

Present and Future of Higher Education in the Hungarian Language in Romania

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to analyse the current problems and challenges of Hungarian language education policy in Romania, in the context of the education policy of the European Union, respectively the processes going on in the European Higher Education Area. In this sphere of thought we briefly outline some of the consequences of the so-called Bologna Process regarding domestic higher education (and Hungarian minority higher education within it), after which we attempt to analyse the specific problems of Hungarian language university education. In the course of the latter inquiry, which is the larger part of our study, we intend to be mindful of both the national policy, demographic and minority aspects pertaining to the Transylvanian Hungarian minority and the higher education offer and institutional system in a qualified sense. Our analyses can obviously not ignore the 'topos' of the independent, Hungarian language state university either - its dilemmas and questions constitute the last thematic unit of our study.

Keywords: higher education policy in the EU, Hungarian language higher education in Romania, minority educational policy, Hungarian system of higher education in Transylvania, European Higher Education Area

It is no simple task nowadays to attempt to give a detailed analysis of the situation and the objectives of higher education in the Hungarian language in Romania. The difficulty lies in the fact that by today the issue has grown into a complex problem, characterised by divergent points of view and considerations, and therefore inquiries into it also necessitate expertise in many different fields, thorough knowledge, a large number of statistical data and exhaustive 'background information'. Consequently, the author of

the present paper pays his tribute with plain respect and recognition to all those experts, institutions and bodies that have been trying recently - including the past two years – to perform a thorough analysis of the state of affairs and the tasks of our minority higher education. They had to be mindful of the transformations of the European system of education (the "Bologna Process"), and of its consequences in Romania; they had to be aware of statistical data referring to Romanian (and within it Hungarian language) higher education; of the labour market analyses and indicators, of demand and supply predictions, they had to be able to link demographic data with educational policy considerations, they had to know their way around domestic legislation with reference to higher education, respectively the development opportunities lying therein, they had to be well-informed in connection with Romanian normative funding, respectively the opportunities in Hungarian support policy - and the list could probably be continued. To all of this, one can add the national and minority policy aspect, as a clear-cut common element of various strategic papers, which fundamentally defines the present and future of higher education in the Hungarian language in Romania, in other words the collection of principles and objectives that create a context, in which even issues that could otherwise be discussed easily in a narrow professional, educational policy setting, become problematic, questionable, disputable.

The full and exhaustive analysis of the complex issues outlined is not the aim of this paper. We do not strive to deduce present-day Transylvanian Hungarian higher education from a historic perspective, or from the traditions of the past, nor is it our aim to argue why independent, full-spectrum higher education in the mother tongue is of decisive importance for a national community. Similarly, an extremely significant issue of our education policy, the placement of higher education in Hungarian into the context of the challenges of general European higher education is not the subject of our present inquiries, either. It goes without saying that a part of the present problems and tasks of Hungarian language higher education in Romania is completely identical with the current issues of domestic Romanian language higher education, and also with those of higher education in Hungary, or even with those of the unified European higher education (the so-called European Higher Education Area). Such challenges, well-known today by universities and academics are: the expansion of higher education, respectively that BSc (Bachelor of Science) level diplomas become more and more widespread, and gradually take over the role of former high-school graduation; the decline in quality as a negative consequence of expansion and of the normative system of financing (the so-called per capita funding) also represents a serious problem as higher education is

struggling trapped between the imperativeness of quantity and quality; the fact that higher education institutions have become market players is yet another challenge worldwide and on a European level, just as the handling of the resulting inherent strategic problems (oversupply, competition etc.); but at the same time we could also mention the questions related to the theoretically existing equivalent curricula and diplomas, which still cause so many problems on the level of the European Union. It is no mere chance therefore that the examination of these major challenges and problems, the analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of the Bologna Process and the search to resolve its negative consequences have been in the forefront of educational policy specialist literature in recent years – obviously including the inquiries regarding Hungarian language higher education in Romania.

