

**Paunović: Quality of
Reporting on the
Implementation of AP for
Minorities Enhanced**

**Effective Participation of
National Minorities in the
Work of Public Authorities
Is a Must**

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**Bulgarians Celebrated
Their National Holiday**

**28th Festival of Ruthenian
Folk Songs "Rose Garden"**

HIGHLIGHTS



Paunović: Local Self-Governments Are Crucial for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities

A round table entitled "Belgrade's Harmonius Mosaic", which was dedicated to the rights and position of national minorities, was held on March 2. On this occasion, the director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, Suzana Paunović, emphasized, among other things, that it is extremely important that local self-governments are fully involved in the realization of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.



Effective Participation of National Minorities in the Work of Public Authorities Is a Must

On February 23, 2018, the Provincial Protector of Citizens - the Ombudsperson, in cooperation with the Center for Research of Ethnicity from Belgrade, organized a round table dedicated to the effective participation of national minorities in the work of public authorities and public services, with the objective to contribute to the assessment of the situation in this area.



The Government of Serbia Actively Works on Further Enhancement of the Position of the Hungarian National Minority

On March 14, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Zoran Djordjevic, met with the Speaker of the AP Vojvodina Assembly and the President of the Union of Vojvodina Hungarians, Istvan Pastor, and stressed that Serbia's relations with members of the Hungarian national minority are at a high level and that the Government of the Republic of Serbia is actively working on their further improvement.



Romanian Holiday in Honour of Spring

In Vladimirovac near Alibunar, the 5th Festival of Folk Traditions and Marcishor was held. Marcishor is a traditional Romanian holiday celebrated in early March, in honour of the arrival of the spring. Romanians who live in Vladimirovac launched a festival a few years ago in order to restore the old national tradition of celebrating Marcishor, the spring arrival. Elementary schools with classes in the Romanian language and Romanian associations presented their costumes, handcraft, and Marcishor pins.

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Majority, But Still in Minority

Addressing the issues related to the minority communities in our country, we have often paid attention to the rights, that is, to the exercising of the rights of members of national minorities - the right to education in their mother tongue, the right to information, the right to develop their own culture and the right to the official use of their language and script. As it is well known, not only do these four competencies represent areas under jurisdiction of national minority councils, but are also key to the preservation of the identity of the national minorities. To what extent are members of the national minorities using these rights? Can we say that they have been granted all rights when it comes to, for example, the official use of language and script? The situation, of course, is not the same in every municipality, and this is largely influenced by the number of members of a particular minority living in individual municipalities. And, while we can say that citizens are sufficiently informed about their rights, there are still those who have a certain suspicion or fear of requesting documents in their mother tongue.

Minorities are not equal in regard to the representation of members of minorities in the work of public authorities and public services, either. As noted at the recent meeting of the Provincial Ombudsman with the representatives of the line ministry and the national councils, "international organizations, experts, and minority self-governments point out that, apart from the work of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and certain local self-governments, the national minorities are not adequately represented in the public administration and the public sector as a whole".

Yes, some local governments take into account how many minority members will be incorporated in their staff, while in some cases the fact that a national minority does constitute the majority population in the municipality does not play a significant role. For example, in the municipalities of Kovačica and Bački Petrovac, where the majority is the Slovak national minority population, the mayoral positions are held by the Serbs. There is no much difference in some other municipalities, where minorities are in the majority or equally represented. Of course, we are talking about AP Vojvodina, because the situation in the south of Serbia is different. Why is the representation of the national minority members in the abovementioned functions not the same in all parts of our country and why is there an open discrimination against the national minorities? Should the answer to this question be sought from the representatives of the local governments or representatives of the leading political parties? Or even minority representatives themselves, because such a situation can be understood, on the one hand, as insufficient respect of the majority towards the minorities, but on the other hand both as an indifference or even insufficient motivation of the national minorities themselves to exercise their rights that have been advocated for for years.

30 different national minorities live in Serbia



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The Slovaks Preserve the Ancestral Spirit and Develop It

The Slovak Community in Serbia has a long tradition. For more than 270 years, Slovaks have predominantly inhabited Banat, Bačka and Srem, but there are Slovaks also living in Belgrade and surrounding municipalities. Known as hard-working and peaceful people, they faithfully preserve the traditions of their ancestors, contribute to the development of their country, maintain good relations with the country of origin, but, like every minority community, even like the majority people, face numerous problems. We talked about these issues with Libuška Lakatošová, a Republic MP, a member of the National Council of the Slovak National Minority and the President of the Slovak Cultural and Art Society "Hero Janko Čmelík" from Stara Pazova.



We know that the Slovaks have lived in this area for a very long time. Could you tell us more about their migration to Serbia?

The Slovak Community has lived in Serbia for many years. In the year 1745, the first families from Slovakia settled in Backi Petrovac. After that, they inhabited the towns in Bačka, then came to Stara Pazova in 1770, settled in Srem, and in 1776 Aradac and Banat. As you can see, The Slovaks have lived here

over two and a half centuries, and they still cultivate their culture, tradition, and preserve their mother tongue. According to the last census of 2011, there are 52,700 members of the Slovak national minority living in Serbia. For the Slovaks, as a Slovak, I could say that Slovaks are peaceful, hard-working people, and loyal citizens of our state, the Republic of Serbia. We respect our country, our Serbia, but we have not lost contact with the Motherland, from which our ancestors arrived in 1745.

