

Higher Education in Transylvania

A new independent Hungarian-language university

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Hungarian lecturers at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania are divided over whether to set up an independent Hungarian-language university. It is no surprise, therefore, that at a meeting on 2 March, attended by only 180 out of 230 lecturers, they emphasised the importance of dialogue. Peter Hantz, a senior lecturer, said most Hungarian lecturers at the university supported, whether tacitly or not, the idea of setting up a new institution.

Things became more heated on 20 February, when the university's senate rejected the proposal to establish an independent Hungarian university. It seemed the Hungarian lecturers would follow the lead of the radical Bolyai Initiative Committee (BIC) in withdrawing their confidence in Levente Salat and Laszlo Nagy, vice-rectors of the university, which would have made the work of teachers in the Hungarian-language departments impossible - at present, each faculty teaches in several languages. In the end, there was no vote of no confidence, even though the two vice-rectors in question had asked for a vote to solve the crisis of legitimacy.

After the senate's vote, Nicolae Bocsa, the university's rector, launched a sally against the BIC and its president, Peter Hantz. The rector said the group agitating for an independent Hungarian university were behaving "without moral scruple". Furthermore, BIC's mostly young members should "focus more on their careers rather than falsify facts." The rector threatened also sent a written note to Mr Hantz threatening him with dismissal. Tension was increased when Andrei Marga, head of the university's academic committee announced he would personally sue the writer Imre Kertesz, since he, along with other Nobel laureates, had signed a petition calling for an independent Hungarian university that was sent to the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. This petition was also handed to Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission on 21 February by Mr Hantz and Csaba Sogor, president of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, along with a report on the condition of higher education in Transylvania.

Things took a strange turn when Laszlo Gyemant, a professor of Jewish studies, said Bolyai University's multiculturalism was very successful in the department of Hebrew. Referring to the Frankfurter Allgemeine petition, he said prominent Jews like Elie Wiesel and Imre Kertesz had been misinformed. Mr Gyemant said: "Holocaust survivors should not be dragged into this campaign."

Hungarian lecturers at the university sent a statement to the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, which had until then been keeping out of the row. They asked the Alliance to press for the government to get involved with the issue. "In a few weeks, we will be holding discussions with the Alliance and other interested parties about the future of higher education in Transylvania," said Mr Hantz. The Alliance was prepared only to say they wanted a negotiated solution.

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