Multilingualism, Multiculturalism and Autonomy (2005)

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In Europe as a whole and in many countries of the continent, multilingualism is the *de facto* situation. Especially after 1989, against the background of liberalizations and of the broadening of citizen's freedoms, minorities look for their cultural identity, so that multiculturalism has gained ground and requires new approaches. The various communities that have discovered their own identity claim autonomy. European countries and the European Union are asked today to find a balanced solution that would allow for the unlimited expression of their specific differences, avoiding at the same time the falling into fragmentarism.

The article will first evoke the fundamental issues resulting from the multilingual situation and from multiculturalism, and the pursuit of autonomy. These observations emerge from the organization of a multicultural university (Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj) and from experiencing transition within a multilingual and multicultural region (Transylvania) in Romania. The article will briefly characterize multilingualism and note the problems that derive from it (1). Secondly, it will emphasize the challenges of multiculturalism (2) and finally clarify the meaning of autonomy (3).

1. Europe is characterized by multilingualism not only in the sense that it is linguistically diversified. Throughout the European continent, over thirty languages are spoken, and many more dialects have been used as well. Multilingualism is a characteristic of many European countries, where natural languages resulting from a complex history, are diversified.

Certainly, Europe and most of the European countries are not only multilingual; on the grounds of multilingualism people find common languages, so that the linguistic unity is constantly preserved not only by the relatedness of different languages, as branches of a European protolanguage, but also by the factual reality of a inter-lingual comprehension. This comprehension is made possible on the grounds of a common education in different European countries, established on acquiring practical skills, cognitive competencies and civic virtues.

It must be noted that multilingualism is, in present day Europe, not only a reality with historical origins, but also a choice in the making of the European Union. The EU preserves its multilingual character, even if there is a lingua franca, for the main reason of ensuring the conditions for self-expression for every citizen of the continent, but also for satisfying the need to adjust to the conditions of activity in the different regions of Europe. From the latter point of view, that of the adaptability to these conditions, "multilingualism concerns every citizen", and not only those with an education in language teaching.

In the last decade, the European institutions and the professional associations of those involved in language teaching drew up a coherent position on multilingualism and on the practical activities necessary for its promotion. Of great importance is the concern of the Council of Europe with "developing the individual's capacity for participation in the democratic process" as part of "education for democratic citizenship"[1]. Along the same lines goes the option of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) in favor of adapting "education and training to demands of a knowledge society" and the focus on new basic skills, which include IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship, and societal skills. It is a realistic option of the Bologna Declaration (1999) that higher education should be oriented towards training graduates for the European labor market. It is useful that the European associations of

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[1] See Little, D. (1999), *Language Policies for a multilingual and multicultural Europe*, Council for Cultural Cooperation, Strasbourg.

language teachers carry out strategies to promote multilingualism: the early teaching of foreign languages, the acquisition of partial competences, exchanges and mobility, and innovative methods (interactive learning, CALL, new educational environment, multilingual education, etc.[2]). As a result of these options and approaches, multilingualism became an effective and specific policy for many European universities and schools, with significant results.

2. Sometimes, multilingualism broadens to multiculturalism, other times linguistic differences occur within the same culture. If by culture we understand historical affiliations, general perspectives on the world, religious traditions, language that set an ethnic community apart; and if by ethnic community we identify a community built up in the succession of generations, in a certain territory, having its own history and language, then we encounter multiculturalism – in a strong sense – when, on the same territory, different ethnic communities with a historically acknowledged culture can be found. This conception of multiculturalism is different in major aspects from the situation resulted from the claim of collective cultural recognition of the groups of immigrants from different countries[3]. When we talk of multiculturalism in Europe we use the term in this sense, understood as plurality of historical cultures, linked to "ethno-cultural" profiles.

The terms of the discussion are contoured as firmly as possible, that, regardless of the ways the borders of some regions of Europe are drawn, the resulting entities are without exception multicultural, as in these regions, different cultures cohabitate in the same territory. For this reason, the issue in question is the adequate shaping of cultural cohabitation and interaction. Consequently, whereas multilingualism mostly entails measures regarding the professional training and its certification and recognition, multiculturalism brings about beliefs on the organization of the modern state and has a preeminent legal facet. Let's tackle the issue of multiculturalism from its grounds, in the European environment following 1989.

The politics of equal dignity[4] assumed as a basis for the modern state, the universalisation of equality among people as citizens. But in the recent decades it is in the very name of the equal dignity of citizens that ethnic communities are claiming the right to assert their cultural specificity and, consequently, the right to cultural differentiation. The historical situation, at least in some Eastern European countries, points to the following state of affairs: the advocates of the traditional national state who adhere to the politics of equal dignity in terms of the equality of citizens and the avoidance of particular enclaves are at odds with those who promote the assertion of the specific cultural character of ethnic communities and who defend the politics of difference, even if the latter might mean a change, and possibly a collapse of existing state organization.

