

RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY: SOLUTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The present study summarises various approaches towards minorities in the dynamics of central/local relations in Slovakia since 1989. It documents the growing role of the local level in addressing the needs of the different ethnic groups living in Slovakia. In this context, the national government and the international environment are powerful actors capable of shaping change. Therefore, attention is given to central decisions trying to misuse the local electoral legislature and to redraw the existing territorial-administrative division. This leads to the underrepresentation of local minority populations in regional governments and undermines mother-tongue education. It will be shown that the local public administration can improve the situation of minorities and help foster ethnic co-existence in localities where minorities directly participate in the local management of their community. From this perspective, the stable political representation of the Hungarian minority and insufficient representation of the Roma minority is reviewed. In addition, a growing search for more flexible means and ways of inter-ethnic communication outside mainstream local institutions, such as informal self-governments, traditional leaders and minority political parties will be presented. It will be concluded that, in general, despite a wide range of possibilities for local initiatives responding to the needs of minority communities, the scarcity of financial resources—linked with the lack of meaningful local powers and competencies—limit their success. Effectiveness in addressing minority issues at the local level is documented by some relevant cases in the fields of education, culture, housing and living environment, employment and social security. Future changes should include meaningful decentralisation, the establishment of more responsive and more professional local governments with the extensive participation of the various local ethnic communities coupled with a series of reforms in sectoral policies, i.e. in employment policies, housing and the social security system.

1. Introduction

In Slovakia, a significant part of the population belongs to various non-Slovak ethnic groups. Institutional instruments and policies need major restructuring if they are to suc-

cessfully solve problems concerning ethnic co-existence, participation and representation for Slovakia's minority communities. Pressure to prepare for candidacy for the European Union has been instrumental in starting a process of reform on the part of local and national officials to address the interests and needs of minority communities. This process was stifled in the mid-1990s due to the presence of a neo-totalitarian/nationalist regime in Bratislava headed by Prime Minister Mečiar that actively resisted any form of pressure to improve the status of minority groups. Measures taken by the Mečiar government met with strong international disapproval and domestic opposition, especially on the part of minorities. However, neither of these sources of pressure could significantly alter the implementation of the planned political changes. Only with the election of a reform-oriented coalition government in 1998 did this situation begin to transform into an acceptable scenario for minorities.

Multi-ethnic relations in Slovakia are dominated by the Slovak ethnic group. Dispersed among this majority are minority groups that make up 15% of the population. A sample of current minority groups includes: Hungarians, Roma, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, Jews, Czechs, Silesians and Moravians.

The situation of minorities—including their own policies, their influence on both local and national levels as well as the central policies directed towards them—greatly depends on a series of factors. These factors include: (1) the deeply embedded historic memories of the various communities in the field of majority/minority relations, which influence current attitudes and policies on all sides; (2) the size and demographic development of various minority communities; (3) territorial distribution, i.e. concentration or dispersion, of a particular minority population; and (4) socio-economic differences based on ethnic grounds. All the above mentioned factors can help in understanding some basic dimensions in the complexity of majority-minority relations. At the same time, it has to be understood that these factors can be easily politicised and misused in furthering misinterpretations, prejudices and stereotypes which deepen and manipulate divisions among the various ethnic communities.

In the 1990s the major inter-ethnic disputes in Slovakia coalesced around heated political debates on the use of minority languages in public, education of minorities in their mother tongue and public administration reforms involving new territorial divisions that have had an impact on the ethnic composition of regions where minorities live. These disputes were in fact bipolar as they mainly involved representatives of the Slovak majority and those of the Hungarian minority. However, due to growing international pressure in the second half of the 1990s, more and more attention has been paid to the situation and treatment of the Roma. Against the background of the increased commitment of the new government to look at minority needs, public understanding of the political participation of minorities at all levels and of the role of the local level in the effective management of Slovakia's multi-ethnic society has grown significantly. It can be said that the majority of society has needed time to understand and acknowledge that effective democracy can only be established by and through the often tiresome process of gaining the consent of Slovakia's minority population.

1.1. *A brief history of inter-ethnic co-existence*

Most minority groups living in present-day Slovakia are deeply rooted in Slovakia's national history (see Table 1). From the perspective of inter-ethnic relations, it is important to note that Slovakia was an integral part of the Hungarian Kingdom for more than nine centuries. The Slovak population, along with other ethnic communities, was the subject of intense 'Magyarisation' beginning in the second half of the 19th century. In the 20th century, following more than seven decades of co-existence between Czechs and Slovaks, Slovakia declared its independence on 1 January 1993. In this section, however, attention will be paid to processes related to three historical periods including: (1) the establishment of Czechoslovakia as a multinational state, (2) events related to World War II and (3) the treatment of minorities under the communist regime. These processes and events help to explain the various dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in contemporary Slovakia.

During the interwar years, the Czechoslovak Republic respected some basic minority rights, especially in the field of the use of minority languages in public. Minority languages were allowed for official use in courts, public administration and cultural institutions. They were the languages of instruction in settlements where the minority population constituted more than 20% of the population. In cases when an ethnic group made up more than 50% of the local population, its language became an official language.¹ At the same time, numerous restrictions were introduced against the Roma, including mandatory police registration, legislation prohibiting their nomadic way of life, as well as forced internal population transfers and the dissolution of many of their settlements.² During this period, Slovaks consolidated their national identity in reaction to the Magyarisation policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As a consequence of the Munich Treaty of 1938, which led to the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the 1939 annexation of southern Slovakia to Hungary upon her request, an independent Slovak state was declared. Slovakia entered World War II as an Axis Power. The annexation brought about the closure of Slovak schools, forced expulsion of Slovaks and confiscation of Slovak and Czech property on this territory. All of these events are among the main sources of historic grievances on the Slovak side.³ But the most catastrophic events of this period included the deportation of 70,000 Slovak Jews to extermination camps by the Slovak state in 1941. Much of the Roma population was concentrated into working camps which, after the occupation of the Slovakia by German troops in 1944, became the sites of numerous massacres. The majority of the Slovak Roma survived, however, though in an extremely poor socio-economic state.⁴

Postwar developments in Czechoslovakia are remembered with bitterness, especially by the Hungarian minority. Among the most dramatic events were the population exchange

¹ Based on The Languages Act 122/1920. J. Plichtová (1993).

² Various cases are documented, e.g. from Gemer region by Gecelovský, 1992.

³ This part of history is often misused by nationalists for rising tension among Slovaks and Hungarians. We can find brief comments on this historical period, e.g. in Čierna-Lantayova (1992); Janics (1994).

⁴ For more details, see: e.g. Řičan (1998); Kollárová (1991); or UNDP National Report on Human Development Slovakia (1998). There are no reliable data on all Roma victims in Slovakia during

between Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the forced resettlement of the Hungarian population from its traditional habitat in southern Slovakia to Czech lands. The anti-Hungarian measures included re-Slovakisation policies⁵ and the confiscation of agricultural land. Hungarian institutions and a network of Hungarian schools were liquidated, and the use of Hungarian language in public was curtailed in the period of 1945-1949.⁶

During the communist period, some opportunities were created for education in Hungarian and Ukrainian, but not at the university level (with the notable exception of teacher training). A few Hungarian and Ukrainian institutions, newspapers and journals were supported by the state. The Ruthenian minority was not officially recognised and they were formally considered Ukrainians. As a result of this forced 'Ukrainisation', Ruthenian schools were closed, along with the Greek Catholic churches to which they belonged. Ruthenians were forced to attend the Eastern Orthodox Church.⁷

The communist regime adopted a strictly assimilationist policy with respect to the Roma, turning this group into a faceless socio-economic 'problem'. As a consequence of anti-Roma legislation and policies, the traditional nomadic way of life of the Roma was prohibited and their settlements liquidated. They were forcibly moved to high-rise housing complexes and dispersed among the rest of the population. The ethnic identity and culture of the Roma were suppressed. As such, the results of this paternalistic 'social engineering from above' were highly negative.

In conclusion, it can be said that Slovakia's present ethno-cultural map reflects communist ideological engineering, forced migration and expulsion that occurred during the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia after World War II. This traumatic history, common throughout Central and Eastern Europe, helps to explain much of the underlying tensions based on mistrust and fear that dominate inter-ethnic relations in Slovakia today.

1.2. Demography

The most recent representative data on minorities in Slovakia is found in the results of the Statistical Census held in 1991. According to this census, minorities compose 14.3% of the population. From the perspective of their size, minority communities in Slovakia can be divided into *three major groups*. Hungarians and Roma are the most numerous minority communities and, as such, much of this analysis focuses on the situation of these two groups. Other smaller minority groups include Czechs, Moravians, Silesians,⁸ Ukrainians, Germans, Jews⁹ and Poles. The smallest minority groups, such as Croatians and Bulgarians, compose the final tier.

World War II. Unfortunately, it has long been a forgotten issue for Slovak historians, only investigated now.

