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## **National and European language policies – case study Hungary**

### **Abstract**

Az Európai Unióhoz való csatlakozás óhatatlan változásokat eredményez a tagállamok nyelvpolitikájában is. Bár az Európai Uniónak nincs kodifikált nyelvpolitikája, a hivatalos nyelvek egyenrangúsága, valamint a nyelvi sokszínűség jegyében indított programok hatással vannak a tagállamok nyelveire, nyelvi közösségeire és nyelvpolitikájára is.

A tanulmány célja, hogy négy területen – a státusz- és korpusztervezés, a kisebbségek és a migránsok oktatása, valamint a nyelvvoktatás terén – rövid áttekintést adjon a magyar szabályozásról és kezdeményezésekről. Megvizsgálja, hogy az európai uniós nyelvpolitika mennyiben járul hozzá e területek fejlesztéséhez, illetve milyen kihívásokat eredményez. Először az uniós státusz- és korpusztervezésről lesz szó. Rámutatunk, hogy míg a nyelvek uniós státuszának meghatározásában a tagállami döntés a meghatározó, addig a korpusztervezésben korlátozott a tagállami részvétel, hisz a dokumentumok fordítása és a terminológia alkotása az uniós intézményekbe helyeződött. A tanulmány második része a kisebbségek és a migránsok oktatásával foglalkozik. Bemutatjuk a magyar kisebbségi oktatás különböző formáit, különös tekintettel a kiegészítő kisebbségi oktatásra. Ezt követi a migráns közösségek oktatásának és feltételeinek ismertetése. Végül rövid áttekintést adunk a magyar nyelvvoktatás általános jellemzőiről, különös tekintettel a Világ – Nyelv programra és a jövőbeni változásokra. Összességében ez utóbbi területek szabályozása tagállami hatáskör, de az Unió kiegészítő, támogató tevékenységei hozzájárulnak a folyamatos fejlesztéshez. A teljesség igénye nélkül megemlítjük a fontosabb, európai szintű stratégiai dokumentumokat is, amelyek ösztönzőleg hatnak a tagállami szintű stratégiák kidolgozására.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the interaction of European and national language policy measures by identifying both stimulating and challenging effects. Firstly, a general insight will be given into a language policy at EU level. A special focus is laid on status and corpus planning by analysing the status of Hungarian as an EU official language and the limits of national involvement in corpus planning. Secondly, the main characteristics and the education of minority as well as migrant communities will be presented. Finally, turning to language teaching and learning, it will be shown how European and national actions contribute to the development of language skills. Since a thorough analysis of every aspect would exceed the limits of this work, the aim is primarily to give an overview of both EU and national level actions.

### **1. Language policy at European Union level**

To start with, it is important to emphasise that the European Union is something of a mixture of an intergovernmental and a supranational organisation. Competences are divided between the EU institutions and Member States depending on various communication levels. At institutional level – in communication within the EU institutions and with European citizens – the EU has competence to regulate language use by giving official status to a number of languages. To the contrary, it has no legislative competence to define what languages to be spoken or be learnt by European citizens since education is not a harmonised policy. In this field the EU may complement Member States' actions by providing programs, financial support or issuing recommendations.

We must also bear in mind that language policy is not a codified area in EU-legislation. Deliberate language actions, however, may well be considered as a policy area, based on the principle of equality and the promotion of diversity. The principle of equality refers to the official and working languages laid down in the very first regulation of the Council in 1958<sup>1</sup> and then modified after each accession. It is important to note that the unprecedented number and equality of official languages is not only a consequence of political prestige but also a democratic necessity due to the peculiar judicial system of the Union. Since EU-law may have direct effect in national legislations (creating rights and duties for individuals), it is a democratic requirement to make documents available in the language(s) of the individual's state. However, behind *de jure* equality there is also a *de facto* inequality at European level.

Firstly, at institutional level only a limited number of languages are used for internal communication and document drafting, as it will be shown later on. Secondly, the European language situation is also characterised by a *de facto* inequality since EU-official status is exclusively given to languages which are recognised at national level as well. As decisions on the number of official languages are made unanimously in the Council, every country having a veto right, there is no way at EU level to override prevailing national language policies. In order to counterbalance the *de facto* inequality of languages, the EU committed itself to the promotion of linguistic diversity, the protection of minority and lesser used languages. The directions of this policy are set out in the European Commission's very first communication<sup>2</sup> on a new framework strategy to promote multilingualism. A general impact of these strategy documents is twofold. On the one hand, they give ideas and recommendations on further actions which can be integrated into strategies at national level. On the other hand, since Member States are invited to report on implementation, it gives the opportunity to investigate and update national language policies in a European perspective.

