



The American Hungarian Federation

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February 15, 2010

His Excellency Knut Vollebaek
High Commissioner on National Minorities
Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Dear High Commissioner:

The American Hungarian Federation (the “Federation”), founded in 1906, monitors developments relating to democracy, minority rights and security and stability in Central and Eastern Europe. One issue which we are closely following is the language law that took effect on September 1, 2009 in Slovakia and discriminates against ethnic Hungarians who comprise only 11% of the population and live in contiguous areas of southern Slovakia – the geographic location where they and their ancestors have lived for centuries.

In your January 4, 2010 statement you noted that the “Government [Slovak] Principles for the Implementation of the State Language Law provide for the respect of principles of non-discrimination and proportionality and *should thus safeguard the right of persons belonging to national minorities to use their mother tongue in the private and public sphere.*” (Emphasis added.)

We were hopeful that this would be the case. To our great disappointment, and undoubtedly to yours as well, the language law threatens the Hungarian minority’s culture and infringes on fundamental freedoms. We have received consistent and credible reports that the mere existence of the law, as drafted, has caused considerable uncertainty, fear and anxiety among ethnic Hungarians. The result has been to chill the use of their mother tongue, precisely why this law is so odious and anti-democratic. There is no place for such a law in 21st century Europe.

The language law is the latest manifestation of the Slovak government’s intolerance toward its Hungarian minority. Not surprisingly, the Slovak National Party (“SNS”) is a member of the ruling coalition. Its chairman Jan Slota is known for his xenophobia: “Hungarians are the cancer of the Slovak nation, without delay we need to remove them from the body of the nation.” The Stephen Roth Institute has called the SNS “an extremist nationalist party.”

Such extremist attitudes have contributed to the adoption of the law, even though Slovakia promised to respect the rights of its minorities before being accepted into NATO and the EU. Not only has the law caused considerable internal unease in Slovakia, it threatens much needed unity within NATO by increasing tensions between Slovakia and Hungary – both NATO allies.

Considering both the immediate and long-term implications of the language law, the response to date has been overly cautious and unduly optimistic, especially compared with the outspokenness about equally disturbing minority issues, such as those relating to the Roma. We, therefore, respectfully suggest that the appropriate response would be for you to raise the unacceptability of the language law with Slovakia – a law which is inconsistent with Slovakia’s freely assumed obligations, Western values, democratic principles and the international norms to which Slovakia as a member of the OSCE has committed itself.

Sincerely,

Frank Koszorus, Jr.
Co-president and Chairman, International Relations Committee