

**Bulgaria Started
Its First EU
Presidency**

**Public Consultations on Amendments
to the Law on National Councils
of National Minorities Held**

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Radko Vlahov: Bulgaria Will Show that There Are No Large or Small EU Members

**Complex Mosaic of
Serbia Organized for
the Second Time**

**The Hungarian Desk at the
RTV celebrated the 50th
anniversary**

HIGHLIGHTS



Bulgaria Started Its First EU Presidency

On January 1, Bulgaria took, for the first time, the rotating six-month Presidency of the EU Council. During the Presidency, Bulgaria will host nearly 300 events, twenty of which will be EU meetings at the highest level.



Public Consultations Held

In December, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, carried out public consultations on the working text of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities. Consultations were held in Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Bujanovac, Petrovac na Mlavi, Subotica and Belgrade.



"Complex Mosaic of Serbia" Organized for the Second Time

The Office for Human and Minority Rights organized the "Complex Mosaic of Serbia" Festival for the second time at the Belgrade Fair, marking the Human Rights Day. National minorities presented their cultural heritage, folk costumes, old crafts, gastronomic specialties, handmade objects and books in minority languages at their stands.



The Golden Jubilee of the Hungarian Desk at the Television of Vojvodina

On January 8th, Hungarian Desk at the Television of Vojvodina celebrated the golden jubilee, the 50th anniversary of the beginning of its work. On the occasion of the anniversary, a rich program was organized in the Studio M of the Radio Novi Sad.

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"Public" Consultations behind Closed Doors

New Year, new beginnings, new chances for a change ... How many times have we heard this or similar phrase and how many times have we just shaken our heads, because our desire for change was to a great extent different from the wishes of those who decide on them, regardless of whether we belong to a minority or a majority? A pessimistic start? Maybe. And maybe just realism.

This year, members of national minorities expect regular elections for members of national councils of national minorities. It is difficult to forecast in what atmosphere the pre-election campaign is going to take place, and whether depolitization of national councils will finally be achieved, which is one of the goals of amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities. The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government organized "public consultations" on these amendments in several towns of Serbia with the support of the OSCE Mission in Serbia. It is highly commendable that the effort was made to discuss the working version of the text at such an early stage of preparing amendments to the law. However, public consultations were not entirely public. At least not when it comes to the first round of consultations, which was held in Novi Sad. The right to participate in the consultations was given to the representatives of national councils, members of the working group for drafting amendments to the Law, while media representatives were kindly asked to leave the meeting, or, to be more precise, they were allowed to attend the event only for the first 3 minutes, so that they heard the welcome speech of the host, in this case, the Provincial Secretary for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities. When asked why it was not possible to attend the event, journalists received a short answer – this is not the event for journalists. They could not ask for any further explanation, because the door was already shut in their face.

In such cases it is necessary to ask the question why such consultations are organized if the right of participation is not given to the ones who will inform the public about them. Of course, representatives of the media could submit their remarks and suggestions on the working text of amendments to the Law, but we all know that there is a world of difference between writing and mailing comments and suggestion and having a chance to ask the questions and presenting one's comments and concerns in person, in a public consultation. Public dialogue, public consultation, transparency ... In recent years, we have included these terms in our everyday vocabulary, but the question is how much we understand the meaning of the same.

30 different national minorities live in Serbia



Bulgaria Started Its First EU Presidency

Source: www.euroactiv.rs
Photo: Sofia Globe



eu2018bg.bg

A decade after joining the EU, on January 1, Bulgaria took, for the first time, the rotating six-month EU Council Presidency, with the enlargement of the Union as one of the priorities and the ambition of achieving a clear action plan for each candidate country, without unrealistic expectations, but with concrete steps. The goal of Bulgaria as the EU presiding country is to be an intermediary, a political leader, and a coordinator, in order to respond to the real needs of European citizens and turn challenges into opportunities, according to the Bulgarian Presidency website.

"It is time to work on a stronger, safer and more solid EU. Citizens of Bulgaria and the EU expect us to find concrete solutions for specific issues. The Bulgarian Presidency will act in a transparent manner, it will be open to all European partners and, above all, to all European citizens", the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU said.

Regarding the enlargement of the EU, it is stated that the Western Balkans needs a clear European perspective that will contribute to the long-term peace, security and prosperity in the region, as well as the connection between the countries of the region and with EU members.

The goal of the Bulgarian presidency is to have a greater connection with the Western Balkan countries in the areas of transport, energy, education...

Bulgaria is already making efforts to connect with the region in a better way, and a good example is to foster a European digitalization policy among the Western Balkan countries through a gradual reduction in the price of roaming and increasing the opportunities for broadband.

The work by Bulgarian EU Commissioner for Digital Society, Maria Gabriel, has been done with this objective in mind. At the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia in May 2018, Gabriel will announce a plan to abolish roaming between the EU and the countries of the Western Balkans.

In addition to the EU enlargement, Bulgaria's priorities will be the future of Europe and the young, security and stability, as well as the digital economy.

The Bulgarian Presidency stated that economic growth and social cohesion are crucial for the future of Europe, that it is important for member economies to continue to grow and that all EU countries participate in the debate on the reform of the euro zone irrespective of whether

they are in the zone or not.

In the area of security and migration policy, the Bulgarian Presidency will work on long-term and fair solutions in the domain of asylum policy, effective policies for the return of migrants and readmission, strengthening border control, and prevention.

The priority of the Bulgarian EU Presidency will also be a single digital market, access to innovations, establishing a link between education and labor market needs, and the young people will be in the focus of all actions.

During the Presidency, Bulgaria will host nearly 300 events, 20 of which will be EU meetings at the highest level.

The logo of the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council shows the symbols of Bulgarian identity - Cyrillic, traditional embroidery and the national tricolor. The author is a Bulgarian artist Todor Angelijev and the logo reflects the idea that Bulgaria is an integral part of Europe and at the same time unique among EU members.

Bulgaria took over the EU Presidency from Estonia, and will deliver it to Austria on the last day of June.

There Are No Small or Large Member States in the European Union

On January 1, 2018, a decade after joining the European Union, Bulgaria took the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time, at the moment when the Union faces perhaps the biggest challenges in its recent history. The slogan of the Bulgarian Presidency of "United We Stand Strong" reflects Bulgaria's strategic goal in the Presidency of the European Union in the next 6 months. We talked to Mr. Radko Vlahkov, Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria, about these objectives and challenges in front his country



On January 16, you presented four priorities for the Bulgarian Presidency. Could you tell our readers something more about these priorities?

