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An Overview of the Modern History of the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians

As of yet, no one has processed the 19th and 20th century history of the Moldavian *Csángó-Hungarian ethnic group*¹ with scientific thoroughness. While research concerning their history in the Middle Ages is quite substantial, the same cannot be said for studies about the subject over the last two hundred years. The exposure and publication of the most important sources² concerning the Moldavian Csángós are lacking; therefore, they are not accessible to those wanting to do basic research. Even data regarding changes in the actual numbers of the Hungarian-speaking population are scarce. For these reasons we are not able to present the modern history of the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians in detail. This study is merely an outline of sorts, with which we hope to prompt readers interested in this subject to pursue further research.

The Csángó-Hungarians in Bourgeois-nationalist Romania

Changes in the Populations of Catholics and Csángó-Hungarians

When attempting to analyse the population of the Moldavian Hungarians, the researcher is confronted with many difficulties. The only information we can rely on from the times before the first population statistics were drawn up, are the reports of those diplomats, travellers, researchers, or local ministers who came into contact with the Csángós. However, it is often the case that these sources make no distinction between *Roman Catholics* and Hungarians; every Catholic is automatically counted as Hungarian

¹ We will not go into the problems concerning the etymology of the name *Csángó*, for that would steer the topic away from its original goal. However, it must be mentioned that the name *Csángó* is not restricted to the Hungarian ethnic group living in Moldavia, as there are “*hétfalusi*” and “*gyimesi*” who are called *Csángós* as well. In addition, with regard to the Hungarians living on the eastern side of the Carpathian Mountains, the use of the name *Csángó* spread in the second half of the 18th century. Though the Szeklers who moved to Moldavia did not call themselves *Csángós* for a long time, in every-day use this term is generally used to signify the Catholic population living in Moldavia. When we speak of the *Csángó-Hungarians* in our essay, we mean the Catholic population that spoke Hungarian and regarded themselves as Hungarians during the age discussed here. For more information see Pávai 1999.

² Among others the material from the archives of the Iași from before 1918, and the papers of the Romanian gendarmerie and *Siguranța* from the times after WWI, and the police and the *Securitate* after 1945, in addition to the those of the Communist party.

regardless of what language he or she speaks. From the very beginning the problems of an organised, government census were obvious in the published reports; either the data concerning mother tongue and nationality were missing (after 1945). When all of these data are presented together, it can be seen that nationalist officials who were interested in presenting national minorities as “disappearing in statistics,” always manipulated the statistics to show the *less than actual* numbers of Csángós speaking Hungarian in Moldavia.

Based on the reports of contemporary Austrian consuls in Iași, Auner Károly, a Roman Catholic Hungarians living in Moldavia in 1807 to be 22,000 souls. While relying on the “trustworthy church statistics,” he claimed seven years later, in 1814, that there were 23,331 “Hungarians in Moldavia” (Auner 1908: 66–67, 79).

A few years later, Petrás Incze János, a Csángó-Hungarian parson in Pustiana, estimated the number of Csángós living in Moldavia to be 45,000 in 1830, and 57,300³ in 1839, though he did add that „many among these 30, 40, or 50,000, speak Hungarian better or worse even today; while the others like calling themselves Hungarian, but can only speak one or two words, often nothing at all, and when they are spoken to by people in the ancient language, they blush with shame and reply in Oláh [Romanian] »I don't know«.”⁴

The first government-organised population census in which the identity of the mother tongue was asked was in 1859, in the newly established unified principality of the two sides of the Danube. At this time in Moldavia there were 52,811 Roman Catholics, of which 71.5 % – 37,823 individuals – were listed as having Hungarian as a mother tongue (Szabados 1989: 91). It is interesting to note that in those days 86.6% of Catholics in Bacău County and 94.6% of Catholics in Roman County claimed to speak Hungarian as a mother tongue.

Later population statistics (until 1930) did not include mother tongue and nationality data⁵, and for this reason a scientific publication that deals with this question would be very important. In the *Great Dictionary of Romanian Geography* at the turn of the 20th century, among others, it is admitted self-evidently that of 26,000 Catholics living in Bacău County, *every single person is Hungarian* (Lahovari–Brătianu–Tocilescu 1898 I: 157–179).

³ In this instance Petrás Incze's data are not reliable, as Domokos Pál Péter – based on church schematics – establishes the number of Catholics to be 45,752 in 1851 (Domokos 1987: 116–119), while Kovács Ferencz gives the number 45,184. (Kovács 1870: 53) Auner Károly recalls that the 1854 church report mentions 50,500 Catholics (Auner 1908: 77) while Kovács, also referring to the church member list, only lists 51,049 Catholics 4 years later. (Kovács *ibid.*)

⁴ The answer written by Petrás Incze János to Döbrentei found in Domokos 1979: 1322.

⁵ In the 1905 census volume a unique reason is given for why the mother tongue and nationality data are missing: “Nationality is not a topic! Even the term cannot be used in a strict scientific sense! It is impossible to research the topic of heritage because the greater part of those persons who are non-Romanian live under such circumstances and in such a condition that they would be unable to answer the questions asked even with the greatest amount of well-meaning and effort on the part of the researcher. Similarly, the research of mother tongue would not be much more successful.” (Quoted by: Csoma–Domokos 1988: 140)

After the foundation of Greater Romania, the first census was in 1930. At this time the statistics showed 109,953 Catholics in Moldavia, of which only 23,800 had Hungarian as a mother tongue. However, if we take a closer look at the published data, it becomes obvious that the nationalist officials seriously *forged* the data. For example, in Onești, at the turn of the century, half of the population was still Hungarian; but in 1930, of the 2,945 people living there, 1,236 described themselves as Roman Catholic, but only 672 of those listed Hungarian as a mother tongue, and only 57 claimed to be Hungarian nationality (Halász 1983: 7–8). Even more disturbing is the case of Fundu Răcăciuni, where the researchers couldn't "find" a single person of Hungarian nationality, even though 833 individuals claimed to have Hungarian as a mother tongue. Another strange case is the village of Șomușca, which can be considered a purely Csángó-Hungarian settlement; according to the census bureau, not one resident with Hungarian mother tongue lived there and in Cleja there was only one such individual.⁶ (In the latter – according to the *Great Dictionary of Romanian Geography*, published 30 years previously – there were about 2,400 Hungarians!) Based on the calculations of Tánzos Vilmos – ethnographer and professor in Cluj – during that time there were some 45,000 Csángós who spoke Hungarian (Tánzos 1997: 381).

The Reasons for the Language Switch among the Hungarian Catholic Population

In the middle of the 19th century, two Hungarian ethnic groups lived outside the boundaries of the Hungarian Kingdom: the *Szeklers of Bukovina* and the *Csángós of Moldavia*. Though there were some traces of common heritage (the ancestors of the Bukovina Szeklers also fled to Moldavia in 1764 after the Szekler massacres of Siculeni; but later, in the '70s and '80s, they moved to Bukovina, which was under Austrian rule), with regard to their identities and language situation, the difference between them is *substantial*. Since the Bukovina Szeklers were not exposed to conscious assimilation efforts, they were able to preserve their strong Hungarian identity all along⁷, while the situation of the Csángós – as a result of the developments of the previous centuries – was quite different.

In our opinion, the language and identity switch among the Catholic population of people with Hungarian mother tongue can be explained by three factors.

One factor is the nature of the *structure of society*: in the age of "national rebirth" the Moldavian Hungarians constituted a virtually *homogeneous* feudal society, therefore we may call this an *incomplete society*. (At the end of the Middle Ages, Hungary was a

⁶ See Domokos Pál Péter's table about the population of Roman Catholic, Hungarian nationality and mother tongue individuals in villages belonging to the Bacău County political community. Hungarian National Archives (MOL) Kum PO, K 63, 259. pack, 1940–27/7. t. and Baumgartner Sándor: *Ó-romániai magyarok statisztikai adatai az 1930-as román statisztika alapján*. Stencilled manuscript MOL, the reserved papers of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, K 64 90. pack, 1941–27. t., 131/res.pol.

⁷ For more information see: Vincze 2001: 141–145.

stratified society: there was a layer of Hungarian noble landowners, there were free peasants – the so-called “részes”/răzeş/share-farmers – while the population in the mining and farming cities consisted of mostly Hungarian – and some Saxon – miners, industrial workers, and merchants. This type of society – for reasons we cannot elaborate on in this study – gradually “disappeared” between the 15th and 18th centuries.) Therefore, the social layer (middle-class city dwellers, a lesser noble layer, ecclesiastic intelligentsia) that might have been the preserver and cultivator of the Hungarian national spirit, a social layer that could have mediated the elements of modern national culture forming in Hungary during the Age of Reform, was *missing*.

The *lack of ecclesiastic intelligentsia* of national spirit can be traced to the fact that institutionalised use of the Hungarian language in the Roman Catholic Church in Moldavia was non-existent; over the course of the Middle Ages the building of a church union with a strong, organised-power structure was unsuccessful. In Siret an episcopate was indeed established (later the headquarters were moved to Bacău), but for centuries the post of the head of the church was filled by bishops of Polish descent, who were not concerned with finding Hungarian speaking priests for the Hungarian speaking congregation. The constant shortage of priests could never be eased by Hungarian missionaries; moreover, in the 16th century, Polish, and later Italian, missionaries arrived in place of the diminishing number of Hungarian monks. None of these foreign missionaries knew Hungarian or was willing to learn it. (There were a few rare exceptions. One was Pustiana’s Italian parson, Philippo Corridoni, who learned Hungarian, “for which he is highly regarded by his congregation,” wrote Kovács Ferenc during his visit to Moldavia in 1870 – Kovács 1870: 13). Throughout the centuries, the Csángó-Hungarians wrote letters to the popes and the Hungarian heads of church asking for Hungarian priests instead of the foreign priests who did not speak their language.⁸ Often their efforts were supported by Hungary. But because of the plotting of the Italian missionaries, Hungarian priests could only remain for a short time. (Not only did the Italian missionaries, in protecting own livelihood, scheme against the Hungarian priests working in Moldavia, but Austrian consuls had their part in the plot as well. The Austrian point of view in the 18th, and even the 19th century was that sending Hungarian missionaries to preach to subjects who had fled to another country would only be supporting illegal migration.⁹)

Not only was there a lack of priests who spoke Hungarian, but in Moldavia – as opposed to Bukovina – *there were no schools teaching in the Hungarian language*. There were a few places that taught Hungarian on some lower level (mostly catechism classes), but after modern Romanian nationalism became stronger – from the middle of the 19th century – the government put an end to even these Hungarian classes (Jerney 1851: 111–112).

