

Slovakia¹

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On International Human Rights Day in 1999, a Visegrad countries (V4) conference addressing the issues of human rights protection and promotion and comparing the results in individual member countries was held in Bratislava. In his opening speech the Slovak Vice Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities, Pál Csáky, noted that the state of human rights in Slovakia was fully comparable to their state in other V4 countries and that it fulfilled the European standards. The Slovak Helsinki Committee (SHC) agreed that Slovakia is becoming a country which is active in protecting and implementing basic civil and political rights and entering a new stage, which sees increased monitoring and protection by the Slovak state. This means the protection of the rights of citizens both by the state and NGOs will be compared to higher norms of human rights.

In 1999, the relationship of the SHC with the state was shifting from the earlier confrontational position towards a new form of dialogue in which the SHC provided comments and opinions on proposed legislation. The committee was also invited to discussions on key issues. The SHC chairman acted as an adviser to the vice prime minister for human rights and minorities. The SHC still maintained an independent, evaluative stance towards the state, which was apparent in its reports, commentaries and statements published throughout the

year. It particularly campaigned for the establishment of the Office of Ombudsman.

Elections and Referenda

Presidential Elections

In January, the parliament approved a constitutional amendment on direct presidential elections by citizens. Rudolf Schuster, the mayor of Košice, the second largest Slovak city, and the head of the Party of Civic Understanding was elected President in May 1999. Some of the candidates in the presidential elections were civic candidates, others were supported by political parties. Schuster was the official candidate of the ruling coalition. He and former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar were the two candidates in the second and final round.

The presidential campaign and elections were judged to be free and fair. A major shortcoming was the speech of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda in which he expressed support for the ruling coalition candidate, on the eve of Election Day – in violation of the campaigning black out period – on public Slovak Television (STV). The Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting fined Slovak Television 1,000,000 SK (U.S.\$ 25,000).

The Presidential elections put an end to an over year long period in which Slovakia was without a highest constitutional representative and during which the competencies of the president were bestowed on the prime minister and speaker of parliament.

Proposed Referendum

At the beginning of June, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the Slovak National Party initiated a petition for a referendum on the Act on Minority Language

¹ Based on the Slovak Helsinki Committee, *The Developments of Human Rights in Slovakia in 1999*, 17 December 1999 and updates.

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Use and on the privatization of strategic firms (to which they objected). Despite the fact that the petition was signed by 400,000 citizens, the president decided not to call the referendum. The reason for this was the non-compliance on the question of the minority language law with article 93(3) of the constitution, which stated that “basic rights and liberties, taxes, levies, and the state budget cannot be the subject of a referendum,” and the non-compliance of the question on privatization with article 99(2), according to which “a referendum on the same issue can be repeated after three years at the earliest.” A referendum on this question was called together with the last parliamentary elections in September 1998.

Rule of Law

The Slovak parliament stripped the immunity of two MPs, Ivan Lexa and Gustav Krajci, who were accused of criminal activity. In 1999, the parliament did not accept all of the prosecutor’s requests to strip an MP of their parliamentary immunity. The SHC criticized the case in which the parliament voted not to strip MP Ján Slota of his immunity. Slota was to be prosecuted for racist, xenophobic and derogatory statements he made at an anti-Hungarian and anti-Roma minority rally in Kysucké Nové Mesto.² On the basis of such decisions, the MPs will not be prosecuted for their crimes they have committed and will be considered not guilty as long as they hold a seat in parliament. Even after that, they cannot be prosecuted for crimes committed while being MPs.

The Constitutional Court dealt with a few serious cases in which constitutional violations were alleged. One of these cases was the cancellation of amnesties granted by former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar in his capacity as acting president. The

Constitutional Court ruled that the constitution does not allow the president to retroactively change or cancel amnesties.

The above-mentioned decision would not affect or have legal consequences in the trials underway as of this writing, concerning the kidnapping of Michal Kovac Jr., the son of the former Slovak president, and his removal abroad (August 1995) or examining the annulled referendum (May 1997), to which the amnesties applied.

The Constitutional Court received a petition by J. Svehota, who was accused of participation in the above-mentioned kidnapping of Kovac. Svehota claimed his human rights were violated because of the above-mentioned resolution of the Constitutional Court. He requested suspension of the trial against him. As of this writing, the Constitutional Court had not rendered a final decision and the hearing was postponed numerous times.

