

## First Minority Forum (15-16 December 2008)

### **Statement by Dr. István Lakatos, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights Republic of Hungary**

#### **Agenda Item IV -Equal Access to Quality Education for Minorities**

Madam Chair of the Forum, Madam High Commissioner, Madam Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Distinguished Delegates, honourable colleagues, dear friends,

We have already mentioned many important elements concerning the core principles and essential requirements for an effective educational strategy. Allow me to say now a few words with regard to the main ideas of the draft recommendations. .

The Hungarian Constitution declares that „The Republic of Hungary shall provide the protection of national and ethnic minorities, their collective participation in public affairs, the fostering of their cultures, the use of their native languages, the education in their native languages and the use of names in their native languages.”

Minority education – as part of the Hungarian public education system – is expected not only to supply all services that are generally provided by public education as a whole, but also to provide the added value of a stable identity. The task is not simply to offer services in the native language but also to create the conditions for passing on the understanding of the culture and the history of minority groups, a heritage of real value for the majority population as well.

In many minority families, the process of passing on language and the related specific culture has broken and Hungarian has become dominant in everyday communication. As language is arguably the most important tool to preserve in its genuine form the complexity of a community culture, the loss of the mother tongue often engenders a process of dramatic cultural fading away. With fast social changes in an increasingly globalized world the family is gradually losing its primary role in this cultural process, which makes the **role and responsibility of the school** in the transmission of the native language ever more important.

Tailored to the special needs of a given community the Hungarian legal system provides for **five forms of minority education**: supplementary minority education, the language teaching form, a special system for the Roma minority, the bilingual education and the comprehensive instruction in the mother tongue.

The **supplementary minority education is regulated by The Public Education Act**. This new educational form, aiming at supporting **dispersed minority communities** with low numbers, ensures that they are given the opportunity to organise their own minority education within the framework of the Hungarian public education system, respecting the same quality standards as other forms of minority education would guarantee. Supplementary minority education only covers the instruction of a specific minority language and culture, thus students carry out their mandatory education in other institutions of public education. Contrary to Sunday schools, a significant advantage is that a **certificate** can be issued, and the acquired credits may be taken into account not only at general education and secondary school final examinations, but also in the case of continuing studies in higher education. **The law ensures that at the initiative of a national minority self-government, supplementary minority education shall be organised** without restriction to the number of

students. National minority self-governments are not only mandated to initiate the organisation of supplementary minority education, they **may also establish** an institution for this purpose. The **Bulgarian, Greek and Polish** national minority self-governments have already seized this opportunity and they have set up their own supplementary minority educational institutions in 2004.

These broad educational rights are integral part of a generous **cultural autonomy provided by the Hungarian state to its minorities**. The Minority Act sets up the framework for taking over, establishing and maintaining institutions of public education by minority self-governments. The details of the transfer of the institution and its terms are set forth in the public education agreements concluded by the Minister for Education and the concerned local municipalities. A further guarantee for the sustainable operation of public education institutions handed over to minority self-governments is that the latter can request contributions, subsidies and supplementary appropriations under the same conditions as local municipalities. Furthermore, the minority self-government is entitled to supplementary assistance after each pupil under the Budget Act.

In Hungary the **central budget provides supplementary funding** for the additional tasks of minority education. The extent of the subsidy varies, depending on the form of minority education; **the largest amount of subsidy is provided to mother tongue and bilingual education**. To treat special problems of minority institutions like low number of students and scarce local resources, the government has introduced the so called “small settlement norm”, making possible in addition to the support of mother tongue/bilingual minority schools the acquisition of minority textbooks, professional services, and the renovation of schools as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Besides adequate funding, the other essential element for high quality standards in minority education is the **continuous training of minority teachers**.

Hungary **provides** comprehensive training from minority kindergarten teachers, to elementary school and secondary school teachers at the existing minority teacher training centres. In order to address increasing demand for **bilingual education**, we make every effort to train our future educators both in the mother tongue and in the majority language in every subject. In this context **bilateral agreements** with interested international partners are of crucial importance. In the framework of bilateral agreements, as well as via **open tender**, the Ministry supports minority children to spend a given time in a mother tongue environment and further expands the guest teachers’ programmes, which have also a significant role in assuring high quality mother tongue education for minority students.

Thank you for your attention.