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FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

(2001 – 2005)

Assessment of the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

For the attention of the Committee of Ministers
and the Parliamentary Assembly

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Introduction

1. The Commissioner for Human Rights visited the Slovak Republic in May 2001 on the invitation of the Government. In the resulting Report¹, the Commissioner identified a number of human rights concerns and made a series of recommendations to improve the country's effective respect for human rights. Issues concerning the sterilisation of women in the Slovak Republic were examined during the course of a separate visit in September 2003 and were addressed in a Recommendation to the government of 17 October 2003.²

2. The purpose of this report is to examine the manner in which the Slovak authorities have implemented the recommendations made by the Commissioner in his 2001 report and his 2003 recommendation. This report follows the order of the main recommendations made by the Commissioner and is based on written submissions of the Slovak authorities, and information provided by human rights experts, local and international NGOs, inter-governmental organisations and other public sources. The Commissioner would like to thank the Slovak authorities for their complete co-operation at all stages.

1. Institutional and legal reforms

3. In his 2001 report, the Commissioner recommended that the Slovak authorities provide for the greater protection of individual rights and freedoms through the establishment a national Ombudsman institution.

Development of the situation and measures taken

4. The first Public Defender of Rights (ombudsman)³ was elected by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 19 March 2002 and took up office on 27 March 2002. The office currently has a staff of thirty eight persons, of whom twenty four are lawyers. The office has 9 regional centres throughout the Slovak Republic where once a month lawyers from the office organise meetings with complainants. Despite an initial shortage of funding, the institution has, in only a few years, come to assume an important place in the Slovak legal and administrative framework.

5. Access to justice has been strengthened further through a constitutional amendment enabling the Constitutional Court to decide on complaints lodged by natural persons who allege violations of their constitutional rights or of their human rights and fundamental freedoms resulting from an international treaty ratified by the Slovak Republic. This is the case unless another court is competent under Slovak law to decide on the issue at stake.

Conclusions

6. The Commissioner commends the new procedure for constitutional complaints and welcomes the establishment of the office of the Ombudsman, which together have significantly strengthened the protection of human rights in the Slovak Republic.

2. National minorities, ethnic groups and non-discrimination

7. In his 2001 report, the Commissioner suggested that the Slovak authorities review its legal framework so as to ensure that constitutional rights granted to national minorities and ethnic groups were given genuine effect in primary and secondary legislation.

Development of the situation and measures taken

8. In 2003 the Ministry of Culture prepared a working version of a draft act on national minorities and a draft act on the financing of national minority culture, which were scheduled to be submitted to Parliament by 31 December 2003. However, the deadline for submission for both acts was postponed by a year to 31 December 2004, due to consultation with NGOs (and the responsibility for both drafts was transferred to the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities). Neither draft has yet been submitted to the Slovak Parliament.

9. An agreement concluded in December 2003 between the Slovak Government and the Government of Hungary on the mutual support for national minorities in the field of education and culture has further strengthened the protection of the largest minority in the Slovak Republic, the Hungarians, who represent almost 10% of the state's population.⁴

10. The implementation of EU anti-discrimination Directives⁵ has also improved minority protection. The principle achievement in this area has been the adoption, in May 2004, of "A Law on Equal Treatment in Some Fields and on Protection against Discrimination (generally known as the Anti-Discrimination Law)". The law includes notions of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation including instigating or encouraging discrimination. However, provisions relating to the introduction of special measures (allowing for affirmative action to address disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin) were challenged before the Constitutional Court which struck them down on 18 October 2005 as contrary to the equality provisions of the Slovak Constitution. The EU Directives uphold the possibility for affirmative action as long as the measures are proportional and are not prolonged beyond the time their targets have been reached.

11. In accordance with the Directives, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights has been credited with the task of promoting equal treatment and combating all forms of discrimination. The National Human Rights Centre has thus become the main body for monitoring and collecting complaints against discrimination on the labour market and providing legal assistance to the victims of discrimination.

