

Political rights of the
Serbs in the region
2018 REPORT SUMMARY

Belgrade, 2018.

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**POLITICAL RIGHTS OF THE
SERBS IN THE REGION
2018 REPORT SUMMARY**

(Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia,
Montenegro, Republic of Macedonia (FYRM),
Albania, Republic Slovenia, Hungary, Romania,
Kosovo and Metohija – Kosovo - UNMIK)

Report for 2017/2018.

No. 10

Belgrade, 2018.

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INTRODUCTION

The Progressive Club, a Belgrade-based civil society organization, has been publishing reports on the political rights of the Serbian people in the region since 2009. This is its tenth annual report.

Serbs are the largest nation based and concentrated in the territory of the Balkans, a large peninsula in Southeast Europe. The Balkans is the only European peninsula where geographic and historical reasons have always precluded the creation of a unified and functional modern state governed by the domicile population. Its national liberation and unification was completed four decades later than in Germany and Italy. Although the Serbian people has been the protagonist and proponent of the idea of the liberation and unification of Balkan peoples, and despite its key contribution to the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918 and its restoration in 1945, which facilitated the emancipation and nation-building process of other nations, after the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) in the 1990s a quarter of the total Serbian population ended up outside of the Republic of Serbia. In some neighboring countries – Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM; as well as Kosovo-UNMIK after 1999 and Montenegro after 2001 – the Serbian population suffered a systematic violation of human and political rights, leading to the outbreak of civil wars and, later on, to uneasy

relations between Serbia and these countries. The status of the Serbian people in neighboring countries and areas has fueled authoritarian and populist trends in Serbia proper, especially in view of the fact that at one point in time Serbia received as many as 800,000 refugees and displaced persons, mostly ethnic Serbs, from the neighboring countries. In addition, after 1999 about two thirds of the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija were displaced, with the number eventually reaching around 50% or 150,000 persons.

In the Balkans and in Central Europe the concept of nation is markedly different than in Great Britain, Russia or the US. The presence of Serbs in neighboring countries was not the result of modern colonization or emigration processes. The Serbs of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Romania and Macedonia have inhabited these areas for centuries, and are no less indigenous to them than their respective majority ethnic groups. Except parts of Hungary and Macedonia, where the Serbian settlement began in the late medieval period, and partially Slovenia, where numerous Serbs began to arrive in cities during the 20th century, they are a domicile ethnic group in these countries. The inclusion of these areas into a democratic Serbia during the modern nation-building period in European history was largely prevented by Austria and the Ottoman Empire. Liberating its own people, notwithstanding errors and difficulties, the Serbian state let others have their freedom too. The undemocratic establishment of federal Yugoslavia under the communist regime led to the frag-

mentation of ethnic Serbs in five republics and two autonomous provinces. Exposed to assimilation and various forms of pressure, the Serbian ethnic group was essentially unequal and yet it formally remained a constitutive nation in the entire territory of the federal state. Under the communist regime the Serbs were (unfairly) marked as a people with expansionist aspirations and a bulwark of counter-revolutionary tendencies, and so efforts were made to engineer its political fragmentation and gradual assimilation. The fact that during the greatest rise of the Muslim community and the creation of a 'Muslim' nation, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) stagnated and underwent two deep rifts orchestrated by the regime bears evidence to this claim. In Austro-Hungarian Croatia, there were 23 publications in the Cyrillic script traditionally used by Serbs; by the end of the communist era, only one had survived, and only with a token circulation. The Serbian population in bordering areas continually plummeted in the postwar period. In part this was the natural result of the creation of ethnocentric unitary republics and partly the result of the systematic assimilation of Serbs, which eventually led to the disappearance of Muslim and Catholic Serbs. Unlike the wide autonomy of Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija – the autonomous provinces in the republic of Serbia, elsewhere there was little autonomy or regional self-government.

By the dawn of democracy and the end of real socialism, the Serbs had become one of the largest ethnic groups indigenously settled along or by the borders of

their mother state: a 2.3 million out of a total population of 10 million. In SR Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were 1.4 million Serbs who made up a third of the total population and acted as one of its three constitutive peoples. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had not enjoyed autonomy or had elements of statehood in the long period from the Middle Ages to 1945, the Serbs were once the relative majority. On the eve of the forced civil war, they were unconstitutionally denied their constitutive status. An international agreement on autonomy was unilaterally refused by the Bosniaks with US support, and independence was declared in violation of the constitution and other legislation. A civil war ensued and Serbs were singled out as the only guilty party by the US, EU and UN. In the republic of Croatia, there was about 650.000 ethnic Serbs (567.000 Serbs and the majority of the 105.000 that self-identified as Yugoslavs). Unlike the Croats, Serbs were not politically united when the democratic transition came. They had been denied their constitutive status and blamed for the introduction of communism and the civil war between the Croats themselves. They were expelled from civil service and denied their cultural rights. The restoration of symbols used by the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH), an Axis ally during WWII, deepened the fears of the Serbian population. The ensuing civil war saw Serbs expelled from cities. The Serbs founded the Republic of Srpska Krajina in areas where they were the majority population; despite being under UN protection, RSK was captured and dissolved in August 1995, and its population