As we have earlier noted, Transylvanian (or in a wider sense, Romanian) Hungarian educational policy has nonetheless an inevitable national strategic component, which weighs heavy primarily on analyses and debates referring to the vision or the future prospects of our higher education. This is the aspect related to *present* and *future*, which we will attempt to discuss in this essay, and even if we cannot provide exhaustive, ample answers, we still at least hope to formulate viewpoints worthy of the consideration of specialists, academics, and the social public sensitive of the strategic questions of our higher education.

In order to assess the present state of affairs of Transylvanian Hungarian higher education, let us consider the last, fully concluded academic year, i.e. that of 2009/2010. The table below presents all the institutions and locations, where the major part of higher education in the Hungarian language is presently carried out, summing up at the same time the total numbers of students and full-time academic staff.¹

The last series of data from academic year 2009/2010 – nearly 12,000 students and a total number of almost 800 teaching staff – throws a light first of all on the fact that the higher education training offer in the Hungarian language in Transylvania, the number of students, and of academic staff have been growing continuously over the past 20 years, and it can also be clearly seen from

¹The data for the report was collected in June 2010, by means of a direct poll addressed to the concerning higher education institutions. The author hereby wishes to thank for the helpful co-operation of the leaders of the Hungarian section of the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely) University of Arts and the Partium Christian University (Vice-Rector Tivadar Magyari, and Rectors Attila Gáspárik and Szabolcs János-Szatmári), respectively of the officials of the secretariats at the Hungarian section of the Medical and Pharmaceutical University of Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely), the Protestant Theological Institute and the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, including for their correct and undistorted data supply.

the table that a so-called Hungarian system of higher education has gradually developed in Transylvania following the political system change in 1989, both from a geographic perspective, and from the point of view of the numbers of students and teaching staff. In spite of that, the Hungarian youth continues to be underrepresented in higher education (in comparison with the majority population), and in certain fields there is still no university level education in Hungarian. (Such fields are for instance Veterinary Science, Agriculture, and a large part of the Engineering and Music programmes. In 2010 there has probably been a single positive 'breakthrough' in this respect: Law education in Hungarian has (re)started in Transylvania, at the Cluj (Kolozsvár) Faculty of the Sapientia University. The imperfections of the full-spectrum of higher education in the mother tongue can further be detailed if we study separately the availability of undergraduate, master's degree, and PhD programmes.)

The data referring to the total number of students also highlights an interesting, noteworthy state of affairs. If we take into account the student numbers of the programmes of Hungarian universities run in Romania, which are not included in the previous table, then – by a rough approximation – we could say that a total of 12,000 students studied within the framework of the Transylvanian system of Hungarian higher education in the academic year of 2009/2010 if counting the full cycles of training (all years of study). Taking the different lengths of the various academic programmes – undergraduate, master's degree, PhD – into consideration, respectively having regard for the weighted number of participating students (in other words, dividing the total number of 12,000 students in a year by the average length of 3.8-4 years of a study programme) we can conclude that approximately 3,000 students were enrolled in the respective analysed year into each year of study of all the Hungarian programmes of the different Transylvanian higher education institutions – and this number included all the students in their first undergraduate programmes, as well as those striving to obtain a 'second diploma', respectively the ones that partook in several academic programmes in parallel. At the same time, based on the internal statistics of our higher education institutions, we can say that a rough number of 2,000-2,200 'new students' enrol into a Hungarian language undergraduate programme of a higher education institution in a given academic year, as freshly graduating from secondary schools (or having graduated in earlier years). What is the problem detected from these numbers? We know from a series of other surveys done in the past years that there is a constant number of around 8,300-8,500 Hungarian secondary school graduates applying to take their graduation examinations each year since 2006 in Transylvania, and that the number of those successfully taking their final secondary school

