

The bronze statue of a man at old town

citizens are the wealthiest in the country. The centre of Bratislava called *Stare mesto* or old town, is only about 9 square km. This place is the historic core of the city and adjacent quarters, originally medieval suburbs.

On arrival, I was moving around the old town and was surprised to see the number of brand shops such as Giorgio Armani, Gucci, Prada, Rolex, etc. It seems that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the people who gained the most were not the general public, but instead, the multinational companies who flourished all over the former Soviet bloc. Everywhere I looked, McDonald's, KFC and their likes were replacing traditional food restaurants seeing as though they couldn't compete with the cheap prices of the fast food joints.

Westernisation seemed to be more rampant among the youth. Being new members of the EU, they have already started to adopt various western ways of life. Although the local currency is still the Krona (SK) by 2009 it is supposed to be replaced by the Euro. Invariably, prices will go up with the currency conversion and there will be a revaluation of real estate, local services. It is debatable whether the Slovakian general public will be ready to cope with the sudden rise of living cost.

The second surprise for me was the visible absence of foreigners. After visiting other general cosmopolitan European cities, full of different races originating from Africa, Asia and Latin America, the absence of them in Slovakia is striking for a country of 5,379,000 inhabitants. It seemed that the place was kept for the natives only. I was however puzzled by the presence of the Indian Embassy there and a huge volume of exhibited Chinese goods, perhaps the first evident signs of globalisation. The majority of the population belong to Slovak nationality (85.5%) and the largest minority are Hungarians leaving mainly in the south-east region. A small portion of the population are Ukrainians who settled in the border region in the east. The official share of Gypsies, otherwise known as the Romas, is 1.7 %. It seems they are in the most disadvantaged group. Research (UNESCO 2005: Quality education for children from socially disadvantaged settings) shows that Roma children perform even worse in language and executive skills than the Hungarian children minority group.