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SLOVENIA: Hindus registered, but others still wait

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

"We are very happy to get registration, of course," Natasa Sivic, leader of Slovenia's Hindu community, told Forum 18 News Service. Her community – one of three religious groups granted registration in August by Drago Cepar, head of the government's Office for Religious Communities – had been waiting seventeen months. Among the seven Cepar identified to Forum 18 as having lodged registration applications is the Christian Outreach Centre in Ljubljana. "My husband was told at the religious office that they couldn't accept any new communities because as Slovenia is joining the European Union all laws need to be changed," co-pastor Carol Vidic told Forum 18. "That was their excuse."

Slovenia's Hindu community was finally registered at the end of August, seventeen months after first applying, Drago Cepar, head of the government's Office for Religious Communities, confirmed to Forum 18 News Service from the capital Ljubljana on 1 September. And for the first time he revealed the names of the seven other groups whose registration applications are still pending. He failed to explain why he had held up the Hindus' registration for so long or whether and when the remaining seven would be registered. The co-pastor of a Protestant Church which has applied for registration told Forum 18 they have been waiting for half a year.

"We are very happy to get registration, of course," Natasa Sivic, leader of the Hindu community, told Forum 18 from Ljubljana on 2 September. She said Cepar had written to her community on 26 August to inform it that registration had been granted. She said there are a number of minor formalities the community must undertake to complete the registration process. The Hindu community has already been added as the 34th on the list of registered religious communities on the Office for Religious Communities' website (www.gov.si/uvs).

After taking office in 2000, Cepar refused to register any new religious communities, a policy he reversed in August of this year in the wake of strong pressure from officials, religious communities and journalists. Just before granting the Hindu community registration, he registered the Calvary Chapel in Celje and the Dharmaling Tibetan Buddhist association (see F18News 27 August 2003).

Cepar told Forum 18 that the other seven groups "whose written materials we have received" are: the Christian Outreach Centre of Ljubljana, the Christian Centre in Ljubljana, the International Church of Christ, the Holy Church of Ultra Teleme, the Universal religious community of the rising sun, the original native of the invincible sun of the empire of the sun and the Raelians.

Carol Vidic, who co-pastors the Christian Outreach Centre congregations in Ljubljana and Maribor with her husband Klemen, told Forum 18 on 2 September that the Ljubljana centre had applied for registration at the beginning of the year. "My husband was told at the religious office that they couldn't accept any new communities because as Slovenia is joining the European Union all laws need to be changed," Vidic reported. "That was their excuse." She said the church had been forced to register after that as a social organisation instead. "That was easier – there was far less hassle." However, the Centre continues to seek registration as a religious organisation.

Other groups on the list remain controversial. The Raelians sparked worldwide controversy last December when they claimed to have achieved the birth of the world's first cloned baby.

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