5. THE EDUCATION QUESTION

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It became urgent in February 1948 for Czechoslovakia to settle its relations with Hungary, as a new period of Stalinist single-party dictatorship and membership of the socialist camp opened.[1] So the reintroduction of Hungarian-language teaching gained exceptional symbolic significance. In the autumn of 1948, Slovak-taught schools opened parallel Hungarian classes, but two years later, separate Hungarian schools opened as well. Much was done to further them by the Cultural Association of Hungarian Workers of Czechoslovakia (CSEMADOK) and by the Communist Party of Slovakia Central Committee's Hungarian Committee. The result was a broad system of schools that taught in Hungarian in the early 1950s: almost 600 elementary schools, and by the 1960s, also 22 Hungarian gymnasia (high schools).

The position of the minorities was affected by the Prague Spring of 1968, for the Slovak demands for greater autonomy fed Slovak nationalism, but the leadership stood firm on minority rights legislation and called for proposals from the minority organizations. The memorandum that CSEMADOK compiled in March 1968 included a demand for an autonomous Hungarian school system. This process was halted and indeed reversed by the Soviet-led invasion by the Warsaw Pact countries in the autumn.

The period of normalization under Gustav Husák brought several attacks on the educational and language-use rights of the Hungarian minority. Hungarian-language teachers' training was run down, and the number of Hungarian gymnasia was reduced to 18 at the turn of the 1980s, while mergers of Hungarian elementary schools had reduced their numbers by half by 1989. There was an attempt to reduce the use of Hungarian in schools. Several Hungarian middle schools changed to teaching certain subjects in Slovak. In the second

half of the 1970s, elements in the Slovak government drew up a plan to allow Hungarian-taught education to wither away, which led to the formation of a Hungarian dissident movement in Slovakia. The Legal Defense Committee of the Czechoslovakian Hungarian Minority[2] was founded to draw public attention to the minority's grievances and to use what means it could to combat them. The leading figure was the young Bratislava intellectual Miklós Duray.

Higher education in Hungarian was provided in the Hungarian language and literature teachers' training faculty at Comenius University in Bratislava and in the teachers' training program at the University of Nitra.

The Hungarian-taught school system in Transcarpathia, ceded to the Soviet Union in 1945, continued uninterrupted.[3] Hungarian-taught lower elementary education in 1944–1945 was extended in the following year to the eight years of elementary school. The Moldavian schools also counted as minority schools, as did one school teaching in Slovak that closed after a year, but for almost twenty years, the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic preferred to refer to such schools obliquely as "non-Ukrainian- and non-Russian-taught schools."

The first minority middle schools, four Hungarian and four Moldavian, opened in 1953–1954. Thereafter the number of Hungarian-taught middle schools continued to rise, but the overall number of Hungarian-taught schools remained between 90 and 100. That year, classes that were taught in Russian or Ukrainian were opened for Hungarian children, in an effort to increase the effectiveness of Russian teaching, already a compulsory subject. In 1966–1967, a quarter of all Hungarian-taught schools included such parallel classes. By 1989 there remained 50 schools teaching solely in Hungarian.

Hungarian teachers' training began in 1947 in Khust and 1950 in Mukachevo, as did a faculty of Hungarian language and literature at Uzhgorod State University in 1963, but all three taught only specialist subjects in Hungarian, and so Hungarian-taught education effectively ended with high school. There were no official

Hungarian kindergartens, but Hungarian would have been used by nursery teachers in Hungarian-inhabited villages.

The Soviet system established over about twenty years the conditions for native-language schooling, but thereafter there was no development, but rather in fact something of a retreat at the end of the 1980s. The textbooks came from an office of the state textbook publishing enterprise in Uzhgorod, as they do today. These, apart from those for Hungarian language and literature, are translations of the officially set Russian or Ukrainian textbooks. The first textbook for Hungarian literature was written by the Hungarian writer Antal Hidas, who lived in Moscow, and appeared in 1950. Later textbooks were penned by teachers, writers and editors in Transcarpathia. These literature books provided the only available information for schools on Hungarian history, as this was not taught at all before 1989. They also included (in Hungarian) information on Ukrainian literature, but Russian literature was taught separately. In Hungarian literature, the emphasis was on the Moscow émigré writers (Máté Zalka, Béla Illés, Sándor Gergely and others), while a quarter concerned the "outstanding figure in the world revolutionary movement" Sándor Petőfi. There was hardly a mention of any Hungarian writing after World War II.

