Democracy and Academic Education in Minority Languages.

The Special Case of Romania

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Final Report

During the research period for our project on Democracy and Academic Education in Minority Languages. The Special Case of Romania we worked with very varied sources in order to have a perspective as detached and comprehensive as possible.

In Romania we studied the materials (books, journals, newspapers) existent at the Library of the Romanian Academy, the main library of Babe_-Bolyai University, the Library of the Faculty of Letters from Cluj, Romania.

We studied the documents and statements on or of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the reports from the Seminar on "The Education of National Minorities in Romania". We also contacted the office of the Council of Europe in Bucharest, which proved to be very helpful. This is how we could order books/publications on democracy, human rights, minorities, human rights education and intercultural education. Studying these materials we came to the conclusion, at least, for this stage of the development of the European Union, that there is not a very precise, easy to grasp opinion of the Council of Europe on the complex issue of the relationships between the state and minorities. A lot depends on local conditions, history, activism of the minority groups, general tolerance of society. Consequently, the problem of education in minority languages, in general, and academic/tertiary education

in minority languages, in particular, is also treated ambivalently in the documents of the Council of Europe. A lot is also left for the states themselves. This is understandable as the Council of Europe is based upon the voluntary acceptance of its rules by the states. These rules are not imposed by any alien force.

During our research period we also contacted PER (the Project on Ethnic Relations) in Bucharest. They have an interesting library where we could study the way in which the ethnic problem is or is not tackled in various countries/groups of countries, namely Yugoslavia, Ukraine, South Africa, Spain, Finland, the United States, the Community of Independent States (CIS). This gave us a very good background for the international frame of our project.

We contacted various bodies of the Government of Romania responsible for academic education in minority languages or dealing with academic education in minority languages as a question of the image of the government.

Firstly, at the Ministry of Education, we got in touch with the people responsible for the educational system in minority languages and with the people responsible for the tertiary level of the Romanian educational system. There is no special department for tertiary education in minority languages and the two departments mentioned above co-operate in this respect. We got interesting statistics which show that at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, at the University in Târgu Mures, at the Drama Conservatory in Târgu Mures there are already some faculties with sections or courses where students are taught in minority languages: Hungarian, German. Minority students are

taught in their mother language Physics, Mathematics, Journalism, Philosophy, Pedagogy. Minority languages are used at the Drama Conservatory. In Romania all the faculties training the teachers-to-be offer courses in minority languages. Babes-Bolyai University also provides training in social assistance for Roma students, in a special department. All these data prove that under the PSDR (the Party of Social Democracy in Romania) administration Romania moved from covert prohibition to overt permission in the area of academic education in minority languages.

A very interesting and fruitful source for our research was the exchange of opinions with people who work in the area of tertiary education in minority languages. Their common sense approach does not apparently have any sophistication but, in fact, it has the power and value given by every day personal experience. According to our interlocutors from the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions from Romania, the United States or Hungary, a good solution to the problem of academic education in minority languages must dialectically and intricately combine the effort and the tendency of the central factor/state to preserve itself, as it is, and the effort of the minority group to get as influential as possible in society, in order to preserve itself, as it is.

During our research period we also contacted the Romanian Ministry of Foreign affairs where we got materials, various aide memoirs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the Law on Education as adopted by the Romanian Parliament. These materials defend the Law on Education as a judicial document according to

the highest European standards about education for minority groups and human rights. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs appreciates that this law does not endanger any currently existing minority language institution. It also criticizes the Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania which calls for "civic disobedience" and insubordination. The documents we were shown at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also draw comparisons between the Law on education, and the situation existent in Romania or in other East or Central European states: Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine. Statistics and legal documents show that the provisions of the laws on education in all these countries are much more restrictive than in Romania. and academic/tertiary education in minority languages practically does not exist in any form whatsoever.

A great help in our research work was our collaboration with the Romanian Parliament where we got a large collection of documents about education with special relevance for the judicial frame offered by the Romanian society to tertiary education, in general, and to tertiary education in minority languages, in particular.

