

Open Letter to the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Intolerance towards traditional minorities has been the source of continuous suffering on our continent and brought great shame to politicians who were leading Europe at those time. Looking back at the past half century's events, we can state, that unfortunate conflicts – for example on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, South-Tyrol, Basque Country or Gagauzia – were never caused by granting minority rights, but rather the opposite: conflicts resulted from ignoring such rights and covering up the related problems.

One would believe that our politicians learned from the mistakes of the past, and today they are attempting to persuade those states that violate minority rights to change their position. Conclusions drawn by Knut Vollebaek, High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE, former Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, after his visit in Romania, certainly do not confirm that.

The Hungarians in Romania, representing one of the largest traditional (non-immigrant) national minority of Europe, have been trying for decades by peaceful means, yet with no results to re-establish their state-financed Hungarian-language higher education institution, the Bolyai University, which was shut down by the former communist regime, by forcedly merging it into an institution with Romanian majority, namely the Babes-Bolyai University. The demand of the Hungarians of Transylvania is reasonable because the Hungarian academic community is continuously harassed and humiliated in the higher education institutions where Romanians are in majority, and it is also justified, since every significant traditional national minority in Europe has its own higher education institution.

More than 500,000 Hungarians in Transylvania demanded with their signature the re-establishment of the Bolyai University, and dozens of Nobel-prize laureated scientists also supported this goal on several consecutive occasions. However, according to Mr Vollebaek's conclusions, the re-establishment of the Bolyai University, that is, the separation of the Hungarian section of the Babes-Bolyai University "should be discouraged".

Why is Mr. Vollebaek obstructing the Hungarians from Transylvania to exercise their rights, while in his home, in Norway, the Sami Indigenous People of just about 100 000 souls have their own University College? Did he not notice the oppression of Hungarians in Transylvania, made obviously apparent by the European Minority Higher Education conferences, where we participated? Did he miss the headline events at the Babes-Bolyai University which he called a "multicultural" institution, into which the former Hungarian Bolyai University was merged? The nationalist management of this institution took down the Hungarian and German "no smoking" signs, and fired those Hungarian lecturers, who put up these multilingual signs. Does he not see that the main sources of tension are the mixed educational institutions where the demands of the Hungarian community are ignored?

Obviously he is aware of all the above and he knows that the Hungarians in Romania are severely underrepresented in institutions of higher education. Is Mr. Vollebaek protecting the minorities or the majority nationalism? Or is he disregarding the demands of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania only because until now they only fought for their rights by peaceful means?

It is our firm belief that this attitude is leading Europe in the wrong direction. We would like to ask the OSCE and the High Commissioner for National Minorities to reconsider their strategy and to support the re-establishment of the Hungarian-language Bolyai University.

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