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**“Minority language education itself doesn’t hinder the acquisition of the majority language”**

*Interview with Attila Z. Papp*

1. Considering the quality of education in our days what kind of educational models are there in the EU member states?

It is important to know what education is, whether it is general or higher education. The quality is fairly well institutionalized in the case of higher education. There are numerous international institutions that inquire into the questions of the quality of education in the whole higher educational systems. This has been institutionalized at international level, but, as far as I know, at the level of general education there have been no such systems created yet though they exist at national levels. It is also relevant what models of educational policy they have been attached to. I would not be able to mention any relevant typology. I can only talk about what I think and what I have experienced. One of the important aspects of the quality of education is whether the general educational system is centralized or decentralized and how well it is connected to the local community, what role do the self-governments play or do not play at all; e.g. there is a difference between the Hungarian system and the Romanian one where inspectors have a certain role. The general trend is to transfer direction or decision to the lower levels but there are also such intermediate institution e.g. in the UK where education has been kept in hand at a certain level.

As to Hungary the general opinion is that it is a pity that the system of supervisors had been dismantled and now there is not outside evaluation. It had several reasons but newly there are discussions that it should be altered. In Romania the system of supervisors is there to serve as outer evaluators but as far as I know they cannot

completely fulfil the role, it is more like an administrative organ that cannot be regarded as real evaluators.

In connection to centralization and decentralisation it is also important how financing is operating. Here again various models could be mentioned: whether the budget of the schools is coming centrally or to what extent are they supported by the local community; whether there is a normative system or not. The question could be placed into these dimensions. There are still other things, too, to talk about, e.g. the countries could be arranged according to their PISA results that show a northern and southern division. The northern countries have shown better achievements than the southern ones. In between there is a Central European region that is literally medial i.e. mediocre: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Austria and there is the category of those of 'also run': Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria. Ukraine did not join PISA.

These are the trends that could be considered from the point of view of quality too. If the aim of education is to hand down certain competence this survey shows what is the situation in Europe.

## 2. What means would render these educational policies to work?

In general the question is what it is we want to achieve through the educational system. Usually there are two levels of interference with educational policy, or else two ways or two models. It has to be decided which level is aimed at; whether we want to get from the middle stage to the lower one or the other way round, i.e. there are the bottom-up or the top-down models. In this respect all the countries have their own traditions. In the French system the developments are created centrally, the Romanian system is similar. But there are other ways of interference, e.g. when the self-governments are more effective. In such cases the question is whether the strengthening of the lower level would effectively lead to results at system level. These are the major existing models. Certainly there is no uniform solution. What I observe is that – similar to the developments in Hungary - there is a swinging movement from the one to the other and back. There are political discourses or regimes that plan to strengthen e.g. the local levels. At the beginning of the 1990s the self-governments were given a free hand; today it is believed to have been a mistake and now the

wish is to hold the reins centrally; e.g. financing is planned to be taken back to the central level. I have no idea which is the better solution, I personally prefer middle solutions. Central or not, schools have an environment, there is a local community that must have a say into the internal life of schools. Since it is about education it has an output beyond one single locality. The levels have to operate under certain control. It is in order if many things are determined at local level, however, it is also important to have a national curriculum but such mechanisms and procedures are also necessary that allow for external evaluation that help schools to fulfil their dual functions, that of being part of the local life and achieve results vertically too.

### 3. If language policy should be defined how would you go about?

It could be called the language politics i.e. politics in its original meaning. I have read a furious article about higher education and the writer stated with the passion of certain linguists that practically the whole European higher education strengthened the efforts of colonization by the English language, even EU is one of the tools of this colonisation since almost every document, albeit written in various languages are primarily written in English. It threatens with the haunting vision of language death that the English language replaces every other in higher education. I do not agree; in my opinion higher education or the entire education is operating at national levels and the fact that a small portion of it is becoming international would not lead to the death of education in the national languages. Globalization is important; it is a matter of give and take. There are documents produced only in English, but it does not matter because if there is a paper about a given topic only in English than it has to be read in English. The question is how it will be adapted later on. I do not think globalization is dangerous. I do not believe either that the mobility programs of Erasmus would endanger education in the language of the nation states. I know Erasmus students at the University of Economy and they did not strike me as if they knew only English and would take all in consequence.

