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april 2018



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HIGHLIGHTS



Serbia Has Good Solutions in the Field of Minority Rights Protection

State Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self Government of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ivan Bošnjak, and the Consul General of Romania in Serbia, Oliver Marius Dilof, chaired the meeting of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission for the Promotion of Minorities in Zaječar on March 29. Bošnjak assessed that Serbia has a good legal framework in the field of the protection of the rights of national minorities, but also noted that a lot has to be done in many fields.



Specific Steps For Provision of Missing Textbooks

Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development Mladen Šarčević and State Secretary Anamarija Viček met with the delegation of national councils of national minorities and on that occasion they agreed on specific steps for issuing textbooks in the languages of national minorities for the first and fifth grade of elementary schools, as well as for secondary schools.



Culture and Language as Pillars for Identity Preservation

The International Conference "Language - Culture - Identity" was organized by the Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman in the Grand Hall of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina on April 12-13. Special emphasis was put on the use of minority languages in the judiciary and administration, as well as the activities of national councils in preserving national identity.



Subotica Synagogue - the Second Largest Synagogue in Europe - Opened

On March 26th, a reconstructed synagogue was opened in Subotica. It was officially opened by Aleksandar Vučić, the President of Serbia, and Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary. At the opening of the renovated Subotica Synagogue, Aleksandar Vučić especially thanked Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, without whose assistance, as he said, there would be no such "a beautiful sacral object, the magnificence of which is unreal".

EDITORIAL 45

New Decisions, New Dilemmas

This year, members of national minorities expect elections for national minority councils. Elections should be preceded by the adoption of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils. As it is well known, round tables that were part of the public consultations on the working version of the text of the draft law were held last year, from November 29th to December 18th. We recall that representatives of the national minorities were dissatisfied with the working text of the Draft, because, as they said, the authorities did not take into account their recommendations and remarks.

The experts, as well as all other citizens, have another opportunity to get acquainted with the improved text of the Draft and provide suggestions, suggestions, opinions in public hearings organized by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government from March 29 to April 18.

There is no doubt that the draft law brings many changes. And we will not be mistaken if we say that a few of the proposed new solutions have greatly surprised the current members of the national minority councils, who have ambitions to keep this membership in the future, too, and who are, at the same time, active in certain political parties. Namely, one of the new provisions of the Draft Law stipulates that a member of a national council can not be a member of a governing body of a political party, that he/she cannot be a director or a member of a governing body of an institution, company or other organization founded by a national council - or if the founding rights have been transferred to the council, an appointed person or a manager in a state administration body, a provincial administration body, or a body of a local self-government unit, which, within its competencies, decides on issues concerning the work of national councils. It is inevitable to ask who will decide (or just sit and occasionally raise their hand) on the issues of interest to national minorities in the next convening of national councils, if we know that the vast majority of current national minority councils members already hold other functions. Whether these individuals will prefer to keep their positions or interests of the national minority they belong to will prevail will become clearer after the elections.

30 different national minorities live in Serbia



Poorly Applicable Laws and Policies

Being a member of a minority and being a woman are the categories that, according to experts, are the most vulnerable to discrimination. In the case of women of the Roma national minority, this discrimination is much higher. The discrimination against members of the Roma national minority exists on multiple levels, but this does not mean that they are not fighting against it. A number of associations have been established that try to help members of their community, raise the level of education, and general awareness of the importance of fighting for their rights. These issues are also focus of work of the Roma Association Novi Bečej, which is headed by Danica Jovanović.



When was the association founded and what are the primary goals of the association?

Roma Association Novi Bečej was established in 1999 with the aim of improving the position of Roma women and children. We initially started working on education, and then we continued to deal with the fight against violence against women and, in general, with women's human rights. Both the Roma Association Novi Bečej and the Roma Women's Network deal with human rights of Roma women.

Can you give us more details about the "It Is Too Early" Project, which focuses on early marriages that are part of the Roma tradition? What is the problem that young Roma women face, do they suffer family and sexual violence? Are you encountering any hostility in the community for dealing with this taboo topic that is seldom talked about in public?

We, activists, insist that this is not part of the Roma tradition. "It Is Too Early" is the name of the campaign that we have run for three years with the support of the United Nations. This project aims to start more intensive work on this topic. And when we talk about early marriages, we have to say that a large number of Roma women have dropped out of school, consequently they cannot get any employment, and all this leads to early marriages and pregnancies at the age of 13, 14, and 15, which is really a violation of every basic human right of the child.

In cooperation with the association "Rromnjako Ilo" ("Heart of A Roma Woman"), during 2016 and 2017 you organized workshops for Roma women who had got married as young teenagers. What was the most difficult to talk about? Have you managed to link sexual abuse with early arranged marriages?

Of course. We even managed to publish a book "We Are Opposed to the Custom, We Love Ourselves", together with the Roma Women's Network and feminist psychologist, Lepa Mladjenovic. We, activists, believe that a juvenile marriage is a doorway to sexual abuse, because if you force a girl who is 13, 14 or 15 years old into a relationship, that leads to a sexual abuse. And that is why we are struggling to prevent this from happening. Now, with this campaign, we have drawn public attention to this important issue, especially when it comes to the responsibility of the institutions. All of these institutions refer to the customary law, they say that these are the customs of the Roma. These are not the Roma customs! A 12-year old Roma girl who has suddenly stopped attending the school classes is the same as any other girl who is not Roma, so we need start asking ourselves where the girl who did not come to school today is and what has happened to her.

How much have the relevant institutions been involved in tackling the aforementioned problem?

