

Objections and Suggestions Sent to the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government on the New Draft Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities

A Meeting between the Coordination of NMCs and Minister Ana Brnabic

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january 2017



**Sivacek:
Small
Numbered
Communities
Cannot
Exercise All
of Their
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**Students Keep
Memory of
Holocaust
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**“Koljindrec”,
a Traditional Vlah’s
Custom on
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HIGHLIGHT



Third Periodic Report on the Implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights to be Presented in March

The director of the Office for Human Rights, Suzana Paunovic, held a preparatory meeting on January 31 with members of the Republic of Serbia delegation which will present the UN Committee on Human Rights with a third periodic report on the implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights in Geneva on March 7-8, 2017.



Montenegrin Library and Reading Room

The Association of Montenegrins in Serbia, Krstas, and the Montenegrin Cultural and Educational Society, Princess Ksenija, launched a project of opening a Montenegrin library and reading room in the premises of the Montenegrin Cultural Centre in Lovcenac. Interior works and the gathering of books are in progress. The aim of the project is to collect Montenegrin literature in one place and to make it available to both the Montenegrin community in the Vojvodina and the wider scientific community and general public.



Joint Steps Taken

The Prime Minister of the Autonomous Province of the Vojvodina, Igor Mirovic, received a visit from the president of the National Council of the Macedonian National Minority, Borce Velickovski, on Tuesday, January 31. They discussed issues of importance for improving the status of the Macedonian national minority and other national minorities in the Vojvodina.



The Alliance of the Backa Bunjevci Held a Press Conference

The Alliance of the Backa Bunjevci held a press conference where they spoke about the previous year and plans for the current year.

EDITORIAL 32

Unity That We Strive For

We got used to summarising results of our work in January and doing everything to do the job as well as we can in the coming period. However, sometimes it seems that despite our great desire and efforts to meet our obligations in the most professional manner as possible, only one news article can make us asking ourselves how do we work, do we work enough and how does the world see us in that context.

Of course, we refer here to an article published by a certain British internet portal which compared the photographs of migrants with photographs of concentration camps from WWII. The article did not leave indifferent any resident of Serbia, and it certainly shocked many foreign readers.

Regardless of the recent bad picture of our country, stories created during the movement of migrants through our country refined many souls. Just like every year on January 27, a memory of the late Srdjan Aleksic forces us to ask ourselves how much do we do to help a friend or any other person, not considering their ethnicity. Young Srdjan did not think about it. His life was cut short when he was 25 while he was defending his fellow citizen, a Bosniak. This was not important for Srdjan. It was important to help and protect.

This bright example of courage of young Srdjan should encourage us to nobility and humanity, which we do not often encounter in these difficult times or which is not talked about enough. And they are present here not only when it comes to the aid to migrants. There are many positive examples of inter-ethnic life for which there is enough room in our multiethnic state. Let us use this unique opportunity and send a beautiful message from our country. Terms multiculturalism and multi-ethnicism will remain a dead letter if they are not supported by concrete examples. We should not allow this to happen.

30 different national minorities live in Serbia



Small Numbered Communities Cannot Exercise All of Their Rights

The Czechs began moving into Serbia in the mid-19th century, when, as many sources say, they were searching for a better life and greater freedoms. They settled mostly in Belgrade, where they founded the “Ceska Beseda” Society. Nowadays, the Czech community is concentrated in the southern Banat, Bela Crkva Municipality. According to the latest population census, 1,824 citizens declared themselves as Czechs. We spoke with Jozse Sivacek, the president of the National Council of the Czech National Minority about how the Czech minority is organised today.



How would you present the Czech national community to our readers?

Judged by numbers, one might say that the Czech national community in Serbia is a rather compact community. But, this is not

so. There are certain diversities among the Czech community which we respect and want to keep. There are three groups of Czechs who live in the Republic of Serbia. Two groups are those who lived in the Austro-Hungary. They are Czechs in the Vojvodina

– one group, a larger group, are Catholics, and the other group are Protestants, Hussites. The third part of Czech community is on the other side of the Sava and Danube Rivers. These are Czechs who came at a time of formation of a modern Czech state, who

helped that state to grow; they had a great idea of Slavism and left a great mark on the Serbian state as well. If we mention Frantisek Zah, who founded the Vojvodina Academy, or Bajloni, hear in Belgrade, this will probably mean a lot. These are people who gave themselves so that people could live better and in greater freedom in these parts. These were ideas from some earlier time. Times have changed, circulation of people and information is much greater, so that our community is very liberal, people are moving and declaring themselves the way they want.

How does your motherland support the Czech national minority in Serbia?