At the level of general education the directions of language policy depend on which country we are talking about.

The starting point must be: if there is a demand on the part of the minority to use its own language in education, the majority state has the obligation to support it. It is not necessarily restricted to indigenous minorities, but migrant minorities, too, can claim the right, but on the other hand it may be a rightful expectation of the majority state to require certain linguistic competence from the minorities in the majority language. And if we are considering economic levels the state has its interest in the use of the majority language, apart from the questions of assimilation, culture, symbols, ethnicity, simply for economic reasons; if someone cannot speak the language of the country they could be in disadvantageous position at the market of working forces; could become unemployed more easily in need to be supported by the state. Thus, out of sheer economic considerations the state has its interest in the use of the majority language. There may be exceptions; if there is any possibility for vertical minority careers i.e. if a person belonging to a minority can take such a minority course, either connected to the region or depending on the size of the community, that does not end up in unemployment, in such a case, provided the state guarantees the conditions either legally or financially, the above scenario would not be so acute. For example if someone completes his studies at Sapiientia in Csíkszereda and then finds some work in the neighbourhood, he is going to do well; if he does not speak Romanian, in theory it would not hurt him too much as he would not depend on it and it would not involve any costs for the state either. The state has to accept the existence multi-culture at a certain level. The problem is not whether it is legally guaranteed or not. There are hardly any nation states that would not have signed the Charta of Language right or would not provide with the regulations to ensure it. It is primarily not a legal question, because that is what the international contracts are for, but how it is specifically realised. Multi-cultures must be accepted by a nation state because if a community wants to use its language officially it has to be supported to some level. The classic example is that of the migrants in Sweden where it is made possible for a group of five or more non-Swedish persons wishing to use their own language in their education they can do so within the official educational system. In general this is not the practice in western countries, Sweden is the exception.

4. What are the most important features of a well prepared language policy?

Starting out from what has been told above naming them one by one, the first is to have legal background. There should be a genuine intention to set these legal backgrounds into life. If the minorities have a nation state the support has to be strengthened by bilateral agreements and in addition to professional, language political programs that effectively strengthen its revitalisation. However, it is effective only if the language-political intention does not stop at schools, the persons belonging to the minority should be able to put their education in their mother tongue to good use at the work force market, in public administration. There should be possibility to live with the linguistic right if the national minority community deems it important. The legal situation in the states of Europe is generally adequate but jurisdiction is not always successful because it depends on actual politics and the actual governmental majorities may be willing to realise the linguistic rights or may not. The Hungarian education in Transcarpathia is a striking example. In Ukraine it is an entirely linguistic question; it is not about the Hungarians at all, even if it seems like that from Hungary. In Ukraine there is a Russian speaking minority of considerable size, and whether the Hungarians in Transcarpathia can learn in Hungarian or not frequently depends on whether the actual and frequently changing and rather unstable governments are of pro- or anti-Russian feelings. If it is pro-Russian, the legal framework would be modified, such features would be built into the application of language use that are favourable to the populous Russian minority, and since it is the same country, it would help the Hungarian language education too. If the government is like it was under Timosenko that concentrates on the strengthening of the Ukrainian national identity, it would damage the language rights basically that of the Russian minority and but also that of the Hungarians. Although Ukraine has international agreements about the question and has agreed to various things in the Chart of Language Right but the realization depends always on the actual politics.

5. In the European practice how important is the question of external achievements, internal success and efficiency when drawing up language policy?

