

**NÁRODNÁ RADA
OBČANOV SO ZDRAVOTNÝM
POSTIHNUTÍM V SR**

ANNUAL REPORT 2007

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Branislav Mamojka, SDC President

Anna Reháková, SDC Director

Address

The activities of the Slovak Disability Council concentrate on the organisation's main mission, i.e. advancing and supporting the common interests and rights of people with disabilities regardless of the type of disability. We entered the year of 2007, as the European Union's year of equal opportunities with the hope and intention to speed up the process of creating equal opportunities and ensuring equal treatment for people with disabilities and their integration into the society and to contribute to a reduction of discriminatory provisions existing in our legislation.

If we look at the past year from the perspective of the people with severe disability, we have to say that it was not a very successful year. The main reason was the postponed date for the submission to the National Council of the long-expected law on the compensation of social consequences of severe disability and the law on social services. This again postponed the solution to the growing problems of people with disabilities and their families,

particularly reduced availability of personal assistance and care services due to the failure to increase the contributions for these services. This makes it very difficult, if at all possible, to find persons willing to provide such services. At the background of these important problems, we also achieved unquestionable successes.

The achievements we are particularly proud of include the introduction of mandatory sickness leave insurance for employees, whose ability to perform gainful activity is reduced by more than 70%, the renewed entitlement to receive the higher of the disability pension and the old age pension, the introduction of a social benefit partly reducing the discrimination of children of certain parents who are not entitled to tax relieves due to disability and the abolishment of the possibility to pay lower minimum wage to employees, whose ability to perform gainful activity is reduced by more than 40%.

The Slovak Disability Council and its member organisations, as well as other disability organisations struggled with existence and development problems also in 2007. The main cause of these problems was the difficulty in obtaining financing and the limited scope of financing. In addition to the well-known problem of delayed payments for activities carried out as part of projects, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family changed the criteria for paying out subsidies in 2007, leading to a reduction of contributions for advocates, self-advocates and promotion of the rights of the people with disabilities and for the related operating and personnel expenses. The outlook for 2008 is also uncertain. The Ministry of Labour failed to publish its regulation on subsidies for 2008 in 2007.

Projects had to be prepared according to the old regulation, even though it was known that they would be evaluated according to the new regulation, which will most likely further limit the possibilities for obtaining support for the activities of advocates, self-advocates and promotion of disabled persons' rights, as the draft regulation submitted for the consultation process suggested.

This is one of the reasons why we have problems in further developing and improving the functionality of the secretariat of the Slovak Disability Council and to support expert work groups, as it would be necessary. At present, the secretariat has 4 employees. At the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, there was a replacement in the position of the Slovak Disability Council's general secretary. Mrs. Monika Vrablova resigned on the position and the office was given to Mrs. Anna Rehakova. The general assembly held on 10 October 2007 changed the name of the position from general secretary to director. The Executive Committee of the Slovak Disability Council then appointed Mrs. Rehakova as the new director. The Slovak Disability Council also changed its seat; it moved from Zabotova Street 2 to Vajnorska Street 1 (both in Bratislava), as the former building was about to be reconstructed.

Despite the above problems and limitations, the Slovak Disability Council unquestionably helped to address the problems of people with disabilities and showed the effectiveness of joint action by its member organisations not only in the field of legislation. We were involved in surveys establishing the situation of the people with disabilities and carried out projects to support their employability and projects promoting partnerships in the regions.

We have great expectations as regards the historically most important international document concerning people with disabilities, i.e. the U.N. Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. This convention motivated EDF to launch a campaign to obtain 1 million signatures for European legislation free of discrimination on the ground of disability. We also took part in the campaign and obtained more than 15 thousand signatures from people with and without disabilities. This was by one third more than required from Slovakia, considering the country's population. This is also an important demonstration of the support for the

application of the rights and equal opportunities of people with disabilities by the society, whose support we want to obtain and which we rely on for the future.

Branislav Mamojka

President, Slovak Disability Council

1. About the Organisation

The Slovak Disability Council (SDC) is a federation of nationwide organisations of people with disabilities. The Council was established on 20 November 2003 and is registered by the Ministry of Interior under No. VVS/1-900/90-22687. As of 31 December 2007, it had 14 ordinary members and 3 members with the observer status.

The supreme body of the Slovak Disability Council is the general assembly held once in 4 years. Each member organisation sends two representatives to its meeting. The highest body in the time between two general assembly meetings is the Presidency of SDC, consisting of the representatives appointed by individual member organisations. The executive body is the Executive Committee elected by the general assembly. The statutory representatives are the SDC President elected by the general assembly and the director appointed by the Executive Committee.

SDC is part of the network of national disability councils operating in all member states of the European Union and associated under the umbrella of the European Disability Forum (EDF). SDC has been a full member of EDF since 2004.

The tasks of the Slovak Disability Council are:

- a) defending the common interests of people with disabilities and promoting the mainstreaming of disability into development policies at all levels;
- b) creating the platform for discussion and implementation of common action against discrimination on the ground of disability and creating the conditions for equal opportunities and equal treatment;
- c) legal and social advisory, awareness raising and providing training to people with disabilities on how to overcome the consequences of disability, development of self-defence abilities, raising awareness of the law, increasing employability and improving other skills supporting effective integration into the society;
- d) supporting the development of the capacities of its member organisations and increasing the level of qualification of their personnel and officers;
- e) informing and awareness raising of the public, public institutions, businesses, state administration and self-governments about the problems and abilities of people with disabilities and on the possibilities of prevention and elimination of barriers related to disability.

