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Group leaders:  
Fényes Hajnalka  
Florica Chipea

MINORITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS  
(Background study)

Belényi Emese – Flóra Gábor - Szolár Éva

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MINORITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Belényi Emese – Flóra Gábor - Szolár Éva

Throughout the two decades of post-communist transition, the demand for higher education in the languages of national minorities - and especially the claim for a Hungarian language state university - have been among the most controversial issues of the Romanian political agenda. This particular importance assigned to the legal and institutional provisions regulating minority higher education in Romania can be explained by the specific interplay of national minority issues in a historically multicultural Central–East European region with the characteristics of post-communist transformation of Romanian higher education system, including its internationalization and Europeanization.

The impact of the 1989 Romanian revolution, and the specific conditions which accompanied the change of political regime contributed to a particularly high legitimacy for ethnic and religious identity and national ideologies. While the communist system and its official ideology collapsed, the strong position of ethnic, national and religious values ensured a certain degree of stability at deeper cultural levels, leading, however, in the same time, to a quick polarisation of society along ethno-national lines.

In this context, the idea of „Hungarian University” became a highly charged concept both ideologically and politically, gaining an immense symbolic value and mobilisation power for members and opinion leaders of Hungarian minority inhabiting Transylvania and Partium, a community which has a strongly developed and fully integrated sense of national identity connected to these regions. Ethnic Hungarians regarded the state recognition of a fully fledged mother-tongue education system including „their own” higher education institution as an essential way in which their identity - perceived as having been endangered by the national communist homogenisation policies of the Ceausescu regime - can be secured. By contrast, to many members of Romanian majority and political elite, the demand for establishing (re-establishing) a separate Hungarian university provoked an acute perception of insecurity and strong negative reactions.

Taking into account the above mentioned dimensions and influencing factors viewed in a diachronic perspective and in their mutual interaction, this paper aims to offer a comprehensive historical, political and sociological outlook on the evolution of minority higher education in Romania, in the light of the changing legislative framework, statements and positions of the main stakeholders, as well as the available statistical data.

Education and cultural pluralism: divergent principles of historic legitimacy
Any effective approach to the study of inter-ethnic relations in Central-Eastern Europe should consider ethnic and national communities in their mutual interaction, rather than seeing them as isolated and self-sufficient entities. Due to the specificity of nation building and state formation in this part of Europe, the various national self-images have been developed to a large extent as a reaction to policies and images promoted by the “other side”. In this regard, the term ‘parallel cultures’ can prove its effectiveness as a key concept if it is interpreted from a sociological, rather than a purely ‘geometrical’ perspective, so as to include the relationship between cultures as an essential component of social relations. According to this vision, interaction is in itself a driving force: both a cause and an effect. It constantly creates and recreates the interethnic context, but at the same time is significantly affected and influenced by it, thus acting both as a factor of stability, and as a motive power of change. The case of Transylvania, a multicultural region in central Romania, is particularly relevant in this regard.

Historically, Transylvania has been regarded as a homeland by its Romanian, Hungarian and German (Saxon) inhabitants equally. The area has had a distinct path of development, which produced its own specific cultural environment and identity. During the Middle Ages, „Transylvania was an integral part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, but owing to its remote situation, enjoyed a certain autonomy.” After the collapse of independent Hungary in 1541 it became a separate principality under Turkish Ottoman rule, and maintained this status for more than 150 years, until the beginning of 18th century, when it was integrated into the Habsburg Empire as a self-governing unit. From 1867 the province belonged to Hungary within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and became part of Romania after the dissolution of the Dual State at the end of the First World War.

The region occupies a central position in the collective memory and myths of both Romanians and Hungarians, as a powerful symbol of ethno-genesis and historical continuity. Several centuries of co-existence created in this region a space of cultural diversity and ethnic and religious tolerance, including a very specific institutional system, aimed at preserving the very delicate balance of power, which recognised and reflected the plurality of cultures within the territory. It is worth recalling in this connection that the political structure of medieval Transylvania was based on the shared dominance of the three recognised ‘political nations’: the Hungarian nobility (which included the feudal leaders of the Romanians), the Szecklers and the Saxons. At the same time, Transylvania was the first country in Europe to codify religious pluralism by the so-called Edict of Toleration of 1571, which institutionalised the full equality of the four recognised churches (recepta religio): that is, the Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian denominations, while the Orthodox, mostly ethnic Romanians, although not included

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in this power sharing arrangement, nevertheless enjoyed full religious freedom and institutional autonomy.²

The existence of a multi-cultural political-institutional system in Transylvania, together with the fact that ethnic and religious belonging overlapped to a large extent, contributed to the creation of a historical link between ethnicity and religion. In fact, ethnic and religious identity became parts of the same value-structure, being perceived by significant social segments as an unique and organic reality. In the field of education, the institutionalisation of cultural plurality included the right of various ethnic and confessional communities to establish and maintain their own autonomous educational institutions and separate institutional systems. In this way, churches assumed an important role in the perpetuation of ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural identity through the administration of their own educational institutions. Indeed, the first Romanian school in history has been set up in Transylvania, on the grounds of the 16th century Orthodox church of St. Nicholas, itself located in the historic district of Şchei, nearby Kronstadt-Brassó-Brasov, the main city of a territorial-administrative unit which belonged to the autonomous territorial-political jurisdiction of the Saxon community.³

As a core component of regional cultural tradition, educational matters have been regarded problems of high importance within the Transylvanian Principality. In 1577 the Transylvanian Parliament decided to set up colleges linked to monasteries in Kolozsvár-Klausenburg-Cluj, Nagyvárad-Groswardein-Oradea and Marosvásárhely-Neumarkt-Targu Mures. Both the Unitarian College of Cluj and the Reformed College in Targu Mures are tracking back their origins to that year 1557. The institution established in Nagyvárad, known as Schola Illustris, flourished until 1660 and according to contemporary accounts, was not far to become a fully fledged university level establishment.⁴ In 1560 there was even an attempt by Ruling Prince János Zsigmond to establish a university in Gyulafehárva-Alba Iulia. The early death of the Transylvanian ruler prevented him to put this ambitious plan into practice.⁵

In spite of all favourable preconditions for the development of a culturally pluralistic and tolerant society, Transylvania did not become an ‘eastern Switzerland’. It entered the age of nation-building facing the consequences of competition between two parallel discourses of legitimacy - the Hungarian and Romanian ones- both of which claimed state-building rights for their own nation. While Romanians insisted that Transylvania is "an ancient Romanian land", for Hungarians the Magyar national character of the region was almost axiomatic. The long-term

results have been the sacralisation of ‘national territory’ as an essential element of cultural identity, and a predominant, mutually exclusive perception of national interests, which has led to the polarisation of society along ethno-national lines.