We have good contacts with them, but we live in Serbia and we strive to nurture our culture and tradition that our ancestors left to us, and we transfer it to our descendants.

You mentioned the tradition. Could you, please, tell us more about the holidays of the Slovak national minority? Is there anything specific in this regard?

Slovaks in Serbia have seven important festivals: the folklore festival for adults

"Tancuj, tancuj..." in Gložane, the festival for children "Zlata brana" in Kisač, also singing festivals in Pivnice, Selenča, Kovačica, as well as theater festivals in Stara Pazova: "3xĐ", children's festival, and "Theater Laurels" - adult festival. These festivals always have high attendance and I can tell you that all the participants of these festivals are preparing for the competitions throughout the year. It is a special holiday for us Slovaks, as well as for the places where festivals are held. All these festivals have a long tradition, and they would not exist without the will and enthusiasm of all of us who participate, both organizers and competitors. I want to emphasize that as far as financing of these festivals is concerned, they have great assistance from local self-governments, from the National Council of the Slovak National Minority, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities and the Provincial Secretariat for Culture and Information. As I have already said, they have a long tradition, we nurture them and we strive to ensure that they last for many years and I believe that it will be so, because there are many young people who really want and like to participate in these festivals.

The synonym for Kovačica is naive painting. Vladimir Boboš, Martin Jonaš, Zuzana Halupova and many others contributed to the fact that Kovačica was declared the unofficial capital of naive painting in the world. Can this positive example be applied in other areas of key importance for preserving the identity and cultural heritage of a nation?

You mentioned yourself that Kovacica is the center of naive art, I would even add that it is a naive art metropolis. Thanks to these naive painters, not only is Kovačica known, but Slovaks are also known, and Serbia is also known, because they have represented us in the whole world, not only in Serbia, but indeed in the whole world. You mentioned some of them, but I think there are many who have also deserved to mention them. Apart from Zuzana Halupova, Jonaš, there are also Glozik, Venjarski, and many others. Each of them has some special style of painting, which is also characteristic of Kovačica and Padina.

Is the Slovak culture more oriented towards tradition, or are the Slovaks visible in contemporary art?

It is true that Slovaks are committed to the traditional behaviour and preservation of their tradition, but I cannot but mention the contemporary creativity of the world-renowned director

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Miroslav Benk from Stara Pazova, who, for example, won the Grand Prix in Teheran with his play in competition of 108 theaters from all over the world. Then Mira Brtko, an academic painter who, unfortunately, deceased; she had an atelier in Rome, she was also a film director, and she won the Sava Šumanović Award, which is the most prestigious award in fine arts. To conclude, while we are committed to the preservation of tradition, we are also present in the contemporary art.

Given that you live in Stara Pazova, can you tell our readers more about the Slovak community living in your city?

First, as I already said, in the year 1770, several families from Slovakia moved to Stara Pazova. To this day, there are Slovaks living there, and according to

the last census, there are 5,200 Slovaks, who live in a symbiosis together with the majority Serbian population. Simply, these are the most natural, most preferable relations between the Slovaks and the Serbs, as our country has very good relations with Slovakia. In my opinion, the largest number of Slovaks lives in Stara Pazova, but when we look at the percentage, given that Stara Pazova has almost 80,000 inhabitants, it is still a small percentage, it is not like in Padina or in Kovačica, where it is almost 90% of the Slovak population. In Stara Pazova, besides the primary school that was built in the 18th century, there is also the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Slovak Cultural and Art Society "Hero Janko Čmelik", that I am the proud President of, because it is a truly successful cultural and artistic society, as well as the Local Board of the Slovak Heritage. In elementary school, classes are conducted in the Slovak language, from the 1st to the 8th grade, and as many as 300 students attend these classes. In the past, there were many more students, but it is a natural process of assimilation, mixed marriages, so that everybody, not only the Slovaks, is struggling with the birth rate, which is in decline, and consequences of all of the aforementioned are now seen in schools.

In the Slovak Cultural and Artistic Society, we have over 200 active members who have really achieved outstanding results. We have members from 4 years of age to 77, even 80 years old, for instance, our famous choreographer, who is the oldest member of the Society is 80 years old. The Local Board of the Slovak Heritage also gathers all the Slovaks, but I would like to point out that, in addition to the Slovaks in these institutions, we also have members from the majority and other communities, both Serbian and Croatian, with whom we live together in Stara Pazova. All of these institutions work together, organize our events together, but I must also note that, regardless of the enthusiasm of people, you always need some financial resources. To this end, I would like to commend the local self-government of Stara Pazova, which maximally helps all our institutions where the Slovaks gather, supports them through projects, as well as the provincial secre-

tariats. I think that without good will, without people's engagement, these institutions would not survive.

De-politicization of national councils has been often mentioned in the public lately. Do you think that de-politicization and more transparent management of finances would contribute to better work of the Council and the position of members of national communities?

I always fully support transparency! I think that everyone is in favour of this, that is, they should advocate transparency of work in every institution, not only in the councils of national minorities. All information must be available to the public. When we talk about politicization, it should not be influenced, because members of the Slovak National Council, and every national council, are the people elected by the citizens and those in this institution should implement the ideas and responsibly to work because they represent a certain group of citizens who gave them their votes. Whether someone is a member of a political party is their personal matter and I do not think it should be an obstacle for them to be members of the national council, but members of the national council should primarily be guided by the need to protect the interests of members of the national minority they represent. If we are talking about the Slovak National Council and the ways to improve the position of the Slovaks in Serbia, how to help, how to allocate the existing funds, where to invest them in order to improve the situation in the four areas that the national council has competencies for.

