



FACT SHEETS ON HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS BUDAPEST

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The national and ethnic minorities in Hungary

Several national communities have lived in the territory of Hungary since the foundation of the state one thousand years ago. The modern ethnic and linguistic composition of the country was basically established following the decimation and the movement of the population during the Ottoman occupation, with mass spontaneous migration or the organised resettlement of people in the 17-18th centuries. With the exception of the Slovene population on the western border, it was during these centuries that the minorities living in Hungary moved into the territory of today's country. Towards the end of the 19th century, non-Hungarian nationalities living within the borders of the country constituted more than 50 per cent of the total population. Following the revision of the borders after World War I this proportion changed significantly. Some 33 per cent of Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin (3.3 million people) found themselves outside the country's borders, while the number of minorities living within the borders declined. Today, the minorities make up some 10 per cent of the population.

A common feature of the majority of Hungary's national and ethnic minorities is that, having lived within the framework of the Hungarian state for centuries, they profess a dual identity: their consciousness of being Hungarian is as strong as their nationality ties. Most left their original homeland and communities before the formation of a structured literary language, and as a consequence the languages and dialects they use to this day are in general archaic linguistic variations.

This lengthy historical coexistence is an important criteria in the definition formulated in the Minority Act. "All groups of people who have lived in the territory of the Republic of Hungary for at least one century, who represent a numerical minority in the country's population, whose members are Hungarian citizens, who are distinguished from the rest of the population

by their own languages, cultures, and traditions, who demonstrate a sense of belonging together that is aimed at preserving all of these and at expressing and protecting the interests of their historical communities" (Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, Chapter 1, Section 1, Subsection (2)) are national and ethnic minorities recognised as constituent components of the state. This act defines the Bulgarian, Roma, Greek, Croatian, Polish, German, Armenian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serb, Slovak, Slovene and Ukrainian ethnic groups (listed in Hungarian alphabetical order) as national or ethnic minorities native to Hungary. A characteristic feature of the situation in Hungary is that the minorities live scattered geographical throughout the country in some 1,500 settlements, and generally they also constitute a minority within these settlements.

Demographic characteristics of the national and ethnic minorities

Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities states: "It is the individual's exclusive and inalienable right to take on and declare their affiliation to a national or ethnic group or a minority. Nobody is obliged to proclaim that they belong to a minority group."

According to the 1990 census, in a population of 10,374,823, a total of 232,751 persons signalled minority affiliation, and 137,724 stated that their native language was one of the national or ethnic minority languages. Estimates from researchers and minority organisations indicate that the true number of national and ethnic minorities is greater: individual groups are reckoned to comprise from a few thousand persons up to nearly half a million.

The difference between the estimat-



Two youngsters of the Croatian nationality in folk costume

ed and declared figures can be explained on the one hand by historical, social and psychological reasons related to minority questions in Central-Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the figures reflect the minorities' emotional and cultural duality dilemma: many feel themselves to be equally Hungarian and a minority, but the opportunity to record and state this was not available in the 1990 census.

To a certain extent it is possible to track minority affiliation on the basis of three questions posed in the 1990 census: nationality, native language and spoken language. Answers given by the minorities to these three criteria allow us to draw some conclusions as to ethnic affiliation. Admission of nationality affiliation does not directly presuppose an acquaintance with the native language. By native language, we mean the language acquired during childhood and the language generally spoken in the family, but at the same time a part of the population speaking a minority native language profess themselves to be of Hungarian nationality. Besides these two criteria, additional information can be extracted by taking into account which other languages besides the native language are spoken if the minority language is not a commonly taught, internationally used lan-



Slovene festival in Felsőszölnök (Gornji Senik)

guage. However, these latter data will refer not only to minorities who do not 'declare' themselves, but it can also include those people of Hungarian nationality who were resettled in, or who fled to, Hungary and who also speak the language of the state in which they used to live.

The table below shows the number of national and ethnic minorities based on data from the 1990 population census, research and other surveys.

Minority policy in Hungary

The acceptance and practical implementation of regulations designed to protect the minorities and improve their situation, and the programmes of succeeding, democratically elected

Hungarian governments since 1990 prove that Hungary pays particular attention to the assertion of national and ethnic minority rights, that it values the cultural diversity that dates back centuries in this country, and that it considers the minorities' existence, the preservation of their languages, traditions and cultures as an important element of social and cultural life. Over the last decade the consistent aim of domestic minority policy – based on consensus – was to establish a minority-friendly environment for the national and ethnic minorities in which they could preserve and pass on their cultural identity, and live freely with rights enshrined in law.