⁵ The aim of re-Slovakisation was to 'restore' the Slovak nationality of ethnic Hungarians who were supposedly victims of previous 'Magyarisation'. See Olejnik and Šutaj (1998).

⁶ For more details concerning the situation of the Hungarian minority after World War II, see: e.g. Bačová (1996); Janics (1994); Hunčík (1999).

⁷ For selected details about the situation of the Ruthenian minority see, e.g. Jurová (1992); Zeľová Bačová (1993); Plichtová (1993); Sisak (1997); Zubriczký (1998).

The Hungarian minority has 570,00 members and comprised 10.8% of the total Slovak population in 1991. Comparing this with data from the same year on native languages, more than 600,000 Slovak citizens declared the Hungarian language as their mother tongue. This number corresponds to almost 12% of Slovakia's total population (Bakker 1997). These figures illustrate the strength of the Hungarian identity and its resistance to assimilation.

It is difficult to compile reliable data about the *Roma*. Only in the 1991 Statistical Census were the Roma given the chance to freely identify their ethnic affiliation. Unsurprisingly, only 1.44% of Slovak citizens identified themselves as Roma. Most of the Roma chose to declare themselves as Slovaks or Hungarians. Due to historical experiences, such as anti-Roma legislation and widespread discrimination, they feared the consequences of openly declaring their ethnic identity.

Census officials collected data on the Roma unofficially during statistical censuses under the communist regime. According to data from 1980, Roma composed 4% of the population. More precise data is available from the registry of state administration from 1989 (Bačová 1993), when it was estimated that the Roma made up 4.8% of the total population. Present estimates (from 1998) suggest figures between 300,000 and 400,000 (about 7% of the total population).¹⁰

As of 1995, almost 40% of the Roma population was below reproductive age. The high birth rate of the Roma minority is generally considered to be the most serious obstacle to its peaceful co-existence with the majority and other ethnic groups. As the Roma generally suffer from severe poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, they are simply considered as a burden by much of the Slovak population (UNDP National Report on Human Development Slovakia 1998).

⁸ The size of the Ruthenian and the Ukrainian minorities is frequently discussed. According to estimations there are somewhere between 100,000 and 130,000 Ruthenians living in Slovakia. These estimates are based on mother tongue and historical interpolations, and they present nearly the entire population with Ruthenian roots. Ruthenian was declared as the mother tongue of 50,000 citizens. Russian Orthodox religious affiliation was declared by almost 40,000 and Greek-Catholic affiliation by almost 190,000 citizens (both with very close ties to the Ukrainian or the Ruthenian population) in the Statistical Census of 1991. See: Duleba (1997).

⁹ The size of the Jewish community is estimated at 3,000 people, living mostly in cities (Salner 1998), although the 1991 Census recorded only 134 persons who considered themselves Jewish. See: Olejník and Šutaj (1998).

¹⁰ The highest estimation for the size of the Roma population in Slovakia was mentioned at 480-520,000 by D. Ondrušek (1999) Centre for Conflict Prevention and Resolution, *Pravda*, 24 April; and at 480-500,000 by the Chairman of the Slovak Parliament's Commission for Solving the Roma Issue, I. Tóth (1999) *SME*, 24 June.

Table 1. Population Development by Nationality

		Slovak	Hungarian	Roma	Czech Moravian Silesian	Ruthenian Ukrainian	German	Polish	Other and un- declared
1930	Abs.	2,337,816	571,952	Na	121,696	90,824	148,214	7,023	44,509
	%	70.4	17.2	Na	3.7	2.7	4.5	0.2	1.3
1961	Abs.	3,560,241	518,776	Na	45,700	35,411	6,266	1012	6,640
	%	85.3	12.4	Na	1.1	0.8	0.2	0.0	0.2
1991	Abs.	4,519,328	567,296	75,802	59,326	30,478	5,414	2,659	14,032
	%	85.7	10.8	1.44	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.27
1997	Abs.	4,614,547	568,291	87,779	59,005	32,496	5,365	3,186	16,981
	%	85.56	10.55	1.63	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.06	0.31

Na – Data not available

Note: Data for 1930, 1961 and 1991 are the results from statistical censuses. Data for 1997 is the result of the population movement register.

Sources: Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 1992,1998; Podolák, 1998.

1.3. Territorial distribution

The territorial dispersal of a minority population strongly influences its political participation at different levels. The Hungarian minority is concentrated in the southwestern, southern and southeastern part of Slovakia, in districts near the Hungarian border. In several towns (Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Galanta and Štúrovo), Hungarians constitute the majority, making up more than 50% of the local population. Their spatial concentration and large proportion in the local population support the Hungarian minority's demands for various types of autonomy, including territorial and administrative forms.

The Roma are scattered throughout the country but are concentrated to some degree in south-central and eastern Slovakia where there are some 300 Roma settlements. Roma quarters can also be found in larger cities where their compact settlement (in ghettos) and poor living conditions often lead to ethnic segregation. In practice, these settlements have become ghettos sequestered on the edges of various towns.

Overall, it can be concluded that regional concentration is significant only in the case of the Hungarian minority, which is comprised of compact settlements in several counties of southern Slovakia, such as Dunajská Streda and Komárno, where approximately 87% and 73% of the respective populations are Hungarian. Nevertheless, at the level of communes, local concentration of other minority populations can also be identified. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate in greater detail the presence of minorities in communes. As the total number of municipalities in Slovakia exceeds 2,800, it can be said that between one-third and one-half of the total number of localities have minority populations that constitute more than 10% of their total populations.

Currently, minority status at the national level is often juxtaposed with a local majority. This discrepancy concerning minority representation has yet to be addressed in legislation.

Table 2. Hungarian Minority Population in Municipalities (Statistical Census 1991)

Share of Hungarian population in municipalities (%)	Number of municipalities
0.01-0.9	792
1.0-4.9	125
5.0-9.9	23
10.0-24.9	31
25.0-49.9	60
50.0-74.9	118
75.0-89.9	244
90.0-100	76
Total municipalities with Hungarian population	1,469
Share of Hungarian population in the total population (%)	10.8

Source: Podolák (1998).

Table 3. Minority Population in Municipalities (Statistical Census 1991)

Share of national minorities in municipalities (in %)	Number of municipalities with minority population					
	Roma	Czechs Silesians Moravians	Ruthenians	Ukrainians	Germans	Poles
0.01-0.9	442	1,672	274	528	337	580
1.0-4.9	349	376	56	90	13	6
5.0-9.9	137	6	28	36	7	0
10.0-24.9	102	1	66	44	5	0
25.0-49.9	33	0	45	11	1	0
50.0 and more	9	0	11	1	0	0
Total municipalities	1,072	2,055	480	710	363	586
Share of total population (in %)	1.44	1.1	0.32	0.25	0.1	0.05

Source: Elaborated from Podolák (1998).

1.4. Socio-economic indicators

It is difficult to directly evaluate the social and economic situation of minority groups. In general, the main socio-economic indicators are not aggregated from the perspective of minority populations and relevant research is rare. One possible method of research is to identify situations that combine poor economic and social conditions with a large minority population.¹¹

High unemployment rates are typical for the Hungarian minority in south-central and southeast Slovakia and for the Ruthenian and Ukrainian minorities in east and north-east Slovakia. In general, however, it is the Roma who are by far in the worst situation measured by any indicators (unemployment, education, health).

A large number of districts with a higher share of minority population combine inherited underdevelopment with problems related to the transition period, including untapped human potential, inadequate technical infrastructure, the closure of old industrial plants and changes in agriculture. The age structure and/or lower education level, characteristic of almost all minority populations in comparison with the Slovak majority, have diminished opportunities for external support of development (new private investments) and possibilities for local initiatives from below.

2. The Legal Position and Political Participation of Minorities at the Central Level

While the importance of the national level cannot be underestimated in the protection of minorities, the role of the international environment has had an increasing impact in this field over the last decade. Of course, it is the domestic legal environment and political arena that are responsible for the formulation of a general framework of multi-ethnic co-existence both at the centre and locally. But processes related to globalisation and Slovakia's commitment to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures, including the European Union and NATO, have greatly influenced domestic minority policies, not in the least for security reasons. The role of bilateral treaties concluded by Slovakia with her neighbours is very important from this perspective, since most minorities, with the notable exception of Ruthenians and the Roma, have kin-states in the region which act as advocates on behalf of their interests.

2.1. *Constitutional guarantees*

The Slovak Constitution guarantees the principal rights of minorities living in the Slovak Republic. The Slovak Constitution made great progress in granting rights unprecedented in Slovak history (Bakker 1997). A series of rights are mentioned explicitly: the use of minority languages is granted under Article 6 and shall be determined by law. Article 12 guarantees basic rights and liberties regardless of nationality or ethnic adherence and Articles 33 and 34 guarantee full development for minorities. These articles define the rights of minorities on the individual level, or as rights realised in groups.¹² While some

¹¹ Rare attempts to characterise the social and economic situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia is presented in: Bakker (1997) or Hunčík (1999).

