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CULTURAL REVITALIZATION OF THE ZALA (POMURJE) CROATS IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

Today, there are 13 recognized minority communities in the Republic of Hungary, among them Croats, who live in a geographically dispersed area. A greater number is present in 8 counties: Baranya, Zala, Vas, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Bács-Kiskun, Pest, Somogy and Fejér. However, due to migration, today they are present in almost all counties. Most groups of Croats immigrated between the 15th and 18th centuries. Researchers divide them into seven groups, namely: Burgenland Croats, Pomurje Croats, Podravina Croats, Bosniaks, Šokci, Bunjevci and Rascians. The subject of this research are the Pomurje Croats who live in Zala County and their cultural life at the turn of the 21st century. The Pomurje Croats live in settlements along the Mura river and speak the Kajkavian dialect of the Croatian language. While in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the rights of national and ethnic minorities included mainly language rights and the right to education, in the second half of the 20th century, especially at the turn of the 21st century, broad cultural and political rights of minority communities are ensured. During the period of democratic changes in Hungary, that is, from the 1990s until today, important laws and regulations were passed that could guarantee their cultural development, and therefore the cultural development and revitalization of Pomurje Croats. The goal of the research is to use field research to show the rich cultural life of the Pomurje Croats, which is aimed at preserving the Croatian linguistic and cultural identity. Cultural institutions and cultural events contribute to the preservation and development of national consciousness, the value of cultural heritage and the native Croatian language. Without them, the cultural revitalization of Pomurje Croats would not have been possible. Croatian minority self-government units together with the civil sector contribute to the cultural revitalization of Zala Croats in Hungary.

***Keywords:** assimilation, Croatian minority self-government units, Croatian civil organizations, Croatian identity, cultural programs, cultural revitalization*

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INTRODUCTION

Pomurje Croats mostly live in the following settlements: Tótszentmárton (Sumarton), Tótszerdahely (Serdahel), Molnári (Mlinarce), Múrákeresztúr (Kerestur), Fityeháza (Fícéhaz), Semjénháza (Pustara), Petrivente (Petriba), Szepetnek (Sepetnik) and nearby towns in Nagykanizsa (Velika Kaniža) and Letenya (Letenje). Their total number is between 6 and 8 thousand. Statistical data indicate the occurrence of the assimilation of national and ethnic minorities since the 1960s, which continues at the beginning of the 21st century. Minority communities, including Pomurje Croats, are certainly aware of the threat of disappearance. In accordance with the laws and regulations that apply to them, they take initiatives and organize a number of cultural manifestations and events through their minority self-government units and civil organizations, all in order to slow down assimilation tendencies and preserve their language, culture and identity. The fact is that due to the centuries-old past within the borders of the Hungarian state, they declare a dual identity, and their Hungarian identity is at least as strong as the minority Croatian one. Natural assimilation, ethnically mixed marriages as well as the influence and consequences of social modernization processes and the minority policy that was maintained during communism contributed to the acceleration of assimilation tendencies. Likewise, linguistic assimilation is ever increasing. Croats, including Pomurje Croats, as well as other minority communities are losing their language, which is confirmed by statistical data obtained on the basis of the population census (1990, 2001, 2011).

In addition to language, a key element of minority identity is attachment to cultural tradition and participation in the cultural life of the (Croatian) minority community, which can be an indicator of the active expression of minority belonging of persons who have “forgotten” their native Croatian language, which is particularly characteristic of younger generations. Most families speak Hungarian, while in a smaller number of families both Hungarian and Croatian are spoken. Another possible reason for linguistic assimilation, apart from mixed marriages, is that after marriage, the young family often lives separately from their parents, who still use Croatian language in everyday communication, so for these reasons, the native Croatian language is not passed on to younger generations. Assimilation tendencies can be slowed down by a positive discrimination policy that began to form in the early 1990s, when the democratization processes in Hungary began. Therefore, the key issue regarding the survival of minority communities, including the Pomurje Croats, is the preservation of their linguistic and cultural identity.

The basis of Hungary's minority policy is the belief that the language, culture and traditions of the people are part of the cultural values of Hungary. The preservation

and development of cultural heritage is the task and interest of the entire society in Hungary, for which the Hungarian Government provides financial support and thus enables the establishment and development of a minority self-government system as well as the functioning of the civil sector, which have the task of realizing and preserving the cultural autonomy of minorities. National and ethnic minorities are protected through the Constitution and laws, as well as various international documents, on the basis of which they have the opportunity to build cultural autonomy and manage their own institutions since legal, financial and political conditions are provided for this purpose. The high level of protection of minorities - the protection of linguistic, cultural and political rights - that was achieved in that period is an expression of Hungary's democracy. *II Act of 1989 on the right to unification and the LXXVII Act of 1993 on the rights of national and ethnic minorities* enabled the re-establishment and activity of minority associations and the establishment of minority self-government units at the local and state level, on the basis of which the minority self-government system has been gradually built and developed since 1994.⁵ The goal of adopting the act on minorities was to ensure appropriate rights for minorities in order to preserve their identity and prevent assimilation tendencies. It is the first systematic act that determines which national and ethnic minorities are recognized, regulating the individual and collective rights of minorities, enabling the establishment of a minority self-government system, which, with other regulations, through the financing system, guarantees the construction of the cultural autonomy of minorities, which is achieved by taking over and independently managing their minority cultural and educational institutions. The right to nurture minority culture and the right to education are defined as individual, but also as collective rights of minorities that enable the establishment of a minority educational system and a system of cultural institutions. The minority self-government unit is the most important institutional form of collective participation of minority communities, including the Croatian one, in public life. The electoral activity of minority voters and the increase in the number of minority self-government units show the interest of minority communities to reorganize. Since 2006, a minority electoral roll has been introduced. Since 2010, independent candidacy has been abolished and only members of minority organizations stand as candidates. A new system of minority self-management has been implemented since 2006 at three levels: local, regional and state level. Minority self-government units handle minority public affairs at the settlement, region (counties and the capital) and state level. In accordance with the amendments to the act on minorities of 2003 and 2005, minority self-government units can take care of conservation, or establish educational and minority cultural institutions. Amendments

⁵ Vuk, Margit Bernadett *Kulturni razvoj i perspektive hrvatske manjine u Mađarskoj od 1989. do danas.* Doctoral thesis, FFZG 2015, p. 256.

to the act on minorities of 2005 define the scope of minority self-government units more precisely. Minority public affairs that minority self-government units handle independently are: representation of the interests of members of the minority, especially fostering, preservation and enrichment of the mother tongue, the realization and preservation of the cultural autonomy of the minority through minority self-government units, as well as tasks to achieve the organizational, personal and material conditions necessary for this, activities with the aim of creating organizational, personal and material preconditions related to minority representation in state administration bodies, as well as local and minority self-government units.

