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## **Social and political aspects of education reforms in Hungary**

## **Spoleczne i polityczne aspekty reform edukacji na Węgrzech**

### **Statement of basic materials**

Education reforms in Hungary were initiated in the 1990s' after the establishment of parliamentary democracy leading to the restructuring and reforming of the entire branch of the government. The second trigger was the country's accession to the EU as a full member in May 2004, which marked a new era of political, social, economic and education innovations.

In brief, the single-party regime and the planned economy were replaced by multi-party democracy and the market economy, and these circumstances had a considerable impact on the education sector. The Law on Local Governance

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adopted in 1990 introduced significant changes in the state administration and education, shifting the responsibility to public administrations and stipulating a wide range of their duties. Currently, public authorities share responsibility for public education, and decision-making remains within decentralized competences.

The Bologna Process played a significant role in reforms aiming at the implementation of the European structure of the higher education organization, with an emphasis on quality and employers' demands. It resulted in changes in the curriculum and induced the search for new educational models (first, the two-level and, subsequently, the three-level), as well as the degree accreditation. Higher education programs (ISCED 5A, 5B) are offered by public or private universities (*egyetem*) and colleges (*főiskola*) (non-university higher education institutions).

The three-level structure of the Bologna system includes bachelor's programs lasting 6–8 semesters (ISCED 5A, 180–240 ECTS credits). Their completion entitles a student to follow master's programs (ISCED 5A, 60–120 ECTS credits), requiring another 2–4 semesters. The third cycle is doctoral studies (ISCED 6). However, there are also indivisible long programs (10–12 semesters, 300–360 ECTS credits, ISCED 5A) in some disciplines, such as medicine or law (Commission of The European Communities, 2000).

The legal framework for the Bologna Process stabilization is specified in the Law on Higher Education adopted by Hungary in 2005 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014). The government policy and the policy of the Ministry of Education are centered on these issues. The interpretation of teachers' competences is not standardized, but the Member States have made considerable efforts to synchronize their national specifications with the expectations of the European Union.

The policy of the Ministry of Education (European Commission, 2004) defines nine competences that should be achieved by a teacher during the professional training process. These competences are as follows: to develop students' individual skills; to create an environment for students' group work; to plan teaching and learning processes taking into account students' individual achievements; to develop students' skills and abilities based on social experience and professional interests; to develop competences that enable students to learn throughout life; to organize the learning process taking into account the principles of learning; to use a wide range of evaluation techniques;

to be sociable and be able to create conditions for effective communication with students; to be a self-conscious, independent, and creative participant in educational interaction; and to constantly evaluate individual professional development.

Another important document aiming at improving the education policy, “Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States”, was adopted in 2007 (Bábosik, 2007). This document included the competences that a teacher should acquire during a professional training, when attending advanced training courses: to develop the general competence according to the key competences specified in recommendations; to create and maintain a safe learning environment based on mutual respect and cooperation; to carry out effective training in mixed classes; to cooperate with colleagues, parents and public organizations; to participate in the development of grants related to the activities of private schools and other models of educational institutions; to enrich knowledge and develop an innovative attitude to reflective activities; to use information and communication technology; and to become independent partners for students in terms of professional development throughout life. The development of these competences is followed by the self-reflection and teamwork, adaptation to multicultural audiences, and the practical evaluation of leadership roles (European Union, 2007).

Hungarian educators’ experience showed their lack of readiness for educational changes taking place in the country and related to the transition from the traditional models of learning based on knowledge and ways of thinking to the innovative ones (Kerber, 2006).

The introduction of educational reforms was aimed at changing stereotypes established in educational environment and teachers’ adaptation to education and information processes, their familiarization with core competences, and motivation for choosing innovative forms of interaction (for instance, to act as a consultant, mentor, a facilitator, or a coach) (Medgyesi, 2006). Scientists emphasize that it is the interactive types of educational interaction that will become increasingly important in the educational space at all levels.

Modern challenges complicate teachers’ professional responsibilities, and their adaptation to the modern requirements of schools and higher education institutions. Most teachers need both psychological and methodological support, an assistance in organizing the educational process, as well as

a didactic guidance in their work with students who have special educational needs, demonstrate deviant behavior, or have problems with adapting to the information and communication space (Medgyesi, 2006), (Nahalka, 2002).

The transformation of education is accompanied by a number of problems that need to be addressed: the content of highly qualified teachers / educators' training; high-quality education based on the acquisition of competences; decreasing prestige of the teaching profession; emergence of new specialties; inconsistency of the training content with digital requirements; unpreparedness of most teachers and students for digitalized educational interaction, and many others.

In the Hungarian educational system, it is emphasized that teachers should take on a new professional role in a short time, and be able to quickly reorient themselves to new activities that are completely different from traditional ones; The "PISA 2000" study points out weak points in Hungarian students' education related to education modernization (Radácsi, 2004).

The result-oriented approach, both in the school environment and in the society, can contribute to teachers' ambivalence, as they are expected to develop their competences while they are assessed on the basis of results they achieve. Hungarian teachers treat the development of their competences as tasks that are closely related to their teaching practice (dual education and retraining).