The main objective of the Slovak Disability Council is advancing and supporting the common interests of people with disabilities regardless of the type of disability. It carries out its activities based on the consensus of its member organisations, fully respecting their independence in specific questions of individual types of disability and supporting the development of their capacities. By respecting these principles, SDC is able to find and promote common positions with the aim of satisfying the needs, eliminating the barriers and promoting the rights of people with disabilities, despite of the manifold social consequences of individual types of disability.

Our main activities:

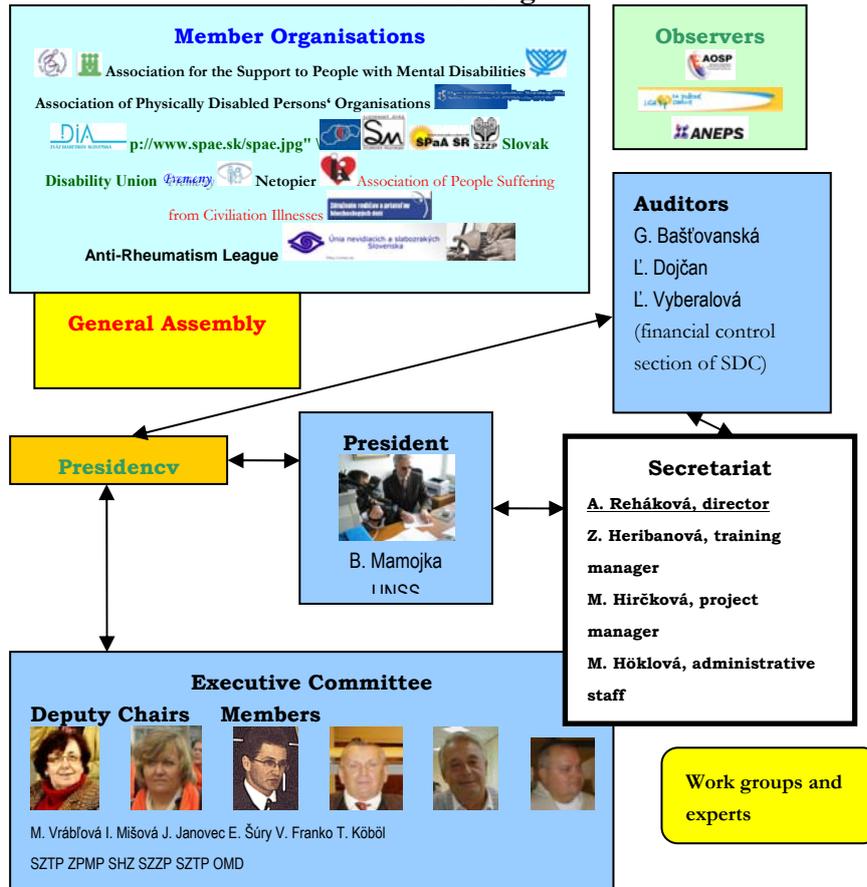
- we provide comments to legislative proposals concerning people with disabilities and their integration into the society, we submit our own proposals, we take part in the preparation of legislative proposals and consultations;

- we negotiate and co-operate with the representatives of the general government and self-governments with the aim of improving the position of the people with disabilities, supporting efficient implementation of current legislation and prevention of misunderstandings in its implementation;
- we organise lectures, conferences, seminars and trainings concentrated mainly on raising the awareness of people with disabilities on their rights, on developing the capacities of their organisations in defending the rights of people with disabilities and promoting equal opportunities, raising the awareness of the public about the rights, possibilities and abilities of people with disabilities and on the methods for the prevention and elimination of barriers of all types and about the benefits of barrier-free society for all.
- Through projects, we also try to improve the quality of life for the people with disabilities, concentrating in particular on informal education increasing their employability, provision of information and advisory to employers about the possibilities of employing such people, on the mainstreaming of disability into development strategies of the general government and self-governments, on accepting people with disabilities as equal members of the society and on combating discrimination on the ground of disability.
- We issue advisory publications for people with disabilities, their family members, employers and the public and we present the results of surveys looking at the situation of people with disabilities.
- We cooperate with international disabled persons' organisations through the European Disability Forum.
- SDC Chairman is a member of EDF Presidency; in this way, we try to shape the opinions of European institutions and the European legislation and promote transfer of knowledge from EU countries into Slovakia. We take part in international projects aimed at promoting good practices and values of European citizenship. At the request of the individual directorates of the European Commission and the European Disability Forum, we prepare informational materials about the situation of the people with disabilities. We closely cooperate with the Slovak members of the European Parliament in the preparation of documents for European Parliament meetings concerning people with disabilities.

