

NEWSLETTER

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The first episode of the new podcast series from MNOÖ/LdU

The National-level Self-Government of Germans in Hungary has initiated a new cultural project featuring podcast discussions. In the first episode, the Minority Ombudsman had a conversation with the President of the LdU regarding the current opportunities and vision for nationality representation. [Details here.](#)



Roma Nationality Study Scholarship Award Presentation

The Roma Nationality Study Scholarship diploma award ceremony was held once again in December, in the Ministry of Interior, during which twenty-five exceptional high school Roma students were presented with their diplomas and support certificates. [Details here.](#)

CASE LAW MOSAIC



Discussion of the 2023 annual report in Parliament

On 2 December, the plenary session of Parliament discussed the report on the activities of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and his deputies for 2023. The document was unanimously supported by the Committee of Nationalities in Hungary, represented by Liliána Grexa, Ukrainian nationality advocate. In her speech, she stressed that, on the basis of the report and the positive experiences of the past year, the Committee assessed the cooperation between the Minority Ombudsman and the Committee of Nationalities in Hungary as meaningful and fruitful, and expressed its confidence in the continuation of joint work. [Details here.](#)



Dear reader!



Each year, the last quarter is characterised by a double ambition in my work: to review and close the ongoing cases and to summarise the year in a comprehensive way, and to make up for the meetings and discussions that were previously missed. This is noticeably the case with my partners, and so - typically in November and December - there is a proliferation of round tables, conferences and cultural events, which I always try to attend with a good heart, despite the lack of time and capacity. This Newsletter 4/2024 attempts to illustrate the above triple "year-end" activities of the Office by presenting documents, events organised by the Office and its partners, and current cases. Although the cases I receive continue to confront me with complex and often overwhelming legal and life situations, it is good to know that I can always count on the help of my professional partners and dedicated expert colleagues to help me solve them.

In addition to stability, 2024 was in some ways an unusual period for me: it was the last full year of my second mandate as Minority Ombudsman, which, in addition to the usual tasks, also prompted me to take stock. In 2025, I will therefore try to formulate my experience in a complex way, mainly along themes that have been problems for decades and will probably unfortunately remain with us for a long time. For the Roma community, these include the phenomenon of segregation in terms of occupation and housing, disadvantages in the labour market, difficulties in accessing health and social services, and for other nationalities, the problems of language loss and the challenges of maintaining complex institutional systems.

Elisabeth Sándor-Szalay
university professor

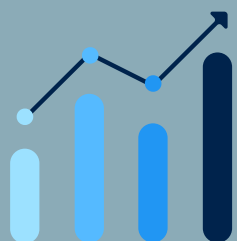
Visit of AC FCNM specialists to Hungary

A four-member delegation from the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities visited Hungary from December 2 to 6. The objective of their visit was to prepare the sixth opinion on Hungary. During their professional engagement, they conducted consultations with the Minority Ombudsman, members of the Nationalities Committee of Parliament, representatives from various nationality self-governments, personnel from civil and church human rights organizations, and government officials. The discussions, held in both the capital and rural areas, focused on the status and future vision of nationality rights, as well as the current challenges and opportunities for the enforcement of equal treatment.

You can acquire [further information](#) regarding the Framework Convention and the Advisory Committee.



STATISTICAL DATA 2024



petitions and ex officio proceedings	13	253
correspondence	263	1196
opinions on legislation	3	14
professional meetings	35	141

4th quarter

2024 in total

13

253

263

1196

3

14

35

141

JOINT REPORT ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE JOINT LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICE AND THE SLOVAK NATIONALITY SELF-GOVERNMENT

In its petition, the Slovak Nationality Self-Government of Mátraszentimre complained about the activities of the former deputy notary of the Gyöngyössolymos Joint Local Government Office responsible for the professional tasks supporting the operation of the nationality self-government, allegedly causing serious difficulties in their operation.

In view of the suspicion of a violation of fundamental rights in the case, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and the Minority Ombudsman contacted the head of the Heves County Government Office in the investigation launched. According to the information of the Heves County Government Office, the former President of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government received invitations to the meetings of the Municipality's body of representatives in due time before the meetings, which he attended. The former President of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government was entitled to exercise his rights of information, consultation, initiative, opinion and consent under the Act on the Rights of Nationalities within the framework of the provisions of this Act, the Local Government Act and the Local Government Decree.

The Head of the Heves County Government Office assessed the exercise of the nationality self-government's functions and powers, its activities in the preservation of the identity of the local Slovak nationality community and its enforcement of its rights as effective and forward-looking.

