25. SLOVAKIA – MY HOMELAND

You are studying at Cambridge University. Every month you and your co-students organize a party where one country is being introduced. Today it is your turn. Your task is to introduce your country and people, tell something about Slovak stereotypes, customs and traditions. Explain why Slovakia deserves (zasluhuje si) an important place in the European Union. Your speech should take 5 minutes.

1. The country and its inhabitants
2. The place I would like to visit
3. Uniqueness, customs, traditions and conventions
4. Stereotypes and prejudices
5. The place of Slovakia in united Europe

**Slovakia** - the official name of which is the Slovak Republic – has an area of about 50 000 km2. The Slovak Republic is an independent state situated in Central Europe. It is bordered (je ohraničená*/(* ***It borders on* Hungary in the south**)) in the west by the Czech Republic, in the north by Poland, in the south by Hungary and Austria. The borders (hranice) are mostly natural (prirodzené), made by rivers (**the Moravia, the Danube**) and mountains (**the Carpathians, the High Tatras**). Slovakia has a **population** (obyvateľstvo) of 5,5 (five and a half) million inhabitants (obyvateľov). The most of inhabitants is of Slovak nationality but there are also ethnic minorities (etnické menšiny), from which the most numerous is the Hungarian nationality living mostly in the southern part of Slovakia. There live people of Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German and Polish nationalities, and 1.7 % of inhabitants are of Romany nationality. An official language is the Slovak language, but also languages of minorities: Hungarian, Polish, Ruthenian languages, and for a part of German nationality also German language are spoken in Slovakia.

**Climate** in Slovakia is continental (vnútrozemské) and mild (mierne) with mild summer and winter temperatures, snow and rain, sun and wind. Spring, summer, autumn and winter are four seasons of the year typical for Slovakia climate, each lasting for three months.

Slovakia is often called “country in the heart of Europe”. Tourists who visit our country can admire (obdivovať) one of the most spectacular scenery (veľkolepú scenériu) in Europe, old towns and cities, fairytale castles, caves and spa resorts (kúpele). Remarkable historical development (pozoruhodný historický vývoj), beautiful scenery and hospitable (pohostinní) people make Slovakia an attractive tourist destination.

Slovakia is attractive for foreign visitors (zahraničných návštevníkov) also because of its history. The visitors like to learn about the history of the *Great Moravian Empire* or the *Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy*. They also like to learn about its recent history (súčasné dejiny), especially (obzvlášť) about the *Slovak National Uprising* or the *Czechoslovak Socialist Republic*. They are also interested in the events such as *Velvet Revolution* of November 1989.

There are many interesting places to visit in Slovakia. There are several national parks and protected regions (chránené oblasti), such as **the High Tatras** – the highest mountains of the country; **the Low Tatras, the Little Fatras, the Great Fatras, Slovak Paradise** and others. The High Tatras are situated in the north of Slovakia and create the natural border (hranica) between Slovakia and Poland. The highest peak (štít), **Gerlach peak**, is situated in the middle of the mountain range (pohorie) and is visible from far and wide. The eastern part of the High Tatras is dominated by the peak **Lomnický štít** and the western part by the peak **Kriváň**. The High Tatras are famous for their numerous (početný) valleys (údolia) and mountain lakes (plesá). The most frequently visited lake is **Štrbské pleso**. It owes (vďačí) its popularity not only to the wonderful views of the surrounding (okolitých) mountain peaks but also to an excellent climate (vynikajúce podnebie). Tourists who are interested in older architecture can visit **Starý Smokovec**, one of the oldest settlements (osídlenie) of the High Tatras. Together with the neighbouring (susediaci) **Nový Smokovec** and **Horný Smokovec**, they are parts of the town **Vysoké Tatry**. The High Tatras area (oblasť) attracts many tourists throughout the year (po celý rok). The High Tatras National Park is the largest national park in Slovakia.

**Slovak Paradise** is a romantic and picturesque (malebný) region located in the northeast. There are numerous rock windows, caves (jaskyne), roaring (hučiace) waterfalls (vodopády) but also vast plains (rozľahlé planiny) with fascinating views of the area. **Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa**, located in the western part of this valley, is the oldest ice cave in Europe. It is one of the most attractive places in Slovak Paradise.

Other places attractive for tourists include **the Spiš Castle**, the largest medieval (stredoveský) castle in Central Europe and **Vlkolínec**, a mountain village known for its typical architecture. Both of them have been included in the **UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List** (svetový zoznam kultúrneho dedičstva). The most visited towns are **Bratislava**, the capital of Slovakia, Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, both in the central Slovakia and Košice in the east. Many domestic and foreign tourists say that the infrastructure and the services in Slovakia are still not very developed (stale nie sú veľmi rozvinuté).

Slovaks are proud of their folklore tradition which is well-developed. In every region, there exist many folklore groups. Various traditions connected to Easter (boys whip girls with willow whips and pour water over them) or Christmas (kids go from house to house and sing Christmas carols) are still kept, especially in the villages. There are many typical Slovak restaurants serving traditional Slovak cuisine (slovenská kuchyňa – jedlá). The most typical food is bryndzové halušky (potato dumplings with sheep cheese), lokše (potato pancakes) and cabbage soup (kapustnica).

Since the 1st May 2004 the Slovak Republic is a member of the European Union, and since the 21st December 2007 is a member of Schengen area, and since the 1st January 2009 is a part of the European Monetary Union and its currency is euro (€).The Slovak language became one of the official languages of the European Union. This membership (členstvo) has influenced the political and economical life of the country. Many Slovak companies and institutions participate in various EU funded projects (projekty dotované EU) concerning (týkajúce sa) environment (životného prostredia), regional development, education, trade and other areas. Many Slovak students get involved (sa zapájajú) in exchange (výmenných) programmes and study abroad (v zahraničí). In spite of the fact (napriek faktu) that several EU countries have imposed (uvalilo) job entry restrictions (obmedzenia na vstrup na trh práce) on Slovaks, a lot of doctors, programmers, engineers, researchers and others have decided to work abroad.

Slovak are said to be (o Slovakoch sa hovorí, že sú) **hospitable, hard-working and willing to help others**. However, other nations often say that Slovaks **underestimate** (podceňujú) **themselves**. Foreigners (cudzinci), on the other hand (na druhej strane), appreciate (oceňujú) the close relationships Slovaks have within (v rámci) their families. Slovak parents help their children a lot even when (i keď) they grow up. In the past (v minulosti) it was common (bolo bežné) that the children lived together with their parents even (dokonca) after they grew up (vyrástli, dospeli) and had their own jobs. This often had a financial reason. These days, more and more young couples prefer living alone rather than (než by) remaining (zostať) in the home of their parents. A lot of them decide (rozhodnúť sa) to take a **mortgage** (vziať si hypotéku) from a bank to buy a flat or a house. They pay it back in monthly payments (v mesačných splátkach). Slovaks are also known (sú známi) for being **patriots** (tým, že sú vlastenci), which means they have a positive attitude (kladný postoj) to their country. In spite of that there have been several waves of emigration (niekoľko emigračných vĺn) throughout the history of Slovakia and many Slovaks live and work abroad (v zahraničí).