

**Slovak Association of Language schools, Baštová 7, 811 03 Bratislava**

**Opinion of the Slovak Association of Language Schools to the State Grammar School Heads Association of the Slovak Republic request for revocation of alternative foreign language school leaving certificates recognition**

*The Slovak Association of Language Schools (SALS) observes with concern the long-term efforts of the State Grammar School Heads Association of the Slovak Republic (SGSHA) to revoke recognition of alternative foreign language school leaving certificates. Given that this request was again presented at the **SGSHA seminar (23 – 25/04/2013, Gerlachov)**, the **SALS issues the following opinion:***

**We do not agree with the SGSHA request for revocation of alternative foreign language school leaving examinations for the following reasons:**

- 1. To revoke recognition of alternative school leaving certificates is a step back.** *Language certificates recognized as alternative foreign language school leaving certificates present a positive point in the development of our education system. This concept within conditions of the Slovak Republic definitely supports ideas of open and pro-European education system (recognition of results obtained in formal and informal education in the EU, etc.). The option of alternative school leaving examination is a democratic choice for every student in the final year, while the decision is made by the student himself/herself. At the same time, alternative school leaving examination is a modern concept in this country which is still suffering from a lack of workforce with high level language skills.*
- 2. International validity of language certificates.** *Students who obtained an internationally recognized language certificate have significantly better prospects in terms of admission to foreign universities. It is obvious that foreign universities requiring foreign language skills do not accept usual school leaving certificates, but require a particular language certificate of a specific level. At the same time, these young people have better prospects in the European labour market, since again numbers of institutions and companies require language certificates. If necessary, we can add accurate information and figures to the mentioned arguments.*
- 3. Questioning of certificates at professional level.** *International language examinations are developed centrally with binding assessment criteria. The examinations are uniform throughout Europe (the world) for all applicants. This ensures **standardization, validity and reliability of examinations**. Recognized European language examinations must comply with **at least 17 standards** of quality assurance in accordance with international association **ALTE** (Association of Language Testers Code of Practice Working Group). Licensing centres authorized to perform language examinations are obliged to pass inspection and meet demanding standards.*

*Note: Negative experience of several heads may probably refer to a particular language school, but not to the international certificates.*

*The Slovak Association of Language Schools notices certain problems in recognition of alternative foreign language school leaving examination, which are obviously the cause of negative approach of several heads. We assume that these are the following issues:*

- 1. **Administration.** One of the problems may be wording “on partner licensing centres” in the Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic no. 319/2008 Coll. on recognition of alternative foreign language school leaving certificates as amended. We suggest that the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic posts a list of licensing examination centres on its website, which would be regularly updated. This is the way in which language schools authorized to perform state language examinations are listed in the Regional Education section, too.*
- 2. **School leaving examination success rate statistics.** Alternative foreign language school leaving examination is mainly used by better students. Then they are included in the average success rate, reducing the assessment of school leaving examination results of schools. The SALS is ready to help in translating results of students in national or international examinations in order to reflect them in overall foreign language school leaving examination results achieved.*

*The Slovak Association of Language Schools believes that the Ministry of Education will resist the demand of the SGSHA and will approach to solution of problems related to alternative foreign language school leaving examination in a constructive way. The SALS wishes that certain grammar school principals change their perception of the issue. At the same time, the Association is ready to actively help in solving all related problems as well as to engage in professional debate if necessary.*

*At the same time, we would like to request response and information on aims of the Ministry of Education in this field.*

**Bratislava, 07/05/2013**