The Office for National and Ethnic Minorities established in 1990 is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the government's objectives. The Office is an independent state administrative body with national sphere of authority, operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice. The Office continuously assesses the situation of the national and ethnic minorities and the assertion of their rights. It prepares analyses and drafts minority policy concepts on which the government can base resolutions concerning the minorities. It is also charged with facilitating the exchange of views and information between the government and the minority organisations. The Office is involved in the drafting of government programmes designed to implement the minority act, it provides necessary co-ordination related to any modifications to the act, it closely follows the implementation of minority tasks and duties falling within the competence of state administrative bodies and participates in their co-ordination.

Minority	Minority identity	Native language	Spoken language other than nat. lang.	Estimated population
Roma	142 683	48 072	22 933	400 000 – 600 000
German	30 824	37 511	416 182	200 000 – 220 000
Slovak	10 459	12 745	56 107	100 000 – 110 000
Croatian	13 570	17 577	18 297	80 000 – 90 000
Romanian	10 740	8 730	40 625	25 000
Serb	2 905	2 953	13 646	5 000
Slovene, Wend	1 930	2 627	1 566	5 000
Armenian		37	48	3 500 – 10 000
Greek		1 640	1 260	4 000 – 4 500
Bulgarian		1 370	1 665	5 000
Polish		3 788	5 948	10 000
Ukrainian, Ruthenian*		674	1 192	
Ruthenian				6 000
Ukrainian				2 000
Other**	19 640			
Total	232 751	137 724	579 469	

* The two languages were worded as a common question in the census.

** Number of persons in the census declaring a minority affiliation not listed in the questionnaire.

Legal frameworks

The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary states that the minorities living in Hungary are constituent components of the state. The Constitution guarantees the minorities the right to collective participation in public life, the nurturing of their own cultures, the widespread use of their native languages, education in their native languages, and the right to use their names in their own languages. Subsection (2) of Section 32/B of the Constitution and Act LIX of 1993 provide for the institution of a parliamentary commissioner to protect the rights of national and ethnic minorities. The minorities ombudsman is responsible for investigating/having investigated any kind of abuse of the rights of national or ethnic minorities that comes to his/her attention and initiating general and individual measures in order to remedy it.

In 1993 Parliament passed Act LXXVII on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, which establishes individual and collective minority rights in the areas of self-government, use of language, public education and culture. Among collective rights, the act states that the minorities have the right to form local and national self-governments.



Soloist of the Elek Romanian dance ensemble awarded the "For Minorities" prize



German historical monument cellar in Palkonya (Palkán)

Minority points of view are increasingly taken into consideration in the wording of legislation passed in the Republic of Hungary over the last few years, and modern acts have been created which are fully in line with today's requirements as regards guaranteeing the minorities' basic constitutional rights. Thus for example the Act on Radio and Television Broadcasting states that the public service media have a compulsory responsibility to prepare programmes presenting the culture and life of the minorities and to broadcast in the native languages. A modification (1996) to the Act on the Criminal Code established the prosecution of the criminal forms of racial discrimination.

While Members of Parliament belonging to the different minorities sit on the benches of some of the parliamentary parties, the question of guaranteed representation for the minorities in Parliament has remained unresolved for some time; it is a matter which regularly appears on the agendas of Parliament and the Government.

Hungary was admitted as a member of the Council of Europe on 6 November 1990; this date also marks the moment Hungary signed the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental

Freedoms. It was ratified on 5 November 1992. In 1995, Hungary ratified the two most important documents of the Council of Europe regarding minority protection: the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Legal regulations in Hungary concerning the minorities are in accord with these two international conventions, and indeed in certain areas they actually provide broader rights to the minorities resident in the country. Hungary has undertaken to implement the optional regulations contained in Chapter III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of the Croatian, Slovakian, German, Serbian, Romanian and Slovene languages. The Hungarian Government presented a national report on the implementation of the two international conventions to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Minority self-governments

Prior to 1993 the public role of the minorities was played out in the frame of the various civil organisations.

