

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

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R e p o r t

NOV. 14-15, 1997



CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA

ROMANIA

SCHOOLS, LANGUAGE
AND INTERETHNIC
RELATIONS IN ROMANIA:
THE DEBATE CONTINUES

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PER

Bucuresti (Bucharest)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
The Background	4
National Minorities in Romania: The Constitutional Framework	5
Undermining Constitutional Guarantees Through Legislation	7
The 1995 Education Law (NO. 84/1995)	7
The Education Decree of 1997	10
Summary of the Discussion on the Use of Minority Languages in Education in Romania	11
University Education in the Hungarian Language	15
List of Participants	19

PREFACE

The devil is in the details. Those who work on promoting interethnic accord know very well the wisdom of this adage.

Romania is a country that has the potential to become an island of amity in a sea of interethnic conflicts. Its largest linguistic minority are the Hungarians, who constitute about eight per cent of the total population of twenty-three million. Since the 1989 revolution that overthrew the Communist regime, there has been a constant, often heated, debate about the rights of the Hungarian community, centering on two key issues. One is the extent to which localities should be self-administering, to provide a degree of political autonomy for ethnic minorities. The other concerns the availability of education in the Hungarian language, through the university level. Would it promote interethnic harmony, or would it lead to ethnic segregation and separatism and, as some Romanians fear, eventually to a loss of territory?

These issues are complicated by several facts. One is that the borders between Romania and Hungary have shifted back and forth several times during this century, making one group or the other the titular or dominant nationality during different periods. Another is the considerable intermixture of Romanian and Hungarian populations. Only two of Romania's 39 counties have an absolute majority of Hungarians, and the most concentrated Hungarian populations are well within Romanian territory rather than at the border with Hungary. Finally, there is the agreement among all political parties in Hungary, albeit with considerable variations in degree, that the fate of ethnic Hungarians in the neighboring countries is the legitimate concern, indeed the responsibility, of Hungary.

Despite these obstacles, Romania and Hungary, under considerable pressure from the West to conform with the requirements for membership in NATO and the European Union, succeeded in 1996 in signing a bilateral treaty that seemed to signal a departure from their traditionally hostile relationship. And, all the more remarkable, later that year the new government that was installed in Romania following presidential and parliamentary elections included for the first time as coalition partners the ethnic Hungarian party—the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania. Part of the bargain

was that the new government would make concessions to long-standing Hungarian demands for new laws and practices in local administration and would change educational policies to enlarge the scope of Hungarian-language instruction.

But then there were those details... The government did in fact promulgate emergency decrees along the agreed-upon lines, but they were subject to parliamentary approval. The governing coalition enjoyed a comfortable majority, but some members of the coalition parties broke party discipline, and the new laws were voted down in parliament. At this writing, the laws are still being debated. Meanwhile, on more than one occasion, the ethnic Hungarian party has threatened to leave the coalition—a move that would seriously detract from Romania's international image and its prospects for acceptance in Euro-Atlantic structures, damage its relations with Budapest, and exacerbate domestic tensions. As this report goes to press, a governmental commission has been formed to assess the feasibility of opening a separate state-sponsored Hungarian university in Transylvania (the region of Romania where most Hungarians live). Whatever the outcome of the present impasse, it is clear that the issue has deep roots and that there are powerful sentiments on both sides.

The ongoing debates about education are explored in this report. The first part consists of an essay by Gabriel Andreescu, a distinguished journalist and human-rights activist in Romania. He compares the provisions of old and new laws and speculates on their impact in practice. The second part, also written by Dr. Andreescu, is the summary of a seminar organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations in cooperation with the Department for the Protection of National Minorities of the Romanian government. The seminar, which was held in Cluj, Romania, in November 1997, was the setting for debates between advocates of opposing views on whether and how instruction in the Hungarian language should be expanded, and on whether Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, which presently integrates Hungarian instruction under the same roof with Romanian, should be divided into separate Romanian and Hungarian institutions on the same campus.