Educational autonomy was won by the Hungarians of Romania under the Groza government of 1945–1948, which was friendly towards them,[4] but this changed with the nationalization of education. The education act of August 3, 1948, applied the Soviet model to Romania's whole education system. Some Hungarian middle schools closed, but for higher education the years 1948–1950 marked a peak, with native-language teaching at Bolyai University, the separate Hungarian Arts Institute, and the agricultural and technical colleges in Cluj-Napoca, as well as a new Hungarian medical university in Tărgu Mureş.

The Hungarian-taught system of education began to shrink in the 1950s. First Hungarian-taught engineering courses ceased, and then a party and government resolution in 1956 called for the Romanianizing of minority elementary and middle schools.

Finally, in March 1959, Bolyai University was subsumed into Babeş University. The medical school in Tărgu Mureş closed in 1962. By the mid-1960s, the Hungarian-taught options remaining were the Protestant and Roman Catholic theological colleges and the Tărgu Mureş Drama College. Native-language vocational training also ceased and most Hungarian middle schools had a mixture of Hungarian- and Romanian-taught classes. There was still some teaching in Hungarian in the Hungarian, philosophy and history faculties at Babeş University.

Some educational grievances were redressed under the influence of the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia. Some middle schools returned to teaching only in Hungarian in 1968–1971. Hungarian-taught classes or departments were started at a handful of vocational secondary schools.

But Act 273 of May 13, 1973, discriminated directly against minority elementary schools in stipulating that 25 pupils were necessary to start a fifth-grade class and 36 for a secondary school class, whereas in every place where schools working in languages of "cohabiting national communities" existed, Romanian-taught departments or classes had to be provided irrespective of the number of pupils requiring them. So a rising proportion of Hungarian elementary and secondary students had to study in Romanian.

In the 1980s it became the practice to send newly qualified Hungarian teachers to Romanian-speaking districts. The mid-1980s marked a low point in Hungarian education in Romania. Separate Hungarian middle schools closed and Hungarians hardly won any places in higher education. It seemed that a truncated society was developing, with no intelligentsia of its own.

In Yugoslavia[5] minority schools were allowed to open in August 1945, right after the post-war executions and deportations that the Hungarians had suffered. The message was that they could expect to gain their minority rights "despite their crimes," but only from the new communist regime, not via separate minority bodies or support from the parent country. Yet most Hungarian elementary and middle school teachers were deported or fled the country. The

acute shortage could be eased only with crash courses for untrained replacements. Attendances at Hungarian-taught primary schools reached a post-war peak in the mid-1950s and then declined steadily – by 35 percent between 1966 and 1986. The contributing factors included the ageing and dwindling of the minority and the opening of bilingual (or more rarely trilingual) schools. The number of teaching staff, on the other hand, rose rapidly until the mid-1970s before beginning to fall slowly, so that pupil/teacher ratios and school standards were high. By the early 1960s there were chances also for those not studying in Hungarian to improve their language abilities. Initially, the backbone of the middle school system consisted of classic gymnasia – six such schools were teaching in Hungarian in the early 1950s. However, mergers between schools teaching in different languages soon followed, concealed behind a "fraternity – unity" slogan. The Serbo-Croat- and Hungarian-taught schools were combined into school centers in 1956. The 1975 education reform replaced the classic gymnasia by "two-plus-two" middle schools – two years of academic education plus two of vocational training. This meant that middle schools could open in larger villages that had never had one, but it led to a decline in quality. By the end of the 1980s, only 63.8 percent of Hungarian-taught middle school graduates continued their studies. The forced spread of vocational training was abandoned in favor of standard four-year (ninth to twelfth grade) middle schools. Despite some advantages, the bilingual system had the drawback of assisting in the assimilation of the minority.