The educational institutions play an ever-increasing role in preserving Croatian identity, where various models and programs for teaching the Croatian language, literature and ethnography (culture) are realized within the Hungarian education system. According to the act on minorities, the right to education is an individual and collective right of minority communities. At the request of at least 8 parents, the self-government unit is obliged to provide conditions for minority education. Education in kindergartens is carried out in a kindergarten group with at least 8 children, and teaching at school is carried out in a classroom, department or combined classes with a minimum of 8 students. According to the National Framework Curriculum (NAT), the goal of minority education is to develop and ensure the use of the native minority language and to preserve and strengthen minority identity.⁶ Every student, regardless of nationality, must acquire knowledge pertaining to minority culture. The teaching of the native Croatian language and literature in the Croatian settlements that are the subject of the research is carried out as a separate subject, from the first grade of elementary school for an average of 4-5 hours per week, while ethnography (culture) is carried out as a separate subject, or it is integrated into fields of education, and is manifested in extracurricular school activities. Since 1998, schools have been creating school curricula containing programs by class, and which relate to the history and culture of the Croatian minority. History, geography, ethnography, musical culture, that is, the Heritage of the Republic of Croatia, as well as the oral, written, musical and material heritage of the Croatian minority in Hungary, must be studied at all levels of education, and in accordance with the age of the students. The education of Croatian intellectuals is a condition for the survival of Croatian communities in the future, because they will determine the future directions of development of the Croatian community. Unfortunately, the closing of schools in smaller settlements (Pustara, Mlinarce, Sumarton) leads to faster assimilation of the Croatian community. The role of educational institutions in the settlements of Serdahel, Kerestur, Sepetnik, in which

⁶ Vuk, Margit Bernadett *Kulturni razvoj i perspektive hrvatske manjine u Mađarskoj od 1989. do danas.* Doctoral thesis, FFZG 2015, p. 177.

the Croatian language and literature are taught as a subject, is similar to the role of Croatian minority self-government units and relates primarily to the slowing down of assimilation, i.e. the revitalization of Croatian communities.

Almost every settlement has a cultural center, a library, cultural and artistic societies and civil associations that operate in parallel and cooperate with Croatian minority self-government units. Local and national media report on the rich cultural life of the Pomurje Croats: *Zalai Hírlap*, *Kanizsaújság*, *Hrvatski glasnik* - the weekly magazine of Croats in Hungary, *Internet radio Croatica*, *Hrvatska kronika* - a minority show. Cultural institutions and cultural events contribute to the preservation and development of national consciousness, the value of cultural heritage and the native Croatian language, which lead to cultural revitalization of Pomurje Croats.

CROATIAN SETTLEMENTS AND TOWNS IN ZALA COUNTY INHABITED BY CROATS

Tótszentmárton (Sumarton)

Sumarton is located southwest of Nagykanizsa. It has about 840 inhabitants, more than half of whom are Croats.⁷ They speak Kajkavian dialect. The village was mentioned under the name *Villa S. Martini* in 1321, and for the first time in 1471 under the name *Zentmárton*. The current name of *Tótszentmárton* has been used in writing under since 1697, which indicates that Croats lived there even then.⁸ The settlement has twin-cities in Croatia, namely: Sveta Marija, Donji Kraljevec, Goričan. There is a church and *Zavičajna kuća <Homeland House>* in the village. The school is closed and students attend school in the neighbouring settlement of Serdahel. The kindergarten still exists, and kindergarten children are included and actively participate in cultural events in the village (*Village Day*, *International Day of Older Persons*).

A Croatian minority self-government unit was established and it cooperates with civil associations. Civil associations are: *KUD <cultural and artistic society>*, *Wood Carvers Association*, *Naprijed Sumarton <Go, Sumarton> Sports Club*, *Sveti Martin Friends of Wine Association* (Szent Márton Borbarát Egyesület). *The Sumarton cultural and artistic society* was founded in 1996 on the initiative of the Croatian minority self-government unit of that time, with the aim of preserving Croatian culture and tradition.⁹ In the beginning, a dance group, a women's choir and a brass orchestra were

⁷ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

⁸ Kerecsényi, Edit *Povijest i materijalna kultura pomurskih Hrvata*. Poduzeće za izdavanje udžbenika, Budapest 1982, p. 35.

⁹ www.totszentmarton.hu (accessed on 31 December 2021)

part of *KUD*. Today it consists of a mixed choir, a dance group and a tamburica orchestra (*Sumartonski lepi dečki* <Handsome boys from Sumarton>), performing folk songs and dances from Međimurje as part of their repertoire. Their performances enrich the cultural life of the settlement and neighbouring towns. They also perform in Croatia. New sections were established as well: men also joined the women's choir, so it became a mixed choir, later a theater, tamburica and ethnic section were created, resulting in a significant increase of active members. In the period from 2010 to 2015 *KUD* had about 75 members, including, in addition to older members, children and the middle-aged generation. They toured all over Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The most important events in which they participate are the (*Prósza, bor és tambura fesztivál*) *Festival of prose, wine and tamburica*>, *Polufinale Međimurske popevke* (Muraközi dal előfásnlaje) <*Semi-final of Folk Songs of Međimurje*>, *Živi Betlehem* (Élő Btelehem) <*Bethlehem Alive*>.

Association Sveti Martin - friends of wine was founded in 2007 with 13 members. To this day, the number of members has almost doubled. The aim of the association is to preserve the cultural and historical heritage of the nearby plantations and vineyards, preserve the culture and customs of the town, expand the tourism offer and develop viticulture. The association fosters the Croatian language, Croatian folk customs and spreads the tradition of viticulture, winemaking, and wine culture. Members participate in numerous events and offer their wines, for example, at *Veselje na Martinju* <St. Martin's Festival>, other events and in wine cellars at wine tasting events. Every year they organize *Vincekovo* (Vince napi pinceszter) <*Start of the wine-growing year*>, *Piknik na Orbanovo* (Orbán napi hegyi picnic) <*Picnic in honor of Orban*>, *Krštenje mošta na Martinje* (Szent Márton napi mustkeresztelő) <*Baptism of must on St. Martin's Day*>, *Posvećenje vina na Sv. Ivana* (Szent János napi borszentelés) <*Vine consecration on St. John's Day*>. They organize professional programs several times a year in order to provide their members and winegrowers from Sumarton with professional development. They built the Saint Orbán Resort (Szent Orbán pihenőhely) with the funds received from the tender. They set up tables, benches, pavilions and bread ovens for guests and visitors.