The traditionally free, and socially and ethnically homogenous communities (such as the Szecklers, but also free Romanian villages) started to gradually lose their privileges due to an internal differentiation process, which gradually led to the creation of a unitary ruling stratum, joined only by wealthy members of the previous ruling nationes. The nobility was not only not excluded from the nation (as it happened during the French revolution), but had a leading role in the process of nation building. In fact, the past and present dominant position of the Hungarian aristocratic elite aspiring to nationalist legitimacy had become the most effective argument in the struggle for Hungarian national supremacy in the territories of the former medieval Hungarian kingdom. As a result, the main factor in shaping the separate modern national consciousness of Hungarians, Romanians and Germans in Transylvania seems to be related to the unequal power positions of their respective leading political strata.

According to this criterion, the Hungarian elite was evidently in the most favoured position. After all, two of the three ruling ‘political nations’ of Transylvania, the county-based nobles and the Szecklers, were Hungarian by culture, mentality and language. As Transylvania had belonged to the medieval kingdom of Hungary, a traditional link also existed between the Transylvanian and Hungarian nobility. Thus, the appeal to the tradition of the medieval state provided them with a shared ground of legitimacy. In addition, Hungarians - both those inside and outside Transylvania - could argue that the Transylvanian Principality was in a sense the continuation of historical Hungary. Consequently, the core principle of Hungarian nationalism (which had been embraced by Transylvania’s Hungarians too) became the idea of establishing—or, in their vision, of re-establishing—a Hungarian nation state within the historical borders of Hungary.

This desiderate was partially fulfilled with the setting up of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867. After 1867, within the "recreated" Hungary, the rhetorical appeal to the historical tradition of the medieval kingdom, while so popular among ethnic Hungarians, did not provide however sufficiently strong legitimacy against the increasing threats coming from the various and numerically strong nations living in the territory of the "revived" statehood. The most important such nations had been the Romanians in Transylvania, the Slovaks of "Upper-Hungary", the Croats, the Slovenes, the Serbs of Voivodina and the Ruthenes. In 1868 these nations repeated their previous claims for autonomy and collective rights, and proposed that Hungary should become a multinational state, with six official languages; proportional representation in the central institutions, cultural autonomy; self-governing rights at regional level and administrative units established according to the ethnic criteria.

The Hungarian political elite rejected these demands (with the only exception of Croatian self-
government), and tried to consolidate the one-nation dominated character of the state. Nevertheless, Hungarian political leaders had to acknowledge in one way or another the ethnic diversity within the society, including the right of various nations to exist at least as ethnocultural entities. The 1868 Law of Nationalities fulfilled this task. The Law granted, in a liberal spirit, the possibility for all non-Hungarians to use their own mother tongue in their contacts with authorities, and also their right of association ‘for the development of language, arts, sciences, industry and trade’. In the same time the Law stated that „all citizens of the country, in the political sense, are members of one nation, the unitary and indivisible Hungarian nation, which includes with equal rights all citizens of the fatherland, to whatever nationality they belong”. The idea of a ‘Hungarian political nation’, supposed to include all citizens regardless their ethnic belonging, can be seen as an unsuccessful attempt of Hungarian leading circles to reconcile the need to assert an ethno-nationalist rhetoric of legitimacy with the practical political necessity to recognise ethnic diversity within the state. This necessity was the more pressing, as ethnic Hungarians amounted to less than half of the total population.

In the case of the Romanians, the most important influencing factors in the process of nation building had been the lack of past political participation, their exclusion from the status of a recognised natio, and the almost complete absorption of their privileged members into the Hungarian nobility. As a consequence, the leading role in the creation of a Romanian national identity had to be assumed by the intelligentsia, and especially by the clergy of the Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church. There were no traditions of independent statehood to be invoked in support of national claims, and, in their absence, arguments of historical ancestry and continuity as well as ethno-demographic and ethno-linguistic arguments had been put forward.

Not surprisingly, the reaction of Romanian representatives to the idea of their being included into the ‘Hungarian political nation’ was sharply negative, as they saw it as a step towards ethnic homogenisation, and an attempt to separate and alienate the national elites from their own communities. The fact that the proposed unitary political community was designated ‘the Hungarian political nation’ rather than ‘the political nation of Hungary’, was regarded by Transylvanian Romanian leaders as a proof in itself of the real intentions of successive Hungarian governments. The Romanian elite perceived that the proposed replacement of ethnic principle of political representation with a modern "civil" one was an attempt of the Hungarian elite to conceal and/or to legitimise the real dominance of the Hungarian element and its envisaged plans for the ethnic assimilation of non-Hungarians. The fact that Hungarian language became a compulsory subject in the mainly Church owned Romanian schools and in the kindergartens, and that the state owned education institutions were almost exclusively of Hungarian language, came only to underline such suspicions. The Ferencz József University set up in Cluj in 1872, chronologically the second „national” university of Hungary after the

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University of Budapest, being named after the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, having Hungarian as a teaching language, symbolically reinforced this dominant cultural-political trend.

