

Disregarding the Hungarian Minority at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, 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 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 recently 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. However, instead of asking for the decision of the University Senate, the highest decision-making organ, the Rector issued, half-heartedly, a decree granting this 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 the signs was set for 10 January 2006.

29 November 2005 A formal request for creating 3 Hungarian faculties at the Babes-Bolyai University, signed by 83% of the involved 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. He interpreted his earlier decree as an act regarding only the erecting of statues and effigies of famous Hungarian professors.

22 November 2006 Dr. Péter 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 Dr. Péter HANTZ and Dr. Lehel KOVÁCS, 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 Hungarian section from the Physics and Computer Science Faculties (where Hantz and Kovács teach) protested against their exclusion. Most ethnic Hungarian students 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.

6 December 2006 Several Hungarian members of the University Senate also resigned. Leaders of the Hungarian Line of Studies decided not to fill the vacancies, until the main problems of the Hungarian community at the University are not solved.

7 December 2006 Hungarian youth and student unions organized demonstrations in several Transylvanian cities demanding the resettlement of the fired university lecturers, and the establishment of the Hungarian faculties at the Babes-Bolyai University.

12 December 2006 As a result of a report filed by the Babes-Bolyai University, with charges of “impairment”, the Romanian Police called in and asked a declaration from the fired lecturers. The professors denied giving any declaration. At the same time, the Romanian Minister of Education decided to establish a commission of inquiry on this issue.

13 December 2006 More than 75% of the Hungarian professors involved signed a petition asking the establishment of a Hungarian-language Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Babes-Bolyai University. The full-time students and PhD-students also started gathering signatures.