

Law on the Use of Minority Languages

Passed into Law by the 17th Session of the Slovak Parliament on July 11, 1999

The Slovak parliament, in accordance with the Slovak Constitution and the various international agreements to which the Slovak Republic is a signatory, respecting the protection and development of the basic human rights and freedoms of Slovak citizens who belong to national minorities... has agreed to the following law:

1. Each citizen of the Slovak Republic who belongs to a national minority has the right to use, apart from the state language, the language of his national minority (hereafter only 'minority language'). The purpose of this law is to establish the rules for use of minority languages also in official state contacts.

2. (i) If Slovak citizens who belong to a national minority represent at least 20% of the inhabitants of a given municipality, according to the latest census, they can use their minority language in official contacts in this municipality.

(ii) The government of the Slovak Republic will decree a list of municipalities which meet the conditions set in section (i).

(iii) Slovak citizens who belong to a national minority have the right to submit requests in writing in their mother tongues to local and state administration bodies in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section (i). Public administration bodies in these municipalities shall provide an answer in both the state language and in the minority language, except in the case of public documents.

(iv) Verdicts passed by public administration bodies in court proceedings in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section (i) shall be issued, upon request, in both the state language and the language of a national minority. The verdict issued in the state language shall be decisive.

(v) Local administration bodies in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section (i) shall provide citizens with official forms in minority languages, which shall be distributed on request.

3. (i) Meetings of local state administration bodies in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) can be conducted in a minority language if all present at the meeting agree.

(ii) Representatives of local administration bodies in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) have the right to use a minority language at meetings. Interpreting will be provided by the municipality.

(iii) The records of municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) may be kept in a minority language.

4. (i) Municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) may mark streets and other local geographical signs in a minority language.

(ii) In municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i), important information, especially warning, protection and health notices, which are displayed in public areas, will be accessible in both state and minority languages.

(iii) Local administration bodies which lie within the boundaries of municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) shall provide on request information about general legal regulations in a minority language.

5. (i) The right to use a minority language in court proceedings and in other areas is governed by separate laws.

(ii) Paragraph 2 section (i) does not apply in the areas of pre-school education, elementary education, secondary school education and culture. The use of minority languages in these areas is governed by separate laws.

6. This law assumes that the use of the Czech language in official contacts complies with the conditions of basic compatibility with the state language, provided that international agreements to which Slovakia is a signatory do not specify otherwise.

7. (i) Local administration bodies and their employees are obliged to use in official contacts the state language, and may use a minority language if this complies with the terms set by law. Local administration bodies and their employees are not employed to speak a minority language.

(ii) Local administration bodies in municipalities which meet the conditions set in section 2 (i) are obliged to create conditions for the use of minority languages according to the terms of this law and separate regulations.

8. This law cancels Paragraph 10 of the Law No. 270/1995 on the State Language of the Slovak Republic.

9. This law takes effect on September 1, 1999.

Source: Legislation on culture and media, website of the Slovak Ministry of Culture

<http://www.culture.gov.sk/>