The language issue was indeed an extremely delicate problem. Hungarian national movement itself started mainly as a struggle for linguistic rights, which is for the recognition of Hungarian as an official language within the Austrian Empire. This ‘birth certificate’ had long-term consequences. The appeal to language—and to folk culture—as essential symbolic bonds linking all Magyars regardless of their socio-economic status, fulfilled an important role in this legitimising strategy. Proclaiming Hungarian as the only official language, beyond the instrumental advantage provided to Hungarian speakers, also offered them an additional sense of privilege and dignity compared to the rest of the population, thus enhancing their legitimacy still further. This had an exclusionary effect on non-Hungarian speakers, and prompted their elites to follow the same model in order to gain popular acceptance, that is, by emphasising the nation-building virtues of their respective languages.

**Minority educational policies in interwar-Romania**

On the 4th of June 1920, the peace treaty signed between the victorious allied and associated powers on one side and Hungary on the other, along with the other treaties signed at the conclusion of the First World War, put the seal of international recognition on a new territorial division of East-Central Europe. As part of the territorial transfers 37· 5 % of the territory belonging to the former semi-independent Hungary within the framework of the Austria-Hungarian Monarchy, an area of 103,093 km, which included historical Transylvania, Partium and a segment of the Banat of Timisoara, with a population of 5,565,000 (of which 1,651,000 were Hungarians and 565,000 Germans), was incorporated into the Romanian state.

Perceived by Hungarians as a deep national trauma, welcomed and celebrated by Romanians as the apotheosis of their nation-state building, the new territorial status of Transylvania, and Partium created in fact as many national problems as it solved. The new minority population approximated in number that existing before the territorial shift. According to the 1930 census, the proportion of ethnic Romanians in the total population was no more than 71· 9%, but within Transylvania their share was only 57· 8 %. The new borders were not established in a way to leave in either side as small number of minority inhabitants as possible. Due to the inextricably mix ethnic map of the area, it was in fact simply impossible to draw a state borderline even remotely resembling the national boundariesThus a major problem emerged: whether, and if so, to what extent the state should now change its structures, so as to provide a model of integration for its numerous ethnically non-Romanian citizens.

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In addition to the problems resulting from a high degree of ethnic intermingling and the existence of competing national claims, the new situation produced now a different type of minority, drawn from the previously dominant population. Hungarians who came under Romanian rule were understandably likely to perceive more accentuate feelings of disappointment and frustration, due to the sudden, unexpected and radical change of their status. This was especially true for members of the Hungarian economic and administrative middle class, who in the years of Dual Monarchy managed to benefit in a much larger extent of modern industrial and urban development. They now feared that the new authorities might conduct preferential employment policies to encourage the Romanian ethnic element, and might adopt selective socio-economic measures in order to improve the situation of ethnic Romanians. As it turned out later, such concerns were not at all groundless.

The new power holders looked upon Hungarians of Transylvania with suspicion and the faithfulness of Hungarian minority members to a state where they found themselves against their own will was considered at best as being questionable. Therefore, it was only to be expected that the Romanian government would try to exert pressures in order to weaken them demographically, economically and culturally. It was hoped that in this way it will be possible to reduce the potential threat to the territorial integrity ethnic Hungarians were perceived to represent. In the view of Romanian inter-war power elite, granting more rights to Hungarians would only have contributed to an increase of territorial revisionist threat, rather than ease the tension.

The difficulties that Romania had to face in integrating Transylvania after 1918 were in certain respect harder than those encountered by Hungary a few decades earlier, also due to the fact the contradiction between the state-building models of Transylvania and Old Romania was much more striking. Throughout several centuries of political distinctness, Transylvania produced institutionalised forms of cultural diversity, religious tolerance and ethno-regional self-government, which were unknown in the territories located to South and to East to the Carpathians. The problems encountered by the ruling elites of "Greater Romania" thus consisted not only in how to accommodate a multi-cultural society under the roof of one state - a difficult task in itself- but also, how to conciliate through this process two rather different political cultures and historically - regionaly determined state building traditions.

During the first few months, shortly before and after the extension of Romanian sovereignty over Transylvania, it seemed that Greater Romania might be built to some extent on the foundation of shared power between the Romanians and the other numerically and politically important nationalities. The Proclamation of Alba Iulia, which expressed the initial view of Transylvanian Romanians, embodied the following principles on the nationality question, which were favourably received by minorities:
..Art. 3 The National Assembly declares as fundamental principles of the Romanian State, the following:

(1) Complete national liberty for all the peoples inhabiting Romania. Each people to educate, administer and judge itself through the medium of persons from its own midst. Each people to have the right to administrative legislation and of taking part in the administration of the country in proportion to the number of individuals of which it is composed.

(2) Equality and complete autonomous religious liberty for every denomination of the state\(^8\)

It was on the basis of this programme that Saxons had voted in favour of unification. In the decades of the inter-war period the political organisations both of the Hungarian and German populations had insistently demanded a solution of the nationality problem on the basis of the principles put forward at Alba Iulia.

In the event, however, ethnocentrism, rather than a consensual vision prevailed. This became evident when the Constitution of 1923 was adopted in a form which embodied exclusively the conceptions of the ethnic majority. Romania was defined as a “national, unitary and indivisible state.”\(^9\) No provisions had been included for the protection of the identities of national minorities, except for the principle of citizenship equality. A unitary administrative territorial system was established, without special status being offered to those areas mainly inhabited by minorities. No institutions of political or cultural self-government were established for the needs of national minority populations.