12. A number of important changes have been made to the Penal Code to tackle racism and xenophobia. These include the extension of the provisions relating to racially motivated crimes to cover acts perpetrated against an "ethnic group", in addition to the existing notions of "nation" and "race".⁶ The prosecution of committing a racially motivated crime through the Internet has also been facilitated.⁷

13. The provisions in the Labour Code forbidding all forms of direct and indirect racial discrimination in the area of employment were reflected in the Acts on State Service and Public Service adopted shortly after the Commissioner's visit in 2001.

14. The Slovak Republic has signed, but not yet ratified, Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights.

15. Practical measures to combat racism have included the continuing adoption of Action Plans on countering all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other demonstrations, the most recent, covering the period 2004-2005 was adopted in May 2004. The Action Plan is based on the results of the previous two action plans and focuses on the following areas: training and education of professional groups in promoting non-discrimination; public opinion-building activities and training in the treatment of immigrants aimed at state and local representatives; social and cultural activities aimed at human rights protection and prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and related intolerance.

Conclusions

16. The legislative framework for minority protection and combating discrimination has been improved considerably in recent years and is now generally in line with European norms in this area. With respect to certain specific measures in the anti-discrimination Law, the Commissioner considers that affirmative action can be an effective tool for addressing long-standing discrimination. European Convention on Human Rights and EU anti-discrimination Directives are widely interpreted as allowing special measures, as long as they are proportional and are not prolonged beyond the time their targets have been reached. The Commissioner welcomes the extension of the role of the Slovak National Human Rights Centre in the fight against discrimination and hopes that it will be able to monitor effectively the implementation of the new legislation.

17. The Commissioner urges the Slovak authorities to take steps towards the ratification of Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights relating to non-discrimination.

3. The situation of the Roma communities

18. The Commissioner's 2001 report paid considerable attention to the respect for the rights of Roma. The Commissioner insisted on the need to improve the access of Roma to housing, education, health and employment.

Development of the situation and measures taken

19. The Slovak Republic has one of the largest Roma populations in Europe with 320,000 persons⁸. In 2003 the government launched a *Socio-Graphic Mapping of Romany Communities in Slovakia* to identify and assess the needs of its Roma population. The project was concluded in June 2004. The mapping revealed that, whilst the Roma were integrated in approximately 50% of all 1575 identified Roma settlement units, the remaining 787 were considered non-integrated communities. Of these a further 149 settlements were classified as segregated – located at the edge or outside of villages/towns with no access to running water and with the percentage of illegal dwellings in excess of 20%. Unemployment is high in many of the non-integrated Roma communities and it is estimated that it approaches 100% in some of them. The Roma population are not, therefore, a homogenous group and their standard of living and degree of integration varies greatly. It is clear, however, and amply acknowledged by the Slovak authorities themselves, that significant structural challenges remain for the integration of Slovakia's Roma population.

20. Despite improvements in all areas, and the numerous programmes and policies, of which only some are outlined below, progress remains slow and, inevitably, has not reached all Roma communities equally. Pockets of serious poverty remain, with all the attendant social problems. Housing remains an ongoing concern, with large numbers of Roma living in settlements lacking such basic amenities as water, sanitation and electricity. Ensuring access to education is still a serious challenge; the segregation of Roma children in special schools continues⁹, whilst the numbers of Roma continuing their education into secondary school remain low.

21. In addition to the many positive legislative reforms introduced to tackle racial discrimination in general, the Slovak authorities have launched several programmes and invested considerable sums in its efforts to integrate its Roma population into society as a whole. The over-arching priorities of the Government in this area were set out in the "Priorities of the Slovak Government in respect of Integration of Romany Communities for 2004".

22. These priorities are reflected in the first National Action Plan ("NAP") on Social Inclusion approved by the Slovak authorities in July 2004 in response to the common objectives that have been agreed by Member States for the European Union's social inclusion process¹⁰. The four key challenges recognised in the NAP are: to increase employment levels and employability of vulnerable groups; to decrease the risk of poverty in families with dependent children; to overcome educational disadvantage; to promote integration of the Roma communities.

