

# MONIKA BALAGOVÁ



Monika Balogová is the most famous functionary in the deaf community. She started working in the Deaf Organization in Košice. Gradually she worked her way up to the organs of the former Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired. Eventually, she became the president of the Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired (1980-1999). She was a great fighter for the rights of hearing-impaired citizens, a member of the Government Committee for Health-Impaired Issues, a recipient of the First Class Pribina Cross, and a significant activist within voluntary humanitarian organizations (such as the Slovak Humanitarian Council).

Monika Balogová had a difficult childhood and eventually a difficult life as a deaf person. She speaks of this as follows:

My parents died, along with my wider family, during World War II. I had siblings, and both of us orphans were placed in a children's home in Prešov. When I was 17, I lost my hearing due to Meniere's disease. I couldn't communicate with the deaf, and I couldn't sign either. I first met the deaf in their clubs, it was horrible, mostly dark, airless spaces in basements, with damp walls, without green, all of it was not dignified spaces for a person, especially for disabled people. After a year, I became a functionary for the hearing impaired - both deaf and hard of hearing, who were then organized together.

In the beginning of my work, there was a nationwide Association of the Disabled, where there were only committees of individual disabilities. That was very hard work, because the hearing impaired were out of the interest, everywhere the physically and visually impaired were being pushed forward. The second thing was that it was a federal body, where there was still "fighting" between Czech and Slovak functionaries. It's true that everything was decided by Prague, and we from Slovakia (and other disabilities) were always the second, or we always "got" only what was "left". That was the time when I was in the presidency of the federal body and in the presidency of the Slovak body, which was the Central Committee of the Slovak Association of the Disabled. It was very hard work, because I knew in what unsatisfactory environment the deaf lived, in what difficult social and working conditions. I wanted, I had to do everything to make the life of the deaf more beautiful, to make them happier, because I was one of them. So that it was not possible for the deaf to live in such circumstances any longer, to be pushed into the corners and to be humiliated, because they are human beings like everyone else. And that was my goal and my life's work."

Monika Balogová worked in the deaf community for a long time, 35 years. Regarding what she managed to achieve, she says the following:



In terms of social living conditions, we have acquired the House for the Deaf in Košice, located at 65-67 Kováčska Street. It is an amazing place where the deaf can gather, with a guesthouse, restaurant, and spaces for informal education and entertainment. Visitors from Africa, Scandinavia, and the Soviet Union admired the activities of the House for the Deaf. We supported the work integration of the deaf and hard-of-hearing through a large sheltered workshop in Lučenec, which has an excellent production program for cardboard. About 80 deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals worked there. In Košice, there was also a production company for disabled individuals called Obzor, which was led from Bratislava. A work center for the deaf was created there, and about 75 deaf individuals worked there, with Obzor providing a separate sign language interpreter. We received the Kunov recreational center as a gift from the former communist party, which had its own recreational center there after the revolution. The biggest success I consider to be the establishment of the Slovak Union of the Deaf in 1990. It was the dream of generations of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to have their own full-fledged union, their own organization that would protect their interests and rights, but also support them in social and work life. In the largest centers for the hearing-impaired, the union gradually builds specialized audio centers, its own video studio and video library, publishes a specialized magazine called the Slovak Gong, and has extensive publishing activities on the topic of the lives of the hearing-impaired. At the time of the end of my activity, the Slovak Union of the Deaf had built 48 centers in district and regional towns throughout Slovakia, with fully paid sign language interpreters for the deaf. But our greatest success was in legislation.

## Law on Sign Language of the Hearing Impaired - one of the first three in the world.

On June 26, 1995, the National Council of the SR approved the Law on Sign Language of the Hearing Impaired. The new law was signed at that time by the highest constitutional officials, President of the Slovak Republic Michal Kováč, Chairman of the National Council of the SR Ivan Gašparovič, and Prime Minister of the SR Vladimír Mečiar.

Immediately after its approval, the XII World Congress of the WFD (World Federation of the Deaf) was held in Vienna. The congress delegates highly valued our social area and our new law, and many envied us. I would like to remind that they were surprised that a young state like Slovakia had a law on sign language of the hearing impaired so well processed. The Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired now has to send the World Federation of the Deaf an English translation of the law. I would also like to mention that on December 7 and 8, 1997, the SZSP, together with the Ministry of Education and the Elementary School for the Hearing Impaired in Prešov, is preparing a seminar with international participation on this law. We will also invite Mrs. L. Kauppinen, President of the SFN, and Mr. G. Baath, an expert from Sweden who teaches sign language and will talk about his experiences with the bilingual method of teaching hearing-impaired students and students.

The Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired (SZSP), as the highest nationwide and unified organization of the deaf and hard of hearing in Slovakia, will also enter into everyday practice. Together with the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the SR, it worked on a number of legislative norms, the most important of which were the implementing regulations for the law on sign language of the hearing impaired.

Of course, as it often happens in life, not everything went according to plan. The planned project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR was to build a National Education Center for training and preparation of professional sign language interpreters. It was supposed to start working from September 1st, 1996, which unfortunately did not happen. There were many other plans and goals that, during the 1996-1999 period, were not achieved due to objective socio-economic reasons. Ms. Monika Balogová narrowly lost the elections in 1999 (by one disputed vote) and went to work in her beloved House for the Deaf in Košice. Upon leaving her highest position, she warned the deaf and hard-of-hearing to maintain their unity and be careful about whom they trust. Her fears were confirmed when the new leadership of the SZSP, due to its inability, allowed the breakdown of the Slovak Association of Hearing Impaired and its extinction in 2006. Since then, the deaf and hard-of-hearing have lost everything that was built during Ms. Balogová's era and her team, especially the House for the Deaf in Košice, which is now a pension and the deaf in Košice have to beg to be in two rooms of the entire house that was theirs, and they ended up on the street. It is a strange time that this happened. However, this is already a different chapter in the history of the hearing impaired, in which Ms. Monika Balogová is not. Of course, to this day (2022), one cannot come to terms with this.

Ms. Monika Balogová wrote her name in golden letters in the history of the lives of the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Her lifelong public work represents the consistent and successful defense of the professionally demanding specific needs of the hearing-impaired citizens, not only at home, but also in global structures of the disabled community, the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and thus spreading the good name of our country abroad.

Source:

Informačné centrum pre osoby so sluchovým postihnutím, Medailón pani Moniky Balogovej;  
Slovenský Gong 10/1995;

Slovenský Gong 7-8/1996;

Rôzne vydania časopisov Slovenský Gong 1990 - 1999.