

**Secretariat of the
Conference on Security and
Co-operation in Europe
PRAGUE**

CSCE Communication No. 307*
Rome, 29 November 1993

RELEASE OF DOCUMENT

Letter from the HCNM concerning the Slovak national minority in Hungary

Upon the decision of the 24th Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials taken on 28 November 1993, the above mentioned letter dated 8 November 1993 (CSCE Communication 307*) has been released.

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C S C E

High Commissioner
on National Minorities

Comm. 307*/93

His Excellency
Mr Géza JESZENSZKY
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Hungary
BUDAPEST
Republic of Hungary

Reference:
No 1331/93/L

The Hague
8 November 1993

Dear Mr Minister,

The Team of Experts, which, in accordance with the Terms of Reference agreed upon in the CSO Vienna Group on 27 May 1993, visited Slovakia and Hungary in September of this year, made an extensive study of the Slovak minority during its visit to your country.

In discussions which the members of the Team had with Hungarian officials and representatives of the Slovak minority, it became clear that the policy of assimilation pursued by previous Hungarian regimes had had particularly negative effects on Slovak language education. This, and the fact that Slovak national consciousness only began to manifest itself more clearly in the course of the nineteenth century and therefore after the assimilation process had already had its effects, caused a considerable weakening of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Slovak minority in Hungary. On the other hand, the representatives of Slovak organizations have left no doubt about the importance they attached to the safeguarding of the Slovak culture and the continuing use of the Slovak language.

Against this background, the repeatedly expressed commitments of the Government to grant the minorities in Hungary a wide range of possibilities is of special importance. The Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, which was passed on 7 July 1993 and which has now entered into force, is of special relevance. If its potential is used to the full, this Act could have a great beneficial effect for the minorities. As far as the Slovak minority is concerned, the Act could provide the basis for steps to promote the position of the Hungarian language as a language in the Hungarian school system.

Having these considerations in mind, I take the liberty to present the following recommendations to your Government:

1. The Hungarian Government should ensure that the recently adopted Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities is made public in such a way that all relevant groups and communities will be aware of its contents and its relevance to them. Part of this should be that the Hungarian Government explain to these groups and communities what possibilities relevant to them the Act contains and how they could use these possibilities. Without detracting from the importance of the other provisions, particular attention should be given to those concerning language education.
2. The Hungarian Government should ensure that any additional legislation necessary for the actual implementation of the said Act be presented to parliament in the near future, emphasising the importance of its speedy adoption by Parliament.
3. The Hungarian Government should ensure that sufficient funds are made available in its budget for the effective implementation of the Act in all its aspects, so that all relevant groups and communities can benefit from its possibilities.
4. The Hungarian Government should accord special attention to the position of the Slovak language as a language of instruction in the Hungarian school system. If necessary, positive action should be undertaken to promote its use as language of instruction for Slovak pupils.

I look forward with great interest to your comments on these recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Max van der Stoep

CSCE High Commissioner
on National Minorities

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**MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY

Budapest, November 29, 1993

Dear High Commissioner, (handwriting)

Having studied your recommendations based on the report by the Team of Experts sent to Hungary I would like to make the following comments on the issues raised in your letter.

As I mentioned to you at our meeting in the spring, we are fully aware of the damage suffered during recent decades by the cultural and language identity of the Slovak national minority. However, as a historian who has studied this question I can declare to be wholly unfounded and unhistorical the Slovak claim that the Slovaks of Hungary were the political victims for centuries of a policy intended to rob them of their nationhood. Had that been the case, the community would not have survived, and certainly not in the scattered pockets, largely on the territory of present-day Hungary, to which Slovaks migrated during the 18th century, after the expulsion of the occupying Turks. Development of modern national sentiment can be discerned in Central Europe from 1830s onwards, and the awareness of belonging to a nation consolidated in the present century, so that measures offensive to national feelings evoke in those abused in every country strong reactions, and so become the sources of tensions. Allow me, High Commissioner, to enclose a study which I wrote on this question back in the early 1980s and whose publication was prevented by the censorship of the time, so that it eventually appeared only at the end of the 1980s in a small-circulation university publication.

Turning to the present situation, I believe that the measures taken by the democratic Hungarian government - the adoption of the national minority act, the development of organizations of minority self-administration, and the institution of a parliamentary ombudsman for minority affairs -

*His Excellency
Max van der Stoep
CSCE High Commissioner
on National Minorities
The Hague*

show plainly that my government is firmly committed to safeguarding the identity of the national minorities living in Hungary. At the same time, High Commissioner, I would request you to follow attentively, in the spirit that you represent, the outcome

of the efforts by the minorities in Slovakia today to annul the still perceptible consequences of Czechoslovakia's so-called Benes decrees, which in 1945 declared the principle of collective guilt and deprived the Hungarian minority of all its rights.