⁸ Such pleading letters can be read in Kovács Ferenc’s travelogue as well. See: Kovács 1870: 66–90.

⁹ For this reason, the Austrian consuls of Iași had hostile views of the arrival of Hungarian priests and missionaries from the very beginning, moreover, in 1807 they protested against Hungarian priests coming to Moldavia. For more see Auner 1908: 59–65, 69, Mikecs 1941: 207–208 and Hegedűs 1902: 61.

The Tools of Romanian Assimilation Politics

The *conscious* assimilation of the Moldavian Catholic population – the Csángós – can first be witnessed in the 19th century when the practice (at first only in certain settlements) of *prohibiting masses in Hungarian* began. The first news of this was recorded in 1845 by Petrás Incze János, parson of Pustiana: upon highest order, every second Sunday in Săbăoani – one of the largest settlements of the so-called Northern Csángós – mass must be conducted in Romanian. This is the same situation in Bacău – he writes – in the south, while in Ploscuțeni the situation is even worse; there the cantor is only allowed to sing in Hungarian with the congregation every third Sunday. The Csángó-Hungarian Minorite also noticed that: “it seems that the most and greatest attention is given to Oláhization.”¹⁰

In 1881, the Romanian government requested that the Vatican set up a Roman Catholic diocese in Iași. The reason for this was because they realised: the only way to assimilate the Csángó-Hungarians clinging fanatically to their faith was with the help of the Roman Catholic Church and foreign priests. In 1884 they organised the Iași episcopate (the Pope appointed the Italian Minorite Nicolao Giuseppe/Nicolaus Josephus Camilli, who had previously served in Tamásfalva), and two years later established a seminary where they reformed the Csángó youths of originally Hungarian identity into becoming fanatic *Romanian priests*. The chief warriors of this forced Romanian assimilation project were these new “Janissary priests”. (The method was to enrol the still Hungarian-speaking Csángó children in the seminary at age 7 or 8, and when they graduated they would speak Romanian and have Romanian identities. Over the course of their studies, they were not allowed back to their homes for even a single day.¹¹) The *banishment* of the Hungarian language from within the walls of the church, directed by the words of authority, had already taken place during the times of Bishop Camilli: in the 1889 Episcopal letter, he ordered that “the required prayers in the churches of the parsonage can not be recited in any other language except Romanian...” (Domokos 1979: 94). Five years later, in 1894, the bilingual catechism in use until then was prohibited.

Since the residents of Luizi-Călugăra refused to accept the fact that Hungarian was not allowed in the church, the head priest – who was of Italian descent but had succumbed to the service of Romanian chauvinism – in May 1915 declared the following to the Hungarian congregation: “...in Romania the language of the people is Romanian and cannot be anything else. It would be an act of injustice against its own nation, [...] it would be shameful if a Romanian citizen would want to citizen would want to speak a foreign language, like Hungarian, in his own country. Now I ask the residents of Lujzi Kaluger: [...] are they

¹⁰ Domokos 1979: 1431. This same opinion is shared by Jerney János (Jerney 1851: 25) and Barabás Endre in an article from 1911 (published by Harangozó 2001: 35–43).

¹¹ MOL, the papers of the Szent László Society, P 1431,19. sheaf, 416 pack (1934), 307. This is reinforced a half-century later by Erőss Péter, who was a seminary student for a year in Jászváros after WWII. See: Sylvester 2000: 18–20.

Hungarian, or are they Romanian? If they are Hungarian, let them go to Hungary where people speak the Hungarian language, but if they are Romanian, as they truly are, then they should be ashamed that they don't know the language of their country" (Domokos 1979: 94). This point of view haunts the whole 20th century history of the Csángós.

The *solution* to the Csángó question was probably most openly expressed by a Transylvanian Romanian chauvinist journalist in 1880: "In two of the most beautiful and largest counties in Moldavia, namely in Bacău and Roman, the farmers – meaning the peasants with smaller areas of land – speak only Hungarian. [...] Mr. Nicolae Cretulescu, Minister of Religion and Public Education, [...] please try to achieve the goal of persuading the population of these villages [...] to be of one language and heart, for it is by reaching this goal that the fate of our country is determined; for this reason, make these Csángós Romanian; free them from this abhorred name, one they do not even wish to have themselves, and we will be grateful to you forever. In order to reach this goal, the following needs to be done: schools must be established in every Hungarian settlement, even in the most remote of valleys; the children must be taken to school with the help of enforcement in winter and summer, especially the girls, who will become mothers and will teach their children Romanian; secondly, priests must be brought in from Transylvanian-Romanian communities who will preach and read to them in Romanian. When the priest blesses them in Romanian then the cantor will sing in Romanian, and when the mothers will sing their children lullabies in Romanian, that's when we will have reached our goal" (Polescu 1880: 27 quoted by Pozsony 2001).

The chauvinistic Romanian officials did indeed do everything in their power to *make Romanians* of the Csángós living in "the heart of Moldavia": people who spoke Hungarian and considered themselves to be Hungarian. Besides the Catholic priests, the strongest power of the assimilation politics, as Ioanu Polescu, the author of the above quoted article suggested, were the *village teachers*. In the decades following the founding of the modern Romanian state, a whole string of Romanian government elementary schools were established in the regions where the Csángó-Hungarians lived. However, since the schools were to serve the goal of forming Romanians of its students, Bucharest sent teachers who did not speak Hungarian (and were Orthodox to boot!); therefore, it is not surprising that they had little result in teaching the children the art of reading and writing, especially those children who didn't speak any Romanian to begin with. The punishment for speaking Hungarian in school was a whipping. It is no wonder that many children fled from school; in addition, many parents were unwilling to send their children to a school where they were at the mercy of brutal teachers who were unable to communicate with their students. (This is part of the reason why, even in the years between the two world wars, 60-65% of the people in Csángó settlements were illiterate.)

When the modern Romanian state administration began, starting from the structuring of the population census, the project to make the Csángó-Hungarian *family names into Romanian names* began. The names either were written using the Romanian phonetic system or re-structured into the mirror-image of the name. Often the Csángós were given new names that "sounded Romanian", but which had nothing to do with the original meaning of their family names. And so "Bordás became Spătaru, László became Laslău, Veress became

Roşu – explains Bartha András’s village monograph published after 1989. Becze could not be translated into Romanian and so it stayed the same but was spelt with Romanian letters: Beta” (Bartha 1989: 22). It must be mentioned, however, that after the incorporation of the government “Romanianized family name”, “parallel christenings” were still a common practice in Csángó-Hungarian communities. The new “Romanian name” was only used at official places and events, while in everyday use, various other Hungarian names were used in the villages. (The people regarded these Hungarian names as their “real” names.)

The Connection of the Moldavian Csángós to Hungary

The connection of the Moldavian Catholic Csángós to the Hungarian Kingdom was quite *intense* in the Middle Ages. However, after the fall of the independent Hungarian state, their only connection with the Hungary under Hapsburg rule was through the missionaries arriving from Hungary. For various reasons we cannot elaborate on in this essay, it was only after the “national awakening” in the ‘20s and ‘30s of the 19th century that Hungarian “public opinion” became aware of the fact that there were Hungarians living beyond the Carpathian Mountains. From this point on, several scientific studies (especially in the Scientific Collection and elsewhere) dealt with the danger of assimilation that the Moldavian Hungarians were exposed to. Under the Batthyány and Szemere governments in 1848–49, this was one of the circumstances that contributed to the idea of *relocating* the Moldavian Csángós to *Hungary*. But because of the unsuccessful Revolution, this idea could not be realized (Spira 1993).

The unfortunate fate of the Csángó-Hungarians, however, was not forgotten. Many travellers visited them, among them Kovács Ferenc, Professor of Roman Catholic Theology in Alba Iulia. He was the one who pointed out, after the year following the 1867 Austrian-Hungarian reconciliation, that “there is a party in Moldavia-Oláh country that does not recognise any foreign elements, and attacks everything that is not Oláh with fire and flame”. Kovács suggested that the Hungarian government persuade Bucharest and the Holy See to set up an *independent, Hungarian-directed Moldavian diocese* and place it under the direction of the Alba Iulia diocese, which would then be raised to the level of an episcopate (Kovács 1870: 91–93). His suggestion was not accepted by the leaders in Budapest, but knowing the “assimilation zeal” of the politicians in Bucharest, it was unlikely that the Romanians would have allowed the establishment of a Catholic diocese under Hungarian direction in Moldavia. By the 1870s and ‘80s, authorities in Budapest realised the endangered state of the Csángó-Hungarians, but the Hungarian liberal political elite was thinking in terms of *citizens*, and the Csángós (contrary to the Bukovinians, and the Szeklers who had migrated to Regat in the 1880s) were Romanian citizens. As a result of this negligence,¹² while Romanian propaganda made known to the whole world

¹² The Csángó-Hungarians were hoping for the help of Hungary and wrote many pleading letters to church leaders over the course of the 19th century. The letters of the villagers of Oituz to the Archbishop of Esztergom can be seen in Domokos 1987: 180–181.

how Romanians¹³ were “oppressed” in Hungary, Budapest was not concerned about the brutal assimilation politics against the national minorities – including the Csángós – in the country next door. By the time Győrffy István – in the middle of WWI pointed out what the previous governments in Budapest had ignored, it was too late. (“While Romania declared to the world how their blood-relatives were being oppressed, they were oppressing the relatives of the Hungarians with a premeditated cruelty that had no similar example in Europe” (Győrffy 1916: 68).

