

Miroslav Kollár a Grigorij Mesežnikov (eds.): Slovakia 2003. A Global Report on the State of Society
Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava 2003, 819 pages.

The publication *Slovensko 2003. Súhrnná správa o stave Slovenska* (*Slovakia 2003. A Global Report on the State of Society*) is the eighth in a series of analytical publications produced annually by the Institute for Public Affairs (Inštitút pre verejné otázky). This annual has been brought out since 1996, which was the year of the foundation of IVO. It is released in Slovak and English. The English version *Slovakia 2003. A Global Report on the State of Society* will be published at the beginning of April 2004. This book is a result of expert co-operation. Besides the editors Miroslav Kollar and Grigorij Meseznikov, 50 other authors and 30 lecturers co-operated on it.

According to the editors' introduction, the ambition of the publication is to diagnose the current state of the society and to identify possibilities of positive development in several spheres of public life. The content follows previous volumes. The thirty chapters of the yearbook are divided into four parts: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, Economics, and Society. In addition to the main text, each chapter also provides annotation, key words, notes and references that enable better orientation when searching for specific information.

The section entitled *Domestic Policy* constitutes a single block analysing the most important domestic political affairs which happened at the end of 2002 and during the first eleven months of the year 2003, such as the functioning of the state institutions, the state of rule of law, the implementation and protection of the human rights, the status of ethnic minorities, selected aspects of the "Roma issue", the functioning of public administration, activities of groups with organised interests and the development of public opinion.

The section on *Foreign Policy* offers an expert's view on the main trends in the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic, on accession processes, on relations with different European states, with the US and China. It provides information about economic aspects of foreign policy and deals with the question of external security and defence. In the section on *Economics*, the authors analyse overall economic development, the state of public finance, monetary policy, financial institutions, the privatisation process, developments in regional politics, and the state and perspectives of agricultural policy.

The section on *Society* analyses trends and events in different spheres of public life which influence the entire society's development. The chapter *Environment and sustainable development* deals with the topic from an institutional, legislative, organisational and personal point of view. The *Health care* section concerns the development of the health service, emphasising the most important changes in the system. It also includes the main trends in citizens' health development.

The next chapter in the thematic block concerns *Social Policy*. The aspects analysed are: characteristics of social policy in Slovakia, its development, approved and upcoming remedies for unemployment, social welfare for the poor and needy, social support for families with children, the pension system and health insurance. Authors analyse the problems that persist and try to suggest ways to solve them. The chapter on *Education* contains basic data about the Slovak education system and gives an overview of changes in related laws, the economic situation in schools, and new laws, conceptions and trends in education development as well as in teaching methods. The authors also deal with some attractive issues such as religious lessons and school fees for external studies. They also examine on-line education and the activities of Slovak university students in the Czech Republic.

The chapter on *Science and technology, research and development* contains a summary about the current situation, direction and development of these fields. Attention is also focused on finances, especially on the expenses of science and technology after accession into the EU. The chapter *Culture* surveys the activities of the government in the realm of culture as well as conditions of cultural development and tools and means of cultural policy. A SWOT analysis of cultural development in Slovakia is included. The chapter on *Media* is focused on developments in media legislation, print media and Slovak Press Agency (TASR), television and radio broadcasting, and on council for broadcasting and retransmission.

Non-government organisations and voluntary work is the title of the chapter providing the numbers and description of activities of these organisations. The chapter on *Criminality* is focused on violent, economic and drug crimes, but also on organised and computer criminality. The authors of the chapter *Transparency and corruption* deal with the current state, trends and perception of corruption in Slovakia. The problem is exemplified by specific cases. *Internet, telecommunications and new information technologies* is a chapter that concerns the development of information society, the liberalisation of the telecommunication market and problems that make competitiveness impossible. Since the annual was published in the year of the ratification of the Slovak Republic's accession into the European Union there is a single chapter, *Integration of the SR into the European Union*, devoted to this topic. In addition, authors of other chapters focus on the same issue and evaluate the preparedness of Slovak society for that step.

The European Union is not the only theme which has attracted the attention of various authors. The publication is very extensive and covers a broad spectrum of social life indeed. Some issues have therefore been treated several times by different authors and from various points of view. For instance, the "Roma issue" is analysed in a separate chapter and also within the topic of public opinion. At the end of the book, a *Chronicle of events* chronologically sums up the crucial events from December 1st 2002 until November 30th 2003 and gives information about the authors in both Slovak and English. Although the authors attempted to write studies that describe the society factographically and objectively, a kind of partisan view in some chapters is fairly noticeable. Preconceived analysis is probably inevitable, especially whilst trying to outline possible solutions for problems. Nevertheless the studies usually present a fair description of events. It is up to the reader to make a conclusion. The editors would like their readers to be actively involved.

One chapter *Environment and sustainable development* had become an object of controversy about the environment in Slovakia. The debate took place on the web-site www.changenet.sk, initialised by one of the chapter's authors, Mikulas Huba.

Slovakia 2003. A Global Report on the State of Society is a publication containing analyses of all relevant events which happened during the last year in different parts of social life. Its specific significance resides in the fact that it has been published already for several years, roughly structured alike. A reader can follow how several areas of social life develop from one year to another, albeit there are a number of themes that do not get into the report every year. In terms of this year I miss a chapter that would concern the status of women in society, which is still a burning issue. The authors deal with this topic only marginally – in the chapter *Human Rights*, there is one part related to the anti-discrimination law. I understand that with regard to the extent of the publication it would be impossible to consistently encompass the whole spectrum of social life.

The publication is not simply a boring collection of facts which awaits readers, but absorbing reading about complex development in Slovakia that might perhaps provide the reader a more comprehensive perspective on Slovak society. Its quality has also been proved by the fact that the previous volumes were the most quoted analytical informative source about social development in Slovakia. In the end, I would like to mention an idea of Eugen Jurzyca who wrote in his article *Slovakia 2002 – the country emerging from the fog* that the government, public and interest groups in Slovakia create a “fog” of factors that influence development in Slovak society, some more, some less. Their impact on the fate of the country is not obvious. *A Global Report on the State of Society* serves as a reflector into the fog. They cannot eliminate it but they can help us to orientate ourselves better.

The work is multidisciplinary; an outcome of co-operation of human scientists, economists, natural scientists and analysts. It is a quality information source and solid working material. In spite of its multidisciplinary nature, each study reflects a problem from the point of view of its social dimension by analysing social processes and relations. I recommend this book to any social scientist.

Martina Bausová