



Position Paper of the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK-MKP) on the State Language Law approved on June 30th, 2009 by the National Council of Slovak Republic

Despite all statements of the Government of Slovak Republic the **State Language Law does concern the use of language of persons belonging to national minorities living in Slovakia.** It contains restrictions in the use of minority languages compared to the previous situation.

In this context we would like to draw Your attention to the fact that **Slovakia ignores the Recommendations of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe¹** which contain the widening of the scope of the use of minority languages.

The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in their latest opinion expressed its greatest regret to the ignorance of the Government of Slovak Republic towards the implementation of the Recommendations of the Council of Europe. The opinion of the Committee of Experts contains further recommendations heading towards the widening of minority language rights in Slovakia.

The newest State Report of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)² from May 2009 on Slovakia urges the Slovak authorities to take a more robust stance against negative political discourse against ethnic minorities in general, and the Hungarian minority in particular. The Government of Slovakia not only ignores the Recommendations of the Council of Europe but furthermore

¹ Recommendation RecChI() of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 February 2007

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/Report/Recommendations/SlovakiaCMRec1_en.pdf

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ECRI Report on Slovakia adopted on 19 December 2008, published 26 May 2009
117. ECRI urges the Slovak authorities to take a more robust stance against negative political discourse against ethnic minorities in general, and the Hungarian minority in particular by, among others, ensuring the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code.

118. ECRI recommends that the Slovak authorities take measures to resolve the above-mentioned issues with members of the Hungarian minority in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Slovakia/SVK-CbC-IV-2009-020-ENG.pdf>



increases the strictness of the rules of the use of state language restricting the use of minority languages.

It is in contradiction with the spirit of the Charter that the **State Language Law requires multilingualism only in one direction – it is compulsory for persons belonging to national minorities**. The mutual tolerance and communication between different language groups is perceived by the law as a requirement for minorities to adjust to the majority. The Slovak language community is cautiously saved from this effort even when in a given situation they appear to be in vast minority (e.g. during cultural events Slovak introduction is compulsory even when there is no Slovak speaking person present among thousand of minority language speakers – troubling them with double introduction). It is important to mention that according to current legal status **the knowledge of minority languages is not even recommended for public officers**, although there are districts like Dunajská Streda or Komárno where the rate of Hungarians is above 69%. Thus the public use of minority languages is purely of declarative character, it is not fostered by the state.

Measurements restricting the use of minority languages in the State Language Law:

- 1. Oversized, disproportionate and useless sanctions. Large financial sanctions - from 100 up to 5000 Euro – unclear decision mechanisms create room for subjective sentencing and fines.** In municipalities where the ration of minority inhabitants is below 20 % (e.g. Bratislava), civil servants and their clients can be fined for using a minority language during their conversation. **(Section 10. § 9a)**
- 2. The introduction of censorship by state authorities.** All texts on monuments and commemorating tables should be authorized by the civil servants of the Ministry of Culture. **(Section 7. §5)**
- 3. Restriction of the use of minority languages in geographical names is in contradiction with international legal obligations of Slovak Republic.** **(Section 5. §3a)**



4. **The compulsory use of state language in official communication for armed forces, police and firearms puts an obstacle to keeping contact with NATO member states. (Section 8. § 8)**
5. **The requirement for the use of state language on public loudspeakers on the first place in municipalities with very small Slovak speaking population. (Section 6. §5)**
6. **The requirement for minority schools to have all the internal documentation in state language puts extra burden on minority education institutions (Section 6. §4)**
7. **Compulsory use of state language for introduction on events organized by minorities even in the case when there is no Slovak speaking person in the audience. (Section 6. §5)**
8. **Compulsory Slovak inscriptions on the first place on all monuments and tombstones.** It is valid for centuries old memorials and monuments as well – it is absurd from a cultural point of view and creates a retrospective legal status. It creates an extra cost for persons belonging to national minorities – not present for Slovak speakers. **(Section 6. §5), (Section 12. §11a)**
9. **All texts, advertisements and commercials for publicity should be in Slovak language in the first place.** This priority cannot be confirmed as consumer protection, its sole ideology is the primacy of state language and discrimination of minority languages. The law thus treats autochthon minority languages on the same level as languages not spoken in Slovakia despite the fact that Slovak Republic ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. **(Section 6. §5)**
10. **In health care the communication between patients and doctors is now regulated by law. The relation between the doctor and his patients is of a**



confidential character. The doctor should use the language in which the communications is most fluent. (Section 9. §8)