The Czech Republic, as our state of origin, has made great efforts to help us in the past few years. A project programme has been drafted which supports a civil option and civil form of organisation of the Czech community. The aid of the Czech state is seen in projects that are connected to that which citizens usually need, but also in some other, larger projects in education, culture and media promotion. The Czech Republic has invested much in communities where Czechs live. Some institutions have become the most developed institutions thanks to the aid from the Czech Republic, which do not serve only us but all citizens, particularly in Bela Crkva Municipality. For example, a village, which has less than 1,000 residents has a sewerage system, waterworks, their school will get a new sports hall...This is something that really deserves our attention and we are grateful to the Czech Republic for this.

How does our state help the Czech minority and are you satisfied with the status of your minority when compared to other

minorities that live in our country?

Serbia's aid is somewhat different. This is an institutionalised aid and it is now directed more to institutions. A small numbered community, like ours, cannot make use of all this and there are maybe some other forms we would like to use in some other way. As far as regulations are concerned, Serbia invested great efforts and we say all the time that Serbia is one of the first European countries to regulate the issue of national communities in this way. How much we are satisfied is another issue since there are differences among national communities and these differences influence on the possibility of using everything that Serbia has offered to us.

What are your relations with other national councils?

The relations with other councils are different, to put it mildly. There is a sort of autism among national communities in the Republic of Serbia. The communities are rather introverted and turned to themselves. They resolve their own problems and I cannot say that the cooperation is at a high level. The basic form of cooperation is reduced to a body called the Coordination. I will openly say that this body is not recognized by law or any other normative acts, so that this is a rather problematic form of organisation since it does not have a fully completed institutionalized form. This body does not have its statute, rulebook, and, as some people from the Coordination say, it is based mostly on good practice. Good practice is not always a good form of organisation when it comes to citizens' and some other problems, so that the cooperation between the national councils and within national communities is not at a level we expect it to be.

What is the situation like with regard to information in Czech language?

The Czech community can have access to information in their mother tongue but we have a problem with capacity and how to implement it. The law allows the use of a mother tongue, information, but having in mind that the Czech community is a small community, we cannot develop institutions for such form of a work. Particularly because a part of this information system is tied only to a local area, concretely in this case, to Bela Crkva. This is a problem, we cannot be seen or heard in the whole community which is dispersed all over Serbia, and the other problem is that the Czech community is small in numbers. Information is reduced to our promotion, it is more like our way to say that we are here, that we have some problems or that we are satisfied, than it is a way to inform the community about the issues that would be interesting to it.

Are the youngest members of your community enabled to learn their mother tongue?

The Czech language is taught in our state. This is a novelty, which came with the formation of the National Council. The Czech Language with Elements of National Culture can be taught in schools. This is an elective subject which is taught in certain schools in Bela Crkva Municipality and one school in Gaj, Kovin Municipality. Four schools have some 100 pupils who learn this subject which certainly is not enough for some serious work and does not provide an opportunity for continuation of education in Czech language. This type of learning gives a contribution to remembering the language and children and young people can get some information

about their history and roots.

Many national minorities are facing the problem of assimilation which as a result has a smaller number of students attending classes in their mother tongue and a decreased interest in nurturing culture and tradition. What is the situation in your community?

Assimilation as a problem is present, and we even can say that it is very pronounced in our community for a number of reasons. The first reason is that the Czech community lives here and it is a traditional community with history of almost 200 years. The majority of Czechs who live in Serbia are the third, fourth even the fifth generation of Czechs. We kept traditional, family values more than we kept that which makes the identity of an entity. When we speak about assimilation we are not saying that we are under any kind of pressure in the sense of negative assimilation. However, there is something that is felt, and I often call it a positive assimilation, which can be interpreted as follows: no one bans us from being Czechs, and this is all fine, but someone says to us sometimes, "it would be better if this was different, then you would have some other advantages." And this is true; it is felt in some systemic issues and institutions. It is different if you are a member of a minority and it is different if you are a member of a majority or a group that has a great number of members. This is one problem of assimilation. The other problem is that there is a small number of people who declare themselves as Czechs. We have now mixed marriages, many things have changed in terms of culture. Everyone can declare themselves the way they like. In the 2002 population census there were 2,211 Czechs in Serbia and there

were 1,820 Czechs in the last population census. We lost 400 members. We know they are here, but they exercised their right and declared themselves the way they wanted, probably because of a better life and I sometimes say because of this positive assimilation.

A Protocol of Cooperation and Understanding was signed last year with some National Councils. What is the essence of the protocol?

