ICANN
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Subject: Long Term SK TLD Problems and Concerns

My name is Ondrej Jombík, I am a citizen of the Slovak Republic, where I was born. I also live in Phoenix, Arizona. I run a small hosting company, therefore, I know the domain registration system well, and I also understand its operation.

This letter was composed because I realized you may not be aware of various problems and issues which are in the SK TLD zone, belonging to the Slovak Republic. I understand that different TLD zones are always facing different types of issues, however the problems in the SK TLD are long term and are unlikely to have any positive outcomes in the near future.

The SK TLD was created in 1993 after splitting from the Czechoslovakia TLD CS. Since its beginning, the SK TLD has been privately held. First, it was EUnet Slovakia, then EuroWeb Slovakia, and now it is a company called SK-NIC, which technically belongs to Slovak Internet Service Provider – SWAN.

Having a private operator of Slovak TLD is not only uncommon, but also creates a very unfortunate situation. In 2002, a contract between SK-NIC and the Government of the Slovak Republic was signed regarding the operating of the SK TLD. Since that time, the SK TLD zone rules have gone through very minor updates. Meanwhile, the Slovak Republic entered the European Union and no matter what major civil and social changes occur, SK-NIC domain rules, system, and website remains unchanged. Furthermore, there have been only fractional investments into the SK TLD since that contract was signed.

As an example of SK-NIC's shortcomings, there is no registrar nor user API at all, DNSSEC is missing, and www.sk-nic.sk website is in the Slovak language only. The system is old and inflexible. For each action within the current system you need to send a corresponding document to SK-NIC by snail mail. To create a new account, change owner, or registrar – you need to send a paper form to SK-NIC. On top of that, for certain actions you must visit an attorney (notary) to have your signature verified. Foreign subjects cannot hold their own SK domain – even if they are a big corporation they still need to use a local contact for this.

Over time, local proxies have become such common practice in the SK TLD that as of February 23rd, 2017, 173,904 SK domains have a registrar company stated as an administrative (owner) contact. That means over 50% of all registered SK domains have incorrect or inaccurate owner on file.

Related to this fact, several Slovak hosting companies were punished with fines ranging from 20,000 EUR to 80,000 EUR for the content on certain SK domains which were registered on behalf of their customers. In this case, SK-NIC works alongside Slovak government, maintaining an obsolete flawed system, while the Slovak government punishes web hosting companies for owning domains, which in fact belong to subjects from other countries.

Those SK domains are not even technically operated in the Slovak Republic. Consequently, searching for real website owners is difficult, thus the investigation process is simplified by punishing the domain owners, even when hosting companies can provide accurate credentials and documentation of their customers as real domain owners. SK-NIC offered tiny help and zero remedy for this unfortunate situation.

In 2015, the general public created pressure which forced SK-NIC to start major SK TLD rule changes. However, this process is far from good. The launch date has been already postponed twice, last time it was moved from January 1st, 2017 to May 31st, 2017. Furthermore, new system development is being outsourced to a software company, which has no prior experience with similar project. Due to their lack of experience, they decided to create their own proprietary system and protocol, instead of using the well-known EPP along with some proven solutions already available.

Recently it was publicly announced, that SK-NIC intended to sell unspecified amounts of company stakes to an unknown foreign investor. First of all, my opinion is that the operation of the SK TLD should belong to a Slovakian subject only. Seeing the SK TLD operation as a merchandise available for sale is just simply wrong. I understand that private businesses are being created for profit, and that is absolutely OK, but the SK TLD should be operated with focus on TLD zone itself.

Many examples from other countries show it is best when a country's TLD is operated by an university, charity, or foundation. Collected profit can be reinvested into a TLD itself, and improve Internet operation in that country. I would like to especially emphasize the CZ TLD, which is operated by a non-profit organization CZ.NIC and is a very nice example how things should be done well.

I am sorry if this letter revealed to you some disturbing facts. It was not pleasure to write, but the SK TLD operation has to change. From the long-term perspective, it is better to have some pain now, than face it for another 15 years.

Should you have any questions or comments, or if want to hear more detailed explanations, feel free to call my number +1 480-270-4199.

Best regards,

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Ondrej Jombík