Which area of the four competencies the National Council has jurisdiction of is the most developed, and where are the biggest challenges for the Slovak Community?

I think that the most developed area is culture. As I have already mentioned, that we pay a special attention that the festivals are organized in all geographic areas - in Srem, Banat and Bačka. I do not think that we have any problems here. Perhaps I would mention the area of information. Slovaks are dispersed and in smaller communities there are no public media. On the other hand, the Public Broad-

casting Service of Vojvodina has a program in all the languages of the national communities, including the Slovak language, so that all this can be compensated. In addition, we also have our own weekly newspaper "Hlas Ijudu". Perhaps we could work a little on information in the languages of national minorities. When we talk about education, there is an exception, because, given that there are only 52,700 Slovaks living in Serbia, we have been allowed to establish

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classes with fewer students. The possibility of having classes in one's mother tongues with fewer students has been given not only to the Slovaks, but also to members of other national minorities.

At the session of the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality held on February 13, the MPs discussed the report of the Republic of Serbia, which had been presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on January 24. What are the conclusions from this meeting?

In the process of the accession to the European Union, Serbia adopted an Action Plan for Chapter 23 in April

2016, which regulates the judiciary and human rights. Based on this report, some conclusions can be made, that is, progress has been made in the protection and promotion of human rights when we talk about gender equality, the situation of Roma, persons with disabilities, refugees, as well as members of national minorities. The fact is that additional efforts should be made to enforce laws, especially when it comes to the field of domestic violence. But we are aware of this and many more new laws and strategies that have been worked on in the previous period are about to be adopted in the nearest future.

What are the plans in the coming period, considering that 2018 is electoral year for national minority councils?

The quality of the work of a National Council normally depends on the financial means. Members of the Slovak national minority live in Serbia and share with the majority community both good and bad, and we are aware that we cannot expect big funds. For example, the budget of the National Council of the Slovak National Minority for 2018 is about 24 million dinars. It is important that these funds are distributed appropriately where they are most needed. Elections will be slated most likely for the end of this year. I believe that members of the National Council will make sure that their work is transparent, and be careful about where these resources will be spent and distributed in order to improve education, in order to improve the information. It would be good to invest in smaller communities. There are Slovak villages where 700-800 Slovaks are left on their own. So they need help. It is also very important to involve as many young people, as investing in youth is an investment in the future. You need to recognize these young people, give them a chance, also create a team that will write projects and help the National Council, help all cultural associations, schools, civic associations to get some financial resources, because we know that the funding of these associations is now based on projects. So I would maximally involve young people, because they should be counted on.

Paunović: The Quality of Reporting on the Implementation of the AP for Minorities Enhanced

Source: Office for Human and Minority Rights

In her opening remarks in the meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Sixth Report on Implementation of the Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities, held on March 12, the Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, Suzana Paunović, pointed out that this report refers to the IV quarter of 2017, adding that implementation of activities envisaged by the Action Plan for Minorities is regularly monitored.

Paunović said that out of 76 stakeholders, 11 of them did not submit their contributions for this reporting cycle, 8 of which were national councils of national minorities.

According to her, 66% of due activities for this reporting period were completed or successfully implemented.

After the training in the previous pe-



riod, aimed at raising the quality of reporting, the Office Director pointed out that the contributions for the Sixth Report on the Implementation of the AP for Minorities were submitted by 40 local self-government units and 20 councils for interethnic relations.

Paunović recalled that the Office continued to improve the reporting system for the implementation of the Action Plan, and that the Sixth Report also contains data on the implementation of activities at the local level.



In the course of collecting contributions for the Seventh Reporting cycle, the Office will, in the forthcoming period, focus on further enhancement of the monitoring system of the Action Plan, Paunović emphasized, noting that it will continue to support all stakeholders participating in the reporting process in order to improve their work and mutual cooperation.

The meeting was attended by representatives of state bodies and institutions, international organizations and national minority councils.

Paunović Met with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Source: Office for Human and Minority Rights

Suzana Paunović, Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, met with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Nils Muiznieks, and informed him on the current state of human and minority rights in the Republic of Serbia, with particular reference to the position of Roma and other vulnerable social groups.

Paunović pointed out that, with the adoption of the new Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women for the period from 2016 to 2025, the continuity in the work on providing better quality of life for the citizens of Roma ethnicity has been ensured.

Through the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion by 2015, Serbia has achieved significant results that can be used as an example of good practice for other countries, Paunović assessed.

- The issue of personal documents for more than 25,000 Roma people has been solved. This progress has been made possible thanks to the amendments to the Law on Extrajudicial Procedure and implementation of the Agreement between the Ombudsman and line ministries, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Law on the Register of Marriages also regulates the procedure for the renewal of missing data or missing registers kept for the AP Kosovo and Metohija, according to which 2,919 registrations of previously legally invisible persons of Roma nationality were re-entered in 2015, Paunović said.

The Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, Nils Muiznieks, commended the results achieved in the provision of personal documents for members of the Roma community.

Suzana Paunović pointed out that there are 175 pedagogical assistants in schools throughout Serbia, with 35 of them providing support to children in pre-school institutions. She added that 1,623 students and 6,104 high school students were enrolled in the faculties and colleges since 2003, based on the implementation of the measures of affirmative. A system for monitoring of the attendance and attainment



of pupils' regularity has been established. For students enrolled in measures of affirmative action, scholarships and mentoring system are also provided. In secondary

schools, in the last two school years, 1,346 cash scholarships for Roma students were awarded.

