

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

Summary of Events 2005-2007

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 a week ago showing that the self-proclaimed 'multicultural' Babes-Bolyai University is, in fact, a hotbed of ethnic intolerance.

**26 May 2005** The 1<sup>st</sup> European Conference on Higher Education of National Minorities assessed that all European Universities teaching in minority languages use inscriptions also in the minority language, except the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania.

**1 July 2005** The Hungarian teaching staff of the University requested that multilingual signs be displayed. However, instead of asking for a decision of the University Senate, the highest decision-making organ, the Rector issued a legally invalid decree granting this request.

**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.

**9 November 2006** The University Rector denied the existence of his former 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 concerning only the erection 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 distinguished and 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 faculty from the Physics and Computer Science Departments (where Hantz and Kovacs teach) publicly 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 to withdraw the decision and to fulfil the demands voiced by the Hungarian community.

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

**6 December 2006** Several Hungarian members of the University Senate 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 remain unsolved.

**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 at the police, with charges of “impairment”, the Romanian Police called in the fired lecturers and asked for a declaration from them. The professors refused to give 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 for the establishment of a Hungarian-language Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Babes-Bolyai University.

**19 January 2007** The Council of the ethnic Hungarian staff members, urged by the Rector to help in normalizing the situation, decided to nominate two Vice-Rectors toward the Senate for heading the study lines in Hungarian language. At the same time it drafted a Petition formulating their demands, asking for the autonomy of the Hungarian section, for the placement of the multilingual signs and for the re-employment of the fired lecturers. The Petition, including a new concession toward the Rector, was approved by the Assembly of the ethnically Hungarian staff by vote. One of the proposed Deputy Rectors was commissioned to put it forward at the next meeting of the University Senate.

**19 February 2007** The Senate elected the Deputy Rectors as nominated. At the Senate meeting the Petition of the Hungarian university community was neglected.

**Bolyai Initiative Committee**