

# **Shortcomings of the Education in the Hungarian Language in Romania**

## **General Presentation**

1,5 million people of Romania's 21 million and Transylvania's 7 million inhabitants are Hungarians, representing 6,6% of Romania's general population and 21% of Transylvania's population. Thus, the Hungarian community is one of the largest traditional national minorities of Europe. However, the Hungarian community in Romania is refused the rights that are granted to almost all other national minorities in Europe.

The following overview highlights the major areas of discrimination against the Hungarians in the Romanian education system.

## **1. Higher Education**

The Hungarian community is underrepresented in the Romanian higher education system. Although Hungarians represent 6.6% of the general population in Romania, only 4.4% of the students in higher education are ethnic Hungarians, out of which only 1.6% enjoy the opportunity to study in Hungarian.

### **1.1. Discrimination in access to education**

There is no state-financed Hungarian higher education in a series of important fields, such as Engineering Sciences, Agriculture, Forestry, Fine Arts and Veterinary Medicine. The case of the "Partium" Christian University, established in 1999, and that of the "Sapientia" University, established in 2000, which teach in the Hungarian language, are unprecedented. These institutions are financially supported only by the Hungarian state. Due to financial restrictions, however, only a limited range of fields is taught at these institutions. Statistically speaking, Romania supports one state-financed university for each 400,000 inhabitants; therefore, the Hungarian community should have 3-4 state-financed universities. Presently, there are several state-funded courses in Hungarian language at the Babes-Bolyai University, the Medical and Pharmacy University of Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mures, and at the University of Dramatic Arts at Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mures. The Protestant Theological Seminary is sustained by the Protestant Churches, without any governmental support.

### **1.2. Complaints of the Hungarian community at the Babes-Bolyai University**

The Babes-Bolyai University was established in 1959, by the coercive merging of the Hungarian-language Bolyai and Romanian-language Babes Universities. The Babes-Bolyai University has never been officially founded, and it does not have any foundation document. This operation, which deeply undermined the interests of the Hungarian community, and led to the suicide of several Hungarian professors, was orchestrated by Nicolae Ceausescu, the former Romanian dictator, and Ion Iliescu, a recent Romanian President.

The Babes-Bolyai University has approximately 32,000 full-time students, of which approximately 7,000 are ethnic Hungarian. The University management claims that the institution is a multicultural one, and creates the false impression of providing the Hungarian community with autonomy and equal rights. However, the reality is entirely different.

#### **1.2.1. The Hungarian academic community has no autonomy in decision-making**

The main problems concerning the decision-making rights of the Hungarian academic community are caused by contradictory laws and regulations found in the University's Charter

and other documents. Although section II.3.d. of the University's Charter clearly states that the head and the representatives of the Hungarian lines of studies (the informal structure of Hungarian teaching staff within the faculties) are responsible for the development and human resource policy of the Hungarian academic programs, other sections of the same document (III.1.i, III.1.j) state that Hungarian leaders can only make suggestions on these issues and any proposal of Hungarian leaders needs the approval of the Faculty Academic Council, with a Romanian majority. (See:<http://www.ubbcluj.ro/www-en/despre/carta-en.pdf>).

University officials consequently take advantage of the contradictory nature of these laws and regulations, presenting to the public only those sections that appear to support the decisionmaking autonomy of the Hungarian academic community. However, in daily practice, only the sections disabling the decision-making authority of the Hungarian academic leaders are applied. Since decision-making at the University is based on majority vote, Hungarian representatives can always be silenced by this procedure.

In November 2005, 149 Hungarian professors (83% of those involved) initiated the establishment of three faculties with Hungarian teaching language (Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences). Their request has been completely ignored. Note that the Romanian Law on Education (no. 84/1995 - modified and republished in 1999, Art. 123) allows the establishment of Hungarian Faculties and Colleges.

Between December 2006 and January 2007 several actions to collect signatures were carried out, in which 87% of the interested instructors asked for establishing Faculties of Natural Sciences and Letters in Hungarian language.

In several departments, Hungarian colleagues cannot take decisions concerning the subjects they teach in class and / or exam topics. The restriction with the most adverse consequences is that the syllabuses for primary and secondary teacher training depend on the syllabuses elaborated by the Romanian colleagues. It is impossible to take into account the specific issues and problems in Hungarian primary and secondary teacher education, as their syllabuses are direct translations of the corresponding Romanian ones.