This report was edited by Warren R. Haffar of PER's Princeton staff and Robert A. Feldmesser, PER's Senior Editor. Aurelian Craiutu of Princeton University translated the report from the original Romanian text. Although PER is responsible for this edited text, which has been translated and adapted from the original Romanian, the views expressed here are those of the author.

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June 1998

THE BACKGROUND

The elections in Romania in November 1996 led to the creation of a governing coalition that consisted of the Democratic Convention (CDR), itself composed of several parties—the most important of which was the National Christian Democratic Peasant Party of Romania, or PNTCD and the National Liberal Party, or PNL—the Social Democratic Union (USD), and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). With the participation of UDMR members in the new government, the Hungarian minority became politically integrated for the first time in the history of Romania. This greatly reduced the political tension that had dominated relations between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority in the years after the fall of Communism in 1989.

The inclusion of Hungarians in the ruling coalition has had a major impact at the international level as well. It improved relations between Romania and Hungary and led to a strategic partnership between the two countries. Romania's position within the international community has radically improved, with many people speaking about a “Romanian model” of ethnic reconciliation.

The UDMR conditioned its participation in the governing coalition, however, on changing the legislation regarding the protection of national minorities. To this end, the Romanian government adopted, respectively in May and June 1997, two emergency decrees: one amending the local administration law (Decree 1997/22) and one amending the education law of 1995 (Decree 1997/36). Under the Romanian system, both these laws were to go into effect immediately but were ultimately subject to final action by both houses of the parliament.

The provisions of the government's emergency decree to amend the education law would indeed bring standards to a level superior to those of the education law of 1978 or the education law of 1995. Despite the agreement between the UDMR and its coalition partners, certain provisions of the emergency decree on education were contested by some senators from the PNTCD, and their views found support in the mass media, triggering an anti-Hungarian backlash in Romanian public opinion. This, in turn, put pressure on the legislators who were to decide on the final provisions of the education law. The main points of contention were, and are, the provisions for studying Romanian history and geography in a minority's mother

tongue and the issue of establishing a state-supported Hungarian university. This situation threatened the continuation of the governing coalition.

It was in this context that the Project on Ethnic Relations organized a seminar in Cluj, Romania, in an effort to help find solutions to the impasse. The seminar was held on November 14 and 15 and was attended by members of all the coalition parties as well as NGO's and leading academics. The head of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities (a UDMR member), as well as representatives of civic and human-rights organizations working for ethnic reconciliation, also participated.

Subsequent events demonstrated that the concerns that motivated the seminar were well founded. On December 9, 1997, the UDMR suspended activities in the government for one day as a protest against what it regarded as the violation of a protocol that had been concluded on December 3 by the leaders of the main coalition parties. However, the UDMR did decide to remain in the government. Some ideas that had emerged during the PER seminar contributed to this decision.

NATIONAL MINORITIES IN ROMANIA: THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Romania has eighteen officially recognized national minorities. Sixteen of them are small, ranging in size from a few thousand to some tens of thousands of people, but the other two are quite large: the Roma (Gypsies), numbering about 400,000, and the Hungarians, numbering about 1,700,000 (according to the 1991 census). These groups differ considerably in social, economic, and cultural respects, in the strength of their identity, in the use of their mother tongue, and in their possibilities for social and cultural self-sufficiency.

After the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime on December 22, 1989, the new Romanian leaders announced their intention to amend several areas of legislation to conform more closely to international standards for the protection of human rights. As part of this effort, Romania's new constitution, adopted on December 8, 1991, included a few seminal provisions: It proclaimed Romania to be a state committed to “the rule of law, a democratic and social state, where human dignity, the rights and freedom of citizens, the free develop-

ment of human personality, justice and political pluralism represent supreme values and are guaranteed" (article 1).