This is exactly what my point is! There are different protocols, there are various strategies and policies that we have created, but they are not applied in practice. The point that I am trying to make is that the institutions act – of fail to act – in line with the customary law. If a 13-year-old Roma girl gets married, they sometimes even go to these weddings. And nobody reacts to the fact that the girl did not come to school, nor the Center for Social Work that deals with the family, nor the Health Center that should deal with the reproductive health of the girl, nor the police that should act according to the law. We have great laws and policies that we have created ourselves through activism, through the feminist movement of which we are members, but somehow they are not implemented in real life.

According to the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1924 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, a child must be protected from all forms of exploitation and violence. How practical is the implementation of these declarations? Do you have the help of the state and European institutions in cases of violation of the rights of the child?

I would add that we also have the Istanbul Convention ratified by the Republic of Serbia, which clearly calls a halt to juvenile marriages and violence against women. Regrettably, in fact, this Convention is not applied. Women's organizations, along with us, insist on its implementation and I, once again, appeal to the state of Serbia to apply in practice what it has committed to. The state and various non-governmental organizations have worked on this issue and have prepared numerous reports. As we are part of these non-governmental organizations through the Roma Women's Network, we have also prepared such a report, on the basis of which recommendations were received from the Committee clearly stating that access to justice for Roma women needs to be improved, that the situation of a Roma woman who comes to a shelter should also be improved. Our data indicate that Roma women do not have access to shelters, although we should have the same rights as other citizens of Serbia.

It is known that racism is fostered by certain right-wing groups, but it is less known that this segregation can also be encountered in some actions of individuals from the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church?

There is racism, discrimination, nationalism in some structures of the Serbian Orthodox

Church, and I felt it personally on my skin when the priest refused to give the Christian religious service at the funeral of my mother. This is also felt by other Roma men and Roma women in Novi Bečej. I would like to point out to the huge racism in this regard. I think that the basic dignity of every human being is to live and, when they die, to be buried with the Christian funeral service. This is a basic human right, and if you can not achieve it with the Serbian Orthodox Church, then I ask myself, as a believer, why am I discriminated against? This cannot stop me from believing, I am still a Christian, I am still a believer. This is really important

There are different protocols, there are various strategies and policies that we have created, but they are not applied in practice. The point that I am trying to make is that the institutions act – of fail to act – in line with the customary law. If a 13-year-old Roma girl gets married, they sometimes even go to this wedding. And nobody responds to the fact that the girl did not come to school, nor the Center for Social Work that deals with the family, nor the Health Center that should deal with the reproductive health of the girl, nor the police that should act according to the law.

for Roma men and Roma women, but it is also important that the Church does not discriminate its believers and does not use double standards for Roma men and Roma women and other national minorities.

In the territory of Vojvodina, you have established a network of SOS phones to support women who have suffered violence. What is the purpose of this network, to whom is it intended, what kind of service does it provide? In which minority languages can users contact you for help?

It is a unique number that all women residing in the territory of Vojvodina can call. The number is 0800 10 10 10 and it is completely free. Women can ask for and receive help in the Roma, Romanian and Hungarian languages and this is the only SOS in Serbia

that provides such assistance - legal assistance, emotional and psychological support, representation in courts. This is the access to justice that I have talked about, because, if I am a Roma woman and I have a language barrier, I need someone to help me in the court, and there are very few Roma language court interpreters in Vojvodina. As a consequence, I am deprived of the right to speak in my native language, and I do not fully understand the majority language and the legal terminology. This phone is available to women in five cities in Vojvodina.

You have personally gone down this path, from a juvenile marriage to getting the university degree and establishing an association, which, through activism, empowers Roma women and women from other minority communities to live without violence. Do you use your own personal example to reach women who appeal for help to you?

I celebrated my 14th birthday in the family I was forced to marry into. I will turn the order of steps you mentioned in your question. First I founded a non-governmental association, became an activist, then finished high school, graduated from the university, now I am in postgraduate studies and, for me, the activism played a life-changing role. The activism has been promoted for twenty years and the Roma women have been encouraged to contribute to the improvement of their position. The only way they can do is if they engage in the work of a non-governmental organization, if they put themes that are of interest to them on the table and speak about these issues at different workshops. It is critical that they educate themselves and remain in the school system, as well as to have the support to strengthen themselves and have their choices.

What is the response you are getting at this time?

Very good. We are doing a great work in Banat, we have expanded activism, included many new girls. There were two activist schools last year and we will continue this work this year as well, focusing on young girls who may have dropped out of the school system, but are slowly returning, either as full time pupils and students, or as I did, by taking exams and graduating from the secondary school as part time students. And I would like to thank to Professor Svenka Savić and to my friends who supported me, they have given me the strength to be here where I am today. And, certainly, mine is not an isolated case, there are more Roma women who have had the same experience as I did and we have jointly set a positive example for others in our community.

Launch of the Public Debate on the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities

Source: Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government

The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Government has announced the beginning of a public debate on the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities with the aim of collecting comments and suggestions that will further improve the existing legal framework. The draft law was prepared during public consultations, in an inclusive and transparent process, with the support of the OSCE Mission in Serbia and the active participation of national councils of national minorities.

Minister Branko Ružić reminded on this

occasion that the improvement of this Law is part of the obligations envisaged by the Action plan for Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights - and the Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities.

"Apart from harmonizing the Law with the Decision of the Constitutional Court of January 2014, our aim is to improve this law in order to clarify the powers of national councils of national minorities, reduce excessive politicization, ensure more transparent financing of activities of national councils of national minorities, and eliminate other possible shortcomings that have been noticed

in practice," Ružić said.