The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and the Minority Ombudsman noted, in relation to the activities of the former deputy notary, that in 2023 and 2024 he did not attend several meetings of the body of representatives of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government, contrary to his obligation under the Act on the Rights of Nationalities. They also pointed out that the former deputy notary committed several violations of the law by extending the interpretation of his duties and powers related to the lawful functioning of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government.

Although the Heves County Government Office provided the nationality self-government with professional assistance on several occasions with information on the content of the applicable legislation, the question arises as to whether the interpretation and practice of the Head of the Government Office of Heves County, according to which the use of legal supervisory instruments was not justified in the context of the above events, which had a negative impact on the functioning of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government.

The investigation found that the actions of the former deputy notary and the partial failure of the Government Office of the Heves County to take measures to facilitate cooperation between the Slovak Nationality Self-Government, the notary and the deputy notary, had resulted in an infringement of the right to self-government of the Slovak nationality community living in the municipality and the exercise of its nationality rights, and in an abuse of the rule of law.

To eliminate these anomalies, the Commissioner and the Minority Ombudsman requested the Mayor of the Mátraszentimre Municipality and the President of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government of Mátraszentimre to review the cooperation agreement under the Act on the Rights of Nationalities and to amend it in accordance with the Act. They also drew attention to the fact that the Mayor of the Mátraszentimre Municipality and the notary of the Gyöngyössolymos Joint Local Government Office should pay special attention to the effective enforcement of the rights of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government and the Slovak national minority community living in the municipality.

Furthermore, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and the Minority Ombudsman requested the Head of the Heves County Government Office to take timely and effective action in justified cases to prevent and promptly eliminate any possible abuses of the rights of the Slovak Nationality Self-Government and the Slovak nationality community living in the settlement. It was also considered important that the Heves County Government Office should consult with the concerned municipality notaries, who support and help the operation of the relevant nationality self-governments on the content and the extent of their responsibilities and competences, in particular on the differences between on reporting a breach of law and statutory supervision conducted by the county government office, and how to grand equal relations in the operations of local governments and self-governments. They also requested that, if cooperation difficulties were detected, the county government office should endeavour to resolve these conflicts as far as possible by using the means at its disposal, in particular by organising meetings and consultations.

The complete text of the joint report is [available here](#).

GENERAL COMMENT NO. 2/2024 ON THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF HATE DEMONSTRATIONS

Since taking office, the Minority Ombudsman has been closely following domestic and international legislative activity and law enforcement practice in relation to hate speech, hate crimes and other hate-motivated acts, as well as related social processes. In view of this, she started to prepare the publication of three general comments in this field. The first document issued was the one on the legal possibilities and limits of action against the use of banned authoritarian symbols, adopted in the General Comment 2/2023, while this document deals with the legal context and social impact of hate demonstrations. The general comment on the current situation of hate crime in Hungary is expected to be published in 2025.

The general comment outlines the development of the case-law of the Constitutional Court, the Curia and the ombudsmen, and the contradictions that have existed to date, in addition to the relevant national and international legislation on the restriction of freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

In the mid-2000s, movements, such as the Hungarian Guard began to operate openly and formally in a legal manner, using and exploiting social tensions for their own ends, radically transforming, in the course of some two years, the public discourse on minority-majority relations and later the public policy environment. Almost immediately after the tragic series of murders against Roma in 2008-2009 and the dissolution of the Hungarian Guard, the former “guardsmen” began to form alternative organisations – vigilante and traditionalist associations, other movements – typically in the framework of activities what they called “policing patrols” and “anti-gipsy crime” actions. Following the events in Gyöngyöspata in 2011, an intensive dialogue between the Minority Ombudsman, and subsequently the Deputy Ombudsman for National Minorities, NGOs and the National Police Headquarters began.

In response to the escalating extremist reactions to social tensions, the Minority Ombudsman and the Working Group Against Hate Crimes (GYEM), established in 2012 and actively engaged in monitoring these phenomena, along with other advocacy NGOs, resolved to undertake coordinated action.

Consequently, the general comment, underpinned by professional arguments, underscores that while honoring freedom of expression, the essential right to human dignity must also be safeguarded.

Any public action that has the potential to incite conflict among members of society, particularly due to national origin or affiliation with a national community, exacerbating existing tensions and sentiments, or that may instill fear and anxiety in members of national communities based on their origin, must be deemed unacceptable. In such instances – considering the recent ruling of the Constitutional Court, which allows for the constitutional restriction of freedom of expression and speech related to public affairs to safeguard the dignity of national, ethnic, racial, and religious communities – the assembly authority may justifiably decide to preemptively prohibit an assembly that could infringe upon the dignity of the Roma community, which has historically faced attacks and is therefore more vulnerable, or to impose appropriate conditions.