displaced. Between 450,000 and 500,000 Serbs were displaced from Croatia, most of them never to return. Even in 2010 they ranked as the largest displaced population in Europe and the 13th in the world. In Montenegro the Serbs were continually assimilated and transformed into a new nation – the Montenegrins. However, since the Serbs and the newly created Montenegrins had never waged wars against each other in the past, this assimilation could be implemented with little resistance. During the dissolution of SFRJ, the citizens of Montenegro decided to remain with Serbia. Nurtured and supported by Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, the local regime was unwilling to abandon the idea of Yugoslavism and the principles of federalism. A return to the Serbian identity was mentioned only in parts of the opposition. The Serbs, which according to the 1991 census made up merely 9% of the population, were not even given the status of a national minority. In FYROM, the Serbs were not granted minority rights until 1991 and when they eventually were, it did not include a reversal of the process of ‘Macedonization’ implemented by the communist regime after 1945. In addition, Serbs in FYROM were denied freedom of religion, since their own church, SPC, had been banned from any activities in Macedonian territory, with its role replaced by the communist-created Macedonian Orthodox Church, which still remains unrecognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija was both officially and de facto a part of the Republic of Serbia until 1999. The local Serbian population enjoyed full rights, but was

manipulated by the regime of Slobodan Milošević, which due to the Albanian boycott of state institutions in Kosovo and Metohija depended on around 30 MPs recruited solely from the ranks of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija. After Slovenia declared independence in 1991, the local Serbs were not granted the status of a national minority, allegedly because they were not indigenous to this territory (an incorrect claim, as there were Serbian villages dating from the late medieval period). In the early 1990s 25,000 Serbs and some Bosniaks lost the citizen status in Slovenia (which they had enjoyed as SFRJ citizens), thereby becoming 'erased.' The 'erased' were made unequal and suffered various grievances over the following twenty years. In Albania the Serbs enjoyed no rights whatsoever, even 25 years after the formal introduction of democracy in 1991. In Hungary and Romania, Serbs had the status of a national minority even in the communist period. During the democratic transition in Romania they were granted equality and full rights; in Hungary this process was gradual and intensified only after 2010 under Fidesz governments.

By 2009, when the Progressive Club began publishing this annual report, the Serbian population in neighboring countries had decreased by almost a quarter, dropping from 2.4 to 1.75 million. This was partly due to the general trend of population decrease in the Balkans and the accelerated disappearance of national minorities. However, in 2010 the Serbs ranked 13th in the world list of displaced populations, a full 15 years after the end of armed conflicts.

The last nine years have seen a worrying drop in the

rights enjoyed by Serbs in neighboring countries. Croatia has failed to implement the Erdut Agreement and the Constitutional Act on Human and Minority Rights. While the Serbs do formally enjoy some rights, they are continually being limited by the establishment and powerful caucuses in the parliament. Anti-Serbian public campaigns are systematic and persistent. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the larger of the two entities, the rights of the Serbian population are limited and fall short of their full capacity; in addition, they are essentially unequal to Bosniaks and Croats in the Republic of Srpska. And although the Republic of Srpska has managed to maintain its autonomy over the last nine years, there is still legislation that violates the Dayton Agreement and none of the 64 competences that the entity has lost in this way have been restored. The protracted campaign to defend its autonomy has rendered the Republic of Srpska impoverished and divided, with little international support for its demands (incidentally, the very same demands that the US and EU deemed worthy of armed intervention in the case of Kosovo). In Montenegro the Serbs now make up 29% of the population. The efforts of the regime to achieve independence brought some Montenegrins back to their roots. After having acquired independence, in 2006 the regime intensified its campaign to assimilate the local Serbs and limit their rights. Serbs are not recognized as a national minority in Montenegro. In Macedonia Serbs were given minority status owing to the conflict between the authorities and Macedonian Albanians, which eventually ended

in the partial constitutive status for the Albanian community granted in the Ohrid Agreement of 2001. The Serbs still enjoy little religious freedom, and the leader of the canonically recognized Archbishopric of Ohrid has been unjustly sentenced and interred in the infamous Idrizovo prison. In Albania, Serbs have received a fraction of the rights enjoyed by national minorities in European countries, and even this has been limited and partly contested in recent years. In Kosovo and Metohija the Serbian population enjoys no autonomy or minority status. Some political rights have been enforced by the US and EU; however, even in linguistic matters the Kosovo-UNMIK government chooses to use the Croatian version of the language and the Latin script as a way of taunting the local Serbs.