Art. 20 makes respect for human rights the cornerstone of Romanian legislation: "The constitutional provisions regarding the rights and freedom of citizens shall be interpreted and applied in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights and with other treaties to which Romania is a party." This article further states that "if there is a disagreement between international treaties regarding human rights to which Romania is a party and the internal legislation, international regulations have priority over domestic legislation." Under art. 6, "the Romanian State acknowledges and guarantees to people belonging to national minorities the right to preserve, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity." And art. 16 affirms the principle of equality: "citizens are equal before the law and public authorities, without any privileges and discrimination."

According to art. 11 (2) the Romanian State must "carry out adequately and with good faith the obligations incumbent on it from the treaties to which it is a party." Art. 20 (2) reads, "If there is disagreement between international treaties regarding human rights which Romania is a party to and the internal legislation, international regulations have priority over domestic legislation."

On the other hand, restrictions on freedom of expression for ethnic minorities were also woven into the constitution. For example, art. 1 refers to the character of the Romanian state as "national," and art. 4 proclaims that the state is based on the "unity of the Romanian people." Art. 30 states that "slanderizing the country and the nation is forbidden by law." (Art. 236 of the criminal code adopted in 1996 stipulates that such slander is punishable by imprisonment for one to five years.)

The right to use a language other than Romanian has been restricted as well. Art. 127 stipulates that "legal proceedings shall take place in Romanian." The article also declares that "citizens belonging to national minorities, as well as people who do not understand or speak Romanian, have the right to be informed of all the acts and trial procedures," but this right is exercised free of charge only in criminal trials. In administrative and commercial proceedings, citizens belonging to national minorities must pay a fee if they want to use an interpreter in their mother tongue.

UNDERMINING CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES THROUGH LEGISLATION

Before the Constitution was adopted, the Romanian parliament passed a law (No. 69/1991) on local administration that required the use of Romanian, designated the official language, "in the relations between citizens and local public administration authorities." Another provision of this law declared that "the right to use one's mother tongue shall be strictly observed," but other provisions laid down conditions for exercising this right that render it largely impractical. For example, all applications and acts presented in writing must be accompanied by an authenticated Romanian translation. The procedure for obtaining authenticated Romanian translations is complicated, time-consuming, and costly.

The law also provides that "proceedings are held in the official language of the state." Consequently, even if all the participants belong to only one minority and know that language, they are still required to use Romanian. The law does permit administrative decisions to be given jointly in the mother tongue and in Romanian in "territorial administrative units where the national minorities are numerous" (art. 30).

A subsequent law (No. 75/1994) imposed restrictions on the display of national flags, the signing of the national anthem, and the use of Romania's coat of arms in public spaces. While art. 4 of the law says that "Romania's flag can be displayed by private citizens at their residence, art. 7 says that "the flags of other states can be displayed on the territory of Romania only with the national flag and only on the occasion of official state visits, international festivities and meetings, on official buildings and in public places established according to the current law." Thus, private citizens are allowed to display the flag of another state only on very special occasions.

THE 1995 EDUCATION LAW (NO. 84/1995)

Education in the mother tongue is one of the basic means of preserving and asserting the identity of national minorities. A law passed by the Romanian parliament in June 1995 left open the possibility of learning in the mother tongue but failed to meet the legitimate needs of the country's national minorities, especially the Hungarians and Germans. This law was actually a setback when compared to the education law that existed during the Communist regime.

The 1995 education law gave a narrow interpretation to the 1991 constitutional provision assuring “the right of people belonging to national minorities to learn their mother tongue and to education in their mother tongue,” and especially to the final provisions of article 32 (3), according to which “the ways of exercising these rights are to be established by law.” Indeed, it introduced some severe restrictions on the right to preserve and assert the identity of national minorities.