The Minority Ombudsman presented several professional proposals to the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior, and the National Police Captain, emphasizing the significance of ongoing dialogue. She recommended that the police establish a communication channel or a permanent forum through which affected communities and NGOs may directly report information regarding gatherings that may pose a potential threat to dignity. Furthermore, she reiterated the necessity for the Minister of Justice to engage in regular and institutionalized consultations with members of the GYEM, as well as with personnel from relevant law enforcement agencies, state institutions, research institutes, nationality self-governments, and NGOs active in the field, to coordinate more effective legislative and law enforcement actions against hate crimes, the use of authoritarian symbols, and hate-inciting demonstrations, while also raising awareness of extremist social tendencies.

The complete text of the general comment is [available here](#).

ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND GENERAL SEGREGATION EFFECTS OF KINDERGARTEN ADMISSION PRACTICES AND THE CONTENT OF NATIONALITY KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

According to the petitioners, children in a settlement's kindergarten, which comprises several institutions and some of its affiliated kindergartens, faced discrimination due to their Roma nationality, resulting in segregated education both between and within the member institutions. They assert that the kindergarten and the local government responsible for its operation failed to uphold the right to a fair process for Roma families who sought transfers due to segregation and inadequate services. The former kindergarten director approved transfer requests from non-Roma parents while consistently denying similar requests from Roma parents, leading to the gradual segregation of one of the affiliated kindergartens located near the local segregated Roma settlement-part.

The general comment emphasizes that the Roma nationality education program referenced in the kindergarten's pedagogical framework primarily addresses issues stemming from poverty and the potential interventions, rather than concentrating on elements that reinforce Roma nationality identity. Additionally, there were concerns that Roma parents did not provide their informed consent for the implementation of the Roma education program.

Although the segregated kindergarten was closed by the maintainer during the investigation, it can be concluded that in the education years 2021 to 2023, the former head of the Kindergarten contributed to the reinforcement of the segregation processes in the Viola Street kindergarten and the complete segregation of the institution by differently assessing the transfer requests of non-Roma and Roma parents, which the maintainer acknowledged with its passivity.

The Minority Ombudsman concluded that by closing the segregated affiliated kindergarten, the maintainer eradicated the abuse and, by redefining the district boundaries, implemented measures to prevent similar occurrences.

The general comment emphasized that the possible content for nationality kindergarten and school education programs is currently not regulated by law. Consequently, in the case of the Roma nationality, the programs are intertwined with elements that primarily address the subject of compensating for disadvantages associated with poverty, and they incorporate stereotypical narratives and approaches. The legislative intent to enhance awareness of nationality identity seeks to foster a positive sense of identity; thus, Roma education programs should not be conflated with matters of addressing social inequalities.

To address the identified irregularities and prevent their recurrence, the Minority Ombudsman advised the head of the kindergarten and the maintainer to take all necessary steps to ensure that, in addition to the regular review of district boundaries, the right of Roma children to equal treatment is upheld during kindergarten admissions and group formations, and that the requirement for written documentation is adhered to when evaluating parental requests. The kindergarten head, in collaboration with the head of the Roma nationality self-government, should develop a comprehensive information sheet regarding the kindergarten's Roma nationality program and implement measures to ensure that all concerned parents are informed. She should verify that declarations of consent are obtained for all children participating in the program. She must also review the components of the kindergarten's pedagogical program on Roma nationality education and the elements related to poverty, ensuring these are addressed in sections of the program focused on disadvantaged circumstances, distinct from those concerning Roma identity. The content of the Roma nationality program should be revised to enhance positive nationality identity, ideally with the involvement of a Roma professional possessing authentic expertise in the subject. The Mayor of Kalocsa, representing the maintainer, should facilitate and oversee the execution of these measures.



The Minority Ombudsman advised the State Secretary for Public Education within the Ministry of the Interior to assess whether the directive on nationality education programs, presently accessible solely on the Education Office's website, adequately guides the content of nationality kindergarten and school education programs. Consequently, he should contemplate re-enacting the Directive on nationality education, including Roma nationality education, within the legislative framework.

The complete text is [available here](#).

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE FINDINGS OF THE MUSEUM INVESTIGATION.

Public collections are of particular importance for the nationalities living in our country, as they present and convey the phenomena and objects of different periods in a systematic and professionally analysed form, thus providing broad access to their cultural assets for all interested parties.

As part of a thorough investigation into the nationality content of museum institutions, the Minority Ombudsman convened a workshop at the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights on 29 November.



