

## Summary

## THE CROAT LINGUISTIC MINORITY IN THE ITALIAN PROVINCE MOLISE

When speaking of the linguistic minority in the Italian province Molise we have in mind the specific enclave of the Croat population of 3500—4000 persons, living in three hamlets at the east foot of the Apenini mountain chain: Acquaviva Collecroce (in Croatian Kruč), San Felice del Molise (Filić) and Montemitro (Mundimitar). Naturally it has to be underlined explicitly that this Croat population does not present a completely "developed" national minority. As the adherents of this community are wholly aware of this fact, they define themselves as linguistic minority.

Their country of origin is the district of Imot and Makarska. They emigrated at the beginning of the 16th century; the emigration thus coincides with culmination of Turkish advancing on the Balkan peninsula. The fact the emigration took place during the mentioned period can be made out of at least two proofs: there is a certain inscription on the church in Palata, a town at the Italian seaside, along the line Teroli-Campobaso-Benevento, which reads as follows: "Hoc primum Dalmatiae gentis incolere castrum ac fundamentis erexere templum anno 1531" (The Dalmatians are the first who settled this place and built the church on the foundations in the year 1531); their language is an even better proof which confirms the statement that Croats settled there at the beginning of the 16th century. There are, namely, no Turkish words in their language, which is the most evident proof of the fact that this population had very few or even no contacts with the Turks.

Generally, however, it is their specific speech which is the most firm indicator of existence of the Croat enclave in Italy. "Our language" (as they usually call their speech) is in fact a conglomeration of "inherited" ikavski dialect with the elements of štokavski; the pronunciation of sound *i* instead of *e* and the joints *št*, *žd* for *šč* and *žž*; with the active verbal adjectives without the final *o*; the omission of final *i* with the infinitive) and the Italian language (in fact the Molisian dialect), which, in course of 500 years must have influenced — to a certain extent — the formation of the modern colloquial language of the Croats.

Each ethnic community which begins to be aware of its specific characteristics, also wants to keep them, not in the form of "folklore", but by means of such legal protection, which would permit its overall development. That's what the Molisian Croats tried to do. Although the struggle for protection has been going on for some years, the last three years signify a sort of its climax. During this period namely, the comune-council and the executive council of the comune of Živavoda-Kruč have passed a decree, in which they demanded from the government in Rome resp. from the competent Ministry the establishment of the autonomous state secondary school, which the pupils of all three Croat communes would attend, and in which also the "Slavonic language" (*lingua slava*) would be taught.

Unfortunately this initiative remained just a dead letter on the paper, as along with the fact that they grind extraordinarily slowly, the wheels of Italian administration, appropriate the exclusive competence to decide upon all the questions, which "disturb" the ethnic purity of the Italian nation.