Certain approaches to this problem are designed to avoid such a conflict. The first of these, one that is organized around a renaissance of the nation-state, concedes that civic nationalism, stimulating the commitment to exemplary liberties and performances, can continue as a real alternative to that nationalism which is being manipulated by demagogues[5]. However, given the realities of the framework of thinking required by this approach, linked as it is to the national state that tends to neglect cultural differences, it can hardly be generalized and

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[2] See Bestoud, A. (2003), *Promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe: the role of research*, Report on the Workshop held at the Fondation Universitaire de Bruxelles, 1 February 2003.
[3] See for details Salat, L. (2001), *Multiculturalismul liberal – bazele normative ale existenţei minoritare autentice*, Polirom, Iaşi, pp. 86 – 100.
[4] For the distinction between "politics of equal dignity" and "politics of difference" see Taylor, Ch. (1994), 'The Politics of Recognition', in Gutman, A. (ed.), *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, p.107. See also Marga, A. (1997), "Liberalismul astăzi", in Marga, A., *Filosofia unificării europene*, Apostrof, Cluj.
[5] Boudin, L. (1992), « Entre Europe et regions: la nation », in *Commentaire*, 58.

implemented. Moreover, it cannot cope with the global tendencies that already characterize the economy, communications, and scientific research of this time.

The approach of the new pluralism, meant to be an alternative to the old pluralism and to consociationalism, endorses cultural pluralism, but outstrips the passivity that characterizes laissez-faire by laying emphasis on the unlimited autonomy of ethnic communities and on the improvement through democratic procedure of their representation in the state[6]. The new pluralism brings to the fore the recognition of cultural diversity by steering it towards the implementation of the solution shared by society and is meant to protect the culturally specific character of ethnic communities. The practical problem that this kind of pluralism has to cope with does not characterize pluralism, but remains open, i.e., the generation of cultural diversity not as diversity in itself but as a diversity which is recognized by the communities that interact.

Federalism, that has outstanding success in the United States, Germany and Switzerland, represents an approach that has resources which enable a true cultural and recognizable diversity without jeopardizing the political equality that the modern state guarantees[7]. But it is unlikely that federalism will succeed in areas that have not been historically prepared for it and that do not have the cultural premises to support it.

But, for the time being, and as a reaction to the forced homogenization undertaken by the nation-state, minority ethnic communities are promoting the politics of difference cultivating tolerance. By tolerance we do not mean the structural tolerance of the modern state with regard to individualism, but rather tolerance in regard to different cultures. Thus, on the very territory of the modern state, the post-modern principle of the pre-eminence of difference is promoted through the particular approach of that state to multiculturalism[8]. It is likely that this difference will remain frail as long as it does not embody the guarantees of the modern state based on the politics of equal dignity.

Substantive liberalism tackles the problem from the deeper stratum of the conditions provided by the modern state for the assumptions of liberties. Whilst procedural liberalism treats the "other" fairly, substantive liberalism prevents the current upbraiding that liberalism equalizes and homogenizes, while giving up neutrality and becoming a fighting creed. It does not denounce the principle of equal respect and of equal rights but concedes the legitimacy of certain goals such as the assertion of a culturally specific character[9].

According to this approach, the politics of difference stem from the politics of equal dignity as a more thoroughly assumed consequence. They start from the idea that the modern state encompasses, in its historical evolution, not only the positive law that provides individual liberties but also the possibility to assume these liberties so as to make cultural differences possible[10]. We agree that intercultural understanding is rife with difficulties; however, to abandon or to restrict individual rights as they are designated by the modern state is not a solution. The legality and, more precisely, the generality of law remain the indispensable foundation for problem solving, but the legal approach must obviously be endorsed by awareness of its assumptions. In this respect, collective rights ought to be recognized without any curtailing of the individualistic structure of legislation. Legislation itself should be conceived not only as a package of positive laws, but as an expression of certain political (in the classical sense) and cultural objectives. Moreover, according to the conditions of

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[6] Phillips, A. (1993), *Democracy and Difference*, Pennsylvania State University Press, p.156.
[7] Kosselek, R. (1994), "Diesseits des Nationalstaates: Főderale Strukturen der deutschen Geschichte", in *Tranzit*, 7, p. 76.
[8] Walzer, M. (1994), "Politik der Differenz", in *Tranzit*, 8, p.17.
[9] Charles Taylor, op. cit.
[10] Habermas, J., "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State", in Gutman, A. (ed.), *op.cit.*

cohabitation, each of the cultures that make up a multicultural society must be open to examination and, ultimately, be periodically revised[11].

3. Autonomy is the current aim of cultural communities and of professional groups. In the life of universities, autonomy represents a condition for efficiency, together with taking responsibility for performance. Etymologically, autonomy means to make your own "law" (nomos) for your own actions. How is it possible for autonomy to work in a multicultural environment, considering the circumstances that, on the one hand, for multiculturalism to be present, the various coexisting cultures must freely express themselves, and on the other hand, that multiculturalism disappears when the diversity of cultures vanishes into self isolation of the respective cultures? Multiculturalism has full sense as interculturalism. In fact, multiculturalism is as far from hegemonism as it is from fragmentarism. How is a functional multicultural organization put into practice?