Art. 118 of the law granted citizens belonging to national minorities the right to “study and learn in the mother tongue at all levels and all forms of education.” For those who study in their mother tongue in secondary schools, the “history and traditions of national minorities, as a subject matter, may be introduced upon request, with instruction in the mother tongue” (art. 120). In addition, “Pupils from national minorities who attend schools where instruction is conducted in Romanian may study upon request, as a subject, the language and literature of their mother tongue, as well as the history and traditions of their minority” (art. 121). In order to ensure the participation of teachers who belong to national minorities in the management of schools, the law called for “proportional representation” based on “professional competence.” Art. 180 guaranteed the right of a parent or legal tutor to decide whether the child of a national minority should attend a school where he will be taught in Romanian or in the language of that minority.

However, these rights were qualified by the provision that they were to be exercised “in accordance with the current law.” In practice, this meant that the exercise of these rights was subordinated to the wishes of the majority. For example, the law required every community to provide education in Romanian (art. 8), even though there are some communities where no ethnic Romanians live. Some critics argued that the mandatory formation of classes with instruction in Romanian was a disguised way of pressuring citizens belonging to national minorities to give up education in their mother tongue and choose education in Romanian instead.

Art. 120 of the law said that state-supported ethnic Hungarian schools must teach the history and geography of Romania in Romanian, using textbooks that are identical to those that are used in schools where instruction is in Romanian. Examinations in these subjects were also to be given in Romanian. The law introduced as a subject the “history of the Romanian people” rather than the “history of Romania.” This has been interpreted by the minorities as an insult. Instead of providing for

the study of the history of the country, whose past and present life is the result of the coexistence of all elements of the population, the law provided for the study of the history of ethnic Romanians living both on this country’s territory and on territories that currently belong to other states.

Representatives of the Hungarian minority also complained about the obligation of studying the history and geography of Romania in Romanian. They argued that the law should have allowed for the study of the two subjects in minority languages, with the obligation to learn historical and geographical names in Romanian as well.

There are other restrictions on education in the mother tongue. According to art. 122, “specialty training” in technical, administrative, forestry, and agricultural studies at the secondary and higher education levels must be conducted in Romanian, although the law does permit a technical vocabulary to be taught in the mother tongue “when feasible.” In practice, this appears to render specialty training inaccessible to many members of national minorities. Moreover, the inclusion of administrative studies in this article suggests that there was no intention of recognizing the right to the use of the mother tongue in public administration. Clearly, if the government had wanted to observe this right, it would have been more concerned to ensure the availability of bilingual public servants.

Art. 123 stated that “education in the mother tongue can be organized, upon request and according to the law, for training the personnel involved in education and cultural activities.” However, except in academic departments where it already existed (medicine, pedagogy, and art), no specialization in the mother tongue was offered. The lack of law schools with instruction in minority languages seems to demonstrate that Romanian authorities wanted to maintain Romanian as the only language used in the judiciary.

In principle, national minorities could resort to private schools to obtain education in the aforementioned fields; but this was an unlikely possibility. According to art. 166, “all the existing educational establishments have become assets of the Ministry of Education, including those nationalized by the Communist regime.” Thus, they cannot be returned to their former owners—some of whom were representatives of national minorities.

One of the most critical provisions of the 1995 law dealt with college entrance examinations. Art. 124 reads: “At all levels, admission and graduation exams are to be given in Romanian. Admission and gradu-

tion exams can be given in the mother tongue [only] in schools, classes and for specialties in which instruction is in the mother tongue, according to the current law." Thus, students with aspirations for higher education would be at a serious disadvantage if they have not studied Romanian at least in the last years of secondary school. Although the law did not impose education in Romanian on national minorities, it provided a powerful incentive.