The Romanian language was declared the language of the state, and the use of languages other than Romanian in the political life and state administration was declared illegal. Citizens were allowed to communicate with the administrative authorities, including those at local level, and regardless of the ethnic composition of local populations, exclusively in the official language. In such circumstances, the Hungarian Ferencz József University was replaced by a new university named after King Ferdinand I of Romania, where teaching activities were organized exclusively in Romanian language.\(^10\) For a brief period, in the academic year 1920-1921, the Hungarian historical churches of Transylvania attempted to establish a Hungarian Teacher Training College in Cluj, which had to be closed down, however, after being refused recognition by the Romanian

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\(^8\) Rezoluțiunea Adunării Naționale de la Alba Iulia din 18 Noembrie/1 Decembrie 1918 In: România și minoritățile. Colecție de documente. Editura Pro Europa, Tg. Mures, 1997, p. 9
\(^10\) The name and the institutional continuity of the Hungarian language University was maintained during the interwar period in Szeged (Hungary), where most of Hungarian faculty members moved from Cluj. In 1940, when North-Transylvania became again part of Hungary, the institution returned to its original home. Cf. Gaal György, op.cit. pp. 92-105
State. Instead, Romanian government authorities advised potential Hungarian students to enroll at the Romanian University.  

As the result of these restrictive measures, the cultural space available to minority education had to be restricted basically to secondary and primary education, the theological faculties of church communities remaining the only tolerated Hungarian higher education institutions. Church communities could maintain traditional confessional schools without state financial support but under strict control and accreditation by government bodies, including the requirement for the teachers and pupils to pass the Romanian language exam.

In 1924, in order to promote Romanianisation, now regarded as a ‘national mission’, the so-called ‘cultural zones’ came into being in the nine Transylvanian counties with the largest Hungarian population. As part of the special provisions implemented in this area, ethnic Romanian teachers, who did not know the language of their pupils, were sent to overwhelmingly Hungarian localities, being offered special economic incentives such as higher salary, quicker advancement, and 10ha of land in the case of definitive resettlement. It was intended to create, in the first stage, small but spiritually and politically active ‘islands’, with the task of preparing the ground for a subsequent, larger-scale colonisation.

In the field of education, measures were taken to ensure the tight ideological control of minority administered schools, in order to subordinate them to the "national idea". Non-Romanians were largely prevented from learning about their own past, except from official textbooks which often adopted an exclusively ethnocentric tone and a confrontational attitude towards their own nations. Various methods and forms of interference in the life of minority language educational institutions were implemented. These included the discretionary closure of schools, the control of curricula, the right to appoint and dismiss teaching personnel and the obligation to teach such subjects as History, Geography and Civic Education exclusively in Romanian.

„Socialist homogenisation” and minority higher education

In spite of all the obvious differences originating in the different nature of the political system, one can identify a series of important similarities between the attitude of inter-war and communist governments, as far as the minority question and ethnic policies were concerned. To both types of regime, emphasising "ancient Romanian rights" and the assertion of Romanian national supremacy within the state was regarded essential, ethno-cultural homogeneity remained a cherished ideal, and minorities were basically excluded from the dominant national rhetoric.

11 idem, pp. 88-90
From a certain perspective, the possibility of minorities to defend their interests became even more precarious compared to the inter-war period. If in the inter-war era citizenship rights frequently entered in conflict with the national principle, but were nevertheless legally affirmed and could be openly claimed and defended by the representatives of the individuals or groups concerned, under communism the leading role of the party nullified any practical significance for minority rights. The extent and the limitations of these ‘rights’ depended exclusively on the arbitrary will of the political leadership, and provisions could be offered as well as withdrawn according to tactical moves and calculations by those holding power. Thus, paradoxically, even the existence in certain periods of facilities created specially for minorities, such as a state-controlled minority language education system, newspapers, broadcasting programmes, etc., could also serve as a fa ade to hide the absence of real rights. The situation of national minorities was made even more difficult by the fact that, like all other social groups, they did not have any real possibilities for independent representation of their interests.

Apart from the mentioned peculiarities, two additional motives played an important role in the intensification of ethno-nationalist homogenisation policies during communist times. First, this was the period when the society of Romania entered the phase of economic en masse mobilisation and large scale rural-to-urban migration - a process which was planned and implemented from above by the communist leadership, and under strict government control, which included the smallest details. Ethnonationalist rhetoric played the leading ideological role throughout this period, in an attempt to offer a surrogate sense of identity to the uprooted population, in order to integrate them into the new environment as fast a possible. While temporarily ‘efficient’ in that regard, its ‘socialist patriotic education’ implied at the same time the inculcation of a false sense of superiority of ethnic Romanians, with disastrous consequences to the climate of interethnic relations.

The second important motive force in the Romanian version of co-habitation between communism and nationalism, particularly under Ceausescu, was the regime’s desperate search for a traditional type of legitimisation in order to enlarge the power basis and consolidate the stability of communist rule. Appealing to the widespread nationalistic sentiments of the population attracted part of the intelligentsia and gained popular support, or at least a silent acceptance of repressive totalitarian measures, by obsessively invoking the argument of a ‘threat to the territorial integrity’ of the country. Romanian communist minority policies did occasionally include short periods of relaxation (as in 1945-47 and again in 1968-70), during times when the regime needed to make some concessions in order to consolidate power. The general trend, however, was an ever more intensive use of ethnonationalism as a political tool of mass mobilisation, a tougher limitation of the cultural space available for minorities, and the use

of more complex and effective strategies and methods in order to achieve higher degrees of ethnic homogeneity.

In the first phase of the communist take-over, due to a complexity of causes and influencing factors (such as the political necessity to oppose „proletar internationalism” to the „burgeois nationalism” of the former dominant classes) the Hungarian community of Romania was offered and to some extent even benefitted from certain favorable legal provisions. The government decree 86/1945 permitted the use of native language in local administration and courts of justice in the localities where the percentage of minority population is higher than 30%. In 1952, in the regions inhabited by homogenous Hungarian population the regime agreed to establish a so called Hungarian Autonomus Region (from 1961 called Mures-Hungarian Autonomous Region, functioned until 1968), which – in spite of its mostly decorative character - nevertheless offered a somewhat larger social space for the official functioning of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism within its territory. In the same period, a network of Hungarian language primary and secondary schools had been set up as well.