23. Further efforts engaged in the context of international co-operation for the integration of Roma include a joint initiative entitled "The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 –2015)", which the Slovak Republic entered into in February 2005 together with seven other central European states. Supported by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute, the goal of the initiative is to help Roma communities break free from poverty, discrimination and harsh social and economic conditions.¹¹

24. Since the Commissioner's original report, the Slovak Government has adopted a series of National Employment Action Plans. These plans recognise the importance of education and tackling discrimination in ensuring the equal access of the Roma to the labour market. They have also recognised and supported the role of NGOs and the need to empower Roma actors to be the agents of change themselves.

25. The Slovak authorities have also sought to improve the housing situation of the Roma. Faced with a significant challenge in this area, the Slovak Government has elaborated a "Long-term Concept of Housing for Marginalised Population Groups". One of the pillars of this policy has been a support programme for the construction of municipal flats of different standards co-ordinated by the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development in co-operation with the Office of the Slovak Government's Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities.

26. One of the positive examples in the field of housing comes from the municipality of Zborov, which has prepared a project for the construction of 110 rental flats of different standards. 51 flats which have been started in 2004 are about to be completed. In parallel to the construction of the flats, PHARE funds have been used to build the necessary infrastructure to support the development. The construction of another 50 rental flats is envisaged in 2006.

27. The Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities has, indeed, continued to play an important role as an advisory body of the Slovak Government for a systematic approach in the integration of Roma. The Office was restructured in 2004 and provided with greater staff and a budget allowing its activity to expand and 5 regional branches to be set up.

28. Efforts are also being made to tackle the segregation of Roma Children in special schools. A "Policy Concept of Integrated Education of Roma Pupils and Youth, Including the Development of Secondary and Higher Education" was approved by the Slovak Government in 2004 and a number of PHARE sponsored projects have been elaborated in this area¹². Particular importance has been attached to the project "Reintegration of Socially Disadvantaged Children from Special Schools to Standard Elementary Schools", which will be finalised by 2006. This project covers the creation of objective, compulsory diagnostic tests for all children to determine whether they should attend regular or special schools. The tests are designed to identify only children with disabilities or special intellectual needs and to prevent the separation of children whose development has been affected by their socially marginalised environment. Further efforts have concentrated on increasing pre-school education, the creation of a zero-grade in primary school, the introduction of teacher's assistants, all-day teaching and reintegration modules in the education process and establishing and operating community centres. Initiatives have also been launched to train Roma language and literature teachers for primary and secondary schools.

Conclusions

29. It is evident that the situation of the Roma in Slovakia continues to require serious attention. The social and economic precariousness of the Roma population is a crucial obstacle to a homogenous and equitable development of the country's population as a whole.

30. The Commissioner welcomes the priority attached by the Slovak authorities to ensuring the equal access of the Roma to housing, education and employment. These policies will need to be carefully co-ordinated and the numerous action plans effectively funded and enforced if the improvements in this area, to date tangible but slow, are to be made at the desirable rate. Recommendation by the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe, provides useful and detailed policy guidance.¹³

31. The Commissioner remains concerned about the unjustified placing and transferring of Roma children into special schools and urges the authorities to carefully monitor positive recent legislative and administrative reforms intended to ensure the equal access to quality education which is central to the integration of all Roma.

4. The involuntary sterilisation of Roma women

32. The issue of allegations of forced or coerced sterilisation of Roma women and girls in the Slovak Republic was examined by the Commissioner in his recommendation of October 2003.¹⁴ The Commissioner concluded that on the basis of the available information, it could reasonably be assumed that cases of sterilisations had taken place, particularly in the eastern part of the Slovak Republic, without informed consent. The Commissioner noted that the information available did not suggest that an active or organised government policy of improper sterilisations had existed (at least since the end of the Communist regime). However, in the Commissioner's opinion, the Slovak Government had an objective responsibility in the matter for failing to put in place adequate legislation and for failing to exercise appropriate supervision for sterilisation practices. The Commissioner made a number of recommendations to the Slovak authorities concerning new legislation, access to medical files, improving the country's health care system to include gynaecological and obstetrical medical services, and consideration given to the setting up of an independent commission to offer redress.

