

Hungary asks Romania to reinstate 2 ethnic Hungarian professors expelled by university

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) _ Hungary's main political parties on Wednesday asked Romanian authorities to reinstate two ethnic Hungarian professors expelled from a Romanian university.

Peter Hantz and Lehel Kovacs lost their jobs last week at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, western Romania, after they put up signs in Hungarian in several university buildings.

More than 20 percent of the student at Babes-Bolyai are ethnic Hungarians and some courses are taught in Hungarian, but several decrees issued by the university making it an official language of the institution are not enforced.

"Hungarian is not an official language of the university and, worse, the Hungarian fields of study have no authority to make autonomous decisions," Hantz said in a telephone interview.

Hungary's five parliamentary parties asked the university to reinstate the two professors and respect the rights of the Hungarian minority. "The expulsion of the two young educators tells Hungary's parliamentary representatives that there are still people in Romania who believe that in the 21st century the desires for democratic higher education of a 1.5-million-strong community can be denied," a statement signed by the presidents of the five parties said.

Education Minister Istvan Hiller also wrote to Romanian counterpart Mihail Hardau, asking for his help on the issue.

The status of ethnic Hungarians in Romania has long been a source of conflict between both countries, since Hungary lost Transylvania and other parts of today's western Romania in post-World War I peace treaties.

Ethnic Hungarian Laszlo Toekes' low-key protest as a priest in a Timisoara church in 1989 was the spark for larger protests in Timisoara, Bucharest and other Romanian cities that led within weeks to a national revolution and the overthrow and execution of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.