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minority and human rights watch

'Shop window' ecumenism in Romania

Bishop László Tőkés who sparked the 1989 revolution that led to the overthrow of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, the country's communist leader at the time, was not participating in the European church assembly in Romania. He said he was protesting at what he called Romania's "shop window" ecumenism.

Bishop László Tőkés of the Hungarian-speaking Reformed Church District of Oradea, Romania had been scheduled to address the Third European Ecumenical Assembly taking place in Sibiu from 4 to 9 September. "With my staying away from the assembly, I myself intend to signal that our Reformed believers long for something more than 'shop window ecumenism'," said Bishop Tőkés in a message to participants posted on the Web site <http://eea3.reformatus.hu/>, and distributed to participants in a leaflet.

László Tőkés, once a pastor in Timișoara/Temesvár in Transylvania, came to prominence in 1989 as an outspoken opponent of the Ceaușescu regime. In December 1989, security forces killed scores of people who had gathered around Tőkés' home to protect him from arrest, an event credited with having provoked further demonstrations and the ultimate overthrow of Ceaușescu.

In his open letter to participants, Bishop Tőkés said that in the communist era a "shop window ecumenism" was forced upon churches in Romania. "There has not been any progress concerning the appearance of an authentic and valid ecumenism ever since," he continued. "Moreover, the relation between the majority Orthodox and the other minority churches, i.e. the Greek Catholic and the Reformed Church, has become especially tense." (...) As a result, his church had considered organizing a protest demonstration outside the assembly, but dropped the plan out of consideration for participants.

"Light will shine through darkness" (John 1:5)

The official delegates participating at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt were utterly shocked when being informed about the Sibiu police arresting five Reformed young people from Oradea/Nagyvárad on 5 September 2007. They were escorted to the police headquarters and kept there for three hours. The youngsters belonging to the Királyhágómellék Reformed Church District, at the special request of the District and with the knowledge and consent of the Assembly Organizers intended to deliver information brochures to the venue.



Another spectacular police action against Reformed youth...

In the city centre they were stopped by three police cars. The policemen requested to give them their identification cards. Subsequently, the small group was escorted, without any sort of explanation, to the county police headquarters. The five detained related that the officers in charge of the questioning aimed at proving them guilty of several misdemeanors. Ovidiu TICHINDELEAN and Ionel VLAD, police officers in civilian clothes, accused them that they were pursuing illegal traffic with religious publications (!). Then they made repeated accusation of the driver pursuing illegal passenger transport (!). The people held in custody were not willing to sign the police record nr. 30595/05.09.2007, which contained trumped-up charges. →

After three hours of custody the policemen finally released them. “We can not tolerate the fact that the armed force, based on invented causes, illegally violated these Reformed young persons` basic human rights. Delegates from Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria were also astonished by these events. The organizers of the Conference of European Churches intervened, as well, on behalf of the persons` release “, declared the delegation leaders of the participating Hungarian-speaking Reformed churches.

LETTER
to the Participants
of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly

Dear Participants,

Welcome to Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben, the symbolical city of the Transylvanian lot for minorities, in the former citadel of the Transylvanian Saxon culture! The spirit of the place compels us: we cannot and we should not forget that as a result of Ceausescu`s brutal dictatorship and its politics of assimilation-homogenization, the inhabitants of the once strong German community are nowadays only present in traces in Transylvania – in Siebenbürgen.

Our Hungarian-speaking community in Romania does not long to share the tragic destiny of Transylvanian Saxons and Swabians. One of the conditions to achieve this is to do away with the discrimination that afflicts our minority churches, furthermore, the building of a real ecumenical relationship among the Romanian churches based on justice and reconciliation.



Reformed Bishop László Tökés

While during the atheist dictatorship a “**shop-window ecumenism**” was enforced upon our churches, after 1989 we naturally endeavored to create genuine ecumenical relations. The Királyhágómellék Reformed Church District has also been devoted during the preparations for the Third European Ecumenical Assembly: two regional meetings were organized by our Church in Oradea/Nagyvárad and Timișoara/Temesvár.

There has not been any progress concerning the appearance of an authentic and valid ecumenism ever since. Moreover, the relation between the majority Orthodox and the other, minority churches, i.e. the Greek Catholic and the Reformed Church has become especially tense. It is due to these conditions that in Romania, contrary to other East-Central-European countries an ecumenical council has not yet been created. Furthermore, our initiative that the Romanian churches should sign the Charta Oecumenica during the 3EEA remained unconsidered. In the period since 1989, in the company of other minority churches, we desolately experienced that the dialogue with the Romanian Orthodox Church does not prove to be fruitful, since the national Orthodox Church is not interested in the fraternal “distribution” of the religious freedom – besides some regional exceptions.

For this reason, our Church was preparing a thought-provoking demonstration at the Sibiu Assembly. Nevertheless, we have abandoned this plan out of fraternal and Christian consideration, since our original plan was appeasement through dialogue and we would not, under any circumstance, overshadow with our problems the promise of **real ecumenical fellowship** for many.

However, I would like to inform you about the obstacles that hinder the realization of true ecumenical relations in Romania. In the same time I warmly request you to support the peaceful settlement of the existing tensions amongst churches in Romania.

