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Understanding Hungary.

Scientists demand Hungarian-language university in Romania

Training of Hungarian professionals inadequate: petitioners

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A collection of 79 scientists, including nine Nobel laureates, last Wednesday petitioned Romania and the European Union to re-establish a Hungarian-language university in Romania.

The group claims the 1.5 million ethnic Hungarians in Romania are under-represented in the education system, and demands that Romania reinstate the Hungarian-language Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

University lost in the '50s

The university was merged with another in the 1950s to form the current Babes-Bolyai institution.

"It is clear that the present structure does not serve the adequate training of Hungarian professionals in Romania," they wrote in a petition addressed to the Romanian Prime Minister and Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the

European Commission. "We understand Romania's current problems but feel that in order to create a truly democratic society, the Romanian authorities should grant this minority right."

Calls for the re-establishment of the university first came in 1989, after the fall of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who faced a makeshift court and was executed on charges of genocide. The petitioners said the merging of the universities was one of Ceausescu's "political triumphs" - he served in the Politburo during the period of the merger before leading the country - and called for this situation to be redressed.

The petition was organised by the Bolyai Initiative, and included signatures by laureates

from the UK, the US and Israel.

Minority abroad

Millions of Hungarians were left stranded abroad after the First World War, when the Trianon agreement saw two-thirds of their country divided up amongst Romania, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Trianon is still fresh in many Hungarians' minds, and a referendum on granting Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians narrowly failed in 2004 after not enough people turned up to vote. Ethnic Hungarians can now, however, apply for a visa allowing multiple entry to Hungary to allow them to maintain links with their culture.