

## The Council of Europe should contribute to deepening democracy in Romania

Written by .Gazda Zoltan

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- Open letter to Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland Secretary General of the Council of Europe -

Your Excellency,

44 municipalities of Szeklerland, located in the centre of Romania, has asked the Romanian government and parliament, in the name of the local communities who elected them, to make it possible to belong to a single and separate administrative unit. They asked for this administrative unit to be called Székelyföld (Szeklerland), and to have a special autonomous status guaranteed by the law for managing its own affairs, and for preserving the self identity of its Szekler-Hungarian inhabitants. They also asked for Hungarian to be considered a second official language of this region, besides Romanian. The municipalities have sent the resolutions containing their requests to the Council of Europe, the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The memorandum is related to Romania's planned administrative reorganization and the fact that, even though the government has promised to respect Romania's international commitments, they published a plan according to which Szeklerland shall be part of a region where the Szeklers make up only 29% of the population, while their proportion in Szeklerland is 75%. This plan violates not only the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but also the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The government of Romania has launched the process of the administrative reorganization, initiated the necessary measures to amend the constitution, without asking for the opinion of the local administrative authorities. This step should have been mandatory, according to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in Strasbourg on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1985, ratified by Romania by Law 199/1997, and which states in Article 4 Paragraph 6, that *"Local authorities shall be consulted, insofar as possible, in due time and in an appropriate way*

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*in the planning and decision-making processes for all matters which concern them directly.”*

The above mentioned requests were drafted in the spirit of the above cited article of the Charter, by the 44 municipal authorities (whose number is expected to increase in the future). Instead of listening, the prefects (the government representatives) contested the resolutions before the administrative court and have been trying to intimidate the mayors and local councillors.

We are convinced that Romania's administrative reorganization should not violate the rights of the Szeklers, and that this violation will not happen, in case the government will respect the commitments Romania has undertaken in the Council of Europe. We strongly believe that the Council of Europe has to assume a serious role in strengthening the democracy in its member states, has to demand to fully respect the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, thus serving the stability of Europe as well.

We ask you, Mr. Secretary-General to ensure that the Council of Europe supervises the administrative reorganization in Romania, to promote dialog between the government and the Szekler community, in the spirit of the documents of the Council of Europe, and to remind Romania that its obligations must be respected.

Tg-Mures/Marosvásárhely, the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2014.

The Szekler National Council