Development of the situation and measures taken

33. The allegations of forced and coerced sterilizations of Roma women in Slovakia were considered as a possible grave violation of human rights and therefore taken very seriously by the Slovak Government. A considerable effort was devoted to their thorough examination. In addition to a criminal investigation, a professional medical inspection of healthcare establishments was organised and an expert opinion of the Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University in Bratislava requested. It was not confirmed that the Slovak Government would have supported an organized discriminatory sterilizations' policy. Legislative and practical measures were taken by the Government in order to eliminate the administrative shortcomings identified in the course of inquiries and to prevent similar situations from occurring in the future.

34. The Public Health Act, which came into effect on 1 January 2005, sought to deal with these issues by including sections on sterilisation, informed consent and access to medical records. The law was elaborated in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, and among other things, eliminates the deficiencies in legislation found in the course of the investigations. The law, *inter alia*, guarantees informed consent and requires health care professionals to provide information to patients before, for example, undergoing sterilisation. It also requires a thirty day waiting period after informed consent is given. In addition, the new law addresses the problem many individuals face in accessing their medical records. The law explicitly allows authorisation by the patient to another person, through a power of attorney, to view and photocopy their files.

35. Women allegedly harmed by sterilisation have the right to turn to the Slovak courts with a request for compensation and it is the view of the Slovakian authorities that the existing legal framework offers them sufficient possibilities to seek compensation. Some of the cases have been concluded by rejecting the complaint or by halting proceedings. In other cases, court proceedings are still underway.

Conclusions

36. The Commissioner welcomes the coming into force of the Public Health Act, and its provisions on informed consent and access to medical records. These were crucial issues which the Commissioner had addressed in his Recommendation to the Slovak authorities, and he is pleased to see that the new law has explicitly addressed these problem areas.

37. The Commissioner notes with regret that the Slovak authorities have not yet established an independent commission to provide compensation or an apology to the victims. While victims may seek redress through the court system, in these types of cases, litigation has its practical shortcomings. These include the difficult and costly nature of obtaining legal counsel, particularly, for Roma women living in marginalised communities, and the extremely high evidential standards.

38. The Commissioner again encourages the authorities to consider creating an independent commission that might, on the examination of each case, provide effective and rapid non-judicial redress. Such redress would be given to individual applicants, who could show that appropriate procedures were not followed, without there necessarily having been intent or criminal negligence on the part of individual medical staff, but because of systemic shortcomings in the procedures permitted, and that in their particular case, sterilisation was without informed consent. Such a Commission might allow for alleged cases to be examined thoroughly, but with fewer formalities and less cost for applicants, than judicial proceedings.

5. Violence against women and children

39. In his report, the Commissioner recommended that the Slovak authorities should amend legislation and provide greater support to institutions providing services to victims of domestic violence.

Development of the situation and measures taken

40. New domestic violence legislation, which became applicable in January 2003, provides stricter sentences for crimes against family members in the same household. In addition, the consent of the victim is no longer required for initiating legal proceedings. Preventive measures, such as no-contact court orders, were also introduced to protect victims during legal proceedings.¹⁵ Courts may now take evidence provided by minors through video recording, to avoid confrontation with and intimidation by the perpetrator. In addition, on the proposal of one of the spouses, the court can restrict or prohibit the right of the other spouse to use the family home. The number of successful prosecutions rose as a result of these reforms from 26 in 2002 to 166 in 2003.

41. Another example of strengthening legislation relating to domestic violence is the amendment of the Code of Civil Procedure (section 76 § 2). The amendment provides the court with the possibility of deciding an issue speedily as a "preliminary measure" if the case before it concerns a minor child or a person threatened by violence. This means that unnecessary court delays can be avoided when quick action is needed most.

42. The Institute of Further Education of the Police Force Academy carries out educational and training activities concerning domestic violence for police officers. A National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and in the Family was adopted in November 2004.

Conclusions

43. The Commissioner commends the legislative changes facilitating prosecutions and providing greater protection to victims of domestic violence. The police training, in particular, has a considerable impact on police intervention, both in terms of victim support and the number of successful prosecutions.