Important manifestations in which they participate are: *Open wine cellars* and *Village Day* - in June, *Festival of prose, wine and tamburica* - in August, *St. Martin's festival* (Márton napi Vigasság, Szent Márton Újbor Fesztivál) - in November.

The *Cultural Center*, as a multi-functional common space, is the central place of cultural life in Sumarton. The building was refurbished in 2014 and became a new complex that houses a library, an IT classroom, a new club for mothers and babies, and rooms for the needs of Sumarton *KUD*. Most cultural events are organized in the Cultural Center, such as wine competitions, events on the occasion of *Fašnik* <Carnival> and *St. Martin's Day*, parties, balls, or programs

for the preservation and nurturing of traditions, in which kindergarten children and schoolchildren also participate. The library has slightly more than 3,000 books, among which there are about 370 volumes in the Croatian language. In the village there is also the *Homeland House*, which was built around 1900 in the classicist style and was refurbished in 2004 with the help of financial resources that were obtained on the basis of a tender. It represents the bourgeois-peasant housing culture from the beginning of the 20th century. Three puppets wear and present Croatian traditional clothing. *The Homeland House* may be visited with a prior notice.

Tótszerdahely (Serdahel)

Tótszerdahely is located on the banks of the Mura river. It abounds in lakes and is part of the Pomurje protected area. The village has about 1100 inhabitants, most of whom are Croats (more than 700 of them).¹⁰ The village was first mentioned in writing in 1370 as Zeredahel, and in 1967 as Tott Szerdahel.¹¹ It got its name from the day on which the fairs were held in that place (szerda - Wednesday), and the prefix tot means Slav, and unambiguously points to the Croatian origin of the population. They speak Kajkavian dialect of the Croatian language. Most of them are older and middle-aged generations who still use their mother tongue in everyday communication. The twin-city of Tótszerdahely is Donja Dubrava.

The Stipan Blažetin Croatian national self-government unit was founded, which cooperates with civil associations and other institutions in the village with the aim of preserving the Croatian language and customs.

The Stipan Blažetin Croatian Cultural and Educational Institute is an institution of the Croatian self-government unit, which serves to preserve, develop, and present the spiritual and material cultural heritage, traditions and customs of members of the Croatian community. It integrates various directions of education and participates in expanding the possibilities for education of Croatian settlements in the surrounding area. The main activity of the institution is to discover, get to know Croatian spiritual culture and artistic values, and nurture customs and traditions. The institution cooperates with domestic and foreign cultural institutions, organizations and other participants in cultural life.

Significant events in the settlement are: *Village Day, Festival of Gibanica, Family, Sports and Arts Day, Actress Fedák Sári Commemoration Day, Croatian Autumn Literary Days.*

¹⁰ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

¹¹ <https://muradrava.eu> (accessed on 4 January 2022)

The *Serdahel Croatian Choir* (Tótszedahelyi horvát kórus) is active in the village, participating in all the programs of the settlement, also performing in the surrounding Croatian villages.

The village has a kindergarten, a school, a cultural center. In kindergarten and school, children learn the Croatian language and foster the Croatian customs, they sing, dance and play the tamburica. There is a modern church in the village. In the 90s, Vilmos Harangozó, a priest in Serdahel, began to celebrate mass partly in the Croatian language in the surrounding settlements, in Mlinarc, Pustara and Sumarton. He had churches built, first in Mlinarc, then Pustara and Serdahel (1994). He published the collected prayers and songs of this region under the title *Ruža nebeska, molitve i popevke* <Heavenly Rose, prayers and folk songs>. It is a prayer book in the Kajkavian dialect. The new priest who came to Serdahel, Marton, unfortunately does not speak the Croatian language, and he even forbade the celebration of mass in the Croatian language in the Croatian settlements where he celebrates mass.

The former *Fedak Manor* was turned into a center that also serves for the activities of the entire area. It hosts various events, conferences, seminars, professional trainings for teachers. In the manor's attic there are 10 furnished rooms with bathrooms for accommodation purposes that are suitable for tourists. Tourism possibilities in the place are: fishing, boat tours and rafting.

The Homeland House is arranged as a museum, where there is an exhibition that presents local history, thus conjuring up images of the past.

Molnári (Mlinarce)

Molnári is located in Zala County, near the Mura river, next to the Croatian border. It has slightly more than 700 inhabitants, most of whom are Croats.¹² Unfortunately, the number of Croats is decreasing year by year due to emigration and immigration, primarily of Hungarians and Roma. The village was first mentioned in written sources in 1321.¹³ The name comes from the noun molnár (miller).¹⁴ The Croatian inhabitants of the settlement speak the Kajkavian dialect, but the younger generations know less and less the language of their ancestors.

The Croatian minority self-government unit operates in the village, which has the task of fostering and preserving Croatian traditions and customs. A choir was also founded, which participates in various events in the settlement and in the surrounding towns. In 2021, on *Village Day*, the village celebrated the 700th anniversary of the

¹² www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

¹³ <https://muradrava.eu> (accessed on 4 January 2022)

¹⁴ Kerecsényi, Edit *Povijest i materijalna kultura pomurskih Hrvata*. Poduzeće za izdavanje udžbenika, Budapest 1982, p. 79.

existence of the settlement, which survived despite the Turkish invasions thanks to Croats who foster their customs, language and culture. After the holy mass, a historical exhibition was opened in the cultural center and a rich cultural program followed.

The Catholic church was built and consecrated in 1991. There is a kindergarten in the village where children learn Croatian songs and preserve the customs. The school was closed due to the drop in the number of children, but the *Cultural Center* was refurbished and it now offers space for cultural events. Every year, the minority self-government unit participates in and organizes the *Village Day*, harvest parade, sports events, street football tournament. The Mura river offers opportunities for water tours and rafting.