## **2. Hungarian as an EU official language – status and corpus planning at EU-level**

As pointed out earlier, status planning is carried out by the Council of the European Union. As long as the Council decides unanimously on the number of official languages, there seems to be no fear for any language – including Hungarian – to lose its EU official status. It is, however, important to note that no distinction was made between official *and* working languages, and the decision on what languages to use in internal communication is left to the institutions. As a result, all languages are theoretically equal (being both official *and* working), but practically there is a limited number of working languages (mainly English, French and German) for internal us-

<sup>1</sup> EEC Council Regulation 1958 No. 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community.

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *A new framework strategy on multilingualism*. COM (2005) 596.

age. This can, of course, be justified by the need for effective communication which would be impossible in so many languages. There is, however, another aspect which is worth having a closer look at, namely, the impact on corpus planning.

At national level, corpus planning is usually carried out by academies, language institutes or other public bodies. In Hungary, the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, member of EFNIL, carries out several research projects in Hungarian and Uralic linguistics (including the compilation and production of a comprehensive dictionary of the Hungarian language), on language technology and on the different variants of Hungarian in and outside Hungary, as well as minority languages in Hungary. Tasks also include counselling services on language and linguistics and issues of language policy related to European integration. However, involvement in corpus planning at EU-level is rather limited.

In an EU-context, peculiarity is given by the fact that corpus planning is carried out by the EU-institutions, that is, not at national level (Fischer 2008). While before accession the *acquis communautaire* was translated by national bodies, after accession terminology and translation activities were moved to the EU institutions. In order to create a clear, transparent language, the EU institutions lay great emphasis on the quality of translations and on harmonising terminology<sup>3</sup>. This gains relevance in view of a specific EU-language and terminology developed in the institutions.

For smaller languages, such as Hungarian, it is all the more relevant since this specific EU language is created through translation. Theoretically, documents are drafted in all official languages, but practically only a limited number of languages serve as a source language. As a result, conceptual thinking is carried out in these dominant languages, not in the national ones. While for most subject fields terminology and special language is created by experts, linguists *and* translators, in the EU-domain translators are the main carriers of this process. Not being involved in national processes and having limited chance to contact experts or linguists, their choices in translation are often affected by the source languages. This may, in turn, influence the legibility of texts and render special communication in the EU-domain more difficult. Realising the effects translations may have on the comprehensibility of texts in the national language, research projects have been launched in some countries, for example in Finland (Piehl/Vihonen (ed.) 2006) to analyse the influence of EU-texts and legislation.

It is also important to emphasize that the thousands of pages produced every year by translation may be considered a linguistic treasure as well. In light of the growing dominance of English and concerns about domain loss, it is of outstanding importance that in the EU-domain there is a constant legal obligation to ensure the “EU-function” of every official language. This, along the observations above, makes further research and enhanced cooperation at national level all the more important.

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<sup>3</sup> See the Interactive Terminology for Europe (IATE) database at <http://iate.europa.eu>.

### 3. Education of minorities in Hungary

As pointed out earlier, the competence of the EU in the field of minority protection is limited. To counterbalance this fact, the EU provides financial support through its programmes, produces European-wide comparative studies such as the Euromosaic reports and organises international conferences in minority topics. In this field the actions of the Council of Europe also have to be taken into account.

In Hungary thirteen national and ethnic minorities are recognised as constituent components of the state according to the Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (Minority Act).<sup>4</sup> These are the Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, and Slovenian and Ukrainian minorities. According to researchers' and minority organisations' estimates, today, the minorities make up some 10% of the population. Protection and basic institutional rights are ensured by a legal, institutional and financial framework: the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, the Public Education Act, the prevailing Budget Act, the Act on local municipalities and the Minority Act. In 1995 Hungary ratified both the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. Under the Charter it made commitments to six minority languages.

