

## Oral statement

### By the Mikó Imre Association for the Protection of Minority Rights For the Twelfth Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

The education in and the teaching of minority languages has become a staple of minority rights advocacy, and rightly so, as more and more scientific studies have shown the wide benefits of ensuring access to education in the mother tongue. Moreover, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, all children, including children attending a school where the language of education is a minority language, should be ensured equal access not simply to education, but to **quality education**, preferably **high-quality education**.

Children in Romania belonging to a national minority generally have access to minority language education, depending on their number and the size of their local communities. For example, Hungarian children studying in their mother tongue make up around 5% of the total number of pupils in the country. Regarding access to quality education, however, there is still considerable room for improvement.

For instance, a recent study looking at the results of the national tests for 8<sup>th</sup> graders found that the success rate for pupils attending a Hungarian school was much lower than the national average, the main reason for their low scores being poor test results in Romanian language and literature. Of course many factors may contribute to low test results among these pupils, but experts agree that the inadequate teaching of the state language is certainly one of them, arguably the most important one. And this is one area where a lot can be done to improve the situation.

In recent years, there has been a slow, but progressive adaptation of the national methodology for teaching Romanian to minorities. The aim is for these children to study Romanian as a second language, instead of studying it according to the same methodology as children whose mother tongue is Romanian. However, there are still a number of problems when it comes to implementing the new methodology. Firstly, this modified curriculum only applies until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and even there the new Romanian textbooks have not yet arrived in schools. Moreover, teachers that we have surveyed agree overall that content focused on theoretical grammar and difficult literary texts should be further reduced, and significantly more practical exercises should be included into these new Romanian textbooks, exercises that focus primarily on useful language and develop the

communication skills of minority pupils in the state language.

The office of the ombudsman has recently weighed in on the issue, calling on the Ministry of Education to ensure the teaching of the state language according to the modified curriculum and textbooks as soon as possible in the schools where the language of education is a minority language. The National Council for Combatting Discrimination also fined the Ministry of Education for the fact that the new Romanian textbooks for Hungarian pupils have consistently arrived late in the past few years, with children being without proper educational materials for months.

To conclude, the issue of education in the case of minority children is not automatically solved by ensuring a minority language education system. Ensuring quality in education is also key. As pointed out in the Recommendations of the European Regional Forum, children and parents should not be forced to choose between quality education or perpetuating their own linguistic and cultural identity.