Murakeresztúr (Kerestur) <Deutschkreutz>

Murakeresztúr is located in the Zala County, southwest of the town of Nagykanizsa, on the banks of the Mura. It was named after the Benedictine monastery dedicated to the Holy Trinity, which has existed since 1347. It was created by the merger of two independent settlements in 1964: Keresztúr (Kerestur) and Kollátszeg (Kolaciba) and since then it has been called Murakeresztúr (in Croatian Kerestur). Throughout history, the population has become mixed. Croats have always had good ties with their motherland (twin-cities are Kotoriba and Donja Dubrava) and to this day they preserve their Croatian language and traditions. Kerestur is also a railway border crossing and this fact greatly contributed to the development of the town and played a significant role in the life of the village. The village has about 1,800 inhabitants, and the number of Croats is slightly above the 400.¹⁵ The Croatian minority self-government unit operates in the village.

The Miklós Zrinyi General Cultural Center (Zrinyi Miklós Általános Művelődési Központ) consists of an elementary school, a kindergarten, a cultural centre and a library. In the *Nikola Zrinski Elementary School*, both Hungarian and Croatian culture is fostered. The Croatian language is taught as a subject 4-5 hours a week. The school has partner schools, namely schools in Kotoriba, Draškovec and the 3rd Elementary School in Čakovec. The school cooperated with the University of Zagreb, the Elementary School in Retkovac and the Pomurje schools in Zala County. The institution organizes joint programs with institutions from Pomurje, namely: *Bilingual student conference "Zrinski"* (in September), *Zrinski Days* (in September), *Zrinski Cup Run*, *Mura Cup Run*, *International Children's Carnival*, joint trips to Međimurje, for example. The school also has a Croatian dance group.

¹⁵ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

The project *Tragovima Zrinskih* <In the wake of Zrínyi> was realized within the framework of the Croatian-Hungarian cross-border program IPA 2007-2013.¹⁶ It was founded on the cooperation of six educational institutions. From the Hungarian side, elementary schools in Kerestur, Serdahel, Mlinarce and Sumarton participated in the project, and from Croatia, elementary schools in Kotoriba and Draškovec. As part of the project, the following joint programs were implemented: Tamburica school in Kerestur and Serdahel, exchange of Croatian and Hungarian language teachers, professional training for Croatian language teachers, opening of an info center in Draškovec, renovation of a multi-functional building in Kerestur, tamburica camp in Sumarton, football camp in Kerestur, language camp in Mlinarce, folklore training in Draškovec, sports meetings in Kerestur and Sedahel, poetry and prose recitation competitions in Serdahel, establishment of a joint choir and dance group consisting of students of schools in Kerestur and Kotoriba, commemoration of Zrinski family anniversaries (*Commemoration Day of Katarina Zrinski* in Serdahel, *Commemoration Day of Nikola Zrinski* in Kerestur, *Croatian Language Day* in Sumarton, excursions, quizzes).

The *Kerestur Cultural Society* operates as a public cultural association. Its field of activity is culture, telecommunications, public education, preservation of tradition.

The association was founded on 23 July 1991, primarily with the aim of providing information and public services. The association is actively involved in public cultural affairs, preserving local traditions and fostering the Croatian culture. It maintains lively relations with domestic and cross-border non-governmental organizations whose work is carried out for similar purposes, as well as with municipalities in neighbouring countries. They organize joint events, meetings and programs. In 2007 it became a non-profit organization for development. Part of the society are the *Rosemary Women's Choir* (Rozmaring Asszonykórus), *Mura Dance Group* (Mura dance), *Njegovatelji tradicija Mura* <Mura Tradition Keepers> (MURA zaszönyörzők) and the *Photographers' Society* (Fotokör). They secured the funds on the basis of a tender for the purchase of national dance clothing and teachers' salaries, and they also organize children's camps and national days. For the needs and functioning of the association, they bought a minibus for 9 people.

They organized 3 big events: *Day of Tradition Preservation*, *Live Wedding* - together as part of the civic day of the civil community and the meeting of 3 generations. They also initiated local television broadcast. In August 2008, they launched their own website. Since 2010, they have been organizing cultural and sports events. In 2011 they founded the folklore group MURA, which has Croatian and Hungarian dances in its repertoire. In 2011, they founded the MURA dance group, which performs the dances with latino, operetta and modern dance elements. They have also been representing

¹⁶ *Tragovima Zrinjskih*. Yearbook of elementary schools Kerestur, Serdahelj, Kotoriba i Draškovec for 2010. Croatica Nonprofit Kft, Budapest, 2011, pp. 12-13.

the interests of the Croatian community since 2013. In 2014 they founded the children's folklore group *Csalamádé*. There are several other civil associations operating in the village, among which the most significant in terms of preserving traditions is the *Zrinski kadeti Udruga za očuvanje tradicija* <Zrinski Cadets, Association for Tradition Preservation> (Zrínyi Kadétok Hagymányőrző Egyesület).

The village has a *Cultural Center*, a *Homeland House* and a sports hall. Mura is suitable for water tours, and the area around the river is suitable for hiking and cycling tours.

The most important programs are: *Zrinski Thematic Week* (Zrínyi témahét), *Zrinski Days* (Zrínyi napi programok).

Fityeháza (Ficéház)

The settlement was first mentioned in 1422 as Fythyefelde.¹⁷ The village has approximately 700 inhabitants, of which around 100 are Croats.¹⁸ The Croatian self-government unit operates in the village. They preserve Croatian traditional customs, of which Easter and harvest customs stand out. The choir that is active in the village also preserves national cultural values. In the village there is a library, a *Cultural Center* and a common community area that is used for various cultural programs and free activities of the population.

The Ficéház Women's Folk Choir (Fityeházi Hagymányőrző Népdalkör) was founded in 1997.¹⁹ The members are cheerful women. Croatian and Hungarian songs from the Zala County are part of their repertoire. The women's choir participated in the county and national folk song contests, where it performed Hungarian and Croatian songs and won third and second place. The Women's Folk Choir preserves the customs, in which not only older persons, but also young people of the village take part. The customs include plucking feathers, corn husking/shucking, presenting and preparing old traditional dishes: gibanica, pogačica, dishes made from corn flour, and handicrafts: embroidery, knitting, crocheting, etc.

Semjénháza (Pustara)

The village is located south-west of the town of Nagykanizsa near Mura, halfway between the towns of Letenya and Nagykanizsa. Most of the town extends over a hill. The village was first mentioned in written sources in 1373 as Semlyenfeulde and in 1420 as Semyenhaza.²⁰ The number of inhabitants is about 600 and according to

¹⁷ <https://muradarava.eu> (accessed on 4 January 2022)

¹⁸ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

¹⁹ www.fityehaz.hu (accessed on 3 January 2022)

²⁰ www.semjenhaza.hu (accessed on 31 December 2021)

the last population census from 2011, more than half of them declared themselves as Croats.²¹ The older generation speaks the local variant of the Croatian language well. Whether they meet in the village, a store, doctor's office, the post office, the self-government unit, they start speaking in their own language.