Slovak Disability Council, the Facts

Name:	Slovak Disability Council
Seat:	Vajnorská 1, 831 04 Bratislava
Identification Number (IČO)	308 53 567
Legal form:	Civic association pursuant to Act No 83/1990 Coll.
Date established	20 11. 2003

SDC Organisational Structure



Presidency of the Slovak Disability Council

President:

Branislav Mamojka

Vice Presidents

Iveta Mišová, Monika Vrábľová

Members

Jarmila Fajnorová

- Slovak Sclerosis Multiplex Association

Eva Farbiaková

- Premeny – Slovak Association of Patients and Patients' Organisations for Mental Health

Peter Fašung

- Association of Parents and Friends of Deaf-and-Blind Children

Terézia Hurbaničová

- Psoriasis and Atopy Association

Jaroslav Janovec

- Slovak Haemophilia Association

Andrea Madunová

- Muscular Dystrophy Patients Organisation

Branislav Mamojka

– Blind and Partially Sighted Union of Slovakia

Iveta Mišová

- People with Mental Disability Support Association

Roman Martinovič

- Association of Blind and Partially-Sighted Youth

Mária Orgonášová

- Association of Disabled Persons' Organisations

Mária Orlovská

- Anti-Rheumatism League of Slovakia

Alojz Partel

- Association of People Suffering from Civilisation Illnesses

Eduard Šúry - Slovak Association of Disabled Persons
Ján Švolík - Association of Diabetics in Slovakia
Monika Vrábľová - Slovak Association of Physically Disabled

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2. Activities on the field of legislation

The Slovak Disability Council seeks dialogue with the Government and the National Council by submitting its own proposals, by taking part in inter-departmental consultation processes and by submitting its comments prior to the adoption of laws, with the aim of influencing the legislative process so that the legislation best suits the needs of the people with disabilities and helps to address and prevent their problems.

We entered the year of 2007 with the hope that certain restrictive provisions for people with severe disability contained in several laws would be changed. We expected the adoption of the law on the compensation of social consequences of severe disability and the law on social services and changes to the social insurance law. The most important discriminatory provisions for people with disabilities contained in our social legislation were described in the conclusions from the workshop on disability that took part as part of the conference entitled "Together towards Diversity" opening the European Year of Equal Opportunities, which was held on 21 February 2007. Our expectations were fulfilled to a certain part only.

We had great expectations also with regard to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which the Slovak Disability Council considers to be very useful and the most important tool of the international law for advancing the rights of the people with

disabilities. It was very disappointing for us to see that Slovakia was not among the more than 100 states that signed the Convention in New York on 30 March 2007.

SDC urged the authorities to sign the Convention as soon as possible and was involved in the consultation process and preparation of the official translation. The President of Slovakia signed the Convention on 26 September 2007, including its optional protocol, which still remains unsigned by several "most democratic" countries of the European Union. On 9 October 2007, we organised a conference about the Convention, which was attended by the representatives of most ministries and central authorities affected, who expressed their support for the Convention.

The negotiation and adoption of the law on the compensation of severe disability and the law on social services was moved from the Government's plan of legislative tasks for 2007 into the 2008 plan. From the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, worked on the final wording of both laws. The Slovak Disability Council was also involved in the preparation of the two laws; we prepared several written positions and attended several meetings organised by the Ministry of Labour to discuss the social services law in particular. It was therefore a very unpleasant surprise for us that the Ministry decided not to submit the draft laws to the meeting of the Government and postpone their adoption until 2008. The Ministry explained this decision among other things by the need to give enough time to all stakeholders, in particular self-governments, to get prepared (in terms of personnel, technical equipment and finances) for new tasks resulting from the new social services law. Because of the delays in the process of adopting the new laws, we several times asked for an amendment of the existing social assistance law to address at least the most urgent needs resulting from changed economic conditions and to stop the further deterioration of the situation of people with disabilities, particularly as regards payment of benefits and provision of social assistance and services. Unfortunately, we were not successful and we have to wait for the new laws. We also tried to achieve several changes to the current social insurance law approved in the previous year. The amendment of the social insurance act, in effect from the beginning of 2008, brought about both positive and negative changes. Disabled persons engaged in gainful activity, whose ability to perform gainful activity is reduced by more than 70%, are no longer excluded from the group of persons covered by mandatory sickness leave insurance. By a change to the provisions concerning entitlement to old age pension, persons receiving disability benefits can no longer be paid lower old age pension than was their disability benefit. When they reach retirement age, the entitlement to disability benefit does not cease to exist and if a person is entitled to both the disability benefit and the old age pension, he/she will receive the higher of the two. What we think was a negative change is the fact that disabled persons are no longer covered by mandatory retirement insurance and the Social Insurance Agency no longer pays contributions from the disability insurance fund into the old age pension fund for such persons. The Social Insurance Agency also no longer pays contributions for disabled persons into private pension schemes. Disabled persons, whose ability to perform gainful activity is reduced by more than 70%, will again pay contributions on disability insurance, even though the payment of such contributions has no effect on the amount of the disability benefit received.