In this relatively favorable context, two simultaneous decrees (406 and 407/1945) have been enacted, to establish two separate universities in Cluj: Babes University, with Romanian teaching language and the Hungarian language Bolyai University. The two institutions coexisted, however, only a few years, until 1959. In that year they had been forcibly reunited as part of the communist regime’s new wave of nationalist drive in the years of political repression following the subpression of 1956 revolution in Hungary and the adoption by Romanian leaders of a more independent political line as an attempt to distance themselves from the reformist policies initiated in the Soviet Union. The reunification was not only a formal act, as it meant a severe restriction of the fields in which university education in Hungarian language was still available. At the end of the fifties, the opportunity to receive higher education in the native language was completely denied to future mechanical engineers, agricultural specialists, economists and legal experts, among other categories of professionals. The same kind of „unification‖ measures occurred at the level of primary and secondary education, thus leading to the cancelation of most autonomous Hungarian language education institutions in the country.

In the decades to follow after the forced unification, the number of Hungarian students at Babes-Bolyai University has diminished continuously, particularly in certain fields of study where teaching was not available any more in Hungarian language. In 1977, for example, the proportion of ethnic Hungarians amounted only to 1,2% of the total number of Law students and decreased even further – almost to zero - in the eighties. In 1977-78 Hungarian students made up only 4, 15% of the total student body of the university, while the Hungarians’ share in the total population of Transylvania reached 22,0% . The diminishing of the number of students was

17 idem, p. 260
imposed in minority confessional higher education institutions as well. Since the beginning of eighties state authorities introduced a drastic limitation of the number of students at the Hungarian theological faculties.\(^{18}\)

A similar phenomenon occurred at the level of primary and secondary education, where, by the second half of the eighties, the use of Hungarian and German languages as the teaching language had shrunk drastically. While in 1976 only 37% of Hungarian pupils were required to attend Romanian schools, in 1986 the proportion of those forced to do so rose to 77%.\(^{19}\) Unlike the inter-war governments, which could rely only on limited means, mainly of an administrative nature, which consequently could not bring about a major change in ethno-territorial distribution, the communist state disposed in addition of a wide range of economic, demographic, political and cultural resources and instruments. These were often used in combination so as to further the regime’s nationalist aims. The steps taken by the party leadership in this respect in the educational field included: merging of Romanian and minority schools, with the aim of subsequently reducing the share of classes and subjects using a non-Romanian teaching language, up to their complete closure; and establishing a system of compulsory assignment for university and high school graduates, with the aim of preventing specialists belonging to minorities from returning to their home regions.

To reinforce the effect of such measures, a system of ‘closed cities’ was institutionalised. This included several heavily Hungarian- and German-populated localities, with the undeclared task of barring the settlement of minority inhabitants, while at the same time offering financial, housing and other incentives for ethnic Romanians to come to those cities, often from remote areas. As a defensive reaction, particularly in the last years of the regime, a sharply increasing number of Hungarian students chose to emigrate.\(^{20}\)

**Interethnic relations and minority education in the two decades of post-communist transition**

\(^{18}\) Vincze Gábor, op.cit. p. 219
\(^{19}\) Schöpflin and Poulton, op.cit. p. 17
\(^{20}\) To give just one example, according to the data published in a book on the history of the University of Medicine in Targu Mures published in 1991, in the period 1985-1990 more than 80% of the Hungarian graduates of this university emigrated. Cf. György Frunda op.cit. p. 19
The events of December 1989 raised the hope that the barriers of nationalism could be overcome. In the wake of the revolution, the basic values of all ethnic and religious communities appeared to be the same: democracy, freedom, and respect for human rights, including minority rights. However, first impressions were short lived, as it soon became clear that reality was far more complicated. Soon after the sudden collapse of communism, nationalism - alongside the promotion of ethno-confessional identity - very quickly and effectively filled the vacuum of legitimacy. Members of the political elite left over from the old system acutely perceived an urgent need of sudden "conversion" and, given the preconditions, they could hardly find a more convenient and suitable solution than becoming fervent promoters and defenders of the "national cause.” At the same time, the appeal to nationalism probably also addressed a psychological need, offering a certain reassurance to people who felt insecure that not everything had changed and that there were some values - such as the national ones - which remained the same. On the other hand, such concepts as ‘democracy’ or ‘freedom’, which were to play a key role in the post-communist period, had been emptied of their real content under communism to such an extent that an urgent political necessity emerged to overemphasise ‘national values’. These were perceived as the only ones which seemed to preserve a clear and unaltered meaning to the population.

The negative memory of past homogenisation policies, shared by all the national minorities, concerning especially the last years of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, when they indeed had to face a not very remote prospect of complete annihilation as separate ethno-cultural entities, led to a rapid political mobilisation of minority groups. This was particularly the case of the ethnic Hungarian organisation, the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR-RMDSZ), which was already functioning at the end of 1989. Almost at the same time, however, an intense ethnic Romanian nationalist political activism manifested itself, with a virulent and occasionally aggressive anti-minority discourse, claiming to defend the rights of Romanians in their own country against revisionist threats, and particularly against Hungarian irredentism.

In January 1990, the organisation Vatra Romaneasca („Romanian Cradle”) was founded. This firmly rejected Hungarian demands for the restoration of past cultural and educational rights, and accused UDMR of an attempt to force the ‘enclavisation’ of ethnic Hungarians, in order to create a state within the state with the ultimate aim of secession and eventual reunification with Hungary. Under the effect of conflicting positions concerning the ethnic issue, particularly on the emotionally charged problem of separating Romanian and Hungarian schools, demonstrations and counter-demonstrations followed. The situation degenerated into ethnic clashes in March 1990 in the city of Tirgu Mures, with a population almost equally divided between the two ethnic communities. Although in subsequent months and years a certain degree of stability has been achieved, and further violent events have been avoided, the polarisation of society and political life along ethnic lines has remained, being only slightly attenuated until the second half of the nineties.
This became clear when the articles concerning minorities of the 1991 Constitution were adopted in a form which basically reflected a consensus of political forces representing the ‘state building’ majority population, instead of a solution based on a general interethnic political consensus. The Constitution approved in November 1991 defines Romania as a ‘national state, sovereign, unitary and indivisible’ (art.1), where ‘the official language is the Romanian language’. (art.13). According to the provisions of Article 6, “The State recognizes and guarantees the right of persons belonging to national minorities to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.” This strictly individualistic definition means by implication a denial of any collective rights of minority communities, including their right to establish educational institutions of their own.