Another board of the Romanian government that we worked with was the Council for National Minorities which offered us publications of various minority groups in Romania. The problem of academic education is insistently tackled only in the Hungarian publications. The other ethnic groups either do not discuss the problem or declare themselves satisfied with the solutions the judicial frame offered by the Law on Education.

During our research period we also contacted the Romanian

Institute for Human Rights which provided excellent help and advice. The Institute deals with the problem of academic education in minority languages as a particular case of human rights. We could compare the laws on human rights in Romania, in the USA and in various European countries.

A very interesting element of our research was our contact with the political parties from Romania. We wrote to all the political parties in Romania which are represented in the Parliament or which are of certain importance in the political life of the country, 25 all in all. We got answers only from 10 parties but we completed our research with the study of the most influential newspapers from Romania. This study has been very interesting as political parties do not perceive any issue only as a theoretical problem. The issue of tertiary education in minority languages is an opportunity for propaganda or an opportunity to link political ideology to the harsh demands of reality.

The research stages abroad have allowed us to assess the situation of tertiary education in minority languages in other European countries, and in the USA in comparison with the standards of the Council of Europe. Our contacts with the Library of the Congress, with the PER headquarters in Princeton and especially with Indiana University in Bloomington have been very helpful and enlightening. Prof. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Prof. Paul Lucas and Dr. David L. Kimbrough have greatly helped us with valuable suggestions and incentive advice.

Summarizing our research period, we can say that we made very serious steps towards getting acquainted with the situation

existent in Romania and with the level of awareness of the problem we are working on - academic/tertiary education in minority languages -in various components of the body politic in Romania. After the elections from 1996 we continued the contacts with the body politic in order to perceive changes, evolutions, solutions in this new period. Impending events have caused changes of tactics and strategies. From the point of view of this project, the way in which the government or the political parties change their perspective is extremely important. These changes are relevant for the inner mechanisms of the Romanian political life. The recent admission of the political organization of the Romanian-Hungarians to the ruling coalition has brought new elements to the issue under scrutiny in my project. As the change of the Law on Education with a view towards satisfying the demands of the party of the Romanian-Hungarians is simultaneous with the Romania'insistent efforts to be admitted into NATO in the first wave with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic there is the perception among the ethnic majority that the modification of the Law on Education is only caused by external pressure and desire for a better image. Significantly, many factions of the most important ruling party (the National-Peasant Christian Democrat Party), especially the factions from Transylvania, do not agree with this change. Consequently, the modification of the Law on Education may rather increase tensions instead of appeasing them, because there is a strong perception that it is only an element in a give-in/take-in game whose bid is to avoid Romania's being forcibly left in the zone of Russian influence (as after World

War II) and not a step towards enhancing democracy in Romania.

The basic assumption of our research on "Democracy and Academic Education in Minority Languages. The Special Case of Romania" is that the educational system, in general, and the academic (tertiary) one, in particular, are an extremely important dimension of the democratic system. They influence democratic values and they are influenced by the democratic values.

The connection between democracy and education goes back to the 18th century. It is during this period that the gradual secularization of life and mentalities brought about the idea that the human being can improve himself/herself through his/her own effort, namely through education, and not through divine grace. The 18th century also revived the idea of democracy with its advantages and disadvantages. One of the most important disadvantages of democracy, already pointed out by Plato, is that democracy hands the control of governments from experts in governing to populist "demagogues". Democracy being basically "the majority rule" there arises a tension between democracy and liberty. Namely, majorities may vote for the persecution of minorities. Consequently, it is extremely important for any democratic system that this ruling majority should be EDUCATED and should assimilate the values of toleration and entrenchment of rights. Toleration and entrenchments of rights, though not exactly constitutive of democracy, are strong preconditions for democracy. These strong preconditions of democracy must be acquired through education, namely through the conscious effort

of society to have them become internal values for as many members of society as possible.