However, the Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities states that minorities have the right to establish their own local and national self-governments.

The minority self-governments are elected bodies which represent the interests of the given national or ethnic minority at settlement or national level. Local minority self-governments, unlike organisations operating in an associative form, represent not only their membership but also the entire minority community of a settlement. With the establishment of the minority self-government system the minorities living in Hungary received the right whereby they could legitimately integrate into the system of local governance so that, during the course of conducting public affairs of local interest, the rights of the national and ethnic minorities living in the given settlement would also be upheld.

The minority self-governments were established with the aim of guaranteeing cultural autonomy. As such the minority self-governments have rights enshrined in law allowing them to make decisions in their own spheres of authority on the foundation, taking over and mainte-



nance of institutions, particularly in the areas of local education, the local printed and electronic media, the nurturing of traditions and culture.

Voting for minority self-governments takes place at the same time as municipal elections. During elections every franchised person in the given settlement may take part and cast a vote for candidates of the given minority. Proof of the success and strengthening of the minority self-government system comes in figures showing that whereas during minority self-government elections held in 1994 and 1995, 822 minority self-governments were formed, following the 1998 elections 1,367 local and 9 capital city minority self-governments were formed across the country. The largest growth was evident in the number of Roma minority self-governments, but the number of German, Slovak and Croatian minority self-governments also increased significantly. As a result of the elections the Bulgarian national minority formed 15 self-governments, the Roma communities elected 768, Greeks 19, Croatians 75, Poles 33, Germans 272, Armenians 25, Romanians 33, Ruthenians 10, Serbs 35, Slovaks 76, Slovenes 10 and the Ukrainians 5 self-governments.

Of the various forms of minority self-government it is worth paying particular attention to the type that is at one and the

same time a settlement (municipal) government and a minority self-government. Minority settlement self-government status confers the same rights as regional autonomy, opening the way to provid-

ing the most efficient means for the realisation of the interests of minorities. As against the 46 minority settlement self-governments of the former term, 63 such bodies from the 1,376 local minority self-governments were established following the October 1998 elections. The German and Croatian minorities availed themselves of this opportunity to the largest extent.

Minority self-governments may determine their protected monuments and memorial sites, the dates of local and national holidays, and they have the right to establish and run cultural and educational institutions, schools, museums and theatres. They are entitled to independently determine their own organisational and operational regulations. Local minority self-governments have a right to veto proposals if the municipal government is working on regulations concerning cultural, educational or language matters related to the given minority. They also hold a veto in the question of the appointment of directors of minority institutions.

The national minority self-governments represent the given minority at national level. The formation of national self-governments occurs on the basis of electoral assemblies following the formation of local minority self-governments. As such, all 13 minorities in Hungary established their own national self-governments in 1999. The national minority self-governments, as partners in legislation and state administration, air their views on planned legal regulations concerning the minorities represented by them. The law grants them the right to the professional monitoring

of minority education, as well as participation in the formation of the principal educational material used in minority education.

The last five years have clearly justified the existence of the minority self-government system. The system is an efficient form of interest representation allowing broad minority participation in matters that concern them both at local and national level. Preparations for the modification of the Minority Act are currently in progress. This work is directed towards ensuring that legal frameworks provide even greater assistance in the operation of the self-government system as well as guaranteeing the working conditions needed.

Minority education

In the majority of families belonging to the minorities the process of passing on the language has broken down and the Hungarian language has become dominant. The different dialects spoken by the minorities do not lend themselves to regular refreshment, and thus their role in social communication is waning. This makes the role of the school as a vehicle for passing on the native language all the more important; the responsibility of educational institutes is all the greater.

Minority education – as a part of the Hungarian public education system – must provide all services that are generally provided by public education as a whole. Moreover, the task is not simply to offer these services in the native language, but it is also necessary to create the conditions for studying the native language and passing on an under-



Minister of Justice Iboyla Dávid and German Ambassador Wilfried Gruber opening the Budapest house of Germans in Hungary



Roma first violinist with his son

standing of the culture and history of the people.

There are three types of minority schools. There are schools which teach the minority language as a foreign language, there are dual-language schools where the humanities, for example history, literature and geography, are taught in the native language and natural science subjects are taught in Hungarian, and there are schools where all subjects except Hungarian language and literature are taught in the language of the given minority. Unfortunately the number of the latter is low because of a lack of suitable teachers, the children's inadequate grasp of their native language, and other reasons.

