



SLOVAKIA

STATEMENT

by

His Excellency

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of the Slovak Republic

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Review of Slovakia

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Mr President/Mrs Vice-President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour for me to be here today to lead the Slovak delegation in the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Since its creation, the UPR has proved to be an effective tool not only to commend States for their progress achieved in the field of human rights but, more importantly to outline ideas and ways for further improvement of human rights standards. The UPR serves as a "pressure mechanism" which in positive terms "pushes" the States to work constantly on promoting human rights.

The outcome of the review process provides national authorities with important guidance on how to enhance the level of human rights protection. This, from our point of view, is one of the main strengths of the UPR process.

In this context we look forward to fruitful and constructive dialogue today and are keen to answer questions put forward by Member States. Let me express our gratitude to delegations of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Lichtenstein, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom for the questions they submitted in advance. Members of the Slovak delegation and I myself will address them later during the review.

By way of introductory remarks, I would like to make a **brief presentation of our national report**, with a focus on how we addressed recommendations from the first UPR cycle and on main developments that have taken place in Slovakia in the last four years. During the first UPR cycle a significant number of recommendations were addressed to us, most of which were accepted by the Government. As a follow-up to the first UPR cycle, a number of legislative and practical measures have been adopted with an aim to bring these recommendations into practice.

At this point I shall be very clear – not everything is perfect in Slovakia. There are certainly areas where much remains to be done, however we can note solid progress over last period. We expect that number of issues will be addressed during the review today and we are ready to provide you with frank answers. In this connection let me assure you of the strong commitment of the Slovak Government to work on making further progress on the institutional and legal framework in the field of human rights. Recognizing the indispensable role civil society plays in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, we will continue dialogue with the civil society by involving its representatives in discussions on policies and programmes having an impact on human rights.

In line with general UPR guidelines, **civil society was involved in the process** of preparing the national report through the Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality. The Government Council serves as an institutionalized platform for government representatives and non-governmental actors to regularly discuss human rights related matters; *I will come back to the role of the Government Council later in my*

presentation. The draft national report was discussed by the Government Council at its formal session in September 2013. In addition, civil society representatives and the public had the opportunity to provide comments on the consolidated version of the national report during the consultation process which was concluded by the Government's approval of the national report.

I will now turn to the main developments that have taken place in Slovakia since the first UPR cycle.

Let me begin with **the institutional framework** for human rights which significantly changed during reviewed period. In 2012, the role of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs increased considerably with respect to human right policies at the national level as the Ministry has become responsible for their coordination and has the role of the coordinator of human rights policies that are implemented by individual line ministries. The Minister of Foreign and European Affairs in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister chairs the Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality.

The Council as a permanent advisory body to the Government represents a forum for a regular discussion among Government representatives, civil society and experts with an academic background on human rights. By addressing substantive human rights issues it serves as the main source of ideas and inputs for the Government on how to further enhance human rights protection. While further work is required to make full use of the potential of the Government Council, we see the real added value of the current system chaired by the DPM and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. The Council enables a better division of tasks and responsibilities among the line ministries in the field of human rights and ensures more concrete follow-up to issues discussed.

Discrimination on any grounds is prohibited in Slovakia. During the period under review important legislative amendments to the Anti-discrimination Law were adopted with a view to further strengthening protection against discrimination, including widening of scope of the indirect discrimination. As the amendment has come into force only recently, information on its practical implications is not yet available. By establishing the Committee for the Rights of LGBTI persons in October 2012, the Government responded to the need to ensure further promotion and awareness about discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Participating in policy-making which has a human rights impact on LGBTI persons is one of the primary responsibilities of this Committee.

The fight against extremism and racial discrimination is an area of particular interest to the Slovak Government. Several concrete steps were taken in order to strengthen protection against these phenomena during the period under review. More information on this topic will be provided later during the review by members of our delegation.

As a multi-ethnic country Slovakia makes every effort to create a **suitable environment for the preservation** and, more importantly, **for the development of national minorities.** We are actively engaged in dialogue with international monitoring bodies, in particular those of

the Council of Europe on their findings and recommendations regarding national minorities. In addition, we also benefit from the valuable expertise of monitoring bodies when adopting and implementing national policies in this area. Dialogue with the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities and the Council of Europe Venice Commission on particular thematic issues serves as a positive example in this regard. As a result of institutional reinforcement of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, the Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities was established in June 2012. One of its core activities is ensuring the adequate follow-up to recommendations made by regional human rights mechanisms of the Council of Europe conventions pertaining to national minorities.

People in Slovakia do care for human rights. The Government, being aware of the lack of a comprehensive concept paper on human rights at the national level took the decision to elaborate the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Broad discussion on ideas and outlines for further improvement of national human rights standards is a part of the preparatory process and involves government and non-governmental actors as well as the public representing a wide range of opinions. A “heated” exchange of views between representatives of different human rights approaches marked this part of the Strategy preparation. The Government has now a difficult task ahead: to elaborate a balanced and modern human rights document that will proportionally cover thematic issues including the situation of vulnerable groups while fully reflecting our international human rights obligations. The Strategy is supposed to be completed by June 2014. In view of this fact we hope then to be ready to share with you our experience from this process.

National human rights protection has been further strengthened in Slovakia by way of taking up **new obligations resulting from international instruments on human rights.** In concrete terms, during the period under review Slovakia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. In 2012 Slovakia became a State Party to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As regards the state of play of the ratification process with respect to the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances raised by Belgium, the national ratification procedure has started. In view of our engagement regarding the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure we are particularly pleased to inform you that Slovakia ratified this international treaty on 3 December 2013, thus becoming its ninth State party. At the regional level Slovakia was among the first signatories of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The ratification procedure with respect to this instrument has been postponed. Norway asked about the reason for postponement, we will provide answer during the review. The ratification of the Kampala amendments, to which Lichtenstein referred to in the advance question, belongs to our priorities. Slovakia is in a process of the national legislative procedure concerning ratification of both amendments. On 15 January 2014, the amendments were approved by the Government. They will now be examined by the Parliament, subject to final ratification by the President. We expect that the amendments will be ratified in the first half of this year.

Now I will briefly touch upon the situation of the Roma communities. Their situation requires further efforts to achieve satisfactory results from a human rights, social and economic perspective. As we expect that delegations will raise the Roma issue in their interventions, a representative from the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and representatives from the line ministries will address the topic more in depth later during the review.

In general, improving the situation of the Roma community has been a long-term priority for the Slovak Government. National authorities are fully aware of this extremely difficult task as well as of shortcomings which need to be urgently tackled. The Strategy for Roma Integration up to 2020, which was adopted in 2012, represents the primary comprehensive policy paper of the Government for the social integration of Roma. It provides a basis for adopting the policies in four main areas of integration: health, employment, housing and education. The implementation of the Strategy is currently under way.

The Government recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to the process of integrating the Roma. Despite slow and we admit not fully satisfactory progress in this field, there are several positive examples, in particular with regard to housing, health and employment. Concrete information will be provided during the review.

Mr President/Mrs Vice-President,

This was a short overview of the human rights situation in Slovakia outlining its main developments and matters that might raise questions from the human rights point of view. There is still a number of challenging tasks which need to be completed. The establishment of a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles is among the most pressing objectives. Necessary legislative steps are expected to be taken in the near future. And finally, a procedure to establish a national independent institution for the rights of the child is about to start. We hope to have the first legislative draft in the first half of 2014.

Mr President/Mrs Vice-President,

Now I would like to give the floor back to you for the first round interventions.

Thank you.