One big advance in higher education was the foundation of Novi Sad University in 1954, followed by a Hungarian faculty in 1959 and an Institute of Hungarian Studies in 1968. Several other colleges and university departments began to teach in Hungarian: the Novi Sad Academy of Drama in 1972, and a Hungarian-taught department at Maribor in 1966, followed by a department of Hungarian language and literature in 1980. Hungarian training of infants' school teachers began in Novi Sad at secondary level in 1952 and rose to college level in 1973. Hungarian teachers were

trained from 1945 onwards in Subotica, where the college taught in Hungarian for a decade before turning bilingual. College-level teachers' training commenced in Novi Sad in 1946 and moved to Subotica in 1978, where teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry, Hungarian and Serbo-Croat were trained. From 1973 there was uniform (elementary and secondary) teachers' training in Hungarian that included education, psychology, sociology, methodology, Marxism-Leninism and civil defense. Wider self-management under the 1974 Constitution gave greater powers to minority provincial and local management of education, for instance through the Vojvodina Education Council.[6] It became possible to give more emphasis to Hungarian language, history, music and art. The progress ended with the wave of Serbian nationalism at the beginning of the 1980s and the fragmentation of the country during the Yugoslav wars.

Notes

1 Béla László, "A (cseh)szlovákiai oktatásügy szerkezete, valamint közigazgatási és jogi keretei 1945 után" [The Structure of the (Czecho)Slovak Educational System, and Its Administrative and Legal Framework after 1945], in László Tóth, ed., *A (cseh)szlovákiai magyar művelődés története 1918–1998* [History of (Czecho)Slovak Hungarian Culture 1918–1998]. Vol. II. (Budapest, 1998)

2 *Csehszlovákiai Magyar Kisebbség Jogvédő Bizottsága.*

3 Csilla Fedinec, *Fejezetek a kárpátaljai magyar közoktatás történetéből (1938–1991)* [Chapters from the History of Transcarpathian Hungarian Education (1938–1991)] (Budapest, 1999); Csilla Fedinec, "Nemzetiségi iskolahálózat és magyaroktatás Kárpátalján" [Minority Schools and Hungarian Education in Transcarpathia], *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle* (2001) 1: 63–82; Károly D. Balla, *A hontalanság metaforái* [Metaphors of Statelessness] (Budapest, 2000), pp. 22 and 59–60; Kálmán Soós, "Magyar tudományos élet Kárpátalján" [Hungarian Scientific Activity in Transcarpathia], *Magyar Tudomány* (1993) 5: 635–638; Lajos Sipos, ed., *Iskolaszerkezet és irodalomtanítás a Kárpát-medencében* [School Structure and Literature Teaching in the Carpathian Basin] (Budapest, 2003).

4 László Murvai, *Fekete Fehér Könyv* [Black White Book] (Kolozsvár, 1996); Gábor Vincze, "A romániai magyar kisebbség oktatásügye 1944 és 1989 között" [Romanian Hungarian Minority Education between 1944 and 1989], in Idem, *Illúziók és csalódások. Fejezetek a romániai magyarság második világháború utáni történetéből* [Illusions and Disillusionments. Chapters in the Post-War History of the Romanian Hungarians] (Csíkszereda, 1999), pp. 187–224; Gábor Vincze, ed., *Történelmi kényszerpályák – kisebbségi reálpolitikák. Dokumentumok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetének tanulmányozásához* [Forced Paths of History – Minority Realpolitik. Documents for the Study of Romanian Hungarian Minority History], Vol. 2, 1944–1989 (Csíkszereda, 2002), pp. 247–248.

5 Lajos Tóth, *Magyar nyelvű oktatás a Vajdaságban 1944-től napjainkig* [Hungarian-Language Education in Vojvodina from 1944 to the Present Day] (Szabadka, 1995); Lajos Bence, "Egy elmulasztott lehetőség margójára (A kétnyelvű oktatás harminc éve Szlovéniában)" [In the Margin of a Lost Chance (Thirty Years of Bilingual Education in Slovenia)], in Sándor Győri-Nagy and Janka Kelemen, eds., *Kétnyelvűség a Kárpát-medencében* [Bilingualism in the Carpathian Basin], Vol. 2 (Budapest, 1992); Enikő A. Sajti, *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbségek. Magyarok a Délvidéken 1918–1947* [Sovereignty Changes, Revision, Minorities. Hungarians in the Southern Region 1918–1947] (Budapest, 2004).

6 *Vajdaság Tanügyi Tanácsa.*