Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1521 (2001)[1]

Csango minority culture in Romania

Parliamentary Assembly

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 lifestyle and world view, may explain their very strong ties to the Roman 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 people 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 that 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.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 23 May 2001 (see Doc. 9078, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa).

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 cases:

9.1. 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 Csango language should be paid;

9.2. 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;

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

9.4. 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;

9.5. 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);

9.6. 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;

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

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

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