The Babeş-Bolyai University, a particularly comprehensive university, has over 45 000 students, and is situated in the multilingual and multicultural context of Transylvania. It has been subject to successive international evaluations (starting with the evaluation of the OSCE High Commissioner for Minorities). The multicultural organization started in 1995, with the new University Charter, which drew on the conclusion of the history of the region – that showed that, in Cluj, no form of university organization, which was conceived apart from the other, but not together with the other, proved to be time lasting. It proclaimed the trilingual organization (in Romanian, Hungarian, and German) of the most representative university of Transylvania as well as the assuming of the entire academic history in Cluj. The Charter of 1995 set Babeş-Bolyai University on the track of trilingual and multicultural development.

The synthesis of results achieved through multicultural development is that, from then on, no complaint regarding any limitation of rights on cultural or ethnic grounds was presented. There were several proposals for the development of the multicultural organization, but not complaints regarding limitations. On the contrary, never before have so many Romanians studied at the main university of Transylvania; never before have so many Hungarians studied here; never before have there been more opportunities for studying in German; never before has the history and the culture of the Jewish people been so broadly studied and the opportunities for studying Hebrew been greater. Never before has there been such a diversified range of specializations ensuring complete studies in Romanian, in Hungarian and in German.

This encouraging result was possible by making use of the framework created by university autonomy in order to develop new agreements regarding the expression of autonomy of the Romanian, Hungarian, and German lines of study, and of the faculties and chairs, according to the legal provisions in force, the latter being themselves in constant motion. The Act of Education (1995) in Romania and the subsequent legal provisions in the field deals with issues such as the name of a university (in what concerns state universities), the official language for certificates of study (which is, increasingly, English), the mechanisms of financing (in principle, per capita), the amount of budgetary allotment. Babeş-Bolyai University enjoys autonomy concerning the establishment of its own organization and functioning, freedom of research and of transfer of knowledge, the freedom to set up scientific research programmes, the choice of criteria for granting academic titles, the freedom to publish, the freedom to carry out international cooperation programmes, the autonomous managing of resources and of patrimony[12]. Within Babeş-Bolyai University, the lines of study (Romanian, Hungarian and German) – whose leaderships function at chair, faculty, and university level, and are elected by the teaching staff and the students of the

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[11] *Ibidem*
[12] See *Carta Universităţii „Babeş-Bolyai",* Cluj, 2003, art. 1.

respective line of study – have effective autonomy. The autonomy of the lines of study consists of: the right to choose their own representatives at any level of organization the right to establish their own curricula according to European criteria; the right to hire their own teaching and research staff; the right to decide on the admission of students to their line of study; the right to decide on their scientific research programmes; the right to initiate and carry out international cooperation; the right to initiate publications and to publish; the right to have inscriptions in the respective language, according to the legal provisions in force; the right to participate in any decision taken at Babeş-Bolyai University. These rights are reinforced by the Charter (2003) of Babeş-Bolyai University[13], which defends a rational, modern link between the unity of the higher education institution and its internal differentiation.

Taking into account the size of Babeş-Bolyai University – with twenty-one faculties, over 120 specializations, 110 departments, and students enrolling in a demographic context where the proportion represented by ethnic communities varies as well – the representation of the teaching staff and of students in the commissions formed at faculty level, the University Senate and the Rector's Office, the Academic Council, and the Board of Administration combines the proportional reflection of the different lines of study with institutional measures (such as paritary commissions) so that viable projects, even if they are initiated by a proportionally smaller (according to the number of students and the size of teaching staff) line of study, can be promoted. There has never been a situation where a project is rejected for the reason that the line of study promoting it does not hold the numerical majority.

The ten-year experience of the multicultural organization at Babeş-Bolyai University permits the reconfirmation of certain conclusions[14] reached by the local experience and by international experiences as well, which are:
(i) Multicultural organization in universities depends on state policies and on the capacity of politicians to elaborate a conception focused on multiculturalism;
(ii) Multiculturalism is a fact that must be admitted and assumed, and the problem of joining together the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference is of paramount importance for multicultural societies;
(iii) The politics of difference are realistic only as a consequence of the politics of equal dignity that derive from the sense of positive law;
(iv) Multiculturalism conceived in this way prevents the dangers inherent to ethnic nationalism and the fragmentations that eventually destroy the politics of equal dignity;
(v) A solution based on the use of force (physical or public) is counterproductive to the same extent as it is counterproductive to constrain the universality of liberties trough attempts at enclaving;
(vi) No lasting solutions can be found for the institutionalization of multiculturalism without the step-by-step negotiation of specific arrangements;
(vii) It is a true cultural challenge of these times to diffuse an approach to social reality in which cultural differences do not imply the limitation of personal identity but an impetus for performance and, in fact, a source of wealth, and to switch from ethnic nationalism to civic "nationalism" and, broadly speaking, from historical patriotism to constitutional patriotism, from "national paradigm" to "European paradigm";

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[13] *Ibidem*, cap. III, 1, 4.
[14] See Marga, M. (1998), "Experiencing Multicultural Organization: the Case of Babeş-Bolyai University", in *Higher Education in Europe*, vol. XXIII, no.1.