According to Paunović, the results of the work of 75 health mediators in the area of Roma health care have led to a great improvement and their work is one of the most successful measures in the public policies undertaken in the previous period.

In the area of housing, for the first time, records were kept of the number and location of informal Roma settlements.

Roma men and women are recognized as a hard-working employable social group and the measures of active employment policy, programs for stimulating self-employment, employment with subsidies to employers in the private sector have been actively implemented, Paunović said.

Commissioner Muiznieks was also interested in the measures undertaken in order to improve the position and rights of national minorities, especially the right to information in the mother tongue.

The meeting was also attended by Aleksandra Djurovic, Head of the Permanent Mission of Serbia to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

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Paunović: Local Self-Governments Are Crucial for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities

Source: Office for Human and Minority Rights



Suzana Paunović, Director of the Government Office for Human and Minority Rights, emphasized that it is extremely important that local self-governments are fully involved in the exercise of the rights of members of national minorities.

As she said, in the past period, more than 60 local self-governments and their employees went through various types of training related to support and assistance to citizens in exercising minority rights.

Deputy Mayor of Belgrade, Andreja Mladenović, addressed the participants of the round table entitled "Belgrade Harmonious Mosaic", held on March 2, which was dedicated to the rights and the position of national minorities. The organizers of the meeting were the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in cooperation with the City of Belgrade.

On that occasion, Mladenović emphasized that Belgrade is an open city, in which the population is not determined by nationality.

"The Belgrade Harmonious Mosaic conference speaks of preserving the spirit of Belgrade, or the spirit of openness towards everyone. The City of Belgrade has an excellent relationship with representatives

of the Councils of National Minorities, but also follows the policy of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of Serbia. To this end, such conferences and debates are very important for our dialogue, exchange of experiences, and presenting problems that we need to address jointly," Mladenović said.

He reminded that, in the previous period, a lot has been done in regard to the the



housing of the most vulnerable groups in our city.

"The results are visible, first of all, in terms of the large number of new housing units and entire settlements where we have been taking care of families who lived in inhumane conditions for many years. Belgrade as the capital and largest city remains certainly under the scrutiny of the public when it comes to social politics. We remain committed to the responsible social policy," Mladenović said.

City Secretary for Social Protection, Nataša Stanisavljević, pointed out that all citizens of Belgrade, regardless of their nationality,

can exercise all the rights and services of social protection and all kinds of support that the City provides.

"In the previous period a lot has been done to improve the position of members of the Roma population in Belgrade. The most significant results are the two major projects: "Let's Build a Home Together" and care for families who lived in the informal settlement below the Ada Bridge. Within the framework of the first project, 121 Roma families received housing support through the allocation of social housing, either by buying prefabricated houses or houses with a garden, while, in the second project, 51 families got a roof over their heads. The City of Belgrade systematically and inter-departmentally monitors the exercise of the rights of Roma," Nataša Stanisavljević stressed.

She added that, in addition to the housing care, health and education support was provided, too, as well as assistance in the employment and opening of small enterprises. In the previous period, 28 Roma women started their small businesses. It will not stop there, Stanisavljević said.

Ivan Bošnjak, State Secretary at the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, pointed out that a set of minority rights laws would soon be adopted, which should improve the living conditions of minority communities, and added that what is being done in this area is a new quality that Serbia brings to Europe - the inter-ethnic dialogue.

Mother Tongue Day in Ivanovo

Source: RTV

The International Mother Tongue Day was marked in Ivanovo, with participation of representatives of national communities living in this area. In addition to members of the Hungarian, Serbian and Bulgarian nationalities, who constitute the majority population of Ivanovo, Slovaks, Macedonians, Czechs, Chinese also took part in the event, while Russians participated in it for the first time.

"For many years, Pančevo has been home to a large colony of Russians that came after the Revolution, and, now, with the arrival of Russian companies, there are new Russians who are here. We are trying to create an environment where we will hang out," Aleksandar Reljinovic of the Romaška Association said.

"The Greek community in Serbia is one of invisible minorities, we are scattered all over Serbia, and our members live in every town in the country. This is an opportunity for the Greek community to present itself in a multinational environment," Petar Rodifcis, the president of the National Council of the Greek National Minority said.

"There is a school in the Czech language, it is not regular, it is facultative, and there are language courses for the elderly. We are trying to maintain and preserve our Czech language as much as we can," Josef Mareš said.

In addition to promoting multilingualism and communication, this event contributes to the creation of a feeling of closeness and understanding among the twenty national communities that live in the Pančevo region. Some of the languages of smaller communities such as the Tzintzars and Banat Bulgarians-Palchens are currently among the most vulnerable languages.

"We do not have any school for the Palchen language of the Banat Bulgarians, so through our association we organized language workshops in cooperation with the association IN MEDIAS RES from Pančevo, so we had several generations who learned to read and write," Augustin Kalapis, of the Association of Banat Bulgarians said.

"For many years, I can say for 50 or 60



years, the Cultural Center has dealt with the preservation of the tradition of the Palchens and Sekelj Hungarians who live in Ivanovo. There are about 300 Palchens who can now speak their mother tongue," Marko Guran, the director of the Cultural Center in Ivanovo said.

