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**Ismertetések – Rezensionen – Reviews  
Katsauksia – Рецензии**

**Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa: Pieni tarina csángóista**

Mäntykustannus Oy. Porvoo 2011. 138 l.

ISBN 978 952 5712 48 3

Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa is well known in Finland for being a minister in the government of Esko Aho in the troubled recession years (1992-1995). However, in Hungary and Romania she is better known for her work in the Council of Europe. The book under review is her account on the personal history and political events that lead to the European Council Recommendation number 1521 (2001) on the Csángó minority culture in Romania, and its aftermath.

Isohookana-Asunmaa (1947–) has been active in cherishing Finno-Ugric cooperation already in the Soviet era. However, at the moment Soviet Union collapsed, she was the Finnish minister responsible for the new forms of cultural cooperation between Finland, Hungary and Estonia, as well as on establishing contacts with the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia. From this background, she became the Finnish delegate to the Council of Europe in 1995. There she focused on making the Finno-Ugric peoples better known in the Council. Isohookana-Asunmaa's goal was in particular to improve the situation of small Finno-Ugric languages and cultures.

After recommendations on the Fenno-Ugric minorities in Russia, Isohookana-Asunmaa's attention towards the Moldavian Csángós was drawn by József von Komlóssy, Vice Chair of the Federal Union of European Nationalities. This resulted to her first trip to Moldavia in 1999. Since then she has made the Moldavian Csángós as the main focus of her international activity. This book describes well the background, sources of information (e.g. the work of Yrjö Wichmann) and several trips to the field which together formed the picture and of the Moldavian Csángós and its interpretations. Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa is still actively supporting the Csángó's case, and she has visited Moldavia as late as 2010, so her devotion to the theme is genuine and persisting.

During her first trip to Moldavia, Isohookana-Asunmaa was surprised by the lack of any linguistic rights of the Csángós and by the general negative attitude towards the Csángós by the local municipality officials, schools and vicars. She became convinced on the need for international protection when she experienced the discrimination on the field. She was shocked to find out, for instance, how the Csángó children were routinely considered as having lower IQ by the local teachers and school administration.

The European Council recommendation 1521 (2001) calls for the recognition of the culture and language of the Moldavian Csángós as an exceptional value for Europe. It requests Romania to ensure the linguistic rights of the Csángós in education and religious services. This recommendation has resulted to the teaching of Hungarian in more than 20 villages in Moldavia. However, despite of the efforts of Isohookana-Asunmaa and others, the Catholic Church in Moldavia is still insisting on having its services only in Romanian.

The book documents the Csángós as an archaic culture, with rich folk traditions, for instance, in music. The many illustrations show the colorful folk costumes and textiles of the Csángós. The image of the Csángós that is constructed in the book is that of a cultural relic. Modernity, in turn is presented in negative terms. Beyond discriminatory acts by the Romanian state, local authorities and clergy, modernity is blamed in general for the dwindling of the traditional values, customs and knowledge of the archaic version of the Hungarian language. Globalization in turn, has resulted in the migration of the Csángó youth to the Mediterranean countries and the returnees have brought West European habits to Moldavia. A return to the traditions in the spirit of ethnofuturism and a revitalization of the Csángó language with promoting its literary use are proposed as solution for the cultural survival of the Csángós. However, the new possibilities brought by modernity are not discussed.

In the view of Isohookana-Asunmaa and the European Council recommendation, the Csángós have a distinct, even though not homogenous, culture and language. The idea of a distinct, autonomous Csángó language has been rejected by the mainstream of Hungarian linguists. However, according to the recommendation, the endangered *Csángó language* should be protected. In political terms, this is understandable, since the *Hungarian language* is not in need of protection from extinction. Furthermore, the idea of protecting or revitalizing dialects is still rather new even among the activists of linguistic rights, not to mention politicians or mainstream linguists.

Isohookana-Asunmaa genuinely believes that the Csángós would best be recognized and protected as a distinct Finno-Ugric culture and language, such as the *Meän kieli* speakers in the north. However, she manages to mention just a handful of Csángó intellectuals, most of whom no longer live in Moldavia, and few of them consider the Csángó as a distinct culture. Rather, it is seen as an attachment to the Hungarian national culture. Further, as she notes, most practical support for the Csángós has come from Hungary or from the Hungarians in Transylvania. Hungarians in general are motivated to help the *Hungarians in Moldavia*, not a separate Finno-Ugric culture and language. That is, a Csángó revival is not in sight.

The European Council handles the issue as purely a human rights question. The arguments for and against of the Hungarian or Romanian origin or national feeling among the Csángós is not an issue for the European Council. Isohookana-Asunmaa sees the Csángós as Finno-Ugric people or nation. In her opinion it should be treated and protected in the same way as any other small Finno-Ugric linguistic minority.

The volume under review is not a report of Finno-Ugristic research, neither does it aim at an academic presentation of the Csángós. However, it lucidly documents and explains the motivation, background, political reasoning and interpretations of cultural and linguistic issues behind Tytti Isohookana-Asunmaa's work. It also documents her close relationship with the Csángós. Not everybody will agree with her interpretations, however, I guess a consensus can be reached that her intentions and political activity are of exemplary nature and that her persisting devotion to help the Csángós admirably extraordinary. A Hungarian translation of the book is in preparation.

PETTERI LAIHONEN