In September, the European Commission for Human Rights ruled that the termination of František Gaulieder’s term as a member of parliament (December 1996) was a violation of his human rights and the case³ was in the friendly settlement phase. In February 2000, the parliament aborted its former decision on Gaulieder’s removal from Parliament and the government agreed to pay an unspecified amount as financial retribution. Gaulieder received an apology and one Slovak crown in moral retribution.

Ombudsman’s Office

Slovakia is one of the few countries in Central Europe without the institution of the ombudsman that would protect the rights of individuals. The SHC has actively pushed for the introduction of an ombudsman act for the past few years. In 1999, the

² See *Intolerance, Xenophobia and Racial Discrimination*.

³ *Gaulieder v. Slovak Republic – Application No. 36909/97*.

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SHC continued activities to gather support for introducing this institution. Also, the SHC cooperated with others groups (the Foundation Citizen and Democracy (Minority Rights Group Slovakia), the Charter 77 Foundation, other NGOs and the Office of the Government for Human Rights and Minorities) in the preparation of a bill on the ombudsman.

Freedom of Expression and the Media

During the former Meciar-led Government there was a significant tendency to restrain and politically influence the activities and structure of the media in the last election campaign. There were also shortcomings with regard to freedom of access to information. The new government of Mikuláš Dzurinda declared its desire to find solutions to these problems on a legislative as well as on a practical level. However, there were some gaps in the government's reform plans.

In February, the parliament elected four new members of the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting out of the total number of nine members. Together with the newly-elected public television and radio bodies, this helped to eliminate their "one-sidedness" and established the proportional representation of all political parties, as well as the representation of professional and interest groups on these bodies.

The government also established the Council of the Government for Mass Media, which was composed of representatives of the public and interest organizations active in the area of mass media. The transformation of the public Press Agency of the Slovak Republic did not happen. This agency operated as a commercial entity while still receiving government funding. While the Press Agency fulfilled its mandate, this mandate could also be fulfilled by the commercial press agencies.

The government was unable to implement all of the legislative changes it promised to make. The election law restraining the activities of private electronic media, passed by parliament during the previous election campaign, was amended. Parliament also passed other amendments, which eliminated the most significant obstacles to freedom of speech, mass media and access to information.

Other bills that were meant to be proposed were not passed or even discussed. The Law on Broadcasting and Retransmission was not passed. This law would have supplemented the Act on the Operation of Television and Radio Broadcasting, making Slovakia compliant with its EU obligations. In spite of a set date for its implementation, the law on public information was not passed in the fall of 1999. This act would have changed the conditions governing the provision of information by state institutions significantly and therefore improved the standard of the constitutional right of access to information.

Cases of changes in ownership and quarrels in the mass media market continued in 1999. The cases had their roots in the previous government's era, which influenced, or even directly intruded into, ownership issues. One such case was the attempt to monopolize the press distribution system. The National Property Fund (NPF) decided to bestow ownership of the First Press Company (FPC) on Danubiaprint, which already controlled a vast majority of companies in the press market, and was open to suspicion because of its close connections with the government of the day. The new leadership of the NPF decided that the distribution company would be re-privatized according to new criteria. This decision was in accordance with the ruling of the Anti-Monopoly Office of the Slovak Republic and expectations of the Association of the Publishers of Periodical Press. The FPC was close to bankruptcy in December 1999, when a new owner, the Pri-

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vate Press Company, took over. It was established by five major publishing houses.

Another major case was the fight for a change in the ownership of the largest private television company during the last parliamentary elections (September 1998). This case was serious, since a preliminary investigation proved the participation of the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS), headed by Ivan Lexa, and the role of organized crime in the change of ownership and in mass media as a whole, as well as in earlier cases of physical attacks on journalists and the tailing of journalists.

In April 1999, a court found the former president of Telecommunications guilty of cutting off the electricity in November 1997 to one transmitter of the private radio TWIST.

The approach of the former ruling coalition towards the mass media was best illustrated by former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar's physical and verbal attack on journalist Vladimír Mišauer, with Czech TV Prima, following the funeral of assassinated former Economy Minister Ján Duckš in January 1999.

There were a few new cases of suspicion of bribery and the non-transparent selection of an administrator of the electronic information network for the government, which will provide access to information on the activities of state institutions on the Internet.