In the 1997-1998 school year 20,440 children attended the 394 minority pre-schools, while there were 53,021 pupils registered in the 390 minority primary schools. A total of 2,096 students attended the 24 minority secondary schools or special secondary school classes. Between 1992 and 1998, within a decline in the overall number of children attending pre-school and primary school throughout the country, the number of minority children actually increased, primarily as a result of the increasing interest in German nationality education.

Higher education is also conducted in nationality languages, primarily for trainee teachers. In addition to domestic training and further training courses youngsters belonging to national minorities also have the opportunity to participate in part- or post-graduate studies in the mother country on scholarships.

So-called Sunday schools are one special form of minority education which function outside the educational system. In general the organisers and operators of this form of education – typically available for smaller minorities – are the national self-governments, with financing from the Ministry of Education.

Minorities arranging "Sunday schools" make every effort to ensure that the study material is the same in all of their schools, that preparations are made for detailing the requirements for subjects taught in the schools (minority language and literature, minority awareness), and

using one of the schools of the given settlement as a base school to get integrated into the public education system.

The educational data of the national minorities are not different from those of the majority population. Within the German and Serb minorities the number of graduates from higher education is above the national average.

As regards education, there are special problems associated with the Roma minority. Currently slightly more than 70 per cent of Roma children complete primary schooling, but only one-third continue studies into the intermediate (secondary) level. This is far lower than the more than 90 per cent proportion of children of non-Roma families who continue studies at an intermediate level. The situation is made still worse by the fact that a large proportion of young Roma are qualified in subjects that provide them with only limited chances for employment. Less than 1 per cent of Roma hold higher educational certificates. Preparatory classes to improve the chances of young people and studies starting at 'beginner' level are held in several higher education institutions with the support of the Ministry of Education. This Ministry and public foundations assisting the national and ethnic minorities offer scholarships to assist the studies of young Roma.

Special programmes for the academic improvement of the Roma are designed to create opportunities and nurture talent among children and pupils belonging to the Roma minority. This form of instruction and education covers students' hostels as well.

The success of pre-school and school education establishing the equality of opportunity for the Roma community is to a large extent dependent on the professional quality of teacher training and further training. With support from the Ministry of Education, several institutions of higher education have introduced – within the framework of departmental, special college or independent programmes – Roma studies (romology) in order to improve the understanding and awareness of students.

Cultural life

The last few years have seen much progress in the minorities organising their own affairs and in developing self-awareness. The numerous minority civil organisations, associations, clubs and ensembles are proof of the high level to which the right of association and assembly is conducted.

Cultural educational institutions in settlements which also have a minority population are obliged to ensure that the cultural demands of these minorities are met. Besides this, the independent minority cultural institutional system has greatly strengthened over the last decade. The national or regional network of minority museums and libraries, the three nationality theatres (German, Croatian and Serb), the numerous cultural associations, community houses, clubs and art societies all help in preserving the cultural traditions of the minorities. Cultural-educational institutions have been established specifically for the minorities, e.g. the Bulgarian Cultural Institute and Library, Roma and German community houses, the National Roma Information and Cultural Centre, the Ukrainian Cultural Centre, the Armenian Cultural Centre, the Slovene Cultural and Information Centre and the House of the Slovak Culture.

From the early 90s on the minorities began to establish minority research institutes to study their own traditions,



Orthodox church in the Greek village of Beloianisz



Statue in Budapest of Bulgarian poet Kbristo Botev

history and present-day situation. The organisational framework of these research institutes is very varied: some operate on the basis of a civil initiative, others have contacts with a national self-government or some universities.

The Hungarian state supports minority access to the means of mass commu-



Consecration of the Cross erected in Budapest to mark the 1700th anniversary of Armenian Christianity

nication. Hungarian Radio began transmitting programmes for 13 minorities in 1998, and the public service Hungarian Television also prepares programmes for all the 13 minorities. The native language television programmes for the minorities are complemented by fortnightly Hungarian-language magazine programmes about the minorities which also serve to inform the wider general public. The national self-governments of the national and ethnic minorities independently decide on the principles for the use of the available airtime at their disposal for public service broadcasting.

