



The Hungarian Education Network is Endangered in Romania

Smaller schools are threatened with being shutdown

Romania has introduced a new school funding mechanism based on pupil "head quotas" that allocates education funds by inherent class size. The typical urban class size is 25 students. As a direct result, Szekler (Hungarian Transylvanian) schools will face dramatic budget cuts effective 1 September 2010.

Traditionally, Szekler schools have smaller classes, due to the small villages and settlements scattered throughout the region. This new mechanism, based on a minimum required class size, discriminates against minority schools, as well as, art, and alternative schools. It appears to be a catalyst for the reintroduction of "mixed classes" that prevailed before the change of regime in 1989/1990.

If so, this new decree will eliminate education in minority languages. Within Romania, there is a constitutional right to education in one's mother tongue. Any reduction or elimination of minority education is a direct assault against the minority community. Further, it is direct violation of Romanian law and conflicts with the tenets Romania agreed to, upon its membership into the European Union (EU).

Without reaching the compulsory number of students, severe budget cuts, ranging from 27% to 47%, will be instituted at individual minority Hungarian schools. This will result in the closure of minority schools. In Arad County alone, more than 300 teachers are expected to be sacked.

For example, in Harghita County, based on (the 2009-2010 school year) pupil headcounts, we can estimate individual school-wage fund cuts. We list the following school budget cuts, as follows: Bradesti (*Fenyéd*) cut 37%, Martinis (*Homoródszentmárton*) cut 35%, Varsag (*Varság*) cut 31%, Sacel (*Románandrásfalva*) cut 32%, and Mugeni (*Bögöz*) cut 27%. By way of illustration, in Mugeni, four teachers at four schools will have to be sacked.

The highest risk Szekler high school is Orbán Balázs High School in Cristuru Secuiesc (*Székelykeresztúr*). It is slated for a budget cut of 36%. The art schools in Miercurea Ciuc (*Csikszereda*) and Odorheiu Secuiesc (*Székelyudvarhely*) are being cut 44% and 47%, respectively. The alternative school, Benedek Elek Trainig-School, is being cut 31%.

The Udvarhelyszék region (Harghita County, west Mures County, and south-east Covasna County) is the most endangered, since it has many smaller settlements. The pupil "head quotas" put it at a serious disadvantage, since the compulsory number of students is unattainable. Any school closures would lead to horrendous consequences.

The prevailing laws, prohibiting school buses to cross county borders, restrict voluntary school combinations. For example, the Ocland School is only several students short of the minimum class size. But it cannot combine with the Zsombor School, a neighboring village, due to the law.

The Hungarian education in Arad County is slowly being reduced

It is likely that the Zerindu Mic (*Bélzerénd*) and Variasu Mare (*Nagyvarjas*) schools will be shutdown. The legal status of the Gaesti (*Gáj*) Neumann Fiverek Elementary School has been revoked. Consequently, this will require the Zimanducz (*Zimándköz*) pupils to commute to the Aurel Vlaicu School, where Hungarian classes are still available.

These significant changes in Arad County will affect Hungarian education, beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, which commences 1 September 2010. Further, the new school funding mechanism will reduce the graduation-rate of Hungarian pupils in Transylvania.

The closure of the small village and settlement schools, will force these students to commute to distant locations daily or even force their attending a boarding school. In either case, their parents cannot afford these options. Therefore, many children will be denied their right to an education. Consequently, the Szekler land illiteracy rate will increase, among the Hungarian minority.

According to Miklós Pellegrini, Deputy Education Inspector, "It is impossible to predict what happens on September 1." The new policies of the Arad County government include class-contractions (reductions in the number of classes for each grade-level), as well as, the announced budget cuts.

The President of the Hungarian Teacher's Association of Romania in Arad County, Mihály Matekovits, stated: "Rumor has it that in September 320-330 jobs in education will be axed in Arad County. We must develop the education network. And if it comes to a stoppage, we must re-evaluate the registration plan into schools. It is only after this elaboration that we can come up with a concrete number of teachers being redundant. There will be colleagues who will need to leave schools, be transferred from one facility to another, or may need to work (part-time) jobs at several schools."

Hungarian education in the Timisoara elementary schools will come to an end

In Timisoara (*Temesvár*), Romania, the diaspora of the Banat region, the Hungarian community has only one class of pupils per school for each of the grades, including 7-10 children each. The new school funding mechanism will eliminate all these classes. The December 2009 decree determines teacher's wages, based on the number of students, attending a particular facility.

Because of the small head counts in Timisoara, it is impossible to provide professors with their requisite wages. As such, there is no alternative but to close the schools. Being a metropolitan area, every Timisoara school must meet the metropolitan average of 25 students per class. Essentially, education in minority language schools will fall victim to this new decree.