This is a novelty in relations between National Councils. At the beginning of our talks we said that the relations are not good enough. Certain National Councils noticed that there is no equality within the minority community. National communities which have a great number of members have different influence, not only by way of their national needs, but by way of their political organisations as well. This is something a small numbered minority community cannot do. After certain not so good experiences with the operations of the Coordination, a few National Councils considered new solutions. We from the National Council of the Czech National Minority, and presidents of the National Council of the Slovenian National Community and the Alliance of Jewish Municipalities in Serbia concluded that we must institutionalize the protection of our rights. We started to communicate, to review joint problems, to seek that which is common. And this is that which is common, which makes the essence of the protocol of cooperation. We concluded that small numbered national communities cannot have all forms of organization and cannot make use of all that which Serbia enabled them, so we can make use of all that if we act together. The second thing is that minority communities are

rather dispersed. We address a member of a minority community, a citizen. We are small communities which number 2,000 to 3,000 people, who are dispersed all over Serbia, and a problem is to gather these people; there are also problems with communication, education. The next problem we noticed is that national minorities whose countries of origin border with Serbia have somewhat different problems than other minorities. You see which communities have signed the Protocol of Understanding and Cooperation. We say that we will resolve problems of our existence and survival of our identity. Some others are trying to resolve some other problems, but we feel that this is a political form of organization which should not belong to the work of national councils. The next thing we consider important is education. Some large communities have the whole education system from pre-school to academic education in their mother tongue. We managed to have one subject in school and this is because our language is in official use in one municipality, while for example the Slovak and the Jewish communities do not have their languages in official use in any municipality and it is very hard for them to survive. The Protocol of Understanding and Cooperation is very widely founded on all basic human and minority rights advocated by the UN which should have been implemented here in the best possible way. We are encouraged with the fact that several national councils expressed the desire to join us. There are principles which we set up and they are public (the Protocol is public), our joint work is transparent, and what is of great importance to us, every community keeps its right to act independently when needed. In short, this is the essence of the Protocol.

A Meeting between Minister Ana Brnabic and Representatives of National Minority Councils Held

Source: The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government

B meeting between Minister Ana Brnabic and representatives of the Coordination of National Minority Councils was held on January 31 in Belgrade.

The meeting was attended by the president of the Bosniak National Council, Sulejman Ugljanin, the president of the Slovak National Council, Ana Tomanova Makanova, the president of the Executive Board of the Croatian National Council, Darko Saric Lukendic, and the legal adviser to the president of the Hungarian National Council, Emil Lulic.

They discussed activities that will be implemented in 2017 with the aim of realizing national minority rights in Serbia in as effective way as possible. They paid particular attention to the work on amendments and



supplements to the law on protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities and the law on national minority councils.

They also agreed a more intensive cooperation between the Ministry and the Coordination in preparations of sessions of the

Republic's Council for National Minorities and agreed the support from the Ministry to increasing the capacities of the National Minority Councils, particularly in connection with the implementation of the Action Plan for the Realisation of Rights of National Minorities and European Integration.

Representatives of the Coordination of National Minority Councils thanked Minister Brnabic for her readiness to work with them at improving the quality of life of national minorities in Serbia. Minister Brnabic also thanked Coordination representatives for constructive topics of the meeting and proposed that such meetings be held more often.

A Third Periodic Report on the Implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights to Be Presented in March

Source: Office for Human and Minority Rights

The director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, Suzana Paunovic, on January 31 held a preparatory meeting with members of the Republic of Serbia delegation which will present a 3rd periodic report on the implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights to the UN Human Rights Committee on March 7-8, 2017, in Geneva.

Paunovic has said that the Serbian Government adopted the 3rd periodic report on the implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights for the period 2011-2015 at a session held on September 4, 2015. She has informed delegation members that responses to additional questions in connection with the 3rd periodic report on the implementation of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights were adopted at a Government ses-

sion held on December 15, 2016, after which they were forwarded to the Human Rights Committee. Responses to additional questions put by the UN Human Rights Committee contain information on measures the state is undertaking in efforts to provide for an efficient implementation of anti-discriminatory politics, measures to ensure efficient investigations and prosecution of perpetrators of hate crimes, inclusion in education and employment of members of vulner-



able social groups, results achieved in the search for persons went missing in the past armed conflicts, realization of rights of refugees and displaced persons, media freedoms, participation of national minorities in public life.

The Committee was also informed of measures the state is undertaking to protect persons who are under arrest, politics for the fight against

violence against women and domestic violence, prevention of torture, says a press release.