The village has been modernized in recent decades, therefore emigration is not characteristic, but rather immigration. Although the population is aging and passing on, empty houses are easily sold because young families are happy to move here. Young people who are still in school, opt for studies in the capital or other cities and they usually get a job there. Also, it is characteristic for the middle-aged generation that, due to the proximity of Croatia and Austria, they migrate and go there to work and only return home on weekends.

The Croatian minority self-government unit operates in the village, and Croatian folk customs and traditions are preserved in cooperation with other settlements in the county (among which harvest parade, pilgrimages, excursions, *Village Day*, street parties stand out). The kindergarten and school are closed in the settlement, and most of the children attend the kindergarten in Mlinarce and the school in Serdahel. The building of the former school has been repurposed and now operates as an *Integrated Service Common Space* (IKSZT) that meets the common needs of the population, i.e. performing various activities in their free time. This modern building includes a common community area, a library and a common public space, commercial area and areas for the civil sphere. There is also a picturesque kitchen here, which provides space for preparing Croatian and Hungarian specialties, so that visitors can not only try them, but also get to know the process of preparing and cooking them. The modern church was built in the 1990s and became the pride of the settlement. In addition to cultural events, sports events occupy an important place in the village. A sports center was built encompassing a large sports field, a small field with artificial grass, a place for long jumping, outdoor chess, table tennis and a volleyball court.

The women's choir under the name of *Semjénháza Gyöngyszemei* (*Biseri Pustare*) <Pearls of Pustara> enriches the cultural life of the settlement with its performances and is happy to visit the surrounding settlements where Croats live. An important task of the Croatian self-government unit is to preserve the Croatian identity, and in addition to the women's choir, other members of civil associations (sports associations) that operate in the settlement help therewith.

²⁵ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

Petrivente (Petriba)

Petriba is located in southern Zala and it is a “real gem.” It has about 400 inhabitants who foster Croatian traditions. The number of Croats is around 60.²² Today’s village was created by the unification of *Petriba* and *Ventepuszta*. *Petriba* was first written about in 1313 as a land called *Petri*, which was owned by the son of Ban Simon Bekcsényi.²³ The name of the village, *Petri*, comes from the personal name Péter (Petar) <*Peter*>. The Croatian national self-government unit was founded in the village, which takes care of fostering, preserving and presenting Croatian traditions. The civil cultural association called *Petribske ružice* <Petriba Roses> preserves old customs and plays an important role in the cultural life of the village.

The traditional events that are held are the *Village Day*, *International Day of Older Persons*, the carnival, and among them the folk traditional wedding event that attracts more and more guests to the village stands out.

Szepetnek (Sepetnik)

The history of Sepetnik goes back to the 8th millennium BC. In fact, the place has been inhabited since then. Before the migration of Hungarians to the Pannonian Basin, it was part of the Frankish and Slavic Empire. The parish in that place was founded during the reign of King Saint Stephen. The first written mention is in Latin and is found in the charter of the papal envoy Bishop Theobald: Scepethnuc, 1184-1188 (Archbishop's Archives, Veszprém). In older sources it is mentioned as Zepetnuk, Zepetnek, Szepetnuk. Its meaning in Slavic languages: stream, water source (waterfall), abounding in the area.²⁴

Today, people of various ethnicities live in Sepetnik: Hungarians, Germans, Croats and Roma. The number of inhabitants is about 1,600, of which 80 are Croats.²⁵ Several national minority self-government units were founded, such as the Croatian, German and Roma self-government units, which contribute to the cultural life of village with its colorful performances. The Croatian national minority self-government unit was established after the elections in 2006 . The members began to organize themselves with the aim of gathering local Croats and those Croats who moved from the surrounding places where Croats live, fostering the Croatian culture and tradition and preserving the language of their ancestors. Among them, there are young members, but also elderly members. In several families, older people still speak

²² www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

²³ Kerecsényi, Edit *Povijest i materijalna kultura pomorskih Hrvata*. Poduzeće za izdavanje udžbenika, Budapest 1982, p. 105.

²⁴ www.szepetnek.hu (accessed on 3 January 2022)

²⁵ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

Croatian and understand it. If they get together on any occasion, they immediately start speaking Croatian. Students who are interested in the Croatian language have the opportunity to learn the language in clubs at school. The Croatian self-government unit supports the work of the Croatian choir called *Veseli Zbor* <Cheerful Choir>, which was founded after the elections and whose artistic director has been Laura Tánzos since the very beginning. The choir actively participates in local programs and programs organized by the surrounding settlements of Pomurje. Every year, the Croatian self-government unit organizes its own programs, which contribute to the fostering of traditions and help preserve the Croatian identity (e.g. carnival parade, meetings of choirs in surrounding towns, professional trips, meetings, etc.). Thanks to tender grants, they can offer higher quality programs from year to year, including choir meetings and summer camps. Since its foundation, they have been organizing *Croatian Day* every year, as well as the *Choir Meeting*, in which choirs, orchestras, and tamburica orchestras from the surrounding Croatian towns participate. Many Croatian families from the town participate in the programs and excursions organized by the Croatian national minority self-government unit in Sepetnik. In this way, local Croats also get involved in the life of the settlement and provide support and participate in events organized by the local self-government unit, kindergarten, school and civil organizations. The *Pál Királyi Library and Cultural and Educational Center* and the *Integrated Service Common Space (IKSZT)* provide a venue for performances and exhibitions. Notable events in Sepetnik are: carnival parade, programs for Pentecost, Easter and Advent fairs, the *Village Day* and various events organized by national self-government units and civil associations.

Nagykanizsa (Velika Kaniža)

Based on an interview with Marija Vargović, the long-term president of the Croatian minority self-government unit in Kaniža, we learn about its activities and role, as well as the activities of Croatian cultural associations in that city.