Minorities are characterised by geographical dispersion and in most minority families Hungarian language has become dominant. The process of passing on the language has either broken down or the different dialects still spoken by the minorities are in general archaic linguistic variations. As a result, schools have an outstanding importance for the minorities living in Hungary. Minority education forms part of the Hungarian public education system providing all the services in public education. Moreover, the task is not simply to offer these services in the native language, but it is also necessary to create the conditions for studying the native language and passing on the understanding of the culture and history of the people.

There are five different forms of minority education,<sup>5</sup> i.e. mother tongue education, where all subjects except Hungarian language and literature are taught in the language of the given minority, bilingual minority education, where minimum three subjects are taught in the language of the given minority in minimum 50% of compulsory school time, language teaching minority education and Roma minority education. There is a special form of minority education, the so called supplementary minority education. Here, the teaching of a minority language is organised in case the number of pupils wanting to learn it does not reach the required number (8 pupils) in one school. This form of education is of crucial importance for minorities which are geographically dispersed or small since it is difficult to provide education in minority languages within one school, especially at secondary level. A great advantage of this form of education to "Sunday schools" is that it is part of the formal education system.

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<sup>4</sup> This section of the paper was based on the document *National and ethnic minorities in Hungary. Office of the Prime Minister. Department for National and Ethnic Minorities. July, 2007.* Along with other documents on minority policy in Hungary the document is available at [www.nemzetpolitika.gov.hu/index.php?main\\_category=4&lang=en](http://www.nemzetpolitika.gov.hu/index.php?main_category=4&lang=en).

<sup>5</sup> Decree 32/1997 on the guidelines for school education of national and ethnic minorities.

#### 4. Education of migrant communities in Hungary

Over the last decade a series of measures have been taken to provide migrant children of school age full access to public education based on equal conditions. The education of children of non-Hungarian citizenship became relevant after the change of regime when, due to political changes, the number of these children increased. In addition, Hungary's accession to the European Union made the alignment of regulations with Community principles and directives on the education of migrant children necessary and urged the Hungarian government to react.

As a result, the Act on Public Education guarantees equal conditions on a legal basis making migrant pupils legally entitled to participate in public education under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens. In order to further promote harmonious social and cultural integration and in line with the Community directive on the education of children of migrant workers (77/486/EEC), the minister of education issued a pedagogical programme<sup>6</sup> for the intercultural education of migrant children in 2004. Schools which organise the education of their non-Hungarian speaking pupils based on this pedagogical programme may be given additional financial support. Within the framework of the program the Hungarian language shall be learnt as a foreign language. Hungarian students shall learn of the culture and native language of migrant pupils jointly with them during compulsory classes. It is important to note that schools offering bilingual and minority education may serve the same intercultural pedagogical objectives. In this case the migrant child may be educated in his/her mother tongue if it is one of the languages of instruction in the school. In 2004 the Hungarian-Chinese bilingual school was opened as part of the Hungarian education system. The school has a multilingual character receiving not only Hungarian and Chinese but other nationalities as well.

In the 2007-2008 Academic Year the total number of migrant children attending Hungarian public educational institutions was nearly 11,000.<sup>7</sup> However, the intercultural program serves as a basis for counteracting the education impact of an expected increase in migration in the future. Similarly to the first National Development Plan, the second Plan (2007-2013) also lays special emphasis on long term developments in migrant education, such as the training of teachers teaching Hungarian as a foreign language and developing teaching materials. In addition, since 2003 a multilingual home page with many useful facts and information for both pupils and parents of foreign nationality has been available on the Ministry of Education's Internet portal.<sup>8</sup> At European level a comprehensive overview is given on the situation of the education of migrant children by Eurydice, the information network of the European Union.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Communication of the Minister of Education regarding the introduction of the guidelines on intercultural education of kindergarten and school level education of migrant children and students. 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Közoktatási Statisztikai Kiadvány 2007, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008 ([www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=1488&articleID=231185&ctag=articlelist&iid=1](http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=1488&articleID=231185&ctag=articlelist&iid=1)).

<sup>8</sup> [www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=66](http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=66).

<sup>9</sup> Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe. Eurydice. 2004. [www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org).