The Minister invited the experts, the non-governmental sector and all interested parties to take an active part in the consultations and give constructive suggestions in order to reach the best solutions in the open discussion, which will even better regulate this area and this part of the system.

The public debate on the Draft Law will last until April 18, 2018, after which the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government will analyze all the remarks and suggestions of the participants in the public debate.

Specific Steps for Provision of Missing Textbooks

Photo: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development Mladen Šarčević, State Secretary Anamarija Viček, Assistant Primary Education Vesna Nedeljković, as well as associates Đurđica Ergić and Snežana Vuković received a delegation of national councils of national minorities on March 23.

On behalf of the delegation, Svetlana Zolnjanova, the Coordinator of the Committee for Education of the National Council of the Slovak National Minority, stressed the need for the publication of new textbooks in the languages of national minorities for the first and fifth grade of elementary schools, as well as for secondary schools. Considering that the meeting was attended by the representatives of the Textbooks Publishing Institute, led by the Director General, Dragoljub Kojičić, the participants analyzed in detail the possibility of signing an annex to the Memorandum on the Publication of Textbooks for Minorities with Education in their Mother Tongue.

Dragana Marinković, a representative of the Institute for the Advance-

ment of Education, presented the dynamics of writing programs in mother tongue and language with elements of national culture for elementary schools and grammar schools within the framework of the reform, as well as the role of national minority councils in this process.

It was noted in the meeting that, by the end of April, the Catalogue of Approved Textbooks will be published, from which the missing textbooks for the first and fifth grades will be selected, which will then be translated into the minority languages, and that, by the May 15, the basis for signing a new agreement between the Ministry, and the Textbooks Institute will be prepared, which will ensure



the publication of textbooks for the first and fifth grade in all languages.

The second part of the meeting was devoted to the members of the national minorities who study languages with elements of national culture as an elective subject. It was agreed that the Ministry will also sign a Memorandum on the publication of textbooks with these national minority councils. The interlocutors also analyzed the possibility of polling students in schools, and the experiences from the field work. It was agreed that the Ministry will send schools polling leaflets about the study of mother tongue with elements of national culture, about which the national councils will be timely informed.



Inclusion of Roma Among the Priorities of the Government

Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia



On the occasion of the World Roma Day, the Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Suzana Paunović, pointed out that the previous year marked the continuity in the implementation of activities in the field of inclusion of Roma men and Roma women, both at the national level and in local self-government units where members of the Roma national minority live.

As she said, the relevant ministries, cities and municipalities and civil society organizations, the National Council of the Roma National Minority, as well as the representatives of the Roma community have been jointly engaged in implementation of the activities envisaged by the Government Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Roma Women. Paunović noted that EUR 6,722,481 was allocated for the implementation of this two-year plan by 2018; of this amount, 70 percent was provided from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, whereas 30 percent was secured from the donors and other EU funds.

Bearing in mind that the units of local self-government are recognized by the Strategy as the key bearers of the highest number of activities in the field of Roma inclusion, funds are provided within the IPA program to support local

self-governments for strengthening of their institutional capacities.

Also, additional support was provided for the preparation of local action plans in the area of social inclusion of Roma men and Roma women, the prepara-



tion of project documentation for the purpose of infrastructure improvement of their living conditions, as well as support to the civil sector.

As part of the IPA 2014 program, support is foreseen for expanding the engagement of mobile Roma inclusion teams in another 20 local self-government units, bringing the number of local self-government units with mechanisms for Roma inclusion to 70.

Also, in order to solve the most complex housing and infrastructure issues in Roma settlements, the implementation of the largest infrastructure EU project was launched in June 2017, which aims at improving the living conditions of Roma in sub-standard settlements in 13 cities and municipalities in Serbia.

Paunović stated that the activities undertaken by the state in the area of improvement of the position of Roma men and Roma women also contribute to the fulfillment of obligations undertaken by the Action Plan for Chapter 23 in Serbia's accession to the Union, and great contribution was also made to meeting the operational conclusions of the seminars jointly organized by the Government of Serbia and the EU.

She recalled that last year the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, before which the Serbian delegation presented a periodic report, commended the efforts our country had made to improve the status of all national minorities, including the most vulnerable Roma national minority.

As part of the Universal Periodic Review, which our country passed at the beginning of this year before the most important body of the UN in the field of human rights, Serbia accepted all the recommendations of the UN member states in the field of Roma inclusion.

Sixty Million Dinars for Activities of National Minority Councils in 2018

Source: Provincial Government

On March 21, the Prime Minister of the Provincial Government, Igor Mirović, awarded contracts worth RSD 60.1 million for the co-financing of the activities of 15 national councils of national minorities with registered headquarters in the territory of Vojvodina.

In 2018, 47.1 million dinars were allocated for co-financing of regular activities of the national councils, while 13 million dinars were allocated for development activities.

Prime Minister Mirović emphasized that, when we talk about national minorities, we are talking about all of us, about the AP Vojvodina and Serbia, about the unity and common problems and the efforts to solve these problems. He added that it is therefore one of the most important tasks for the Provincial Government to support the work of national councils of national minorities.

"That is why, in the period from 2016 to the present day, we have continuously increased the amount of funds for the activities of national councils," Mirović said. He added that, in 2018, after the compe-



tion for the support to the activities of national councils, the funds increased by 5% and expressed the belief that in the future it will grow even further.

Deputy Prime Minister of the Provincial Government and Provincial Secretary for Education, Regulations, Administration and

National Minorities - National Communities, Mihalj Njilas, emphasized that the practice of allocating funds for the activities of national councils was a confirmation of the commitment of the Provincial Government to the preservation and promotion of the status of national communities in Vojvodina.

