

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING WORKIN SESSION 6: Tolerance and non-discrimination I. (2 October 2008) |

STATEMENT BY THE SLOVAK DELEGATION in exercise of its Right of Reply

Slovakia has one of the largest Roma populations in Europe. Since 1991, Roma have been considered as a national minority in Slovakia. After the census (May 2001) 89,920 persons declared themselves as Roma; however the more realistic expert estimates set the Roma population at 320,000. The Government of the Slovak Republic considers solving of the Roma national minority problems as its priority as also declared in the Manifesto from 2006.

The Government pays ever increasing attention to the issue of education of Roma children. During its **presidency in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe** (November 2007 – May 2008) Slovak Republic organized a high-level **European conference on Roma education** in Bratislava.

Within the framework of the Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti Slovak Republic adopted following recent measures and initiatives.

In May **2008** the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (**the School Act**) and on amendments to certain acts. Pursuant to the School Act, education and training are based particularly on the principle of:

- **prohibition of all forms of discrimination and especially of segregation;**
- exemption from the kindergarten fee in the last year before starting the compulsory school attendance;
- preparation for a responsible life in a free society in a spirit of understanding and tolerance,
equality of men and women, friendship between nations and ethnic groups and religious tolerance.

In est de jure the primary school for pupils with mentally disadvantages (special schools) are clearly designated for mentally disadvantaged children. **The pupils are not enrolled to these schools on the basis of their ethnicity, but on the basis of their mental disadvantages and after a competent diagnostic examination.** The legal guardian of the child is always involved in this process and the whole process is guarded by the State School Inspection.

A new methodological test entitled "Test of School Aptitude" designed within the framework of the PHARE project is used in examining the children. The gesture of these tests is Research Institute for Children's Psychology and Patopsychology, which has distributed that test to all pedagogic centres.

On the basis of the results of the analyses of the previous government concepts, a **Medium-term Concept for the Development of the Roma National Minority in the Slovak Republic (2008-2013)** has been drawn up, which the Government of the SR approved by its Resolution No.183, of 26 March **2008**. The concept identifies current problems in the area of education, health, employment, media coverage of problems faced by the Roma population. The document contains new suggestions and new perspectives of the perception of the current situation of the Roma, namely the gender issues and subsequent missionary work in the most vulnerable localities.

Currently a document is being prepared that will spell out the programmes in the substantive responsibility of particular sectors in a way to ensure co-action with the objectives of the Medium-term Concept for the Development of the Roma National Minority. From the concept's goals, activities and actions of the Plenipotentiary's Office will be derived that will form the core for legislative changes in areas which the concept anticipates, i.e. housing, social assistance, education and health care, - individually - but also in the context of cooperation with central state administration bodies, self-government authorities and non-governmental organisations.

The Medium-term Concept defines the following measures **in the field of education of Roma children and pupils:**

- draft alternative curricula that can be used by elementary schools in adapting the content of education for Roma children from a socially disadvantaged environment;
- promote the establishment of integrated classes at elementary schools by creating adequate conditions in the education and training process;
- define a category of pupils with psychological and social development disorders, behavioural disorders and evolutionary learning disorders and pupils from a socially

disadvantaged environment, which would be distinct from pupils with health handicaps (health-related disabilities) requiring special educational and training needs;

- regulate the issue of integration and re-integration of pupils with psychological and social development disorders, behavioural disorders and evolutionary learning disorders and children from a socially disadvantaged environment (with individual educational and training needs);
- use and perform consistently tests evaluating the capacity for education of children (school readiness) from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and RR-screening tests in order to rule out mental retardation of children. Tests should be carried out in the language (of the ethnic minority), which the children know best;
- provide financial resources for continuous purchase of new specific psychological and diagnostic methodologies;
- provide for capacities (personal, material, infrastructural, financial) for on-site (at school) diagnosis of children and pupils;
- perform a regular (bi-annual) re-diagnosis of pupils assigned to special elementary schools and prepare a report;
- ensure that diagnosis and re-diagnosis of the child are performed in a natural environment.