Within this context, the fight of ethnic minorities for academic (tertiary) education in their native language is extremely important for the acknowledgement of the degree of toleration and entrenchments of rights in that particular society. At the same time, this revendication of a minority poses serious problems to the majority because the official language is a factor of cohesion in society and there is the fear that a too much relaxation of the system might lead to its dismantling. An interesting example, from this point of view, is the recent "English Only" law adopted in the United States of America.

Our research on democracy and education combines an inductive and a deductive perspective. The possibilities offered to ethnic minorities to study in their native languages are examined in several countries that call themselves democracies or are perceived as democracies. This study has to begin historically in order to understand present tensions or apprehensions.

The creation of ethnic minorities in different countries follows one of the following patterns. One of the most widespread patterns is that of populations coming from Europe and creating hyphenated minorities in the USA or the New World, at large. These populations admit that they are new comers and they try to preserve some of their heritage while, at the same time, making efforts to be an active part of the main stream. Another model is given by the history or proto-history of Europe

where the survivors of defeated or submerged populations retired in isolated areas. Wales, the Caucasus, or the Alps, or the Balkans are such areas. These peoples have a strong and painful consciousness of their historical right to the land and the use of the language is one of the most emotionally charged strongholds of their identity. Such minority regions are usually in not very fertile lands, characterized by difficult access. The imperial Russian conquests, be they Soviet or Czarist, created such situations where the Slavs dominate strong native groups that are minorities at the scale of the empire but majorities at the local scale. Such cases are the Baltic countries, Moldova, Turkestan. A third pattern is that of the groups brought to a land that was not theirs originally in order to turn into account the local resources or to defend the frontiers. Such cases are the Saxons in Transylvania brought by the Hungarians to defend their Eastern and Southern frontiers or the French brought to Algeria to turn into account the riches of the country. A fourth pattern is offered by peoples driven away from their country of origin by political events, conquests, religious persecutions. Such cases are the Jews, the Armenians, the Lebanese or the Chinese. They create diasporas that are culturally and economically identical, though they may be far away from one another.

These particular ethnic histories bring about different attitudes towards the space where the ethnic minorities live and also different attitudes towards their language and culture. The collective memory may be slumbering and then violently erupt all at once. Such was the situation with the peoples from the Balkan

Peninsula which were under the Turkish rule for 500 years. Such a surprise might offer the slumbering, for the moment, peoples from Siberia still dominated by Russia. Such awakening must not surprise, for if we are careful about the psycho-social reality of minorities we shall see that, behind the surface of complete assimilation, they maintain their discreet links, their ways of living, their language, their religion and the mythology of their home country.

The present-day situation concerning ethnic minorities in Europe owes a lot to the exceptional importance given to ethnic minorities by the 19th and beginning of the 20th European century. In the 19th century it was generally believed that a language is an important element in the definition of a nation. The peace makers of Versailles tended to define national boundaries on the basis of language zone (with appropriate exceptions in favor of the victor powers) and showed an unprecedented respect for the rights of linguistic minorities. Nowadays the complexity of the issue is due to the fact that besides the ethnic minorities already constituted by conquests, this historic period also experienced important movements of refugees bringing about diasporas and later on migrations of working people. The relations of these people with the land and their cultural demands are different. If the ethnic group is assimilated and wants to do away with its specific, obvious exterior identity markers, with the ideologic and material links with its mother community, we no longer have a diaspora. This is very much the case of the immigrants from the former Communist countries. In the case of Romania, for instance, the strong ties

with the country of origin have been severed and ideologically scrutinized under the Communist regime. Distrust and strong resentment have led to the reduction of Romanian-American diaspora and its melting into the mainstream of American society. This type of integration implies generation conflicts or the existence of an individual double culture, which is an inner contradiction. Our research contains a thorough correlation of these ethnic minority "histories" and the actual cultural situation/opportunities of minority groups.

