

Slovakia

Slovakia is a democratic republic with a multi-party parliamentary system. After the 1989 collapse of Communism, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 meant that Slovakia became an independent state. It is now a member of the EU and NATO. The population of around 5.4 million people is predominantly Catholic.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>Preferential treatment is given to a religion or religion in general</u> <u>There is an established church or state religion</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>	<u>There is state funding of at least some religious schools</u>	<u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u>	
			<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

According to the Slovak Constitution (Article 1), the state does not affiliate itself with any specific religion.

The right to freedom of belief and religious (or non-religious) expression is outlined in the constitution.

“The freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, and faith are guaranteed. This right also comprises the possibility to change one’s religious belief or faith. Everyone has the right to be without religious belief. Everyone has the right to publicly express his opinion.”

— Article 1, The Constitution of the Slovak Republic

The government has been criticized for policies that favour the Roman Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent other religious groups sizeable followings in Slovakia, over newer or minority religions or beliefs. In particular, an extensive concordat between Slovakia and the Vatican, signed in 2000 and subsequently expanded in 2002 and 2004, increased Catholic influence in state schools and the armed forces, as well as increasing government funding to Catholic institutions. The government avoided some criticism of this agreement by then extending similar, but lesser, benefits to eleven other religious groups. Total government funding to religious groups was €37.19 million (c. US

\$50million) in 2009.

Religious privilege and concordats

The separation of Church and the Slovak Republic as outlined in the constitution is undermined by state-funding of religious institutions and the guarantee of freedom of belief is also compromised by requirements that favour certain religions over others.

<slovakia.org/sk-constitution.htm>

<dw.com/en/slovak-foreign-minister-miroslav-lajcak-our-people-havent-been-exposed-to-muslims-and-theyre-frightened/a-19414942>

<politico.eu/article/robert-fico-islam-no-place-news-slovakia-muslim-refugee/>

The connection between religion and politics has been widely disputed since Slovakia gained its independence in 1993, as state financing of religious institutions compromise the separation of Church and state as outlined in the constitution. The Roman Catholic Church faced heavy persecution under the Communist regime in Slovakia, but all religious orders were allowed to resume their activities following the collapse of Communism in 1989. Property that had been seized was returned, and while the role of religious institutions may not be as influential as prior to Communism, due to the forced laicization of that period, the predominance of the Catholic Church above other religions remains visible too in Slovak society: for example, the Roman Catholic Church is the only religious institution with the right to have its masses broadcast on state TV and radio.

In 2000, a concordat between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See caused controversy as it ensured that that offertories are “not subject to taxation or to the requirement of public accountability”.

<secularism.org.uk/blog/2013/10/do-you-know-what-a-concordat-is>

In 2006, a row concerning a controversial Vatican treaty that would have allocated new powers to the Catholic Church inadvertently caused the collapse of the Slovak government. The EU were concerned that the proposed treaty constituted a violation of human rights; had the treaty been ratified, Catholic doctors would have been within their rights to refuse to perform abortions and Catholic employees also would have been able to refuse to perform any professional task in accordance under a “conscientious objection” principle. When Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda did not include the treaty in the agenda of government business, the Christian Democrat Movement (KDH) - the main proponents of the concordat - withdrew from the ruling coalition, forcing the government to call an early election.

The influence of the Catholic Church on politics in Slovakia has historical roots: The first Slovak state, a client state of the Third Reich that existed between 1939 and 1945, was led by Catholic priest Jozef Tiso. The clero-fascist regime, whose one-party government issued a number of anti-Semitic laws prohibiting Jews from participating in public life and supported their deportation to concentration camps, had initially been recognized by the Vatican.

The connection between the Catholic Church and the state in Slovakia today is evident in the fact that churches receive funding from the state budget, which goes almost exclusively towards the salaries of the clergy. Wages of the clergy are paid by the state under the current system but at the same time the number of clergy hired is not regulated, and the state appears reluctant to interfere with the internal affairs of the Church despite the fact that over the last decade state expenditures for registered churches have more than doubled.

In 2015, a proposition to change the current financial arrangement regarding state funding of churches was rejected in parliament. The Catholic Church also receives revenues from the rental of

buildings and plots of land that were returned to it following the fall of Communism.

<webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/999527-odluku-cirkvi-od-statu-poslanci-zamietli/>

<cas.sk/clanok/308767/odluka-cirkvi-od-statu-co-by-priniesla-a-kolko-by-stala/>

<thedaily.sk/state-funding-of-the-church-under-scrutiny/>

<divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/financing-churches-slovakia-debate-and-dilemma-lubomir-martin-ondrasek>

Education and children's rights

The right to religious education is guaranteed by Act no. 29/1984 Zb.

Article 24 of the Slovak constitution states that it is churches and religious societies that 'organise the teaching of religion'.

On 13 May 2004, the Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See on Catholic Education was signed. This treaty, along with the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Registered Societies on Religious Education, introduces religious education into the Slovak educational system as an elective mandatory subject with the option of attending a secular ethics class as an alternative. Religious studies classes are taught by a member of the clergy and with a focus on one specific religion.

Family, community and society

Of the 18 registered churches in Slovakia, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest and 62% of the population identify as Roman Catholic. Other prominent religious institutions include the Protestant, Greek Catholic, Reformist and Orthodox Churches. According to the 2011 census, the number of Catholics in Slovakia is 3,347,277.

The influence of Catholicism in Slovakia is particularly notable when considering the situation in the neighbouring Czech Republic, which is considered to have one of the least religious populations in the world.

<spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/346489-odluka-cirkvi-od-statu-bez-suhlasu-vatikanu-je-nemozna/>

<independent.co.uk/news/uk/atheists-countries-list-six-world-most-convinced-a6946291.html>

Anti-Muslim prejudice

Theoretically all religions and belief systems should be equally protected under the constitution, but the Slovak government has become known for its tough stance on immigration from Muslim countries and reluctance to accept asylum seekers from the Islamic world. Slovakia is among the four countries that refused to implement the EU settlement scheme and Prime Minister Robert Fico has made anti-Muslim statements in the past, promising to "protect Slovakia" and that he "will never allow a single Muslim immigrant under a quota system." In May 2016, Fico stated that "Islam has no place in Slovakia".

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Freedoms of speech and of the press are protected by the constitution, but media outlets sometimes face political interference. Journalists continue to face verbal attacks and libel suits by public officials, though these have decreased in frequency in recent years. A September 2011 amendment to the controversial Press Act reduced pressure on editors by removing a requirement that media publish responses or corrections from public officials if they were criticized for their performance in

office.

While homosexuality is not illegal in Slovakia, same-sex unions are not protected in law and some privileges available to heterosexual couples are denied to same-sex couples. In 2014 a constitutional amendment banned same-sex marriage. A referendum on the ban in 2015 sent a mixed message, with over 90% of those who voted agreeing that marriage should remain heterosexual-only. However, in an apparent victory for liberal and pro-LGBT rights campaigners - who had called for a boycott of the referendum - only 21.4% of eligible voters turned out, voiding the poll (which required a 50% turnout to be valid).

<bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-31170464>

On 30 November 2016, the Slovak parliament adopted a bill sponsored by the Slovak National Party (SNS), which requires religions to have at least 50,000 members to qualify for state subsidies. Previously the requirement was 20,000 members. The move seems to have been aimed at making life more difficult for minority religion or belief groups. The SNS chairperson, Andrej Danko, has said: "We must do everything we can so that no mosque is built in the future."