In October 2007, the National Council adopted an amendment of the child benefit law introducing a new benefit - additional payment to child benefit. This additional payment replaces the tax bonus for persons receiving disability benefits, who cannot claim the bonus as they are not engaged in a gainful activity. The Slovak Disability Council strived for the introduction of such benefit for persons receiving disability benefit, whose ability to perform gainful activity is reduced by more than 70%, since 2004, after the introduction of the tax bonus for persons engaged in gainful activity according to the Income Tax Act. In the consultation process for the amendment of the law, we proposed to provide additional

payment to the child benefit in an amount equal to the tax bonus; this requirement, however, was not accepted. Nevertheless, we consider the outcome to be an important achievement in combating discrimination on the ground of disability. In our opinion, however, the discrimination has not been fully removed, as the benefit is lower than the tax bonus and there still exist certain groups of people with disabilities, who, for objective reasons, cannot fulfil the conditions for becoming entitled to the new benefit.

Another achievement in the fight against discrimination was the law on minimum wage. This law no longer contains the discriminatory provisions allowing the reduction of minimum wage to 75% or 50% of the minimum wage, if the employee is receiving partial disability or full disability benefit, respectively. It is thus no longer possible to reduce the minimum wage on the ground of disability.

During the year, preparations of the amendment of the employment services law started. The amendment is expected to reinforce substantially active employment support policy for people with disabilities. When submitting our proposals and comments, we used the experience from the project implemented in 2006 by the Slovak Disability Council entitled "Equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for monitoring and combating discrimination phenomena on the labour market".

We also managed to get the obligation for digital TV broadcasters to include programmes including commentary for the blind into their broadcast incorporated into the digital broadcasting of programme services law. Starting from June 2009, public broadcasters and private broadcasters will be obliged to air 20% and 3% of such programmes, respectively. The mandatory percentage of programmes with hidden subtitles and sign language for hearing-impaired was also increased.

We will continue monitoring the implementation of the strategy for the changeover to digital broadcasting, which also contains the requirement for increasing accessibility of user devices for people with disabilities. If people with disabilities had no access to digital broadcasting, it would make the access to information for them much more difficult.

We welcomed the draft amendment of the free access to information law prepared by the government, which now contains the right for submitting requests for information and for receiving information in a format accessible for people with sensual impairment. This was actually one of the tasks included in the National Programme for Improving the Living Conditions of People with Disabilities. We hope that this proposal will not become the excuse for adopting other provisions, generally limiting access to information, which most non-governmental organisations are afraid of.

The Slovak Disability Council, as well as organisations of the elderly, expressed their strong disagreement with the intention of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family to set up a joint Government Council for the Elderly and People with Disabilities, arguing that "the issues of the elderly and of the people with disabilities are overlapping in many areas and the ways for addressing those issues are identical in most cases". This argumentation is very simplified and generalising and it disregards an important part of the issues faced by people with disabilities, mainly disable children, youth and people in the productive age. As part of the subsequent discussions, an agreement could be reached, according to which the Government Council for Disability Issues would be transformed in 2008, but still would be preserved as an independent advisory council for the Government.

The Slovak Disability Council embraces the proposal by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family to ratify the European Social Charter. It, however, expressed its disagreement with the proposal of not ratifying Article 15(3) and Article (30) of the Charter. Such ratification with a reservation would mean that:

1. With the aim of ensuring efficient use of the right for independence, social integration and participation in the life of the society by persons with disabilities of all age

categories regardless of the type and origin of disability, the Government of the Slovak Republic does not undertake “to promote their full social integration and participation in the life of the community in particular through measures, including technical aids, aiming to overcome barriers to communication and mobility and enabling access to transport, housing, cultural activities and leisure.

2. “With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Government does not undertake: to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;

It seems that the protests were successful, as the proposal for ratification was not submitted to the Government. We hope that we will be able to reach an agreement during 2008 and the European Social Charter will be ratified with no reservations.

A very unpleasant surprise waited for us at the end of the year with the draft of the association act, which should replace the existing law on the association of citizens. If the draft law was adopted in the proposed version, it would mean the end of most non-governmental organisations, including disabled persons' organisations. It is enough to mention just one of the negative provisions: according to the proposal, we would not be authorised to carry out any activities carried out by other types of organisations, including non-profit organisations providing service of general benefit. Such organisations carry out almost all activities currently carried out by the Slovak Disability Council. The proposal initiated a wave of disagreement by non-governmental organisations and individuals and negotiations with the government on possible changes to the proposal are already underway.

In 2008, we will try to achieve changes to the final version of the law on the compensation of severe disability and the social services act, which should be adopted this year after several rounds of postponement and amendment of the employment services act. Together with other non-governmental organisations, we will try to achieve that the draft law on associations is withdrawn from the legislative process or that it is reworked substantially. We will also support accelerated ratification and implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Below is a list of draft laws and other documents, to which the Slovak Disability Council submitted its comments as part of the consultation process prior to adoption by the National Council in 2007:

1. Comments to the draft law on town and country planning and building procedure.
2. Proposals concerning the amendment of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services;
3. Comments to the draft law on social services.
4. Comments to the draft law on the compensation of social consequences of severe disability
5. Comments to the draft law on public health insurers.
6. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 580/2004 Coll. on health insurance;
7. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 311/2001 Coll. (the Labour Code);
8. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 131/2002 Coll. on higher schools;
9. Comments to the Strategy of Life-Long Learning and Life-Long Advisory
10. Comments to the draft law on fees for services to the public provided by the Slovak Television and the Slovak Radio
11. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 600/2003 Coll. on child benefits;
12. Comments to the draft law on the support of regional development;

