

## **Hungarian public education ruined with EU money**

*László Miklósi*

*President of the Association of History Teachers*

Over the last few years, EU funding in the field of education, and public education in particular, has allowed Hungary to build and develop a system that has severely deteriorated compared to the past, instead of improving it.

The European Union has provided substantial support for the development of public education in Hungary. However, this aid has been used in certain key elements in a way that is radically at odds with the principles and expectations of the European Union, which require a significant improvement in the quality of education, as this is the basis for the Union's competitiveness.

The negative transformation of public education started with the adoption of the Public Education Act in 2011. The Framework Curriculum approved in 2012 was also a step backwards, and the National Core Curriculum (NAT) and Framework Curriculum 2020 have led to a further major deterioration.

Over the past 12 years, schools have been taken away from local municipalities and taken over by the state. The school system has been centralised and compulsory central curricula have been created. Schools have lost almost all autonomy, and school principals have become heads of institutions, who at one time even had to obtain permission from the state education district centre to buy chalk for writing on the blackboard. Compulsory teaching hours were increased to 22-26 hours a week. This made the number of compulsory teaching hours for teachers more uneven and opaque than before, while at the same time increasing the workload on teachers. As a result, teachers have less energy and time, and find it harder to prepare for their lessons. Not only are salaries low, but substitutes are usually not paid overtime. The increase in tasks and the continuing deterioration in working conditions mean that teachers are increasingly being exploited. This, combined with other factors, has led to a decline in the quality of teaching.

A state monopoly on textbooks has been created. These so-called experimental textbooks were developed with EU money and, although experimental, were made compulsory straight away. These one-off textbooks were a huge step backwards compared with the textbooks of the past. In state schools, only these textbooks are allowed to be ordered from state funds, even though many other textbooks are available on the market which are used with great satisfaction by teachers in other countries, such as Romania and Slovakia, thanks to their high quality (for example, some books from Mozaik Publishing). The quality of the one-size-fits-all textbooks is typical of the fact that one of the textbooks which we have analysed contained so many errors that we listed them on about 100 pages.

One of the problems is the way the textbook is produced. The textbook author has no responsibility, his or her name does not appear on the textbook, but the author is a so-called curriculum developer, and the textbooks are practically moulded into their final form by the editors. Thus, the textbook author sometimes does not even recognise his or her own work.

Someone writes the basic text for the textbooks, someone else writes the exercises, and someone else produces the workbooks, and they are often not even on speaking terms with each other. So, the work itself is not professionally coordinated, and that is one of the reasons why there are so many errors in these books. These are partly professional errors that make it difficult for children to learn from them, and partly they often contain elementary mistakes. For example, in the first edition of one of the textbooks, dozens of basic errors were found on the maps (among other things, Visegrád was drawn on the opposite bank of the Danube from where it is located). Many of the errors we pointed out (including this one) were corrected only later.

What the independent press is most concerned with, by the way, are questions of ideology or related to ideology. Recently, for example, a geography textbook became a press case: while Russian aggression against Ukraine is taking place, a cartoon in a currently used 8th grade geography textbook shows a Russian bear fighting with the European Union and the Americans, suggesting that this is why the war broke out (this cartoon has also been protested by the Ukrainian embassy in Hungary). This is just one example, I could give many more, which show that, contrary to the European Union's obvious intentions, textbooks of a very questionable quality have been developed, which, in accordance with the curriculum, sometimes contain a compulsory "positive" approach, in which myths may be more important than historical facts, hypotheses are treated as facts, while facts are relativised. The poor quality of textbooks also affects other subjects besides history, literature and geography.

The lesson to be learnt from the use of EU funding for public education is that if the EU gives money for a purpose, then the content of the use of the money should not be left solely to national governments, but should be consistently monitored by the EU not only to ensure that the use of the money is in line with the EU's financial requirements, but also that the content is compatible with core European values. The EU should not allow European taxpayers' money to be used for purposes that are contrary to these values. This is particularly important in the case of public education, the quality of which will affect the lives of generations to come.

This article originally appeared in Hungarian on [Clean Air Action Group's blog](#).

Supported by:



on the basis of a decision  
by the German Bundestag

**Disclaimer:** This article has been produced in the framework of the project "Towards a climate neutral EU: efficient allocation of EU funds" funded by the European Climate Initiative (EUKI). EUKI is a project financing instrument by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). The EUKI competition for project ideas is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It is the overarching goal of the EUKI to foster climate cooperation within the European Union (EU) in order to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

The opinions put forward in this document are the sole responsibility of Clean Air Action Group and do not necessarily reflect the views of BMWK or the other project partners.