I would risk saying that the planning of language policy is hardly in any relationship with the external achievement of the schools, or with the question of efficiency or success. I say that because I have recently studied the PISA results and have written about it too. I have suggested these results to be analysed from the linguistic point too. I have compared the 2006 results of various countries. There are various relations. In the questionnaire there is one question 'do you speak a different language from that of the test or of the country.' The results can be treated in this respect too. The trend is, considering all the countries, and especially the EU countries, where the otherwise eminent Finland is no exception, that those students do worse at school whose language used at home is not the state language. There is no information about the language of education in the report; not all the countries offer such data, but as a trend it seems clear. In the case of most Western-European countries this may mostly refer to immigrants and their school achievements, however, the Swedes in Finland do no better. In the Carpathian Basin, in Romania, in Serbia, the trend is the same. If we consider the performance of Hungarians, in Romania their general school performance is weaker than that of the Romanians at the competence measurements. It is found difficult to believe and there are all kinds of protests questioning the tests, blaming the schools the questionnaires were filled in, wondering about the language of the tests, etc. In Slovakia the situation is different, there are detailed data about whether the Hungarian pupils, who are using Hungarian at home, are educated in Hungarian or not. They are not much behind the Slovakian students and in the field of interpretation the Hungarian schools are better than the Slovakian ones. The international survey could offer a detailed analysis of the topic, however, I have not found any such study. There has been only one that considered the school achievement of immigrants but the question of language was not a central question either. This why I have said that language policy and efficiency at school are not in close relationship because those who deal with language policy are not interested in these problems. And the reverse is true too, because till 2006

the question on the language of instruction was not included in the questionnaire, questions about language use appeared first in the 2009 PISA inquiry.

Should I deal with language policy, I would introduce something like the measuring of competence used in Hungary in minority education. It would be useful to know at institutional level how those minority schools where Hungarian is the language of instruction, are achieving and this knowledge could help the development of various minority schools. Such networking intention does not seem to be in the mother country and beyond the borders the Hungarian educational policy has not yet noticed its necessity even though the regulations of the given countries would render the introduction and the carrying out of such measuring possible (cf. the new Romanian educational law). In the USA there are numerous essays on the ethnic aspects of school achievements but language is not always in the centre of interest because it usually is settled with the conclusion that the African-Americans are what they are and of the Hispanics it is known that they are low-achievers. But what are the reasons and how could it be changed by linguistic political measures has not been treated. There are statements on the ethnic background without explanation.

6. In your opinion what decides the amount of finances the majority state invests in minority language education?

It is an interesting question. There are various models, e.g. in the Romanian higher education that has been extended to the general education as well; it requires relatively much investment because of the introduction of the multiplier of 2. It is possible that it had already been there earlier too, in an economically different form. A couple of years ago normative financing has been introduced in Romania, since then there is the multiplier of 2. Every subject has a given multiplier, e.g. subjects of arts have bigger multipliers; in Hungary it is 3, but e.g. in Romania the film subjects have 8. In Romania there is the extra multiplier 2 for the subjects taught in the Hungarian language. Teachers' training is the basis with 1, pedagogy, sociology, economy are the least expensive subjects because they do not need laboratory equipment. A general education in pedagogy with Romanian as the

teaching language costs  $x$  sum, and everything in Hungarian is multiplied by two. There is something similar introduced in general education too; in 2005, 2006 there were about eight so-called pilot-counties which were the first ones to agree to introduce the financing system. Romania is therefore doing quite well, because e.g. in Estonia where there is a populous Russian minority the multiplier was increased to 1,3 and that caused uproar among the Estonians. In Romania both Romanians and Hungarians have accepted that the multiplier is two. But then the situation is that there is the law and there is its application. The problem at the University of Babes-Bolyai is that though the multiplier has been agreed upon, the inside distribution of the money is uncontrollable and the Hungarians have no say in it. When the debate was about independent universities and faculties, there was basically an economic aspect in the background even if it was not openly expressed; those within the system are well aware of it. If there is the legal framework, an educational institution, especially a higher educational one, complies to the legal framework. In this sense the expansion of higher education in Hungarian was possible because it was in the interest of the institution, the University Babes-Bolyai, to introduce as many subjects in non-Romanian language of instruction as possible since it brought in more money. Distribution is decided upon internally. The case of the University Sapientia is important from the point of view of the question of language and financing that has not yet been properly discussed; it is in the Romanian state's interest that Sapientia should function, function well and has as many students as possible. The support of the institution does not come from the Romanian state but from the Hungarian budget. Usually it is not openly discussed that about 40% of the sum arriving to Sapientia from Hungary for upkeep and wage costs is spent on taxes. It is 1,5 or 2 billion HUF and it is very convenient for Romania to receive say 500 million HUF without having to do anything for it simply allowing the University Sapientia functioning in Hungarian. Thus it is the interest of the Romanian state the system to remain. Albeit the sum is not considerable compared to the budget of a state still is sufficient to finance some other small Romanian universities.