¹² Šutaj and Olejník (1998) explain: 'The legal norms of the Slovak Republic aim at the protection of national minorities; however, they do not create a special mechanism for the protection of minorities. All rights of national minorities are guaranteed as individual rights'.

authors (Čič et al., 1997) interpret these articles as preferential approaches to minorities (regarding culture, access to information, associations, education and language), it must be noted that 'affirmative action' or 'positive discrimination' is not explicitly mentioned in the Slovak Constitution. Article 34 also protects the state's interests: minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution may not threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic or discriminate against other citizens. This wording is extremely problematic and can be easily used to restrict minority rights.

The main obstacle concerning constitutional provisions for minorities is the lack of subsequent legislation developing important rights declared in the Constitution. Article 34 is compromised by the phrase 'and shall be fixed by law'. While the Constitution can only be amended by a two-third majority of the Slovak Parliament, the indicated acts proscribed in its articles are susceptible to the whims of a simple majority. Although at first glance it appears to be a highly flexible mechanism, it also allows for a new round of political wrangling for minority rights protection in Parliament, systematic political fights over ethnic issues and disputes with the state administration. From 1994 to 1998, minority rights were actively undermined in Slovakia. Many constitutional principles were not implemented. There is a some chance that the new constitution being drafted in 1999-2000 will also redress the mentioned deficiencies concerning minority rights.¹³

2.2. *Participation at the central level*

The size of a minority and its ability to mobilise its resources during parliamentary elections is strongly related to its political influence at the national level. The ability to exercise political influence depends largely on surpassing the 5% threshold for any political party to gain representation in the Slovak Parliament since the Slovak Electoral Law does not contain any special provisions for the representation of minorities in the Slovak Parliament. Under this Electoral Law, only Hungarians (given their size and degree of political mobilisation) have been represented in the Parliament. The Roma minority is active but fragmented and, in spite of its large size, cannot actively participate in and influence decision-making at the central level. For other minorities, the political participation of their members is not based solely on ethnicity. Many minority citizens are members of nonminority parties. These minorities' interests are negotiated with political parties through cultural associations and organisations, a phenomenon more applicable locally than nationally.

2.2.1. *Hungarians*

Since the beginning of the post-communist transition, several parties have emerged to represent Hungarians. They include the national-liberal party, Co-existence (Spolužitie), the liberal Hungarian Civic Party (Maďarská občianska strana or MOS) and the conservative Hungarian Christian Democrat Movement (Maďarské kresťansko-demokratické hnutie or MKDH). Their position was originally strengthened by the dissident credentials of

¹³ The approval of a new constitution of the Slovak Republic is one of the main aims of the coalition government ruling since 1998.

many of their leaders. The permanent presence of their members in the Slovak Parliament since 1990 documents the solid popular support of these parties. To increase their influence in the Slovak political arena, these three parties formed a coalition before the 1994 general elections. This coalition was then turned into a single political party—the Hungarian Coalition Party (Strana Madarskej Koalicie—SMK). They receive about 10% of the total national votes in each parliamentary election, consolidating their position as legitimate political representatives of the Hungarian minority. Following the 1998 elections, the SMK entered into a coalition with its rivals, thus gaining the central government posts of Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Environment and Minister of Construction and Public Works. The Hungarian Coalition defined co-operation as its priority. Its success is due to the precise definition of minority interests and responsive leaders. This pragmatic strategy needs to be replicated among other minority communities. Owing to the importance of the coalition-building process in Slovak political life, Hungarian political representation is influential and the Hungarian party is attractive as a coalition partner. The presence and lobbying of Hungarian politicians in the central government provides opportunities for the establishment of an improved local-level co-existence framework that benefits all minorities. However, it is important to note that, despite being part of the governing coalition, Hungarian politicians face difficulties in fulfilling their primary policy goals related to the use of the mother tongue in public, the establishment of higher level education in the mother tongue and the granting of special status to regions where Hungarians live in a majority (including the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, changes in the Constitution, territorial-administrative division, etc.).

2.2.2. *Roma*

The Roma minority has not had representatives in the Slovak Parliament or in any central government since 1989. Its political representation is poorly organised, fragmented and burdened by unco-operative political leaders and numerous political ideologies. The Roma Civic Initiative (Rómska Občianska Inicialiva or ROI) was created immediately after 1989. Though the most influential Roma political party, ROI achieved only very marginal political results. It also sought support from the Mečiar administration (Drozd 1998) and therefore has been somewhat discredited. A more critical voice was founded in 1996—the Roma Intelligentsia for Co-existence (Rómska inteligencia za spolunažívanie), or RIS. The RIS has preferred democratic political elements and has gained more influence since the 1998 elections. Until the Roma build a coalition, or one party succeeds in garnering votes from other ethnic groups (unlikely given the negative stereotypes of the Roma that pervade the Slovak population at large), they will not be able to capitalise on opportunities for minority participation under current rules for entering Parliament. Even a small parliamentary presence would give the Roma important negotiating and coalition-building power on a national scope.

Until now, Roma parties have lacked the ability to mobilise support among their own constituencies, have failed to clearly formulate or articulate their interests to their own communities and have not built the trust necessary for real political leadership. Despite the poor performance of Roma parties, they remain *the* representatives of the Roma minority. The consequence of this situation has been that various Roma political groups have attempted to affiliate themselves with the main political parties. The Hungarian Coalition

has been the most receptive to Roma interests. They fielded four Roma candidates for the 1998 parliamentary elections, though none were elected. Representatives of the Roma community have made inroads into the state administration (Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education). A Roma representative was nominated to the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Solving the Problems of Roma Minority in 1999 (V. Danihel). Roma parties must address their ability to co-operate, organise, formulate problems and strategies, negotiate and communicate. The last attempt to form a large Roma political block was the signing of an agreement on joint electoral program by 14 Roma political parties and 29 Roma nongovernmental organisations, with the aim to gain seats in the next parliamentary elections for Roma political representation. This initiative has yet to be tested by political praxis.¹⁴

2.3. *The international environment and bilateral treaties*

Article 11 of the Slovak Constitution emphasises that 'international treaties in regard to human rights and liberties, ratified by the Slovak Republic, have precedence over its laws if they secure a greater range of basic rights and liberties'. This measure gives an appropriate role to any international document. The most important binding international document is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, signed and ratified by Slovakia in 1995. A positive shift influencing the role of local governments was the ratification of the European Charter of Local Authorities in 1999. It is also expected that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages will be ratified during this electoral period. Nevertheless, various deficiencies mentioned in this chapter prove that the integration of international documents into domestic Slovak law has yet to be completed.

A crucial positive step in Slovakia's bilateral relations was the signing of the bilateral treaty with Hungary in 1995.¹⁵ The treaty has some problematic aspects, however (despite the above mentioned constitutional commitment). For example, Article 15 says that the Contracting Parties should respect Recommendation 1201 of the Council of Europe. Critical Article 11 of the Recommendation has never been fully respected by Slovak legislation.¹⁶ It was considered as an expression of the Hungarian minority's aspirations for territorial autonomy and evoked memories of the revision of Slovak boundaries in 1938.

International organisations have played a significant role in the accommodation and resolution of ethnic conflicts, especially during the Mečiar government, and they sys-

¹⁴ Kotian (2000).

¹⁵ The Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Co-operation between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary.

¹⁶ Article 11 of Recommendation 1201: 'In the regions where they are in a majority the persons belonging to a national minority shall have the right to have at their disposal appropriate local or autonomous authorities or to have a special status, matching the specific historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the domestic legislation of the state'. For more details in Slovak-Hungarian context, see: e.g. Sándor (1996), Olejník and Šutaj (1998).

tematically monitored the situation, identified key problems, evaluated relevant legislation and mitigated inter-ethnic conflicts by raising public awareness. The most active participant has been the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities. Thus far, the international pressure has been only partially successful (for example, in leading to the modification of the administrative reform process and more systematic approaches toward improving the position of Roma). By increasing activities related to European integration, the role of various EU institutions is rapidly growing.

