

Hungary

József Pálincás

Minister of Education



He was born 18 September 1952, in Galvács, Hungary, is married, has three children. In 1977 he graduated as physicist at the Attila József University of Szeged. He worked between 1977-1996 at the Nuclear Physics Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Debrecen, first as associate researcher then as deputy director, from 1991 as director. In 1981, he took his doctorate in physics at the Lajos Kossuth University. Up to 1985, he worked as visiting professor at the College Station Texas A&M University, while from 1988-1989 at the Manne Siegh Institute in Stockholm. He is member of several Hungarian and European institutes of science. He was later qualified as Doctor of Physical Science of the Hungarian Academy of Science and elected as corresponding member. He is professor and head of Experimental Physics Department at the Lajos Kossuth University in Debrecen. From 16 July 2001 he is minister of education of Hungary.

Strengthening of social cohesion, as reflected by economic, social and technological challenges

In Hungary social differences have markedly grown as a consequence of the transformation of the economic and political systems, the gap has further widened between the lowest and highest income groups. Economic and social disadvantages pile up in the life of families, to be handed down inevitably to their offspring. New dividing lines develop between the winners and losers of rapid change, between the highly qualified elite, producing and managing modern technology and the masses who operate that technology but who are increasingly semi-skilled people easy to replace, between those who find jobs and people on long-term unemployment. The spread of new technologies itself creates new inequalities and enhances the differences among the various social groups and increases social tension.

One of the most important means of overcoming dangers threatening social cohesion is the development of education and training that determines the international political and economic position of the country in the long run. The most important is that the system of education should create the equality of opportunities to young people of every social stratum. Hungary pays an especially great attention to the satisfaction of the special educational needs of national minorities living in the country, which may mean teaching in the mother tongue, or, in the case of the Romany minority, kindergarten and school programs aiming at overcoming social disadvantages. It pays concentrated attention also to helping disadvantaged regions and villages to catch up, where the development of human resources largely promotes the economic progress of the region and hence the improvement of living conditions.

The coexistence of different cultures and generations, globalization, the utilization of advantages deriving from cultural diversity and the avoidance of the accompanying friction or conflicts is one of the most significant problems where education has a prominent role to play. Education is not only able to promote the growth of tolerance by handing over the adequate curriculum, but by utilizing its role in socialization, it can present behavioral patterns and methods of conduct as well. Schools can only perform their complex and important role properly if they co-operate with other social agents as well.

Hungary sees an opportunity in education, best capable of promoting social cohesion, however, not only governmental measures and adequate financial means are necessary to it, but also the development of social dialogue, and it should be recognized that overcoming gaps in the society and creating cohesion is in the common interest of all of us. ✍