The mother tongue is part of the culture of a nation and, when it is lost, the identity of a national community is also lost. Currently around 6000 languages and dialects are spoken in the world, and experts are concerned that around half of them will stop being used by the end of this century.

The Province Continues to Support RTV

Source: RTV

The Provincial Government will continue to support the work of the Public Broadcaster Radio-Television of Vojvodina (RTV), the newly-appointed Provincial Secretary for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, Dragana Milošević said.

During her visit to the RTV Director General, Miodrag Koprivica, she emphasized that the broadcast of program in 16 languages is of great importance not only for the Province, but for Serbia as a whole. She expressed satisfaction with her visit to, as she pointed out, the most prominent media house in Vojvodina,



which is important for all citizens of Vojvodina.

As the most important aspect of cooperation between the RTV and the Provincial Government, Milošević singled out the construction of a

new building of the RTV, which should be completed by the end of next year.

"In the coming period, the Provincial Government and the Secretariat for Culture, which I head, will fully support the Radio Television of Vojvodina. I think that the most important step has been made in this regard, and we will keep the public informed on all aspects of our cooperation," Milošević said.

The RTV leadership briefed the guest on the status of the works at Mišeluk, and also informed her that, as of March 5, the RTV program has been enriched by the contents in the Russian language, too.

Effective Participation of National Minorities in the Work of Public Authorities Is a Must

Source: Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman



In February 23, the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman, in cooperation with the Center for Research of Ethnicity research from Belgrade held a round table on the effective participation of national minorities in the work of public authorities and public services, in an effort to contribute to the assessment of the situation in this area.

The participants were welcomed by Zoran Pavlović, the Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman, and Goran Bašić, from the Center for Research of Ethnicity. After the introductory interventions, Ivan Bošnjak, the State Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, and Emil Lulić, the representative of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority, addressed the audience.

The round table was organized as a part of the project implemented by the Center for Research of Ethnicity, the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government with the objective to identify proposals for sustainable solutions for improving the representation of national minorities in the public sector.

Goran Bašić pointed to the problem of social integration of national minorities. Despite the fact that the Constitution and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities have guaranteed the right of



national minorities to adequate representation in recruitment in the public services, this right is not fully implemented.

International organizations, experts and minority self-governments point out that, apart from the work of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and certain local self-governments, the proper representation of minorities is not observed in the public authorities' employment practices. This is one of the obstacles to the integration of minorities and social stability.

As an expression of a meaningful employment of members of national minorities, which does not represent a mere satisfaction of a mathematical form, reflected in the proportionality of the number of employees, the Ombudsman recognizes, above all, the need and urgency of engaging members of particularly vulnerable social groups, whose sensitivity stems from the knowledge of the milieu they come from and

also from adequate education, and they can qualitatively improve the work of bodies with specific competencies. To this end, as of March 1, 2018, the Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman, as an independent body that aims to protect and promote human and minority rights, in cooperation with the Roma Education Fund from Belgrade, hired a law graduate who is a member of the Roma national minority for six months work in the institution, with the possibility of extension of the employment.

In addition to the aforementioned, the meeting was attended by representatives of the Hungarian and Roma National Councils, the Croatian National Council, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Administration, Regulations and National Minorities - National Communities, the association of local ombudsmen of Serbia, the representative of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, and the Assistant Mayor of the Municipality of Šid.



Bulgarian National Holiday Marked

Photo: www.nadlanu.com

By a formal reception at the Metropol Hotel in Belgrade, the Bulgarians celebrated their national holiday, March 3, the day they were freed from the Ottoman slavery.

The ceremony was organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Belgrade.

His Excellency, Ambassador Radko Vlajkov, began the speech with a story about Martenitsa, which Bulgaria, brought into the European family of nations and cultures together with the Cyrillic script.

Martenitsa is a small decoration, made of white and red yarn worn from the first to the last day of March.

The festival is named after "Baba Marta", which, according to tradition, is a character from the folklore of eastern Serbia, Bulgaria and part of Macedonia, welcomed by the forthcoming spring. The month of March, according to the Shopski and Bulgarian folklore, marks the beginning of the spring. It is celebrated on March 1st and represents a traditional holiday related to the departure

of winter and a welcome to spring, Vlajkov said.

The Ambassador pointed out that Bulgaria, as the Presidency of the Union, managed to create the necessary energy for the continuous contact of the leaders of the candidate countries with the EU leaders.

The culmination of the Bulgarian presidency and the striving for the strongest ties possible between the Western Balkans and

importance of the moment, and the hope that the reforms will be implemented, which is, above all, in the interest of the Serbian people, not Brussels.

He also said that the leaders of Serbia and Bulgaria talked more times over the last year than in the past six or seven years, and that it is very important that there were no problems from the past, but plans for a common future in the foreground of these talks.



"There was never a better political atmosphere in the history of Serbian-Bulgarian relations," Radko Vlajkov said.

As a particularly important area in which progress has been made, Vlajkov emphasized the position of the Bulgarian national minority in Serbia, noting that he wants

the EU, as Vlajkov announced, will take place in Sofia on May 17, when the summit of the representatives of the Balkan countries and the highest representatives of the EU will come about for the first time after 2003.

Vlajkov also expressed his firm belief that the Serbian political elite understands the

to believe that prejudice and hate speech towards Bulgaria and the Bulgarian national minority, which existed for over a century, is a definitive past.

The national holiday was marked by ceremonies in Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad, where members of the Bulgarian community live in Serbia.