3. Central – Local Relations and Local Initiatives Addressing Minorities

The role of local public administration in addressing minority issues depends on the overall structure of state government and the dynamics of central-local relations. This section addresses a series of important political issues concerning the position of minorities in Slovakia that has come to the forefront of debates about local government. Among the many issues relevant to minority interests, the most highly debated have been:

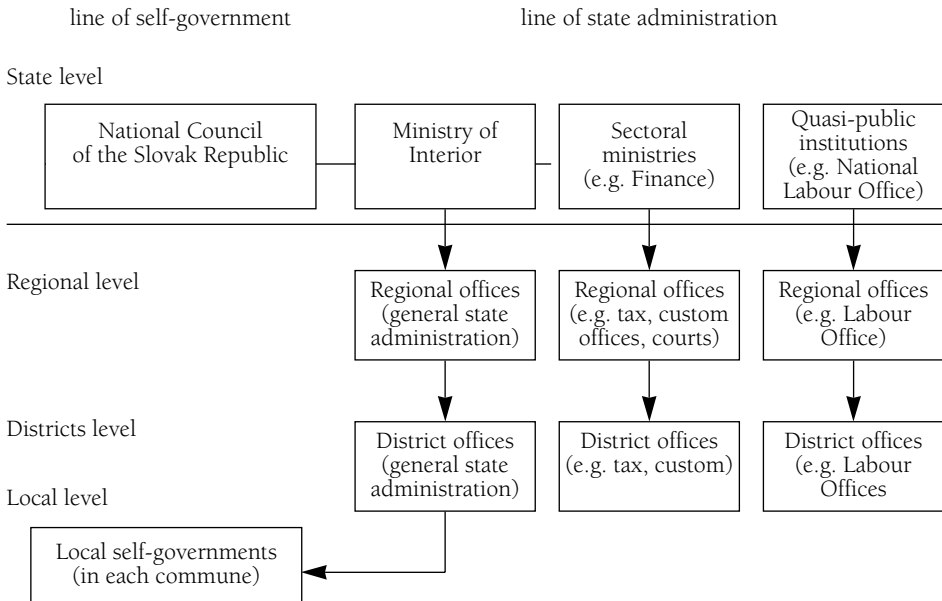
- the Local Electoral Act and its amendments,
- territorial-administrative division and the reform of state administration,
- the Act on the Use of Minority Languages, combined with its effect on the official state language,
- alternative schooling and requirements to study the official state language.

These debates have reflected the attempts of the 1994-1998 governing coalition to intervene into the lives of minorities at the local level, to change principles of local government and to dissolve local government functions serving minority communities. These attempts brought about the strong criticism of the domestic political opposition—particularly the Hungarian parties—and were partially responsible for the political disqualification of Slovakia as a European Union accession country in the first round. At the December 1997 EU summit meeting in Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic was moved from the first to the second wave of applicant countries.

3.1. *The dual model of local public administration*

The Slovak Republic adopted a dual model of public administration after 1989. This consists of two separate entities: (1) the local government and (2) the state administration. Local governments operate in each village and city. District and regional state administration consists of district and regional offices for general state administration, as well as several offices directly under the control of various ministries (for example, tax and custom offices). Selected sections of administration with specific functions were transferred to public self-governing bodies and/or underwent a process of ‘de-etatisation’ during the last decade. Bearing in mind problems of post-communist transition, the most important institution has been the National Labour Office (NUP), with nationwide networks of district labour offices (see Figure 1). Responsibility for the majority of Slovakia’s technical infrastructure is still under the control of state monopolies (electricity, gas, water and sewage).

Figure 1. Basic Model of Local Public Administration in Slovakia (since 1996)



3.2. Local public administration: structure and competencies

The scope of decentralisation and the territorial distribution of minorities are two major factors that influence the efficiency of local government in addressing minority needs. During the first phase of public administration reform—from 1990 to 1993—the tendency of decentralisation of power and competencies to the local level prevailed. The following phase (from 1994 to 1998) was characterised by the strengthening of the state administration, deconcentration and the marginalisation of minority issues.¹⁷ Their limited degree of power has prevented local self-governments from playing a more influential role in satisfying minority needs. Local governments are the main actor in the administration of certain local matters, but usually play a role in all areas of local life. District and regional state administration offices are responsible for many important competencies relevant to minorities (including nearly all aspects of educational administration and planning at the primary and secondary levels,¹⁸ health care and social security), as well as financing from the state budget (See Table 6). Local state administration can only act

¹⁷ The most visible proof of the predominance of deconcentration is the introduction of the new regional state administration and the postponement of the introduction of regional self-governmental institutions.

¹⁸ The state administration has nearly complete legal authority over the school curriculum, the payment of teachers and building maintenance of public schools. There is some space, however, for

strictly within the law, and it is too dependent on central level guidelines. Furthermore, it suffers from a lack of opportunities to initiate specific or innovative approaches toward minority issues.

The most important asset of local governments is the degree of autonomy they are granted.¹⁹ Local governments are legal entities that, according to the law, administer their own property and their own financial resources.²⁰ Local autonomy is therefore protected by law, and municipalities can only be given duties and set limits by acts approved by the Parliament. The right to approve local by-laws confirms the right for initiatives. The best case documenting the potential strength of local autonomy was the local referendum in Štúrovo, realised in spite of strong opposition from the central government.²¹ Local autonomy is only restricted in the sense that, if local by-laws are in disagreement with the Slovak Constitution or valid legislature, they are overturned by the Constitutional Court.

The main failure of this arrangement is the limited degree of local financial autonomy. Its advantage has been confirmed in cases when local governments have adjusted previous local by-laws that limited minority rights. Attempts were made, for example, to refuse incoming Roma the right to settle down in the city of Jelšava, and local by-laws in Ňagov and Rokytovec (communes in eastern Slovakia) banned Roma from entering their municipalities.²² The importance of constitutional and legal guarantees for local public administration that aim to meet minority needs is well documented in the 'Komárno Document'.²³ This document stresses the need for more extensive decentralisation, including: the transfer of powers that are important for minorities (in the fields of education, culture, public safety, health and environment) to the local level, the transfer of financial and material resources, and the right to use Hungarian in oral and written communication with public administration officials wherever Hungarians make up at least 10% of the population. Special status for the regions where Hungarians make up the majority is advocated.

activity on the part of local governments through local school boards on smaller issues such as small maintenance issues and personnel issues.

¹⁹ The mentioned approach to local autonomy is inspired by Clark (1984), who emphasises two values: initiative and immunity.

²⁰ Although Slovak local self-governmental municipalities are defined as economically independent entities, in practice they depend on transfers from the annually approved state budget.

²¹ The referendum in Štúrovo became a symbol of resistance against central government. The local self-government organised a local referendum that replaced the national referendum cancelled by V. Mečiar (on the direct election of the president, and on joining NATO). For details, see: Hrabko (1999).

²² Bančanský (1999); *SME* (1998) 28 November.

²³ For more details on this very important document for the Hungarian minority in Slovakia in English, see: Bakker (1997). While part of this document was modified later, many of the declared conditions have remained among the main political goals of the parties representing the Hungarian minority.

Table 4. Distribution of Key Powers among Main Lines of Local Public Administration

Local self-government*	District and Regional State Administration** in:
General administration, Municipal enterprises and budgetary organisations	General internal administration, management of state property, public tendering and trade licensing, international co-operation, control
Administration of local taxes and fees, administration of own property	Fire protection, state defence, civil protection
Regulation of economic activities, local economic development	Small entrepreneurs, consumer protection
Planning documentation preparation and approval	Regional development and regional planning, strategy of regional development
Administration and maintenance of local roads and parking sites, public spaces, public green spaces, public lighting, market places, cemeteries	Education Primary schools, primary art schools (district) Secondary schools, secondary vocational schools, special schools, youth and sport
Waste collection and disposal, water supply, sewage and water cleaning stations, street cleaning, central heating	Environmental administration and protection, water management, territorial planning, construction order, waste management, landscape protection, air protection
Kindergartens, health ambulances, elementary day-care social services, personal services for elderly	Social affairs, social care, state social payments distribution, state social facilities network, co-operation with humanitarian institutions
Administration and operation of local cultural and social facilities, sport and leisure facilities	Culture—museums and galleries, regional and district libraries, cultural heritage protection
Support in the fields of education, historical heritage protection, cultural and art activities, sport	Health care administration, health centres, hospitals, clinics state veterinary care
Support of humanitarian activities	Transport and road management
Support of housing	Cadastral register and land ownership changes
Local police and fire brigades	Agriculture, forestry and hunting

* the scope of involvement of local self-government depends mostly on the size of the commune.

** competencies of general state administration without separated lines of state administration and quasi-public institutions with nationwide network (the most important is the National Labour Office).

Sources: Act No. 369/1990 the Communities Act; Act No. 222/1996 Coll. on Organisation of Local State Administration, Nemeč et al. (2000).

3.3. The Local Election Act

Among the most important issues concerning minority groups has been the heated debate surrounding the drafting of a new Local Election Act. The Mečiar coalition government attempted to usurp civic principles with nationalist and ethnic principles in order to strengthen the role of its political affiliates in local elections and local policy-making. The

government often cited the insufficient representation of the Slovak minority in local councils in southern Slovakia in order to bolster and justify its efforts to guarantee better positions at the local level for its coalition member parties (Mečiar's Movement for Democratic Slovakia, the Slovak National Party and the Association of Slovak Workers).

The new Local Election Act contained special measures for municipalities with ethnically heterogeneous populations. According to this Act, the number of local councilors must be obligatorily distributed according to the ethnic composition of the population. Minorities must be represented proportionally in localities where their share of the population exceeds 5% (and by at least one councilor). This system of proportional representation based on ethnic composition was highly criticised by municipal associations, opposition parties and the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max van der Stoep. In their opinion, the new Act would prevent candidates for local councils from having equal access to local seats. Under the Act, ethnic groups would have predetermined shares of seats on local councils, contributing to highly polarised elections and removing opportunities for moderate party candidates. Further, this forced 'ethnicisation' of local councils would reduce space for political compromise.