13. Comments to the translation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, U.N. 2007
14. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 461/2003 Coll. on social insurance;
15. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 5/2004 Coll. on employment services;
16. Comments to the draft law amending Act No 365/2004 Coll. on equal treatment in certain areas and on the protection against discrimination – the Anti-Discrimination Act - 2nd amendment;
17. Comments to the proposal for leaving out task No 17 in the month of September and task No 18 in the month of September from the Government's Plan of Legislative Tasks for 2007, obliging the Ministry of Labour to submit to the Government the draft social services law and the draft law on the compensation of social consequences of severe disability.
18. Comments to the proposal of the strategy for the development of Slovak libraries in 2008-2013
19. Comments to the proposal of the e-government strategy
20. Comments to the proposal of ratification of the (revised) European Social Charter
21. Comments to the draft Regulation of the Ministry of Labour on the granting of subsidies by the MoLSAF
22. Comments to the Plan of Activities of the Government for 2008
23. Comments to the proposal of cancelling task No 4 in the month of June from the Government's Plan of Activities for 2007, imposing the obligation to establish a Council of the Government for the Elderly.

2007 – European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

3. Activities under the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

The philosophy and the activities of the Slovak Disability Council are based on the definition of disability with respect to the attitudes of the society and barriers in social and living environment.

If a person with permanent disability encounters severe difficulties in his/her life due to his/her disability, that person is disadvantaged, compared to the rest of the society.

Definition of disability

Disability is the result of the interactions between persons with deteriorated health and the barriers in attitudes and environment, which prevent them from fully and efficiently taking part in the life of the society on equal basis as others.

The European Year of Equal Opportunities was for us a major challenge to raise the awareness of the public about equality of opportunities and its importance for the entire society. The participants in the national opening conference held on 21 February representing disabled persons' organisations formulated the recommendations concerning the main areas, in which discrimination on the ground of disability exists and the proposals for its elimination.

This document served as the basis for later negotiations with the ombudsman, who confirmed our statements and included several of our opinions into his annual report submitted to the National Council.

As part of the call for projects submission to implement the objectives of the European Year of Equal Opportunities, we submitted the project entitled "**Implementation of the principle of non-discrimination, equality of opportunities and participation in policy making and drafting of measures on regional level.**" The project was approved as one of nine Slovak projects. The objective of the project was to help in the efficient mainstreaming

of disability into standard policies on regional and local levels. We placed great emphasis on the establishment of systematic cooperation between higher territorial units and disabled persons' organisations in the regions.

We informed Commissionaire Spidla about the project, who met with non-governmental organisations from Slovakia implementing projects supported by the European Commission. The roundtable meeting took place at the Office of the Government under the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Caplovic.

As part of the project "**Member contribution to European Disability Forum**", we were also active internationally; we took part in EDF meetings, arranged for the translation of EDF and EU documents and paid the contribution to EDF. The project was supported by MoLSAF.

Slovak Disability Council President Branislav Mamojka is a member of the so-called board of directors, which meets twice a year in the country of EU Presidency. In 2007, the meeting took place in Berlin, the city, which also hosted the European Ministers Conference focused on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, and was attended by the representatives of national disabled persons' organisations, including those from Slovakia.

In addition to discussions about the documents prepared by EDF secretariat in cooperation with Disability Intergroup and external experts from various EU countries, and about the directives and regulations of the European Parliament affecting the lives of people with disabilities, meetings of the board are also attended by the representatives of the government of the host country. The meetings are also an opportunity for the exchange of experience and for learning the conditions, in which disabled persons' organisations operate and the policies of individual governments concerning people with disabilities. Based on the previous experience and on the comparison of the working conditions of DPOs in the individual EU countries, we have to say that the Slovak Disability Council has to work under very difficult and complex conditions, and that the same is true for other disabled persons' organisations in Slovakia.

The year of equal opportunities for all declared by the European Parliament was the driving force for increasing the number and variety of activities organised not only by the presiding EU countries (Germany and Portugal) but also by the European Disability Forum. From the viewpoint of disabled persons' organisations, the most important event was the European-wide assembly of people with disabilities in Brussels and the meeting of EDF general assembly on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of EDF. For more information about EDF activities visit:

<http://www.edf-feqh.org/>.

So far, our biggest project was PHARE project entitled "**Equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for monitoring and combating discrimination phenomena on the labour market**". The objective of the project was to test the system supporting employability of people with disabilities through activists from among the disabled, who were supposed to help their peers in the process of finding employment, in the communication with job centres and employers and in early stages of employment. This model appears to be very promising. Due to the short period, in which financing was available under the project, however, it was not possible to extend the network of activists and to retain them. Two manuals were prepared "Looking for job?" and "Thinking of giving work to a person with disability?", which received positive feedback from the public, employers and job seekers. Quite unexpectedly, the information leaflet written in easy-to-read text was accepted very well and was quite frequently asked for. The recommendations formulated in the closing conference served as the basis for negotiations about the amendment of Act No 5/2004 on employment services. It was very encouraging that Commissionaire Spidla took particular interest in this project and highly appreciated its innovative nature. The Commissionaire

attended a discussion at the Slovak Disability Council on 2 March 2007 and discussed the problems faced by people with disabilities and their organisations in projects implementation.