I would be very happy to answer this question, because, taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union by Bulgaria, presents us with an extraordinary challenge. At the same time, it is a great honour. As you know, we have become a member of the European Union ten years ago, and we are still "fine-tuning" our membership in the Union, and we have already assumed such a great responsibility. This is even more challenging, keeping in mind that Bulgaria took over the Presidency of the European Union six months earlier because of the Brexit. It was the turn of Great Britain to assume the Presidency in the first half of 2018, but, after the decision of the British citizens to leave the Union, we had to take it over six months earlier than originally planned. And, of course, I can say with pleasure that we have been preparing for

many years now, precisely because we understand how important it is for small Bulgaria to show that there are no small and big member states in the European Union. That the basic principle is that we are all equal and that we have equal voting rights. And that we can all contribute to the necessary reforms in this difficult moment. Let me now turn to your question. First of all, we have been thinking about what is necessary for European citizens, citizens of the European Union. They need more security, stability and more solidarity in order to live in a strong, digital and unified Europe. And if we want to build in practice these three pillars to which we rely - security, stability and solidarity in the next six months, we believe it can only be achieved through consensus, competitiveness and something that is very important for the new member states, such as Bulgaria, and for the future members, such as Serbia, - cohesion. Cohesion and cohesion policy are the most important issues.

You've already mentioned that we have 4 priorities, and I will briefly look at each of them.

The first priority is the Future of Europe and Young People, primarily from the aspect of economic growth and social cohesion. In particular, I would like to emphasize that during this six-month period of the Bulgarian Presidency, one of the most important tasks will be the preparation of the Long-Term Financial Framework for the period after 2020, i.e. adoption of the EU Budget. You know that whenever a budget is being prepared, there are different interests, there are different demands. Our desire is truly to be an impartial arbiter, to be a unifying country. In your question, you mentioned something that makes us happy, which is that during these six months, the motto of the European Union will be "United We Stand Strong". This is the motto of our country. It is written on the National Assembly building. This is the basic principle on which the European Union was created by the 1957 Treaty of Rome.

Another issue, which is also extremely important for all citizens of the European Union, is Security and Stability in Strong and United Europe. Literally in one sentence, one of the basic issues that will be dealt with over the course of these six months is the fight against terrorism. You yourself know how important the terrorism threat is for all EU countries, as well as for countries like Serbia, which is not yet a member. We are all concerned about this phenomenon all over the world. Of course, a special attention will be given to efforts to overcome the migrant crisis and to solve the problem of asylum, as well as to the need to amend the Dublin Regulation. These are the problems that Serbia has been facing, too, and, although not yet a full member of the EU, Serbia has had very good cooperation with the EU in this regard.

The third priority concerns the Digital Economy and the Skills for the Future - this is something we have been thinking about how to formulate for a long time, as well as how to come to a consensus on this priority with our EU partners. First of all, it is connected with the modernization of Europe, that we incorporate in all regulations the answers to the new challenges that modernity brings on us. First of all, I want to draw your attention to a unique digital market. We have to take into account how new technologies affect our society and how they modernize it.

And last, but not the least, I deliberately left this priority for the end of the answer. According to Bulgaria's assessment, this is one of the most important priorities, and it relates to the European perspective and, I emphasize, the connectivity of the Western Balkans. I can say that we cannot imagine that the European Union project is completed, unless the countries of the Western Balkans take part in it and, of course, to this end, I am very pleased to place Serbia here first. We are happy to have been able to convince our partners in the EU about this priority. It will continuously be in focus during our presidency.

One of the priorities of the Bulgarian presidency is the European Perspective and the Connectivity of the Western Balkans. Given that Bulgaria is a neighbour and one of the closest allies of Serbia and other Western Balkan countries in their efforts to achieve full membership in the European Union, what are the specific steps that you will take under this priority?

As you have accurately pointed out in your question, Bulgaria is indeed not only a neighbour and a close friend, but one of the most active advocates of Serbia's EU

membership. I assure you that in the last 6-7-8 months, as we were determining our priorities, the main efforts of the Bulgarian Government and the Bulgarian Prime Minister were focused precisely on the persuasion of our partners in the EU about the necessity of returning the subject of EU enlargement to the Western Balkan countries. We are really happy that we managed to convince our partners in this regard and, as a result, we can now say that our Presidency is the Balkan Presidency. It will be recorded in history as the "Balkan Presidency". You asked me about the specific steps we will take during these months. I can tell you that, almost every month, there will be events that are directly related to the issue of EU enlargement and to the countries of the Western Balkans. First of all, in February we expect the publishing of the Strategy for Serbia and Montenegro as the leading candidates for EU membership from the Western Balkans - this is precisely the formulation used by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Then, in April, regular reports on the progress of countries in the region, especially Serbia, are expected. And then, in May, we come to one of the culminations of our Presidency in regard to the Western Balkans priority. On May 17, a summit of EU leaders and leaders of the countries of the Western Balkans will take place in Sofia. I do not know whether this fact means anything to your readers, but, as a professional diplomat and a politician, I very well understand its great significance. In 2003, the last meeting was held in Thessaloniki during the Greek Presidency, with the countries of the region - but not all Balkan countries - participating in it. Now, it is clear to you that this issue has been marginalized for 15 years. Among other things, as a result of the 2003 meeting, countries like Bulgaria and Romania were given the opportunity to join the European Union. So, the upcoming meeting is really filled with many expectations. But I want to say very clearly here: the main expectations, the main efforts are aimed at creating the most favourable political climate for the consideration of the progress of each country. However, it should also be emphasized that it depends on each country how and how quickly they will join the Union. Or, in other words: the doors are wide open! And it depends on individual countries, and, in this case, on Serbia in particular, when they will pass through the doors. But I would still mention something else. When, at the beginning of the mandate of this European Commission in 2013, Jean-Claude Juncker made clear that there will be no enlargements during this mandate, this was discouraging news. And as an ambassador, I have attended many meetings here or heard different

statements from the current president, and then for the Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić on the need for a clear perspective, because it motivates the reform forces. You yourself know that in October 2017, Jean-Claude Juncker gave a statement, which is, I would say, extremely important for the region, and in this statement all pieces fell into place. I am happy that this has also happened as a result of Bulgaria's efforts. In the end, allow me to say one more sentence in this regard. Couple of days ago, I signed a document with Minister Jadranka Joksimovic, and, in the statement she gave after the signing ceremony, she presented one fact that I am personally very satisfied with. Namely, she said that the support of the citizens of Serbia to EU membership is now over 50 percent, to be precise it is 52 percent, although there were fluctuations in this regard over the past few years exactly because of the lack of a clear perspective, resulting in lack of motivation of the people, of the society to support the reforms. Now the support is over 50%, it is 52%. We see this fact as a result of the return of the subject of enlargement to the EU agenda, which makes us both satisfied and happy.