Another problem resulted from the fact that 'ethnic composition' was determined according to the results of the 1991 Statistical Census, which were highly inaccurate. Notably, a fair representation of the Roma minority could not have been achieved by this mechanism as many Roma declared themselves as other nationalities during the census.

The Local Election Act (No. 302/1998) was approved by the Mečiar coalition before parliamentary elections in 1998, in spite of strong protests by opposition parties and organisations representing Slovakia's communes and cities. This act was never applied, however, thanks to the decision of the Constitutional Court, which declared several of the Act's articles unconstitutional, and because of the change of government after the 1998 elections.²⁴ The consequence of this development has been that all local elections since 1990 have been conducted according to almost identical legal regulations. Their most typical features have been the majority principle, the direct election of mayors, the use of 'multimember constituencies'²⁵ in the election of local councilors and greater opportunities for independent candidates to compete.

3.4. Representation of minorities in local public administration

The representation of minorities in local public administration opens opportunities for more effective participation and a stronger influence in decision-making. Local governments also offer a useful platform for the solution of minority problems: the local level is generally more sensitive to minority needs and is more likely to understand the dynamics of local inter-ethnic relations better than central government officials.

²⁴ The new parliamentary majority of the former opposition amended this Act immediately following the elections.

²⁵ Larger communes are divided into several multi-member constituencies, for which a certain number of council seats are allocated.

Despite the absence of precise information on minority representation in state administration, it seems that the participation of the Hungarian Coalition in the central government has led to wider participation of Hungarians in both regional and district state administration. Members of the Hungarian minority had limited access to higher positions in local state administration under the previous government, but this is changing.

The position of minorities in local self-governments can be examined through the local participation of their political parties. While the Hungarian minority has a long tradition of participation in local power, the Roma are only now strengthening their position step-by-step after a long history of disenfranchisement.

The 1990 elections offered a long-anticipated opportunity for parties representing minorities to gain political office. Three active Hungarian parties were successful and achieved good results. The total number of mayors representing the Hungarian minority during the first period of free local self-government was 164 (6% of a total of 2,727 mayors elected in Slovakia). The number of local Hungarian councilors elected was 4,052 (10.5% of a total number of elected councilors). Hungarian parties and their candidates also supported other candidates in many localities, notably those of VPN (Public Against Violence Movement), and independent forces that had pushed for democratic change. Roma parties were not nearly so successful and only gained two mayoral posts (0.07% of total mayors) and 88 local councilors (0.2% of total councilors).

Table 5 documents the results of two main minority communities in two consecutive local elections (1994 and 1998). The representation of the Hungarian minority is quite stable. The Roma minority remains strongly underrepresented, although its results have improved. Six candidates of the Roma Civic Initiative were elected mayors in 1998. A further two mayorships were also gained in coalition. The local elections of 1998 have provided several excellent examples of inter-ethnic co-existence. In Nové Zámky, the mayor is Hungarian even though Hungarians are in the minority in this town, while in Štúrovo, a town with a Hungarian population of over 70%, a Slovak mayor was elected. These candidates ran for office independently.

Table 5. Position of the Two Largest Minorities' Political Parties in Local Self-Government

Election	Minority	Mayors	Mayors** (in %)	Councillors	Councillors** (in %)
1990	Hungarian	164	6	4,052	10.5
	Roma	2	0.07	88	0.2
1994	Hungarian	249	8.9	4,404	12.5
	Roma	2	0.07	72	0.2
1998	Hungarian	227+25*	8.7	3,841+324*	11.8
	Roma	6+2*	0.3	100	0.3

* elected candidates of minority parties plus candidates of coalitions with minority parties.

** percentages in comparison to the total number of mayors/councilors elected in Slovakia.

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (1990, 1994, 1998). Local self-government election results.

3.5. *Territorial division and public administration reform*

The Slovak Parliament accepted new territorial divisions in 1996. Act No. 221/1996 on the Territorial and Administrative Division of the Slovak Republic introduced eight new regions and 79 districts. This reform only concerned state administration. Discussion of self-governance issues was postponed. The divisions were presented as a rational technocratic solution justified according to the standard of 'economic viability', leaving plenty of room for gerrymandering against minorities and political opponents.

Pressure came from opposition parties, most notably the Hungarians, and international bodies to change or repeal the divisions.²⁶ Without question, the aim of this territorial-administrative re-division—that also intended to establish electoral districts within the new boundaries—was the fragmentation of the Hungarian ethnic minority. Hungarian regions have been divided in such a way that the number of primary and secondary administrative regions with a Hungarian majority or a Hungarian population share of more than 20% has diminished drastically.²⁷

Carrying forward the process of public administration reform—including new regional divisions—has continued to be a major aim of the new government. In the present stage of political development, power-sharing is generally accepted at the local level, but there is a reluctance to apply full-scale power-sharing at the regional level (in regions with more than 50% Hungarian inhabitants). One of the potential outcomes of the debates on territorial division is the acceptance of more regions with greater than 20% minority populations, combined with an extended minority rights framework at the regional level. This could improve the position of the minority population and its representation, preserve the rationale of the regional division (its multi-criterion principle) and prevent the instinctive majority fear of potential minority secessionist movements.²⁸

3.6. *Communication and co-operation*

Communication and co-operation with minorities in local life are needed even in the case of their absence in locally elected bodies. They can be improved by using minority self-governing institutions, local minority political party organisations and activists, and traditional leaders.

In some localities, these links were developed with Roma communities, their main goal being improved communication between the minority and the local authorities (e.g. in the

²⁶ Under the original proposal, e.g. Nové Zámky district, having a Hungarian numerical majority, should have been split into three new districts (Krivý 1997). Finally, the administrative boundaries of the districts with the highest share of Hungarian minority were not changed (e.g. Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Nové Zámky).

²⁷ For details of the 1996 administrative territorial division, see: e.g. Bakker, 1997.

²⁸ Nevertheless, Slovak representatives should respect Recommendation 1201 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and avoid territorial changes that change share of ethnic minorities in administrative units. For details on international aspects of territorial administrative changes, see: Kusý (2000).

towns of Prievidza, Michalovce, Žarnovica).²⁹ The formation of local Roma minority self-governments depends on local conditions and is not always successful. The main obstacle to their establishment is the internally divided local Roma community and the undifferentiated, untapped human potential that makes the creation of a political class very difficult.³⁰ Local minority organisations are usually informal, depending on the presence of local activists and natural leaders. Their legitimacy can easily be challenged—by the minority community itself and by other local actors. Attempts to use traditional Roma leaders (*vajda*) for this purpose face similar difficulties. The traditional organisation of the Roma community has often dissolved and the size of many local Roma communities is often too big for monocratic control by one leader. Some representatives of the Roma minority at the local level are self-elected (political party activists, natural leaders), with respected positions as part of the local minority community. They serve as consultants in the articulation of local minority community needs to local institutions. They become regular members of various special committees in local public administration and organise the participation of the minority communities in local life. A similar initiative is the establishment of the District Roma Council in Kežmarok district (eastern Slovakia).³¹ Functioning communication links and co-operation with local administration prevents conflicts and the worsening of Roma living conditions (but is still missing in many localities).

Case Study 1. Participation, co-operation and communication

The issue: What are effective tools leading to effective co-operation and communication with the local Roma community.

The actors involved: Mayor of Zbudské Dlhé, traditional Roma leaders (*vajda*), local councilors

The issue proceeding and strategy: This is the case of Zbudské Dlhé, a small village in eastern Slovakia (Humenné district), with a majority of the Roma population (57%) living in their own settlement. There are five Roma local councilors out of a total of twelve. This official line of co-operation is multiplied by the activity of the *vadja* (a nonmember of the local council). He is in regular direct contact with the mayor, informing her of the Roma community's needs and problems. The most pressing of these problems is that the entire Roma settlement is served by a single well, and therefore receives poor quality water.

The results: The participation of Roma in local self-government and the regular communication with the *vajda* has improved their participation in all spheres of local life. Roma co-operate in local voluntary work projects, as well as in local cultural festivities (having their own music group). But the most important achievement is that one of the local self-governments' priorities is to finish the construction of a water-pipe system and an access road leading to the Roma settlement.

²⁹ SME (1996) 7 December; Piecka (1999).

³⁰ As it is confirmed in the Project Svinia's case. This project is supported by the Canadian government and other western organisations. Despite of its successes in other fields, the attempts to form a well-functioning Roma self-government have faced difficulties. See: Borszék (1998); *Hospodárske noviny* (1999) 8 June.

³¹ *Pravda* (2000) 24 January.

Lesson: A series of links can be used for effective co-operation with minorities, for their full integration in all spheres of local life. Official structures of local self-government together with effective traditional leaders can create efficient ways to address Roma problems.

Source: J. Hrubovčák (2000) 'S Rómami nemáme žiadne problémy' (We have no problems with the Roma), *Obecné Noviny*, No. 3, p. 20.

