

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3369/09  
by Edit Bauer (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Restriction of the use of minority languages in a Member State

On 16 April 2009, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted a draft law amending Law No 270/1995 Coll. on the state language of the Slovak Republic, thanks to votes from members of the governing party. Despite declarations by Government representatives to the effect that the proposal does not restrict the use of minority languages, in reality it represents a serious restriction of the use of national minority languages.

For example:

- The number of institutions where the state language is to be used in official contacts (paragraph 3(1)) is considerably greater than is laid down by Law No 184/1999 Coll. on the use of minority languages, meaning that, among other things, it will not be possible to use a minority language in official contacts with certain authorities, health insurance offices and social security offices even in localities where over 20% of the population belong to a national minority.
  - In personal communication with social and health-care workers, minority languages may be used only in localities where the proportion of the minority is over 20%, and in other cases only if the patient or the client does not speak the state language (paragraph 7(4)). This proposal represents a serious intrusion into the private sphere and is absurd.
  - Public radio broadcasting in other languages is permitted only if the programme is immediately broadcast in the state language in the same form, which makes it practically impossible for anything to be broadcast in other languages (paragraph 5(1)(b)).
  - Commemorative signs must be written in the state language, and an inscription in another language may be added in lettering of the same size or smaller (paragraph 5(7)), but the Slovak Ministry of Culture must be approached to issue a binding opinion. This provision applies retroactively with no limit of time, and additions to the inscriptions must be made at one's own expense.
  - The draft law lays down strict penalties of between EUR 100 and EUR 5 000. Not even people carrying out their professional business, such as doctors and nurses, are exempt.
1. Does the Commission consider this step by the Government and National Council of the Slovak Republic to be in keeping with the spirit of Article 6 of the EC Treaty?
  2. In the Commission's view, is this draft law in keeping with Directive 2000/43/EC<sup>1</sup>?
  3. What does the Commission intend to do to safeguard cultural and linguistic equality in one of the Member States of the European Union?

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22.