

Oral statement

By the Mikó Imre Association for the Protection of Minority Rights

For the European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

The Mikó Imre Association for the Protection of Minority Rights was founded with the purpose of monitoring and signalling issues related to minority rights and ethnic discrimination against the Hungarian community in Romania. We believe that in order to assure harmonious interethnic relations, it is important to identify the shortcomings of the system that supports minority rights, including education of and in the mother tongue. To fulfill this purpose our organisation publishes a yearly report about the situation of the rights of the Hungarian community in Romania.

In recent years there has been no significant improvement regarding the rights of minorities in Romania. In several crucial aspects, including the updating of linguistic rights, the use of national and regional symbols, hate speech in the mainstream media, or the restitution of confiscated private property, the situation is much the same, in some cases even worse, with systematic double standards.

The Hungarian minority of Romania presently faces three serious issues related to the minority language education system, issues that we believe hinder Hungarian pupils and students from getting access to quality education, and thus infringe upon their basic rights:

Regarding access to quality education in the mother tongue, an increasingly concerning matter has to do with the lack of textbooks available in Hungarian in primary and secondary education. At the start of each school year, Hungarian pupils suffer the consequences of a discriminatory and ill-working educational system. An entire generation, starting with the current sixth graders are being taught based on a new national methodology adopted in 2011, however, many of the textbooks printed according to this new methodology have in the past years arrived late, well after the start of the school year. It is worth noting that this is a problem which disproportionately affects children studying in a minority language, since most of their books also have to be translated from Romanian to a minority language.

Another issue of concern affecting students belonging to the Hungarian minority continues to be the teaching of the state language. In recent years, there has been a slow, but progressive adaptation of

the national methodology for teaching Romanian to minorities. The aim is for these children to study Romanian as a second language, instead of studying it according to the same methodology as children whose mother tongue is Romanian, which was the norm until a few years ago. However, there are still a number of problems when it comes to implementing the new methodology. Overall, teachers that we have surveyed agree that content focused on theoretical knowledge should be further reduced, and significantly more practical exercises should be included into these new Romanian textbooks, exercises that focus primarily on useful knowledge and develop the communication skills of minority pupils in the state language.

Regarding higher education in Hungarian, an issue of major concern is the future of medical training in Hungarian. Ever since its foundation, there has been a slow but relentless effort to encumber Hungarian training at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureș, an institution originally destined to train Hungarian doctors in their mother tongue. The Hungarian community has been asking for a separate and independent Hungarian department for years. According to the National Law on Education, multicultural higher education institutions are required to create separate faculties or departments for minority students. However, the Romanian leadership of the University of Medicine has resisted the idea for years, invoking academic autonomy.

The situation got even worse last year, when the University of Medicine and Pharmacy and the Petru Maior University, which is a purely Romanian university, were merged, despite the objections of students, professors, prominent political leaders and the entire Hungarian community of Romania in general. The already unstable and never quite fully materialised multicultural aspect of the university is in more danger now than ever before, as the percentage of Hungarian students and professors dropped significantly. Paradoxically, in early 2019 the senate of the university decided to establish an English faculty, after resisting for years the idea of creating a Hungarian one.

Creating separate faculties or departments for minority students is a reasonable request reiterated time and time again by students and professors alike, since it would solve numerous problems and anomalies that the Hungarian line of study is currently facing, but most importantly it would secure and strengthen the multicultural character of the university and safeguard the future of medical training in Hungarian.

In order to find suitable solutions for these issues, we are presently working together with several organisations, including FUEN, but we are open to collaboration with international and governmental institutions, as well as other civil society organisations.