At least one nationally distributed newspaper per minority receives full state support for publication purposes. In 1998 this translated into financial support being provided to 17 nationally distributed newspapers for the 13 minorities. Besides minority national papers other press organs give news about the minorities, thus for example minority

supplements carried by the national press and native language supplements in local newspapers. At the beginning of the 90s several minority research journals were launched, and research projects and high-level conferences held by university, higher educational and museum research groups, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Minority Research Workshop and the Teleki László Foundation's Central European Institute also draw attention to the question of the minorities. Several publications e.g. the *Handbook of Minority Self-governments*, published by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, or the volume *Minorities in Hungary 1999* published under the auspices of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, provide general information for the national and ethnic minorities.

Measures promoting the social integration of the Roma minority

From an economic viewpoint one can consider the integration of the minorities living in Hungary as complete, with the exception of the Roma minority. They were hardest hit by the recession of the 1980s and the transition to a market economy. Currently the unemployment rate among Roma is four to five times higher than the national average. There are villages where 90-100 per cent of the Roma population is unemployed.

Long-term and youth unemployment are also far more common in the Roma community. The problem is only compounded by the fact that large numbers of Roma live in those parts of the country where as a result of industrial structural transformation following the change of regime job opportunities in heavy industry have been severely restricted. The Roma are also frequent-

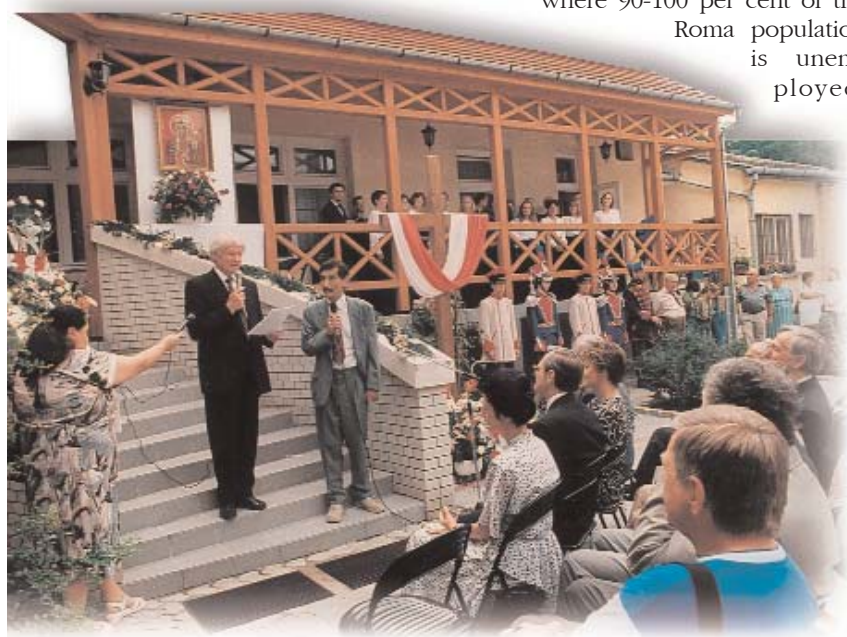


Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (right) receiving Flórián Farkas (centre), President of the National Roma Self-government, on 17 June 1999. Toso Doncsev, President of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, is also pictured

ly discriminated against in employment and everyday life.

Factors unfavourably influencing the state of health are multiplied among the Roma. Thus, the life expectancy of the Roma population is 10 years less than that of the non-Roma. In 1993, 14 per cent of the Roma population lived in isolated run-down neighbourhoods without running water, electricity and other conveniences.

The Roma policy conducted by the Hungarian Government is characterised by continuity based on the results of earlier years. After assuming office in 1998 the new government immediately launched an analysis of the implementation and efficiency of the medium-term package of measures passed by the pre-



Ceremonial inauguration of the National Polish Minority Self-government headquarters, 27 June 1998

vious government in 1997, as a result of which a new package of measures was drafted and promulgated on the medium-term measures to improve the living standards and social position of the Roma population. The concrete implementation of medium-term measures takes place through the drafting of the annual governmental action plans which have to be in harmony with the long-term strategy finalised in September 2000.