The special case of Romania contains, in our opinion, patterns two and three of the appearance of historic minorities. Namely, the Romanians were a good example of pattern two under the Hungarian rule, while the Romanian-Germans are a good example of pattern four. A lot of present-day frustrations of Romanian-Hungarians come from the loss of their majority status through the creation of the Romanian state in its present borders. A similar case is offered by the evolution of the Russians in the Baltic states.

If the analysis of the minorities'attitude towards their language differs according to history and circumstances of displacement from their mother culture, the analysis of educational rights across nations has been done starting from the theoretical premise that a minority child has the right to acquire high degree of proficiency both in his/her mother tongue and in the dominant language of the country of residence. This is the ideal situation that few would dare to contradict, but, in practice, countries vary a lot in the degree to which they provide for the educational language rights of minority groups.

Our analysis has been done according to two basic criteria: explicitness, namely explicit provision for minority languages in education and promotion, namely promotion of dominated languages. These two criteria assess whether educational language rights legislation exists and whether rights inscribed in national constitutions, signed declarations, or covenants and international laws are honored. The degrees of explicitness range from overt support (explicit mention in the national constitution) to covert (no mention on the minority language in the national constitution). The degrees of promotion rage from prohibition, to toleration, non-discrimination between the minority language(s) and the dominant language, prescription and even promotion of the minority language(s). Strong preference for the prohibition, toleration attitude indicates a society assimilation-oriented, while strong preference for prescription and promotion of minority languages indicates a maintenance-oriented society.

Taking into account the analysis of the minorities'attitude towards their language and the analysis of educational rights across nations we have come to perceive that there are three possible models concerning the tertiary system of education in minority languages: a) ethnic minorities cannot study in their native language at the university; b) universities offer certain programs in minority languages, which are meant to maintain or revive these idioms; c) ethnic minorities have universities in their own language. The adopted model has been correlated by each society with the minorities'attitude towards their language and with the educational language rights grid analyzed above.

The solution adopted by each country depends on the history of that community and the activism of the ethnic minorities. No universally valid model can by given, only several patterns depending on the history of that particular community.

The confrontation minority vs. majority is the confrontation between the tendencies to enlarge the bases of a state or to reinforce its borders and the ascertainment of the particular tendencies that tend to divide at least symbolically, if not overtly. Philosophically speaking, the problem of academic education in minority languages has to do with the theory of the systems and their cohesion, the study of margins and liminality, the dialectical game between the center and the margin and, especially, the frame analysis. The same or almost the same judicial situation causes different reactions because of different historical or psychological frames. Our research focuses on the special case of Romania against this wide background of philosophical implications which may help us find, understand and create similitude. In this way, our project is useful not only as a practical source of information concerning Romania, but also as a more general source of information about the repetitive patterns of politics and, through politics, of history. The complexity of the issue - academic/tertiary education in minority languages - lies in its two-fold aspect: a problem of cohesion of the system and a problem of democracy, such an important aspect in the societies from Eastern and Central Europe.

After the inductive analysis of minority language rights and the standards of democracy in various countries, our

research project contains a deductive approach. The special solutions of this problem in Romania, given both by the administration and the ethnic minorities themselves, are examined from the point of view of a young democracy that should tend to bring about and strengthen a more stable system based upon consent and not upon imposition.

The analysis of the Romanian solutions has to take into account the specific historic circumstances of the development of Romanian nation and nationalism. During the 18th and the 19th century, when the Romanian nation and the Romanian nationalism took shape, the Romanian population was separated into different states by the great empires of the time. The aim of the Romanians was not freedom in the Kantian sense, namely an internal clarification of social organization criteria, but independence, namely, the external clarification of the circumstances of its very existence. The Romanian people achieved this aim constituting itself as a nation. We might say that the need for independence created the Romanian people rather then the Romanian people won its independence. Built upon the values of independence, DEPENDANT on INDEPENDENCE the Romanian nation has an exterior center of coherence always concerned about the frontiers of its independence. Therefore, the Romanian independence and the Romanian nation, as the corollary of this independence, is always vulnerable to the real or imaginary threats of these frontiers. At the same time, the Romanian state became a sort of protective roof for this independence of the whole community rather than the individual freedom of each of its members. From this perspective, the