With my staying away from the Assembly I myself intend to signal that our Reformed believers long for something more than “shop-window ecumenism”, which proves to be unworthy of traditional Transylvanian tolerance, as well as the motto of the Third European Ecumenical Great Assembly: “The Light of Christ shines upon **ALL!**”

Although I keep away from this Assembly, I am praying for the success of the meeting in the spirit of my due greeting. May God bless your fellowship, the joining of forces of the European Churches, the ecumenical movement and your personal lives – with many greetings:

3 September 2007


László Tökés
bishop

Physical Aggression Against Young Adult

István Csomortányi, member of the Transylvanian Hungarian Youth's (THY) presidium reported at the police an unknown aggressor on the charge of bodily harm. The Oradea/Nagyvárad organization of the Transylvanian Hungarian Youth concluded that during the last year there has not been any sort of advance in the case of placing the Hungarian names of the street-tables. Furthermore, there has been a resolution passed by the local council which obliges the local authority for carrying out this task. Subsequently, the Transylvanian Hungarian Youth decided, as a voluntary act, to put four Hungarian street tables onto private properties. Although their endeavor did not violate any law, the City Hall sent the authorities in order to remove the tables.

On 19 September 2007, several members of the Oradea organization of the Transylvanian Hungarian Youth (THY) placed bilingual tables on four Oradea buildings. They had previously agreed upon doing so with the legal owners of the buildings. The affair did not end here, as it was reported to the media by József Barna Nagy, president of THY and István Csomortányi, member of THY-presidium.

During the press conference they summed up the atrocities they had been subject to while placing the tables. Csomortányi István outlined the precedents of the Wednesday events. In his detailed account it was revealed that they had planned to place bilingual tables onto streets for over a year taking into account the percentage of the local residents. At that time a resolution brought by the city council determined that on public domains the Hungarian equivalent should also appear. Nevertheless, there were no tangible developments in this case, though the particular decree had been passed in September 2006, reported Csomortányi.



The victim. Why should a public servant hit citizens?



It should be like this.



It can only be like this in Oradea/Nagyvárad.

In spring, 2007 the representatives of the THY visited the authorities requesting the reasons for this omission. They were informed that the realization of the project was postponed due to technical hindrances. As a result of the neglect of the resolution on the part of the authorities, THY decided to embark on this mission, as a sign of civil disobedience, and set out to place the Hungarian street names themselves on those real estates whose owners would give the authorization for doing so, said Csomortányi.

On Wednesday, 19 September, at 11 o'clock they placed the four tables. Two of them were placed in Calvin Street and two more in the Városháza/City Hall Street right below the Romanian tables, emphasized József Barna Nagy.

The employees of the City Avenue Joint-stock Company removed the tables four hours later. In their report they emphasized that they had been instructed to do so at Mayor Petru Filip's personal intervention. As István Csomortányi arrived at the scene, he asked the workers not to take away the removed bilingual tables, since they were the property of THY. After a heated dispute, one of the employees of the company hit Csomortányi, and then he left taking the tables with him. →

The THY brought the decision not to leave this action without consequences. They reported the case on the account of the following charges: theft, on the one hand, since the employees of the company did not have the right to appropriate the tables, and aggression, on the other hand.

In the first instance they will bring a charge against the City Hall, which entrusted the company with the removal. In addition, they are going to bring a charge against the unidentified assaulter, who was photographed and his license plate was noted down.

The president of THY outlined that all they want is the Hungarian tables to finally appear in the streets. He added that the following week they would apply, yet again, to Mayor Petru Filip and Deputy-Mayor Rozália Biró for an audience regarding the bilingual street tables. According to the members of THY the authorities and the City Hall practice arbitrary politics: they put blindfolds when considering the obscene notices on walls and in case one intends to place Hungarian street tables, they immediately call the authorities and threaten with charges, said József Barna Nagy.

Display Ecumenism and Chaos in Sibiu



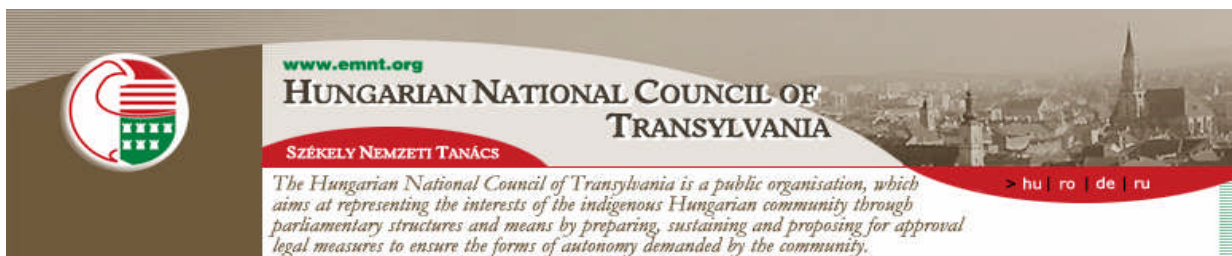
Lutheran Bishop Adorjáni

Dezső Adorjáni, Transylvanian Lutheran bishop felt aggrieved at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly discriminating Hungarians. He declared to www.maszol.ro that contradicting all previous promises the Hungarian language did not become one of the official languages of the event.

Bishop Dezső Adorjáni, called the event “display-ecumenism”, where the Orthodox Church forces its way to the first place for a strength display. He added: “I would be utterly glad if the event were fraternal and honest”.

Previous Transylvanian Monitor issues are available at:

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