Russian Community

The "Window to Russia" Program on RNS3

Source: RTV

From March 5, 2018, on the Third Radio Novi Sad Program, a new radio show in the Russian language "Window to Russia" will be broadcast every Monday from 21:30 to 22:00.

In light of the fact that there is a large number of Russians and their descendants in Serbia and in Vojvodina, the initial intention of the Radio Television of Vojvodina was to design a radio program intended for this population as well as for the public as a whole.



"The goals and tasks that we wanted to achieve are the preservation of Russian language and culture, objective information about the current events in Russia, in the field of culture, society and economy, about activities related to Russian cultural events in Serbia and Europe, as well as the historical heritage of Russia and the popularization of the Russian language" the RTV statement said.

A New EU Project to Strengthen Roma Inclusion

Source: EU Info Center

Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Mateja Norčič Štamcar, said that the EU will fund a new project in Serbia that aims at empowerment of local communities for the inclusion of Roma. The value of the project is EUR four million and it will last for three years.

At the conference on the occasion of the launch of the project "EU Support to Roma Inclusion - Empowering Local Communities for the Inclusion of Roma", Norčič Štamcar said that the Roma are the largest European minority, which is most discriminated and marginalized.

She stated that issues of inclusion and the position of Roma are some of the key conditions in negotiating Chapters 19 - regarding social policy and employment, and 23 - judiciary and basic rights.

According to Norčič Štamcar, the EU invested EUR 11.4 million in projects concerning the position and inclusion of the Roma community, and is ready to approve another EUR 20 million for future projects.

The Union is a partner to the Government of Serbia in this important issue of improving the position of the Roma community, she said, adding that the cooperation with the local self-governments is very good in collaboration with the Standing Conference

of Towns and Municipalities.

In some past projects, Norčič Štamcar reminded, the number of Roma community members registered in the registries increased, and 1,000 scholarships for continuing secondary education were given.

State Secretary at the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs Stana Božović said that, according to the 2011 census, Roma account for 2.1

and the number will be increased to 60 in accordance with the needs of municipalities, she announced.

The Deputy President of the National Council of the Roma National Community, Duško Jovanović, assessed that the Roma issue is important not only for Serbia, but also for Europe, and that the Roma do not leave Serbia because of human rights violations, but for economic reasons.

There are 600 illegal, unhygienic settlements in Serbia, Jovanović said and assessed that this project is good, but that the inclusion of Roma should be the job of the state.

Secretary General of the SCTM, Đorđe Staničić, said that this organization is a partner in the implementation of the program financed by IPA 2016.

He said that the program has three components: improvement of local mechanisms, support to implementation of measures for Roma inclusion (grant program) and support in legalization of housing units, development of urban plans, and documentation for substandard Roma settlements.

The budget of the Program is EUR 4.2 million, and EUR two million have been approved for the grant part of the program, Staničić said.



percent of the population and that they are young people.

Recalling the results of past projects, Božović noted that employment was one of the biggest problems and that there were 26,456 unemployed Roma or 4.3% of the total unemployed on the unemployment register.

The network of Roma coordinators was established in 47 local self-governments,



The Government of the Republic of Serbia Actively Engaged on Further Enhancement of the Position of the Hungarian National Minority

Source: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs

Uhe Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Zoran Djordjević, met with the Speaker of the AP Vojvodina Assembly and the President of the Union of Vojvodina Hungarians, Istvan Pasztor on March 14, and stressed that Serbia's relations with members of the Hungarian national minority are at a high level and that the Government of the Republic of Serbia is actively working on their further improvement.

Minister Djordjević said that the Government of Serbia is committed to good neighbourly policies towards all countries in the region and that its constant work on improving the status of minority communities in the territory of Serbia is an example that all countries can see.

"The Government of Serbia wants all citizens of Serbia, regardless of their nationality, to feel safe and secure. The cooperation between Hungary and Serbia is positive and both countries are actively working both in the interests of the

Hungarian community living in Serbia and in the interests of the Serbian community in Hungary," the Minister said.

The President of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, Istvan Pasztor, extended his appreciation to the Minister for his reception and said that members of the Hungarian community, thanks to the policy led by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, feel respected and completely safe in this country, which can only be maintained by constant joint engagement.

RTV Promoted a Book of Fairy Tales in the Hungarian Language

Source: RTV

At the Novi Sad Fair, the Radio Television of Vojvodina presented a book of fairy tales in the Hungarian language "Closet Residents" by Monika Čik with the CD of the same series of radio tales. A series of twenty sequences was produced by the Drama Program of the Radio Television of Vojvodina, with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Information. It is broadcast every Thursday from 16:35 on the second program of the Radio Novi Sad. The book with the CD was published by the Publishing

Institute "Forum" from Novi Sad.

In addition to the author, Edit Lakner, the director of the RTV Drama Program, and Kinga Shagi Varga, representative of the publisher "Forum", took part in the book promotion.

Lakner talked about a radio drama program in the Hungarian language, but also about the work on the production of the series made by dramatization of the fairy tales by Monika Čik, while Shagi Varga emphasized the importance of literature for children. The young

writer from Subotica, the author of dozens of prose and poetry books for children and adults, discovered how the fairy tales of the "Closet Residents" were created, but also how important it is for children and adults to hear these fairy tales, and not only to read them.