Table 6. Main Sources of Income of Local Self-Government in 1996

Item	SKK (Millions)	Per cent of Local Budget
Tax incomes	10,163.1	39.9
Shared taxes	5,857.3	23.0
Local taxes (real estate tax)	2,878.9	11.3
Other (local fees, road tax)	1,426.9	5.6
Non-tax incomes	8,992.6	35.4
Own property, entrepreneurial activities	633.8	2.5
Administrative fees	1,370.1	5.4
Capital incomes	2,265.9	8.9
Other non-tax	4,722.8	18.6
Central grants	3,608.7	14.2
General grants	1,377.4	5.4
Capital grants	2,231.3	8.8
Incomes from credits and borrowing payments, sold shares	93.8	0.4
Credits received	2,565.7	10.1
Total Incomes	25,423.9	100

Source: According to Berčík (1998).

3.7. Local finances

Finances hinder local governments' attempts to play an active role with respect to minority issues. Two aspects of local finances are important to consider: (1) financial autonomy, and (2) resources available for activities aimed at and fulfilling minority rights and needs. Limited local tax revenue (real estate tax) and local fees collection (maximum limits defined by law) have hampered local attempts to generate revenue. Municipalities are strongly dependent on shared taxes and specific grant transfers from the state budget. Resources from suitable municipal property management are available only for larger localities. This serves as a substantial barrier against more active local self-government in the area of minority relations.

The worst financial situation is found in small communes. A large percentage of their expenditures go to operational costs rather than to programs and initiatives that address community issues. Minority groups are especially concentrated in such small communes.

Financial scarcity at the local level quite simply limits good intentions with respect to minority needs. More sophisticated co-operation between state and local administrations could help to solve this problem. Local state administration also suffers from a long-term lack of financial resources in the most sensitive areas for minorities: education, culture and health. These strained resources inhibit chances for experiments and new approaches to local government.

3.8. *Education and use of minority languages*

Issues of education and mother-tongue instruction are the two primary concerns of minority groups. They directly influence the protection and survival of minority languages and cultures, and serve as a basis for group identity formation. Major issues related to minority schooling are available levels of mother-tongue education (kindergarten, elementary, secondary, university level), the number of subjects offered in minority languages (all subjects, selected subjects), minority teacher training and the existence and accessibility of school facilities. On the other hand, good teaching in the Slovak language, suitable for minority school students, is also a crucial factor contributing to the social and economic advancement of minorities.

3.8.1. *The school system serving minorities*

The Hungarian and Ukrainian minorities have well-developed and stable networks of kindergartens and elementary schools.³² The Hungarian minority also has a network of secondary schools with various vocational trainings. In addition, Slovakia has a strong tradition of mixed schools, hosting classes 'under one roof' with both Slovak- and minority-language instruction. The network of Ukrainian schools also constitutes a 'good practice': in addition to the schools presented in Table 8, there were 26 schools hosting 74 classes in which Ukrainian was the language of instruction in 1996-97.³³ The teaching of the Ruthenian language as a mother tongue was accepted as of the 1997-98 school year (the written form of the Ruthenian language was constituted in 1995), but was instituted only in seven schools (eight classes with 66 pupils), reflecting the lower interest of parents in Ruthenian-language education.³⁴ The future expansion of schooling in this language will be supported by the Ruthenian Department established at Prešov University in 1999.³⁵

The miserable level of education among the Roma minority group is one of the major factors contributing to the group's gritty social and economic position. Roma children are educated in Slovak, despite the fact that they live within their own linguistic community (or combine the Romany language with other local languages). Their basic right to be educated in their mother tongue is not fulfilled. Roma children are generally unsuccessful in

³² The number of kindergartens decreased as a consequence of the economic transformation after 1989. The number of schools serving minorities have increased, with the exception of the schools with Ukrainian-language instruction. See: Gabzilová (1994).

³³ According to information of UIP MS SR (1998).

³⁴ According to UIP MŠ SR (1997).

³⁵ SME (1999) 20 April.

school and are considered 'backward'.³⁶ There is no network of education facilities in the Romany language and there are insufficient capacities and resources (prepared teachers, full collection of teaching materials) to establish such a network at the present time.

Two successful policy initiatives aimed at the improvement of Roma education are currently being expanded: (1) the preparation of Roma children in so-called 'zero' classes or in kindergartens, and (2) the introduction of teacher assistants for Roma children in some classes with a higher proportion of Roma pupils. These initiatives have been combined with afternoon centres for children (and their mothers). In the past few years, many local councils have decided to support local kindergartens in their effort to prepare Roma children for Slovak schools. Both mixed and entirely Roma kindergartens function in various municipalities. Schools serve as centres for the delivery of public goods (e.g. hygiene, health, school lunches) and as training centres for future employment.

Table 7. Structure of Local Self-Government Expenditures (1996)

Expenditure	SKK (Millions)	Per cent
Economy	3,547.7	15.3
from this: transport	2,346.1	10.1
Banking operations and technical services	2,518.6	10.9
Education	131.5	0.6
Sport	397.0	1.7
Culture	1,076.4	4.6
Housing	5,232.4	22.6
Health	200.3	0.9
Local services	2,227.0	9.6
Social security	392.3	1.7
Environment	1,385.7	6.0
Other social services	103.0	0.4
Security	487.9	2.1
Administration	5,014.7	21.7
Other	439.2	1.9
Total	23153.7	100

Source: According to Berčík (1998).

The main centres for university-level, minority-language studies and teacher training are Comenius University, the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra (including a Department of Roma Culture and an affiliate in the Spiš region) and Prešov University. The Hungarian minority's attempts to establish university-level education in the Hungarian language have not yet been realised. In Komárno and Kraľovský Chlmec, 'city universities' were established at the initiative of the local governments, with the participation of universities based in Hungary. Their legal status is not fully recognised and the Ministry

³⁶ Magdolenová (1998).

of Education vigorously opposed their establishment during the 1994-1998 period. In 1998 Comenius University offered talented Roma minority students the opportunity to apply for places reserved exclusively for them. This type of 'positive action' was more or less a gesture of goodwill without success. There is an outstanding need for more elaborated and complex initiatives to increase the number of Roma university applicants. In 1998, only two Roma students attended the biggest Slovak higher education institution—Comenius University—according to the Foundation 'InfoRoma'.³⁷

Table 8. School Network According to Minority Language of Teaching in 1997

	Hungarian	Ukrainian	Slovak and Hungarian	Slovak and Ukrainian	German
Kindergartens	283	35	104	3	1
Elementary	274	8	30	1	0
Grammar	14	1	8	0	0
Secondary vocational	5	0	20	1	0
Secodary vocational apprentice training	6	0	26	0	0

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic (1998).

3.8.2. *Disputes over education in minority-languages*

The most sensitive issues in the field of education have been attempts to introduce the so-called 'alternative schooling' model and to cancel bilingual certificates in schools with Hungarian-language instruction. According to the alternative schooling model, some of the subjects (e.g. history, geography) had to be taught exclusively in Slovak. The main argument for this provision was the need for the improvement of minorities' proficiency in Slovak. The Hungarian political parties and other Hungarian institutions, such as the Association of Hungarian Teachers, with the broad support of parents, opposed this initiative as a blatantly assimilationist policy. Alternative schooling was applied only in a very small number of schools and it was not successful. An initiative requiring that only Slovak teachers can teach Slovak-language classes in Hungarian-language schools was similarly unsuccessful.

The decision to replace bilingual study certificates with certificates only in Slovak (as a result of the 1995 Act on State Language) also caused great commotion. Bilingual certificates had been issued since 1921 and have important symbolic value. In spite of the state administration's decision, some schools did not stop delivering bilingual study certificates, and in other schools students refused to accept study certificates in Slovak. Teachers and parents organised protests and submitted petitions and, as a result, some teachers and school directors were fired and others received reduced salaries. The conflict was fully resolved in 1999 by returning to official bilingual certificates.

³⁷ *SME* (1998) 15 April.

It should be noted that these initiatives were combined with legislation that strengthened the role of state administration in managing schools. School directors were granted only very limited powers, depending in most matters on the approval of the state administration. Parents' associations and local self-governments served only in consultative positions. The state administration used its new rights to remove school directors from office if they opposed these policies or refused to implement them. The situation was reversed in November 1999, when a new Act³⁸ balanced the position of the state administration and self-governing institutions in education. Reconstructed school councils now act as powerful self-governing institutions working at each school and in district and in regional offices. The councils have advisory status and the right to initiate new programmes. These councils represent the interests of parents, local self-governments and teachers in the fields of the quality of education, personnel issues, facility-use and future development. School activities can therefore be modified according to local needs and serve as important local community centres.