Under Slobodan Milošević the Republic of Serbia neglected the matter of the rights and minority statuses of Serbs living in the region. The relevant institutions, such as the Ministry for Expatriate Serbs, never became involved. The regime saw the struggle of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia merely as a tool in its own battle for the Yugoslav legacy. This state of affairs did change slightly after 2000. under the governments of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia. At the first the expatriate policy had also been neglected, partly in response to the former regime's propaganda and partly due to the ideology adopted or fostered by some of the political parties in the new government. However, there was some sort of continuity. The Ministry for Expatriate Serbs was transformed into an agency. After SPO became a government mem-

ber in 2004, the Ministry of Diaspora was established and initially the ministers focused on the expatriate Serbian population. However, the department had a small budget (with over a third used for staff salaries) and was the only department that could not propose legislation to the parliament. This was changed later on, but the Ministry never formulated a specific program or range of activities, and operated with the bare minimum of means. Funds allocated for activities concerning expatriates remained merely symbolical and were ten times lower than the annual investments of Croatia for the Croatian cause in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thirty times lower than Slovenia's expatriate expenditure. However, investments were made, including the purchase of mobile providers in the Republic of Srpska and Montenegro and the founding of Tesla Bank in Croatia. However, most of these projects were eventually abandoned or passed on or simply failed. All of them – including the Agreement on Special Parallel Relations, revised and amended on multiple occasions – have always depended on the political needs of various ruling parties in Serbia. However, led by pressures and poor prospects in the resolution of the Kosovo and Metohija problem, by 2010 Mirko Cvetković's government allowed the Ministry to be made equal to others, and made it responsible for the Serbian population of neighboring countries. The Ministry adopted a general policy and established institutions meant to gather and represent Serbs in the region.

However, this policy was merely formal and brought little real change and few new activities; the objectives,

although limited and formulated to conform to EU and US demands, were changed by the government as soon as the governments of Montenegro and Croatia objected to some of them. The rise of the Serbian Progressive Party in 2012, due to the party's nationalistic identity and the fact that some latent nationalist groups had seen its leaders as the protectors of the rights of the Serbian people, allowed the emerging regime to gradually shut down these fledgling institutions. The Ministry became an Office and was eventually attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All strategies were abandoned and reduced to the activities of Aleksandar Vučić and his associates.

Compared to other neighboring countries that have a large population in their own border areas, in the last twenty years Serbia hardly managed to have a consistent, adequate or reciprocal policy. The last ten years have seen a drop in rights enjoyed by Serbs in the region, including the right to their own language and script and their smaller representation in institution than in the case of other minorities. Its freedom of religion and education has been denied everywhere except in Romania, Hungary and the Republic of Srpska. The situation in Hungary has recently improved somewhat. The Republic of Srpska still suffers constant pressure from Sarajevo as well as Brussels, London, Berlin and Washington towards unitarization, reducing autonomy and the forced creation of a Bosniak nation. The double standards used by the EU and US towards the Serbs (vs. Albanians, Croatians, Bosniaks and Montenegrins) also pose a significant problem.

In response to this situation, the Progressive Club uses black covers for its annual reports. The tenth annual report is again bound in black.

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

According to the 2001 census Albania had a population of 3,069,275 (ethnic composition data is unreliable), including 3,026,383 (98%) Albanians, 35,829 (1.2%) Greeks, 992 Aromanians and 678 Montenegrins. An estimate made in 2011 suggests that there was 82.6% Albanians and 0.9% Greeks, as well as 1% other minorities and 15.5% undecided respondents. The unreliability of these data serves to underline the disorderliness and isolation of the country, as well as the degree of violation of human and minority rights, especially in the case of the Serbian minority.

During the communist era religion was banned in Albania. Therefore there is little reliable information about the religious affiliation of its inhabitants; however, (unreliable) estimates suggest the following religious composition: Muslims 38.8%, Orthodox Christians 23% and Roman Catholics 13.5%.

The assimilation of Serbs in Albania began during the reign of King Zogu I and has persisted throughout the regime of Enver Hoxha, and is still an ongoing process. In 1934 King Zogu I issued a decree to shut down dozens of Serbian schools in Albania and six in Skadar (It. Scutari, Alb. Shkodër); in 1967 the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha banned all religious activities, forcing the Serbs and other minorities to become assimilate as the church had always been one of the pillars of the Serbian identity. Without

their own church and schooling, the Serbs were caught in a deep assimilation process in Albania.