In the same time, the Constitution states that „the protection measures taken by the Romanian State for the preservation, development and expression of identity of the persons belonging to national minorities shall conform to the principles of equality and non-discrimination in relation to the other Romanian citizens” (Art. 6, par.2), as „citizens are equal before the law and public authorities, without any privilege or discrimination.” (Art. 16). In light of this formulation, minority claims for educational, cultural or other category of rights could and indeed were often interpreted as demands for „special privileges on ethnic ground.” It is worth to mention here that the desiderate for re-establishing of Bolyai University, which was formulated by the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania already at the beginning of 1990, was refused by political leaders representing the Romanian national majority on the basis of the mentioned constitutional provision.

Beyond the non-recognition of national minority collective rights, the constitutional text presents a certain ambiguity and includes contradictory provisions in the field of individual linguistic educational rights as well. For instance, Art. 32 in its first paragraph states that „education of all grades shall be in Romanian. Education may also be conducted in a foreign language of international use, under the terms laid down by law.” while the second paragraph mentions – in apparent contradiction with the first one - that „the right of persons belonging to national minorities to learn their mother tongue, and their right to be educated in this language are guaranteed; the ways to exercise these rights shall be regulated by law.”

In compliance to the above provision, the task to offer a more precise and comprehensive regulation of the conditions in which the right of persons belonging to national minorities to be educated in their native language can be exercised, had to fulfilled by the subsequent Law of Education, which was duly approved in 1995 and has been in force (with several subsequent modifications) until the end of 2010. The 1995 Law, however, preserved a good deal of the ambiguity already present in the constitutional text, and some of its formulations have been regarded by the representatives of Hungarian minority even as a step backward in ensuring linguistic educational rights. As opposed to the similar kind regulation enshrined in the

Constitution, the Law only „provides” but not „guarantees” the right of persons belonging to minorities to be educated in all forms and all levels in their native language”. Another disadvantage was that the ways and modalities of implementation were allocated to the jurisdiction of local authorities, thus being made in fact dependent on local political conditions and power relations.²²

As far as higher education is concerned, the 1995 Law did not allow a separate Hungarian language state university, permitting only the organizing of „study groups and sections” in the languages of minorities. (Art. 123) In addition, the Law restricted state education in the languages of minorities to teacher training and the cultural/artistic fields. However, as stated in a monitorisation report by the OSCE High Commissioner in 1995, possibilities remained open to organise additional private university education also in other fields, according to the provisions of Law No. 88 of 1993.²³ Having the intention to join the EU, Romanian government could not afford not to take into consideration the outcome of evaluations by relevant European institutions. The European monitoring of minority education system can be regarded as one of the early signs that Romanian educational policies began to gain an international dimension and significance. Perhaps, as a solution of compromise – while firmly rejecting the claim for a separate Hungarian state university – the government nevertheless decided to grant a legal possibility for autonomous minority higher education in the private sphere.²⁴

This opportunity, to organize minority language educational programs in private institutions, should be discussed in the context of the large-scale post-communist expansion of higher education in Central-Eastern Europe. Its first wave occurred in the years immediately following the revolutionary changes of 1989/90, when the number of students enrolled in higher education became five times higher in only ten years. This meant a huge increase not only in the number of students, but also in the number of higher education institutions and faculties.

**TABLE 1. NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS AND FACULTIES IN THE STATE AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN ROMANIA (1989-2004)**²⁵

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²⁴ The only additional formal provision put forward by authorities required minority private universities to have at least one study programme organized in Romanian language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Year</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Faculties</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data illustrate an important peculiarity of the analysed phenomenon, namely the important contribution of the private sector to the expansion of university education. Mainly due to the extremely limited number of available university places during the communist period (particularly in the humanistic and social fields of study), after 1989 there was a huge popular demand for „getting into university at all costs", as – based on the realities experienced during communist times- a diploma from a higher education institution was overwhelmingly regarded by population as the only guarantee of upward professional mobility and personal success. In the first years, a quick response to this social demand came both from the newly emerging private university sector and from the expanding state sector. As can be seen from the above table, in

26 Private universities entered the official records only after the Law of University Accreditation was enacted in 1993 and the Romanian National Council of Academic Evaluation and Accreditation began its activities in 1994. In the first period the authorization of functioning was withdrawn from a number of 32 institutions, which do not appear at all in official statistics. On this subject see Ioan Mihailescu –Zoltán Rostás: Dialog neterminat. Editura Curtea Veche, Bucuresti, 2007, pp. 250-258
1995/96, the year from which the first official record of Romanian private universities is available, already 63 private higher education institutions were functioning, a much higher number than that of state universities existing in 1989. Meanwhile, a huge increase occurred also in the state sector, which more than doubled its size, as far as the number of institutions is concerned).