Case Study 2. Slovak as a Second Language

The problem: Improvement of Slovak teaching in schools with Hungarian language of instruction
The actors involved: Two Hungarian teachers (Rózsa Skabela, Irén Bóna), 'Foundation Forum' (later the 'Forum Institute'—a Hungarian organisation)

The issue proceeding: One of the best examples of initiatives in the field of minority schooling is the introduction of the innovative Skabela-Bóna method for the teaching of Slovak in Hungarian-language schools. This was the best response to the Mečiar government's assimilationist tendencies and the Ministry of Education's attempts to introduce alternative schooling that would have meant teaching of selected subjects in Slovak instead of Hungarian. One of the most often cited reasons for these measures was Hungarian students' poor knowledge of the Slovak language limited their chances for success in public life. Two Hungarian teachers developed a new, more efficient and modern method of teaching Slovak in Hungarian schools. This initiative attracted the attention of the Foundation Forum (later Forum Institute) and received basic support from it. After the method's final elaboration, due to its good references, Forum Institute took over also the management of its dissemination.

The result: In the first, experimental stage the method was introduced in 20 schools, and in four years this number raised at 260. This meant teacher training and delivery of four years' complete teaching materials for 20,000 pupils. This initiative grew into a massive movement for substantial modernisation, and was instituted in the majority of Hungarian schools. This program was elaborated without the support of the 1994-1998 Ministry of Education, although it was fully in agreement with the Ministry's original aims for more communicative teaching of Slovak in minority schools. Enormous work was conducted without state support—largely on a volunteer basis. Only in November 1998, after the change of government, did the Ministry of Education offer its official support for this initiative. This program will continue with state support and a full range of applications in schools. The highly constructive and responsive approach of the Hungarian teachers' representatives, combined with third sector support, documents one of the best cases of dealing with existing problems and interest for good co-existence.

³⁸ Act on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government

Source: Based on a speech of Károly Tóth, director of Forum Institute, Dunajská Streda, delivered at a seminar in the presence of Milan Ftáčnik, Minister of Education of the Slovak Republic and László Szigeti, State Secretary of Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Komárno, 28 Nov. 1998.

3.8.3. *Use of minority languages*

The Act on the Use of Minority Languages was not adopted until 1999, in spite of repeated requests by minority groups, international pressure and the promises of the central government. To the contrary, Mečiar's government approved a new Act on State Language of the Slovak Republic (valid since 1996) under the pressure of its nationalist, right-wing coalition partners. This Act replaced the earlier Act on Official Languages, which allowed the use of minority languages in official matters. The new Act limited the use of minority languages in many fields (in public administration, minority media and education). After intense international protests, the governing coalition was urged to prepare legislation on the use of minority languages. At the end of 1997, however, the government proclaimed openly that the existing legal framework was sufficient for the regulation of the use of minority languages. Many local self-governments in southern Slovakia responded to the restriction in the use of Hungarian by applying Article 34 (see Section 2.1) of the Slovak Constitution. They adopted their own by-laws allowing the use of Hungarian in official conduct. One example is the city of Samorin, where the city council adopted measures according to which citizens have the right to use either Hungarian or Slovak in public.³⁹ A similar approach was adopted by approximately 40 other local governments.

3.9. *Central – local co-operation in public works*

The organisation of local public works is an example of good co-operation in the field of employment between the state administration and local governments. This co-operation was a reaction to high levels of local unemployment and was especially suitable for the Roma minority. Unemployment among the Roma has been estimated at 90%, and in many local communities it is 100%. Attempts to improve this situation have been limited by informal discrimination in the labour market.⁴⁰

Many local governments formed working groups with unemployed people. In some cases these groups were composed entirely of Roma and their leaders were also Roma. Public works were largely financed by the National Labour Office and organised by local self-governments. The town of Trnava created eleven jobs for Roma residents in street cleaning and road maintenance. A similar approach was applied in the town of Kolárovo.⁴¹ Unemployed people were frequently channelled into projects aimed at improving the local environment and infrastructure, including improvement works in Roma settlements.

³⁹ Sutaj and Olejnik (1998).

⁴⁰ SME (1998) 7 January; *Hospodárske Noviny* (1998) 17 December.

⁴¹ Krajčovič (1997); Tóth (1998); see also case study on Kolárovo later in this section.

In spite of the limited number of jobs created in this way, public works provided selective support for the local Roma population. The project also helped improved relations between local governments and local Roma communities.

3.10. The social security system according to local needs

The state plays a major role in the social security sphere. Its competencies include direct state social support, such as family allowances; nationwide institutions, such as Social Insurance (pensions, sickness allowances); and the National Labour Office (support for unemployed). Social allowances constitute a substantial portion of the income of many Roma families. Approximately two-thirds of Slovak Roma live well below the national standard of living.⁴² The general rules of the distribution of social allowances by the state administration cause some problems in targeting the specificity of particular minority communities. Social security allowances are easily accessible and allow the distribution of resources without actively motivating anyone to improve his or her personal situation.⁴³ Despite the existence of many types of social benefits, they are still not elaborated enough in addressing specific minority problems (e.g. housing).

Many local governments operate their own social support schemes. Due to the limited local resources, they are delivered occasionally, they cannot be obligatorily demanded and often they are distributed on a case-by-case approach. Local offices can be more flexible and successful when addressing families in trouble. As local self-governments can freely decide about the forms of delivering social benefits from the local budget, they often combine financial support with other forms of distribution (food, clothing). The main impediments to local self-governments playing a more active role are the scarcity of resources, narrow personnel capacities at local offices and the very large size of some minority communities needing support.⁴⁴

A promising form of state social benefit delivery is the 'special recipient', developed in attempt to avoid misuse of social payments distributed by direct financial transfers (on alcohol, gambling).⁴⁵ This form allows the distribution of allowances through local self-governments (for covering selected basic expenditures, e.g. meals in schools, housing). The beneficiaries receive vouchers for buying specific goods and services (food, pharmaceuticals, etc.) in local shops. They receive the rest of the payments in cash. This co-operation between the local state administration, local self-governments and local businesses helps to stabilise the situation of many families. The deficiencies of these alternative forms of distribution are dependency on local services and the local price level. In some rele-

⁴² In his interview. Čerňanská (1999).

⁴³ Some discrepancies in the Slovak social security system are outlined by Bodnárová (1999). It concerns, e.g. small difference between the official minimal wage and living minimum, easily accessible various forms of support, opportunities to combine various forms of social allowances, which altogether can be sufficient for Roma with lower living ambitions.

⁴⁴ We can hardly expect more active social approach from communes with hundreds of poor households under the present financial and personal capacities of local self-governments.

⁴⁵ For example, in Veľká Ida in eastern Slovakia (Štark, 1998).

vant cases, the monthly distribution of social payments should be reconsidered and distributed every week, as some households spend the received cash during the first few days after delivery, suffering throughout the rest of the period.⁴⁶

3.11. Housing

For socio-economically deprived Roma households, it is almost impossible to meet their housing needs without external help. Roma—who own minimal property, are unemployed and live on social allowances—have minimal opportunities to save enough money or receive loans. The majority of these households are financially excluded from these possibilities and the standard financial options are not accessible to them (building societies, mortgages, etc.). The higher cost of housing that emerged following the deregulation of the real estate market has worsened the housing situation of the Roma. The pressure for their relocation or their voluntary retreat from expensive locations has led to their concentration in marginal localities or unsuitable areas on the outskirts of towns and cities.⁴⁷

The poor housing conditions and rapid population growth of the Roma have forced local self-governments to act (e.g. Lučenec, Martin, Spišská Nová Ves). The minimal local and state resources available have allowed for the construction of an insufficient number of new houses. They have consisted mainly of various forms of simple, smaller housing units, fulfilling basic housing standards. In order to satisfy Roma housing needs, inexpensive building materials have been used, as well as movable housing units or wooden houses. In some cases, these housing projects attempted to respect the specific needs of the Roma population, but in other cases new housing was not co-ordinated with local Roma requests and did not properly address the needs of the local community. For example, Roma in Čičava (in eastern Slovakia) were not satisfied with the new social housing in small cabins.⁴⁸ The most suitable technologies, forms of financing and the involvement of Roma are being developed only now.

Many local governments have developed projects for the improvement of the living environment in Roma settlements (including improved drinking water, sewage and gas). Communes can receive subsidies from the State Environmental Fund. Bringing these services to isolated Roma settlements is an extremely expensive investment. Nevertheless, the poor finances of local administration is used as an excuse to ignore the abysmal living conditions in some Roma settlements. Even simple, inexpensive solutions could improve their dismal standard of living (fixing roads and wells, collecting waste, improved access to public transport).

A further problem is the fact that Roma settlements were often built on land that did not belong to them, without building permission or planning documentation. Under such

⁴⁶ It could also diminish the role of Roma usurers. Poorer Roma households have problems with long-term planning of households expenditures, so they borrow money from usurers. They have to return this money after receiving social benefits.

⁴⁷ Some problems with relocations, segregation are outlined, e.g. in Říčan (1998).

⁴⁸ *Pravda* (1999) 14 August.

conditions, substantial improvement of these settlements is restricted by legal constraints. Issues of land ownership, planning and the depreciation of Roma housing facilities are sensitive issues among the majority population, which also suffers from housing shortages.