Judicial System and Independence of the Judiciary

In 1999, the activities of representatives of the Judiciary were focused on changing the judicial system in order to improve the overall independence of the judiciary and especially to separate it further from the executive. The main weakness identified was the financial and personal dependence of judges on the Ministry of Justice,

the executive branch responsible for the finances of the judiciary and which also had other significant competencies in the sphere of the judiciary.

It was proposed that the Highest Court be a separate chapter in the state budget. However, this change was not introduced in the year 2000 budget. The Ministry of Justice allowed for a greater degree of decentralization of the judiciary and strengthening of the self-governance of the courts. At the beginning of the election period, the minister of justice dismissed all chairs of the courts, so that the judges could elect their chairs themselves. He also considered the recommendations of the Council of Judges and the Slovak Judges Association.

All of the conditions for judges to decide independently and objectively were met and it was up to individual judges to resist outside pressures to influence their judgment.

Media stories about the judiciary appeared most often in connection with cases in which a judge had released a suspect. In such cases, judges usually argued that the submitted documents, which should have served as a basis for trying and sentencing a suspect, were incomplete. The basis on which a suspect could be detained was governed by law and required the submission of proof.

The release of a suspect from detention was up to the judge, and it was not considered a "resolution," therefore there was no basis for an appeal. The judge was not obliged to state the reasons why he/she had decided to release the suspect. The media often criticized this as unlawful, and accused judges of bias. Judges criticized the pressure from the executive and media in these cases and objected to these cases being connected with the abuse of procedures by some judges.

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The Ministry of Justice could not intervene in a judge's decision, obtain access to the files or review the correctness of a judge's decision. If there was evidence that a judge had been influenced by someone, he/she would face disciplinary action. In 1999, more judges were disciplined than during the past four years combined.

Another problem area was the duration of the entire court process. In criminal cases, this fluctuated between 4 and 11 months, but there were cases in which a final decision had not been reached even after three years. Three years is the maximum detention period allowed by law. In civil cases the process often took much longer, which often led to cases in which the person seeking a remedy withdrew the case since a decision was not expected to be rendered within a reasonable time. The European Court of Human Rights dealt with two such cases this year.⁴ To overcome this problem, the establishment of the institution of higher court secretaries, who would help with the court's agenda, was under consideration.

There were reports about judicial corruption and political pressure on judges. Threats of violence from parties to the case, as well as open physical attacks on a few judges, served as proof of the pressure exerted on judges. Cases involving bribery and blackmail occurred rarely and they did not severely influence the independence of the judiciary as a whole. The

media often published information about these cases before a decision was rendered, which decreased the objectivity of this information as well as the public's level of trust in the judiciary.

There were several bills under consideration aimed at making the work of the courts more transparent, e.g. by introducing obligatory property reporting requirements. An ethical code setting standards of behavior for judges in their professional and private lives had not been approved by the end of 1999.

The criminal code was amended in order to facilitate the uncovering of corruption and the abuse of positions by public officials. One of the amendments introduced the institution of a police agent. It also included recommendations of the OSCE agreement combating the bribery of foreign public officials in international economic transactions and the Council of Europe convention on corruption.

The Ministry of Justice established free legal counseling offices for the public, which offered advice on family and civil law. The aim was to increase citizens' knowledge and to give professional aid in cases of violations of individuals' rights.

The Center for Victims of Criminal Acts, which monitors the legal position of people harmed by criminal acts, was also established in 1999.

⁴ *Bohunicky v. Slovakia* (Application No. 36570/97): The case concerned the length of civil proceedings which the applicant brought in 1989 against, inter alia, the Czechoslovak Railways, seeking damages in respect of non-payment of sickness payment. The final judgment in the case was given in 1995 and was served on the applicant in October 1996. In friendly settlement of the case, the government agreed to pay the applicant 100,000 SKK (U.S.\$2,500) to cover any damages and costs, without any acknowledgement of a violation of the Convention. (Judgment 13.9.1999)
P.S. v. Slovakia (Application No. 29024/95): The applicant complained of the excessive length of civil proceedings. The Committee of Ministers held that there had been a violation of article 6(1) in both proceedings in its Interim Resolution DH (99) 429, 9 June 1999 (communicated according to article 32 of the former Convention).

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At the beginning of November, the first trial of individuals accused of involvement in organized crime began. The court would hear testimony of protected witnesses, and elaborate security measures were taken to protect all involved. There was an information embargo on much of the testimony, thus the media was limited in the information it could provide to the public about the trial.