### 1.2.2. Lack of financial autonomy of the Hungarian academic community

The Hungarian community at the University has no financial autonomy, as only the faculties have autonomy in this field and Hungarian departments are non-existent (except for two small Theology departments). Moreover, the Babes-Bolyai University and the Medical and Pharmacy University from Marosvásárhely/Targu-Mures don't even allocate for their Hungarian sections the funds especially provided by the state budget for minority higher education.

### 1.2.3. Discrimination in language usage

There are absolutely no Hungarian signs at the University. Note that the Rector of the University took a decision to change this situation, but the decision has never been carried out in practice.

On the Rector's hallway, only the pictures of the previous Romanian rectors are placed on the wall; the Hungarian Rectors are selectively "forgotten". Although the history of the University traces back to 1581, the first relief represents the rector of 1919, the year when the Romanian army occupied Cluj/Kolozsvár. Among others, Rectors of Bolyai University are simply ignored. Note that the Babes-Bolyai University never had a Hungarian rector.

The great majority, about 90%, of the denominated lecture halls are named after Romanian personalities; several are named after foreign personalities, but only a couple of them carry the names of Hungarians, and one of these names is spelled in Romanian (Samuil Brassai instead of Brassai Sámuel). Most of the official publications of the University are published only in Romanian.

The Official Newsletter of the University (Buletinul Informativ) is published only in Romanian. It should be mentioned that this periodical often publishes letters and articles glamorizing the University management. Generally, no critical articles are published. However, in recent months, several letters denigrating Hungarian teaching staff fighting for the autonomy of the Hungarian line of studies were published. No opportunity to answer the criticism was provided in these cases.

The Hungarian language cannot be used in the formal communications of the University. No applications or petition forms can be written in Hungarian, and no official documents (such as University Diplomas) are issued in Hungarian.

With the clear intention to humiliate the Hungarian community, the University management installed recently a memorial plaque “honoring” Stephanus / István BÁTHORY, King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania and Prince of Transylvania, the founder of the first higher education institution in Transylvania. No Hungarian text is present on the memorial plaque; even the name of King Báthory was written with Romanian orthography, which deeply hurt the Hungarian community and aroused concern due to the intense reactions. Note that even the Latin text was copied incorrectly onto the plaque.

*Some of these problems may appear to be small-scale or petty shortcomings, but they illustrate and are emblematic of a deeply ingrained, discriminatory institutional culture, which reflects the monopolistic attitudes of the majority towards the minority.*

However, the measures taken by the management of the Babes-Bolyai University against the leaders of the Bolyai Initiative Committee, a civil organization of the Hungarian professors which works for language equality and extending the independence for the Hungarian higher education, cannot be considered any more a negligible problem, since it resembles the mock trials of the communist dictatorship.

The antecedents (of what happened before) have been that Hungarian instructors of the Babes-Bolyai University requested in accordance with multicultural quality of the institution placing multilingual inscriptions (in Romanian, Hungarian and German) in the buildings of the institution, to replace the present monolingual ones (only in Romanian). During 2005 and 2006 the Rector and the Senate of the University took several contrary decisions in this matter.

On November 6, 2006 lecturer Peter Hantz placed Hungarian inscriptions below the Romanian ones in three buildings of the University. Within few hours, the security staff broke down and treaded the inscriptions at the instruction of the University leaders. On the same day, the University organized an exhibition at the European Parliament, where announced that multilingual inscriptions were placed in the institution.

On November 27, 2006 the Rector of the Babes-Bolyai University proposed the expulsion of Peter Hantz and Lehel Kovács (the two vice-presidents of the Bolyai Initiative Committee) from the instructors' body. The motion has been adopted by the University Senate on no grounds from the legal point of view, under unclear circumstances and by breaking the procedures. The dismissal of the two Hungarian instructors has brought about wide international protests and has been causing serious tensions in the University even until today.

### **1.3. Complaints of the Hungarian academic community at the Medical and Pharmacy University in Târgu Mures**

The Hungarian students of the Medicinal and Pharmaceutical University asked for the independence of the Hungarian section of the institution already after a few months following the 1989 change of regime. As an answer, an anti-Hungarian pogrom bearing the signs of secret service control emerged in the city.

In the past seventeen years several unsuccessful attempts have been made to create Hungarian language faculties of general medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, within the University, with extensive financial and decision-making powers.

The proportion of Hungarian teachers in the academic staff is only 34%, whereas the share of the Hungarian students is around 50%. This teacher/student ratio has a negative influence on the professional level of the education. Practical training is solely in Romanian language, and Hungarian students can attend many courses also only in Romanian.