The total number of inhabitants in the city of Nagykanizsa is about 50 thousand, of which there are about 500 Croats since Croats had emigrated to this city from the neighboring Croatian settlements of Serdahela, Mlinarce, Pustara, Sumarton, Kerestur and Fičehaz. A dozen citizens, members of the Croatian community, initiated the establishment of the Croatian self-government unit. Their goal was to gather Croats in the city, represent their interests, get to know and foster Croatian culture and tradition, revive the language of their ancestors and build good relations with the motherland. The Croatian self-government unit is the representative body of Croats in the city, which represents their interests and organizes its programs in accordance with them, primarily cultural programs. In the same year, they founded the *Croatian Choir of Velika*

Kaniža. It was a women's choir with eight members. In 2002, men also joined, so they became a mixed choir and now counting about 30 members. The director of the choir is music professor István Zsolt Proszenyák. The Croatian self-government unit has also initiated Croatian language courses that they organize every year, because their goal is for as many people as possible to learn Croatian. They founded the *Association of Croats in Kaniža (Kanizsai Horvátok Egyesülete)* in 1999, which includes and gathers the middle-aged generation. They founded the *Velika Kaniža Croatian Dance Group* in 2004 with members of the choir. They regularly participate in tenders for financial support announced by the Croatian self-government unit, county and city authorities, and they also have the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Croatia in Budapest. They received financial support on the basis of a tender for sewing of national clothing with original motifs from 1930. At the beginning, they performed only in the city, and later they received more and more invitations and visited the surrounding Croatian settlements, as well as various Croatian regions in Hungary. They also perform at the *Croats National Day*. They performed several times in Croatia in Čakovec, a twin-city of Velika Kaniža. Later on, performances followed in other Croatian cities, in Varaždin, Pula, Zagreb (in the hall of Vatroslav Lisinski and at the Međimorsko prošćenje <Međimurje kermesse>). They have expanded their repertoire, so in addition to Pomurje dances, they also perform dances from Podravina and Međimurje. They also include young people in the programs of the Croatian community in Kaniža, organizing free Croatian language courses for them, as well as trips to Croatia and camping trips. They also participate in various programs aimed at preserving Croatian customs and traditions, such as decorating Easter eggs with motifs from that region. They consider the foundation of the tamburica orchestra in 2007 their greatest success, whose members are young high school boys. The six of them, under the guidance of music teacher Zsolt Trojko from Sumarton, practice with dedication, because they really love what they do. On the basis of a tender, they received financial resources for the purchase of instruments and clothing for performances. The members of the orchestra are already composing their own songs and they plan to release a music CD. Their most prominent and main program until 2010 was the *Kulturni susret zalskih Hrvata* <Cultural Meeting of Zala Croats>, which they organize every year with the aim of getting to know the cultural life of Pomurje Croats better, their songs, the way they are performed and, of course, socializing. Since 2010, they have been organizing the *Susret crkvenih zborova zalskih Hrvata* <Zala Croats Church Choir Meeting> during Advent and Lent. After the Croatian mass, choirs from the surrounding villages perform and sing Croatian church songs.

In Velika Kaniža, religious people can participate in mass in the Croatian language. Since 2003, Blaž Horvat, a priest and canon of the Varaždin Cathedral, has been coming to the city once a month and celebrating mass in the Croatian language.

Since they do not have a Croatian pastor, religious people come to Kaniža to attend Croatian masses from all of the Croatian settlements of the county. The place of pilgrimage for all religious people in the county is Komar (Homokkomárom), where a mass is held in Hungarian on the 13th day of every month. The pilgrimage celebration for Croatian religious people in Zala County has been held in Komar every year on 13 July since 2003, on the initiative of the local priest, Imra Szücs. The recognition of this important event also confirmed the state pilgrimage of Croats, which was held in Komar in 2013. In addition, Zala Croats regularly go on pilgrimages to Ludbreg and Marija Bistrica in Croatia, where tamburica players and a choir from Kaniža had the opportunity to perform church songs.

Since 2004, students in the *Osnovna škola, gimnazija i đачki doma Piarista* <Piarista elementary school, gymnasium and student dormitory> have had the opportunity to learn the Croatian language in clubs. Today, Croatian is taught 5 hours a week in the gymnasium, and those who opt for it as a foreign language have 3-6 hours a week. The school has a partner school from Zadar with which it signed a cooperation agreement. *Trgovačka i ugostiteljska srednja škola* <Trade and hospitality high school> used to offer the possibility of learning the Croatian language and cooperated with a school from Opatija. In Mala Kaniža (suburb), students can also learn Croatian in clubs. Croatian language courses organized by the Croatian self-government unit for young Croats are free, meanwhile Hungarians can also attend them for a fee. Among those interested, there are those who want to pass the state exam for the Croatian language because they need it for their job, and others want to learn the language because they have real estate in Croatia. There is also a Croatian group in the kindergarten in Rozgonyi Street, led by teacher Magdolna Havasiné Horvát. The kindergarten cooperates with a kindergarten in Čakovec, from which they received professional help for the organization and implementation of the program. The self-government unit also had clothing sewn for the kindergarten children because they are also included in the performances.

The Croatian self-government unit maintains good relations with civil organizations in Croatia. It cooperates with the *Cultural Center in Čakovec* and the *Čakovec Tourist Board*. They are often guests at their shows (e.g. carnival parade in Čakovec). On the initiative of a lawyer from Čakovec, Đuro Ružić, Croatian friends collected books in Croatia and presented them to the Croatian self-government unit in Kaniža. A small library was opened in their premises, where today there are about 3,000 volumes in the Croatian language. At the beginning, the self-government unit consisted of 5 members including the president, and today it has four members who participate in the design and implementation of the program. The Croatian self-government unit cooperates successfully with the city self-government unit of Velika Kaniža. The city provides them with the conditions for their operation, including an

office, library space, a larger room for reception and meetings, lectures, and courses. Tamburica players, choirs, and dancers practice and come to rehearsals there as well. A legal representative from the city self-government unit always comes to the meetings of the Croatian self-government unit follow and assist their work. Based on the evaluation of the work, i.e. the tasks completed in the previous year, for the year 2013 they received support in the amount of more than 2 million forints for carrying out the tasks of public interest. In accordance with greater financial possibilities, in 2014 the minority self-government unit organized a four-day trip for choir members and tamburica players with the motto “Upoznaj svoju domovinu” <Get to know your homeland>, and they offered a richer program with new content: a Croatian educational conference, discussion groups, activities such as making bouquets for wedding guests. The city of Kaniža provides significant support, and the Croatian self-government unit is also involved in the cultural life of the city. For example, in 2006, the Croatian self-government unit won first prize for Croatian traditional dishes at the city's gastronomic festival entitled *Dödöllefesztivál*. The programs of the Croatian self-government unit and its associations are also covered by the media. There are regular reports about them and their programs in *Hrvatski glasnik* and in the county newspapers *Zalai Hírlap* and *Kanizsaújság*, and they are also followed by local television Kanizsa TV. Croats from the surrounding area are their frequent guests, and more and more Hungarians are also showing interest and attending their programs, because they feel sympathy towards Croats. Croatian Rotary has been helping their work for years, cooperating in building relations between the civil organizations of Kaniža. The City Association of Lawyers maintains relations with the Association of Lawyers from Čakovec, and firefighters, associations of the blind and visually impaired cooperate as well. Rotary helped connect and strengthen the cooperation of entrepreneurs from this side and the other side of the Mura. Even before joining the EU, they had good relations with Croats in Croatia. The proximity of the two countries enables a better connection of regions and border areas, as well as the connection between Pomurje and Međimurje Croats. By joining and becoming a member of the EU and through tenders for EU funds, relations have become even stronger and opportunities for further cooperation, including cultural cooperation and the development of regions and areas, have opened up. The cities of Kaniža and Čakovec participated in a joint project in 2012, in which cultural centers and tourism offices from the Croatian and Hungarian sides were partners. They also cooperate with Croats in Slovenia, in Lendava, and maintain cultural ties with them, which includes annual meetings and mutual visits, as well as the exchange of information related to tenders for EU funds through which cultural events are financed.