The Republic of Serbia, as a member of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights, has an obligation to periodically submit reports to the UN Committee on Human Rights on legislative, judicial or other measures it adopted for the sake of implementation of the Charter's regu-

lations, and on progress made in exercising the guaranteed human rights.

The delegation will be tasked with ensuring the Committee members that the Republic of Serbia respects obligations assumed with the ratification of the International Charter on Civil and Political Rights and that it will undertake measures to resolve the existing problems.

The International Charter on Civil and Political Rights is an international instrument relating to human rights, which is of a legislative character. Its regulations determine individual and collective rights, measures for overseeing their realisation and it founded the Human Rights Committee which endeavours that signatories abide by their assumed obligations. The Charter was adopted and opened for signing and ratification by the UN General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) on December 16, 1966, and it entered into force on March 23, 1976 when the necessary 35 countries deposited instruments for ratification or accession. The SFRY ratified the Charter on January 30, 1971.



Objections and suggestions of the national communities and the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights regarding the proposed bill amending and supplementing the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities

The first report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Realisation of the Rights of National Minorities for the first and second trimester of 2016 was presented at the end of November last year. Soon after that, a draft bill amending and supplementing the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities was presented. The Ministry of Public Ad-

ministration and Local Self Government called on citizens and experts to get involved in a public debate which lasted until December 28. For the time being, the Ministry did not voice its opinion on objections to the bill.

In effort to contribute to as good implementation of the Action Plan as possible and to the drafting of a more efficient law, a number of na-

tional minorities and associations made a list of comments and objections to the first report and the draft bill, and, in some cases, they drafted their own proposed bills. Words of the proposals and objections have been published in full on the Minority News internet portal, in the Chapter 23 Section. In this issue of the Bulletin we present crucial proposals and objections.

Opinion of the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

The Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights /YUCOM/ points out that certain articles of the Law on National Minority Councils are not in line with a draft bill amending and supplementing the law on protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities. Objections pertain to 11 articles of the draft bill.

YUCOM says that the existing definition of a national minority in Article 2 which deals with a definition of a national minority defines a national minority in keeping with subjective and objective criteria and stipulates that every group of Republic of Serbia citizens who are representative enough when it comes to numbers, who have long-term and firm ties with the territory of the Republic of Serbia, who have their own language, culture, national or ethnic affiliation, origin or religion, by which they differ from a majority and whose members want to



YUCOM
Komitet pravnik
za ljudska prava

jointly nurture their identity, including culture, tradition, language or religion (Article 2 of the law on protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities) meets these criteria.. In theory, "an open" definition of a national minority enables full freedom to minority ethnic groups to demand recognition of "ethnic and cultural" identity and to exercise their rights on the basis of it. However, such approach creates problems in practice and does not favour the purpose of the open approach in defining the term national minority but to the contrary it can stimulate the fragmentation of identity and hamper the realization of collective rights. It can happen that new minority identities are "created" and "awakened" year by year, identities

wishing institutional recognition. This suits the fragmentation of identity of national minorities which meet the existing criteria. So they suggest that national minorities should be listed in a future law (this can be also done in possible changes to the Constitution) or that true, well thought-out and clearly explained criteria should be determined for recognizing the status of a national minority.

Article 4 stipulates the possibility of government bodies to undertake measures for the sake of securing full and effective equality of national minorities who are essentially in an unequal position in comparison to other citizens. However, YUCOM says that solutions in this Article essentially do not define affirmative action nor do they set a goal that should be achieved. "Paragraph 5 pertains to a sensitive issue of representation of national minorities in

government bodies in all forms of territorial and political organization. The existing solutions in regulations which regulate local, provincial and state elections for members of local, provincial and state parliaments do not guarantee representation of “small numbered” national minorities. In order to have them represented, it is necessary to determine who is entitled to these measures (by listing or determining percentages). It would be good, although it is not a condition, to list measures which ensure the representation of minorities in representative bodies.

Article 17 repeats principles for establishing a national minority council, which is stated in an Explanation. YUCOM says that in addition to a number of positive functions which these bodies have, problems have been noted in the past 13 years of work of national minority councils. Civil society organizations and experts pointed out the issue of decentralization of national minority councils and a number of problems in connection with organisation and work of these councils.

The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia, Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, and representatives of national minority councils voiced their

opinion on competencies and work of the national minority councils, while representatives of national minority councils pointed to a number of problems they are facing during the elections and particularly when it comes to competencies.

The Action Plan for Chapter 23 stipulates (3.8.1.2. Item 4) that the law on national minority councils is amended. According to their opinion, a draft law should:

- Propose decentralisation of national minority councils, i.e., stipulate the way of election, organisation of work, competency and financing of minority self governance at the local level as well.