Romanian state is either paternalist or IT IS NOT. A second peculiar characteristic both of the Romanian nation and the Romanian state, as of all the states and nations in Central and Eastern Europe, is that modernity does not appear in contradiction with tradition but from within tradition because the enemy is not inside but outside. Therefore, a strange and paradoxical relation between Tradition and Modernity results in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of being in a relation of succession and opposition in time, tradition and modernity coincide and complete each other in space. The difficulty to constitute themselves as nations and to fulfil their modernity is a characteristic of the Romanian nation and of all the nations in Eastern and Central Europe. This explains the most important characteristic of the psychic attitude and the lack of balance of the peoples from Central and Eastern Europe: the fear for the survival of the community. Nowadays this is expressed in the extreme historicism that pervades this area. For instance, the loss of what had been considered Hungarian territory after the breakup of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I is a national trauma for the Hungarians. On the other hand, the national traumas of both the Slovak and the Romanian population are connected to their oppression under the Austrian-Hungarian rule and during the Hungarian re-occupation during World War II. On the one hand, in this area, the minority often appears to have an exaggerated fear of the loss of identity. On the other hand, the majority authorities often have an exaggerated fear that if they comply to minority demands this will lead to the loss of the territory state, or to the creation

of enclaves where all the cultural, economic and political ties with the majority state and society are cut. Historical experience is often cited as a proof of their fears by both sides. Both the political elites of the area and the minority groups forget that political separatism is not inherent in the existence of linguistic pluralism. Conscious effort must be made by all sides to surpass the widespread historicist perception that the state is the ethnic tool of the majority and that the minority demands are illegitimate. In order to be successful minority ethnic demands should be formulated in terms of the general interests of society. Otherwise ethnic minority demands come up against a brick wall of majority fear and indifference. Therefore, the present organization of ethnic minorities in Romania in political organizations creates an important disadvantage and risk for a satisfactory solution of the problem through its intense politicization instead of its intense socialization. Success may be momentary but not lasting.

It is only through the identification of the demands of the minority with the demands of the majority as common points of interest towards a democratic and prosperous society that a lasting solution can be met. Economic development is particularly critical in societies undergoing transitional economic stages. In the case of Romania, there is the fear that an alternative labor market may be created upon linguistic exclusion. The long term consequence would be a movement of mini-social mobility concentrated upon Transylvania and endangering its position as a Romanian province.

As a general conclusion, we consider that analyzing the

situation of ethnic minorities is one of the essential orientations of international politics. The situation of ethnic minorities is an important tool in assessing societies and influencing their development. We cannot talk about the stability of a country or an area besides the satisfactory situation of ethnic minorities.

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Democracy and Academic Education in Minority Languages.

The Special Case of Romania

Michaela Mudure

Abstract

The basic assumption of the project is that the educational system, in general, and the academic (tertiary one), in particular, are an extremely important dimension of the democratic system. They influence and are influenced by the democratic values. The connection between democracy and education goes back to the 18th century when the increasing importance of education as a means to improve human nature also becomes a means to overcome the disadvantages of democracy through the creation of an educated majority.

Our research contains a thorough correlation of the ethnic minority histories and the actual cultural opportunities of minority groups. Taking into account the analysis of the minorities'attitude towards their language and the analysis of educational rights across nations we have come to perceive that

there are three possible models concerning the tertiary system of education in minority languages: a) ethnic minorities cannot study in their native language at the university; b) universities offer certain programs in minority languages, which are meant to maintain or revive these idioms; c) ethnic minorities have universities in their own language. The adopted model depends on the history of that community and the activism of the ethnic minorities.

The solutions of this problem in Romania are examined from the point of view of a young democracy that should strengthen a more stable system based upon consent and not upon imposition.