44. The broader measures contained in the National Strategy testify to the commitment of the Slovak authorities to tackling this issue, which remains a significant, and all too often hidden, problem. It is important that the funding foreseen for support centres for victims of domestic is guaranteed, that public awareness is raised and that the successful training programmes are extended to cover all police forces in the country.

6. Asylum and nationality

45. In his 2001 report, the Commissioner expressed his concern over the procedure for acquiring refugee status and the acquisition of nationality. Both procedures had been criticised by NGOs for lacking transparency and their excessive duration.

Development of the situation and measures taken

46. Significant changes to the asylum procedure have been made by the new Act on Asylum, which came into force on 1 January 2003. The act regulates the asylum procedure, re-defines the rights and obligations of asylum seekers, specifies the procedure for granting temporary shelter, and regulates the stay of asylum seekers in asylum facilities and their integration into society.

47. First instance decisions are made by the Migration Office and are usually made within ninety days. The new Act on Asylum introduces an independent appeals body whereby an appeal against a first instance decision not to grant asylum can be filed with a regional court (namely the Regional Appeal Courts in Bratislava and Kosice). The regional court can either uphold or overturn the Migration Officer's decision, but it cannot grant asylum. While several cases have been returned to the Migration Office mentioning incorrect administrative procedures, no cases have been decided by the regional courts on the merits.

48. As regards nationality, a foreign national who receives asylum is entitled by law to permanent residence in Slovakia and, without needing to fulfil the ordinary conditions for obtaining Slovak nationality, may apply for citizenship immediately¹⁶.

49. In 2004, the number of asylum applications (11,391) was the highest ever since the beginning of the asylum system in the country in 1992. The large majority of cases (90%) were closed before reaching the first instance decision due to the "disappearance" of the applicants heading to Western Europe. Despite positive changes in the legislature, asylum was only granted in thirteen cases in 2003, and fifteen cases in 2004. In year 2005, a small decrease in asylum applications in Slovakia was recorded, in line with trends elsewhere in Europe.

50. The recent rise in asylum applications reflects both the application of 'Dublin procedures' and the increasing attractiveness of Slovakia as a destination country since the country's accession to the EU. This rise has inevitably placed burdens on the administrative apparatus dealing with asylum applications. In order to deal with this pressure, "The Task Force on the assessment of the asylum system in SR"¹⁷ has recommended linking the Slovak Republic with neighbouring eastern European countries, co-operating with neighbouring western European countries and increasing the staff of the Migration Office together with raising their salaries. A PHARE project on "Improving the administrative structure in the field of migration and asylum in the light of the Slovak Republic's EU membership", involving the Swedish Migration Board and the Slovak Migration Office, was completed in 2005.

Conclusions

51. The Commissioner welcomes the adoption of the Act on Asylum as a positive step. Indeed the Slovak authorities have made notable, and largely successful, efforts to bring their legislation and administrative practises relating to immigration and asylum into line with European Union norms. The statistics since the reforms do not, for all that, suggest that asylum is any easier to obtain than before. Greater administrative resources would appear to remain necessary.

7. The administration of justice and police behaviour

52. In his 2001 report, the Commissioner recommended that the Slovak authorities take further steps to ensure the independence of the judiciary and the effective administration of justice. He also recommended that reforms be put in place for guaranteeing the effective respect of citizens' rights by the police, particularly with respect to racially motivated violence.

Development of the situation and measures taken

53. Since the Commissioner's report, the Slovak Judicial Council has been established. This body, presided by the President of the Supreme Court, is responsible for the appointment and transfer of judges and can take disciplinary action against members of the judiciary in specific cases. The Act on Judges and Lay Judges has strengthened the status of the judiciary by enshrining the principle of the non-transferability of judges. The Act also defines and regulates conflicts of interest of judges. These administrative and legislative reforms have significantly improved the independence of the judiciary.