Hungary is actively implementing the EU educational standards. Teachers are intensively searching for forms and methods of work that are focused on satisfying students' educational needs. This approach is characterized by support, empathy and assistance in overcoming problems with the development and formation of students' personality (Szekszárdi, 2006).

Teachers who were previously considered "pivotal" to the current education policy, were not properly prepared for the challenges they faced. Therefore, the leading trends in Hungary's education system are related to the idea of creating conditions for individual development, self-realization and self-perfection.

Considering this requirement, researchers studying the problems of pedagogical innovations try to correlate new developments in pedagogy with the useful, progressive, positive, modern, and advanced aspects. Not only ideas, approaches, methods, and technologies that have not yet been used in such combinations are new in pedagogy, but also a set of elements or the individual elements of the pedagogical process that are based on a progressive principle allowing for carrying out educational tasks effectively in changing

conditions and circumstances. It is proven that for the socialization of young people, the today's society requires not only knowledge but also practice-oriented information in those areas that optimize their development.

Today's young people live in the virtual world and receive information through the use of digital technologies that expand their knowledge in those areas that are of interest to them. Modern teachers should constantly improve their skills, be aware of scientific discoveries, carry out research, and be able to create favorable environment for students' activities. But not every teacher is able to independently carry out their professional self-development, analyze their activities, realize potential opportunities, and identify them with the use of information technology.

Adult education plays an important role and includes part-time general education programs at all levels, taking into account ISCED developed by UNESCO. It offers a wide range of non-formal courses delivered by the public and private sectors. Teachers are free to choose a program and teaching methods. Every five years their work is evaluated by external state experts. This way, teachers are stimulated to learn throughout life, maintain their professional level by creating all necessary conditions (training at off-work time and financial support – 70% of tuition fees are paid by educational institutions and only 30% are covered by teachers themselves).

Once every seven years, teachers go through certification which includes four credits of 30 hours. To obtain the second category, which is the highest in the system of postgraduate education in the country, teachers manifesting creativity, having at least three years of teaching experience, and passionate about the profession and students have to take a two-year training course at relevant institutions at off-work time, and are required to pass a professional exam. This category opens up opportunities for a higher salary, career development, and new promising proposals.

Teachers able to confirm the acquired knowledge and defend the final qualification thesis, obtain the highest category and receive a respectable salary and a contribution to a future pension.

It is worth noting that the responsibility for adult education rests with the Ministry of National Economy, whereas local authorities, the local self-government bodies of minorities and legal entities (foundations, churches, etc.) are responsible for activities and operation of schools and preschool institutions. Natural entities are subordinate to the Ministry of Human

Resources responsible for solving problems in education and culture, social issues, health care, sports, etc.

About 90% of students attend public sector institutions. It is considered to be a significant achievement of the Hungarian government ensuring free access to education for everyone.

The success of Hungarian education reforms is evidenced by the government's concern for national and ethnic minorities densely inhabiting this area. After the adoption of the Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, the government emphasized the interest in preserving the native language and cultural traditions. The law defines minorities from 13 states residing in Hungary. The largest ethnic minorities are Roma, Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Slovenes, Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians, Russians, and Armenians. Furthermore, the opening of borders has led to an increase in the number of foreign immigrants. However, their total number does not present a significant imbalance in relation to the integration of the Roma community. In the country, there is a growing number of school-aged Roma children, whose cultural roots are different from Hungarian traditions. Especially in recent years, the number of the Roma minority has increased to more than 500,000 people. The Hungarian teaching community was not ready for an increase in the number of Roma students to meet their educational development needs, starting at preschool, up to higher education.

The aim of the Hungarian education policy is to organize education in keeping with integrated teaching principles, to foster tolerance and the acceptance of Roma by the members of society.

The organization of tolerant education is a key goal of the Hungarian educational and parliamentary-democratic policy. The assistance provided to minorities living abroad confirms that the Roma are treated as citizens of the country with full rights.

Since 2013, state educational institutions have been subordinate to the local authorities (except for kindergartens), and a special center has been set up to serve them. The local authorities allocate funds from the central budget to finance kindergartens. The European Economic Commission (EEC) of the UN deals with issues concerning laws and all regulations.

The minority government has a right to establish schools and to deliver training in their native language.

Similarly, the Hungarian government also pursues an effective policy in Ukraine, especially in Transcarpathian where the Hungarian and Roma minorities compactly live (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014). There are more than 668 secondary schools in the region, 118 of which provide bilingual education in minority languages. In addition, there is a higher education institution – Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education. There are currently 20,853 students studying at educational establishments (68 public and 5 private schools). The Hungarian minority in Ukraine, according to the 2001 census, numbers approximately 156.6 thousand people (0.3% of the population of Ukraine and 12% of the population of the Transcarpathian region). Relatively small groups and individual Hungarian and mixed Hungarian-non-Hungarian families live in other regions of Ukraine, without creating separate enclaves, and uniting in communities on national grounds only in some cases.