The Croatian minority self-government unit has good relations with the Roma self-government unit in Kaniža. They held a joint event entitled *Jedan dan u znaku*

različitosti <One Day in Honor of Diversity>, which they have already organized several times. As part of the program, lectures were held in the morning, followed by joint cooking in the afternoon. Roma and Croatian self-government units, police and border guards participated.

The Croatian self-government in Kaniža is well organized and has an important role and a mission it fulfils, which is the expansion of cultural autonomy and the strengthening of the identity of Pomurje Croats.

Letenye (Letinja)

Letenye is located in the Zala County, next to the Croatian border. It is a border crossing and the district seat. The name of the city of Letenya means south-west state gate. The name of the place in the form “Letyne” was first mentioned in 1347 and derives from the Slavic word “leto” <summer> - nyár. In 1989, it received the status of a city.²⁶ This small city is one of the busiest city crossings to Croatia, a rest stop for tourists on their way to the Adriatic Sea or returning from the coast of the Adriatic. The city has slightly more than 4,000 inhabitants, of which about 100 are Croats.²⁷

The Croatian minority self-government unit has been operating in the city since 1998. The Croatian community is made up of Croats who immigrated from Croatian settlements in Pomurje and maintain strong ties with their birthplaces to this day. The main tasks of the Croatian self-government unit are the organization of Croatian language courses, preservation and fostering of Croatian culture, traditions, traditional clothing, folk art, music and dance culture, monuments of oral literature. They gather and unite members of the Croatian community, as well as supporters who encourage them, with the aim of strengthening and preserving the Croatian identity. Likewise, they consider collecting, fostering and presenting national cultural traditions to be an important task. Several times a year, they organize various events with the aim of preserving Croatian customs and traditions, which are attended by Croats from surrounding towns and Croats from Croatia. Popular programs that they organize are the *Pomurski hrvatski piknik* <Croatian Picnic in Pomurje Style> (gastro and cultural program), the harvest parade (a program whose goal is to preserve tradition) and the *Martinjske veselice* <St. Martin’s Day Festivities> (gastro and cultural program).

A series of events called *Dani pored Mure* <Days by the Mura> (Festival of Three Borders at the Entrance to the State) has been held in Letinja since 1960. It is the largest traditional event in the region that offers cultural programs and entertainment and contributes to fostering friendly relations with people from Croatia and Slovenia,

²⁶ www.letenye.hu (accessed on 3 January 2022)

²⁷ www.horvatok.hu (accessed on 5 January 2022)

among them with Hungarians as well, and also strengthens good neighborly relations. It is believed that artistic groups of different ethnicities and nationalities and their presentation, getting to know their culture, preserving and respecting different customs and traditions can strengthen the connection and rapprochement of European peoples.

The Croatian self-government unit founded the *Croatian Choir*, which presents and performs Croatian songs. A folklore group is active in the kindergarten because it is believed that Croatian identity should be developed from an early age.

In addition to the kindergarten and elementary school, the *Baklja* <Torch> *Educational Center* and Library are also active in Letinja for educational purposes and cultural events.

CROATIAN COUNTY SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS

It is a longstanding tradition of the Croatian county self-government units to take care of religious life and to organize Croatian masses, church meetings and pilgrimages for Croats living in the county. In addition, it also organizes a traditional *Advent Concert* and cooperates with Croatian national self-government units in Zala County.

In 2021, it organized the *Regionalni hrvatski glazbeni tabor* <Regional Croatian Music Camp> (Regionális horvát zenei tábor) for young Croats in the region and for schoolchildren, which was held at the elementary school in Kerestur from June 28 to July 2. Together with the Croatian national self-government unit of Velika Kaniža, it organized the *Tradicionalni tabor hrvatskog folklora* <Traditional Camp of Croatian Folklore> (Horvát szállóőrző folklórtábor) from 3 July to 7 July 2021 in Velika Kaniža.

CULTURAL PROGRAMS OF POMURJE CROATS AS INITIATORS OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Croatian settlements in Zala County offer a wide range of cultural programs and are important as initiators of cultural tourism. In fact, many inns attract guests due to various cultural events and entertainment shows that are traditionally organized every year. For example, Varga Vendégház (Varga Inn in Serdahel) has collected traditional folk Croatian programs in the area, which it published on their website. Program overview/program offer:²⁸

- *Croatian Ball* (February), organizer: Stipan Blažetin Cultural and Educational Institute, place: István fogadó (inn)

²⁸ <http://vargavendeghaz.hu/programok/horvat-nemzetisegi-programok> (accessed on 7 January 2022)