THE EDUCATION DECREE OF 1997

As mentioned above, emergency decrees on public administration and on education were adopted by the coalition government that was formed following the 1996 elections. Neither of these decrees has yet been given final approval by parliament. Indeed, both of them are subjects of considerable disagreement within the governing coalition. However, the decree on education would surpass even the most liberal provisions of the 1978 education law concerning education in minority languages, as can be seen in the following articles:

Art. 8. (1) All education is to be carried out in the mother tongue. According to this law, education takes place in the languages of national minorities, as well as in major international languages. (2) In every community, classes with instruction in Romanian and/or, as the case may be, with instruction in the languages of national minorities are offered; alternatively, instruction in the mother tongue is offered in the nearest community, in the same county. (3) The study of Romanian in school, as an official state language, is compulsory for all Romanian citizens, regardless of nationality. To this effect, curricula should include the necessary number of classes; at the same time, conditions will be ensured for learning the official state language. (4) In both the state and private education, the documents designated by the Ministry of Education must be drafted in Romanian. Other school documents may be drafted in the language of instruction. Higher education institutions may carry out translations of their own documents.

Art. 118. Citizens belonging to national minorities have the right to study in their mother tongue, at all levels and forms of education, according to the conditions established by this law.

Art. 120. (1) The subject of Romanian language and literature is

taught in primary and secondary schools, according to curricula and textbooks that are currently in use. In institutions of higher education, Romanian language and literature is taught according to curricula and textbooks that are identical with those for classes with instruction in Romanian. (2) In primary education, the history and geography of Romania are taught in the mother tongue, according to curricula and textbooks that are identical with those for classes with instruction in Romanian. In secondary and higher education, these subjects can be taught, upon request, in the mother tongue, using curricula and textbooks that are identical with those for classes with instruction in Romanian; the Romanian names of people and places must be transcribed and learned in the mother tongue.

Art. 122. Vocational and post-secondary education may also be conducted in the mother tongue, upon request, but with the obligation of acquiring the specialty terminology in Romanian.

Art. 123. (1) In the education system, groups, colleges, and other institutions with instruction in the mother tongue can be organized, upon request, according to the law. In this case, the specialty terminology should be learned in the Romanian language. (2) Higher education institutions with multicultural structures and activities for promoting harmonious interethnic coexistence and integration at the national and European level are encouraged. (3) Upon request, the training of Romanian specialists in the languages of national minorities is encouraged.

Art 124. At all levels and in all types of education, admission exams and graduation exams can be given in the language in which those subjects have been studied, according to the law.

These and other changes were the subject of intensive discussion at the Cluj meeting.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON THE USE OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

The meeting began with a presentation by a representative of the Romanian Ministry of Education, who described the provisions of the new education law. The changes, he said, reflect the government's desire to open up new possibilities for national minorities to assert their identity.

He emphasized that instruction in minority languages was only one aspect of the reform, which was intended to improve the quality of education in ways that would affect the children of the majority population as well as of the minorities.

The representative of the Council of Europe spoke of the European Union's interest in ensuring appropriate conditions for instruction in minority languages. He reviewed the evolution of international documents aimed at protecting national minorities and stressed the importance of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention (1995) on that subject. He gave details of the convention's provisions on instruction in minority languages.

A participant from a nongovernmental organization (NGO) commented that the Framework Convention in fact set lower standards than an earlier recommendation had done. Furthermore, he suggested, the convention is not especially relevant to a situation such as that in Romania, where the Hungarian minority is large and has its own educational tradition.

An ethnic Hungarian participant pointed out that in 1995 about 500,000 ethnic Hungarians in Romania signed a petition urging the parliament to consider a number of provisions concerning instruction in the mother tongue. The petition was never considered by the parliament, even though it was constitutionally obliged to do so.

The head of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities discussed the government's strategy for the reform of education in minority languages. The first phase of this reform was the education law (discussed above) and a parallel administration law. The second phase would involve the adoption of a national minorities law—a single, comprehensive statute on the rights of minorities. Unfortunately, he went on, even the first stage was jeopardized by a nationalistic opposition within the government, which was manifested during the parliamentary debates. These debates have led to a lowering of the standards that the government had originally proposed.

The proposed education law, said a senator from one of the coalition parties, had gone too far in the direction of minority rights. An ethnic Hungarian now has the possibility of receiving instruction in the Hungarian language from kindergarten to the doctoral level. The dissatisfaction on the part of the Hungarian population is centered on the idea, now dominant in the senate, that history of the Romanian people and Romanian geography should be taught in Romanian. However, this

is something that would be good even for Hungarian children, for it would give them a chance to practice the Romanian language.