In addition to Bulgarians, Bulgaria is home to many ethnic groups, such as Turks, Roma, Armenians and others. What are the specificities of the legal framework in which members of ethnic groups can exercise their rights?

Bulgaria, as well as Serbia, pays special attention to the respect of human rights. In our case, ever since the beginning of the changes in 1989, we have paid special attention to this problem. In the period of the totalitarian state, these rights were marginalized, even suppressed. But we have come to the point when our legislation in this area is extremely modern. First of all, I would like to emphasize that our legislation, our Constitution is in line with all the most important documents in the field of human rights and the rights of ethnic groups and national minorities that exist in international law, in European law. Our Constitution is fully aligned with these documents. In our domestic legislation, we have a number of normative acts that guarantee these rights and prevent discrimination based on sex, nationality, social status, religion, and so on. And that is, I think, very important. In response to your question, I would like to note several key points in regard to the exercise of rights of ethnic groups. Above all, they can express their identity, first through use of language and education in their mother tongue. In this regard, there are all legal norms in force in Bulgaria, however, the question is how to implement them. One of the most serious issues that

our society faces in this regard, and I would like to talk about a special case here, refers to the Roma. I assure you that in the last 15-20 years, Bulgaria has made great efforts in order to integrate Roma into society. Unfortunately, the results are not what one should expect from such energetic efforts. But, in any case, significant progress has been made. Especially in the field of education, the efforts that tend to start children's education from pre-school age, I mean Roma children, and this the issue is linked to the social assistance they receive, so that parents understand their responsibility. Sometimes we have, unfortunately, paradoxical situations in which parents themselves should be pupils, too, because, as you know, in the Roma community, mothers are often 12, 13, 14 years old, and fathers are 13, 14, 15 years old. It is the age when they themselves have to be educated. So, children are born, they grow up, and come into the situation of becoming parents while they are still of school age. This is a very serious problem that we are facing and for which we trying to find a solution. I do not want to single out only the Roma as a separate group. I can tell you that each of the ethnic groups in Bulgaria, and especially those larger groups, such as the Turkish, Armenian, Jewish and other ethnic communities, each has a guaranteed right to education in their own language, and there is no discrimination in terms of origin, education and the use of languages related to their origins. I even prepared statistics on how many children from different ethnic groups have decided to study in their mother tongue. The numbers are very indicative. I will not talk about big numbers, I will extract small ones. For example, in 2008-2009, a Bulgarian citizen, or, to be more precise, his parents, because he was a child, asked to be educated in the English language, and we enabled him to study in his mother tongue, because he is a child from a mixed marriage, his father was English, and his mother was Bulgarian, or vice versa, or they both came from abroad to live in Bulgaria. Likewise, we have education in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, etc. In 2008-2009 we had another interesting situation, when one child wanted to be educated in the German language only that year, and the following year decided not continue with it. I would not even talk about all the cases of education in the Turkish and Armenian languages. I have used the aforementioned examples to show how much attention we pay to this issue. We recognize it as one of the most serious issues concerning the protection of the rights of ethnic groups and, generally, of people who are in some sort of a minority position. Enormous efforts are being made especially in the field of education, in health

care, too, so that people in very remote areas, in inaccessible parts of the country, have all conditions to live as normal life as all other Bulgarian citizens.

According to the 2011 census, 18,543 members of the Bulgarian national minority live in the Republic of Serbia who exercise their rights to self-government in the field of education, culture and official use of languages and script through the National Council of the Bulgarian National Minority. How closely do you work with the Bulgarian National Council and what do you see as the biggest challenges in which it is possible to make the greatest progress?

I will talk to a greater length about this issue, which, to me, seems to be very important. First of all, the Bulgarian national minority suffered for many years in the past due to the assimilation policy. The totalitarian system was responsible for it, and I am not referring only to former Yugoslavia, but also to the Bulgarian totalitarian state, which closed its eyes for decades. People were too afraid to declare themselves as Bulgarians. They were afraid of losing their jobs, this was also a fact. So, for one reason or another, their number has decreased, dramatically decreased. I looked at statistics, the official statistics for the period from 1953 to 1981. During this time, the number of the Bulgarian minority was reduced by more than 40 percent, which was the result of the aforementioned short-sighted policy. Glory to God, as we say in Bulgaria, as you in Serbia say "Thanks to God", the time has changed. Glory to God, Serbia and Bulgaria are nowadays different countries. We are now modern countries who realize that the rights of all individuals, regardless of their origin, regardless of their faith, regardless of the specifics they may have, must be respected. And, in this regard, I believe that the Serbian state has done a lot in the last few years, and we can gradually begin to feel these changes. Unfortunately, the desired results can not be reached over night. In the year and a half I have served as the ambassador here, I have constantly kept appealing to our compatriots of Bulgarian origin, constantly saying to them: "Do not be afraid! Do not be ashamed!", Serbia is different, Serbia gives you the opportunity to say proudly: "I am Bulgarian!" And nobody will suffer any consequences, because this is really the case. As one of the most difficult problems, I would pinpoint the economic underdevelopment of the municipalities in which the population of Bulgarian origin is predominant. To this end, I would particularly single out Bosilegrad. Bosilegrad is a very sad town. It is a town with amazingly good people, but with

people who have suffered a lot. These are the people who have suffered for decades, and now, instead of using all the rights that the state has given them, they still face incredible difficulties. Not only are new foreign investments rejected in this town, but the scarce existing ones are forced to leave, too. This is the area, the town, in which a single person makes decisions about everything, determines whether someone will be examined by a doctor, whether someone will continue education in Bulgaria or not, etc. I would even say that this is the town with a feudal rule. These people do not deserve it, and I think that people have already realized that it is high time they took things into their own hands.