## 5. Language learning and teaching in Hungary

As pointed out earlier, the EU has no legislative competence to interfere in national educational policies. Its actions are complementary, providing financial support for language projects (such as the Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013), commissioning studies,<sup>10</sup> researches and organising conferences. Preceding the Framework strategy, the Commission also adopted an Action Plan 2004-2006 on the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity including additional actions. Apart from directly promoting the development of language skills, these actions contribute to exchanging ideas and comparing practices on a European platform. Similarly to the Framework Strategy, Member States were invited to report on the implementation of the Action Plan as well.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of foreign language competence had long been recognised in Hungary and was further underlined by the accession to the European Union. Obligatory language learning starts in grade 4 but generally one-third of pupils already starts in grades 1-3. At primary level one language, at secondary level two languages are obligatory and bilingual education (CLIL) has had a long tradition in Hungary. There is also a free choice on languages at schools, i.e. there is no mandatory language to be taught. However, a recent modification of the Act on Public education ensures the learning of English as a *basic right* from 2010/2011 at secondary level. By making English not a mandatory language but a basic right, the Act tries to balance the growing demand for English on the one hand and the provision of linguistic diversity on the other.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education launched a comprehensive strategy, the so called World-Language Programme with the aim to significantly raise the level of foreign language competence in Hungary. Within the framework of this programme the possibility of starting a Year of Intensive Language Learning (YILL) in grade 9 was introduced from 2004, where a minimum of 40 percent of the total curriculum time is to be allocated for foreign language study. In line with the recommendation of the European Council in 2002 on teaching at least two foreign languages, two foreign languages are recommended in YILL. In 2006/2007 more than one third of schools provided YILL for students. Similarly to English, participating in YILL is planned to be a basic right for students from 2010/2011 at secondary level. The Programme also offered schools the opportunity to apply for extra funding of projects. The projects aimed at setting up resource centres, developing pilot teaching projects for early language teaching and special needs, introducing teaching programmes for lesser taught languages, curriculum development for teaching university subjects in a foreign language, the organisation of conferences, in-service teacher training, ICT in language learning, as well as content and language integrated learning. The principles of the Programme were constantly brought in line both with the recommendations of the EU and the Council of Europe. In Hungary the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages developed by the Council of Europe is widely used as an assessment tool.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/key/studies\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/key/studies_en.html).

<sup>11</sup> The national reports can be found at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/policy/report\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/policy/report_en.html).

For the coming years an important task at EU level is the development of a European indicator on language competence<sup>12</sup> on the recommendation of the European Council. In the first round of the survey the first and second most taught official languages of the EU (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian) will be tested, with the possibility to include further languages at national level. Skills will be measured in the final year of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), or the second year of upper secondary education (ISCED 3), if a second foreign language is not taught. The need for an indicator arose from the fact that apart from public opinion surveys and data on national regulations there are no comparable data at present on the actual level of European citizens' language skills.

## **6. Summary**

European language policy may influence the language situation in a country since measures – be it legislative or complementary – have a direct or indirect effect on national language policies. In the first part of the paper the extent of national involvement was analysed in corpus and status planning at EU level. It was pointed out that status planning is carried out by the Council unanimously, ensuring the status of Hungarian as an EU official language. In corpus planning national involvement is rather limited since translation and terminology development is carried out in the EU institutions. The institutions play great emphasis on the quality of translations. It was, however, concluded, that due to the impact translations may have on the quality of special communication in the EU-domain, an enhanced national coordination would be needed. In the following parts of the paper, aspects of foreign language teaching and learning were analysed by presenting Hungary's foreign language teaching strategy, the so called World-Language Programme as well as the main features of the education of minorities and migrants. In line with European recommendations both the World-Language Programme and other actions at national level aim at promoting the teaching and learning of at least two languages from an early age. In minority policy the aim is to provide a minority-friendly environment by law so that national and ethnic minorities can preserve and pass on their cultural identity. Various needs are ensured by five different forms of education. Since Hungarian has become the dominant language, schools play a huge role in ensuring the studying of the native language as well. In line with EU directives the necessary conditions were laid down for the education of migrant children within the framework of an intercultural pedagogical programme. Finally, it was shown that although EU actions may only be complementary in these fields, they provide both financial support and a platform to exchange views and compare experiences among Member States.

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<sup>12</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council. Framework for the European survey on language competences. COM(2007) 184. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/com184\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/com184_en.pdf).

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