- Propose the way of election of the national minority council at the state level (central minority self-governance) which would be clearly connected to previously elected members of minority self governance in local communities.

- Propose competencies and mutual relations between the central and local minority self-governances.

Civil society organisations propose that a law be drafted with a minimal breach of deadlines stipulated by the Action Plan for Chapter 23 in a section dedicated to national minori-

ties, which would regulate:

- the status and rights of national minorities (definition, decision making and participation in decision making directly and by way of elected representatives), cultural autonomy, measures for provision of full equality (participation of representatives of national minorities in political life, proportional representation in bodies and services of public administration, economic reinforcement), the financing of cultural autonomy, public politics management (Council for National Minorities);

- status, election, organisation, competencies, financing of minority self governance;

- conformity of rights recognised by other laws.

In connection with the idea of merging two laws into one law which would regulate the rights and freedoms of national minorities and issues which pertain to the National Minority Councils, experts from the Belgrade Human Rights Centre and Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights feel that the same goal can be achieved with two laws as well, i.e., rights and status of national minorities can be improved if clear and detailed amendments are made.

Bosniak National Council /BNV/: A New Draft Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities

The secretary of the Bosniak National Council, Ahmedin Skrijelj, has prepared a new Draft Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities.

In addition to things that are of essential importance and arguments which oblige the state to bring a completely new law, there are also formal and legal reasons because of which a bill amending and supplementing the law on protection of rights and



freedoms of national minorities cannot be sent to [a parliamen-

tary] procedure because Article 47, Paragraph 2 of Single Methodological Rules for Drafting Regulations (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 21/2010) stipulate that if more than half articles of a law are amended or supplemented, then a new law should be brought.

Having in mind that 20 Articles of the law, which has a total of 25 Articles, are amended and

supplemented, and that 6 new Articles have been added, conditions have been created to bring a new law.

Article 8 of the law on national assembly stipulates that when drafting bills and other acts that are passed by Parliament relevant bodies are obliged to strictly abide by methodological rules for drafting regulations.

In this regard, and having in mind that which was said before, we suggest you to support our proposed bill, and to ask the Government of the Republic of Serbia to withdraw from a parliamentary procedure this bill and to begin a procedure for drafting and adopting a new bill having in mind that conditions stipulated by Article 47, Paragraph 2 of Single Methodological Rules for Drafting Regulations

(The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 21/2010) have been met, to form a new task force for drafting a new bill on the protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities, to include at least 8 representatives of the Coordination of National Minority Councils in its work and to oblige the task force to accept proposals from representatives of the Coordination.

Comments and Objections from the Alliance of Jewish Municipalities, and the German, Czech and Slovenian National Minorities



Objections are motivated by the concern of small numbered national minorities, whose numbers are on the decline according to an analysis of demographic trends, that in the future their numbers will fall below the level of arbitrary determined number of “representativeness” so that they will thus lose any attention from the state and support to their effort to keep their national identity, by which the process of assimilation, alienation and complete disappearance would be accelerated in a passive way.

The second, significant segment of which we warn is the fact that small numbered and dispersed national

communities do not have access to systemic and institutionalised solutions made according to the needs of large and spatially homogeneous national minorities which are tied to their states of origin bordering with Serbia (where there are Serbian minorities also) and which take an active part in the political life. The consequence of the failure to see inaccessibility of the given solutions is the failure to find alternative non-institutional solutions in support of small numbered, and by that, jeopardised minorities.

The third segment are objections concerning not only small numbered but

all other national minorities. In addition to other objections, the one pertaining to punishments for the failure to act in keeping with Articles of the laws with positive content, and punishments for banned actions, is also important. Answers to questions (posed by a layman) as to who and when launches proceedings in case of violation of the law, whether this is done ex officio or after a report, at what speed proceedings are conducted, can the case fall under the statute of limitation because of the slowness of the proceedings, whether interested parties are informed of the course of the proceedings, are not clear.

BNV: COMMENTARIES ON A DRAFT REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE REALISATION OF THE RIGHTS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A draft first quarterly report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Realisation of the Rights of National Minorities shows that the Action Plan, as a very important strategic document for Chapter 23 in Serbia's accession negotiation with the EU does not deal with essential problems facing minorities in the Republic of Serbia. The first report shows all shortcomings of the Action Plan, including a non-defined status of national minority councils which did not get a role of a real partner in the whole process.

The very fact that national minority councils are not partners or holders of activities in the majority of planned activities from the Action Plan confirms that representatives of national councils were treated as mere objects and not as equal partners during the process of drafting this important strategic document.

