

Ladies and gentlemen! Dear Polyglots!

I'd like to express my gratitude for the invitation and I'm delighted to accept the challenge of outlining the topic "Esperanto in Hungary" in twenty minutes.

In the 136-year history of Esperanto, Hungary has played a determining role from the very beginning. It can be said that Hungary is an Esperanto superpower.

In 1906, Endre Ady, the famous Hungarian poet, writing from Paris, stated that if Esperanto matters to some nation it must matter most to Hungarians. „Look at the map!” “This is as clear as day” – he added. He recognized, right after his first "encounter" with it, that Esperanto was the solution to the world's language problem.

Sándor Giesswein, a linguist, politician, and priest, who served as the president of Esperanto Society between 1911-1923, also represented the Minister of Culture at the pre-war congresses of Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) - in Antwerpen and Krakow. Meanwhile there are some humorous stories from the heroic early era as well; for example once the police superintendant of Székesfehérvár wanted to ban an Esperantist meeting, considering it to be the language of thieves, who used Esperanto to prepare crimes so that the police did not understand ...Sándor Giesswein had to intervene in the Parliament not to ban Esperanto gatherings...

In the 1920s and 1930s, the best Esperantists gathered around the *Literatura Mondo* - a monthly journal founded by Tivadar Soros (father of George Soros). Kálmán Kalocsay and Gyula Baghy played pivotal roles in the development and progress of the language - as in the highest level of communication - in poetry they created values equal to those of natural languages, be it translated literature or original Esperanto works.

This period marked the era of the Budapest School.

The world considers Kálmán Kalocsay as the second most important figure of the history of Esperanto, right after the creator Zamenhof, although he is already one from the second generation.

The Tragedy of Man, the masterpiece of Imre Madách and Sándor Petőfi's poetry, following the brilliant translations made by Kalocsay, have become an inescapable part of Esperanto literature. Both were later translated from Esperanto into many other languages, e.g., Chinese, Maltese, etc.

This cultural exchange was 'reciprocal'; for instance, the epic *Kalevala* from Finland and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* from Georgia arrived to Hungarian via Esperanto. Let me mention the name of Béla Vikár, the translator of both epics, with the help of Esperanto into Hungarian.

Before World War II, Serédi Jusztinián, the archbishop of Hungary was the honorary president of the Catholic Esperanto Organization... And the prime minister was the chief patron of the UEA World Congress in Budapest, 1929.

In 1966 and 1983, the governments in office also supported the Esperanto World Congress in Budapest with record-breaking participation - five thousand attendees each.

So far Budapest has hosted three World Congresses.

Since 1966, it has been possible to take a state language exam in Esperanto. Between 1966 and 2011, a university department operated in Budapest – that time the only one in the world. It was founded and led by István Szerdahelyi.

(During the 45 years of operation 160 students obtained an Esperanto teacher diploma. It was a second major, one could not enroll in it, the subject could only be taken in the second year.)

The monthly journal *Hungara Vivo* continued the literary traditions of *Literatura Mondo* between 1960 and 1990, a period marked by abundant book publishing; it was a profitable business, and we supplied the Soviet area with it.

In 1987, the association had 7,700 paying members.

In 2004 „the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences reported that the unanimous opinion of the Institute's "leading staff" is that Esperanto belongs to the category of a living foreign language, according to which Esperanto is

- a) highly normalized,
- b) highly socialized,
- c) a non-ethnic living language

that fulfills all possible linguistic functions in a secondary language community and at the same time acts as a mediating language.”

The Ministry of Education informed likewise university rectors about this decision

In 2000, the first Orbán government imposed a language test requirement for the issuance of higher education diplomas, which included the acceptance of all languages eligible for a state language exam, including Esperanto. Between 2000 and 2020, more than 36,000 people passed the language exam and thus received the higher education diploma.

During the pandemic, the requirement was temporarily lifted, but it continued for two more years, until it was finally delegated to the universities' discretion.

Most of the exam-takers did not become active Esperantists.

This "grace period," however, showed that Esperanto could thrive in the market economy, requiring no public funds. It spontaneously generated a dynamic and vibrant market, with 250 language teachers, numerous publications, textbooks, and many more. The necessary conditions were met, but not sufficiently— there was a lack of depth and liquidity in the market. If several other countries had implemented similar measures, we might now read headlines like "More Esperanto – More Jobs" and "Esperanto: the Engine of the Market Economy," etc.

The rise of Esperanto did not have a displacing effect, on the contrary: the other languages also benefited from it, because Esperanto's linguistic preparatory effect manifested itself and encouraged language learning.

Hungarian Esperantists still hold key positions in Esperantia today: the head of the university department in Poznań is Hungarian, Mrs. Ilona Koutny, the creator and operator of the CEFRE Esperanto language exam system is Hungarian, Mrs. Katalin Kováts, one of the judges of belletristic literature competitions is Hungarian, Mr. István Ertl , one of the creators and 'the soul' of the unique "Esperantocity Herzberg-am-Harz" project is Hungarian, Mrs. Zsófia Kórody.

The Hungarian translation of the extraordinary novel *Adolesko* by our linguist Balázs Wacha, written by he in Esperanto, is currently with the publishing house and promises to be a big success.

In 2023, the traditional world congress of Esperantists was held in Italy in Turin for the 108th time. In a one-and-a-half-hour lecture, I commemorated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Sándor Petőfi and, continuing the 'Kalocsay tradition' , I presented his great prophetic poem

written in hexameters, titled *The Judgment*. My translation partner was Antono Samak, an Esperantist from Debrecen.

