
Department for Conference Services

At the request of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the attached letter of 26 February 1997 to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary, Mr. László Kovács, as well as the letter of reply, dated 29 April 1997, are being distributed to all OSCE delegations.

OSCE
High Commissioner
on National Minorities

His Excellency Mr. László KOVACS
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary
BUDAPEST
Republic of Hungary

Reference:
No. 144/97/L

The Hague
26 February 1997

Dear Mr. Minister,

May I first of all thank you for the effective help your Ministry gave me in preparing various contacts in Budapest regarding the situation of the Slovak minority in Hungary.

In previous recommendations I have referred to the need for a law regarding the implementation of article 68 of the Constitution of Hungary which foresees a direct representation of the various national minorities in Hungary in the Hungarian Parliament. I was glad to hear that a number of obstacles standing in the way of a solution of this problem now seem to have been removed. At the same time I express

the hope that a determined effort will be made to speed up the preparation of a draft-law on this subject and its subsequent submission to Parliament. This would open the way to a direct representation of the national minorities in the parliament which is due to be elected in 1998.

My second recommendation regards the question of the programme in the Slovak language in public radio service and television. I have been informed that the regional radio programmes in the Slovak language - 90 minutes a day - are being cancelled on days that the Hungarian Parliament is in session and replaced by reports on the parliamentary debates. I would express the hope that efforts presently undertaken to find a solution which guarantees 90 minutes broadcast every day without such cancellations will soon be successful. In addition, I express the hope that it will soon be possible to establish better contacts between the management of Hungarian Public Radio and T.V. and representatives of the Slovak minority.

I noticed with satisfaction that the basic contribution provided by the state for the work of minority Self-Government has been increased for the current year. I express the hope that, notwithstanding the difficult financial situation of Hungary, a further increase will prove to be possible for the year 1998.

The interest of members of the Slovak community in Hungary in ensuring a proper training in the Slovak language seems to be affected by their wish to have their children learn English, German or French. I hope that your Government will be ready to consult with the Hungarian national Self-Government on ways to revive the interest in learning the Slovak language without undermining the principle of freedom of parental choice.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Max van der Stoel

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY

To
H.E. Mr. Max van der Stoel
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

The Hague

Budapest, 29 April 1997

Dear Mr. High Commissioner,

May I thank you for the latest recommendations kindly formulated in your letter of 26 February. As I pointed out on the occasion of your last visit to Budapest, we continue to consider your recommendations as most instructive for perfecting our legislation on national minorities and for improving the implementation of the respective laws. I am convinced that however flawless it may seem on paper, no legal and institutional framework can do without constant revision.

I have pleasure in informing you that preparations for a draft law on the direct parliamentary representation of Hungary's national minorities have been accelerated lately. Both parties of the governing coalition are now agreed to grant the national-level minority self-governments the right to draw up their own lists of candidates. Agreement has also been reached on the preferential treatment of these lists according to which in the 1998 election one third of the votes normally required for the election of candidates running on party lists will be sufficient for one nominee from each national minority to obtain a seat in the Parliament.

As to the question of adequate air time for Slovak language radio and television programs, the problem is caused by the current practice of live FM broadcasting of parliamentary sessions by the Kossuth Station of the Hungarian Public Radio. In cases sessions are drawn out, minority programs might in fact be cancelled or broadcast at a later date. To redress these irregularities, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Right of National and Ethnic Minorities has made a recommendation which was accepted by the Steering Board of the Hungarian Public Radio. It called upon the management of the Radio to start consultations with the national minority self-governments on the rules of air time distribution and to carry out the necessary program restructuring to avoid further violations of the relevant provisions of the Law on Public Radio and Television. Although it has no say in the programming policy of the Radio, the Government welcomes every effort to quickly remedy the situation.

State subsidies allocated to the minority self-governments have increased since 1997 and the Government is ready to take further steps to close the gap between their current allotments and their actual needs. To this end, preparations for a draft amendment to the Law on the Rights of National Minorities are underway.

In like manner, the Government is ready for consultations with the Slovak National-level Self-government with a view to further improving the teaching of the Slovak language in Hungary. In fact, such consultations are already continuing at expert level.

I believe there is a certain correlation between the interest shown by the Slovak minority for learning their native language on the one hand, and the extent to which they deem it practical, on the other. The political, cultural and economic links between Slovakia and Hungary as well as the various forms of regional and cross-border cooperation or twin-town partnership, etc. can help build consciousness of the benefits of belonging to a national minority and increase the readiness of all those concerned to make use of their rights recognized and protected by our legal system. I consider your recommendations and your whole activity as an encouragement for the promotion of these ideas on which the Hungarian Government remains committed to base its policy.

I look forward to welcoming you in Budapest soon again.

Yours sincerely,

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