I would like to reiterate that the state of Serbia gives very wide rights in the field of education and use of mother tongue, in the media of national minorities. At the legal level, the Serbian state, I would say, is flawless, but, when it comes to the implementation of the law at lower levels, things take a different course. Or, as we have a saying in Bulgaria, I'm still not sure if there is an adequate translation for it in Serbian: "The emperor gives, but the cop does not let it through!" I am sure there is an analogue in the Serbian language, so you understand what I mean by it. At the highest level, things are really what they need to be - in a modern, European way. But, at the level of implementation, when these things need to become a daily routine, people face great problems.

You asked me about the National Council. In my opinion, national councils in the Republic of Serbia represent an extremely important achievement of democracy and respect for the rights of national minorities. National councils are legitimate bodies that represent a living link between minorities and the Serbian state. A national council should make full use of the rights the state has vested in it. However, if a national council is passive, even if it has a low level of competence, such a national council cannot be of benefit to the people it represents. I know that in the Republic of Serbia, in the autumn of 2018, elections for national councils of national minorities will be held. I sincerely hope that all national minorities, and, most of all, the Bulgarian minority, will choose the right people who will protect their rights. Who will protect them hand in hand with the Serbian State. And to use the climate that exists, to use this, I would like to underline it, the excellent political will of the Serbian state. I emphasize - excellent political will! In order not to break the fine thread between the State and people who represent the minority.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria Finances Projects in the Field of Human and Minority Rights



On Wednesday, January 24th, at the press conference "Support of the Republic of Bulgaria to the EU Accession Process of the Republic of Serbia", which was jointly organized in the Media Center by the Center for Migration Studies, the Forum for Ethnic Relations and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, YUCOM, these organizations presented their projects in the area of human and minority rights that will be financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2018.

The participants in the conference were greeted by the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Serbia, Radko Vlahov. In his opening speech, Ambassador Vlahov reflected on the priorities of the Bulgarian EU Presidency in the first six months of 2018, stressing the importance of the Western Balkans. As he said, Bulgaria has consistently supported Serbia in the process of EU accession from the very beginning. Support to Serbia represents a permanent goal of our country, he said, and this support will continue until Serbia's definitive accession to the EU. Since 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria has financially supported this path of Serbia in areas such as strengthening democracy, processes in the non-governmental sector and building a civil society. Accordingly, last year, funds earmarked for Serbia amounted to more than half of the total allocated funds. In 2018, financial resources for Serbia are doubled and amount to 700 000 Euros. The Ambassador also stated that for the first time Bulgaria has agreements with the state institutions of the Republic of Serbia, with civil society organizations, as well as with the Office of the Ombudsman. Vlahov emphasized the importance of the field of human and minority rights in the process of accession to the European Union, and the continued progress in this field is significantly contributed to by civil society organizations whose projects will be supported by these funds. At the end of his address, Ambassador Vlahov stressed that the Republic of Bulgaria with full confidence supports Serbia in the process of reforms implementation and ex-



pressed the solidarity of its country with Serbia on its path to the EU.

Milena Vasić, speaking on behalf of the YUCOM Human Rights Lawyers' Committee, presented the project "Human Rights beyond Chapters", which aims to strengthen democratic institutions in Serbia and support the European integration of Serbia, pri-



marily by implementing the Action Plan for chapter 23. As she explained, the project is aimed at the citizens themselves, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups - national minorities, LGBT population, women, persons with disabilities, etc. through the provision of free legal aid, at representatives of the media through training of journalists in Vranje, Zaječar, Subotica and Belgrade on how to report on cases of discrimination, hate crime and hate speech and at general public through raising public awareness of the problems faced by minority groups at risk and the consequences of disrespect of human rights through an active campaign in the media and on the Internet. As Vasić concluded, the project is designed to include support to the individual - both immediate legal assistance to those whose human rights are at risk, and training for journalists and reporters dealing with re-

porting on this topic, with the protection of human rights, the strengthening of democracy, and the principles of good governance in Serbia as the ultimate goal.

Dušan Janjić, the President of the Board of Directors of the Forum for Ethnic Relations, announced the beginning of the work of the Academy for Interethnic, Intercultural and

Inter-confessional Dialogue - AID, a project that will be implemented in 2018 through a series of trainings, research, roundtables, and a summer school of publishing. As he said, while the Forum throughout its activities supported education and encouraged the public engagement of young people, one of the major problems faced by both its organization and other stakeholders who seek to systematically deal with issues of national and other minorities, and mutual dialogue, remains to be a lack of experts, especially young people. In addition, there is a notable lack of quality processing of these topics in education and scientific research. The project of the Academy for Interethnic, Intercultural and Inter-confessional Dialogue - AID Forum will try to respond to the aforementioned challenges.

Biljana Jović, President of the Center for Migration Studies, presented the project "Minority News as a Comprehensive Media Platform for Improving Minority Policy and Practice in the Republic of Serbia", which has been implemented for six years in cooperation with the National Councils of National Minorities. She reminded the attendees that the project also includes, in addition to the web portal and monthly electronic newsletters in Serbian and English languages, the weekly TV program National Minorities Chronicle. The support of the Republic of Bulgaria will provide for modernization and daily operation of the portal, monthly issuance of newsletters, and also a monthly printed insert Minority News in the Serbian language and one of the languages of national minorities in the Danas Daily in the next six months. As Jović announced, the first Minority News insert in the daily newspaper Danas will be published on Tuesday, January 30, 2018.

Ružić: The National Minorities Fund Increased Twelve Times

Source: Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government
Photo: MDULS

Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Branko Ružić, stated that in the year 2018, RSD 21.8 million was allocated for the Budget Fund for National Minorities for financing programs and projects in the field of information in the lan-

"We therefore increased these funds in the budget for 2018 by 20 million dinars, or twelve times", Ružić said.

He assessed that national minorities are an important asset for Serbia and the strongest link to the partners in the region, adding

to the EU and Chapter 23, but it is much more important that we arrange our relationships with each other in order to live the better life and realize that diversity makes us even richer", Ružić said.

In addition, in order to fulfil the criteria defined in the negotiating chapter "Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" with the EU and the National Minorities Action Plan, several legislative initiatives have been put in place, in which the representatives of national councils were actively involved. The Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities and the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts have already been submitted for deliberation to the Government of the Republic of Serbia. As one of the most important legislative activities, the preparation of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities is also underway.



guages of national minorities, which is 12 times more than last year.

He said that, in 2017, the Budget Fund for National Minorities was activated for the first time after 15 years and that the funds allocated for this fund in 2017 were very small, 1.800.000 dinars.

that the issue of the position of citizens of other nationalities in Serbia should not be viewed only through the prism of Serbia's obligations in negotiations with the EU.