Interestingly, it was during WWI, for the first time in the 20th century, that Hungarians fought against Hungarians. After Romania joined the war in August of 1916, the Hungarian-speaking soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Romanian Kingdom shot at one another at the bloody battles in Transylvania and later at Oituz and Mărășești as well...¹⁴

The Moldavian Csángós in Greater Romania

Paradoxically, the Trianon Peace Treaty had a positive effect on the Hungarians in Moldavia, since their *artificial isolation* from the Transylvanian Hungarians ceased to exist. Now it was easier to travel to the Pentecost Pilgrimage in Șumuleu Ciuc. (Previously it had been very difficult to obtain a passport, since the Romanian officials tried to keep the Csángós away from Șumuleu Ciuc.) Now the Transylvanian Hungarian monks and Catholic priests could *travel to Moldavia* much easier. (For example, P. Kukla Tarzícusz travelled from Șumuleu Ciuc, through the Hungarian speaking Csángó villages at Christmas, Easter, and in the summer months for a decade beginning in 1923.¹⁵ Dr. Németh Kálmán, parson in Józsefalva in Bukovina, also held regular masses and confessions in Hungarian in several villages in Bacău County.¹⁶) Naturally, Romanian officials were not too happy about the regular meetings taking place between the Csángó-Hungarians and their Transylvanian language-relatives. In the ‘30s, the gendarmerie had orders to *escort* any “suspicious strangers” out of Csángó-Hungarian settlements, whether they were Hungarian or Transylvanian (!) ethnographers (namely Lükő Gábor and Szabó T. Attila, see: Lükő 1936, Szabó T. 1981: 501), or Transylvanian-Hungarian tourists. (Baumgartner Sándor, who was a Professor of Theology in Iași until the 1930s, personally saw the order given to the gendarmes to send away any Hungarians arriving in the Csángó-Hungarian villages – see: Baumgartner 1940: 27.)

¹³ For information on the situation of the Romanians in the age of dualism, and the efforts of the irredentists see: Bíró 1989 and Polónyi 1939.

¹⁴ Gazda 1993: 41–59. (The Csángós had already fought bravely in the 1877 Revolution, proving their loyalty in opposition to the Romanian state...)

¹⁵ MOL, P 1431, 20. sheaf 171. pack (1937), 35/937. Sz. memoir of Németh Kálmán from Septembers, 1937.

¹⁶ MOL, P 1431,19 sheaf 1 pack (1928), no number. “Magyar Katolikus Misszió Ó-Romániában”, and also, 19 sheaf, 416 pack (1934), report of an unknown person about the situation of the Szeklers of Bukovina and the Csángós of Moldavia, and Siculus 1942: 93.

Hungarian ethnographers, linguists, and journalists who visited the Moldavian Csángós unanimously described how the Csángós who still speak Hungarian, living in *extreme poverty*, are very dejected by the fact that in spite of all their pleas, the establishment of a Hungarian church ministry was rejected by the head of the church.¹⁷ (In those days only Neumann Peter, pastor from Valea Seacă, held masses and confessions; the other Hungarian priest, Ferencz János, was relocated by his bishop to a village where there were Catholics who spoke only Romanian.) The authorities even stopped the children from going to non-denominational schools in Transylvanian-Hungarian villages – as there were no Hungarian schools in Moldavia. Based on the Angheliescu chauvinistic education law, the right to publicity of those schools that enrolled Csángó children was revoked, since the Csángós were considered Romanian, and therefore could not study in Hungarian non-denominational schools.¹⁸

By the 1930s the situation had become so bad that, for example, in the purely Hungarian villages of Fărăoani and Cacova, the parson, Romilla Bonaventura, declared the following from the pulpit: “Let the Hungarian language and all those who speak it be cursed!” In the village he closed down spinning-rooms and forbade voluntary co-operative peasants’ work, because the participants usually passed the time singing Hungarian songs; moreover, he threatened not to wed those young couples who did not know their catechism in Romanian (Csúry 1934: 249). Before the outbreak of WWII, the prefect of Bacău County ordered that “in Catholic churches masses will be conducted in Romanian and Latin only. Priests and cantors cannot sing any hymns except in Romanian and Latin. [...] We will severely punish anyone who does not follow these orders”.¹⁹ This order was a severe blow to several Csángó-Hungarian villages not only because sometimes – as mentioned earlier – masses were conducted in Hungarian by visiting Franciscans from Șumuleu Ciuc, but also because in places where the “deák” (cantor) was allowed to sing at least some of the hymns in Hungarian, this practice was stopped. (The cantors who spoke Hungarian and shared Hungarian sympathies were persecuted not only by the priests but also by secular officials. One cantor, who led the congregation for years at the Șumuleu Ciuc Pilgrimage, was threatened by the head magistrate that he would be “broken” if he did not stop his actions... – see: Siculus 1942: 92–93).

On the eve of WWII, when the government turned to right-wing internal politics, anti-minority hysteria reached its peak and the situation became even worse for the Csángós. There were probably a few “renegades” who did not pay heed to the 1938 order, for in the next few years the Romanian government summoned all the cantors to the gendarme headquarters “at the request of the Bacău County church”, where they were “threatened with imprisonment if they continued their practice of Hungarian masses and singing of Hungarian hymns”.²⁰

¹⁷ In the middle of the '30s, a Csángó from Valea Seacă (who could read Hungarian) said to a renowned Hungarian ethnographer: “The most painful for us is the fact that the Holy Pope has the money and attention to make believers of wild men, but has no attention to give us, the Moldavian Hungarians, who are the most devout believers representing the faith on the easternmost edges of the world.” (Csúry 1934: 250).

¹⁸ See Sebestény Antal’s letter to Krywald Ottó dated March 18, 1939 (published in: Albert 1983: 296–300).

¹⁹ The document published in: Domokos 1987: 195.

²⁰ Tolna Megyei Levéltár (TML) the material of the Bonyhád Szekler Museum, the papers of the Commissioners responsible for Repatriation of Foreign Hungarians, 19 box, 3249 No., memoirs of Németh Kálmán.

Attempt at the Relocation of the Csángó-Hungarians to Hungary during World War II

During the autumn and winter of 1940, about 13-14 thousand Hungarians – the Szeklers of Bukovina – decided to free themselves from Romanian rule and “move home” to Hungary. This decision was based on circumstances too complex to elaborate on in this essay, but was also based on the persuasion of Németh Kálmán, parson in Józseffalva.²¹ Since more and more people fled to Hungary each year, the government in Budapest, which had been hesitant up to that point, concluded an agreement with Bucharest and *organised the transfer* of all the Szeklers to Hungary. Besides a few families, the only people who remained in Bukovina were the priests left without congregations. The latter were appointed by the Iași bishop Mihail Robu – a man with Csángó-Hungarian parents – to serve in a few Moldavian parsonages. (The bishop probably sent these priests to the Csángó-Hungarian villages because, due to the lack of priests in the churches of these villages, it was the “deáks” or cantors who were leading the masses.²²)

But soon enough the bishop regretted his decision. The Catholic priests who came in from Bukovina tried to convince the congregations to follow the example of the Bukovina Szeklers and *move to Hungary*²³. In the end it was not the bishop who commanded the priests to leave; they fled of their own accord. The parsons of Romanian identity who spoke Romanian – partially because of the agitation of the Hungarian priests, and partially because they felt them to be their rivals – started to report the actions of the Hungarian priests to the military courts; for this reason the Hungarian priests were forced to flee to Hungary.

Not that the Csángó-Hungarians needed persuasion, for when in 1941 they heard about how the Szeklers who left Bukovina were granted land and houses in Bácska – an area that had been reoccupied from Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941—the desire to “go home” grew within them.²⁴

At the beginning of September 1941, a delegation appeared at the Hungarian Diplomatic Agency. It consisted of the representatives of two Csángó-Hungarian villages, Vladnic and Găiceana-Unguri who asked for permission for the members of their villages to *emigrate to Hungary*. Upon hearing this, Nagy László, Ambassador in Bucharest, reported to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the desire to *move to Hungary*, especially in

²¹ For more information see Vincze 2001.

²² The names of the Moldavian Roman Catholic parsonages, filiates, and parsons, are listed in a 1941 report by Csopey Dénes, Consul of Brașov: MOL 64, 90 pack, 1941-27. t., 131/res.-pol.-1941.

²³ The wife of soldier Laczkó István, who was home on leave, greeted her husband with the following news upon his arrival home: László Antal held mass (in Romanian, “naturally”) and when he finished, he spoke to the congregation in Hungarian: “My dear brethren! I ask of you, if you want, go to Hungary, and there you will receive homes, land, and anything you need. [...] I’ve been to Gajcsána, and people from there will go, too. I have been beyond Szeret, and they, too, will go.” Quoted from his father’s autobiography Laczkó 1999: 195.

²⁴ MOL, the papers of the Department of Minorities and Nationality of the Prime Ministry, K 28,9 pack, 38. t., the closing report of the government commissioner from December 19, 1941. No. 3.

certain villages, was *very strong*. “This can especially be witnessed among the poor and among the younger generation, the latter wanting to escape from the encumbering duty of their army requirement.”²⁵ (In addition, the Ambassador had heard from the priests from Bukovina who had served for a few months in Moldavia that in spite of the scheming of the Romanian priests the local officials “had gotten used to the idea of the Csángós moving to Hungary, and would not make great efforts to hinder this cause.” And so he explained that in the event of the repatriation of the Csángós, the same method must be followed as that with the Szeklers: the “slow filtering in” of the people.)