54. Racially motivated violence continues to be a problem in Slovakia. The response of the police to such crime has improved, however. This owes much to the establishment of a Commission for Co-ordinating Actions to Eliminate Racially Motivated Crime. This commission is composed of officials from the Ministry of the Interior and the police (a representative of the Public Prosecution Office and representatives of several NGOs also take part in its work). The main task of this body, which meets on a quarterly basis, is to exchange information concerning racially motivated crime and to co-ordinate action in eliminating all forms of racial discrimination, including offences committed by police officers. Until 2003, the commission operated only at a central level. By order of the Minister of the Interior in 2004 commissions of this kind were also set up at the level of individual regional directorates of the Police Corps.

55. A difficulty undermining the fight against racial discrimination and racially motivated crime would appear to be the inaccurate or improper legal categorisation of these offences by police officers, investigators and sometimes by prosecutors, suggesting that further training is required in this area.

56. The issue of police behaviour continues to raise concerns, as harassment and ill-treatment during police investigations, particularly of Roma suspects, are still reported. According to the Slovak authorities the current training program¹⁸ has put special emphasis on issues of tolerance, racism, the rights of national minorities - notably the Roma community - and effective communication. While the presence of Roma in the police is still very low, the Minister of Interior has introduced the position of police specialist for Roma communities. A review carried out in 2005 by the Ministry of Interior evaluated their impact positively.

57. The programme of further education of police officers has been extended to include training courses focusing on improving the communication of the police with the Roma population. The police officers were trained in attitudes, communication skills (identification of activities in Roma groups, negotiating skills, specific approach to conflict settlement, etc.).

Conclusions

58. The Commissioner welcomes the structural and legislative reforms aimed at strengthening the independence of the judiciary and acknowledges their success.

59. The Commissioner commends the establishment of the Commission for Co-ordinating Actions to Eliminate Racially Motivated Crime and welcomes the training activities for the police on communicating with Roma communities. However, continuing incidents of the excessive use of force by police personnel, including cases of police brutality against the Roma community and other vulnerable groups indicate a need to strengthen efforts in this area.

¹ Report by Mr Alvaro Gil-Robles Commissioner for Human Rights, 19 September 2001, CommDH(2001)5. on his visit to the Slovak Republic 14-15 May 2001, for the Committee of Minister and the Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg. The report was presented to the Committee of Ministers on 19 September 2001, and can be found on the Commissioner's website at www.commissioner.coe.int. ² Recommendation of the Commissioner for Human Rights Concerning Certain Aspects of Law and Practice Relating to Sterilization of Women in the Slovak Republic, Strasbourg, 17 October 2003, CommDH(2003)12. ³ Doc. JUDr. Pavel Kandrác, CSc. ⁴ Second Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic pursuant to Art. 25 § 1 of the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities p. 8. ⁵ Council Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC. ⁶ Act No. 253/2001 Coll. ⁷ Act No. 421/2001 Coll. ⁸ Comments by the Slovak Government to the UN Human Rights Committee dated 27.01.05. ⁹ According to the Slovak National Center for Human Rights, there were 7,000 Roma children in special schools out of a total number of 32,244 pupils in 2004. ¹⁰ In these plans each new member state analyses the situation in relation to poverty and social exclusion, presents the strategy, objectives and targets it has established for the two year period from mid-2004 to mid-2006 and identifies the specific actions to be implemented in order to achieve them with the assistance of EU funds. ¹¹ National Action Plan of the Slovak Republic Regarding the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. ¹² Existing programmes include "Reintegration of Socially Disadvantaged Children from Special Schools to Standard Elementary Schools" and "Support to Roma minority in education". ¹³ Recommendation Rec(2005)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states, adopted on 23 February 2005. ¹⁴ Recommendation of the Commissioner for Human Rights Concerning Certain Aspects of Law and Practice Relating to Sterilization of Women in the Slovak Republic, Strasbourg, 17 October 2003, CommDH(2003)12. ¹⁵ International Helsinki Federation Report 2004. ¹⁶ Section 7,ii(e) of Act No. 40/1993 Coll. On Nationality, and Section 2(d) of Act No. 480/2002 Coll. On Asylum. ¹⁷ Established and coordinated by the UNHCR. ¹⁸ Carried out mainly by the Police Force Academy and the Institute of Further Education of the Police Force Academy, with the support of institutions such as the Section of Human Rights and Minorities of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Helsinki Committee.