

Protest against excluding Hungarian lecturers from Babes-Bolyai University in Romania

by Kormos Laszlo editor of HUNSOR

and with the support of the committee of Association of Hungarians In Sweden - SMOSZ

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable members of councils and parliaments!

Both the ethnic history of Transylvania and the history of higher education in the region are traced, particularly the history of Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, (*hun.* Kolozsvár) which dates back to 1541.

Today, this institution is a trilingual university offering lines of studies in Romanian, Hungarian, and German, as enshrined in the university charter of 8 July 2000, but unfortunately the reality is quite the opposite.

The trilingual instructional system, as it is proclaimed by this institution, is unfortunately far away from the reality. The recent reports on exclusion of two Hungarian lecturer on November 27 2006 from the Babes-Bolyai University just because they placed several Hungarian inscriptions inside various buildings of the university witnesses about something completely different than the University rector and charters of the institution are officially proclaiming. It is important to remind that there is a law in Romania which states the right of using multilingual inscriptions on those institutions where ethnic minorities are represented.

Recent news from the city of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár are making us even more concerned on the situation of basic human rights in Romania, when news reports are telling us on a possible police investigation against Dr. Peter HANTZ and Lehel KOVACS where they are called responsible for damaging the properties of the university by placing the inscriptions on the walls of the university. All this reminds us of the communist era of conceptional prearranged trials that we thought could never come back.

Unfortunately there is still a long way in accommodating ethno-linguistic diversity in Romania, which is going to be a full member of EU from the 1st January next year.

HUNSOR – as an independent Non-Profit information resource, which monitors Hungarian minority and human rights issues/events on a daily basis, is seriously concerned by the risk of deteriorating inter-ethnic relations in Romania, and particularly between different ethnic groups on the Babes-Bolyai University in the city of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár.

HUNSOR calls on the Romanian authorities and the rector of the Babes-Bolyai University to properly investigate and sanction any ethnically motivated incidents, but also to reinforce the dialogue among the University Senate and the rector with the Hungarian-language teaching staff, and reemploy the excluding Hungarian lecturer from Babes-Bolyai University.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable members of councils and parliaments!

In order to enable you make a fair and objective judgment about things in a soon to be EU member state, please be kind enough to spare a few minutes and read the report below.

Disregarding the Hungarian Minority at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania

Out of Romania's 21 million inhabitants 1.5 million are Hungarians, being the second largest traditional national minority in Europe. Although Hungarians represent 6.6% of Romania's population, only 4.4% of students in higher education are ethnic Hungarians, and only 1.6% enjoy the opportunity to study in Hungarian.

The Hungarian-language Bolyai University in Transylvania was forced to merge with the Romanian Babes University in 1959. After the anti-communist Revolution in 1989, the representatives of the Hungarian community asked several times for the re-establishment of the Bolyai University, but their requests were repeatedly denied. The events, listed in chronological order below, that unfolded during the last two years culminated a week ago showing that the self-proclaimed 'multicultural' Babes-Bolyai University is, in fact, a hotbed of ethnic intolerance.

26 May 2005 The 1st European Conference on Higher Education of National Minorities concluded that all European Universities teaching in minority languages use inscriptions in the minority language, except the Babes-Bolyai University.

1 July 2005 The Hungarian teaching staff of the University requested that multilingual signs be displayed. Instead of asking for the decision of the University Senate, the highest decision-making organ, the Rector issued, however half-heartedly, a decree granting the request.

October-November 2005 On further pressure from ethnic Hungarian university officials, a series of technical decisions regarding the multilingual inscriptions were issued. The deadline for displaying them was set to 10 January 2006.

29 November 2005 A formal request for creating three Hungarian faculties at the Babes-Bolyai University, signed by 83% of the Hungarian-language teaching staff, was submitted to the University Senate. The demand was ignored.

8 November 2006 Since, in spite of decisions made earlier, nothing happened in terms of displaying multilingual signs, the Bolyai Initiative Committee urged that the mentioned decisions be put into practice before 19 November.

9 November 2006 The University Rector denied the existence of the decision regarding the multilingual inscriptions, and declared that Romanian law does not allow for the placement of multilingual signs in the University. (It must be noted that the concept 'multicultural university' is used in Romanian legislation regarding higher education.) He interpreted his earlier decree as an act regarding only the erecting of statues and effigies of famous Hungarian professors.

22 November 2006 Dr. Peter HANTZ, university lecturer, placed several Hungarian signs inside various buildings of the university. These inscriptions, having the same size and design as the Romanian ones, were fastened below the latter. However, the security staff of the university forcibly prevented the placement of some inscriptions, like 'No smoking' or 'Information'. The Hungarian signs that were actually displayed were removed and destroyed, or even vandalized, later that day following an order of the Rector.