Table 1: Academic year 2009/2010 in figures

		BSc	MSc		Total	Full-time
${\rm Institution}^a$	Location	students	students	Other	no. of students	academic staff
Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU)	Chuj (Kolozsvár) and training in the Hungarian language at its affiliated departments (Gheorgheni/Gyergyószentmiklós, Sfântu-Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy)	5,586	1,185	300	7,071	327
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (SU)	Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda), Cluj (Kolozsvár), Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely)	1,874	1	1	1,874	184
Medical and Pharmaceutical University of Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely) (MPUTGM)	Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely)	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,500	125
(PCE)	Oradea (Nagyvárad)	880	20	1	950	98
Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely) University of Arts (TGMUA)	Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely)	118	48	21 (PhD)	187	27
Protestant Theological Institute (PTI)	Cluj (Kolozsvár)	119	119	1	119	14
Total					11,701	763

^aThe first column of the table includes the institutions which in the past few years have formed the backbone of Transylvanian Hungarian language higher education, both due to their territorial coverage and the size of their teaching staffs, as well as the number of their students. Nevertheless, it also has to be mentioned that some Hungarian universities (the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the University of Debrecen, the Corvinus University of Budapest, or the College for Modern Business Studies) operate further undergraduate programmes in Tg. Mureş (Marosvásárhely), Oradea (Nagyvárad), Miercurea Nirajului (Nyárádszereda) and Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely), and at the same time the Budapest Business School and the Corvinus University of Budapest have started master's degree programmes in Cluj (Kolozsvár) and Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) These programmes differ from one another regarding their forms, some of them are full-time, while others part-time.

examinations is around 8,000. If these two numbers are compared, it becomes evident that only about one fourth of our secondary school graduates carry on with their studies in one of the academic programmes in Hungarian. This state of affairs has been recently confirmed by a study undertaken by the Higher Education Work-Group of the Regional Committee in Cluj (Kolozsvár) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as well as the secondary school survey conducted by the "Omnibus" Ltd. from Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós), making it clear at the same time that only half of those graduating in Hungarian from a secondary school carry on with their studies on a higher level, of which about 50-50% partake in Hungarian, respectively Romanian language higher education in Romania.

A further problem (challenge) of Hungarian higher education in Romania (Transylvania) could be the dissolution of its current, relative 'closed character', i.e. its more powerful, more explicit engagement in domestic and international scientific life. It can be ascertained that our higher education programmes in Hungarian have established educational and scientific co-operations primarily with partners from Hungary, which is without any doubt a natural and positive fact, yet it also purports a certain danger of 'linguistic closure'. Student mobility statistics in the recent years uphold this state of affairs (Hungary being the primary target country of Transylvanian Hungarian students), and another symptom of the mentioned 'linguistic closure' could be the infrequency of Hungarian-Romanian scientific and professional communications in some fields.

When discussing about the present and future of Hungarian language higher education in Romania, one obviously must not omit the issue related to the existence and likelihood of the independent Hungarian language public university. Since the change of the political system in 1989 (or since the 1959) suspension of the Bolyai University, to go back even further in time) the creation of a state-funded, independent Hungarian university in Romania has been the permanent, legitimate, and so far unfulfilled demand, claim of the Hungarian minority. This right, request of the Transylvanian Hungarian community can obviously not be given up either today or in the future – if not for any other reason, then because of the obligations of the Romanian State toward its own (minority) citizens. However, in relation with the events and occurrences connected to Hungarian language higher education in Romania in the past 21 years, especially the last decade, one can rightfully ask how the foundation and the functioning of the independent, state-funded Hungarian university would be practical in the present higher education circumstances. What do we mean, what could we mean when talking about the "Bolyai University" today? The