"The confirmation of this is also the commitment of the line ministry in promoting and improving minority rights through numerous annual competitions, as well as active participation in the monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities, i.e. participation in the process of passing amendments to the laws that are of exceptional importance for a minority rights corps," DPM Njilash said.

The funds were allocated to the national councils of the Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Roma, Montenegrin, Bunjevac, Macedonian, Ukrainian, German, Czech, Egyptian, Ashkali and Greek national minorities.

The Ambassador of the European Union Sem Fabrizi Meets with the National Minorities Councils

Source: Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia
Photo: Roma National Council

Ambassador of the European Union, H. E. Sem Fabrizi, held an introductory meeting with the representatives of the 21 National Councils of National Minorities of Serbia in the Delegation of the European Union. This introductory meeting was aimed at exchanging views in regard to the respect and protection of minority rights.

The Ambassador of the European Union, Sam Fabrizi emphasized that respect for minority rights is one of the fundamental principles of the Eu-



ropean Union. The opportunity to meet with representatives of national minorities of Serbia has contributed to a useful review of the current situation, also in the context of Serbia's accession to the European Union. This was also an opportunity to encourage all councils of national minorities to participate

actively in the implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Rights of National Minorities, as this represents an essential element of improving the position of national minorities.

The representatives of national minorities expressed both a wide spectrum of views and common positions on many issues. Ambassador Fabrizi encouraged the representatives of national minorities to work together on the implementation of the Action Plan and to act united on the points of common interests.

Serbia Has Good Solutions in the Field of Protection of Minority Rights

Source: Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government

State Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ivan Bošnjak, and the Consul General of Romania in Serbia, Oliver Marius Dilof, co-chaired the meeting of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission for the Promotion of Position of National Minorities on March 29 in Zaječar.

Bošnjak assessed that Serbia has a good legal framework in the field of the protection of the rights of national minorities, but also that a lot has to be done in many fields.

He said that at the meeting there were words about popularizing minority language learning through the education system, establishing minority editorial desks in private media at the local level, as well as supporting members of national minorities freely expressing their religious affiliation.

According to him, some issues remained open after the meeting, such as the functioning and operation of the Romanian Church in the Eastern part of Serbia, the issues of education and information in minority languages, as well



as the issue of elections for the national minority councils.

The State Secretary assessed that good bilateral relations between Romania and Serbia and the non-recognition of Kosovo-Metohija's independence will be completed with good agreements that will help Serbia in the implementation of the National Plan for the Improvement of the Position of Minorities in Serbia.

Dilof stressed that, in order to develop good cooperation with Romania's Consul General, when it comes to respecting the rights of national minorities, the economic development of these two regions should be taken into account.

The Romanian community in Serbia

and the Serb community in Romania should be the point connecting these two countries, he said, adding that a good understanding of the two communities will lead to prosperity in their bilateral relations in the future.

The head of the Zaječar Administrative District, Vladan Paunović, pointed out that this environment has always been nationally mixed, noting that according to the last 2011 census, there are 307 citizens declared as Romanians and 6 254 Vlachs living in Boljevac and Zaječar.

Participants in the discussion stressed the importance of analyzing the implementation of bilateral agreements, noting that the issue of the status and position of national minorities will be the subject of Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU.

Ambassador of Bulgaria Visits RTV

Source: RTV

The Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to Serbia, Radko Vlajkov, visited Novi Sad on March 29th, where he talked with the Mayor Miloš Vučević about the plans for establishment of brotherly relations between the towns of Novi Sad and Plovdiv. The interlocutors agreed that the Radio-Television of Vojvodina should provide support to this process.



One of the missions of the RTV is the affirmation of unity and understanding among peoples: among other things through the promotion of culture and the tradition of other nations.

In a meeting with the Bulgarian Ambassador, Radko Vlajkov, it was agreed that one of the following months on RTV will be dedicated to Bulgarian cinema, and the Ambassador supported the RTV's new project, the promotion of Danube countries

and cities on the banks of the Danube.

"The final preparations for establishment of the brotherly relations of Novi Sad and Plovdiv are in progress, and we discussed the support of RTV in this process and cooperation with the TV center in Plovdiv," Vlajkov said.

The Ambassador also handed over the official letter of the Town of Plovdiv to the Mayor of Novi Sad, Miloš Vučević, which will serve as the basis for establishing the brotherly relations of the two cities, the two future capitals of culture. They also discussed cooperation in the field of culture, economy and education.

Culture and Language as Pillars for Preservation of Identity

On April 13-14, a two-day international conference of the Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman "Language - Culture - Identity" was organized in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina.

The conference gathered prominent linguists and translators from our country and from Hungary, Romania, Croatia and Germany, as well as representatives of national councils of national minorities who spoke for two days about the position of minority languages, their future and official use. Attention was also paid to the activities of national councils aimed at preserving identity.



new program package to be opened, which will be interesting enough to continue the debates in the Assembly next year.

The official use of language and script was the biggest challenge that had to be solved in all conferences of the National Council of the Bunjevac National Minority, the President of the Council, Suzana Kujundžić Ostojić said. "As the Bunjevac language is recognized only as a speech, and not as a language, the Bunjevac community has been denied a number of minority



Zoran Pavlović, Provincial Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman, Snežana Sedlar, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, and Dragana Milošević, Provincial Secretary for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, spoke on the first day of the conference.

"I want to emphasize that the rights and freedoms, problems and difficulties of members of national minorities are not exclusively theirs. The point is the following: If the problems of minorities are not felt by members of the majority, if they do not recognize or register them as part of their own problems, then there are no adequate opportunities for the reproduction of some basic values - such as those expressed in 1789 - freedom, rights and equality," the Provincial Ombudsman said, adding that he expects a

rights, which are recognized only for those communities that have a language in official use, Kujundžić Ostojić said. Darko Sarić Lukendić also spoke about the problem of official use of language and script on behalf of the National Council of the Croatian National Minority.

