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## The Roma in Domestic Media

Between 1999 and 2000, coverage of the Roma in Slovakia's periodical press experienced a renaissance, while simultaneously showing signs of pluralism. Although coverage of the Romany issue continues to be problematic, more press are now focusing on the minority.

The Culture Ministry extends financial subsidies to six Romany periodicals, in 1999 allocating a total of 4,449,000 Slovak crowns for this purpose. The most respected Romany periodical in Slovakia is *Romano Lil Nevo*, which has been published in the eastern Slovak town of Prešov since 1991. It is officially a weekly, but is actually published only occasionally. It has a circulation of 8,500 and its editor-in-chief, Daniela Šilanová-Hivešová, is a Slovak writer of Romany fairy tales. In total, only six issues of *Romano Lil Nevo* were published between the summer of 1999 and October 2000, due mostly to lack of funds and the irregularity of subsidies from the Culture Ministry.

The 1993 Radio and Television Broadcasting Law allows public media to "produce and commission the production of [...] broadcasts which preserve and develop the cultural identity [...] of ethnic minorities and ethnic groups living in the Slovak Republic". A specialized news review focused on the Roma called *Romale* is broadcast once a month by the public Slovak Television (STV). From 1999 to 2000, there were no problems with the regularity of broadcasting, nor did we see sloppy or anti-Romany editions of the *Romale* news review as had sometimes occurred in previous years.

Radio broadcasting for the Roma is produced nationwide by the Ethnic Broadcasting Office of the Prešov studio of public Slovak Radio. Its weekly radio broadcast, called *O Roma vakeren - Hovoria Rómovia*, features 20 minutes of news and information on Roma culture. The Banská Bystrica studio of Slovak Radio provides religious broadcasting for the Roma through its program *Balvajeskere Čhave*.

Between January and December 1999, the first annual Preparatory Course for Romany Journalists in Slovakia was jointly organized by the Centre of Independent Journalism and the InfoRoma foundation. The main objective of the project is to give young Roma access to print and electronic media. Eight graduates of the course's first year completed a study visit to Slovakia's most prestigious media, and upon graduation most went on to work for local television stations. In 2000, the course successfully completed its second year.

While Slovakia intensified its efforts to join the EU, there was a dramatic growth in coverage of the Roma issue by Slovak media which, besides news reports, began producing analyses, expert articles and features on the issue.

The sudden wave of migrations by Slovak Roma to EU states had a significant impact on the frequency of news about the Roma in Slovak media. An analysis by the Slovak Helsinki Committee in 2000 suggested a direct connection between reporting on the Romany migration and on the introduction of visa requirements for Slovaks by various EU member states.

The independent civil society association MEMO 98 monitored the main evening news programmes of the three most influential Slovak TV stations - the private TV Markíza, the public Slovak Television (STV), and the private TV Luna - from November 27, 1999 until February 28, 2000. The results suggest that Romany asylum seekers ranked among the five most important themes covered by Luna and STV.

The survey also monitored the time devoted to particular ethnic minorities by selected Slovak media between January 1 and March 31, 2000, and delivered an astonishing conclusion: while the time devoted to the Roma by Slovakia's five most influential electronic media totalled 3 hours, 19 minutes and 2 seconds, the time devoted to the Hungarian minority was only 7 minutes and 46 seconds; the Ruthenian minority received 1 minute and 33 seconds of coverage; the Czech, Polish, and Ukrainian minorities were not given any broadcasting time at all. In percentage terms, only 4.68% of screen time at the country's five most influential electronic media went to ethnic minorities in Slovakia; 95.32% of that time concerned the Roma.

**Excerpted from the chapter on Roma written by Michal Vašečka in Slovakia 2000: A Global Report on the State of Society.**