The “slow filtering in” of the Csángó-Hungarians, therefore, began in 1941. By February of 1942, about 100-110 families had received repatriation papers, but as it turned out later, only 32 heads of families (with 119 family members) and 17 “individual persons” left Moldavia. The rest – though they had renounced their Romanian citizenship and sold their homes and land – *did not leave Moldavia*.²⁶ Several contemporary sources state that originally, many more people had planned to emigrate than the actual number of people who did leave their homes.²⁷ The reason for not leaving, among those who had received their repatriation papers, was that the male members of the family had been called in to complete their service in the army, and the family did not want to leave without them. In addition, for two years starting from the summer of 1941, *journeys within the country* were limited so some people could not even travel to Bucharest in order to reach the Hungarian Embassy. There were also examples of *Romanian officials stepping in*: three farmers from Cleja were arrested because they were “spreading Hungarian propaganda” by preparing the Csángó-Hungarians for their repatriation into Hungary.²⁸

In the end, by the spring of 1942, a minute number of Csángó-Hungarians settled in Hungary: according to various data, their numbers were not more than 40 families: some 160 individuals.

After the spring of 1942, for two years the emigration of Csángó-Hungarians to Hungary *almost completely stopped*. The reasons for this were the restrictions on internal travel and the fact that the Hungarian officials stopped issuing repatriation papers (for those *ca.* 40 Csángó-Hungarians who could not receive their papers to leave Romania because of the travel restrictions²⁹).

²⁵ TML 19 box, 3249. No. 6.597/pol.-1941.

²⁶ One example of this was the following: Demse Péter, who had taken his post in Pustiana, informed the Repatriation Commissioner in October that 50 families from Oituz are “ready to depart for Hungary”, however, these families could not leave. In Găiceana-Unguri, of 260 Hungarian families, 80 received their repatriation papers, and a further 150 families had applied for them. Nevertheless, by the end of the World War, only a few dozen families succeeded in emigrating to Hungary. TML 16 box, 319/928. No. the Feb. 28th report of the Bucharest Hungarian Embassy concerning the repatriation of the Moldavian Csángó families, No. 209/biz.-1942.

²⁷ TML 16. box, 319/468. No. Notation by Szabados Mihály on October 23, 1941 concerning the Csángó-Hungarians. It could not be discerned from the report, which village residents were the ones who emigrated.

²⁸ From among these three men, one of them escaped from prison and fled to Hungary.

²⁹ MOL K 28,158 pack, 334. t., R 28.086., 515/res./10-1943.

Therefore, until the beginning of 1944, the Hungarian government did not deal with the question of the repatriation of the Csángós. But 1944 seemed to be the right year to begin attempts at the *mass repatriation* of the Moldavian Csángós once again. The Russian front began to approach the eastern border of Romania, and the news reached Budapest that the Romanian authorities had ordered the evacuation of Bessarabia and Bukovina;³⁰ moreover, according to confidential information, the Bucharest government had given the order to people living east of the Siret River that “anyone having any possibility to move to the right side of the Siret – to relatives or anywhere else – quickly do so.”³¹

At first the idea was that with a *mutual agreement* between Romania and Hungary this question might be resolved (as it happened with the Szeklers of Bukovina in May of 1941). The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, was not sure that they could come to agreement with Bucharest on this question. They believed that the Romanians would only agree to take those people into account who were listed as of Hungarian nationality or Hungarian mother tongue in the 1930 population census. They were afraid that the Romanians would not even let *those* individuals out, “not only because they made up a significant number of the working population, but also because they did not want the number of Moldavian Roman Catholics they deemed to be Romanian to diminish...”³² It must be noted, that because of the aggressive assimilation politics, the *consciousness of belonging to the Hungarian nation* faded among many Csángós; therefore, it was questionable how many people would be willing to voluntarily emigrate to Hungary amid possible anti-propaganda from the chauvinist-spirited priests.³³ (The Director of the Hungarian Commission of the Repatriation of Foreign Hungarians, Commissioner Bonczos Miklós, estimated in February that “15,000 Csángó families are to be expected, which comes to about 75,000 individuals.”³⁴ In July, however, an anonymous report stated that “according to the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians who came over in the last weeks, if it is possible, the arrival of some 50,000 souls can be expected.”³⁵ Though Commissioner Bonczos reported in his transcription to Kállay Miklós, dated February 21, that [he] “would be willing to raise the Csángós of Moldavia from their homes with the right propaganda without

³⁰ MOL K 28, 65 pack, 135. t., the papers of the Hungarian Monarchy’s National Central Authority for the Supervision of Foreigners of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Transylvanian Branch, No. 2/3-1944, January 25, 1944.

³¹ MOL K 28, 133. pack, 262. t., the transcription of Horthy Miklós Jr. to Prime Minister Kállay Miklós on March 2, 1944.

³² MOL K 28, 133. pack, 262. t, 121/res.pol.-1944.

³³ In a letter dated June 27 to Bonczos Miklós, Szabó Sándor – lieutenant colonel and director of the Intelligence Bureau of the 9th Corps – also stated that “according to information we received, the Romanian government will never comply with the repatriation of the Romanian Csángó-Hungarians under diplomatic protection”. He also added that in many cases, the Csángó-Hungarians themselves don’t want to move to Hungary, either because “there is no one to awaken their feelings of national standing”, or because of financial reasons, or because they are under the spell of Romanian propaganda. TML, 20. box, 535/1944., 2234. No.

³⁴ TML, 20. box, 535/1944, 2234. No. notary register.

³⁵ TML, 20. box, 535/1944, *Summary on the Moldavian Hungarians*.

the consent of the Romanian government...”³⁶ such open agitation in certain settlements of Moldavia would obviously not have been tolerated by the Romanian officials.

Following the German occupation on March 19, 1944, the newly formed Sztójay government gave its consent to the *secret organisation work* of the Commission in the beginning of April. The main source of information and one of the key figures in the organisation was the information officer of the Hungarian consulate in Braşov, Baumgartner Sándor (Besenyő, after 1940). He had extensive knowledge of the area since, as mentioned earlier, he taught Catholic theology at Iaşi University until the middle of the 1930s. In April, he secretly visited the Csángó-Hungarian villages in Bacău County and in the more important centres he set up a web of “cells” or “reliable men” who would help in forming a unit of all the villages still inhabited by Csángó-Hungarians; but they had to do it in such a way that the Romanian officials would not know about it.³⁷ Then when the officials order the evacuation of these specific counties, the greatest number of people should be “directed towards” Hungary.

Besenyő’s plan was based in part on the theory that as the front approached, the evacuation of Bacău County would be as substantial as the evacuation had been in Bessarabia and Bukovina. He was also hoping that his men would be able to go about their business without the knowledge of the Romanian officials and would be able to win the Csángó-Hungarians over to the idea of moving to Hungary.

During this time, it was not only Besenyő Sándor who worked among the Csángós, but as we know from a strictly confidential report,³⁸ the *Hungarian army reconnaissance* officials also sent in a few of their men. However, according to the writer of the report, the situation was not quite as reassuring as Besenyő reported earlier. The same problem arose as before, when the mass repatriation of Csángó-Hungarians began: almost everyone has been summoned for Romanian army duty and so “that same layer of men are missing who would be fit, through their age, to decide the fate of their family. [...] The opinion of our reconnaissance men is that Csángó-Hungarians welcome the idea of moving to Hungary, but in the absence of a father, husband, son, etc. they will only be able to reach a decision with some difficulty.”

Though, for the above-mentioned reasons, the organised, mass repatriation did not begin in the summer of 1944, the infiltration of Csángó-Hungarians into Hungary was *continuous*. There are no reliable statistics with regard to the number of Csángós repatriated, but according to partial sources it seems that some *250 individuals* crossed the Hungarian-Romanian border during the summer of 1944.³⁹ Because of the attitude of the Romanian officials, the morale in Pustiana (where most of the emigrates came from) was

³⁶ MOL K 28, 133. pack, 262. t, 1944–20.022. No.

³⁷ TML, 20. box, 535/1944, 1210/1944. No. Report to Bonczos Miklós from Besenyő Sándor dated April 28, 1944.

³⁸ TML, 20. box, 535/1944, no number. Letter to Commissioner Bonczos Miklós from Lieutenant Colonel Szabó Sándor dated May 12, 1944.

³⁹ For source, see: Vincze 2001.

so dejected that – as may be read in a contemporary report – “the whole community is packing, everyone wants to go, even the priest.”⁴⁰

While the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarian families slowly filtered into Hungary, plans were still underway to determine how it would be possible to move at least the residents of Bacău County “home.” The plan of the Hungarian Commission of the Repatriation of Foreign Hungarians was based on the following: 1. if the time came for a possible forward assault of the Russians, then the greater part of the residents of Moldavia would be re-settled in Muntenia or Oltenia; 2. in this instance, the refugees would flee along the shortest path,⁴¹ through Háromszék, which would bring them back to Romanian territory; 3. at this point “our Csángó brethren would also arrive inconspicuously”, but they would stay in Hungary. The optimism of the workers of the Commission was strengthened by the fact that all those Csángó-Hungarians who had settled in Bácska in Hungary, and had received houses, land, supplies, and tools, had corresponded regularly with the people at home, who – according to their replies – “were ready to depart for Hungary as soon as an opportunity presented itself.”⁴²

But the preparations were in vain, for an unexpected event in Bucharest upset all calculations. On August 23, Mihai I arrested Marshall Antonescu, “leader of the nation”, in the Royal Palace in Bucharest, and announced that Romania would break with all previous allies and become the ally of the victorious party. From the point of view of our discussion, this meant that the military resistance against the Russians came to an end, and hence the evacuation of Bacău County was not needed.

And so the plans could not be realised: those same plans that in 1848–1849 would have helped the Csángós of Hungarian tongue and identity *settle back into Hungary* from where their ancestors fled at the beginning of the New Age. Only 141 families,⁴³ some 400 individuals, were able to cross the border during the War, to find new homes and till new land after 1945 in the emptied villages of the relocated Germans on the far side of the Danube. However, as soon as word spread that the fate of the Csángó-Hungarians who had settled in Hungary had turned out well, many of those who had stayed home wished to follow their families and friends.

⁴⁰ TML, 20. box, 535/1944, 245/1944. Om.

⁴¹ With the Vienna ruling, Szeklerland was returned to Hungary. For this reason, if someone wanted to go to southern Romania from Moldavia, the shortest route would be through Háromszék, an area that was under Hungarian jurisdiction. Therefore, through a mutual agreement between the two countries, in May of 1944, the refugees from Bessarabia and Bukovina could get to Muntenia via this path.

⁴² TML, 20. box, 535/1944, 2480. No.

⁴³ TML, the estate of Bodor György, 1. box, typed manuscript, critique of Thierry Árpád's book, 6–7. According to the Bureau of Public Welfare, only 110 families were settled in Baranya and Tolna Counties in the autumn of 1945, but it is possible that the data of the bureau was not up-to-date. MOL, the papers of the Department for the Preparation of Peace of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, XIX-J-1-a, 14. box, 11–28. pack. 40.986/Be.-1945. The Csángó-Hungarians arrived from the following villages: Csumás, Funtinel (a part of Sascut-Sat), Gioseni, Cleja, Vladnic, Lespezi, Unguri (part of Găiceana), Valea Rea, Pustiana, Șomușca.

Repatriation or Emancipation? Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians in the Years of the “People’s democracy” (1945–1959)

The Continuation of Emigration Fever after World War II

Despite the fact that the Hungarian government supported the repatriation of Csángó-Hungarians in Hungary – as has been demonstrated – only a few could benefit from the opportunity offered. Those who were forced to remain at home were justified in thinking that, if they had not yet succeeded in emigrating to Hungary, their chance finally came when “democratic” (Soviet friendly) governments were in power in both countries. However, they could not have known that the order of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was that *no one should be allowed into Hungary* from Romania. The new government, under the leadership of the Smallholders’ Party representative Nagy Ferenc, had received information that Romanian officials claiming to be “Hungarian friendly”, were planning as much as possible to “rid Transylvania of Hungarians” before the closing of peace talks.⁴⁴

For this reason, in May 1946, a Csángó-Hungarian from Pustiana and a Csángó-Hungarian from Lespezi went to the Hungarian Mission⁴⁵ in vain. They were given no more than encouraging words when inquiring about how the residents of the two villages “as well as the majority of Csángós living in other communities”⁴⁶ “could move to Hungary”. Several factors encouraged Csángó-Hungarians to emigrate to Hungary. One of them could have been the usual: *the prohibition of the use of the Hungarian language in church* and the lack of priests who spoke Hungarian. In addition, if the congregation dared to request that a Hungarian pastor be sent, “the priest did not refrain from using the name of Christ to declare that this request brings shame to Jesus and the faith.”⁴⁷

After the end of WWII, however, new problems combined with the old ones. The flames of anti-Hungarian nationalism reached the ethnic group living in Moldavia as well; in consequence, Csángó-Hungarians were bombarded with *threats* that, like the Germans, they too would be deported to the Soviet Union.

During the land reform, Csángó-Hungarians were *deliberately excluded* from the land grants.⁴⁸ The question of land was a centuries-old problem in that region (this is why

⁴⁴ For details see: Vincze1999: 72–74.

⁴⁵ Until the signing of the peace treaty, the two defeated countries, Romania and Hungary, could not have official diplomatic relations, therefore they set up so-called political missions in the capitals of the respective countries.

⁴⁶ MOL, the papers of the Romanian Administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, XIX-J-1-k, 18. box, 16/a pack, 97/pol.-1946. The report published in: Vincze 1999: 213–214.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The Romanian neighbours of Laczkó István, a resident of Vladnic, who emigrated to Hungary after 1945, said the following to him: “Pista, go to Hungary and get land there, for if you didn’t know, this here is Romanian land” (Forrai 1994: 154).

so many Csángó villages took part in the Romanian peasant revolt in 1907), and so this was a serious problem for Csángó-Hungarians who were struggling to earn their livelihood. In addition, in 1946–1947 a serious drought forced many people to make their living elsewhere. During this time, Csángós went to work in Bánát, a Hungarian region in Transylvania, where the drought was not as severe, while others would rather have moved to Hungary as a result of the longterm dry spell.

Finally, let us not forget, that the example of those Csángó-Hungarians who had succeeded in emigrating to Hungary in 1941–1944 was very positive. As mentioned earlier, during the War (and after 1945) those people who had settled in Hungary kept up a regular correspondence with relatives and friends who stayed home; though they had to leave the Southern regions of Hungary along with the Szeklers of Bukovina at the end of the war, they found permanent homes and land on the far side of the Danube in the villages of the relocated Germans.

The Foreign Ministry in Budapest was worried about the news concerning the willingness of masses of Csángó-Hungarians from Moldavia to move to Hungary. By allowing them to come, they would be creating a *precedent* that would make it easy for the Romanians to execute their plans of “ridding Romania of Hungarians”. Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered the diplomats of the Hungarian Mission not to make any concrete promises to any Csángó-Hungarians seeking information about repatriation in Hungary. For this reason, they tried to reassure the farmers from Pustiana and Lespezi ed that “after the peace talks are over, the Hungarian Republic will represent them. They will do everything in their power for the Csángó villages to receive Hungarian priests, notaries, and teachers.”⁴⁹ However, after the peace talks were over, the case of the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians was not taken up. In the beginning, Hungary wanted to incorporate *modified borders* but when it turned out that the greater powers didn’t support this idea, at the last minute they tried to add a *minority protection clause* (which *might have* improved the situation of the Csángós if the law had been *applied* as well), but this last effort was too late and nothing came of it.⁵⁰ Csángó-Hungarians – unaware of these activities – still hoped that somehow, in some way, they would be able to move to Hungary. In October 1946, other Csángó-Hungarians appeared at the Hungarian Mission and informed the diplomats that *half of Pustiana would like to settle in Hungary*. They also said that in spite of the “Hungarian-friendly” propaganda of the Groza administration, the *situation is unchanged*: “In the name of 400 souls, the Roman Catholic Church Committee of the Csángó Hungarians in Lespezi requested from the Bacău County Roman Catholic Archdeacon that the Hungarian mass be reinstated in the churches, as they had been informed that Romania denied minority rights to minorities. The archdeacon answered this request by saying that they would not receive a Roman Catholic priest, not

⁴⁹ MOL XIX-J-1-k, 18. box, 16/a pack, 37/pol.1946. Published by: Vincze 1999a: 213–214.

⁵⁰ For more information see Vincze 1999b: 5–28, Sylvester 2000: 51.

even in 10 years. As for masses in the mother tongue, the dialogue was over. Masses must be conducted in Romanian...”⁵¹

It is no wonder that, following these events, many people in the villages were *very ready* to go to Hungary, especially after so many of their friends and relatives had already made their new home there during the War. Unfortunately, they had to realise bitterly that the Mother Country – who had already taken so many of their relatives under her wing again after centuries of separation – did not want them.⁵² Their pain was even greater, for in many situations, the emigration to Hungary would have meant the *reunification* of parted families; family members who stayed home wanted to join their parents, siblings, children, etc. who had gone to Hungary after 1941. Though many wished to go, only 22 families from Vladnic succeeded in leaving in January and July of 1947 (Sylvester 2000: 51).

With regard to the repatriation intentions of Csángós, the attitude of Romanian officials can be said to be *contradictory*. Through letters⁵³ written between 1946–1948 to relatives, friends, and acquaintances who lived in Hungary from people still living in Moldavia, as well as from published memoirs, it turns out that it was not only the Hungarian Political Mission that *rejected* the emigration requests, but often the Romanian officials as well. In other instances, the Romanians *blatantly supported* the emigration of Csángó-Hungarians by spreading “whispered propaganda”: Hungary awaits the Csángós in the vacated houses of the Germans. The Csángós who were “led on” were given *one-sided repatriation papers*: even though the Romanians allowed them to leave, since Hungary did not give them entry visas, they were not allowed into the country.⁵⁴

The Csángó Politics of Stalinist Romania

In 1947, when hundreds of Csángó-Hungarians pleaded with Hungarian foreign affairs officials for repatriation permits, a *visible change* came to pass in Bucharest’s Csángó politics. This of course was not independent of the political changes going on in the country itself. This was the year when (with great fraud) the Romanian Communist Party (RKP) won the November 1946 parliamentary elections, and began to liquidate civilian opposition and started to *battle* with the Roman Catholic Church, who were very much against them.

At the beginning of this “anticlerical war”, the RKP found an exceptional ally in the Hungarian People’s Union (MNSZ), the organisation for the protection of their interests led by the Communist Hungarian Minority. The re-awakening of the Csángó question was convenient for the MNSZ, because they had to stop the work they had done in more-

⁵¹ MOL, Romanian TÜK papers, XIX-J-1-j 17. box, 18/b pack, 3198/46. Published by: Fülöp–Vincze 1998: 216.

⁵² Ignác István from Lespezi, wrote a letter lamenting the situation to Domokos Pál Péter in November of 1947: “I wish I knew why we cannot go?” See: Vincze 1999b: 305.

⁵³ See the Manuscript files of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 120 contemporary letters in the Domokos Pál Péter estate. Ms. 5172.