An Office for Documentation of Communist Era Crimes was established at the Ministry of Justice.

Torture, Ill-Treatment and Misconduct by Law Enforcement Officials

During the first half of 1999, thirty-three police officers were prosecuted for misconduct, 12 of whom were prosecuted for improper behavior during an investigation. The Section of Control and Inspection of the Ministry of Interior recorded 267 cases of suspicion of misconduct in 1999.⁵

The SHC also recorded cases of police officers ill-treating suspects and abusing their authority. The SHC believed that those abuses were racially motivated.

The most serious incident occurred in the District Police Headquarters in Poprad, where a young Roma was shot dead during an investigation. The police were investigating this case and some prosecutions were proposed.

Religious Intolerance

Shortcomings remained in the area of the freedom of religion. The ruling coalition declared its intention to pass the Act on the Relationship of the Church and the

State, which was relevant in connection with the treaty between the Vatican and the Slovak Republic under preparation. The Party of the Democratic Left, a member of the ruling coalition, stated their objections to this treaty. They requested a declaration of the total independence of church and state.

Conscientious Objection

The constitutional right to refuse to perform compulsory military service on the basis of conscience or religion was not guaranteed. The legislation in force in 1999 allowed an objector to substitute compulsory military service with civil military service, which took twice as long (24 months) as the normal military service.

Another important restriction was the conditions governing the decision to perform civil military service. The individual had to express his will to enter the civil military service 30 days after the Slovak Army had pronounced him capable of performing military service. This contradicted the Resolution of the UN Commission for Human Rights No. 84/1993. An amendment to the Act on Compulsory Military Service and the Amendment on Civil Military Service, which proposed the elimination of the above mentioned shortcomings, were discussed at length.

Protection of Minorities

The situation of national minorities in Slovakia remained complex due to the heterogeneous composition of Slovakia, where minorities comprised almost 20 percent of the overall population. 1999 brought some positive changes, especially in the attitude of the government towards minorities.

⁵ Data are selected from the working copy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, *Second Periodical Report of the Slovak Republic on the Convention Against Torture, and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, November 1999*.

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One part of the new government's agenda was an improvement in the position of minorities, with a special focus on the Roma minority – an issue that constituted one of the most serious social problems in Slovakia. The Office of the Vice Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities was established, along with a Bureau for Human Rights and Minorities and the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Solving the Problems of the Roma Minority (headed by Vincent Danihel, longtime Board Member of the SHC). Through the introduction of these offices, the input of minorities and NGOs became much more vital than in the past. Yet, improvements in the sphere of legislation came very slowly and the concrete steps that were taken were not efficient.

Hungarian Minority

The Hungarian minority was represented in the National Council, and three ministers and three state secretaries were representatives of the Slovak Hungarian Coalition. Therefore the tensions from the past between the representatives of the Hungarian minority and the government somewhat dissipated. Still, a few incidents did occur. They were more of a political character, and did not result in the serious violation of the rights of the Hungarian minority.

The Act on Minority Language Use, passed in July, filled the gap which had been present in Slovakia for the past few years due to the Act on the State Language, which was very restrictive in relation to the official usage of minority languages. The creation of the Minority Language Act was a very long and stressful process and the result required a compromise from all sides. The act was assessed positively by the OSCE High Commissioner for Minorities Max van der Stoep, and

was recommended for approval by the National Council.

The act allowed the use of minority languages for official purposes, including the posting of signs in the languages of national minorities in areas where minorities comprised over 20 percent of the local population: this applied to 586 villages in 19 districts. Prior to the passage of this act, there was a nationwide petition calling for a referendum on this topic, which collected over 400,000 signatures.⁶

The Hungarian Coalition Party protested against the act since, according to them, it did not completely solve the problems raised by the Act on the State Language. The Act on Minority Language Use set out the conditions governing the official use of the national minority languages, but it made it possible for local assemblies not to use the minority language if at least one member of the assembly disagreed with the use of the minority language on the floor of the assembly. Still, the act came into force on 1 September 1999.

Roma Minority

A positive change in the attitude of the Slovak authorities regarding the Roma issue did not come until after the new government was formed in September 1998. The new government took various political and institutional measures on the issues such as the establishment of the Office of the Vice-Premier for Human Rights and Minorities; the nomination of a Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma Issues; the improvement of a new Government Council for National Minorities; the organization of round tables with Roma representatives and experts on the Roma issue; the preparation of a governmental strategy to improve the social and economic situation of the Roma population; the initiation of a

⁶ See also *Elections and Referenda*.