A Romanian participant agreed, saying that to study Romanian as a separate subject, a "foreign language," was not sufficient. Because Romanian is the official state language, all Romanian citizens should know it well, whatever their ethnic identity. For this reason, it is important not merely to study the language but also to practice it, to get to know its subtleties.

An NGO participant drew attention to the fact that an official language is simply the language used by the state authorities. It is wrong to insist that it also be the language in which all the country's citizens are obliged to express themselves. He said he was surprised that the 1995 education law spoke of the "history of the Romanian people" rather than the "history of Romania." Romania is the country of all its citizens, regardless of descent, nationality, or race. To study the "history of the Romanian people" is to study only part of the history of the country.

The notion that the history of the Romanian people and Romanian geography should be studied in the Romanian language was described by



At the meeting in Cluj-Napoca, in the foreground: Smaranda Enache and Elek Szokoly.

one Hungarian participant as a “major pedagogical confusion.” These are subjects like any other, and there is no reason that they should not be studied in the same language as other subjects. Furthermore, this requirement would impede communication between teachers and pupils. It could even lead children to become antagonistic toward the Romanian language and toward the subjects studied in it. A Hungarian who is a professor of cognitive linguistics told of the parents of a Hungarian child who wept when recounting the difficulties their children had in studying the subjects in which instruction was in Romanian.

A senator from one of the coalition parties said he was unable to see why using the Romanian language in two classes a week should be viewed as a tragedy. Knowledge of the Romanian language was in the interest of all children, and the state had a responsibility to satisfy those interests.

A Hungarian participant decried what he called ‘this paternalistic perspective.’ It is presumptuous for Romanian politicians to say that they know the interests of Hungarian children better than the Hungarians do. He also pointed out that the previous speaker was a member of a religious minority and, in that capacity, had appealed to principles that he was unwilling to apply to other minorities.

An NGO participant said that members of the parliament were obliged by the constitution to “support the interests of the Romanian people.” Hence, when they voted, they must take account of the interests of both the majority and the minority populations—which is to say, the general interests of society as a whole. Consequently, it is improper to describe as “paternalistic” a member of parliament who voted for a law concerning national minorities according to his own judgment, whether or not he belongs to a national minority himself.

A refusal by parliament to meet the demands of Hungarians as put forth by the UDMR could have serious political consequences, said a Hungarian politician. If the UDMR were to leave the government coalition, the domestic political equilibrium would be upset, and Romania’s international position would suffer.

The representative of the Council of Europe reinforced that point. He expressed the European Union’s appreciation of the signs of Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation; any disturbance of that process, he said, would be an obstacle to Romania’s integration into the EU. He cited the example of Slovakia, whose policy on minorities led to harsh criticism from the European Parliament.

A senator who is a member of the leading party in the government coalition acknowledged the absurd character of the current situation. But, he said, “we have no choice.” The party’s constituents were insistent that the history of the Romanian people and Romanian geography be taught in the Romanian language. Indeed, the party has been criticized for having been “blackmailed” by the UDMR. In view of the fact that there were many possibilities of studying other subjects in the minority languages, it did not seem too much to require that these two subjects be studied in Romanian.

An NGO participant disagreed with that position. The opposition to the proposed education law originally came from within the party, not from the electorate. Only after the issue had been framed in nationalistic terms, which were then taken up by the mass media, did the voters become agitated. Furthermore, many people lack a sufficiently deep understanding of the problems. The previous speaker agreed with these observations.

