

Human Dimension Implementation meeting 2009
Working Session 5: Tolerance and non-discrimination I.

National minorities in Slovakia

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovakia is the multi-cultural and multiethnic country, in which approximately 800 000 persons belonging to **12 national minorities representing 14%** of the population lives.

Since its independence in 1993 Slovakia has adopted numerous legal acts, which create a comprehensive framework for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The current government has a genuine interest that all national minorities benefit from their rights in order to sustain their culture, language, customs and identity. Since the political representation of the largest Hungarian national minority occurred in the opposition, the Government has convinced itself in 2006 not to adopt any measures that could worsen the existing level of national minorities' protection and it has held its word.

Under the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, persons belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups in the Slovak Republic are guaranteed the right to develop their own culture in association with other members of the minority or group, the right to receive and disseminate information in their mother tongues, to form national associations, to create and maintain educational and cultural institutions.

More than 30 generally binding legal provisions define the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The law of the Slovak Republic is based on the concept of the protection of **individual human rights** and basic freedoms. In this sense **it rejects the concept of "collective rights" of national minorities.**

The Slovak Republic adopted in 2008 amendment of the **Anti-discrimination Act** about temporary compensatory measures in the field of employment, education, culture, healthcare and services, which has a positive public acceptance.

The **act on the use of national minority languages** entered into force in 1999. It lays down rules for **the use of minority languages in official communications in the municipalities** with at least 20% of the minority population. There is a total of 655 such municipalities.

In these municipalities persons belonging to the national minority have the right to communicate in writing with state or local authorities in the language of their national minority and answers will also be provided in the minority language. The same applies to decisions of public administration authorities issued in administrative proceedings. The minority language shall also be used for example in signs for public administration authorities placed on buildings, street names and other local geographical markings, etc.

In the Slovak Republic the **education** of national minority members is being realized in the schools with tuition in the language of a national minority and with the teaching of the language of a national minority from kindergartens to universities.

At the **Constantine Philosopher University in Nitra** the **Institute of Roma Studies** was established. At present the institute prepares specialists in the Roma problematic.

To support the Roma language, the **Standardization of the Roma Language in Slovakia** was proclaimed in 2008. The objective of the standardization was to officially proclaim the Roma language and place it on an equal footing with the other languages of national minorities.

At the **Selye Janos University** subjects are being primarily taught in Hungarian language. Following fields of study is being offered: preschool and elementary pedagogy, teaching of primary education, teaching of academic subjects, teaching of artistic-educational subjects; economics and corporate management; reformed theology.

At the Faculty of Pedagogy and Faculty of Central European Studies of the **Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra** – there is a possibility to study: Hungarian language and literature; Hungarian language and culture; Hungarian studies.

Hungarian language and language of the national minorities is possible to study also at further universities as foreign languages in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov.

National minority **culture** in Slovakia is promoted through **periodical and non-periodical publications** – together 39 publications, from which 25 publications for Hungarian national minority.

The cultural values are being developed also through the 4 national **theatres** – 2 of them are Hungarian theatres.

The historical heritage of minorities is being preserved through 8 state national **museums** and 4 national museums under the trusteeship of higher territorial units.

Radio and television broadcasts in national minority languages have a long tradition in Slovakia.

Slovak Radio broadcasts programmes for national minorities and ethnic groups living in Slovakia on the **Radio Patria** channel.

Slovak Television is broadcasting national programmes in 10 minority languages and special national news in all languages of national minorities.

As an advisory and coordinatory body for the government in the area of nationality policy the **Government Council for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups** has been established. Each of the officially recognized national minorities has equal reputation in the council. Representatives of central state administrative bodies and independent experts are invited to the meetings of the council. **Only the representatives of the national minorities vote in the council.** It is prohibited to take decisions on issues affecting a specific national minority or ethnic group in the absence of its representative.

The Slovak Republic participates also on the programme „**Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015**“ and recently is the fifth **presiding country**. Among the priorities of the Slovak presiding are - integrated school system and multi-cultural education; Roma identity and revision of National Action Plans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovakia perceives its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character as one of its composition advantages that is worth being further fostered and supported for the benefit of both the minority and majority population.

Thank you for your attention.