Nikola Šanta, who spoke on behalf of the National Council of the Ruthenian National Minority, focused on the problem of publishing books in minority languages from the perspective of the publisher. Accord-

ing to him, the concept of a minority culture is problematic as well. "When it comes to the cultures of national minorities, it is about preserving national and cultural identity. We are talking about something that is preserved, so it should be kept. We are not talking about something that is emerging today,

what is newborn, and culture is exactly that. When we speak about Ruthenians, Slovaks, Romanians, etc., about their cultures, to a potential Serbian consumer, speaking about these cultures implies playing and singing in folk costumes, which no one wears any more and they are part of the past. We never talk about what representatives of these cultures create now in their own language, what kind of literature and what kind of theater," Shanta pointed out, adding that the least funds are allocated for these areas of cultural activities. As an example, he noted that, in 2014, the funds for publishing in the Ruthenian language amounted to more than three million dinars, while last year only 300,000 dinars were allocated for this purpose.

The presidents and representatives of the national councils of the Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, German, Roma and Czech national minorities also had interventions during the conference and presented their problems and possible solutions for joint engagement for the benefit of all national communities.



"Ana Njemoga Kolar" Award Competition



The National Council of the Slovak National Minority has announced the seventh competition for the "Ana Njemoga Kolar" Annual Award for the best media content on the Slovak national minority in Serbia, which is granted with the aim of promoting and increasing the visibility of the existence and activities of the Slovak nationality in Serbia in media intended

for members of the majority population and other nationalities in Serbia and the countries of the region.

The prize is awarded for the best media content, dealing with any aspect of the life of a Slovak community or an individual belonging to this community in Serbia.

Media content must be published in any language other than Slovak, in print or

electronic format (radio, TV, internet).

The prize consists of a diploma and a cash amount of € 250 in dinar equivalent for the author.

The competition lasts until July 16, 2018. Works submitted for the competition must have been published or broadcast in the previous 12 months - from August 1, 2017 to July 16, 2018.

Tell Your Story

The Forum for Interculturalism, with the support of the Open Society Foundation, has launched the "Tell Your Story" project, which, according to the portal www.ispricajsvojupricu.rs, aims at bringing the feelings of members of minority communities closer to the citizens from the perspective of personal stories, perception, their understanding

of themselves in the ambience of the majority culture, therefore, their experience of the society in which they live.

"Personal stories are important because they give insight into the subjective experiences of citizens, members of minority communities and are always more truthful, more lively and more real than any "official" for-

mulations. We believe that the launch of this unique portal in our media space has provided a good way for us to get a clear insight into the other, personal side of the lives of members of minority communities, which will result in better mutual understanding, recognition of common problems and better communication," the Project Coordinator Aleksandra Djurić Bosnić said.

Subotica Synagogue - the Second Largest in Europe - Opened

Source: RTS

Photo: www.subotica.com

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban opened a reconstructed synagogue in Subotica on March 26th.



At the opening of the renovated Subotica synagogue, Aleksandar Vučić especially thanked Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, without whose assistance, he said, there would be no such "beautiful sacral object the magnificence of which is unreal".

"The synagogue, the second-largest in Europe after the one in Budapest, has had the shine it deserves restored. During the reconstruction we worked together and we joined our efforts and resources, and I therefore extend my special appreciation to Prime Minister Orban, without whose support and participation this synagogue would not shine like this," Vučić said.

As he said, not only did the works link the Jews with Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Protestants, but also to governments

together," Orban said. He emphasized that all the peoples of Europe live on the foundations of Jewish and Christian faith and that they still want to live in Europe where there is freedom of religion, nation and language.

Orban said that there are still places in the world where people are persecuted and where buildings and societies are not reconstructed, but demolished instead, and added that he is proud of the religious tradition of Europe that promotes tolerance.

The Synagogue Is Not Only a Jewish Heritage But Also a Heritage of the City of Subotica

Rabbi Isak Asiel said that the Subotica Jews built the Synagogue at the beginning of the 20th century and thus "embedded themselves in the foundations of Subotica, both in religious and in every other sense".

He said that, after the Second World War, the building "grieved and slowly aged" and that, when you entered it, it looked as if the time had stopped. Asiel said that the synagogue is no longer just a Jewish heritage but also a legacy of the City of Subotica and place for all people, which will radiate love.

"This is the heritage of Subotica, Serbia, Hungary, and Europe, and the world, and we thank the Serbian and Hungarian governments, who restored it from the foundations and created a place of gathering and love," Asiel said.

There are about 2,000 Jews living in five Jewish municipalities in Vojvodina

In Subotica today there are about 200 Jews, and besides this temple, which is the second largest Jewish temple in Europe, there is also a small, so-called "winter synagogue" in Subotica, where religious rites are held throughout the year. Before the outbreak of World War II, in the area of Vojvodina, there were as many as 76 synagogues, former President of the Jewish municipality of Novi Sad, Goran Levi, said, noting that religious ceremonies are held only in Novi Sad and Subotica. There are about 2,000 Jews living in Vojvodina today and they are organized in five Jewish municipalities - Kikinda, Sombor, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad and Subotica.

President of the Union of Jewish Municipalities of Serbia, Robert Sabadoš, told Tanjug that this is the first time since 1945 that the renovation of such a significant Jewish temple in Serbia has been done, and that this shows the Jewish community that they are an important factor in society.