⁵⁴ Százegy pusztinai hányódásairól: MOL XIX-J-1-k, 44. box, 30/d, 2484/pol.-1947.

or-less representing interests in 1945–1946 because of the decision of the RKP.⁵⁵ In the summer of 1947, therefore, they began the re-establishment of local organisations in villages where Csángó-Hungarians lived as well. There were places where the MNSZ was popular because it supported the incorporation of mass in Hungarian, but in other places it was popular simply because it was “a Hungarian organisation”. However, our theory, based on the few sources we have, is that the MNSZ organisation was established not because of the needs of the people, but because of a *higher will* that desired it. The reason for this assertion is that the Csángós (also) knew that on a national as well as a local level, it was the communists who were leading the union,⁵⁶ and it was known that communists were *opposed* to the Catholic Church.

The RKP supported not only the agitation-organisation work of the MNSZ among the Csángós in the beginning, but also the establishment of schools teaching in Hungarian, because they thought that by reducing the severe illiteracy rate and by teaching children in their mother tongue, they would be able to awaken in the Csángós an inclination to *spread communist propaganda and conduct political work amongst themselves*.

The organisation of the first Hungarian schools began in the autumn of 1947, and classes began in the first days of 1948. In the beginning, each school in Lespezi and Cleja had three teachers, while in Újfalú (Ferdinánd) and Fundu Răcăciuni each school had one teacher; but in a few weeks, another eight complemented the already existing eight teachers. Because of the lack of detailed sources, we do not yet know how the Moldavian Hungarian school system was built step-by-step. But we do know that two years after the establishment of the first schools, in September 1949, classes in 22 Hungarian-language elementary schools in Moldavia were begun. According to the January 25, 1951 report of the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Education⁵⁷, there were Hungarian-language kindergartens in 10 villages of Bacău Province,⁵⁸ and Hungarian-language elementary schools in 31 settlements (24 schools with grades 1–4, and 4 with grades 1–7, with three different faculties). From a report made presumably in 1952,⁵⁹ we know that there were 32 settlements in Bacău Province where Hungarian schools were in session.

At *first glance* these seem like excellent results, but a few things must be mentioned.

1. Establishing schools outside of Bacău Province was unsuccessful. Therefore, the northernmost Csángó village, Săbăoani, did not have a Hungarian school, and neither did the southern villages of Arini and Vizantea Mănăstirească. 2. The few school statisti-

⁵⁵ For more information, see Vincze 1999b.

⁵⁶ According to Demse Ádámné from Cleja: “The people did not much care for the Hungarian Union. [...] They were Communists!” (Gazda 1993: 145).

⁵⁷ Archives of the Institute of Political History (PIL), Bányai estate, 923. fond, 3. 6. e., hand-written note by T. Marinescu: *Regiunea Bacău, l. maghiară*.

⁵⁸ The administration reform of 1950 eliminated the traditional system of counties and established provinces on the Soviet model. Bacău Province included the previous Bacău County but also included Ghimeș from the liquidated Szekler County, separated from Csik, of Hungarian majority, as well as a few settlements from the Havas mountains where so-called Csángós of Ghimeș, lived.

⁵⁹ Ráday Archives, Bányai estate, C/189. fond, 1. box, no number.

cal data available give very little detail about how the numbers of Hungarian-language schools changed from year to year (or during the school year). It happened that within one year *a Hungarian school was closed in one village* – as in Valea Seacă, where the school was open for only 2 years – while in another village *another school opened*. (Naturally, contemporary communist media did not notify its readers about the closing of a school; it only wrote about the newly opened ones.) 3. According to the aforementioned report, in the almost purely Csángó-Hungarian Buda, there were *only Romanian schools*, while in Luizi-Călugăra, only 12 students attended the Hungarian school, and 399 students were enrolled in the Romanian school. In Nicolae Bălcescu there were 8 in the Hungarian school and 130 in the Romanian; in Fundu Răcăciuni the proportions, respectively, were 13 to 112, and in Oituz there were 63 to 266.

The question obviously arises: what can account for the fact that in those settlements where mostly Csángó-Hungarians lived, the parents *sent their children to Romanian language schools rather than to Hungarian schools*?

While the school statistics allude to the fact that Hungarian-language education in Moldavia was developing apace from 1948, contemporary documents (see Vincze 1999b, Vincze 1999a: 235–246) suggest that Hungarian schools had quite a number of problems.

One of the obvious reasons for being *wary* of a Hungarian language education had a material-technical base. The newly-organised Hungarian schools did not have proper facilities, and for this reason, classes were taught in places not fit for the purpose (sometimes the school moved from one private home to another), until a new school building was erected with great difficulty. The question of school buildings also showed that often-times local governments and party organizations *did not treat* Hungarian and Romanian schools *equally*, even though they received support from the Csángó-Hungarian citizens. Very often there was not enough fuel for heating, there were no books and supplies. This poverty was then used by the “ecclesiastic opposition” to point out the shortcomings of the Hungarian schools...

But let us not forget the individual problems in addition to these financial problems.

Though the original concept was that only voluntary workers would go to Moldavia, some of the teachers went to serve the Csángós out of *constraint*. Having finished teacher training school, some of the teachers had to move to Moldavia because of the resolution of the educational officials; some teachers decided it was better to “disappear” from Transylvania because of their “bad” family background (children of “kuláks” [wealthy peasant farmers] or army officers, etc.) and so they went to teach in Moldavia (Sylvester 2000: 142).

There were others who felt as if they had been “banished to Siberia” and tried to escape with whatever excuse they could.⁶⁰ We must not forget that some teachers wished to go back to Transylvania because they were unaccustomed to the previously unimaginable poverty in Moldavia. Kerekes Irma, the School Commissioner of the Hungarian schools

⁶⁰ PIL, 923. fond, 3. 6. e., statement by Ambrus Berta on June 11, 1951.

of Bacău County, wrote in a letter dated January 6, 1952,⁶¹ that 4 more schools had to be closed because of the lack of teachers.

It should be mentioned that the higher-level officials tried to compensate the almost *constant lack of teachers* by training the Csángós themselves to be teachers. For this reason, in the winter of 1951–1952, 25 Csángó youngsters were volunteered to take part in an 8-month “crash course” in teaching in Cristuru Secuiesc. In the end, only 18 took part, of whom later many acquired their teaching certificate through their own efforts.⁶² But by the time these teachers of Csángó origin could have joined the teachers’ work force, the Hungarian language schools had been closed down.

Another crucial problem was that teachers who had no training were teaching at Csángó-Hungarian schools and could not deal with the problems facing them. In addition, a great many teachers (especially the Szeklers) did not speak Romanian well, and for this reason they could not “win the confidence of the people” – Bakcsi Miklós and Varga Jenő, ministry representatives, wrote in a report (Vincze 1999b, Vincze 1999a: 228).

The *attitude* of the Hungarian teachers also provided a reason for the parents to turn their backs on the Hungarian education they may have wanted in the past. (In one of the villages, because of the “immoral attitude” of the principal, half of the 180 students in the school were enrolled in the Romanian school the following year.)⁶³

In the *agitation* against Hungarian schools, the Catholic priests were the leaders of the “clerical opposition” (who announced not once that “the Hungarian language is the devil’s language”)⁶⁴, but a number of Romanian teachers were also against the Hungarian schools. They were afraid of losing their jobs, so they did everything they could to convince the parents not to enrol their children in Hungarian-language schools.

In the end, *the attitude of Csángó-Hungarians* towards the Hungarian schools was widely diverse. The two ministry representatives mentioned earlier also had to admit: “it would be an exaggeration to say that the Csángós of Hungarian mother tongue unanimously want, or demand, the incorporation of Hungarian-language education”. They saw the reasons for this to be the denouncement of the “kuláks” and the “clerical opposition” of the Hungarian schools. From other documents, we learn that the problem was

⁶¹ Ráday Archives, Bányai estate, C/189. fond, 1. box, noted without date. (It is interesting that in the interview conducted with Kerekes Irma, she remembered that she went back to Transylvania on September 1, 1951, while contemporary official papers show that she was still in Moldavia in 1952...)

⁶² PIL, 923. fond, 3. 6. e., the notation of Bartis Arpad, the overseer of the Ministry of Education’s Nationality Managing Department: *A moldvai csángók anyanyelvű iskolai oktatásának és művelődésének távlatai* as well as the report of László István from January 15, 1952 about the “recruitment” of young people. Ráday Archives, Bányai estate, C/1 89. fond. 1. box.

⁶³ PIL, 923. fond. 3. 6. e., the December 4, 1951 report of Raduly Mihály: *Bákó tartományban a magyar tannyelvű iskolákkal kapcsolatban fennálló kérdések*.

⁶⁴ This is how a Csángó woman from Cleja explained thirty years later: “The teachers took the children to the church to pray and sing hymns. [...] Then someone spread the news that we shouldn’t enrol our children in Hungarian schools because Hungarians don’t believe in God. And it went by word of mouth, and then one of them stopped going to the Hungarian school, and then another, and since there were so few children left in the schools, they closed them down.” (Gazda 1994: 147).

much more complex; added to these factors was that many people were *afraid to openly admit their Hungarian nationality*. For this reason the number of children enrolled in the Hungarian schools was always fluctuating, determined by how many people could be convinced. The parents had to be visited regularly in order to put them at ease that “they would not go to hell”, nothing would happen to them if they enrolled their children in Hungarian schools...

Added to this was the *unstable national identity* of the Csángós; for various reasons⁶⁵, the Hungarian identity of even those people who spoke Hungarian was weak and had faded.

In the end, however, it was not because of the aforementioned reasons that the communist officials closed down the Hungarian schools in Moldavia. After the 1952 power struggle, elements of traditional Romanian nationalism combined with rigid Stalinism and with Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej as their leader, the party established its adamant power. After the death of Stalin, the “lenient” minority policy – “developed by the great Stalin”⁶⁶ – ended abruptly. They forced the MNSZ to “dismantle itself” (even though it was only the party’s mouth-piece for half a decade) and stopped Hungarian-language engineer training; this was the fate that awaited the Hungarian schools as well. In the autumn of 1953, with the exception of the Lespezi and Ghimeş⁶⁷ schools, *all the Hungarian schools were eliminated in one blow*.