In March **2008**, the Government of the SR approved the **Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Students including the Development of Secondary School and University/College Education**. The ambition of this initiative is to enhance the quality of upbringing and education of Roma children and students, to increase the rate of success of students and to help in the acquiring of education and finding jobs on the labor market within the framework of the upbringing-education process in the SR.

The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (The Office of Plenipotentiary) cooperates with the Ministry of Education in the implementation of the National Project **“Increasing the qualification potential of members of the Roma community by introducing a new study specialisation – Roma Studies - in the secondary school education system”**. The National Project **“Roma Studies”** assumes creation of a new study specialisation, which currently cannot be studied at any other secondary school in Central Europe. In addition to receiving general qualification (general-education subjects and foreign languages) the pupils of this study specialisation will receive qualification in the subjects of Roma Studies, they will master the **Romani language, Roma literature and history**, as necessary prerequisites for their prospective activities in schools and school facilities with

dominating Roma pupils, in the Roma communities and in the institutions dealing with Roma issues.

The Government of the SR respects the codification of the Roma language according to the western model from 1971 when the language commission at the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Slovakia adopted the binding norm for the entry of the Slovak dialect of the Roma language. Within the framework of preserving, maintaining and acknowledging the Roma language, on 29th June 2008 in Bratislava the standardization of the Roma language in Slovakia has been officially proclaimed. As part of the official proclamation the **Declaration of Roma of the Slovak Republic regarding the standardization of the Roma language in the Slovak Republic** has been signed by the representatives Roma national minority.

The Slovak Republic also adopted Act No. 365/2004 Coll. of 20-th of May 2004 on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination, and on amending and supplementing certain other laws as amended (**Antidiscrimination Act**), which took into force in 2004. The Antidiscrimination Act presents a comprehensive antidiscrimination legislative regulation covered by one law legislation. **In 2008 in close cooperation with the civil society the amendments to the Antidiscrimination Act have been adopted, among them - the most important is the adoption of temporary balanced measures.** Another change that was introduced was a more detailed specification and extension of the scope of the **Slovak National Centre for Human Rights**, which will under the amended Act (besides its existing powers) also have the power to conduct independent inquiries concerning discrimination and prepare and publish reports and recommendations on issues relating to discrimination.

Structural Funds of the European Union are one of the sources for the solution of problems of the Roma communities in Slovakia. The **National Strategic Reference Framework of the Slovak Republic for 2007-2013** has created room for the solution of the issues of the **marginalized Roma communities by a separate horizontal priority**. Its goal is to strengthen cooperation, pursue more effective coordination of activities and financial resources aimed at improving the living conditions of members of the marginalized Roma communities. The horizontal priority will be implemented through a comprehensive approach, the integration of projects from multiple operational programmes and will be focused on 4 priority areas: education, health, employment, housing and three mutually related problem areas: poverty, discrimination and gender equality.

The Office of Plenipotentiary cooperates systematically with the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR in the implementation of the **programme supporting the construction of municipal tenancy apartments of lower standards designed for citizens in material hardship and the construction of technical amenities in Roma settlements**; renders consultations regarding new housing construction of lower-standard apartments. These consultations and the assistance in the area of new housing development have already achieved some success related to the cooperation of regional offices with regional cadastre offices in pursuing priority municipalities with a Roma community for the commission, elaboration and completion of the land records restoration register; with the Slovak Land Fund in making use of the option of substitution or long-term lease of land for the benefit of municipalities and Roma community. The Office of Plenipotentiary cooperates with the non-governmental organizations in the field of legal counselling and prevention of the cases of evictions.

The Government of the Slovak Republic is open to the dialogue with non-governmental organizations – either through the Governmental advisory bodies or through individual meetings.