- *Regional Carnival Parade* (February 2020), place: Pustara; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Pustara
- *Croatian Customs – Torkoscjutserok* (February 2020), place: Mlinarce, Sumarton; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Mlinarce
- *Children's Carnival* (February), place: Kerestur; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Velika Kaniža
- *Carnival Parade* (February), place: Sepetnik; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Sepetnik
- *Traditional Pig Slaughter (Bóllérfesztivál)* (February), place: Kerestur; organizers: Self-government unit in Kerestur and Fićehaz
- *Youth Church Meeting* (March), place: Nagykanizsa; organizers: Croatian national self-government unit of Zala county, Croatian national self-government unit in Velika Kaniža
- *Međimurska popevka V. <Folk Songs of Međimurje> Qualifications in Hungary* (March), place: Sumarton; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit in Sumarton
- *Hrvatski križni put <Croatian Way of the Cross> in Komar* (March-April), place: Komar; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Zala County
- *Croatian Tradition of Egg Decorating* (March), place: Serdahel; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit
- *Meeting of Church Choirs* (May), place: Nagykanizsa; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Zala County
- *Croatian Day* (31 May 2020); organizer: Croatian national self-government unit in Pustara
- *Village Day on Pentecost*, place: Pustara
- *A Croatian Star Is Born (Horvát csillag szűtlik)* (June), place: Mlinarce
- *Family, Sports and Art Day* (June), place: Serdahel; organizers: School Parents' Council, Stipan Blažetin Croatian national self-government unit
- *Croatian Film and Music Camp* (June), place: Serdahel; organizer: Stipan Blažetin Croatian national self-government unit Stipan Blažetin
- *Croatian Picnic by the Mura Letenye* (June), place: Letenye; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit in Letinja
- *Open Traditional Village Houses and Woodcarving Camp/Gathering* (end of June), place: Sumarton
- *Croatian Pilgrimage* (13 July), place: Komar
- *Gibanica Festival* (1st weekend in August), place: Serdahel
- *Sumarton Festival of Zlevanka, Wine and Tamburica* (end of August), place: Sumarton

- *Zrinski Days* (September), place: Elementary school in Kerestur; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Kerestur
- *Croatian Week in Velika Kaniža* (October), place: Velika Kaniža; organizer: The Croatian national self-government unit in Velika Kaniža
- *Actress Fedák Sári Commemoration Day* (October), place: Serdahel; organizer: Cultural and Sports Association Serdahel
- *Autumn Croatian Literary Days* (Croatian Cultural Evening and Croatian Harvest Ball) (October-November); organizer: Stipan Blažetin Croatian national self-government unit
- *Meeting of Croatian Choirs and Tambura Orchestras* (last Saturday in November), place: Sepetnik; organizer: Croatian national self-government unit of Sepetnik
- *Croatian Advent Concert* (December), place: Nagykanizsa; organizers: Croatian national self-government unit of Velika Kaniža, Croatian national self-government unit of Zala County
- *Bethlehem Alive* (December, before Christmas), place: Sumarton.

Although these events and programs are organized primarily with the aim of preserving the Croatian identity of the Pomurje Croats, there is also interest in them from other regions where Croats live, and Croatian friends from Croatia and guests from Slovenia are also happy to come to make friends through these events and get culturally uplifted and entertained.

CONCLUSION

Pomurje Croats live in Zala County in Hungary, mostly in the following settlements by the Mura River: Tótszentmárton (Sumarton), Tótszerdahely (Serdahel), Molnári (Mlinarce), Múrákeresztúr (Kerestur), Fityeháza (Fićehaz), Semjénháza (Pustara), Petrivente (Petriba), Szepetnek (Sepetnik) and nearby towns in Nagykanizsa (Velika Kaniža) and Letenya (Letenje). Their total number is between 6 and 8 thousand. They speak the Kajkavian dialect of the Croatian language.

The role of families in which Croatian is spoken less and less, in the transmission and preservation of the native Croatian language is increasingly taken over by educational institutions where the learning of the native Croatian language, literature and culture takes place within the subject model of education, usually 4-5 hours a week. The language of the ancestors is most often learned as a second or foreign language. Educational institutions, kindergartens and schools where the Croatian language is taught and the Croatian identity is fostered greatly contribute to the slowing down of assimilation and the revitalization of the population. Therefore, their role is similar to Croatian minority self-government units. Croats like to attend Croatian masses, sing and pray in the Croatian language, and go on pilgrimages. They

preserve their language and customs through family and religious holidays, rituals and church gatherings.

On the basis of the constitution and laws, since 1994, the Croatian minority self-government system has been gradually built up. Croatian minority self-government units were formed in all settlements and cities in Zala County, where Croats still live in large numbers. Croatian self-government units, together with civil organizations, organize various manifestations, cultural programs and events that aim to preserve and foster the Croatian language and culture, for which a need and interest exist. The minority self-government system is the basis for the prospective development of minority communities, including Pomurje Croats. Based on the research, it can be concluded that Croatian minority self-government units in Zala County, together with civil associations, fulfil their role in developing and preserving the cultural identity of their communities and at the same time slow down assimilation tendencies. They contribute to the cultural revitalization of Pomurje Croats. Thanks to the Croatian minority self-government system, the cultural life of Zala (Pomurje) Croats came to life. After the second election cycle, the extended self-government system succeeded in motivating the Croatian population. In parallel with the activities of the associations, Croatian minority self-government units developed the tradition of local Croatian days, cultural and religious events, pilgrimages, camps, exhibitions, and they built partnership relations with Croatian settlements and institutions in the Republic of Croatia through various programs. Among the main determinants of partnership is good cross-border, educational and cultural cooperation. The results of the minority elections, which were held on several occasions after the democratic changes, show that the Croatian community uses the rights guaranteed by the constitution and the law and actively participates in the execution of public tasks, including the planning, provision and development of cultural activities and services in which individual members of the Croatian minority community and the Croatian community as a whole play an active role. In the organization of cultural manifestations and programs aimed at preserving the Croatian language, identity, tradition and culture, numerous cultural, artistic and religious societies participate in cooperation with minority self-government units. The Croatian minority self-government system aimed at building cultural autonomy enabled the cultural development and cultural revitalization of the Croatian minority in Zala County, and the further development of this management system will be able to contribute to the perspective development of Pomurje Croats.

Cross-border and regional cooperation in various areas between Hungary and Croatia, which intensified in the processes of association and membership in the European Union, was realized with the active participation of Međimurje and Pomurje Croats as well. The development of regions can favorably affect the living conditions

of the Croatian community in those areas and prevent the process of their displacement. Strong relations with Međimurje, the development of regions and regional cooperation have a favorable effect on the preservation and modernization of the language of the Pomurje Croats, strengthening their regional and local identity. The expansion of cultural cooperation, learning the Croatian language, various contacts along the border create more favorable circumstances and strengthen the position of Pomurje Croats who want to preserve their identity: language and culture. The language and culture of Pomurje Croats is considered an integral part of the culture in Hungary, enriching it in the same way the culture of Croats in the diaspora enriches Croatian culture as a whole. Pomurje Croats are aware of their role and responsibility for the preservation of Croatian identity, they actively participate in fostering, preserving and inheriting their rich culture, develop and present that culture, and at the same time contribute to the creation of cultural autonomy, which is the basis for survival in the community of European countries in the 21st century.

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