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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC POLICY

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

January 28, 2010

The Honorable Robert Fico
Prime Minister
Republic of Slovakia

Dear Prime Minister Fico,

I write to express my deep concern about the recent implementation of the undemocratic Slovak language law that took effect on September 1, 2009 and encourage you to rethink it. Such a law discriminates directly against Slovakia's ethnic minorities that comprise fifteen percent of the total population, which includes primarily the Hungarian community that constitutes eleven percent of ethnic minorities in the country.

As you know, the amended Slovak language law sets forth fines between €100 and €5,000 for the unauthorized use of any language other than Slovak in official communications. The law requires anyone employed by the state, including all civil servants, judges, members of the armed forces, police, and firefighters, to use the official language in "the performance of their duties." The employing agency will be fined should an employee respond in a language other than Slovak. The deliberate vagueness of the law has led to arbitrary interpretation of its provisions, including whether the law applies to communities where minorities comprise more than 20 percent of the population. A firefighter responding in the Hungarian language to a call for help could be subject to disciplinary action under the law. The implementation of such a law violates the basic human right of freedom of expression that is a fundamental underpinning of all successful democracies.

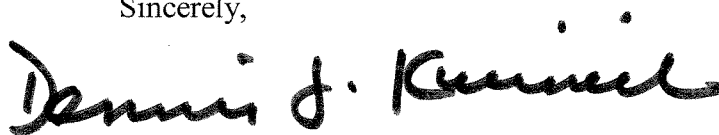
The law also requires "memorials, monuments and commemorative plaques" inscribed in a language other than Slovak, to be re-carved or re-written. Inscriptions in the Hungarian language can be kept, but an additional inscription must be added in Slovak and must be at least the same size or larger than the Hungarian inscription. These requirements clearly intend to degrade the rich history of ethnic minorities and seek to homogenize the diverse identities of the peoples in the region.

The law codifies inequality between languages and undermines equality between the people of Slovakia that have long lived side-by-side. Recent news reports indicate increased tension between ethnic minorities and the rest of the Slovak population. The law creates an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among the population as employees report

each other in the event of a response to a customer or constituent in a language other than Slovak.

I hope that you, as Prime Minister, will do all that you can to ensure that all Slovaks have equal protection under the law, and that Slovakia complies with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which states that "Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language...shall be prohibited."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis J. Kucinich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and "K".

Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress