

Witches foresee demand from hex inspector

Spell Menu

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To free somebody from a bad spell **£36**

To undo a bad spell that prevents a woman getting married (any witch would tell an unmarried woman that her chances have been hampered by a bad spell) **£36**

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To make a business go well **£58**

To make someone fall in love with you **£58**

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MONICA PETRESCU
in Bucharest

THE ROMANIAN taxman is stirring up a cauldron of trouble for witches whose tax-free spells are costing the treasury millions of pounds a year in lost revenue.

Vampirism, spells, hexes and curses are still big business in the country, providing a black-market income – and relatively luxurious lifestyle – for about 4,000 women who peddle their services both in Romania and abroad.

The witches can command between £9 and £90 for a spell, a significant sum in Romania where the average monthly salary is £150. Businesses have been known to consult them in an effort to boost profits, and the witches even had a stand at a recent export trade fair.

Yet despite their commercial success, only



Cross to bear Maria Campina, a self-proclaimed White Magic Queen and leader of the Romanian witches, insists that rituals to protect the country from natural disasters are 'worth more than any tax income'

one is officially registered to pay tax – Gabriela Ciucur, 31, from Targu Jiu in eastern Romania, who sees up to seven clients a day and charges around £6 a session.

She gives receipts to her

clients for work that includes star-gazing, fortune-telling and talking to the dead.

She said: "I registered myself because I wanted to sleep peacefully at night after hearing the taxman

was going to start checking on witches who make lots of money, have luxury houses and don't pay anything to the state."

Across the country, tax officials are gathering details of local witches and sending them to Bucharest where their incomes can be assessed by the "Taxe Si Impozite" – the Romanian Inland Revenue.

"They need to be made to follow the same laws as everyone else," said Andrei Chiliman, the mayor of Bucharest's First District, and the first official to risk the witches' wrath by ordering a census. Since then, others have followed his lead.

"If they sell something,

whether it's a potion or a curse, they need to pay tax," Mr Chiliman added. "And by registering them we will allow unsatisfied customers to sue them if they don't get what they paid for."

The witches are not hard for the taxmen to find as most advertise daily in newspapers, and live in expensive flats or houses. They are infuriated by the census, seeing sinister figures bearing self-assessment forms looming in their crystal balls.

Maria Campina, 57, a self-proclaimed White Magic Queen and leader of the Romanian witches, said: "Why should we pay taxes when we don't get anything from the state? Everything

we know was passed on from other witches. My mother taught me and I will teach my daughters.

"The state has not educated us. If they set up a witchcraft academy with the tax money, then we would pay – but until then we won't be paying anything.

"We already do a lot for our country. Whenever there is an important Christian celebration, we perform a ritual to protect the country from natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes, and ask for prosperity for Romania. That has to be worth more than any tax income."

So far, Mr Chiliman has survived any curses that may have been aimed at

him by the 20 witches in his area. "You only need to see what sort of places they live in to know they are earning a fortune," he said, "and that means they owe the taxman huge amounts of money."

Emil Popescu, from the Romanian tax office, said: "Witches are not exempt from tax, and we are gathering information to make sure they pay their fiscal dues like everyone else."

He added that even though the witches said they were casting spells to make the country prosper, it could not be used to reduce their tax bills.

"We cannot accept payment in kind," he said.