During the promotion, visitors to the fair, as well as listeners, could listen to the insights from the series, which was broadcast live on the second RNS program. The program host was Laslo Patoc, a journalist of the Radio Novi Sad.

Joint Project of the Hungarian National Minority Council and the "Pető András" Faculty from Budapest

Source: vajma.info

Cooperation of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority in Serbia and the Faculty of "Pető András" of the Semmelweis University in Budapest has entered a new phase, thanks to which it is planned to launch a program of specialized education for the development of educators and therapists of children with disabilities.

Attila Perpauer, President of the Commission for the Education of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority, reminded the attendees at the press conference held in Senta

on March 6th, that cooperation with the "Pető András" Faculty started in 2015. During the past three years, the situation on the grounds has been mapped, on that basis of which, the first intensive three-week training course on the methods for educators, which can significantly contribute to helping people with injuries of the central nervous system, was held.

Another course is currently under way in Senta with the participation of 35 students. At the same time, systematic examinations for children with developmental disorders are continuously organized for interested

families from all over Vojvodina.

Acting Dean of the "Pető András" Faculty, Dr. Andrea Zebe pointed out that with the support of the Government of Hungary and the "Bethlen Gábor Foundation" a joint program with the Hungarian National Minority Council has been implemented, which has so far included about 150 children and around 30 adults. Since last year, the project has included an exercise room for attendants of the Special Educators Course, so-called conductors, who will later be able to use these specialized methods with children with developmental disabilities.

Mutual Commitment to Higher Education Confirmed

Source: BuPress

The signing ceremony for the Cooperation Agreement between the Faculty of Economics in Subotica and the Faculty of Economics in Tetovo, which facilitates continuation of the engagement of professors from Tetovo and the teaching of the Albanian language classes in Bujanovac was attended by the professors and deans of these higher education institutions, Aleksandar Grubor and Raman Ismaili, the Bujanovac Mayor, Shaip Kamberi, Deputy Director of the Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medvedja, Jelena Čolić, OSCE Head of Office in Bujanovac, Dakomo Bosisio, and President of the National Council of the Albanian National Minority, Shukri Ymeri.

The Dean of the Faculty of Economics in Subotica, Professor Aleksandar Grubor, expressed his great satisfaction over the fact that all those who attended the signing



of this agreement were the immediate "culprits" for the existence of the Faculty's department in Bujanovac and its functioning for 7 years, with classes held both in Serbian and Albanian.

"This agreement is only a continuation of cooperation with the Faculty of Economics in Tetovo and confirms the com-

mitment to our cooperation and the successful realization of higher education in the coming years," Professor Grubor emphasized.

During the seven-year existence of the Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics in Bujanovac, a total of 94 students graduated.

Bosniak Community

Ambassadors of Norway and Turkey Visited BNV

Source: BNV

On March 1, the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Norway, Arne Sannes Bjornstad, and the Republic of Turkey, Tanju Bilgiç, with associates, visited the Bosniak National Council

The President of the Council, Dr Sulejman Ugljanin welcomed the guests and informed them of the challenges that Bosniaks in Serbia are facing, especially with regard to their participation in the drafting of minority laws, amendments to the Serbian Constitution and the implementation of the Action Plan for Minorities.

The President of the Council also expressed the need to hold an urgent meeting of representatives of the Bosniak National Council with the newly arrived Head of the EU Del-



egation to Serbia, Ambassador Sem Fabrizi.

The interlocutors in the meeting also discussed possibilities for infrastructure and economic development of Sandzak, as well as financial support to such projects by

the Governments of Norway and Turkey.

Ambassador of Norway, Arne Sannes Bjornstad stressed that the joint structural fund of the European Union and the Kingdom of Norway will support development projects in Sandzak.

Speaking about economic cooperation between Serbia and Turkey, Ambassador Tanju Bilgiç particularly mentioned the activities on the construction of the Belgrade-Sarajevo highway, the regional roads in Sandzak and the agreed export of meat from Sandzak to Turkey.

The ambassadors emphasized that they will work together to improve the overall situation in Sandzak in the future.

Romanian Holiday in Honour of Spring

Source: RTS

Un Vladimirovac near Alibunar, the 5th Festival of Folk Traditions and Marcishor was held. Marcishor is a traditional Romanian holiday celebrated in early March, in honour of the arrival of the spring.

Romanians who live in Vladimirovac launched this festival a few years ago in order to restore the old national tradition of celebrating Marcishor, the arrival spring. Elementary schools with the Romanian language classes and associations presented their costumes, handcrafts and Marcishor pins.

Loreana Balan from Uzdin explains that Marcishor is made of white and red thread and is adorned with something, for example, with a flower. The custom dates from the time of ancient Rome, and symbolizes friendship, connection, tolerance.

"At the beginning of the first month, the Romans gave their women gifts for the 1st of March in their year, which lasted ten months. This custom was inherited by the



Romanians," Professor Traian Keta says.

Georgi Dinu, the Consul General of Romania in Vršac says:

"In December last year Marcishor was registered in the UNESCO's list of non-material assets. In addition to Romania, Macedonia, Moldova and Bulgaria also participated in the initiative."

National tradition, songs and dances from Romania were also presented by guests from Timisoara and Sanpetru Mare.

Marijana Popescu from Timisoara says:

"We came with students from the fifth to the twelfth grade of the Art School. We will show the national costume, customs, and fine arts of our region.

In Vladimirovac, where Romanians constitute 40% of the population, young generations preserve their language and customs through such events, too.