"What is important is that, in this way, the Jewish community in Serbia confirms its presence here. A special relationship between the Government of Serbia and the Government of Hungary suggests that the Jewish community in this area is respected and represents one of the important factors in the society in terms of attitudes towards minorities, i.e., minority communities in Serbia," Sabadoš said.

Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban, said that this day will be remembered as the day when Central Europe showed its most beautiful face to the world – the face of cooperation and

mutual tolerance. As he said, the synagogue's shine has been restored, as the appreciation to the Jewish community for its great contribution to the development of Europe and the world.

He said that the governments of Serbia and Hungary have great respect for the Jewish people, and that the synagogue was a turn to the future in which Jews, Serbs and Hungarians live together.

"Serbs and Hungarians already live together in Subotica, but today we are sending a message that this is Europe in which we want to live - in peace and security, all



of both countries, international institutions, and they have also brought all people closer to each other ...

"I am happy that the residents of Subotica now have a new-old house more beautiful than ever before, I am happy that people from other cities will come here to admire it. This will be a cultural hub and tourists will come from all over Serbia and Europe, because such objects are rare."

Upon arrival in Subotica, the President of Serbia spoke to the citizens and representatives of the Jewish community in front of the Synagogue.

Mobile Teams for the Inclusion of Roma

Source: Office for Human and Minority Rights

A total of twenty cities and municipalities recognized the problems of the Roma population, as well as the need to address these challenges. By joining the project "Technical Assistance for Improving the Living and Housing Conditions of the Roma Population in Informal Settlements", cities and municipalities have demonstrated a high level of commitment and understanding of the importance of social inclusion of Roma men and Roma women.

Mobile teams have been recognized as an effective support model at the local level that connects key actors in the community: coordinators for Roma issues, pedagogical assistants, health mediators, representatives of the Center for Social Work and the National Employment Service. The goal of establishing mobile teams is to identify and understand the real needs of the Roma population on the ground, as well as to identify the support needed to improve their overall position, in accordance with the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Roma Women in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025.

An important part of the project is the grant scheme, which supports 11 projects at the local level in a total value of 7.55 million Euros. The initiative will provide housing solutions for over 1,000 Roma men and Roma women, and will improve infrastructure conditions for over 6,000 Roma people.

Within the framework of the project in Leskovac, on March 20 and 21, a two-day training was held with representatives of relevant institutions from Niš, Aleksinac, Vlasotinac and Vladičin Han, with the aim of establishing Mobile Roma Inclusion Teams.

Brankica Jeremić and Dragan Gračanin, specialists for social inclusion and trainers at the workshop, presented the goals

and purpose of the training, stressing that representatives of four local self-governments, out of the total number of twenty local self-governments, were involved in this training, which will include mobile teams. During the workshop, inter alia, the concept of social inclusion, the importance of inter-sectoral cooperation, and potential institutional models, which at the level of local self-governments provide a coordinated policy of social inclusion, were discussed.

It is explained that the data collected by the mobile teams will be processed and analyzed, after which the development of operational plans will be launched.



Each unit of local self-government, based on the field data, will develop its operational plan, which will be aimed at contributing to resolving identified problems, in accordance with established priorities. Representatives of local self-governments will have project support throughout the process.

On March 22-23, a workshop was held in Ždrel with representatives of relevant institutions from Požarevac, Paraćin, Bor, Zaječar and Kraljevo. Milun Jovanović, a member of the City Council of the City of Kraljevo, believes that the economic empowerment of the Roma population is very important. "It is not enough to relocate them, mechanisms should be created that will support them in employment, as well as in self-employment. For such a thing, it is certainly necessary to work on raising awareness among the Roma so that they also get involved in the process of improving their lives and take responsibility for their lives. They should properly use the opportunities

provided to them and work on the quality of their life."

The third in a series of workshops was held in Ruma on March 28 with representatives of relevant institutions from Subotica, Šabac, Ruma, Pećinci, Bačka Palanka and Beočin with the aim of forming Mobile Roma Inclusion Teams. Subotica's Roma Affairs Coordinator, Stevan Nikolić, pointed out that the project "Technical Assistance for Improving the Living and Housing Conditions of the Roma Population in Informal Settlements", gives the city of Subotica the opportunity with the help of international funds, which will also be co-financed from the

local budget, to form the mobile team, implement Roma inclusion projects and thus improve the overall status of the Roma community in Subotica. "The mobile team will help us collect and then analyze the problems and needs of the Roma community in our city. This is very im-

portant because the solutions that the local self-government now offers and those that are yet to be designed must be adequate, feasible and tailored to the needs of the Roma community," Stevan Nikolić said, adding that there are about 4000 Roma living in Subotica of different religions and descent. A part of the population is made of displaced persons from Kosovo, a part is the domicile population, a part speaks Serbian, and a part the Hungarian language.

The project "Technical Assistance for Improving the Living and Housing Conditions of the Roma Population in Informal Settlements" is one of the initiatives currently supported by the European Union with the cooperation and co-financing of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The contracting body of the project is the Ministry of Finance, and the main beneficiaries are the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure and the Office for Human and Minority Rights.

Gifts for Pupils Who Learn the Macedonian Language

Source: South Banat

Vasko Grkov, Charge d'Affaires of the Republic of Macedonia in Serbia, together with the President of the National Council of the Macedonian National Community in Serbia, Borko Veličkovski, and Zorica Mitrović, Secretary of the National Council, visited Plandište Municipality.

