association's activity, as well as in questioning the legitimacy of requests of educating Csángó children the Hungarian language, and on threatening parents in order to withdraw their applications. These were done by the use of different erroneous arguments such as: the theory of Csángós' Romanian origins; the Romanian theory of forced Hungarisation of the Csángós; the fact that there were few declaring themselves Hungarians at the last two censuses; the contradiction between having Romanian citizenship and being of Hungarian nationality (for example: "if you live in Romania, you are Romanian, not Hungarian"; "if you want to study Hungarian, go to Hungary"; "you may learn Hungarian, but only as a foreign language, not as your mother tongue", etc.). In the same time the Association initiated facultative Hungarian language courses for children, including the teaching of Csángó folk dances and songs. This programme is free of charge.*

- III. *The Csángó-Hungarian community expressed several times its wish of taking part in mother tongue religious services where they could chant their traditional folk songs as part of the liturgy. At the moment, there is no possibility of partaking Hungarian language services in Csángó villages. Parishioners from Pustiana, Bacau county, asked several times for the introduction of mother tongue religious services in church. Their petitions towards the Roman Catholic Bishopric in Iasi were not taken into consideration. There is an attempt of "modernization" of Csángó religious traditions by stating that customs are "misplaced in time". This is done so, for it is well-known that all of the Csángós' oral traditions are in the Hungarian language.*

- IV. *At the moment, Csángó-Hungarian community in Moldova has four NGOs: the Association of Csángó-Hungarians in Moldova (Asociatia Maghiarilor Ceangai din Moldova), Siret-Roman Foundation (Fundatia Siret-Roman), Siret-Cleja Foundation (Fundatia Siret-Cleja) and Saint Stephan Cultural Association in Pustiana (Asociatia Culturala Sfantul Stefan din Pustiana). These organizations encounter difficulties at local level when carrying on their activities: they are not backed up as legitimate spokesmen of Hungarian community in Moldova, they put up with the attacks of local media, they confront with discriminating treatments in certain cases (rejected any financial aid, difficulties renting public spaces, etc).*

- V. *As far as the possibility of free access to public information is concerned, neither of their associations, nor one of their foundations was directly supported by the Romanian government. The monthly, bilingual edition of “The Paper of Csángó-Hungarians in Moldova”, as well as their webpage (www.csango.ro) is operated via own capital.*
- VI. *The Council of Europe recommended the organization of specific programmes for the promotion of traditional Csángó culture in the framework of making citizens aware of their culture and of making sensitive for respecting minorities. However, there were no representatives of the Csángó minority organisations invited to “scientific conferences” organized on the theme of the Csángó minority. Csángó folk groups are neglected during folk festivals of the Csángó region – despite the international acknowledgement of these groups. Csángós consider of utmost necessity to establish a Csángó ethnographical museum – or at least to establish a permanent Csángó exhibition within the framework of the ethnographical museum of Bacau.*
- VII. *Instead of an informative campaign that promotes Csángó minority culture in the context of raising awareness of and respect for minorities in Romania, the Csángó issue is mostly used to stir up anti-Hungarian hostility.*
- VIII. *Those few Romanian scientists who deal with Csángó subjects are constantly ignoring the research of Csángó-Hungarian dialect as well as Csángó-Hungarian folk creations.*
- IX. *The economic development of the Csángó area is growing far too slowly, and small and middle industrial and/or commercial units should be supported similarly to underprivileged regions in Romania.*

Conclusion: It is obvious that no consideration has been given by Romanian authorities to Recommendation No 1521 of Council of Europe.

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