According to various scattered sources, including information from those who remember these times, it seems obvious that besides the problems listed, the attitude of chauvinist Catholic priests (some of Csángó descent), the methodical, years-long psychological terror of the Romanian teachers, as well as the whispering propaganda and the repressing apparatus were needed to reach the goal: *the parents themselves requested⁶⁸ the closing down of the Hungarian school*.

A few years later there was a glimmer of hope that the Moldavian Hungarian-language schools could be re-established, at least in part. In the autumn of 1956, the party directors were informed of the general dissatisfaction among the Hungarian intelligentsia, and so they decided to be a little bit more lenient. A sign of more relaxed minority policies was that the Ministry of Education set up a nationality Board of Directors, appointing as the head Bányai László, who had already supported the Moldavian Hungarian schools as the advisor of the Ministry. As a first step, Bányai tried to introduce *the Hungarian language as a school subject* in Pârgăreşti, Bahna, Tuta, Lilieci, Pustiana, Găiceana-Unguri, and

⁶⁵ For more information see Tánzos 1997: 383–385.

⁶⁶ The possibility to build Csángó-Hungarian language schools was granted by the victorious Soviet Army, while the road was designated by the nationality policies developed by the great Stalin (Kovács 1950: 11).

⁶⁷ Ghimeş, an area settled by so-called Csángós of Ghimeş, for the most part consisted of Hungarian speakers; this was an area that was detached from Csík County by the administrative reform of 1950.

⁶⁸ In an interview a writer from Budapest conducted with the parson of Cleja, the parson admits that he went from house to house escorted by 2 policemen and talked parents into signing the petition asking for the Hungarian school to be closed. It is possible that in several other villages this was the method used to “convince” parents (Cseres 1982).

Fundu Răcăciuni. They also established the Hungarian language 5th grade in Lespezi and Bacău (the latter was in the Bacău Romanian School of Pedagogy under the direction of Albu Zsigmond).

However, these efforts proved to be *transitory*. From the effects of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on Transylvania, the Romanian party leaders drew the conclusion that the “lenient” policies towards Hungarians were a mistake.⁶⁹ The “obvious” consequences of this radical change were not only the dismantling of Bolyai University of Sciences (and the Hungarian faculty of the Agricultural College) but also of the Hungarian schools still in existence in the Csángó-Hungarian villages.

The “Virtual Disappearance” of Csángó-Hungarians in the Decades of National-communism

The “statistical disappearance” of Hungarian-speaking Csángós—paradoxically—did not cease even when the activists of MNSZ were organising Hungarian schools in Moldavia. The 1948 census showed even fewer Hungarians – some 6,600 people (Vincze 1994: 64) – than the 1930 census. (Experts on the Csángó question and activists who were in Moldavia at this time estimated the number to be more like 60,000.) The later population counts were not much more reliable either. While in 1956, compared to earlier, the number of people who spoke Hungarian increased (18,817), ten years later the statistics – which had become one of the “tools of battle” for Romanian nationalism – “found” 9,516 people who spoke Hungarian, while in 1977, there were only 3,813 people who claimed to be Hungarian by nationality. (The number of Catholics living in Moldavia at this time was estimated to be 150,000.)⁷⁰

The “virtual disappearance” of Csángó-Hungarians is proportionate to the growth of the brutality of the Romanian communist regime. In the 1950s, Bolyai University of Sciences and the Folklore Institute of Cluj organized several ethnography collection trips in the whole of the Csángó region. One of the representative results of the research (*Moldavian Csángó Folk Songs and Folk Ballads*) could still be published in Bucharest in 1954, though a few years late. However, the changes in the Csángó-policies of the communist powers were signified by the fact that the planned historical section of the book could never be finished, while an extensive folk art summary (*Moldavian Csángó Folk Art*) was published two decades later, in 1981, by Kriterion Publishing House in Bucharest. It is also interesting that it was at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s that the Hungarian-language media wrote the most about the Hungarian-speaking Csángós living in Moldavia – naturally without even the possibility of mentioning their greatest problems (mother-tongue education and the prohibition of Hungarian language use in

⁶⁹ For more information see Vincze 1997.

⁷⁰ Szabados 1989: 98–101. (The population statistics between 1945–1989 do not indicate religion.)

church).⁷¹ As the minority policies of the Ceaușescu regime became harsher (see: Vincze 1999c), the Csángó nation also “disappeared” from the media. Scholarly studies about the Csángós from 1982–1983 were published only accidentally or not at all. The only book that could be published was the *botched unscientific work* that was first published in Romanian in 1985 (then later translated into various western languages) and was rejected for years by even Romanian scholars who had any respect for their profession: the work of Romanian Dumitru Mărtinaș, of Csángó descent, the book entitled *Originea ceanăilor din Moldova (The Origins of the Moldavian Csángós)* about the Romanian origins of the Csángós.⁷² The goal of the chauvinist powers with this was to *manipulate* the historical knowledge of those Csángós who spoke only Romanian.

In addition, Csángós who openly professed their Hungarian nationality (by representing the Moldavian Hungarian culture, etc.) were *regularly harassed* by police and national security officials (Pozsony 1994: 7–9). Those Csángó-Hungarians who were in regular contact with Transylvanian or Hungarian ethnographers or inquiring tourists were also at the mercy of Romanian officials. The officials already exercised persecution against one of the most renowned researchers of Csángó folklore, Kallós Zoltán, who was *tried before court* under various fabricated charges.⁷³ In the 1980s, the harassment of researchers and those interested in the fate of the Csángós was a regular occurrence.⁷⁴ In 1985, there were site reports which claimed that the Csángó settlements could not even be approached since members of government security were guarding the train stations and the roads, stopping anyone from entering.⁷⁵

This *hermetically sealed* life only brought those Csángós who still retained their Hungarian identity even more under the will of those against them. However, there were those who kept their Hungarian nationality through thick and thin, who never gave up the fight for the church emancipation of the Hungarian language. In 1982, they turned to the Pope, just as their ancestors had done centuries earlier. “We unfortunate villages of Kákava and Nagypatak and other villages and Hungarians – in our language – Csángó-Hungarians [...] are greatly troubled, for they wish to prohibit the Hungarian mother Language, because the prayer before the holy mass is said in Oláh (Romanian) by the cantor, and the hymns are also sung in the same way, and the youth do not know how to pray in the Oláh language, so they cannot be married, and especially other elderly and young women who do not speak Oláh, go to have their confessions, all of them are cast away from the confession and so they do not go to church on Sundays and holidays... when before we went to [the priests] and asked them to give us back our mother language, they said that they would report us to the ministry that we don’t want to give up our Hungarian

⁷¹ The journalist who published the most on this subject was Beke György from Cluj. It is very characteristic of the age that his collected works on this subject were only published in Budapest (see Beke 1988).

⁷² See the report of the illegal Erdélyi Magyar Hírügynökség/Hungarian Press of Transylvania No. 1985/58.

⁷³ MOL, Romanian TŰK-1974, XIX-J-1-j, 99. box, 128-75. No.

⁷⁴ Hungarian Press of Transylvania No. 1985/50 (September 15.) and Pozsony 1996: 176.

⁷⁵ Hungarian Press of Transylvania No. 1985/67. (August 21)

language. [...] We often plead with the Bishop of Jas, Vicar of the Holy Earth [...] to have mercy on us and give us a Hungarian priest of our own language. [...] Holy Father, please grant our attachment to the Transylvanian diocese, or order a Hungarian priest to be sent to us from there.”⁷⁶

We must mention here that the number of Csángós who kept their Hungarian identity and language seriously *diminished* due to the chauvinist, anti-minority policies, as well as the Stalinist-type, distorted modernism. The Ceaușescu regime in the ‘70s and ‘80s continued the industrialisation begun in the ‘50s. After forced collectivisation ended at the beginning of the 1960s, a great number of Csángó men (also) ended up working in the city industries or factories. Away from the closed world of the villages, they were in a strong Romanian environment, which furthered the flow of language and identity switch. (Since the women usually stayed home, their role in passing on the Hungarian language became crucial.) In addition, those bilingual, dual-identity Csángós who went to work in Transylvania, partially in cities with Hungarian residents, did not “assimilate back” to the Hungarians, but permanently *melted into the Romanian language and cultural environment*.

When the Ceaușescu regime fell at the end of the 1980s, the many-century long course of events *almost* completely ended: most of the Csángós of Moldavia assimilated into the Romanian majority, “not only in financial, linguistic, and cultural ways – explains a researcher on this subject – but on a level of consciousness as well, on a level of national identity” (Pozsony 1996: 177).

Today, there are only a few villages in which we can still find people who have preserved their mother tongue and original identities; sometimes it is only a few members of a family. Their struggle is now helped and directed by a handful of intellectuals of Csángó origin. But that is another story.

The Emancipation Struggles of Csángó-Hungarians in Post-communist Romania 1990–2000 (a Perspective)

By looking at the developments of the 1990s (and today) we can see that the emancipation of Csángó-Hungarians has not finished *entirely*.