The guests were officially received by the Deputy Speaker of the Plandište Municipal Assembly, Vladan Mladenović, together with Miroslav Petrović, the director of the Cultural Education Center "Vuk Karadžić" and representatives of the Macedonian Association "Vardar" from Plandište, Nikol Kiprović and Boro Kostadinovski. During the conversation with the guests, the hosts presented the municipality of Plandište, noting that there are 5 different languages, including the Macedonian language, in official use in this municipality, which makes this municipality unique in the world.

The reason for the arrival of guests in the Plandište Municipality is to visit the elementary schools where pupils, from the beginning of the school year 2017/2018 year, learn the Macedonian language as an elective B course. Together with the hosts, the guests first visited the pupils at the "Dositej Obradović Elementary School" in Plandište, where the Macedonian language is taught.

From this school year, the Macedonian lan-

guage course is available at this elementary school as an elective B subject, and it is taught by language teacher Aleksandar Angelovski. In the beginning, there were 7 pupils in the course, but 3 more students joined the class subsequently.

The National Council of the Macedonian National Minority presented all pupils with a package, which included a textbook and newspaper magazines in the Macedonian language, as well as with a 5,000 dinars-worth voucher for the purchase of school supplies necessary for the study of the Macedonian language. The School Principle, Sava Divljakov, welcomed the guests at the Plandište school.

The delegation also visited Hajdučica, the elementary school "Jovan Jovanović Zmaj", where the learning of the Macedonian language began in the second half of the year. The guests were welcomed by the school principal, Miroslav Maričić with teacher Boško Malenović and students learning the Macedonian language.

In this school, there are presently 9 students who learn Macedonian language 2 hours a week. Students are from Hajdučica, Staro Lece and Dužina. As the principal noted, a



special transport arrangement has been provided to these pupils because classes are held after regular hours. The pupils have been presented with gift packages as well as vouchers for the purchase of school supplies in this school, too.

For best students, winter or summer holiday camps in Ohrid and in Kruševo have been prepared.

The Charge d'Affaires thanked the hosts for the hospitality and pointed out that the main goal of his associates and him, as representatives of Macedonia in the Republic of Serbia, is to connect the two nations, which has obviously been accomplished in Plandište. He expressed hope that the cooperation with the municipality of Plandište would be even better and invited the schools who bring their students to Belgrade for excursions, to have them visit the Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia as well.

The Monograph "Toys and Musical Tradition of Macedonians in Kačarevo" Presented

Photo: Matica Srpska

Un Matica Srpska, on April 4, 2018, the ethnomusicological monograph "The Toys and Music Tradition of Macedonians in Kačarevo", by Julijana Jovanović (married Baštić) and Goran Milošev, was presented.

According to Julijana Jovanović, the book is based on the master dissertations defended at the Academy of Art in Novi Sad in 2013 and 2014. "The contents of the book include two parts - the Phenomenon of the Playwright among the Macedonians in Kačarevo and the Vocal Tradition of the Macedonians in Kačarevo," Jovanović said, pointing out that the work was preceded by extensive field research, which was carried out with



the technical and financial support of the National Council of the Macedonian National Minority and the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia.

Zorica Mitrović addressed the attendees on behalf of the National Council of the Macedonian National Community in Serbia and pointed out that the book represents one of the capital works of the National Council of the Macedonian National Minority, not only in Vojvodina and South Banat, but in Serbia as a whole, "because it is the evidence of the existence of the Macedonian community in this region".

Besides the author, ethnomusicologists, prof. Dr. Selena Rakočević and prof. Dr. Nice Fracile, also spoke in the event and the attendees were greeted by prof. Nenad Ostojic, M.Sc., Vice President of Matica Srpska.

BNV Does Not Accept Legal Precedents to the Detriment of Minorities

Source: BNV

A round table on the presentation of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities was held in the municipality of Kučevo.

Representatives of national minorities expressed in their comments dissatisfaction with the proposed text of the Draft Law due to the fact that such a proposal diminished the reached level of rights and constituted a step backwards in the exercise of minority rights in Serbia.

Ahmedin Škrijelj, BNV legal adviser, noted that the Draft Law did not address any important issues in order to develop and strengthen national councils, as minority self-government institutions, and urged the Government of Serbia to incorporate proposals into the Draft that as a member of

the Working Group for Drafting the Draft Law on behalf of the Bosniak National Council.

Most solutions in the Draft Law, as well as the Draft Law as a whole, represent a legal precedent to the detriment of national minorities and minority self-governments in Serbia, Škrijelj said.

Also, the proposed legal solutions are a reflection of the intention to limit, suspend and dissolve civil and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution to members of national minorities, he concluded.



The round table, organized with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, was attended by presidents and representatives of national councils, representatives of the local self government Kučevo and the media.

The Importance of Language in Interethnic Communication

Source: BuPress

On March 20, the Organization for Development and Democracy (ORD) from Bujanovac organized a round table, on the similarities and differences between the Serbian and Albanian languages, as well as on the importance of language in interethnic communication. The round table was organized in Preševo, in the grand hall of TV Preševo, as a part of the project "Let's Meet, Let's Be Tolerant", which is implemented with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Embassy of the United Kingdom.

Giacomo Bosisio, Coordinator of the OSCE Office in Bujanovac, held the welcoming address. He noted that the OSCE has been



working on prevention of any kind of radicalization and extremism, including through support to projects such as this. The speakers at the round table included Mentor Nuhiu, Albanian language teacher and Deputy Principal at the Elementary School "Ibrahim Kelmendi" in Preševo, Enkel Rexhepi, an Albanian language

Bujanovac, and Goran Arsić, a court interpreter. The moderator was Altin Borici, from the Youth Office Presevo.

