

SUMMARY

General Comment 4/2021 of the Minority Ombudsman on the use of community names in nationality languages

On 14 December 2021, the Minority Ombudsman issued her General Comment 4/2021 on the use of community names in nationality languages. The aim of the document is to review and explore the complex situation and specific problems of the use of community names in nationality languages.

The right of nationality communities to use community names in their nationality language is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Fundamental Law and international conventions. This right is a fundamental element of the identity and self-identity of nationality communities, and at the same time a guarantee for their survival. The right to use the community name in nationality languages is also closely linked to the right to use the mother tongue of the nationalities living in Hungary.

The Minority Ombudsman gathered information through personal professional consultations with political representatives and experts from nationality communities, as well as through written enquiries. She requested information from the nationality self-governments and the Parliament's Committee of the Nationalities in Hungary. After processing the replies received, she contacted the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, the Prime Minister's Office and the Central Statistical Office. An important part of the work was to learn about and present specific scientific approaches, and to this end, she also sought information from linguists and visited a number of scientific workshops, in personal consultation with the experts teaching and researching there.

The General Comment also touches on national and international examples, including relevant national and EU legislation, international treaties, international recommendations and some academic treaties on the subject.

In the course of her investigation, the Minority Ombudsman examined at the following issues:

- In the municipalities inhabited by nationality communities

- the use of official geographical names (place names) in nationality language;
- the use of nationality language on street name signs;
- the establishment of transport names in nationality language.

- Procedures relating to the use of national community names, in particular the relevant duties and powers, the scope of those entitled to take the initiative, the establishment of names.

During drafting the General Comment, a number of practical issues and problems arose which may have a decisive impact on the effective enforcement of rights in the field of the use of community names in nationality languages. At the same time, no structural problems were identified in connection with the enforcement of the right to use community names in nationality languages.

The Minority Ombudsman made proposals in the General Comment to the Parliament's Committee of the Nationalities in Hungary, the national-level nationality self-governments, the

Minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Innovation and Technology and the President of the Central Statistical Office, with the aim of promoting more effective enforcement of the rights of persons and communities belonging to nationality communities in Hungary. The professional proposals of the General Comment mainly concerned the partial amendment of the rules on the use of community names in nationality languages, the method of determining official geographical names in nationality languages, the financial incentives for the installation of signs with place names, transport names of national or local importance and signs of public places in nationality languages as well as the unification of registers of official geographical names in nationality languages.

The Minority Ombudsman made it clear that ignoring the findings and suggestions made in the General Comment could result in the violation of nationality rights.