The objective of the five-hour consultation, attended by nearly twenty experts, was to present the fundamental findings of the investigation, engage in discussions regarding the professional insights and recommendations, and to clarify and enhance them. Gabriella Varjú, Head of the Investigation started the workshop, who outlined the results and findings from the nearly two-year process. She noted that the Minority Ombudsman initiated a comprehensive investigation in 2023, drawing on a report of similar content issued by the predecessor Ombudsman in 2010. This investigation focused on the regulatory framework, infrastructural capabilities, and operational practices of museum institutions, emphasizing their nationality-related content and responsibilities. As part of this inquiry, the Minority Ombudsman distributed a questionnaire to 111 institutions and, in addition, conducted on-site visits to 25 institutions with her colleagues.



Following the draft report about the experiences, the participants engaged in a thorough professional dialogue. The attendees included experts from nationality self-governments, directors of nationality museum institutions, leaders of nationality country houses, and representatives from nationality base-institutions. Additionally, the event featured directors from various county-level city museums that also undertake nationality-related responsibilities, the head of the Open-Air Ethnographic Museum's department, and a staff member from the Museum Department of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation.



The meeting offered a platform for the attending experts to deliberate on the proposals and issues highlighted in the previously distributed professional materials, along with the specific and overarching challenges they had encountered. The participants collectively deemed the discussion beneficial and expressed a willingness to engage in similar events and consultations in the future.

The general problems of all museum institutions (such as the situation of professionals and colleagues, the shortage of nationality professionals, regulatory deficiencies, professional support, funding problems, the renewal of the museum institution system) and specific issues (especially the situation of the base-institutions, the regional museums and the institutions maintained by the nationality self-governments) were dealt with separately.

MORE PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATIONS AND SITE VISITS FOR THE MUSEUM INVESTIGATION

Visit to the Ethnographic Collection of the Zemplén Slovaks in Rudabányácska

As part of the cultural investigation, the Minority Ombudsman and her colleagues visited Sátoraljaújhely-Rudabányácska, where the National-level Slovak Self-Government's Nationality House is situated. During the visit, they engaged in comprehensive discussions with Katalin Király, the Director of the Cultural Institute of Slovaks in Hungary (MSZKI), who, in addition to addressing maintenance concerns, offered extensive insights into the expert aspects through her specialized knowledge and experience. The MSZKI plays a crucial role in the preservation and presentation of the cultural assets of the Slovak nationality community.



In addition to the German nationality, the Slovaks in Hungary possess the highest number of nationality country houses. Presently, there are over 70 country houses, village museums, and ethnographic collections, which are managed by local governments (municipalities or nationality self-governments) or associations. The institute also undertakes responsibilities associated with significant museum institutions, specifically safeguarding the built and material heritage of the Slovaks. In this capacity, it provides professional assistance and support for the operation of Slovak country houses in Hungary and manages the Ethnographic Collection of the Zemplén Slovaks as its own site.

Talks with Magdolna Závogyán, Secretary of State for Culture

The Minority Ombudsman and her colleagues convened a professional meeting with the State Secretary for Culture, Magdolna Závogyán, and her chief of staff, during which they addressed policy and cultural strategy matters related to the museum investigation. The State Secretary expressed her support for the investigation, emphasizing the maintenance and development of institutions that safeguard the cultural assets of nationality communities in Hungary, as well as the securing of funds in the long run.



Discussions during the meeting of the Subcommittee on Public Education, Culture, and Church Affairs



The Subcommittee on Public Education, Culture, and Church Affairs of the Committee of Nationalities in Hungary of the National Assembly convened on December 17, chaired by Erika Kissné Köles, Slovenian nationality advocate. Based on the investigation of the nationality content of museum institutions, the Minority Ombudsman, as a special guest, provided the committee members, along with representatives and experts from the nationality self-governments, with an in-depth overview of the status of nationality museum institutions and their role in upholding the cultural rights of nationality communities in Hungary. [Details and minutes](#) of the meeting.

Architecture of Peripheries – Lecture at the Budapest University of Technology

Following a special invitation, the Minority Ombudsman delivered a lecture on nationality rights, the prohibition of discriminatory practices, and the potential for interdisciplinary professional collaboration at the BME course titled Architecture of Peripheries - Rediscovery and Innovation. The host of the event was Balázs Kemes, DLA architect and assistant professor at the Department of Urban Planning within the Faculty of Architecture. As part of a program initiated five years ago, he invites distinguished professionals from diverse scientific fields to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. The department's commitment to social responsibility and its interdisciplinary approach are also reflected in its activities beyond the lectures: a permanent professional working group, a series of interprofessional discussions, and an annual summer construction camp are integral components of the department's framework for social engagement. [Details here.](#)