"Improving the position of national minorities and securing the conditions for exercising their rights is important for our path

Ružić said that the first version of the draft was prepared in cooperation with the national councils and that they also conducted public consultations on this working text, which, as he added, was a completely new practice. He noted that he believes that they are on the good track to produce a high quality draft law that will satisfy all interested parties.

Revision of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 by Autumn

Source: B92

Serbia will revise the Action Plan for Chapter 23, after which new deadlines will be set for fulfilling obligations in relation to this Chapter.

As the Head of the Negotiating Team for Chapter 23, Čedomir Backović said, the entire work in this regard should be completed by the autumn.

"We intend to start the analysis right after the holidays, on the basis of which we will

carry out the revision of the Action Plan," Backović told RTS.

He stated that "deadlines will be set only after we have determined what needs to be changed. And then we shall see what the realistic deadlines are for the implementation of the activities envisaged by the Plan. We believe that all this work will be finished sometime in autumn", he said.

He announced that the first working text of the amendments to the Constitution in

the area of judiciary, which he is currently working on with the experts of the Venice Commission, will be published by mid-January.

"After a series of discussions with civil society, we paid attention not only to what was said, but also to what was not said, not only to those who participated, but also to those who did not participate in the discussion, because it all has its weight", the Head of the Negotiating Team said.

Public Consultations on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities Held

In December, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, carried out public consultations on the working text of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities. The first public consultation was held in Novi Sad on November 29, followed by consultations in Novi Pazar, Bujanovac, Petrovac on Mlavi, Subotica and Belgrade.

Consultations were attended by members of the working group for the drafting of the law, representatives of national councils, civil society and others. As the State Secretary, Ivan Bošnjak, who was the President of the Working Group, stated during the first consultation, one of the results of the new Law on National Councils of National Minorities should also be greater transparency of the work of the Council. "The legal solution specifies more precisely the work of the national councils based on the competencies vested in them for the four areas, as provided by the Constitution. I expect even more transparent management of finances and, if possible, additional depolitization. New elections for national councils of national minorities will take place next year, too, and we expect that this legal solution will strengthen citizens' participation in the work of national councils, and closer links between state bodies, national councils and the public in Serbia, which will be in the best interest of our society", the State Secretary said at the consultation in Novi Sad.

However, minority representatives agreed that the draft working text of the Draft Law reversed existing minority rights. At the roundtable in Subotica, the criticism of minority representatives was mostly related to the use of the Serbian



Photo: Mađar so

language in acts of national councils, the depolitization of their members, the reduction of competences over educational and cultural institutions, etc. According to the portal www.subotica.com, the representatives of the Hungarian minority are dissatisfied with the proposal that the minutes of the council meetings,

because the cultural autonomy and its implementation have actually collapsed in this pre-draft," DZVM President Csonka Aron said to the Portal.

Representatives of the Croatian minority believe that the whole process was not sufficiently inclusive and that there was no partnership between those who drafted the working text and the national minorities, while Mirko Bajić, president of the Bunjevac Association of Bačka, believes that members of the leadership of political parties have the right to participate in the election of National Councils, since, as he noted, political parties of national minorities are envisaged by law and, if registered as such, their leaderships should have the right to participate in the work of the council.



Photo: Ministarstvo državne uprave i lokalne samouprave

other than in their mother tongue, also have to be taken in the Serbian language. President of the Democratic Community of Vojvodina Hungarians Csonka Aron believes that the proposal is not in line with the provisions of the Constitution, which states that every nation can speak in its mother tongue. "We believe that the solutions offered in this pre-draft or working version are actually a step backwards,

Public consultations were concluded at the round table in Belgrade on December 18th. On this occasion, State Secretary Ivan Bošnjak pointed out that the need for a clearer definition of the authority, organizational and personnel structure of the council, as well as the need for a more transparent management of taxpayers' money, which finances the work of national councils, are not only the demands of domestic actors, but also the suggestions of relevant international organizations.

Complex Mosaic of Serbia Organized for the Second Time

The richness of ethnic diversity is our treasure of which we are all proud and which makes our country recognizable in the world. How different we are, but at the same time, similar was shown at the festival "The Complex Mosaic of Serbia" organized by the Office for Human and Minority Rights on December 10 for the second time. The festival took

equally likes and respects all its citizens, and every difference is appreciated, accepted, and we want them to be preserved", Vulin said.

The fair was organized in cooperation with the national councils of the Hungarian, Slovak, Czech, Roma, Montenegrin, German, Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian, Bunjevac, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Vlach, Macedonian, Greek, German and Ashkali national minorities.

National minorities presented their cultural heritage, folk costumes, old crafts, gastronomic specialties, handmade objects and books in minority languages at their stands.

Republic Deputy and President of the Cultural Artistic Society "Heroj Janko Čmelik" from Stara Pazova, Ljibuška Lakatoš, assessed that it is good that the fair is organized again, because, as she said, it is important to understand that we are all different, and in fact we are all equal.



Hlas ljudu

so many people and nationalities that are mutually understood and living in this region," she said.

The Bunjevac National Minority was also presented with its cultural heritage. According to Suzana Kujundzic-Ostojic, President of the National Council of the Bunjevac National Minority, Bunjevci presented two fertility festivals - Christmas and Duzijanica. "We have linked these two holidays and we wanted to show everything we do from



Kancelarija za ljudska i manjinska prava

place at the Belgrade Fair, where representatives of state institutions, national councils, tourist organizations, civil society organizations and others participated in addition to representatives of minority communities.

The event was opened by Suzana Paunović, Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights. On this occasion, among other things, she pointed out that the festival is the best way to send a message about the importance of human rights and the complex multicultural mosaic that exists in Serbia. According to her, Serbia is committed to implementing the Action Plan for Chapter 23 and its obligations.

The event was also attended by the Minister of Defense, Aleksandar Vulin. According to the RTS, the Minister pointed out that representatives of national minorities in Serbia are the bridge for cooperation in the society.

"Every national minority has a very positive role when it comes to our society and we are trying to keep it that way just as it will remain. The Republic of Serbia

assessed that it is good that the fair is organized again, because, as she said, it is important to understand that we are all different, and in fact we are all equal.



Kancelarija za ljudska i manjinska prava

"It is therefore good that such manifestations are more often organized, in order to understand that this is actually the richness of Serbia, that there are

straw, from which we live, from which we made art and what is adorned by the end of the year," Kujundzic-Ostojic said.