In addition to high school students in Preševo, the debate was attended by representatives of local self-government and the Preševo Youth Office.

teacher at the Elementary School "Ibrahim Kelmendi" in Preševo, Aleksandar Nikolić, a Serbian language teacher at the Elementary School "Branko Radičević" in Bujanovac, Jelena Randjelović, professor of Serbian as a non-native language in the Secondary School "Sezai Surroi" in

Remembering Ferenc Fehér in Novi Sad

Source: Pannon RTV
Photo: Mađar so

On the Day of Hungarian Poetry, on April 11, Novi Sad Hungarians honored the distinguished Hungarian poet Ferdinand Fehér, and, on that occasion, laid wreaths on his monument.



Ferenc Fehér was born in a farm near Bačka Topola, but he always considered the city as his home. During his career, he published in all Yugoslav Hungarian newspapers, published 22 books, and with his translation work he built a bridge between the majority and the Hungarian people. The spirit of his activities can still be felt today. Piroška Š. Čaki, a retired university professor, says: "We remember many Hungarian poets and it is a special joy for me, because here, in the southern parts, we remember Vojvodina Hungarian poets. Apart from academic Hungarian poets,

other writers are very important as well, as they have done a lot in the interests of the local Hungarians."

Szilard Antal, a member of the Executive Board of the Hungarian National Council, said that Vojvodina Hungarian artists deserve greater support and recognition.

"Lately, not only poets, but also all artists have been pushed back a bit and it would not be bad to see how to fix it. This day is a remembrance day and a great opportunity to think about these topics."

The commemoration of the poet and the wreath-laying ceremony were organized by Novi Sad's Board of Union of Vojvodina Hungarians (UVH). Lenke Erdelj, Chair of the UVH Committee in Novi Sad, pointed out that the work of

Ferenc Fehér could be a showcase for pedagogues. "He tells them that Vojvodina poets and writers should surrender their works to children in order to make them fall in love with reading and story-telling, in order to make them preserve these cultural values that we nurture, and, through translations, cultural values of other communities we live with, as well.



In this way, the peoples and minorities living here can meet us, meet our novelists, our poets, and our culture," Lenke Erdelj said.

The Future Role of Minorities in the EU

Source: Croatian Word

Representatives of HKPD Matija Gubec and the Croatian National Council presented the Croatian national minority in Serbia at the three-day International Conference on the Role of Minority Organizations in Thinking and Designing the EU's Future, held in Slovenia March 16-18.

The conference program started with the presentation of partner organizations of the project, their local communities and countries. The partners introduced themselves through the presentation of experiences and practices in the field of minority integration in social, cultural and political life in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia.

In the special Europe Café Workshop, the participants discussed the role of minority organizations in the local community, how to encourage minority organizations to integrate into the local community, their role in the integration of minority members into the new environment, and the establishment of satisfactory, functional communication between local actors and members of minorities,

as well as the importance of a minority culture for the future of the EU.

"In the panel discussion, we touched on the topic of the future role of minorities in the EU, the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life, and concrete proposals on how minority organizations can contribute to reducing discrimination and prejudice. The participants in this discussion were members of the Slovenian Parliament, representatives of the Service for Cultural Diversity and Human Rights - Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, representatives of the Municipality of Škofja Loka, representatives of the Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Cultural Activities, representatives of the Central State Office for Croats outside the Republic of Croatia, representatives of the Croatian Embassy in Slovenia, representatives of applicants and partner organizations, representatives of minority associations in Slovenia. In the cultural part of the program, we presented autochthonous hand-made works, straw souvenirs, and folklore groups performances. The final phase of the Conference resulted in the signing of a joint ini-

tiative on the efforts of partner organizations in the active integration of minorities into local communities, by respecting and recognizing their needs, knowledge and skills. The aim of this joint initiative is to create a platform for the successful integration of minorities into the new environment, to create a communication channel between the local community and minority communities and to define activities and mechanisms for the active integration of minorities in the social, cultural and political environment," the President of HKPD "Matija Gubec", Ladislav Suknović said.

The conference was organized by the Croatian Cultural and Art Society Komušina Škofja Loka in cooperation with the Municipality of Škofja Loka and the partners in the project, the Municipality of Dupnitsa (Bulgaria), the Riebini Municipality (Latvia), Szödliget Municipality (Hungary), the Bosnian Croat Association Ring (Croatia), Cultural and Educational Society Bazovica (Rijeka, Croatia) and Croatian Cultural and Educational Society Matija Gubec (Tavankut, Serbia). The project is co-financed by the European Commission – the Europe for Citizens Program.

Easter Exhibition in Bajmok

Source: Bunjevci

The traditional "Easter exhibition" was organized by the Bunjevac Cultural Center "Bajmok", and this was the sixteenth gathering of this kind among the hard-working residents of Bajmok.

As Branko Pokornić, the director of the BCC "Bajmok" said, this year's exhibition gathered around 40 exhibitors from Bajmok, and other towns, with over 2,200 exhibits. The skilled hands prepared the most colorful eggs, made

with various techniques and various motifs, with Easter, as a common denominator.

Kata Kuntić, the chairwoman of the Culture Committee in the National Council of the Bunjevac National Minority, talked about the Bunjevci's Easter customs, and the exhibition was officially opened by Mirko Bajić, a member of the Bunjevac National Minority Council Executive Board. On that occasion, he commended the organi-

zers, and also noted that the Bunjevci finally completed the Bunjevac language standards, which would be of great importance for the young generation.

Most of the program was delivered by the children, who study the Bunjevac language in Bajmok. With their teacher, Svetlana Mormer, they prepared a suitable program, congratulated everyone on coming Easter, and in the end, they were rewarded with sweets.





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