author of the present paper is strongly convinced that the name of the former Hungarian university of Cluj (Kolozsvár) has grown out its narrow "geographical" borders, having risen above the restricted space defined by the walls and corridors of its one-time building-complex. The "Bolyai University" in our days has become the symbol of independent, state-financed Transylvanian Hungarian higher education on the whole. The symbol of the "Bolyai University" comprises today practically all the unfulfilled claims, demands, needs and desires that the Transylvanian Hungarian community strives for in connection with its own higher education. In so far as this is true, the question arises how, by which means and according to what strategies this symbol can/must be filled with contents, in such a way as to create a vision that is based on the realities of domestic Romanian and Hungarian higher education, on the realities of Romanian and Hungarian politics, and at the same time based on the pragmatics of construction. As for ourselves – taking into account the main topoi in the social-professional publicity of the past more than two decades -, with respect to the achievement of the independent, full-spectrum Hungarian language higher education, we basically consider three possibilities, three strategic 'visions' worth examining: the thought of the re-establishment of a public university that would be the successor of the independent "Bolyai University" dissolved in 1959; the issues of the Romanian public funding of the independent private university network (i.e. the university system represented by the four locations where the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania and the Partium Christian University operate); and finally the possibility of a looser-tighter alliance and common interest representation of the existing - public and private - actors of Hungarian language university education in Romania (the "Consortium" Principle).²

We consider that the thought of a "Bolyai University" in Cluj (Kolozsvár) as an independent Hungarian university seceding from the present Babeş-Bolyai University by the division of its existing structure, personnel, fellowship and assets lacks realistic chances today, for at least four reasons. One the one hand,

²In the discourse about the strategy and vision of Hungarian language higher education in Romania, two concepts have been formulated recently that we consider very unrealistic, primarily because they lack expedience and pragmatism. One of these is the thought of a new independent university to be established in addition to the already existing ones, which seems a rather questionable strategy given the fact that the mere accreditation procedure of new higher education institutions in Romania is rather lengthy, lasting at least ten years of time. The other idea would transfer the Hungarian section from within the Babeş-Bolyai University to the Sapientia-PCE network, in which case there would be a strong risk of losing the per capita normative funding presently provided by the Romanian State for the academic programmes carried out in the Hungarian language.

ever since the moments of the changes in 1989 there has practically never been a determined and true political will on the side of the Romanian power that would have made the re-establishment of the former "Bolyai University" or the return of the confiscated and nationalised possessions, buildings, and assets possible in the first place. Concerning the latter ones – jointly with or irrespective of the 'university issue' – the Hungarian community in Transylvania must continue to uphold the demand and claim for legal remedy. Chances for the establishment of an independent university by 'division' are further diminished by the fact that even the teaching staff of the Hungarian section of the BBU has been lacking an adequate consensus with regard to that solution: both the idea of separation, of independence by secession from the university and the will to maintain the present status quo have many devotees and committed supporters within the Hungarian section, and this lack of consensus undoubtedly weakens the opportunities to politically achieve 'separation'. At the same time – being particularly aware of the objectives formulated by the Romanian leadership of the university – we must not forget that the 'pullout' of the Hungarian section would practically make the main strategic aim of the BBU declared on several occasions (namely to become one of the largest multicultural higher education institutions in Central-Eastern Europe and in that respect a success story, an example to follow) hollow and trifling. Lastly, a fourth reason that makes an independent Hungarian university born from the BBU unrealistic is the significantly changed context of Transylvanian Hungarian higher education that has developed over the past ten years, the coming into existence of the PCE and of the SU, with a continuously enlarged number of students and extended programme spectrum.

Another alternative for the establishment of the state-funded, independent Hungarian university is usually also formulated in the latter context. By the already obtained accreditation of the Partium Christian University, respectively the imminent one of the Sapientia University, the formal conditions for a possible support from the Romanian State are/will be fulfilled as stipulated by the law (the Romanian State may provide funding for private universities functioning on its territory within the national system of education). Such a situation would not be without precedent in Europe, as the Åbo Akademi University in Turku followed a similar trajectory (becoming a public institu-

³Being aware of the fact that such opinions and evaluations could touch upon sensitive spots today, the author of the present study considers it important to remark that his diagnosis had not been formulated as one of an 'external observer', but of a participant in the debates on the future status of the Hungarian section, as well as based on the experiences gathered as a full-time teaching staff of the BBU between the years of 1996–2006.