The project was also the starting shot for the cooperation with the company Profesia. In cooperation with SDC, a user-friendly area for disabled jobseekers was created at www.profesia.sk, an area for employers seeking employees with disabilities and an area for free advertisements by sheltered workshops employing disabled people is being prepared. The Slovak Disability Council nominated the company Profesia for the Gift of the Year award granted by the Slovak Humanitarian Council and the company finally won the award. In this context, it should also be said that the Slovak Disability Council created two jobs at its secretariat for the disabled, with the support of the European Social Fund.

Right of People with Disabilities for Non-Discrimination

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

The main objective of the project was to inform people with disabilities about discrimination and how they should protect themselves. Seminars were divided into two parts: in the first part, participants were provided basic information on anti-discrimination legislation and international documents in this area, along with an overview of national and international organisations working on the field of non-discrimination. In the second part, participants analysed case studies, using information which they were provided earlier. The seminars were held in the towns of Nove Zamky, Bratislava, Kysucke Nove Mesto, Humenne, Kosice, Piestany, Puchov and Brezno and were also accompanied by other activities.

In cooperation with the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, we monitored the situation on the field of discrimination of people with disabilities.

As part of the project, we arranged for the translation of important anti-discrimination documents.

We also issued information materials in printed form containing basic information about discrimination, about the valid legal documents and about the possibilities of legal protection. For more information about the project visit www.nrozp.sk.

Being Informed as a Precondition for Equal Opportunities

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

The objective of the project was to raise the ability of self-defence by people with disabilities and social advisory in areas relating to disability and its consequences by systematic provision of information and trainings for its efficient use. The project was targeted at member organisations of the Slovak Disability Council providing basic or specialised social advisory (holding accreditation by MoLSAF).

Trainings for Qualified Participation in Mainstreaming of Disability

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

The project was implemented in two parts and focused on the training of people with disabilities in the regions of Slovakia. Activating methods, lectures and trainings were used.

Participation of people with disabilities in the process of drafting policies, plans and measures at local and regional levels

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

In line with section 13.3.2 of the National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions for People with Disabilities (Support to systematic research projects and programmes concentrated on the living conditions of people with disabilities and their families), the Slovak Disability Council carried out a survey in Slovakia. Its main objective was to get relevant field information, which could help to focus further education programmes of people with disabilities on issues relevant for them at the place where they occur, i.e. directly in the regions. This was in line with the long-term policy of decentralisation.

Training of people with disabilities for work at IBM

This joint project was carried out as an open training course for potential employees of IBM Slovensko from among the disabled. The trainings were focused on the acquisition of skills needed for work in this company. Based on a selection procedure, people with different types of disability were enrolled for the course. The trainings took place from September till December 2007. At the end of the course, participants had to pass a final test.

“People Need People” Concert

The Slovak Disability Council organised a concert in the Theatro Wustenrot in Bratislava entitled “People Need People” on 6 December 2007.

The main purpose of this event was to present outstanding artistic abilities of those, who, despite their disability, invested a lot of effort to prepare an unforgettable artistic experience.

The concert was introduced by Monika Kunkelova representing people with disabilities and the famous TV anchorman Roman Paulech. The programme featured performances by hearing-impaired students of the school for hearing impaired youth in Kocelova Street in Bratislava together with the DIKO ensemble. In a dumb show, they introduced a number of professions, which can be taken by people with hearing impairment after finishing school. True human values were introduced by the Pavuckovia artistic group of people with disabilities in Malacky in their songs and spoken word. Their performance was entitled Scary Castle. The programme also featured a performance by foreign guests from the Figiel artistic group representing the mentally disabled youth in Poland. Their music, dance and theatre performance captured the attention of and inspired the audience. The successful gymnast Gizka Billikova, born with the Down syndrome, also accepted the invitation to the concert. She is the holder of four golden medals in gymnastics from World Special Olympics.

She gave an outstanding dancing performance from the Nutcracker ballet. This concert could take place thanks to the Ministry of Culture and thanks to the sponsors Profesia spol. s r.o., Východoslovenská energetika a. s., Gedur, Atrimex (who lend us the approach ramp) and Anna Siskova, who prepared a sweet surprise for all performers from her confectionery in Pezinok. Our thanks also go to young volunteers from secondary schools and people from Plus, who were the right hand for the organisers of the event.

4. 1 milión4disability.eu

The Slovak Disability Council is also active internationally, particularly through its cooperation with the European Disability Forum.

The most important international event organised in cooperation with the EDF was the campaign aimed at obtaining 1 million signatures for the support of European legislation free of discrimination on the ground of disability. We were able to obtain almost 15 thousand signatures in Slovakia, exceeding the required quota by almost 30%. In the whole of Europe, 1,232,771 signatures were obtained, which were handed over to the representatives of the European Commission in Brussels during the manifestation of people with disabilities from all around Europe on 4 October 2007. A delegation counting 12 members of the Slovak Disability Council was able to take part in this event, thanks to the financial support by the members of the European Parliament, EDF and a project of the Ministry of Labour supporting participation in international organisations.