This is confirmed by the fact that the Action Plan reduces the importance of national councils regarding the issue of the use of minority languages and scripts, where the local councils for inter-ethnic relations are partners in the implementation of all activities.

The Serbian Government adopted the Action Plan on March 3, 2016, but the timeframe in the report concerning the implemented activities is not logical since in the majority of cases data pertaining to 2015, the period before the Plan was adopted, are cited, which is not relevant since it is impossible to make plans for the past or set task backwards. A part of the report speaking about the implementation of activities contains unnecessary enumerations, quotations of legislative norms, and there are no neces-

sary data on the implementation of planned activities.

Introductory and concluding statements are contradictory, they deal with the analysis of the constitutional framework and international agreements and there are attempts to deny the right to the use of "similar languages" in court proceedings, citing as an example the ICTY which used the abbreviation BHS for Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian.

The report lacks measurable indicators of the implementation of activities pertaining to all minority language speaking areas where national minorities live. For example, there are no data on the implementation of activities in the territory where Bosnian is spoken, in the area of the Sandzak where Bosniaks live.

The report also lacks an analysis of data speaking of the level of achievement of strategic goals which limits a monitoring of progress in realising basic and collective rights of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia.

The BNV concluded that the Action Plan failed to make progress towards improving the status and rights of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia.

The following steps need to be taken:

- The Action Plan needs to be revised;
- More measurable and qualitative indicators need to be defined in order to ensure mechanisms for measuring the influence of the planned activities and the level of achievement of goals;
- A socio-economic analysis of areas where national minorities live, such as the Sandzak, where

Bosniaks traditionally live, and a strategy for sustainable development of underdeveloped areas should be done with the aid of UNDP indicators of human development;

- When it comes to the use of Bosniak language, solutions need to be found in order to remove administrative barriers to the official use of Bosniak language in the Sandzak so that the Bosniak language could be used in state bodies, courts, prosecutor's offices, public companies and other state institutions;

- A team of experts tasked with reviewing and implementing the Action Plan should be appointed, and it should be given clear tasks;

- National minority councils, as a key factor in the implementation of the Action Plan, should be defined;

- A team of experts tasked with monitoring the Action Plan should be appointed;

- Education of national minority councils and other key players should be planned both for the monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan;

- A strategy of communication for the implementation of the Action Plan and promotion of rights of national minorities should be drafted;

- Activities and efficient mechanisms for resolution of cases of discrimination of Bosniaks in education in Bosnian should be defined in keeping with recommendations of the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Equality of 2014;

- Activities and efficient mechanisms should be defined with the view of introducing regular shows in minority languages on the public broadcasting system.

Koljindrec, a Traditional Vlah Custom on Christmas Eve

Source: the Community of Vlachs of Serbia

Throughout the Eastern Serbia, the Vlah community celebrated Christmas Eve and Christmas on January 6-7.

Like in majority of communities populated by Vlachs, Christmas Eve was celebrated in Metovnica near Bor with traditional custom called Koljindrec and with a service in the local church (which was built by money donated by

from generation to generation.

In addition to warm cloths, "koledari" had traditional Vlah's bags, "trasta" and "colinda-koljinda," traditional Vlah's sticks made from hazel or willow.. Several representatives of a group of "koledari" are making a toast in the house of a host. The lady of the house is serving meatless food and is packing fat food which they will bring home to eat

ten courageous young men toured several dozen houses in Spinet, in dark and at temperature below -15°C despite snowdrifts which in some places were higher than one meter.

Koledari toured both churches, but they got gifts only in the Orthodox Paraklis of "All Saints" of the Romanian/Vlah Orthodox Church, where father Antonie Isac (who was



all residents of the village). The service in the church was celebrated by Serbian Orthodox priest Milan Jankovic and a service in the Orthodox paraklis of All Saints of the Romanian/Vlah Orthodox Church was celebrated by parish priest of Metovnica, father Antonie Isac.

More than 100 "koledari", mostly children and young people, divided in several groups, toured almost all households in this village, wishing them luck, health and a successful and good crop year with a traditional toast which is passed on

it after midnight, when Christmas will be celebrated.

Even though it seemed that "koledari" will not be able to visit the Spinet hamlet due to snowdrifts, a group of some

born in the village of Ilovo in Romania) said: "I feel like at home. The same customs, stick and songs. This returns me to childhood; this is how I and my friends toured my birth village."



