

PANEL: Constitutional regulation and public policy objectives: justifications and practice

National Slovak Minority Self-Government in Hungary, Budapest

Slovaks in Hungary

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Slovaks in Hungary are considered to be the third largest minority in Hungary. According to the census in 2001, a total number of 17,692 people and in 2011 a total number of 29.647 claimed themselves to be Slovaks in Hungary. However there is a difference in total number of people who can speak the Slovak language and those who have been raised with it as a mother tongue, also between those who use it when speaking with friends or family members. There was also possible to identify yourself to have a double nationality in the latest census. Interesting was that questions focused on minority and religion issues were not compulsory.

In 5 minutes it is not possible to talk about the history of Slovaks starting from the 18th century as it has been 300 years the Slovaks came to the territory of present-day Hungary. When presenting Slovak minority education today I have to start with the situation after the WW2 and the Czechoslovak–Hungarian population exchange in 1947-1948. It is because in 1949 a complete Slovak school system started to be developed and the first post-war Slovak schools in Hungary were established between 1948 and 1958. In the academic year of 1958-59, the Slovak language was taught as a separate subject in 112 schools. Secondary level education was carried out in the Slovak Teachers' Training College in Budapest and in the secondary grammar school in Békéscsaba. The number of primary schools in 1996/97 dropped to 67 and the situation today shows less than 53 schools, two Slovak secondary grammar schools at secondary education, and at higher education there are several colleges and universities that offer Slovak higher education in Hungary. We also use the services of visiting teachers from Slovakia.

When we talk about the Constitutional regulation I have to stress that the Constitution of Hungary states that the national and ethnic minorities living in Hungary share the power of the people and are constituent components of the State. This way the Constitution guarantees collective participation in public life for the Slovak minority, the establishment of local and national self-governments, preserving and maintaining their own culture, use of their native language, education in their native language and the right to use their names in their native language.

The Act on Minorities differentiates two levels of representation: Individual Minority Rights and Rights of Minorities as Communities.

In Hungary everybody may freely use his/her mother tongue wherever and whenever she/he wishes to do so. The conditions of the language use of minorities - in cases provided for by a separate law - must be guaranteed by the state.

Minority communities have the right to:

- a) initiate the creation of the necessary conditions for kindergarten, primary, secondary and higher education in the mother tongue or bilingually*
- b) establish a national educational, training, cultural and scientific institutional structure of their own within the boundaries of existing laws.*

At the request of the parents of eight students belonging to the same minority group, it is compulsory to establish and run a minority class or group.

Among the rights there is also a powerful one. The national self-government has the right of agreement (veto) in defining the basic material.

The Act on Minorities guarantees cultural and educational self-governance of minorities.

With the Act on Public Education (Act LXXIX/1993.) and its amendment in 1996 the basic steps were completed to achieve harmony with the Act on Minorities. The specific principles of minority education have been incorporated in the National Curriculum.

The pedagogical programme of each school defines the following aspects:

a) the goals of education and teaching in the school,

b) the local syllabus of the school, in the framework of which:

In the case of national and ethnic minority education and teaching the curriculum it is the aspect of the native language, history, geography, culture and national awareness, of the given national or ethnic minority.

Self-and minority governments co-operates in assessing the demand for minority education and in the organisation of such education.

It is the duty of the state to train native teachers to provide education in the mother tongue or 'bilingually' to minorities.

The state ensures, through international agreements that members of minorities participate in full-time and part-time training, further training, and scientific training at foreign institutions which teach in the relevant minority language and foster that culture.

The state in Hungary supports the employment of visiting lecturers / host teachers from the mother country. If persons belonging to minorities pursue their studies in countries where there are universities, colleges and other educational institutions which run their courses in the mother tongue, the degrees, diplomas and other certificates the students is awarded there must be considered equivalent to the appropriate degrees obtained in Hungary.

Conclusion

Despite a favorable public policy the Slovak community in Hungary still faces challenges, such as the lack of teachers with adequate qualification who are partly compensated by host teachers from Slovakia and motivated by scholarships given to teachers for further studies. Questions about curricula that is overloaded with high number of lessons taught is also a problem, furthermore there is a doubt whether they should teach Slovak as a foreign language or rather develop the methodology of teaching it as a minority language.

Recommendations / Suggestions

The Slovaks in Hungary would appreciate if the Forum advised the EU to discuss the possibility to access freely the broadcast of public TV and radio of member states.

The Slovaks in Hungary as an autochthonous minority find very important to add separate passages on treatment of minorities in each bilateral treaty of the member states.