3.12. Cultural institutions

A number of minority cultural institutions (theatres and museums that often function as minority departments of Slovak institutions) are financed by the state through regional state administrations. The state also subsidises other important minority cultural institutions (cultural associations, media, cultural events). Between 1995 and 1998, state financing in this area stagnated, and in some cases many of these institutions did not receive already approved resources.⁴⁹ Local self-governments cover the costs of local cultural institutions like libraries and local museums. They also support local art groups, folk ensembles and cultural festivals, and create the possibility for different types of cultural activities. Many of the local cultural institutions are festering due to the poor condition of many local government budgets, but minority communities have their own cultural associations that oversee a wide range of activities.

The activities of local self-governments serve the needs of Slovaks and Hungarians in particular (these two groups usually form a majority in local councils and have a strong history of co-operating with local governments). Local self-governments and local activists can request state support for local cultural activities from the Pro-Slovakia Cultural Fund, but the resources of this state fund are very limited. In many ethnically heterogeneous communities, the cultural activities of all local groups receive support. One of the best cases of such local co-operation can be found in the town of Levoča and its local elementary art school, where talented Roma children study music, painting and drama. This initiative is also supported by foreign resources and provides good opportunities for Roma children to advance in education.

Case Study 3. Ruthenian Revival

The problem: Ruthenians suffered strong Ukrainisation under the communist regime.

Ruthenians wanted to revitalise their identity through an association for cultural, educational and religious needs.

The actors involved: 'Ruthenian Revival' Association, Greek Catholic Church, World Congress of Ruthenians.

The issue proceeding: All Ruthenians were made Ukrainians by an official declaration in the late 1940s. Forced 'Ukrainisation' started in 1952 with massive state support for Ukrainian infrastructure. This policy led to the closure of the Ruthenian school network (almost 250 elementary schools), the banning of the Greek Catholic Church in favour of the Russian Orthodox Church, and collectivisation of agriculture. This solution was refused (i.e. Ruthenians turned to Slovak schools and the Roman Catholic Church). Miraculously, after almost 50 years, the

⁴⁹ According to: 'Správa k implementácii Rámcového dohovoru Rady Európy na ochranu národnostných menšín v Slovenskej republike za MK SR', 1999. In fact it was not stagnation. Due to inflation it was a remarkable decrease of state expenditures spent for minority culture.

small Ruthenian minority in Slovakia survived. Ruthenian-sponsored initiatives to improve their position have played a crucial role in supporting their interests and cultural associations, with the Ruthenian Revival Association as its key 'umbrella'. (Another organisation also formed in 1989 is the Association of Ruthenian Intelligentsia in Slovakia.) The Ruthenian Revival has its centre in Prešov; it has its own local and regional branches, especially in northeastern Slovakia. In Bratislava, Ruthenian representatives develop wide-ranging activities in building the position of its minority in comparison to other minority communities in Slovakia. There are difficulties due to some conflicts with Ukrainian minority representatives.

The results: The Ruthenian Revival Association, in co-operation with other Ruthenian associations, strengthened the minority's position within Slovak society. They developed good ties with local government in their subsequent districts and municipalities. Their activities have helped the revival of Ruthenian identity in the whole of Central Europe, especially in the field of Ruthenian language. Ruthenians are represented in the Council of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities. Teaching in the Ruthenian language began again, as well as teachers' training. The Theatre of Alexander Duchnovič (Divadlo Alexandra Duchnoviča) began to give performances in Ruthenian. Slovak Public Television broadcast special programmes only in Ruthenian. The debate and initiatives in 1999-2000 address problems with broadcasting in Ruthenian on Slovak Radio (public) and Ruthenian as a liturgical language.

Source: 'Sixth Congress and Changes in Leadership of Ruthenian Revival' (1999) *Narodny Novinky* (in Ruthenian), No. 24-26, pp 1-2.

3.13. Nongovernmental organisations

A major source of support for minority groups has come from the 'third sector'. This sphere has attracted numerous active citizens, often dissatisfied with political developments and the political culture in Slovakia. They are sensitive to various local problems that have not been dealt with effectively, mostly due to the lack of resources and limited capacities of local administrations. The voluntary sector initiates various projects targeted at minority communities in the fields of education, culture and living environments, and uses resources from various donors. Local governments usually co-operate with these voluntary organisations and often co-finance third-sector projects in their localities, or offer other forms of support for their activities (office space, facilities, services, etc.).

4. Conclusions

4.1. Participation

Effective work to improve the situation of minority communities is not possible without the direct involvement of and co-operation with minority groups and their leaders. All policies that aim to address minority issues efficiently must be organised in co-operation with local authorities. Local public administration cannot operate in a schematic way without any sensitivity to specific local features.

More participatory forms of government at the local level should be applied that can lead to solutions acceptable for both minority and majority populations. Various formal and informal minority advisory bodies should co-operate with local public administration institutions, partly as a training field for future minority leaders. Local public administration should be able to co-operate and support multi-faceted activities with private and third-sector actors willing to act in favour of minorities.

4.2. Decentralisation and deconcentration

Because of its important role in meeting minority needs, the power, autonomy, financial base and personal capacities of local public administration must be expanded. Public administration reform should reduce the overly strong position of state administration. The regional level of government should be introduced and the administrative-territorial division rethought.

4.3. Local finances

Local self-governments should be given the freedom to make decisions without financial impediments so they can address minority issues. Expenditures can be controlled and directed to the relevant fields by local councils including fields also covered by the state administration. Municipal resources can be combined with private finances in the formation of new legal entities, and municipalities can combine their resources in various forms in intermunicipal associations.

4.4. Flexible local state administration

The competencies of local state administration must be organised in a more flexible and co-operative way. State administration should retreat from its bureaucratic and passive position, based on the uniform application of particular policies or the distribution of allowances to minorities through district offices, according to rules assigned by the central government. Suitable evaluation procedures should address project administration, creating opportunities for their correction and reshaping. The atmosphere of dependency in some minority communities, policies based on 'giving' and not on 'working together', should be revised. Local minority communities are diverse and are interested in different issues. The success of many policies depends on the identification of suitable participants and their will to participate.

4.5. Strong local self-government

A stronger role, more power and more resources should be granted to local self-governments. They can be more effective than state institutions and are better able to design locally appropriate social and housing policies. The selective, direct and deliverable dis-

tribution of social allowances requires decentralisation and reorganisation. Because this type of distribution depends on local information, local self-governments should play a much more active role.

4.6. Professionalism

In local public administration, a better trained staff would ideally cope with minority issues. They should be trained in communication, negotiation, developing and sustaining co-operation with minority communities and their leaders, and in understanding the specific features and needs of minorities. Special training has to address local mayors and councilors representing minorities as well. The professional work addressing minority needs should include the preparation of high-quality strategies, as well as efficient administrative practices. Special, better-aimed and well-designed programmes and allowances should be quickly implemented to address concrete needs (e.g. planned housing allowances).

4.7. The value of diversity

The various ethnic groups living in Slovakia should be better informed about each other's specific features, history, co-existence, rights and responsibilities within society. The school system should prepare specialists addressing minority problems at the local level (e.g. social workers, teachers, specialists in minority culture). Initiatives targeting Roma education should be reconsidered according to the interests of local Roma communities, including specific forms of adult training (both in Romany and Slovak languages).

4.8. Active employment policies

Local administrations should formulate their own strategies for 'equal employment opportunities' in the public sector (including local bureaucracies and the police). The institutions of public administration and private companies should define fields for preferential treatment ('positive action') for particular minorities or should strictly respect the application of equal opportunities to improve the chances of minority population in employment (including actions against discrimination in the labour market). Initiatives that penalise employers refusing to employ Roma and reward employers with a particular percentage of Roma employees (for example, through lower taxation and better access to public contracts) should be considered.

The existence of an active employment policy based on co-operation between local self-governments and labour offices should be protected. More co-operation should be required between allowance givers and receivers in the local community, which can be organised effectively by local self-governments. The training of the unemployed for continuous employment should be organised according to local needs. A special fund for the support of Roma businesses should be created that could help to improve access to credit for Roma entrepreneurs and create workplaces for the Roma in particular regions and localities.

4.9. Contracting of municipal services

The contracting of municipal services and public projects to companies employing relatively high numbers of Roma workers provides a means of employment protection. In the private sector the support of Roma employment is limited and should be reconsidered. In the public sector the number of Roma employees in public administration should be increased, including offices responsible for the most sensitive issues for the Roma (social security, labour offices, health services and general public administration). Such a policy would improve communication and develop trust between minority and majority communities.

4.10. Land, ownership and living conditions

Public administration should initiate the clarification of the ownership rights over the land and housing of the Roma population. Planning documentation should be prepared especially for poorer settlements with the participation of local minority communities. The location of new Roma housing only in local, compact, built environments and discriminatory practices on the land and real estate market should be deterred. Housing problems, especially those of Roma households, can be solved only by combining the activities and resources of the state, local self-government and minority population (including self-help). Special programs should address isolated Roma settlements. Local self-government can play a crucial co-ordinating role in numerous activities addressing the living environment of minorities at the local level.

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