In order to continue attending a Hungarian language school, the only alternative is to commute daily. Parents will not be able to afford this option. The only viable option becomes re-registering their children into the Romanian school system. Thus, the children, who were formerly taught in Hungarian, are now forced to learn in the Romanian language. This is a denial of their basic Constitutional rights, which guarantee the right to education one's mother tongue.

Crippling art education

"The School Inspectorate made a decision concerning the fate of the Targu Mures (*Marosvásárhely*) Art High School," affirmed Matei Dumitru, Chief Inspector. According to him, art education is too costly compared to the results achieved. Therefore, in the 2010-2011 school year, there will only be one Hungarian art class for the first, fifth, and ninth grades. Formerly, there were two Hungarian art classes for each grade, from the first through the ninth grades.

The children display a tremendous interest in art and music. In addition, there are exquisite artists and musicians, who would teach as honorary or full time professors. A parental initiative calls for the contracting (out-sourcing) of fine art and music classes, so that they may continue, even with the limited remaining funds. The school board has also submitted a memorandum in defense of maintaining the current art and music classes. This memorandum was rejected out of hand.

The School Inspectorate has showed absolutely no willingness to reverse its new decision. As such, in the future, it is inevitable that art and music education will be entirely axed.

Professional objections

Since its founding, the Hungarian Teacher's Association of Romania (HTAR) has always stood up for the advancement of Hungarian education in Romania. Their statutes have included the objectives of preserving, in times of struggle, and promoting professional development, whenever possible.

On 22 February 2010, the President of the Hungarian Teacher's Association of Romania, Pál Lászlófy, declared: "Recently, government decrees pertaining to budget cuts in the public sphere and the paring down of educational funding has initiated a process, which demolishes the Romanian education system. More particularly, the education of minorities will be harmed."

The HTAR objects to government's sole priorities: funding reductions and sacking public servants.

The HTAR expectations include the following:

1. No kindergarten and elementary school classes should be eliminated. The new decree disproportionately impacts small villages and settlements. In many instances, these parents' cannot afford the commuting cost of their children attending another school. Without access to education, the number of illiterates would increase.
2. The new decree is another attempt at "village destruction" that was implemented by the Ceausescu dictatorship. In the last 20 years, practically nothing has been done to improve the economic conditions of these small settlements.

No one has demanded or received any form of compensation for the destruction of these communities by the totalitarian regime. As a nation, Romania is obliged to provide every child with a complete education; if only as compensation for its vile and violent past.

We suggest that a register of all school-age children be made of the settlements in question. Further, these Hungarian children should continue to receive their education, from a special fund that is not based on the head-quota system.

3. The Szekler settlements of Hungarian majority are populated with ethnic Romanians, who compose the local police and army. Their children are taught in Romanian in classes of diminished number of students. Therefore, in Szekler counties, the pupil headcount, per class, is too low for both nationalities. As a result, the mother tongue classes in Romanian face a similar plight, as those in Hungarian. In this case, we suggest that the Romanian classes continue, via a special fund that is not based on the head-quota system.
4. In anticipation of the new decree, we suggest that a re-evaluation of the Hungarian school network be made for grades 5-8. The goal would be to find solutions that ensure every student could access a Hungarian school via a commuting option.
5. The implementation of the budget cuts demands supervision and verification, within the ministry for education and the county educational inspectorates.

The HTAR suggestions:

- A. A per-pupil cost of education should be established. And this figure, based on the 2009-2010 school year, should be increased. The current funding mechanism does not permit providing alternative education (outlined in the extracurricular syllabus). Thus, subjects demanding more hours (e.g., art, sport activities, and optional courses) are monetarily short-changed.
- B. A special fund that is not based on the head-quota system should be established to support the educational expenses of the minority population in Romania. This special fund should be separate from the general education funding mechanism.
- C. In any minority education situation, where pupil headcounts do not meet the inherent class size requirement, we demand a non-discriminatory solution. Following the new decree, we propose that any shortfall (budget cuts) to minority Hungarian schools be subsidized through a special fund. This special fund is to be separate from the general education funding mechanism. Further, the general education fund amount and the subsidy (from the special fund), combined together, will meet the customary and guaranteed basic rate (salary level) to adequately pay every professor.
- D. It is quintessential to distinguish between settlement regions that are "scattered" and "concentrated" by their school-age populations. Presumably, in settlement regions that are "concentrated," it may be possible to arrange for a reasonable commuting option, to existing Hungarian schools. In the "scattered" settlement regions, the commuting option is not viable. Likewise, the budget cut option (based on the new school funding mechanism) is not viable either.

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