Hungarian instructors are underrepresented in leading positions as well. At present, none of the deans of the University is ethnic Hungarian; only 3 out of 14 heads of faculties are ethnic Hungarian, moreover only one of the 7 members of the Committee of the University Senate is ethnic Hungarian. It should be ensured that the Hungarian officials and managers of the University are elected directly by the Hungarian teaching staff. The current practice, according to which Hungarian staff officials are elected by bodies with Romanian majority (Department Councils and Senate), is deemed inappropriate for experience has shown that officials elected by such bodies can seldom represent the interests of the Hungarian community in an efficient manner.

The use of the Hungarian language is not allowed in the administration of the institution, and only a few percent of the administrative staff are ethnic Hungarian. Moreover, Hungarian students are not provided with the opportunity to take their finals, elaborate and defend their thesis in the Hungarian language.

In 1999, 77% of the Hungarian teaching staff requested that the University management create a proper Hungarian faculty with departments and colleges, so that both the Romanian and the Hungarian faculty would be granted the rights to decide upon the education process and the teaching staff, and that the University Charter be amended accordingly. The University management did not reply to the petition, which was not even forwarded by them to the University Senate as the procedure in such cases requires.

In 2007 more than 70% of the Hungarian students from the Medicinal and Pharmaceutical University, i.e. almost 800 Hungarian students have recorded a ten-point petition at the University Rectorship and the Romanian Minister of Education and Research, claiming amongst others the introduction of departments in Hungarian language. At present there is a similar collecting of signatures being carried out among the Hungarian instructors of the University.

Recently, the management of the University tried to intimidate a professor who protested against the discrimination of the Hungarian academic community.

## **2. Primary and secondary education**

### **2.1. Discrimination through language exams**

The Romanian language as a subject matter is taught in high-schools for minority children not as a second language, but rather as if it was their mother tongue. Tests and graduation exams are designed accordingly. Consequently, Hungarian students fail the exams to a greater extent than their Romanian counterparts, and are presumably disadvantaged with respect to their chances of admission to higher education institutions. In December 2005, a large number of intellectuals demanded the changing of this situation from the National Agency against Discrimination. After examining the demand, the Agency concluded that it was legitimate. In spite of this, nothing has been done to change the situation.

### **2.2. Teaching of history of Romanians and geography of Romania**

According to point 2 of paragraph 120 of the law on education in Romania the subjects 'Geography of Romania' and 'History of Romanians' are taught in the Romanian language in

grades 5 to 12 of the Hungarian schools as well. The Hungarian community has been requesting for over a decade that these subject matters be taught in Hungarian.

### **2.3. Blocking of mother-tongue education of the ‘Csángó’ Community**

The ‘Csángós’ are a Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholic ethnic group that lives in Moldova, Eastern Romania.

In the so-called ‘Csángó land’ there is no public education institution of any kind teaching subject matters in Hungarian. However, the teaching of the Hungarian language has started from scratch privately. The Hungarian language is taught in 13 villages to around 950 pupils by commuter teachers. The extension of this education is being blocked by the intolerant management of the schools.

The teachers who educate the pupils in Hungarian are being paid part-time, according to the number of hours taught, instead of receiving a monthly salary as is usual in Romania. This situation has several negative consequences that put these teachers at a financial disadvantage compared to their full-time working colleagues.

However, the disadvantages of this situation go beyond salary issues. Their part-time status exclude these teachers from the educational bodies of the schools, a fact that has a number of more serious consequences regarding their status and working situation: they are not viewed as teachers of the local school and full members of the educational body, they do not sign a contract with the school that would state rights and obligations, they are not welcome at teachers’ meetings and, as a result, they cannot have a say in the affairs of the school whose pupils they teach.

Nevertheless, Hungarian language teaching could be extended to a further 50 villages and some 10,000 pupils if proper financial support and authority were ensured.

### **2.4. Undermining the establishment of Hungarian schools**

An essential step towards the achievement of cultural autonomy is the (re-)establishment of Hungarian schools. In a number of Transylvanian towns this aim has partly or fully been reached: there are 76 Hungarian high-schools all over the country. However, in several places where the number of pupils would account for the (re-)establishment of the schools, the attempts of the Hungarian communities to do so are being consequently undermined.

For example, in the town of Turda/Torda, the Hungarian delegation trying to persuade the local Romanian representatives to enable the re-establishment of the only Hungarian school had to face aggressive, malicious verbal attacks and insults. The widespread protests triggered by this tragedy forced the Romanian authorities to allow the re-establishment of the Hungarian school of Turda/Torda.

In mixed schools Hungarian pupils are disadvantaged from many points of view: for example they are subject to assimilation, they are restricted in the use of their mother tongue and in several instances they are the targets of insults and mockery by their Romanian peers.