Ethnic Hungarians, however, have been to a less extent able to take advantage of this expansion, comparatively to the general population. As in the overwhelming majority of the newly set up private universities the teaching language was exclusively in Romanian, these institutions were less attractive to potential Hungarian applicants. Their main attention continued to remain focused throughout the nineties on the developments taking place at Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, aiming to reestablish the exclusively Hungarian language Bolyai University, or at least, to improve the status of Hungarian as a teaching language within the mixed Hungarian-Romanian university structure. In spite of the fact that beginning from the 1993-1994 academic year Hungarian political leaders indeed obtained a partial satisfaction in securing a certain number of guaranteed places for students wishing to study in Hungarian language at Babes-Bolyai University, the share of Hungarian students in the general student population constantly remained lower than the percentage of ethnic Hungarians in the population of the country, throughout the first decade of post-communist transition.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University year</th>
<th>Total number of students</th>
<th>Number of Hungarian students</th>
<th>Share of Hungarian students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>164,507</td>
<td>7,100</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 As a reaction to the Hungarian demand for separating the linguistically mix university into a Romanian and a Hungarian one, in 1995 Babeș-Bolyai University was defined by its own academic leadership as a “multicultural institution” with three teaching languages: Romanian (currently 99 fields of study), Hungarian (51), and German (13). The undeclared aim was presumably to obtain a sort of international legitimacy for the refusal of separating the University on ethno-linguistic ground, by invoking the “European idea” of multiculturalism. The power positions and status of the three languages (and language communities) at the University were however, far from being balanced. Romanian language preserved a clearly dominant position.


28 The number of students currently enrolled in study programs conducted in Hungarian language at Babes-Bolyai University is around seven thousands, out of a total student population of approximately 53 thousands.


29 Szőlő-Sebestyén, op.cit. p. 20
Two countries, one goal, joint success!
www.huro-cbc.eu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Hungarian population</th>
<th>Share of Hungarians (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>203 864</td>
<td>8300</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>250 027</td>
<td>8777</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>322 080</td>
<td>12 842</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>360 967</td>
<td>8814</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>369 662</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>336 011</td>
<td>12 248</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>354 493</td>
<td>13 240</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>360 590</td>
<td>13 944</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>407 720</td>
<td>16 122</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>452 621</td>
<td>21 724</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethno-demographic data (according to 2001 census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population of Romania</th>
<th>Hungarian population</th>
<th>Share of Hungarians (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 698 181</td>
<td>1 434 377</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Hungarian minority members aspiring to enter higher education institutions were to a less extent able to take advantage of the large increase of the number of available places in the public and in the market oriented private sector compared to their Romanian counterparts, a somewhat larger space for new opportunities seemed to open up in the field of confessional and/or church constituted private educational sector. As a consequence of the traditional link between ethnic and religious identity, after 1989 the dominant social expectation was that both the majority Orthodox Church and the minority churches should maintain their traditional legitimising function, in close connection to the protection and affirmation of the national identities to which they were primarily linked.

In spite of this favorable precondition, the task of religious leaders linked to Hungarian ethnic community to establish schools and higher educational institutions for the linguistic, educational and spiritual needs of their fellow church-members was not easy either. Differences of perception between the majority Orthodox Church and the historical minority churches also originated from differences of tradition. While religious education has been perceived as a concern by all recognized churches, denominational schools belong to a cultural tradition primarily linked to minority religious and ethnic communities, being much less frequent and less characteristic within the Orthodox population.\(^{30}\) That is why for the Government of a country

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\(^{30}\) Within the framework of the Orthodox Church (which claim the allegiance of more than 86 % of the population) there are 39 theological seminaries. By contrast there are 16 Roman Catholic and 9 Reformed high schools, which is
with a predominant Orthodox population – which hardly has any tradition of church based education apart from the training of its own church personnel - the recognition of lay denominational institutions of education has not been a political urgency.

In contrast, the denominations closely linked to the ethnic Hungarian minority (the Roman Catholic, the Reformed, the Evangelical-Lutheran, and the Unitarian) constantly advocated minority rights and have been very effective in the mobilization of ethnic Hungarians in favour of legislative changes beneficial to the national minorities. Minority churches, which prior to communism had a large number of educational institutions, repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the Government's failure to allow by law the proper establishment of confessional schools and universities.\(^{31}\)

Religious minorities firmly contested what they perceived a privileged position of the Romanian Orthodox Church within the state, and had an important role in asserting ethnic and confessional pluralism in post-communist Romania. They have been also instrumental in minority institution building in the fields of education, culture, and social services. After it became obvious that the political conditions will not permit the recognition of a Hungarian language state university in the foreseeable future, in 2000 the Hungarian historical denominations decided to provide the legal and institutional umbrella to the new private universities and faculties with Hungarian teaching language, which were set up with the financial and political support of the Government of Hungary.

The chronologically first initiative of this kind dates back to 1990, when the Reformed Church District of Királyhágómellék decided to set up the Sulyok István Reformed College in Oradea-Nagyvárad, with the official task to train lay collaborators for the church. As far as its legal status was concerned, the institution was recognized by authorities and functioned as a faculty of the Protestant Theological University Institute of Cluj-Kolozsvár, taking advantage of the vacuum of regulations in the field of university accreditation, which characterised the first post-revolutionary years. Beyond its officially assumed mission, however, the long term aim of the founders was to go beyond the Reformed denomination’s own educational needs in order to establish a fully fledged university under Christian ecumenic leadership, in the service of the entire Hungarian community.

This intention was transformed into reality in the period 2000-2008, when Partium Christian University was first founded as a private educational institution, then recognized by the

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\(^{31}\) This demand finally obtained satisfaction with the new Law of Education, in force from February 2011, which recognized three categories of higher education institutions: state, private and confessional. At that time, however, the Hungarian universities set up under confessional umbrella were already established as private universities. Any possible change in their legal status would be a difficult and time consuming process, involving also certain risks.
government to function provisionally, and finally – after a four year waiting period in parliamentary commissions - established by law as a private university of public interest, part of the higher education system of Romania (2008). In this way, the university became the first accredited Hungarian minority higher education institution in Romania after 1959, the year when Bolyai University was forcibly merged with Babes-University by communist authorities. Currently there are around one thousand students enrolled, in 14 fields of study, and approximately 150 academics involved in teaching activities.