Minority Media between the Rock and the Hard Place

Un December 2017, the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina issued the second report "Information in the Languages of National Minorities – Sidetracked". The report was drafted by NDNV experts, and the project was supported by the international organization Civil Rights Defenders. We recall that the first report was published in October 2017.

In the second report, the authors Žužana Serenčeš, a media analyst, and Nedim Sejdinović, the President of the Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina, have put emphasis on the public consultations on the working text of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, as well as on the provision of information in the languages of national minorities and harmonization with the new Strategy for the Development of Public Information System.

Serenčeš warns in her findings that the opportunity and the need to determine and specify not only the founding rights of national councils of national minorities, but also the principles of their responsibility are again missed. "Many years of experience (the Assembly of Vojvodina in 2004 transferred its founding rights in a number of minority newspapers to the national minority councils) have shown that it is a particularly big problem with the media in which national councils (even indirectly) have the role of founders related to the issue of editorial autonomy of these media and the influence of minority national councils, that is, political parties that have a dominant role in the editorial policy of those media", the report noted. "The greatest surprise in regard to the working version of the legal solutions on the national minority councils is in the fact that it failed to formulate a completely clear systemic solution prescribing the way the work of minority media in which national councils indirectly play the founders' role will be funded in the future", the report notes. "While the possibility of transferring the founding rights

in the media to the national councils was abolished in 2014 by the decision of the Constitutional Court, this ruling has not had any impact whatsoever on the founder's rights that had already been transferred to the national minority councils before this decision was issued. "Keeping in mind that, by the time of the ruling, only the national minority communities living in Vojvodina had

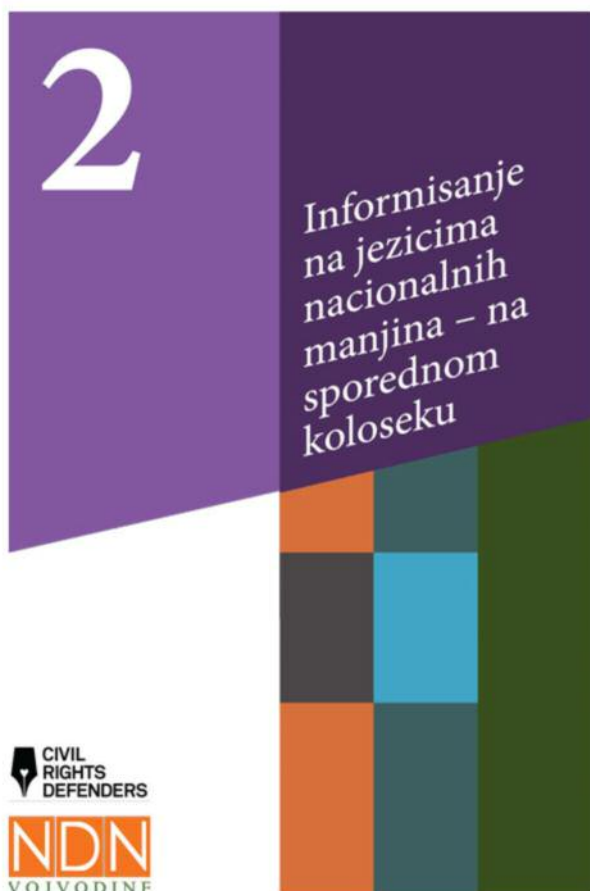
national minority communities out of Vojvodina, the problem of their funding still remains", Žužana Serenčeš concluded in the report.

The Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in Serbia was no longer valid at the end of 2016. Initially, the development of a new strategy was announced for the end of 2017, but we

are witnessing that its drafting is still underway. In the report, Nedim Sejdinović recalls that due to certain announced solutions, as well as the methodology used in the drafting process, "relevant journalists and media associations" - the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, the Association of Journalists of Serbia, the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina, the Media Association, the Association of Independent Electronic Media, Press and Association of Online Media left the working group. Sejdinović notes that it is not clear why there is a high degree of lack of interest of the media community in the field of information in the languages of national minorities. As stated at the working meetings, apart from the representatives of the Coalition of Journalists and Media Associations (NUNS, NDNV, ANEM, AOM and Lokal pres), nobody else recognized the importance of the freedom of media and the removal of political pressures on the media that provide information in the languages of national minorities. "Other actors dealt with the rights of minorities,

more precisely minority elites, the role of the state and national councils in this process, the financing of media and media contents, and the quality of information was only mentioned in a very superficial way," the report concluded.

We recall that the Ministry of Culture and Information invited the representatives of the Coalition to return to the working group for the media strategy, however, the Coalition did not accept the invitation because, as they stated, not only do the reasons for leaving this working body still exist, but, in the meantime, there are new ones that have become evident, too.



used the right to transfer the founder's rights to the national minority councils, as a consequence, the national minorities living in Vojvodina are now privileged in comparison with other national minority communities in Serbia (Albanians, Bosniaks, Bulgarians, Vlachs). These communities are discriminated against in this respect, since either they do not have their own media at all or they have not been provided with the systematic funding by the state, as the provincial media have. Possibility for the national minority councils to be the founders of the media, however, still continues to exist, but, in practice, in the case of the

Unique Christmas Spirit

Christmas holidays are among the most beautiful holidays of the year. All believers will agree with this. Family gatherings, children's smiles in front of a luxuriously decorated Christmas trees just complement this great holiday. The spirit of Christmas could be felt already on December 3rd at the traditional Christmas diplomatic charity bazaar. On this occasion, representatives of over 40 countries gathered and donated all the income to the most vul-

nerable families in our country.

Festive moods were also felt by visitors to the Second National Minority Fair that took place on December 10th. And after that, numerous Christmas festivals followed, the number of which has been growing in recent years. It is precisely because of the unique atmosphere and feelings that this holiday brings, we are sharing with you part of the atmosphere from numerous Christmas fairs.



Hlas Ijudu

www.subotica.info



Bunjevci



Hlas Ijudu



www.subotica.com

The Golden Jubilee of the Hungarian Desk at the Television of Vojvodina

Source: Vajdasag Ma
Photo: Hungarian

On January 8th, the Hungarian Desk at the Television of Vojvodina celebrated the golden jubilee, the 50th anniversary of the start of its work.

On the occasion of the anniversary, a rich and comprehensive program was organized. An exhibition on the history of the Television Vojvodina was organized in the foyer of the Studio M of the Radio Novi Sad, followed by a gala program featuring contents created in fifty years of the Desk's work.