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Minority Tolerance Program, and other measures.

The office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Solving the Problems of the Roma Minority prepared a strategy to solve the problems of the Roma Minority, which was approved in September. In cooperation with the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Nationalities, the Expert Commission for Roma Issues was established, which deals with developing a strategy to solve the problems of the Roma. The SHC commented on the strategy for solving the problems of the Roma minority and considered that it did not contain concrete steps to be taken, lacked any plan for cooperation with NGOs working in this area, and did not address the initiatives of the Roma community.

The ongoing exodus of the Roma to some Western and Northern European countries further complicated the situation as some of these countries introduced a visa obligation for all Slovak citizens. Roma asylum seekers from Slovakia began leaving Slovakia in substantial numbers in 1997. They entered Great Britain and requested asylum on the grounds of racial persecution in Slovakia.

The situation of the Roma minority remained a serious social problem. The living conditions of the Roma population in Slovakia were appalling. Many Roma (who number close to half a million in Slovakia or up to 10 percent of the total population) lived in deplorable slums which often lacked drinking water, and they faced up to 100 percent unemployment in some localities. The SHC monitored the effects of racial segregation on the Roma people, particularly in the areas of employment and education, as well as racial attacks against them and other violations

of their human rights. Further, the SHC warned the government authorities that the mounting problems that Roma faced in Slovakia would lead to an increase in inter-ethnic tension and might even lead to open conflicts. The new government inherited the Roma question precisely at the time when the problems of the Roma were at their zenith. It began to propose change in the midst of the deep economic crisis facing the country, and at a time when industry was stagnating and unemployment rates were up to 20 percent for the country as a whole.

Some Slovak authorities misleadingly interpreted that the flow of Roma from Slovakia was organized by somebody who tried to misuse the "infantile" Roma people promising them "a better life abroad," and that their reasons for migration were purely economical. The SHK stated that it was crucial to examine the reasons for the emigration of substantial numbers of Slovak citizens, taking all aspects into account – including humanitarian and racial ones.

On the other hand, reactions to immigration in the countries of destination were – according to a report of the Council of Europe⁷ – not adequate. In the case of the "invasion" of Dover (as reported by the British media), where "the total number of Slovak Roma represented no more than 1,000 people ... it can hardly be claimed that several hundred persons would be in any position to burden national governments significantly or drain their asylum resources." In the cases of Finland and Norway, the numbers were substantially smaller: 140 and 70 people, respectively. According to the report, it was "best termed an emigration event rather than a 'wave' of emigration." The report also expressed the viewpoint that the fear gener-

⁷ Dr. Yaron Matras, *The Recent Emigration of Roma from the Czech and Slovak Republics*, report submitted to the Council of Europe Population and Migration Division in August 1998.

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ated by these modestly sized “migration events” derived “not so much from the logistics of the administrative procedure and the humanitarian and social responsibility it entailed, but from a fear that the few hundred Roma merely announced the beginning of yet a larger wave of unforeseeable dimensions.”

Intolerance, Xenophobia and Racial Discrimination

The SHC recorded evidence of a number of physical attacks on members of the Roma community as well as on foreigners.

The most common offenders were skinheads. Even though the victims felt that the crimes were racially motivated, the police and investigators refused to examine the racial motivation aspect of the crime: they classified these crimes as intentional physical attacks in the absence of evidence proving racial motivation behind the attack. If there were no witnesses to say that the offenders had made racist statements, the physical attack could not be qualified as racially motivated. This was a significant problem which prevented the offenders from being appropriately punished, and did not prevent the growing number of such incidents. It was disputable as to whether the problem was caused by the rigid legislation or by the implementation of legislation, where the SHC saw lack of experience, common stereotypes and racial prejudices. State officials did not pay an appropriate amount of attention to this serious problem.

Frequent incidents proved that the police were not professionally prepared to investigate these physical attacks.

■ In November, a student from Peru was attacked by three offenders with characteristic skinhead traits. As the student was severely injured in the attack, his friends decided to drive him to the hospital. On the way, they were stopped by the police who

requested their identity cards. They were fined because they were unable to provide the appropriate documentation. They were not escorted to the hospital by the police, although it was the legal duty of the police officers to escort them. The president of the police denied that the offenders were racially motivated, however, he expressed displeasure at the behavior of the police officers who were disciplined.