In the euphoric days of December 1989, members of the Transylvanian and Bucharest Hungarian intelligentsia founded a minority interest protection union: the Romanian Hungarian Democratic Union. Partly influenced by this, a few Csángó-Hungarians living in Sfântu Gheorge, the capital of Covasna County, established the *Moldavian Csángó-Hungarian Union* (MCSMSZ) in January and February of 1990. (They also founded a Hungarian–Romanian bilingual newspaper, called *Csángó Ujság/Csángó News*, which was later renamed *Moldvai Magyarország/Hungarians of Moldavia*.) Their goal was to unify

⁷⁶ The letter written to Pope John Paul II. published in: *Életünk* (Szombathely), 1990, July–August.

those Csángós who live in Transylvania or Moldavia and still speak Hungarian, to “awaken in them [Hungarian] national identity, [...] to serve the interests of raising their cultural, social, economic, and spiritual lives; to assist and make easier the Hungarian-language education of the children [...], and with this, to help intellectuals to develop themselves [...], to draw the attention of Hungarians at home and abroad to the abandonment and forced assimilation the Hungarians of Moldavia have been subjected to...”⁷⁷

In the beginning of the 1990s, the Union supported a project to enrol as many school-aged Csángó-Hungarian children as possible in *Transylvanian Hungarian Schools*. (A few were even able to study at Hungarian colleges and universities.) As a result of this, *hundreds* of Moldavian children were able to study in primarily Hungarian-language elementary schools, and a few in bilingual schools, in Miercurea-Ciuc, Sfântu Gheorge, and other places. However, there were many problems with this mode of education. It turned out that the Csángó-Hungarian children, arriving in the Transylvanian and Hungarian schools without pre-selection and a proper educational background, and confronting the sudden change in the language of education and the cultural surroundings, were unable to fit in and study properly. In addition, the chauvinist Romanian priests – who had already inflamed the assimilated Csángós – excluded and stigmatized those families that had sent their children to Transylvanian or, God forbid, Hungarian colleges! However – without forgetting the good intentions of those who organised the Transylvanian education of the Csángós – we have to admit that there were no prospects for those Csángós who had finished their studies in Hungarian. (This had already been a problem in the 1950s! – see: Pálffy 1999, Táneczos 1994.) At the beginning of the 1990s, there were local initiatives – of good intention – in a few villages (Cleja, Lespezi) where they tried to do as much as they could to satisfy the need of reading, writing, and Hungarian cultural knowledge in Hungarian; but the effects of these attempts were minimal because of the teachers’ lack of professional training; in addition, because of the constant harassment from officials, the classes conducted in private homes *ended* after one or two years.

Only one or two hundred people went to study in Hungary; however, *thousands* went to work there. The unemployment rate at home prompted even those Csángós of Moldavia who spoke only Romanian and were full of anti-Hungarian prejudice because of the influence of chauvinist propaganda to engage in illegal work in Hungary. Since it was possible to acquire prestige-elevating (in Moldavian relations) luxury goods by working only a few months in Hungary, the *value of the Hungarian language grew*, since those who could speak even some Hungarian could get jobs more easily. (There were those who took their families out as well, and stayed in Hungary for years, until the prospect of working illegally became impossible.)⁷⁸

Not only did the Csángós go to school in Hungary, but they also worked there. When Pope John Paul II visited Hungary in the summer of 1991, more than a thousand Csángós

⁷⁷ *Moldvai csángómagyar kalendárium az 1992-es esztendőre*. H.e.n, [Sepsiszentgyörgy, 1992]: 41.

⁷⁸ Ozsváth 1999. (The Csángós worked not only in Hungary. In the second half of the 1990s thousands went to work in Israel.)

from thirty villages travelled to Hungary to see him; many among them no longer spoke Hungarian. Naturally, the local “Janissary priests” did not look favourably upon this, and it often happened that after their return home, the local priests labelled the pilgrims *traitors*.⁷⁹

Those people were labelled with this word who followed the example of their ancestors and requested the reinstatement of Hungarian-language worship. A group of pilgrims had already made a “humble plea” to the Pope in the summer of 1991. This led to no result; and for this reason, they sent yet another request in the spring of 1998, this time to the head of the diocese, the bishop of Csángó descent, Petru Gherghel. However, the result of the petition signed by 160 Csángó-Hungarians of Pustiana was the same as it had always been: the local leaders of the church made various excuses and *rejected* the plea.⁸⁰ Had they allowed the practice of religion in Hungarian, because of the advanced state of the language switch and fragile national identity, only *very few* (perhaps only a few thousand) would have been able to take advantage of this option.⁸¹

A census completed in a valid manner would not have shown more than *a score-or-two thousand* people of Hungarian mother tongue in Moldavia⁸² – partly due to the aforementioned causes; nevertheless, the Romanian state was not willing to acknowledge the existence of this Moldavian Hungarian minority: even in the census of 1992 nothing was left to chance. The interviewers were given strict orders that no one was to be counted as Hungarian. In those villages where the people refused to be listed as anything but Hungarian (Pustiana, Cleja, Luizi-Călugăra, Galbeni), the interviewers threatened them with jail or said they would call the police. Following the orders of the circular of the episcopate of Iași, the congregations of Săbăoani, Luizi-Călugăra, Cleja, and Șomușca, among others, were asked to describe themselves as Romanian since, after all, they were “*Romanian Catholics*.”⁸³ (The parson of Săbăoani threatened to *deport* those who didn’t claim to be Romanian. In response to this, Perka Margit, local census taker, quit her job and wrote an open letter as a protest against this corruption.⁸⁴) It is no wonder that under

⁷⁹ 20 residents of Galbeni who went to see the Pope were humiliated from the pulpit by the priest who said: “they sold the country for a bowl of lentils”. (Csoma–Bogdánfalvy 1993: 163).

⁸⁰ *Háromszék* (Sfântu Gheorghe). March 7, 1998.

⁸¹ For more information see Tánzos 1996: 174–189.

⁸² The Vice-president of MCSMSZ, Csicsó Antal, counted thirty thousand Csángós who wished to preserve their knowledge of the Hungarian language. (*Szabadság*. July 27, 1999.) Researchers know that the statistical data concerning the Moldavian Hungarian Catholics cannot be relied on, but they also know that those numbers that claim 100–150,000 Hungarian speakers have no basis either. Partially due to this, the Hungarian ethnographers of Babeș–Bolyai University, Cluj, began research on identity and language knowledge, which finally showed that, at the beginning of the 1990s, there were 62,000 Csángós who spoke the Hungarian language on any level at all (Tánzos 1997: 379–382).

⁸³ The term “Romanian Catholic” appeared at the end of the 19th century, when the priests who wished to assimilate the people tried to manipulate them with the false word etymology according to which *Roman Catholic* (in Romanian: *romano catolic*) really means *Romanian Catholic* (in Romanian: *român catolic*), and so the Csángós must call themselves Romanian.

⁸⁴ *Romániai Magyar Szó*. January 23, 1992.

such circumstances only 1,800 people claimed to be Hungarian. (In addition, only 500 of these lived in authentic settlements: the villages – Tánzos 1997: 383.)

In the second half of the 1990s, the struggle continued for Hungarian-language education. It grew ever more obvious that the nationalist surroundings could not accept any civic initiatives that might lead to Hungarian education or the strengthening of Hungarian identity in Moldavia; to exercise its power, the authorities used any and all methods to repress these initiatives. From this point of view – as the events show – after the new government took power in 1996, no real change occurred. Despite the fact that DAHR was part of the new, centre-right government coalition, it was not possible to launch optional Hungarian-language education in a single village, even though the Education Law of 1995 provided for it. In July of 1996, 29 residents of Cleja requested, in a petition to the county board of school supervisors, that the subjects of *Hungarian Language and Literature* as well as *The History of National Minorities* be added to the local school curriculum. They received no answer. At this point 13 parents went to the Ministry of Education; even though between 1997 and 2000 the Ministry ordered the local authorities to comply with the petitions, the county's head school inspector and the principal of the school *sabotaged* the program. (The parents and their children, who were only exercising their constitutional rights, were constantly harassed and threatened.) The same thing happened to the parents of Lespezi and Pustiana (Kötő 2001: 170–175).

The “Csángó question” however, *could no longer remain the internal affair of Romania*. People in western countries heard about the scandals too,⁸⁵ and the news reached the European Council as well. In May of 2000, the Culture and Education Committee of the European Council discussed the report of Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa, from Finland, on the cultural situation of the Csángó minorities. In September, the Committee's head secretary, Joao Ary and Komlóssy József, the Vice-president of the Federal Union of European Ethnic Groups, went on a fact finding trip to the Csángó-Hungarian villages to see for themselves.

While a few important western councils looked into the educational problem of the Csángós as a human rights issue, certain movements began in 1999 on a local level as well. The Union of Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians moved their headquarters from Transylvania (Sfântu Gheorge) to Bacău, and appointed new leaders. A new, *younger generation* began work, among whom many had studied in Transylvania or Hungary. These people had a wider outlook and range of connections than their predecessors and bravely used the tools of the post-modern era, such as the Internet.⁸⁶ New civic groups were organised (the Via Spei Csángó Youth Organisation in Bacău, and the Szeret-Klészse Foundation in Cleja), and full-houses were started; out of constraint they began an *alternative form of education*.

⁸⁵ In 1995, Csicsó Antal had already held lectures in Brussels on the true state of Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians.

⁸⁶ It is also interesting to note what a wide range of activity the Csángó e-mail list has: Csángó-magyar@yahooroups.com

The MCSMSZ decided that they would wage no more futile battles with the Bacău County school board in order to have Hungarian taught in school. In 2001, with the help of twelve teachers, alternative classes were begun in various private homes in the following seven Moldavian settlements: Cleja, Buda, Șomușca, Pustiana, Fundu Răcăciuni, Gioseni and Galbeni.⁸⁷

Though the local officials did everything to prevent these initiatives, the genie was out of the bottle. As the Csángó-Hungarian cultural case had already reached European forums (the Ministry Committee of the May 2001 parliamentary meeting of the European Council made various recommendations to Romania in November, which included reforms calling for the introduction of mother tongue education and religion for Moldavian Csángós) it was impossible to employ the means the far right had suggested in the Bucharest parliament.

The years to come will show whether those efforts, which hope to save the Hungarian language in Moldavia in the last hour, will succeed. Only fraction of the communities which still spoke Hungarian 100-150 years ago still speak the language; however, those who still speak the language *have the right* to preserve it and develop it. The future will show whether they have the *opportunity* to do this. Will the central and local governments stop them? This will be one of the tests of Romanian democracy.

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