The material of the 'First Book' published on July 26, 1887 was sufficient for the translation, so that the poetical ethos of the poem was not damaged at all. This demonstrated once again that Esperanto is perfectly suited, encoded by birth, for hexameters which is – one would say - 'the cradle' of European culture.

Looking to the future, I hope that ongoing developments will lead to a small breakthrough in the Hungarian Catholic Esperanto movement.

I will deliver a memorial speech on the centenary of the death of Sándor Giesswein – who was the president of the Esperanto Society between 1911-1923 – at a commemorative ceremony of the Christian Democrats now in government position who claim him to be their predecessor since Sándor Giesswein was also the founder of the Christian Socialist Party.

In a letter, we have requested, albeit unsuccessfully so far, that Hungary initiate at UNESCO the declaration of July 26th, the birthday of Esperanto – for being the International Day of Esperanto.

I solemnly ask You the polyglots not only to be aware of this but to actively support this idea using your own means. With Esperanto, you can only win; it promotes language learning and entices language enthusiasts.

The emergence of the virtual world and communication is greatly facilitating the future of Esperanto. We can easily meet in the virtual world at any time and from anywhere. from all over the world.

Esperanto Wikipedia is among the 30 largest ones in the world.

The president of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi, - a Hungarian professional career diplomat, my old friend - invited our world organization UEA to take part in the work of the General Assembly.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, our representatives delegated to the UN - among other things - organized a historic conference on June 12, 2023 on the topic of multilingualism - a historic one, since in addition to the six official languages it was held with simultaneous interpretation in Esperanto furthermore three lectures were given in Esperanto.

Esperanto was used officially at an UN conference for the first time. Many high ranking state politicians, diplomats took part and it got stakeholders' support. UN PGA himself delivered a six-language-speech.

Esperanto and our world organization the UEA are being taken more and more seriously in the world.

The possibility of a literary Nobel Prize remains open.

William Auld, the late Scottish-Esperanto poet and dramatist was three times among the top ten candidates.

According to Clemens Setz, winner of the German literary grand prize, Esperanto literature is a huge world waiting to be discovered, and that there are still Nobel-Prize worthy authors today. Setz considers Croatian writer Spomenka Štimec a candidate.

Umberto Eco realized that Esperanto is not only a living language but it also meets the Shapiro-Whorf concept, since behind it there is a kind of "religion", a worldview, and its own literature and translations are impressive, which put it on an equal footing with other languages.

Hollywood may soon discover our language, with its abundant literary material that has remained unknown to them, and this newfound resource may greatly pique their interest.

To promote multilingualism, the president of the European Esperanto Union Dr. Seán Ó' Riain, an Irish high ranking diplomat, made a proposal that ranked first in the Education category of the "Future of Europe" conference, with a quarter of the votes coming from Hungary. The CULT committee of the European Parliament dealt with the situation of multilingualism in the European Union and very favorably mentioned Esperanto's power and ability to contribute.

It must matter to Hungary even more since half of the population of Hungary does not speak a foreign language at all. Furthermore with the help of Esperanto, elementary school students' ability to understand texts and the interpretation of the texts they read can be significantly improved. This latter is a big issue in Hungary, as well as in many other countries.

(In the 1920th, the English government reported to The League of Nations very favorable experiences on the improvement of mother tongue capabilities after experimental teaching of Esperanto in primary classes of schools.)

However, the further expansion of the Esperanto language is hindered by significant processes and factors.

Above all, the hegemonic interests of great powers have always manifested themselves linguistically , they appeared in the guise of language. During the times of the League of Nations we had a French

veto, and now the English language dominates the world. This dominance creates discrimination and that discrimination is a real threat.

It's likely that discussions about multilingualism will still be conducted in English for a very long time. However, the former colonial countries must experience linguistic and cultural independence and we support them in this. This could take a decade or two. Until then, our case will continue going ahead on a quasi-common path with the parallel development of multilingualism.

Politicians' monopoly on information and their influence, and where applicable, their manipulation possibilities, would be significantly reduced all over the world if people could communicate with each other freely and effectively about almost anything. The resentment and resistance of politicians is understandable.

What artificial intelligence will be capable of and whether our descendants will have to learn a foreign language at all is a question for the future.

Even today, anything can be quickly and easily translated from English to Esperanto. The scientific and technical vocabulary of Esperanto is extensive and relies entirely on the international vocabulary with simple and clear word formation principles. The Esperanto vocabulary of geology was created by Endre Dudich between 1976-1980, and that of geodesy by Ottó Haszpra, who made his maiden speech to the Academy of Sciences in 2005 on Esperanto.

There are still professions where English is the sole language used today, such is the world of foreign exchange dealers, where I began my career. I didn't become George Soros and he didn't become an Esperantist. He turned away from it, even though his father was the founder of *Literatura Mondo*. George opted for English.

What if the number of native Esperanto speakers becomes massive?
We cannot know exactly what will happen, but we can be quite sure that, due to the high degree of normalization of the language, the language preservation function of Esperanto will continue to be highly effective.

Dear polyglots,

In conclusion, I would like to share two things with you.

I am mentioning again Umberto Eco, the writer of *The Search for the Perfect Language* and the eternal intellectual and explorer.

In the last year of his life he said about Esperanto: "I have gone from indifference to interest, from ignorance to information, and from skepticism to an appreciation of the language (and its creator, Zamenhof)."

I would also like to share what László Polgár, the father of the chess prodigies, said: "If you want what's best for your child, start with Esperanto." His daughters started with it and still speak Esperanto today. We know what they have achieved.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.

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In Esperanto:

<https://esperantohea.hu/konferenco-de-poliglotoj-en-budapest-2023-prelego-pri-esperanto-kaj-hungario/>