In Transylvania, the Sapientia University was established in 2001, having faculties in several cities of Transylvania (Tirgu Mures-Marosvásárhely, Miercurea Ciuc-Csíkszereda and Cluj-Kolozsvár). Its current leadership invokes three facts which contributed to its foundation. 1. That the percentage of Hungarian students in Romanian university life is smaller than the percentage of Hungarian population in Romania. 2. That university education in Hungarian does not cover the range of necessary specializations. 3. That only third of Hungarian students conduct their studies in their mother tongue. The social need to which these facts are pointing seems to be confirmed by the continuous increase of the number of study programmes as well as the number of students: in the academic year of 2010/2011, a total number of 1940 students were enrolled in 29 BSc programmes within 4 faculties, under the guidance of 270 teachers. As recognition of its quality and viability, in 2010, the official Romanian university accreditation body (ARACIS) proposed the accreditation of the University, a proposal which was approved by the Government and sent to the Parliament for the final decision in 2011.

Instead of conclusion: recent tendencies and directions of further research

Although the road of the two Hungarian autonomous higher education institutions towards recognition and accreditation was far from being a smooth one (and in case of Sapientia University it is not, as yet, finalized), to sum up, it can be said that – although not without hesitations - members of the Romanian national majority political elite ultimately found acceptable to agree to the establishment of private minority universities in contrast to their attitude of categorical refusal manifested towards the idea of a Hungarian state university. This differentiated attitude of Romanian politicians perhaps can be explained by the fact that – due to the particular context in which the issue of the Hungarian state university was debated in the period immediately following 1989 - they tended to attach to it a much higher political significance.

To the members of Hungarian community, Hungarian students and academics, the functioning of the new autonomous higher education institutions does have, beyond its obvious instrumental value, also an important symbolic significance, providing them with an additional sense of

dignity and self-respect, together with the opportunity to take autonomous decisions at the level of academic management and assume responsibility for them. To potential students, it also means an increased possibility to choose among various forms and types of university education: state or private, minority language or multi-lingual, with a church conducted or lay institutional background.

Another important phenomenon with potential, but still uncertain effects on the status of minority higher education and the opportunities offered to future minority students has been the establishment of the two cycle degrees structure under the auspices of the “Bologna Process”, introduced in Romania as a typical “reform from above” by a government ordinance which had to be applied by all institutions of higher education in the period 2005-2008. According to Romanian legislation, only fully accredited universities can apply for having study programs at master level. That is why such programs in Hungarian language could be initiated in 2005 and in the subsequent years only at Babes-Bolyai University, contingent to the approval of the governing bodies of that institution. In Partium Christian University, the initiation of the first MA programs became possible only in the academic year 2008-2009, after the full accreditation of the institution was achieved. The Sapientia University, which is in the final phase of accreditation, still has to wait until it can organise admissions for master level studies. This fact can have a negative effect also on the number of potential applicants at BA level, as future students are increasingly regarding the obtaining of a second degree as a “natural” continuation of their studies and they would probably expect this continuity to be provided by the university of their choice.

Rather surprisingly, taking into account the rich multicultural and pluralistic tradition of European education, the reference to the minority cultural and educational needs is almost completely absent from the dominant “Bologna” discourse at European level, and the implicit globalizing and homogenizing message transmitted in this way has its corresponding effects at national level as well. As a consequence, the specific requirements of minority higher education tend to be regarded as marginal and often neglected by the national governments and policy making agencies conducting the implementation of educational reform. The process of transformation – at least in the form it is interpreted and applied by higher educational decision-makers in Romania - tends to favor the establishment of large institutions, having an important research component, with standard procedures and evaluation criteria, which pay insufficient attention to the institutional and cultural specificity of small size minority institutions having an ethno-national and/or confessional-religious mission.

A more recent development having a negative effect both on the legitimacy level and the practical chances for the implementation of the political claims concerning minority higher education is concerning the shift gradually occurring in the perceptions of Hungarian minority members themselves. As the process of post-communist economic and social transformation is going on, being accompanied by a rapid expansion of the higher education system along with the
Gradually opening up of the country to abroad and the increasing level of educational internationalisation, the symbolic value of receiving native language education seem to diminish in certain social segments belonging to the Hungarian community. In view of recent research data on high school graduates options concerning university studies, an increasing level of discrepancy can be observed between the ways in which the opportunity to receive education in the native language is perceived by the political and cultural representatives of Hungarian minority and Hungarian elite on the one side and the individual Hungarian minority members on the other side.

While for the political and cultural representative organisations of Hungarian minority and for the members of Hungarian intellectual elite the idea of „Hungarian University” and of higher education in Hungarian language continues to preserve both an important symbolic and pragmatical value for the preservation of national identity and the perpetuation of cultural community, this perception is now shared to its full extent only by a part of Hungarian population. The actual options of ethnic Hungarians are almost equally divided between Hungarian and Romanian as the language of studies. According to statistical estimations, around 50% of high school graduates who choose to continue their studies at university level are doing so in Hungarian language universities and/or specialisations, while the other half are choosing to study in Romanian language. On the other hand, the potential number of Hungarian students studying in their native language in Romania is also diminished by those who – in increasing number – choose to continue their studies at higher level at universities in Hungary.

The reasons for choosing Romanian as the language of studies might be connected to the fact that a significant proportion of Hungarian population believes that their children have better chances of upward social mobility or for preserving the social status inherited in the family if they study in Romanian and attain a good mastering of Romanian language. This argument is already at work in influencing parents to send their children to Romanian schools at primary and secondary level. To the Hungarian minority graduates of Romanian language secondary schools the continuation of their studies at higher level in Romanian is a likely occurrence. Such options are characteristic to geographical areas with balanced Hungarian-Romanian ethnic compund and to those with scattered Hungarian population, rather than to regions inhabited by compact minority population.

To a certain extent, the option for Romanian as the language of study can also be explained by other factors, such as the necessity to select a field of study available in the geographical proximity of the students for economic and social reasons and the lack of minority language educational offer in the chosen specialisation or in the students’ home region. The perceived reputation of higher education institutions (traditional state universities tend to be valued higher

than new private ones) and the perceptions concerning the value and usefulness in the labour market of the diplomas issued by one university or another might also play a significant role. All these assumptions, however, although already based on some empirical evidence, require further research.

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