Thus, a teacher creates the environment for the holistic and harmonious development of personality, lays the foundations of civic consciousness, activity and responsibility. The policy pursued by the government plays a special role in educational transformations, in terms of boosting education, responsibility, initiative, discipline, independence, insistence on high standards, and an uncompromising and principled stand understood as updating a critical approach to solving problems, advocating a clear civic position, and improving effective communication skills. The level of education of each member of the society, especially of teachers, is assessed according to these indicators in everyday life. Modern teachers face a number of modernized requirements: readiness for changes due to the social and informational transformation; mobility in personal and professional activities, systemic and critical thinking; understanding the connections and interdependencies generated by social reforms; professionalism, responsibility, creative nature of practical activities; lifelong learning, readiness to adequately respond to social and integration transformations, and to demonstrate tolerance in cross-cultural interaction.

Promising directions for further research emerge from the introduction of innovative models and digitalization into educational institutions, and the formation of a professionally re-established position of a teacher as a bearer of educational and social values.

**Abstract:** The article concentrates on the issue of Hungarian education reforms brought about by radical political changes, in particular, the country's admittance to the

European Union. The paper outlines priorities in educational process transformation, as well as risks emerging in the system of teacher education and lifelong learning. The challenges associated with our times transform the teacher's consciousness, shifting focus to the mandatory use of information technology, the activation of students' information mobility, and the detailed analysis of employers' requirements. The study reveals the Hungarian government's key activities in relation to the socialization of the Roma minority and other national minorities compactly residing in Ukraine. The research illustrated educational resources used to train teachers at educational institutions to instill tolerance and mutual respect. The 2020s' are marked by powerful globalization and political factors penetrating all spheres of social life. The dynamic formation of the civilized information society is accompanied by a number of contradictions and conflicts, the strengthening of social ties, and changing living conditions (Réti, 2009), (Vágó and Vass 2006). Despite numerous methodological and conceptual studies, the issues of updating the modern teacher's training to enable teachers to train and educate students and adequately react to challenges imposed by digitalization remain open. In this respect, the experience of European states that successfully carried out a number of educational reforms is of great scientific interest and deserves to be systematically studied, popularized and introduced into the domestic educational system. One of such countries is Hungary, which borders on Ukraine both territorially and functionally (Transcarpathia is compactly inhabited by Hungarian national minorities). The aim of the article is to substantiate the essence of the key educational reforms in Hungary and to identify the risks and priorities brought about by transformational changes in the country.

**Keywords:** educational process transformation, reforms, teachers' education, lifelong learning, national minorities

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł koncentruje się na zagadnieniach reform edukacji na Węgrzech będących wynikiem radykalnych zmian politycznych, a w szczególności przyjęcia państwa do Unii Europejskiej. Publikacja nakreśla priorytety dla transformacji procesu edukacji, jak również ryzyka wynikającego z systemu edukacji nauczycieli i kształcenia przez całe życie. Wyzwania stawiane przez obecne czasy zmieniają świadomość nauczycieli, przenosząc nacisk na obowiązkowe wykorzystywanie technologii informatycznych, aktywowania mobilności informatycznej studentów oraz szczegółową analizę wymagań pracodawców. Badanie przedstawia kluczowe działania rządu węgierskiego w odniesieniu do socjalizacji mniejszości romskiej oraz innych mniejszości narodowych obecnie zamieszkałych na Ukrainie. Badanie obrazuje zasoby edukacyjne wykorzystywane do kształcenia nauczycieli w instytucjach edukacyjnych, mające za zadanie wprowadzanie tolerancji i wzajemnego szacunku. Lata dwudzieste XXI w. odznaczają się silną globalizacją i czynnikami politycznymi przenikającymi wszystkie



sfery życia społecznego. Dynamicznemu formowaniu ucywilizowanego społeczeństwa informatycznego towarzyszy pewna liczba sprzeczności i konfliktów, wzmocnienie więzów społecznych oraz zmiana warunków życia (Réti, 2009), (Vágó i Vass 2006). Pomimo licznych badań metodologicznych i koncepcyjnych, problemy unowocześnienia współczesnego kształcenia nauczycieli tak, aby byli w stanie szkolić i kształcić studentów oraz odpowiednio reagować na wyzwania stawiane przez cyfryzację nadal pozostają nierozwiązane. W tym względzie doświadczenia państw europejskich, które skutecznie przeprowadziły liczne reformy edukacyjne, budzą znaczące zainteresowanie naukowe i wymagają systematycznych badań, popularyzacji i wdrożenia krajowego systemu kształcenia. Jednym z takich państw są Węgry, graniczące z Ukrainą zarówno terytorialnie, jak i funkcjonalnie (obwód zakarpacki jest gęsto zaludniony przez węgierskie mniejszości narodowe). Celem niniejszego artykułu jest uzasadnienie podstaw kluczowych reform edukacyjnych na Węgrzech oraz ustalenie ryzyka i priorytetów będących wynikiem zmian transformacyjnych w państwie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** transformacja procesów edukacyjnych, reformy, kształcenie nauczycieli, uczenie się przez całe życie, mniejszości narodowe

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Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 12.03.2020

Date of acceptance of the article: 30.08.2020