Czech Community

Activities Depend on Finances

Source: Czech Word Belgrade

On February 25, 2018, the Czech Word Belgrade (ČBB) held a regular annual assembly in its premises at the Czech Center in Belgrade, where members elected the new leadership of the Association.

Milan Fürst was re-appointed as the head of the Association, and the newly elected deputy president of the Association is Denisa Djordjevic. Also, members of the Management and Supervisory Boards were elected.

The Assembly voted on the annual report on the work and financing of associations, as well as the plan for 2018.

The plan is to carry on regular activities, continue the work of the Czech Theatre, which was re-established in 2017, continue the Czech language course, and implement the activities envisaged by the



projects for which the funds were received. Provided that funds have been allocated for these purposes, the members of the Assembly have authorized the Steering Committee to provide financial and other assistance to Czechs living in Novi Sad for the possible establishment of their association.

The attendees paid most attention to the

news about inability to use the premises that the association is entitled to, which also brings a risk of a litigation the association does not have sufficient financial resources for. Members of the association are urged to provide voluntary contributions for administrative and legal expenses so that the association can defend its right to use premises in the Czech Center in Belgrade.

28th Festival of Ruthenian Folk Songs "Rose Garden" Held

Source: RTV

Photo: Ruthenian letter

On March 4th, the Festival of the Ruthenian Folk Songs "Rose Garden" was held at the M Radio of the Radio Television of Vojvodina, where 16 new folk compositions were performed.

Members of the expert jury composed of Ljiljana Barna Nikitović, Olena Puškaš, Olena Plančak Sakač and Snežana Janjušević evaluated and decided which authors of compositions, songwriters, arrangers and interpreters would receive the award.



"You" by Mihail Budinski, who wrote the lyrics with his wife Tatian, and also performed the song.

The best lyrics award was given to Ahneta Timko Mudri, for the song "Love Is Calling Us", and, for the same song, the award for the best arrangement went to Miron Sivc. The expert jury awarded Ana Rimar for the best interpretation, for the song "Meeting", lyrics by Dušanka Kostić, composed by Danijela Hornjak. The author of the arrangement is Bogdan Rankovic.

According to the audience, the most beautiful composition was "Just for



The official part of the Festival was devoted to Mihailo Zazuljak, the author of numerous compositions, who was also a long-time collaborator of the festival.

This year's festival was opened by the Deputy Director General of the Radio Television of Vojvodina, Jozef Klem, the producer of the festival night was Zoran Drakula, and Edvin Baloš was in charge of the good sound and tone recordings. Music editors of the festival were Ahneta Timko Mudri and Tatjana Kolesar Gvojić.

For the best composition, the jury declared the song "Love is Calling Us" by composer Miron Sivc, lyrics by Ahnete Timko Mudri, which was sung by Alexei Sivch.

The second prize was given to the song "You Left" by composer Ljubomir Zahorjansky, performed by Tanita Hodak. The third prize was won by "My Dear", with music, lyrics and arrangement written by Jovan M. Jovanović, which was interpreted by Jovgen Nađ.



The Province Agrees With the Establishment of the Educational Center in Subotica

Source: Croatian Word

Uhe Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Governance and National Minorities - National Communities granted a tentative consent and logistic support for the establishment of an educational center in Subotica. This was announced at the meeting of the Provincial Secretary, Mihály Nyilas, and his associates with the delegation of the Croatian National Council composed of: Adviser to the President of the Croatian Development Fund for Development Projects Jasna Vojnić, President of the Executive Committee of the Croatian National Council, Darko Sarić Lukendić, and the Vice-President of the Committee for the Education of the Croatian National Council, Margaret Ursal, held on Wednesday, February 28th.

As the school center was the main and the only topic, the following steps were agreed in the meeting, including the preparation of legal acts necessary for its establishment.



The meeting was also attended by State Secretary in the Ministry of Science, Education and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, Annamária Vicsek,

who, after holding the last session of the Intergovernmental Mixed Committee, was involved in solving open issues related to the Croatian national minority.

Croatian Ambassador Visits RTV

Source: RTV

On March 7, the Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia to Belgrade, Gordan Bakota, visited the Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV) and the RTV Croatian Desk and pointed out the importance of bilateral relations between Serbia and Croatia, and the position of minorities in the two countries.

Information in the minority language is an important aspect of the relationship between Serbia and Croatia, which was also discussed at the recent meetings of the two presidents, the Croatian Ambassador said.

He also welcomed the continuation of talks between Belgrade and Zagreb, assessing it as a major step forward in current relations.

"This dialogue actually means intensifying the communication and conversation at the highest level, which is very important be-



cause it has enabled us to reactivate a number of working groups for open issues. It is quite certain that these relations are still complex, but overall Serbian-Croatian relations have gained a new dynamic. I think that there is a good political will to resolve open issues in a short period, on both sides, and raise the level of those rights that are guaranteed," Bakota said.

In the relations between the two countries, the minority communities, their

position and exercised rights, and the implementation of agreements on protection of the same, are of particular importance, especially when the foreign policy is in question.

"For Croatia, the issue of minorities is something that can be a strong link in relations between the two countries. As Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković said, the status of the Croatian minority is a priority of the Government in relations with Serbia," Bakota said, adding that he believes that it is also as important for Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić when it comes to the Serb minority in Croatia.

Bakota is the first ambassador of the Republic of Croatia who visited the Croatian Desk at the Radio Television of Vojvodina since it had been formed.



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