tion in 1981, after six decades of existence as a private entity), but the Free University of Bolzano (Bozen) also functions with mixed funding (in this case the funding legislation of 1997 declared the establishment of a private entity, where the state contributes to cover the expenses of education and research). The present private university network functioning with support from the Hungarian budget must undoubtedly formulate its claims for Romanian state support, given the fact that it takes over public tasks of education, yet an indirect and truly problematic result of such a claim could be the appearance of a 'discriminatory' treatment among private universities in Romania: on what grounds could the Romanian State provide support to the Hungarian private universities, while denying it from other private institutions functioning on its territory? In this context domestic state support could only be feasible or realistic if the Sapientia-PCE system was conferred some sort a 'special' status by the Romanian State, recognising the fact that the institutions undertake public tasks related to the full-spectrum education in the mother tongue of the Hungarian minority in Romania. On the other hand the legal-normative conditions for such a solution are rather deficient and vague, and it is also true that the Romanian political elite at present is quite determined in not considering any kind of state funding for the Hungarian private university network. The feasibility of this scenario of establishing an independent, state-funded Hungarian university is made even more difficult by the question how in this case the public tasks undertaken by the existing Hungarian sections of public universities and those undertaken by the also partly publicly funded private university network would relate to each other? Or approaching the issue in a different way: by what algorithm and by what institutional division would the Romanian budget fund a full-spectrum of academic programmes perceived as a *onetime* obligation toward minority taxpayers?

A third alternative of the independent Hungarian university can also be formulated as an intermediary, mixed solution, yet which may be faster, and easier to achieve. The question or proposal put in simple terms is the following: would it not be practical to 'assemble' the independent Hungarian university in Romania (i.e. all we mean by the symbol of the "Bolyai University") from our existing higher education institutions, as a network? We envisage a consortium-type co-operation based on a looser-tighter alliance, in which the main partakers would be the institutions engaged in higher education in Hungarian, the ones appearing in the table presented earlier: the Hungarian section of the BBU, the SU, the PCE, the Hungarian sections of the TGMUA and of the MPUTGM, the PTI. Such a union or network would practically yield an (almost) full-spectrum Transylvanian university, both geographically – from

Oradea (Nagyvárad) to Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) – and from the point of view of the academic programmes, in other words, the entirety of the symbol, or the demand of the "Bolyai University" as we mean it today. In addition to the almost complete programme offer in Hungarian and the comprehensive territorial or geographic span, such a university union would undoubtedly have the advantage that the institutions existing today would be obliged to develop their common strategy, it would lead to a much stronger 'lobby power' and a better representation of the specific problems of higher education in Hungarian, and not the least, it would create the setting for the joint request of Romanian state funding for an integrated institutional system which provides higher education in the mother tongue (and thus performs public duties). It is important to stress that such a co-operation (or union) could help in adjusting to each other the different, publicly declared or silently enforced independent strategies of the various institutions existing today, in formulating a relatively uniform Transylvanian Hungarian vision on higher education - and furthermore, this could happen while the independence of the different institutions working together within the consortium would remain intact.

Obviously this solution has also got its question marks and practical difficulties. Thus for instance, the Hungarian sections within the presently existing public universities would certainly need more decision power and autonomy regarding their functioning, so as to permit them to become a 'contracting partner' in a higher education alliance on a Transylvanian level. At the same time the academic communities and the leaders of the institutions participating in such a consortium, will effectively have to assume the meaning and the realisation of such a vision of the Hungarian higher education in Transylvania - even if at times the narrow institutional interests and strategies of the partnering institutions will have to be sacrificed for the sake of a common interest. If on the other hand no reasonable arrangements, covenants, alliances are born, which would truly be subordinated to the future of Hungarian higher education in Romania; in case each of our universities will continue to define the educational needs of the Transylvanian Hungarian minority and the strategic objectives originating from them separately, and what is more, if they continue to think that these objectives must be assumed exclusively by their respective institutions, well in this case one can fear that – as the Hungarian proverb says - the child will be thrown out with the bathwater, i.e. among the numerous debates about various visions for the Transylvanian Hungarian higher education, merely the essence will be lost.

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