"Colinda-Koljinda" is made of hazel or willow. The man of the house usually goes to the woods with his children or grandchildren. The bark is removed in a special way in order to get regular-shaped stripes which are used to cover the stick, which is then smoked above the open fire. When stripes are removed, marks are left on the stick, which symbolise snakes.

Montenegrin Library and Reading Room

Source: Krstas

UThe Association of Montenegrins in Serbia, Krstas, and the Montenegrin Cultural and Educational Society, Princess Ksenija, launched a project of opening a Montenegrin library and reading room in the premises of the Montenegrin Cultural Centre in Lovcenac. Interior works and gathering of books are in progress at the moment. The aim of the project is to collect Montenegrin literature in one place and to make it available to both the Montenegrin community in the Vojvodina and the wider scientific community and general public.



The reading room will be equipped in keeping with contemporary librarian standards and will be at the disposal of all persons interested in learning about the Montenegrin literature, history, geography, language and other

areas concerning Montenegro.

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The Slovak Community

Serbian-Slovak Ties are Deep and Long-lasting

Source: The Provincial Government /Hlas Ljudu

Whe Museum of the Vojvodina started the marking of the 300th anniversary of the settling of Slovaks in the Vojvodina as early as in October last year when an exhibition titled "Behind Mountains and Valleys – Three Centuries of Slovaks' Presence in the Vojvodina," opened, and the marking of this anniversary continues this year as well. Two lectures on the Slovak-Serbian cultural and political ties were held in January. The first lecture was delivered by the deputy Provincial Secretary for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, Nebojsa Kuzmanovic. He stressed not only strong cultural ties between the Serbian and Slovak peoples, but said that Slovakia confirmed its special attitude towards Serbia by the fact that it did not recognise Kosovo. Serbs in Slovakia got the status of a national minority even though there were only 457 Serbs in Slovakia according to the 2011 population census. He pointed out the significance of this gesture of the Slovak Government by citing the data that there are more than 50,000 Serbs in Slovenia

and there are more than 100,000 Serbs in Vienna, the capital of Austria, but they do not have the status of a national minority in either of these countries. "From the end of the 17th till the first half of the 20th century, more than 2,500 Serbian writers, philosophers and scientists were educated in Bratislava, Kosice, Kezmark, Modra and other Slovak cities," Kuzmanovic said.

Among them were renowned men such as Dositej Obradovic, Djuro Danicic, Svetozar Miletic or Jovan Jovanovic Zmaj, whose bust was unveiled at the end of last year in Modra by the Vojvodina Prime Minister, Igor Mirovic.

Kuzmanovic has said that the relations between the Serbian and Slovak peoples are characterised by the lack of any conflicts or misunderstandings, noting that at the end of the 18th century, professors from Slovakia, Jan Gros, Andrei Volni, Karol Rumi and Pavel Magda were among the first teachers at the first Serbian Gymnasium in Sremski Karlovci.

"However, the great philosopher and historian of literature, Pavel Josef Safarik, who was a professor and director of the Serbian Orthodox Gymnasium, and whose arrival in Novi Sad was the result of strong cultural, commercial and friendly ties between Serbs and Slovaks which last until today, left the greatest mark in our parts," Kuzmanovic said.

The next lecture was dedicated to the political life of Slovaks in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and was delivered by Professor Slobodan Bjelica, a visiting professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. He spoke about the only Slovakian political party from that time, the Slovak People's Party, which was active during the Austro-Hungary, about the coalition with other parties, and disagreements with the leading Vojvodina party from that time. He stressed that the Slovaks had a positive attitude towards the Yugoslav state and unity, they were not separatists, but disagreed with the politics of the Radical Party which was a dominant party in the Vojvodina at that time.

The Jewish Community

Students Keep Memory of Holocaust Alive

Source: Radio-Television of Serbia /RTS/

On January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day, children from Belgrade elementary and secondary schools read memories of surviving Serbian Jews. Their painful testimonies were heartbreaking both for the present survivors and for the children, who passed the hardest history exam on the planet with a grade A.

“We were running as fast as we could, and Ljotic’s soldiers moved slowly. I think they were certain that we cannot escape,” Lazar Stevic read the memoirs of Aleksandar Ajzinger, the then 12-year-old boy who together with his mother escaped from the Banjica concentration camp.

He survived by hiding at homes of righteous people in Eastern Serbia. He was listening to the memoirs like they belong to someone else, until one moment:

“As his story unfolded, I got into it. I un-

derstood that it was a part of my life. It was not a fiction, but something I went through and something I was going through again,” Aleksandar Ajzinger has said.

Children, descendants of surviving Jews, were particularly emotional.

“They managed to survive by hiding in their friends’ basements, they were hiding under the ground, they were hiding all the time,” says Adam Savic.