The complex package specifies tasks in the areas of education, culture, employment, agriculture, regional development, social affairs, health, housing, anti-discrimination and communication related to the Roma. The government decree defines the ministries responsible for the implementation of the tasks and the deadlines by which tasks have to be implemented.

On the one hand the aim of the measures is to reduce social inequality of opportunities, and to prevent and reduce prejudice and discrimination. On the other hand they aim at strengthening the identity and culture of Roma communities. The Government considers that the social integration of the Roma is both a question of minority policy and of social policy.

The Inter-Departmental Committee on Roma Affairs co-ordinates the implementation of the programme. Its chair is the minister of justice, its vice-chair is the president of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, and its members are the deputy state secretaries of the ministries concerned as well as the president of the National Roma Self-government. The parliamentary commissioner for minority rights also takes part in the work as a permanent guest.

Hungary's Roma policy stands at the forefront of world attention. The 1997 annual report of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance states that Hungary is aware of the problems of the Roma community, and is making serious efforts in several areas – housing, education, employment etc. – to remedy the situation as well as to examine and reduce forms of racial discrimination against the Roma community.

* USD 1 = approx. HUF 290 – Aug. 2000

Chapters dealing with minority rights and minority protection in European Union documentation published in relation to Hungary's accession to the EU recognise the achievements the country has made, but also mention that the Roma in Hungary frequently have to battle against considerable difficulties, and their situation is afflicted by numerous problems. According to the assessment of the European Union, Hungary meets the political criteria for accession to the EU set down in Copenhagen, but it must continue to make strenuous efforts to improve the position of the Roma community.



System of financial support

The state provides financial support for the self-organisation and activities of the minorities through a multi-channel system which splits operational and programme costs, respectively the support available to the minority self-governments and civil organisations.

Financial means from the central budget allocated for the national self-governments and public foundations appear in the budget of the Ministry of Justice, and support for the local minority self-governments is included in the



Verse by Imre Fudl entitled "Ukrizovanie" (Crucifixion)

budget of the Ministry of the Interior. Support available to minority civil organisations is made on the recommendation of Parliament's Committee for Human Rights, Minority and Religious Affairs.



Ruthenian folk singers of Múcsony

Support allocated to the minority self-governments has increased. The national self-governments received HUF 398 million in 1998, HUF 496.3 million in 1999 and HUF 554.3 million* in 2000. Local minority self-government support ran to HUF 350 million in 1998. In 1999 the 1,376 local minority self-governments received state budgetary support amounting to HUF 730 million, and in 2000 this figure was HUF 803 million.

The issue of providing headquarters for the national self-governments is nearing completion. The 11 national self-governments established in 1995 have appropriate headquarters with the necessary basic operational conditions. Securing headquarters for the Ukrainian and Ruthenian self-governments (formed in 1999) is in hand.

The single largest amount of specified minority-targeted budgetary support goes on supporting education for the minorities. The prevailing budget provides supplementary state contributions within the framework of normative financing for those municipal governments which maintain institutions conducting minority instruction and education programmes. The budgetary law for 1999 provided a total of HUF 4,941,000,000 for minority pre-school instruction, school education and students' hostels as well as bilingual education. In 2000, this sum increased to over HUF 5 billion.

However, despite supplementary support going to minority education it may happen that the local governments maintaining small independent minority schools experience financial problems. A solution to this problem appeared in the 1999 Act on the State Budget which decreed, on the basis of separate entitlement, further supplementary support to municipal governments maintaining independent minority schools with fewer than 130 students, or independent minority pre-schools with fewer than 60 children.

The following public foundations are

also important institutions of the budgetary minority financial support system: the Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary, the Public Foundation for Roma in Hungary, and the Gandhi Public Foundation.

The Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary supports programmes, activities and press organs which protect the identity of the minorities in Hungary, and which serve to nurture, pass on and preserve their traditions, languages, material and spiritual culture. The Government provided this foundation with HUF 474 million in 1998, HUF 520 million in 1999 and HUF 556.3 million in 2000.

The Public Foundation for Roma in Hungary received HUF 278.5 million in 2000. The organisation is primarily engaged in supporting the development of small enterprises and employment and health care programmes assisting families and small communities. Grants extended to the Gandhi Public Foundation which runs secondary boarding schools, primarily for talented young Roma, amount to HUF 200 million in 2000.