Why did

⇒ **more than 1,200,000 European citizens,**

⇒ including 15,000 citizens of Slovakia sign?

Because they are aware that

- ☞ ... there are more than 50 million people with disabilities living in Europe;
- ☞ .. people with disabilities face prejudices and discrimination in all areas of life every day;
- ☞ ...people with disabilities do not have equal access to education, have the highest share of unemployed and generally live on with significantly lower income;
- ☞ ...people with disabilities cannot move freely, go to work, restaurant or theatre, go shopping or meet with friends or carry out other everyday activities, due to inaccessible public transport, pavements or buildings;

- ☞ ...the free movement of people with disabilities in the European Union is only an ideal, because of the legislative obstacles which prevent them leaving their home country;

- ☞ ...more than 200,000 people with disabilities in Europe are forced to live in closed institutions deprived of their fundamental human rights

...and they believe in ...

a European Union that **works for all and protects the rights of all** its citizens without any difference:

- 📖...right for equal access to education;
- 📖...right for equal treatment in employment;
- 📖...right for the same recognition and same protection by the law;
- 📖.. right for social protection, health and long-term care services;
- 📖...right for independent living inside the community;

- 📖...right for access to public transport, buildings and other architectonic infrastructure;

- 📖....right for access to information and communication technologies and services;

- 📖...right for access to products of everyday use.

We gave our vote for a European Union, in which the rights of the people with disabilities will be protected by efficient legislation combating all forms of discrimination and ensuring full integration of more than 50 million people with disabilities into the European society.

We thank all who supported this campaign in Slovakia and we are very glad that the people took part regardless of the fact whether or not they are disabled. We are therefore convinced that the barriers in the thinking of the people are gradually being removed and more and more people of Slovakia understand the problems resulting from disability, including those that are not visible.

As part of our cooperation with EDF, we also shape the European legislation. Let's mention our participation in the preparation of the directive on state aid for the support of employment of people with disabilities, of the "television without borders" directive and of directives and handbooks helping with more efficient use of the structural funds, etc. We carry out those activities also thanks to the very good cooperation with Slovak members of the European Parliament, without regard to their political membership. Let's mention the support of all our MPs when voting on the addenda supporting accessibility of audiovisual programmes for hearing and sight impaired people under the "television without borders" directive or the provisions preserving free post service for the blind in the draft directive on the liberalisation of post services. Our MPs also received the representatives of DPO, who were present at the handover of the signatures to the European Commission on 5 October 2007.

Slovakia's membership to the European Union opens up new possibilities for addressing the problems of people with disabilities. This is evidenced by a series of activities and tasks relating to people with disabilities addressed at European level, including the following:

- Resolution of the European Parliament on the situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged European Union: European Action Plan 2006-2007.
- Directive on the rights of air passengers with disabilities;
- Recommendation of the Council of Europe: "Action Plan for the Support of the Rights and Full Integration of Persons with Disabilities into Society and Improvement of the Quality of Life for People with Disabilities in Europe in 2006-2015"
- The five-year European campaign "For Diversity - Against Discrimination" now coming to its end; the Slovak Disability Council is among the participants in the campaign in Slovakia;
- Conference organised by EU Directorate for Employment focused on the possibilities of disabled persons' organisations to become involved in operations financed from the structural funds; the rules for the implementation of structural funds contain a requirement that support can only be provided to projects, whose implementation will in no way increase discrimination of people with disabilities in the EU;
- the European Disability Council issues an internet magazine bringing latest news from the Parliament and its individual committees, and informing about the activities of EDF member organisations; The Slovak Disability Council arranges for the translation of these documents and publishes them on its internet site. This is one of the channels, through which we are informed about EU directives and regulations adopted, which affect the quality of life of people with disabilities;
- Vice versa, the Slovak Disability Council is asked to submit information about the implementation of European legislation into the laws of the Slovak Republic, about compliance with anti-discrimination measures and about progress achieved in the employment and education of people with disabilities, etc.

5. U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

From historical perspective and with respect to the promotion of the rights of people with disabilities, we think that the adoption of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 13 December 2006, which was ratified by the President of Slovakia on 26 September 2007, was the most important event. We are proud that we had the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the Convention through EDF that we contributed to the translation of the Convention and that we helped that the Convention was finally signed including the optional protocol. This, however, is only a beginning.

As part of a project supported by the Government Office, which concentrated on the implementation of anti-discrimination policies, and organised a conference shortly after the U.N. Convention had been signed by the President, to inform people with disabilities about the contents of the Convention (at the same time, we published the first 300 copies in the Slovak language).

We invited to the conference and the conference was attended by all ministries, except for the Ministry of Environment. The representatives of the individual ministries informed about the process of revision of the Slovak legislation with respect to the U.N. Convention and on the need for changes in the Slovak legislation, as well as about the possibilities for cooperation with the Slovak Disability Council. We consider efficient implementation of the U.N. Convention to be a priority task for the coming years. As a result, we drafted an Action Plan, which want to be guided by.