Of course actual politics decides how much capital the majority state invests in the instruction of minorities in their mother tongue. If there is a government in power that is less tolerant toward educa-



tion in minority languages it can try to infringe the financial conditions.

7. What is your opinion, does education in the minority language help or hinder the learning of the majority language?

It is a Transylvanian question. In itself education in the minority language does not hinder the learning of the majority language. I want to stress that the learning of the majority language does not depend on schools. There could be a very good Romanian language teacher e.g. in Szeklerland, but if the pupil goes to town and does not use the language than the majority language cannot be mastered. I know from my own example that while I lived in Szeklerland I could more or less speak Romanian sufficiently till I finished school; after all I was being taught for several years. But I learned the language properly when I lived in Romanian surroundings, e.g. in the army and at Romanian universities. That I was not able to learn the language during my school years was not the fault of the school but my surroundings, I did not use it. Admittedly I did not have good Romanian teachers, but had they been good I am still not certain I would have known the language better.

8. When we are talking about language education in the minority mother tongue how effective are moral arguments in persuading the majority?

I believe moral arguments are not enough and it is useful to produce a system of arguments that suggests the strengthening of the other's interests or is built upon it. It can help the matter if the whole problem could be presented in a way showing that it is financially advantageous or beneficial for special reasons. Moral arguments frequently turn into emotional ones and it is not always effective. It is true for every argument that it helps if there are several points made and the party to be persuaded is made interested.

9. Has the attitude toward language teaching in the minority mother tongue changed in the past decades?

If it has changed in Europe, I cannot judge it unfortunately, I do not know anything about it. In the Carpathian Basin or in the neighbouring countries it has changed because the legal conditions facilitated the changes. The states have financial interest in it for two reasons. One is that it is not good to produce masses of unemployed speaking minority languages; the other is that the new financing system makes it profitable for the state too if there is education in the minority language. In the neighbouring countries there have been changes but I cannot say whether it has happened in Spain too. It is a fact that the Catalonians received increasing autonomy in the past fifteen years. The education in the mother tongue could have expanded too, but it is an ambiguous situation because the question is how far it is education in the minority mother tongue in a region where Catalanian is the majority language. Parallel to all that there are other linguistic fault lines too. Within Belgium the Flemish - Wallonian and a small area with German minority; this again is different because it is not certain which is the majority language. The country is tri-lingual, or there is multi-lingual Switzerland. What I personally know about or have researched from various points of view is that the development has been widening in the case of Hungarian minorities. It is statistically demonstrable that in spite of decreasing trends in demography the proportions of schooling are increasing in the case of the Hungarians living beyond the borders. At the beginning of the 1990s not quite the half of the Hungarian nationals were instructed in Hungarian at secondary schools. In 2002-2003 it was already about 75% thus there is development in this respect made of course possible by the legal framework assured by the majority.

10. How profitable is linguistic variety for the business life in our days?

I believe it is positive. The way I interpret linguistic variety is that there should be a lingua franca, say, English and further it is preferable to have multi-language markets. There are suggestions e.g. to teach the majority speakers minority languages and that is possible

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on business level; e.g. to teach business Hungarian to Romanians. If we consider international markets, English is unavoidable, but parallel knowledge of other languages means the more languages one knows the more business one can participate in. It is true within the Hungarian language too, Miklós Kontra would be able to elaborate on it. I usually say that I know various Hungarian languages the Szekler, that of Kolozsvár, or the Upland, etc. Intercultural understanding within the same language could be important too. If someone goes on research to Voivodina and does not know the meaning of 'község' could be in difficulty. It is different from that of in Hungary or in Romania, where it means a 'small town' in Voivodina it has the meaning of 'district' [Cf. the different meanings of "township" in England, Canada, Australia, and South Afrika. V.K.]. Such local differences must be kept in mind if we want to step outside of our world. But from the point of view of minority and business it is of great importance. Recently there was a survey about the Romanian cultural and economic elite. Again it turned out that the Romanian economic elite was better in competence than the cultural one.