With the establishment of the public foundations the government has not only involved representatives of minorities in the decision-making process, but has created the opportunity to realise task-financing which takes into consideration the different situations and demands of the minority communities.

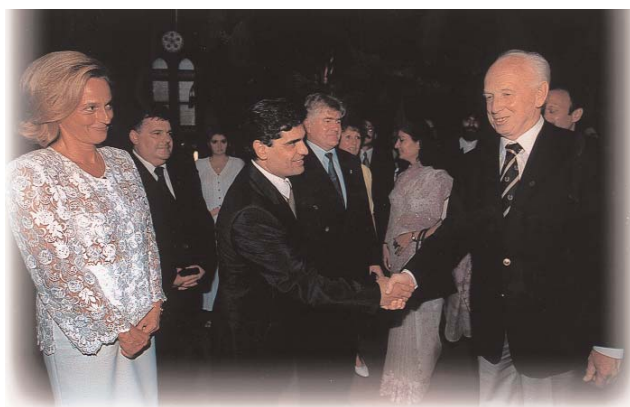
Contacts with the mother countries

The Government of the Republic of Hungary welcomes the contributions of the mother countries and language nations to the strengthening of the language and the cultural identity of the minorities living in the country. The Government endeavours to ensure that the minorities serve as a bridge between Hungary and the mother nations.

Efforts to establish good neighbourly, amicable relations and co-operation are reflected in the fact that besides signing up to multilateral international conventions the Republic of Hungary has signed bilateral agreements and conventions with the mother countries of many of the minorities (Slovakia, Romania, the Ukraine, Slovenia, Federal Republic of Germany and Croatia). In line with these conventions intergovernmental minority joint commissions have been established to discuss topical minority questions, to

assess the realisation of obligations deriving from the convention, respectively to draft suggestions for their own governments. The latest such commission was established with the representatives of Slovakia and Hungary in January 1999. The representatives of the minorities concerned also participate in the work of all the joint commissions.

The Republic of Hungary undertook obligations in the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities not to obstruct persons belonging to the national minorities in practising the right to establish cross-border relations freely and in peace, and to maintain contacts with persons with a shared ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity, or with a common cultural heritage. The Minority Act states that persons belonging to the minorities have the right to maintain relations both with the state and community institutions of their mother coun-



President of the Republic Ferenc Mádl and Minister of Justice Ibolya David meeting representatives of the minorities in Parliament on 17 August 2000

try and language nation, and with minorities living in other countries. Local minority self-governments have the right to maintain relations with any foreign or mother country minority organisation and association, as well as the right to conclude co-operation agreements. The minority organisations conduct cultural activities, for which they can establish institutions – within the legal framework – which are entitled to maintain international relations.

According to a national survey conducted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1998, one of the most important areas of the activities of the national minority self-governments has been the establishment and the development of relations with the mother countries. In the last few years, relations between the minorities and their respective mother countries have started to blossom. These contacts are evidenced in a variety of forms from the operation of a jointly maintained school, through youth exchanges, educational and cultural co-operation and support, to 'twin' contacts between settlements and entrepreneurial initiatives linking the two countries.

The Hungarian Government considers the conscious nurturing of the culture of the minorities not only as a duty deriving from international commitments it has undertaken, but also as a long-term national interest. It supports the strengthening of the identity of minority groups, the development of the minority self-government system, and the implementation of the cultural autonomy of minorities. The cultural diversity of the country that goes back centuries is a common value of all the citizens.

Fact Sheets on Hungary, published since 1996, accessible on the Internet:

- Measures taken by the state to promote the social integration of Roma living in Hungary
- The Republic of Hungary
- Thousand years of Hungarian culture
- The national and ethnic minorities in Hungary
- History of Hungary
- The historical churches in Hungary
- The Hungarian defence forces
- The foreign policy of Hungary, a member of NATO
- On the threshold of a new millennium
- Hungary's revolution and war of independence of 1848-1849
- Relations between Hungary and the European Union
- Hungary and the Council of Europe
- The path from the Orient
- Hungary and NATO
- The 1956 Hungarian revolution
- The contribution of Hungarians to universal culture
- The Hungarian education system
- Hungary and its inhabitants
- Hungary's national days
- Hungary's national symbols
- Hungarian winners at the Olympic Games