The SHC brought the media’s attention to this case and highlighted the attitude of the police to similar incidents. Already in the past, the police had refused to accept allegations that a physical attack was racially motivated. In one case, a judge had refused to classify a physical attack on the Roma as racially motivated, reasoning that there were no anthropological differences between the Roma and the Slovaks, since both belonged to the Indo-European race.

Discrimination against the Roma was common at all levels of society. The labor offices marked the files of Roma citizens with an “R.” Even though Slovak legislation forbid the creation of files of personal data on the basis of race or ethnicity, this evidence remained hidden until it caught the eye of the public. Discrimination against the Roma was common in their places of residence. In many areas, there was tension between the “white” and the Roma population and the Roma often faced barriers imposed by the majority community even when they were trying to integrate into society.

The SHC was engaged in a number of projects focusing on the Roma community and assisted other organizations in this area. In 1998–1999, the SHC conducted media research, in particular monitoring the image of the Roma community in the media. Its findings showed that the image of the Roma in the media was mostly negative. In articles dealing with crime, the ethnicity of the perpetrator or victim was only mentioned if they were Roma.

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Ascribing the negative acts of an individual to the entire Roma community was common.

Hate Speech

■ Jan Slota, former chairman of the radical right-wing Slovak National Party and a Member of Parliament, verbally insulted and defamed the Hungarian and Roma minorities at his pre-election rally in March in Kysucké Nové Mesto. He also challenged Slovaks to attack Budapest and to support the military industry. Many politicians disapproved of these statements and asked for an inquiry into his public speeches to assess his liability for the criminal offense of defamation of the nation and race; incitement to hatred on the basis of belonging to a certain nation or race; dissemination of false information and scare mongering; and drunkenness. In September, the parliament decided not to strip Slota of his immunity. The SHC and other organizations objected to this decision.

Economic and Social Rights

Slovakia was also bound by international agreements in the area of social rights, and above all, the European Social Charter. The integration of Slovakia into the EU and the necessary transformation of the extensive system of social security and the cuts in public expenditures required a few vital decisions to be taken. The labor unions protested against these restrictive measures, using pressure tactics (e.g., strikes, protest meetings). The labor unions tried to force the government to take counter-measures that would compensate for the declining standard of living for low-income groups, which were hardest hit.

Owing to gaps in legislation, the slow operation of the courts, and economic pressure on firms, there were numerous cases

in which employees were not paid their wages, violating their right to a fair wage for their work guaranteed by the constitution (article 36(a)). The government wanted to solve this shortcoming by amending the penal code, such that in certain circumstances such cases would be classified as a crime.

The inaction on long-term problems in the education sector and further decreases in the education budget were the reasons for the dissatisfaction of teachers. A number of universities were forced to end the winter semester early because they could not pay their expenses, including utilities bills.

Some universities did not fulfill the accreditation conditions during the previous government. The Accreditation Committee did not grant accreditation to these universities and the then opposition made accusations that these decisions had a political background. The SHC believes that this was not the case and that the Accreditation Committee based their judgment on the professional failings of the universities.

The rights of women and children remain a serious problem in Slovakia, despite the many international obligations Slovakia undertook in this area. One of the most serious problems was domestic violence directed at women and children, with an absence of legislation in this area. The attitude of the public and institutions that should be involved in this issue remained very ambiguous.

Arms Trade⁸

Contrary to its international commitments to exercise restraint in its arms sales, Slovakia has exported weapons to countries where they risk being used to fuel serious human rights abuses. Slovakia confirmed selling heavy weapons to Indonesia and Turkey in 1998, and in November 1999 it

⁸ By Human Rights Watch/Division on Arms for the IHF Annual Report 2000.

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was reported that Slovak authorities had approved the sale of a dozen surplus warplanes to Angola. In addition to such government-sanctioned arms exports, Slovakia has been implicated in illegal arms transfers. Bratislava airport is reportedly a hub for illicit arms trafficking. In early 1999, for example, it was reported that weapons shipments from the Bratislava airport – ostensibly intended for Uganda – were delivered to rebels in Sierra Leone via Liberia. Both Sierra Leonean rebels and Liberia are subject to United Nations arms embargoes. ■