27 November 2006 The Rector manipulated the 70 (out of 137) members of the University Senate present at its latest session in order to obtain a vote for the 'exclusion from the teaching staff' of Peter HANTZ and Lehel KOVACS, vice-presidents of the Bolyai Initiative Committee. It is noteworthy that 'for/aye' and 'abstain' votes have not been counted. Nevertheless, it is certain that 14 members (most of them ethnic Hungarians) voted 'against/noe'.

28 November 2006 More than 120 ethnic Hungarian members of the teaching staff, including all the Hungarian faculty from the Physics and Computer Science Departments (where Hantz and Kovacs teach, respectively) protested against their exclusion. Most ethnic Hungarian student of these departments joined their action. Moreover, members of the Romanian, the Hungarian and the European Parliament also asked for the withdrawal of the decision and the fulfilment of the demands

voiced by the Hungarian community.

29 November 2006 The Hungarian Vice-Rectors of the University resigned.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable members of councils and parliaments!

As a result of a Trianon Peace Dictate of 4 June 1920 which followed the World War I, the problems of 1.5 million Hungarians who came under Romanian rule as a result of this dictate, continuously increased.

Even to this date the promised rights for ethnic Hungarians for self-governing and Autonomy in Romania, have not been provided.

Hungarians living in the historically Hungarian-inhabited Transylvania are increasingly forced to face intolerance, violence and discrimination and, furthermore, they are not able to exercise their right to self-determination - not even in the form of autonomy. The fact that the government of Romania do have Hungarian members as members of parliament and ministers in the government does not help the situation, rather, it diverts attention away from the actual realities.

Even today, **Transylvania** as a part of nowadays Romania is the place where the purest Hungarian is spoken, where Hungarian popular art has found its most exalted, most perfect expression, and where Béla Bartók collected his Hungarian folk tunes.

We must remind you that this place therefore can not be the place where intolerance is feeling itself at home. Hungarian language should have the same and equal treatment in Transylvania in all levels of a modern Romanian state and should be not discriminated, neglected, or excluded from any institutions if Romania really wants to be a part of a new and United Europe and EU.

We must remind You that Transylvania is also the place where the Hungarian diet at Torda, in 1557, declared the freedom of religion for the first time in the world. Transylvania provided an atmosphere of religious and ethnic tolerance across centuries and as such became the birthplace of the Unitarian and Sabbatarian religions.

For this reason, we are requesting for the awareness of the Honorable members of councils and of the European Parliament to pay attention on the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania and particularly the situation of two excluded lecturer from the Hungarian-language teaching staff.

HUNSOR is deeply concerned and considers that these issues upon multi linguistic teaching, the equal treatment of minority languages are common European values and require increased attention and assistance of European institutions in order of solving the problems, as it is in the interest of all member states in preventing conflicts and maintaining stability.

The foreign policy formulators of the European Union in particular should be concerned upon these facts.

In the global context of European interests the Babes-Bolyai University and the question of excluding of two lecturers who wanted to achieve equal treatment of their mother tongue on a self proclaimed 'multicultural' Babes-Bolyai University may seem to be of minor significance. But in the overall scheme of consolidating a stable Eastern and South Eastern Europe, the unrest and the polarization of ethnic communities may signal the unraveling of the peace process that followed the wars in Balkans.

The EU's present focus on the Enlargement issue makes it easy to miss these signals, but such an unraveling could undermine long-term European interests in an important part of the world and destabilize the efforts on peace and stability for whole Europe.

HUNSOR calls on the Hungarian EU EP delegates to take further steps on these issues in front of Council of Europe and in the European Parliament, to propose a draft resolution, which will

include concrete directives for Romania if their authorities fail to do necessary measures on stopping discrimination of any minority group or any form of human right abuses.

HUNSOR addresses the attention of the education minister of Romania Mihail Hărdău, to make all the necessary steps toward stabilization of inter-ethnic tensions in the Babes-Bolyai University. The discrimination, intolerance and inequality, denial of basic human rights and mistreatment of minorities must come to its end. Romania and all of its citizens need stability, peaceful democratic prosperity for all of its citizens, including minorities.

Therefore, for the native Hungarians living in Romania, who have been separated from the mother country for 86 years by a state border whose dividing role cannot be eliminated even within the framework of the European Union, we the signatories of this letter demand:

Equal treatment of Hungarian language beside the Romanian and German in the Babes-Bolyai University in the city Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, freedom of speech and freedom of expression without being investigated and harassed of a police in a conceptional alike trials, we demand the promised rights for ethnic Hungarians for self-governing and Autonomy in Romania, the right to self-determination and human dignity on the basis of democracy, rule of law and equality of peoples and nations.

*Thanking you sincerely and respectfully for your attention,
Kormos László
webeditor on HUNSOR
Hungarian-Swedish Online Resources.*

*This protest letter is fully supported by the
SMOSZ - Association of Hungarians in Sweden
which counts 5486 members in Sweden*

*Copy:
Swedish Government
Swedish Parliament
Finish Government
Finish Parliament
European Union
Council of Europe
Media*