“I am particularly glad that this is happening with children who have nothing to do with the Jewish Municipality and who do not know so much about Holocaust. If we have more children, I hope that something like that will not repeat anymore,” Ognjena Ratkovic said.

“By learning about Holocaust, we are learning about the most important human values. We are learning how much dignity,

freedom and peace are important,” says teacher Nada Banjanin Djuricic.

“We are trying to connect children with this part of history at a personal level and I think that this has much better effect than to expose children to some horrible, traumatic pictures,” says Sonja Vilicic of the Haver organisation.

Memories of WWII bring Serbs and Jews closer together, say people in the Jewish Community.

“There are special ties between the Serbian and Jewish peoples. The Jews suffered much in WWII. Serbs helped them much,” said Danijel Bogunovic from the Belgrade Jewish Municipality.

The Red Army liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. By that time, six million Jews were killed in Holocaust, including 90% of the Jewish population in Serbia.

Macedonian Community

Significant Progress Made

Source: Provincial Government

On Tuesday, January 31, the Vojvodina Prime Minister, Igor Mirovic, received a visit from the president of the Macedonian National Council, Borce Velickovski, with whom he discussed issues of importance for the improvement of the status of the Macedonian minority and other minorities in the Vojvodina.

They said that when it comes to the Macedonian national minority, significant progress was made in the past few years particularly in the area of education and the use of language and script. The Macedonian language is in official use in Planiste Municipality and in the community of Jabuka (the City of Pancevo), where classes are in Macedonian. Velickovski has said that the support of the Province in the field of culture through support to cultural institutions and publishing in Macedonian is particularly important to the Macedonian national minority. “We are working together to create as good as possible conditions for nurturing culture and identity of all minorities in the Vojvodina, since this is our common value,” Mirovic has said.



In 2017, the Macedonian minority will mark the 70th anniversary since their settling in the Vojvodina. In addition to a number of events, this significant anniversary will be marked by the erection of a monument called “Mother Macedonia” in Pancevo, where the seat of the Macedonian National Council is located. It was said at the meeting that the Vojvodina will support the

erection of the monument.

Mirovic has said that the support to national minorities through mechanisms which will contribute to improving their status is one of the priorities of the Provincial Government. This is why the activities of the Provincial administration are directed at increasing financial support to national councils and institutions.

The Alliance of the Backa Bunjevci Held a Press Conference

Source: Bunjevci

Representatives of the Alliance of the Backa Bunjevci /SBB/ held a press conference on Wednesday, January 25.

Mirko Bajic, the president of the Alliance of the Backa Bunjevci first talked about last year. It was a difficult, but successful year. Bajic stressed the participation of the SBB in the work of the National Council of the Bunjevci National Minority.

- We are a part of the Council. Out of 19 members, six are from the SBB. We worked hard, and I think that we managed to give a great contribution to the work of the Council. Maybe for the first time in the past ten years, the Council works normally, in the interest of the community. We do not politicise the work of the Council. Our community is maybe an example of how one should work, without politicising the Council in the interest of one political party.

When analysing the year 2016, Bajic stressed the initiative to declare the Act from 1945, by which the Bunjevci were banned from declaring themselves as Bunjevci, an act contrary to human rights and an act of open assimilation of Bunjevci, and said that the initiative was left to the National Council of the Bunjevci National Minority.

Regarding plans for 2017, Bajic stressed that the spirit of the past work of the National Council of the Bunjevci National Minority will be nurtured.

- We will not impose political goals of the SBB to the Council. Out of the nine leading positions, the SBB holds only

two. The National Council of the Bunjevci National Minority represents all Bunjevci, regardless of their political affiliation, and we will give a maximum contribution to the realisation

Province of the Vojvodina. The symposium will deal with Bunjevci, will deal with who we are, what we are. We deserve that everyone in Serbia respects us as an indigenous national minority.

Bajic says that the main goal is that Bunjevci be equal with other national communities, no more and no less.

- We do not ask for any rights of which others are deprived. We only want that all national minorities achieve that which they need, and that all minorities be equal. This primarily pertains to education, language, information, culture. This is the obligation of the SBB, and this is why we still

of goals of the community. When it comes to the initiative regarding the Act of 1945, it was received in an extraordinary way. A scientific symposium on Bunjevci will be held on February 18 and it will be organised by the Assembly of the Autonomous

stick to our motto "Together" and this is how we should work in the future as well. Everyone in the national community must recognise it; we must work together on a common goal, on achieving our rights in Serbia, our motherland.





Centar za istraživanja migracija
Center for Migration Studies

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