6. Together, we can achieve more - cooperation

The Slovak Disability Council was established by a memorandum of foundation pursuant to Article 16 of Act No 83/1990 on the association of citizens. The Council gradually extended its membership from the nine founding organisations in 2003 to 14 regular members and 3 observer organisations at the end of 2007. Each of these organisations best knows the problems and worries, but also the possibilities and the skills of people with disabilities, which it represents. These problems and needs are very varying and therefore, we are guided by the COOPERATION principle also within the Slovak Disability Council. And this is enriching experience, which we can use in the contact with public administration, local governments, non-government organisations, companies and various institutions. Representatives of the Slovak Disability Council work in advisory bodies of the Government, of individual ministries and of non-government organisations. The President of the Slovak Disability Council is a member to the Council of the Government for Non-Government Organisations; we have also a representative in EDF's Commission for Transport.

During the year of 2007, we cooperated with the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, the ombudsman, the representation office of the Council of Europe in Slovakia, the representation office of the European Union in Slovakia, the Social Affairs and Family Research Institute, the Office for Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Towns Union of Slovakia, the higher territorial units and with the Socioforum platform. Together with the civic association Občan a demokracia (Citizen and Democracy), we helped to design the www.diskriminacia.sk web site (we are responsible for the disability section of that site). We also have some successes in extending the cooperation to the employment of people with disabilities.

The Slovak Disability Council also faces its own organisational and development problems. Mainly due to the complexity of financing and limited access to funding, we are struggling with the further development of our secretariat and other structures, particularly expert work groups.

The general assembly of the Slovak Disability Council held in October 2007 approved some changes to the statutes with the aim of improving the efficiency of the organisation's work. One of the most significant changes relates to the membership to the Slovak Disability Council. Now, in addition to ordinary membership, association and honorary membership are also possible.

We hope that the changes approved will help us to improve our work in defending the rights of people with disabilities and their living conditions.

7. More information – more opportunities

From the very beginning, we have been aware of the importance of providing information both to and about the disabled people.

Publications by Slovak Disability Council

1. **Dictionary of Disability Terms** (leaflet financed by the Office of the Government as part of the European Year of Equal Opportunities 2007). Targeted both at people with disabilities and employers.
2. **Did you know??** (leaflet financed by the Office of the Government as part of the European Year of Equal Opportunities 2007).
3. **U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.** (Document issued with financial assistance from the Office of the Government in 2007).
4. **MĚCHURA, Milan. *Thinking of employing a person with disability? Handbook for employers.*** Bratislava, Slovak Disability Council, 2006 ISBN 80-969532-4-9
5. **MĚCHURA, Milan. *Want a job? Handbook for people with disabilities;*** Bratislava, Slovak Disability Council, 2006 ISBN 80-969532-3-0
6. **Proceedings from the final conference** (published as part of the PHARE project entitled “Equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for

monitoring and combating discrimination phenomena on the labour market”), available from the Slovak Disability Council.

7. **REHÁKOVÁ, Anna and PAVLÍKOVÁ, Eva. *Barriers and problems in the field of employment of people with disabilities.*** Bratislava. Slovak Disability Council, 2006
 8. **SUCHÁ, Alica. *Equality of opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for monitoring and removal of discrimination phenomena on the labour market.*** Bratislava 2006, Slovak Disability Council, ISBN 80-969518-9-0
 9. **Disabled Persons’ Organisations and European Structural Funds 2007-2013** (published by the Slovak Disability Council with financial support of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, Bratislava, 2006).
 10. **Activists and advocates of disability rights. Training manual.** (Issued by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights in Bratislava, 2006, ISBN 80-89016-16-2)
 11. **Assistance to employers employing people with disabilities** (leaflet published as part of the PHARE project entitled “Equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for monitoring and combating discrimination phenomena on the labour market”, 2006).
 12. **Want a job? Searching for one?** (leaflet published as part of the PHARE project entitled “Equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social partnerships for monitoring and combating discrimination phenomena on the labour market”, 2006).
 13. **Accessibility of Conferences and Other Meetings to Persons with Disabilities Concise Guide** (published with the financial support of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2005)
 14. **Development of Cooperation of National Disabled Persons’ Organisations and Extending their Capacities** (brochure published with the financial support of the British Embassy in Slovakia, 2005)
 15. **Legislation and practice in the field of disability** (bulletin published with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005)
- 8. Accounts of the Slovak Disability Council**

The Slovak Disability Council uses multiple sources of funding to finance its activities. The main sources are:

1. Membership contributions from disabled persons' organisations, representing the lowest income item; in 2007 we received SKK 14,000
2. Donations from 2% of tax SKK 77,788
3. Grants from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (the ministry primarily responsible for disability issues) SKK 2,150,000
4. Grants from other sources in Slovakia – Ministries, Endowments, Embassies, Office of the Government: SKK 728,000
5. Grants from European funds - projects submitted to Brussels, in which the Slovak Disability Council was a partner SKK 0

Acknowledgements

We thank all our external collaborators, volunteers, sponsors and supporters for their cooperation and support.

We thank all, who, with their donations and support for the Slovak Disability Council helped to improve the living conditions for people with disabilities.

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