The participant from PER said that if all sides stuck firmly to their positions, no solutions were possible. Reciprocal concessions were needed to satisfy the interests of all. Democracy is the art of compromise.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE

The discussion turned to the issue of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. As explained by a Hungarian professor at the university, it had originally been simply the Bolyai University, a Hungarian institution, but in 1959 it was transformed into the Babes-Bolyai University, with equally strong Romanian and Hungarian sections. Since that time, the Hungarian sections have been gradually dismantled or subordinated, and today the Hungarian faculty members have hardly any voice in the affairs of the university. An organization has now been formed that seeks the ultimate restoration of Bolyai University as a Hungarian institution. Recognizing that this cannot be accomplished overnight, the organization proposes that, for now, the university should have two sections, Romanian and Hungarian, professionally and administratively independent of each other.

A Romanian professor from the university said that its current leadership sought instead the creation of a multicultural university, with Romanian, Hungarian, and German sections. This would reflect the history of

Transylvania, the area in which Cluj is located, where there has always been a strong German influence. This would be a university of a modern type, encouraging diversity, various identities, and communication between different groups. Such an institution might also find it easier to mobilize financial resources. Planning for this project is in an advanced stage.

But a Hungarian professor objected, saying that the idea of a multicultural university was a diversion. Moreover, if it were to be established, its senate would probably be dominated by Romanian academics. In any case, there was no comparison between the demands for university education in German and in Hungarian.

An NGO representative said that a higher educational institution with instruction in the Hungarian language was necessary in principle. Hungarian culture was on a par with Romanian culture, but it would continue to develop only if ethnic Hungarians had their own university and other institutions. This was not merely a pedagogical issue. The protection of a minority community entailed the preservation of its symbols, and a university was one such symbol.

A Romanian politician recalled that President Constantinescu and Prime Minister Ciorbea had accepted in principle the establishment of a Hungarian university, but in another city, perhaps Tîrgu Mureş or Miercurea-Ciuc. An understanding about this arrangement had also been reached in talks with Prime Minister Horn of Hungary. But a Hungarian professor said that he thinks that Prime Minister Horn had no information about the wishes of the Hungarian community in Romania with respect to higher educational institutions.

The argument about the need for separate Romanian and Hungarian sections was overblown, said a Romanian professor. It is diverting attention from greater problems in higher education. In fact, it might be a good idea to teach many courses in the English language, because of the urgency of preparing students for a globalized economy.

An NGO representative said that, although principles were important, it was also important to make a precise assessment of the feasibility of higher education in the Hungarian language: the number of students that would be expected to enroll, their distribution between the sections, the availability of funding and of faculty—all the practical matters connected with the establishment of a university. He said that it was strange that the UDMR had not undertaken such a study.

This part of the discussion concluded with the hope expressed by several participants that politicians and academics interested in this issue would bring new information to bear on the possibility and timeliness of creating an independent Hungarian university.

In the final part of the discussion, a participant representing a human-rights organization put forth a compromise on the issue of the teaching of history of the Romanian people and Romanian geography. The currently proposed education law provides that in elementary schools, these two subjects are to be taught in the mother tongue. In secondary and higher education, they are to be taught in the mother tongue “upon request,” but with the requirement that students learn the Romanian names of people and places as transcribed in the mother tongue. These provisions, he said, were probably written with only the Hungarian minority in mind. However, among Romania’s eighteen recognized minorities, there are many boys and girls who do not speak the mother tongue even at home. This is particularly true of the Roma, Albanians, and Italians, but it was also true of many



From left: Giovanni Mangion, Livia Plaks, Gyorgy Tokay and Gabriel Andreescu.

Hungarians. Why should these children not have the opportunity of studying the two subjects in the Romanian language?

Consequently, this participant suggested, the proposed law should be revised to provide that, at all levels of education, history of the Romanian people and Romanian geography would be taught either in Romanian or, “by request,” in the language of a minority group. This would give all students the possibility of choosing the language in which they wanted to study these two subjects. Other participants, including a senator who is a member of the PNTCD, and the representative of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities, expressed support for this idea. It was subsequently introduced at a session of the Romanian parliament and met a favorable response, and thus may influence the final form of the new education law.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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