Many authors, directors, stage designers, professors and public figures spoke on the occasion of the anniversary in the programs of the Hungarian Television of Vojvodina on participation in the work of the editorial staff.



The Day of Hungarian Culture Celebrated in Senta

Source: Vajdasag Ma
Photo: Hungarian

"Thanks to our culture, we survived as individuals, as a community and as a nation," State Secretary for Culture at the Hungarian Ministry of Human Resources Peter Hopal said at the central Vojvodina celebration of the Hungarian Culture Days at the Culture Center in Senta on January 12th.

In the official program, the President of the Cultural Union of Vojvodina Hungarians, Sutus Aron, greeted the attendees, and noted that the celebration of the Day of Hungarian Culture in Vojvodina is linked to the work of three prominent figures. These are Hajnal Jenő, Karol Dudas and Szöllősy Vágó László, who, in the field of culture, managed to create cooperation throughout the Carpathian Basin.

"In all of this, we all play the main role, everything we have achieved, we have



achieved together, dreaming together, but all this would not have become a reality without the active support of the Government of Hungary and the nation with Christian basics," Sutus Aron noted in his speech.

During the ceremony in Senta, awards were given to the Cultural Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians. The lifestyle prize "The Hungarian Tree of Life" (Magyar Életfa Díjban) was awarded to the organizer of cultural life in Doroslov, Diósi János, the Cat-

holic priest of the Salesian Order, the President of the Scout Association of Vojvodina Hungarians, the director of the Student Home in Mužlja, Stojan Kalapiš, art colony organizer, Mezei Erzsébet,, and language and folklore researcher, retired professor, Antal Penovac.

The Golden Plaque was awarded to the President of the Association "Rakoczi", Dr. Jozsef Halc. The awards were received by the music scientist Agnes Nagy Abonyi, the head of the tamburitza orchestra and the president of the Cultural Center "Mendicus" in Chantavir, Robert Vereš, the Cultural Association of Hungary "Delibab" in Senta, the Association for Local History Research "Monography" in Stara Moravica, and the Association "Bratstvo -Jedinstvo" in Martonos.

At the ceremony, awards were presented for the most beautiful books in the Hungarian language in Vojvodina.

Annual Prize of the Institute for Culture of Vojvodina in the Hands of Miroslav Benka, Too

Source: Hlas Ljudu



On December 14, the annual awards of the Institute for Culture of Vojvodina were presented in the Hall of the Provincial Government. Laureates received the awards from Miroslav Štatkc, Provincial Secretary for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities.

Among the winners is the actor, director, screenwriter and designer, Miroslav Benka from Stara Pazova, who received Medal for multiculturalism and interculturalism.



His creative expression and contribution to the world trend of non-verbal theatre is recognized abroad, where he

also received numerous prestigious awards (Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran, Egypt ...).

"This prize is very important to me, because it is difficult to present yourself in your own environment and to stand out in your own environment. And when you are recognized in your own environment, this means that you really deserve that reward. This prize is also binding. This means that you must not stop, always have to fight, go

ahead, think, if possible, ahead of your time and do your best", the winner of the award, Miroslav Benka said.

"Slovak Story" at the Cultural Center of Novi Sad

Source: Cultural Center of Novi Sad



The opening of the exhibition of photographs by Petar Dešić "My Slovak Story" was held on Wednesday, January 17, at the Youth Club of the Cultural Center of Novi Sad. This exhibition, which presents the life of the Slovaks from 24 villages from these areas, was opened by Her Excellency Dagmar Repchekova, the Slovak Ambassador in Serbia.

On behalf of the host, and in the presence of Vesna Srdanov, the Head of the City Administration for Culture, the guests and the audience, Sunčica Marković, Assistant Director of the Cultural Center of Novi Sad, addressed the author, thanking Dešić for illustrating Slovak customs, tradition and culture.

Ambassador Repchekova expressed her satisfaction that the exhibition "My Slovak Story" raised great interest of the people in Novi Sad. She noted that Dešić's exhibition was earlier shown at the Embassy of



Slovakia in Belgrade last December, and that it received very positive comments by all visitors.

"The exhibition faithfully depicts the life of the Slovaks here in Vojvodina, Slovak souls are shown in these photographs," her Excellency said, reminding that Slovakia celebrates 25th anniversary of its independence this year, whereas, the Slovak community has lived in Vojvodina for 250 years.

The exhibition "My Slovak Story" consists of 34 photographs created during the four-year fieldwork, and a special emphasis is put on the Slovak folk costume, which represents the author's initial impressions. The photographs show the scenes of children, the relationships of older and younger people, the portraits of the elderly, as well as the visit to cemeteries on All Saints holiday.

The exhibition in the KCNS will last until January 31st, and then it will be moved at the National Museum in Pančevo, and subsequently to Golubac.



New Bridge of Good Neighbourly Relations

Source: RTS

On the occasion of marking the National Holiday of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia and 15th anniversary of the first assembly of the National Council of the Romanian National Minority, a Protocol on Cooperation between the Serb Union in Romania and the National Council of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia was signed in Vršac in December.

Considering the traditionally good relations between Romania and Serbia, considering the necessity of promoting the achieved degree of cooperation between the Romanian national minority from Serbia and the Serbian national minority from Romania, with mutual desire, and on the principles of mutual respect, agreeing to work on strengthening the process of Euro-integrations with the motto "together in Europe", in the premises of the National Council of the Romanian National Minority, the President of the Serb Alliance in Romania, Ognjan Krstić, and the President of the National Council of Romanians in Serbia, Danijel Petrović, signed the Protocol on Cooperation and further strengthened the good neighbourly and friendly relations of the two countries, aiming at improving the cooperation through the joint implementation of future activities in the mutual interest of the Romanian minority in Serbia and the Serbian minority in Romania.

The signing of the protocol was also attended by state officials from institutions in Serbia and Romania, prominent figures of the Romanian minority in Serbia and the Serbian minority in Romania, church dignitaries and representatives of cultural and artistic circles. State Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ivan Bošnjak, Second Secretary of the Embassy of Romania in Belgrade, Aleksandar



Patru, Consul General of Romania in Vršac, George Dinu, Secretary of the Alliance of Serbs in Romania, Zlatiborka Markov, Serbian MP in the Romanian Parliament, Slavoljub Adnadj, the Vice-Presidents of the Alliance of Serbs in Romania, Borko Jorgovan and Dejan Popov, the General Director of the Alliance, Radmila Dragotoj, as well as numerous representatives of the Serbian and Romanian media.

Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ivan Bošnjak, and Consul General of Romania in Vršac, George Dinu, addressed the attendees and the media representatives.

Celebration of the National Day of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia and the 15th anniversary of the first assembly of the National Council of the



After the ceremonial signing of the Protocol the President of the Alliance of Serbs in Romania, Ognjan Krstić, and the President of the National Council of Romanians in Serbia, Danijel Petrovic, State Secretary in the Ministry of State Administration and

Romanian National Minority was continued at the Vršac National Theatre "Sterija", where a gala concert was held. The participants had the opportunity to greet the orchestra and the choir of the National Council of the Romanian National Minority and vocal soloists, who, through numerous performances at various events, promote Romanian folklore, as well as the special guest, Pero Todorović, with Tamburitza orchestra "Timisoara Memory Books" under the direction of Tomo Djurić. This evening, the orchestra gave the long tradition of the Timisoara tambouritza players with a rich repertoire of Serbian and Romanian folk songs, virtuosity, warm and powerful voice of Pero Todorović and a great performance as a gift to the audience.

Annual Press Conference of the Roma National Minority Council

Source: Roma National Minority Council

At the final annual press conference of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, held in the premises of the Roma National Council in Belgrade on December 22, the work of the new leadership of the National Council of the Roma National Minority in the past 100 days was presented to the public.

The conference was attended by a large number of news agencies, radio and television companies. Journalists were addressed by the President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, Tefik Ramadanović, and the deputy presidents, Duško Jovanović, Jelena Jovanović and Ninoslav Jovanović.

The President said that, in the previous three months, the representatives of the Council had the opportunity to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Head of the Coordination Body for Monitoring and Implementation of the Strategy, Zorana Mihajlović. In this

meeting, they agreed to sign the Protocol on Cooperation between Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Roma National Minority Council. In addition to this meeting, Ramadanović particularly emphasized excellent cooperation with the State

and implementation of a number of joint projects.

Deputy President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, Jelena Jovanović, paid special attention to all strategic documents that were adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, aimed at improving the status of the Roma community. She highlighted positive examples of good cooperation with local self-governments in Vojvodina, as a result of the readiness of the provincial administration led by President Mirović to solve the problems of the Roma community. Jovanović said that the Roma National Minority Council is a serious partner of a large number of local institutions that count on assistance in implementation of all activities directed towards the Roma community.

Ninoslav Jovanović, Deputy President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, spoke about plans for 2018. He said he expects the education and employment of the Roma community to be priority areas in which they will work intensively.

Deputy President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, Duško Jovanović, took the opportunity to thank the media for their interest in the work of the Roma National Minority Council. The great interest of the media is another indicator that the Roma National Minority Council is one of the most visible national minority councils in Serbia. "What is most important for me is the signing of the Protocol on Cooperation between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the National Council of the Roma National Minority, which is expected right after the holidays. The abolition of the quota, as well as the provision of scholarships for Roma secondary school students and college and university students, will be one of the most important tasks for the next year", Duško Jovanović concluded.



Fifteenth Anniversary of the First Issue of the "Croatian Word" Marked

Source: www.subotica.com

On January 26, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the publication of the first issue of the weekly in the Croatian language, a public celebration took place at the Open University, when an exhibition of photographs of the front pages of this weekly was also opened.

The "Croatian Word" News Publishing Institute was founded by a decision of the AP Vojvodina Assembly in 2002 with the aim of providing information to the members of the Croatian national community in the Croatian language on a non-profit basis. The first issue of the "Croatian Word" Weekly was published on January 31, 2003, and, on the same day this year, the 771st Weekly will be issued.

- For 15 years, the "Croatian Word" has followed various political changes, events, cultural events, the work of institutions and cultural and artistic societies with a Croatian sign, as well as the activities of our community in Vojvodina. Our weekly went through various changes, and as its design changed, the contents and sections were adapted to the time in which we live. The plan for the future is to adapt to modern



tendencies, or to make a kind of fusion of print and digital media. That is why we, on this day, have activated our website, and we have also made an effort to launch a page on Facebook, where readers can read the short text and see what is offered in our weekly. We have also changed the design of the weekly, and we consider that the current look of the "Croatian Word" is more appealing to all ages of our community, and, of course, to the broader public, as well - Ivan Ušumović, director of the Croatian News Publishing Institute said.

Editor-in-chief of the "Croatian Word" weekly, Jasminka Dulić, said that the concept of the magazine has changed in certain

segments over the past 15 years, but that it has remained the same in the key aspects.

- We monitor all events within the Croatian community in terms of culture, tradition, identity, official use of language and education, but we also try to see all the events that are important for every citizen in this country from the perspective of the Croats in Serbia. Also, we follow bilateral relations between Serbia and Croatia, everything that happens



in the field of minority rights, the process of joining the European Union, and what it looks like from the perspective of the national minorities - Dulić said.

Great Recognition of the Work of Ante Sekulić

Source: Croatian Word

In the Great Hall of Croatian Heritage in Zagreb, the 2017 Christmas Seating of the Croatian Heritage was held, where, among other things, appreciation awards were granted to the deceased members of this important Croatian cultural institution by the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. The famous Croatian linguist and cultural historian, the correspondent member of HAZU, a Croat from Bačka, Ante Sekulić, was also among the twenty laureates.

Welcoming the participants, the President of the Croatian Heritage, academician Stjepan Damjanović, emphasized the contribution of the deceased members of the Heritage and the undeniable



mark they left behind during their lifetime. The Appreciation Award of the President of the Republic of Croatia is a great acknowledgment and reward for the overall work and contribution to the improvement of the Croatian national and cultural identity.

On behalf of his father (Ante Sekulić died on March 18, 2016 in Zagreb), his son Ante Sekulić jr. received his recog-

nition of his long-standing work on the study of the ethnic, cultural, literary and linguistic history of the Bačka Croats.

"I see this recognition of the work of my late father in several dimensions. First, to him personally and to his lifelong work, and then to the city and to the people from which he came. The Croatian President's award showed that she has the ear for the problems of the Croats on the other side of the Danube and that this Award is a sign she is listening to us, and some guarantee she will continue to listen to the Croats in Bačka. I would like to add on this occasion that we are, at the moment, working on the preparation of my father's collected works", Ante Sekulić jr said for the Croatian Word.



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