24th ÉMNÖSZ Gala in Zsámbék



The Association of German Local Governments of North Hungary (ÉMNÖSZ) hosted its annual culture and tradition gala in 2024 at the Zsámbék St. John the Baptist School Center. This year's guest of honor was the Minority Ombudsman. In her ceremonial address delivered in German, the Minority Ombudsman remarked: "Crises underscore the significance of community, collaboration, and unwavering respect for one another, as well as the vital role we play within our communities. It is essential to emphasize that a community can only thrive in an inclusive and accepting manner, characterized by open dialogue and grounded in mutual respect and acceptance, all within a democratic framework – in this way, it is capable of achieving remarkable outcomes, perhaps even 'miracles' at both the local and national levels." [Details here.](#)

PRESENTATION AT THE MEETING OF THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON ROMA AFFAIRS



The annual meeting of the Thematic Working Group on Roma Affairs, functioning within the Human Rights Working Group and comprising 15 NGOs and state institutions, took place on December 10. At the request of the chair, Attila Sztojka, State Secretary for Social Opportunities and Roma Relations, the Minority Ombudsman shared insights gained over recent years regarding the cultural autonomy, self-governance system, and socio-economic challenges faced by the Roma community.

The Minority Ombudsman delivered a comprehensive overview of the cases she received, their categorization, and the trends in case volume, while also presenting reports and general comments on cases that has affected the Roma community from 2020 to 2024. In her presentation, she underscored her commitment to monitoring segregation trends within the domestic public education system in 2025, as well as the opportunities and constraints in addressing pervasive drug use, the prosecution of hate crimes, and the representation of nationalities – particularly the Roma community – in domestic educational materials. Concluding her briefing, she stressed the significance of fostering relationships and collaboration with professional partners and nationality communities. [Details here.](#)

CONFERENCE ON THE EFFECTS OF DIGITALIZATION ON THE RIGHT TO DEFENCE

The Secretariat of the Minority Ombudsman, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, and the Res Iudicata Association convened a collaborative professional-scientific conference in Budapest titled “The effects of digitalization on the right to defence.” During the event, experts in criminal proceedings, academic researchers, and policy-makers shared their insights regarding access to justice for vulnerable groups and the digitalization of criminal processes. They also examined current challenges individually and, based on these discussions, developed proposals aimed at enhancing the system’s efficiency. This event was facilitated by the support of the Justice Programme of the European Union and the main organiser was Lili Krámer (HHC). [Details here.](#)



CULTHERMIN CONFERENCE AT THE PARLIAMENT

The parliamentary program series of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was concluded with an interparliamentary conference titled “Cultural Heritage and Identity of Nationality Communities.” This two-day event took place in the Parliament, featuring the Minority Ombudsman as one of the keynote speakers. The professional dialogue addressed the linguistic and cultural heritage of Europe, the protection of European nationalities, the safeguarding of national identity for both majority and minority groups, as well as best practices in the Member States or regions. [Details here.](#)



CASE LAW MOSAIC

In his submission, a Roma complainant contacted the Minority Ombudsman concerning the opportunities for his fellow candidates who did not obtain a mandate to engage in the activities of the Roma nationality self-government.

[Details here.](#)

The Minority Ombudsman received two submissions in which the complainants sought assistance in removing their registration as minority voters. In both instances, the Minority Ombudsman furnished the petitioners with comprehensive information regarding the requests related to the minority voter register.

[Details here.](#)

A public statue of significant importance to a Hungarian nationality community was removed from the facade of a property in the Buda Castle undergoing renovation in 2022, without prior consultation with the nationality self-government. At the request of the Minority Ombudsman, the investor expressed their intention to relocate the statue to a museum in the future for its preservation. Following discussions facilitated by the Minority Ombudsman, the investor and the district nationality self-government reached an agreement for the reinstatement of the restored statue, which occurred in December 2024.

[Details here.](#)

In light of the decision to deny the complainant's request for paying tribute subsequently, the Minority Ombudsman pointed out to the National Commander of the Prison Service the criteria on the exercise of the right to pay tribute.

[Details here.](#)

A Roma complainant sought assistance from the Minority Ombudsman due to financial difficulties and the refusal of his participation in a public employment program. Although the Minority Ombudsman had no competence to investigate a general complaint on financial issues, she deemed it essential to furnish the complainant with comprehensive information.

[Details here.](#)

A German parent expressed concerns to the Minority Ombudsman regarding the registration of his child's birth names and the details on his identity card in the civil registry. The Budapest Capital Government Office was subsequently requested to conduct an investigation into the issue.

[Details here.](#)

