

Slovakia doctors threaten to leave over low pay

November 29 2011

(AP) -- Slovakia has declared a state of emergency in more than a dozen hospitals to ensure that health care is not compromised after thousands of doctors resigned from public hospitals over low pay.

Prime Minister Iveta Radicova, speaking after an emergency government meeting on the crisis, said the measures involve 15 hospitals across the country, including two clinics in the capital, Bratislava.

Around 2,000 doctors in state-run hospitals have handed in their resignations, effective Dec. 1, if their demands for higher pay are not met. More than 7,000 doctors work in Slovak hospitals.

The [state of emergency](#) means the doctors must stay at their jobs or face fines or even prison terms.

The government has proposed pay increases of euro300 (\$400) a month, but the doctors' union wants a euro700 (\$934) increase.

The doctors plan to rally Tuesday in the central city of Banska Bystrica.

Radicova said she agreed the salaries were "inadequate" but said the government could not afford to increase its offer because of the [debt crisis](#) in Europe. Slovakia is one of 17 nations that uses the common euro currency.

"The situation is very serious," Radicova said.

Health Minister Ivan Uhliarik said Monday it was not clear how many doctors would change their minds and accept the government's offer. He has asked neighboring countries to send doctors to help.

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