To the specific recommendations contained in your letter, my replies are these:

- The act on national and ethnic minorities has been translated into the languages of all the thirteen minorities in our country, including Slovak, and we are distributing these translations widely. Officials of the Hungarian government regularly hold briefings and consultations with the minority communities, and a booklet with a detailed explanation of the act is being prepared.
- There are amendments to the minorities act on the parliamentary agenda. Rapid passage of these, however, cannot be expected, as they have to be prepared in a thorough, professional way, and time-consuming process of agreeing them with the minority organization have to take place. For well-known reasons, the Hungarian Parliament is overburdened with work, and has to deal with several hundred pieces of legislation a year. Incidentally, the minorities are also affected favourably and to a great extent by these social, economic and other acts.
- The minorities act contains a special chapter dealing with the question of financing. The government is implementing the special measures through extra financial support. Hungary will study the methods of financing minority policy in other states taking part in the CSCE -including the WEU member states. Here I would like to inform you, High Commissioner, that the local authority of the city of Békéscsaba, for instance, has transferred in recent weeks a valuable piece of real estate to the local Slovak community for the purposes of a cultural centre.
- There is no legal or financial obstacle to Slovak being the language of instruction in schools. The Office of National and Ethnic Minorities and the Ministry of Culture supported the plan for the Budapest Slovak Primary and Grammar School to change steadily from a bilingual to a Slovak-language school. However, the administration of the school and the National Federation of Slovaks in Hungary, along with the other Slovak organizations, gave their support to the earlier type of bilingual (Hungarian and Slovak) education. The main obstacle to the spread of the Slovak language in the other schools is resistance from the parents, who in many communities have demanded that the school abandon the teaching of the Slovak language, and teach German, English or French instead. Teachers make efforts year after year to persuade the Slovak parents to agree to their children being taught Slovak. The government provides 40% more grant per pupil for children learning a minority language as well.

We greatly look forward to next year's visits by the experts, and expect concrete results from them on the questions studied. In order to ensure progress with further CSCE Commitments as well, allow me, High Commissioner, to draw your kind attention to the problem which has emerged over the opening of Slovak Hungarian border crossings, which closely affects Paragraph 4 of Chapter VII of the Geneva Report on the CSCE Meeting of Experts on National Minorities: "They [the Participating States] therefore encourage transfrontier co-operation arrangements on a

national, regional and local level, inter alia, on local border crossings, the preservation of and visits to cultural and historical monuments and sites, tourism, the improvement of traffic, the economy, youth exchange, the protection of the environment and the establishment of regional commissions." We agreed with the Slovak side in August to sign an agreement this year on the opening of three new border crossings. The crossing points we proposed (which functioned before the communist period) were accepted by the Slovak side as professionally justified, but they refuse to implement this until we accept an agreement on the expulsion and reception of persons. Hungary is prepared to do so, but not in the form proposed by the Slovak side as professionally justified, but they refuse to implement this until we accept an agreement on the expulsion and reception of persons. Hungary is prepared to do so, but not in the form proposed by the Slovak side, which is disadvantageous to Hungary. There is no relation of any kind between the agreement on deportees and the question of the border crossings, and so we find incomprehensible this linkage of the agreements in question for political questions. We request you, High Commissioner, to convey as possible to the Slovak side as well our desire to find technical solutions to the problems of a technical nature, and-not to make them the subject of political bargaining.

I would like, High Commissioner, to express once again how highly we value to work of the experts' teams, and above all of yourself. The positive experience gained in our joint efforts has persuaded us to repeat our earlier recommendation concerning the fact that we would gladly see a similar examination by experts in Romanian-Hungarian relations as well. We are aware of the Romanian side's argument that Romania has fulfilled the relevant norms of the CSCE and the Council of Europe on the question of the minorities by establishing the Romanian National Minority Council. I do not wish to detail our reservations about the composition and operation of this Council, but in an appropriate forum, with your aid, High Commissioner, we would pass on the experiences of ours that persuaded us to abandon the idea of applying a similar solution, and instead entrust the minorities themselves - a so-called minorities' round table - with the task of reaching agreement on the questions affecting them. We therefore managed to defend ourselves from the charge that the Hungarian government was seeking to legitimize its own aims through a sham conciliation forum.

Please accept assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely

[signature]
Géza Jeszenszky