[SK] Complaint for breach of the Language Act dismissed

IRIS 2015-6:1/34

Juraj Polak
Radio and Television of Slovakia (PSB)

On 10 March 2015, the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission of the Slovak Republic (CBR) dismissed a complaint against a radio programme, which presented to listeners the latest trends in the British music scene. The programme had been provided within the radio programme service of the Slovak public service broadcaster (PSB). The complaint drew attention to an interview with a British band and one regular section, both broadcast exclusively in English. The claimant thus disputed that these passages of the programme breached the obligations under the so-called Language Act.

The provisions of the Language Act apply (with minor alternations) to both TV and radio broadcasting. In principle any broadcast of a programme service must be in the official state language (at present only the Slovak language) with a few privileges for the Czech language (which officially qualifies as “understandable language”) and limited exceptions. The rather firm nature of the Language Act has been criticised on many occasions by both radio and TV broadcasters, professionals in the audiovisual sector, journalists and the European Commission. The European Commission’s objections led to a joined amendment of the Language and Broadcasting Act (for more details see IRIS 2014-1/41).

The programme in question, “Selector”, is a mutual project of the PSB and the British Council in Slovakia and its aim is to present to the Slovak audience current British musical culture. The disputed interview in English lasted 1 minute and 47 seconds and was broadcast without any interpretation into the Slovak language. The Council stated that in a formalistic interpretation of the Law, the given programme and the interview do not fall under any of the exceptions stated in the Language Act. However, the Council concluded that, in the present case, it is necessary to take into account the intercultural character of the programme, as well as the statutory obligations of the PSB - in particular the mission to promote and spread various (national and international) cultural aspects.

The Council considered the abovementioned aspects and the short duration of the interview and declared that the broadcasting of the interview did not constitute a breach of the Language Act.

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

The regular section broadcast exclusively in English is characterised by the producers of the show as a “language window with the British Council”. This light entertainment section about a specific topic (in the present case the topic was football) is presented through a conversation between two English speaking hosts. The Council pointed out the exception for “TV and radio language courses or programmes of similar fashion”. The wording “of similar fashion” is of special relevance, since it means that the exception should not cover only traditional language courses, but it may also apply to various types of light entertainment programmes aimed at specific features of foreign languages.

The Council therefore decided that the broadcasting of the “language window” did not constitute a breach of the Language Act and thus dismissed the complaint as such.

An appeal against the CBR’s unpublished decision is not possible.

Zápisnica RVR č. 05/2015 zo dňa 10. 3. 2015

http://www.rvr.sk/sk/spravy/index.php?aktualitaId=2874

Minutes of CBR’s meeting on 10 March 2015

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026