Nowadays the Serbs formally do have minority status in Albania as the nation-state of the Albanian people (Article 3 of the Albanian Constitution) although it is not mentioned by name in the Constitution. Albanian is the official language (Article 14). Article 20 promises to minorities the right of using and developing their mother tongues, and the right of association to protect its own interests and identity. The Committee for National Minorities is currently preparing a law on minorities and adapting any future censuses to self-identification.

According to IMF data, in 2008 the monthly gross salary in Albania was 339 USD in nominal value and 571 in purchasing power parity.

The Serbian population is concentrated in the Shkodër District and County (Qarku i Shkodrës, Rrethi i Shkodrës), and Malësi e Madhe District (Rrethi i Malësisë së Madhe). The 1989 census had registered no more than 100 members of the Montenegrin minority. In 1991, after the opening of the Božaj border crossing, 1,671 persons have been recorded as having crossed the border as asylum seekers, with 1,500 of these being of Serb-Montenegrin ethnicity and the rest being Muslims and Albanians from mixed marriages. Settlements with a large concentration of Serbs include: Vraka (Vrakë), Grilj, Boriç, Omara and Kopljika, with many Serbs also living along the Skadar Lake and in the town of Skadar. Estimates suggest that there are around 2,000 Serbs settled in the Skadar area;

the number of Serbs in Tirana, Lješ (Lezhë), Elbasan, Fir (Fieri) and other major towns remains unknown.

As the political successor of Omonoia, the Unity for Human Rights Party is the political organization of the Greek minority in Albania and has good cooperation with the Serbian and other national minorities.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, organized in Albania as the Vicariate of Skadar, is very close to the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. Owing to this close relationship, the Days of St. Sava were organized for the first time in Skadar in 2009.

In 2010 around 70 students were enrolled in a Serbian language course funded by Serbia. This was the third annual course of its kind.

The representatives of the Serbian community were included in the commission for the preparation of the impending census of 2011 to allow Serbian participation in the census, which was previously prevented by objective administrative obstacles.

The Serbian public broadcaster RTS has filmed and broadcast on multiple occasions a documentary called *Skadar, A Serbian Story* about the Serbian cultural heritage in the Skadar area.

The occasion of the Serbian statehood day (Sretenje) has been marked in Skadar with the support of the Serbian embassy in Tirana. In March 2010 the rector of the University of Belgrade Branko Kovačević made an official visit to Skadar and promised the local Serbian community professional support in their cultural projects. In June

2010 Zdravko Ponoš, an advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, did the same.

2011 was a tumultuous year for all minorities in Albania, including the Serbian. It was marked by the founding of the Red and Black Alliance (AKZ), a political party formed by Kreshnik Spahiu, the former Deputy Head of the High Council of Justice of Albania. AKZ is an ultra-nationalist party advocating the concept of so-called Greater Albania and is very close to Albin Kurti's Vetëvendosje in Kosovo and Metohija. Furthermore, it denies the existence of minorities in the territory of the Republic of Albania.

The Act on Citizen Status of 2009 allowed people who had been forcibly registered as Albanians to officially change their nationality. Around 4,000 members of national minorities submitted requests to have their nationality officially changed in state records.

In March 2011 courts in the south of the country (Gjiro-kastër and Përmet, with a significant Greek and Aromanian population) suspended the process of nationality change.

The chairman of the county courts in Saranda, Përmet and Skadar (areas with the highest concentration of the Serbian, Greek and Aromanian minority) asked the provisions that had allowed nationality change to be rescinded. On 1 December 2012 the Constitutional Court of Albania sided with their opinion and essentially removed nationality as a legal category from official Albanian documents, with six members of the judicial body voting in favor and two against. The representatives of the Greek, Serbian, Macedonian, Aromanian and Egyptian minority have an-

nounced that they will continue their struggle for the acknowledgement of constitutional and international norms and the right of national self-determination at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In early 2011 AKZ organized country-wide protests, demanding the removal of questions pertaining to nationality, religion and native language from the relevant legislation.

This violation of nationality minority rights and the fascist protests of AKZ have shown Albania to be a totalitarian state.

In February 2013 the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia hosted a public hearing about the political and other rights of the Serbian people in the region, which included the representatives of the Progressive Club. At this hearing, Pavle Brajović (Pavao Jakoja in Albania), the chairman of the "Morača-Rozafa" association from Skadar, which works for the protection of the Serbian identity in Albania, presented a set of important demands and requested help from Serbian authorities.

The main demands and objectives set forth by Serbian representatives can be summarized as follows:

- 1) adherence to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities issued by the Council of Europe and ratified by the Albanian parliament more than ten years ago;

- 2) freedom of national and religious self-determination and free use of the Serbian language, script and national symbols;

- 3) education conducted in the Serbian language in Albanian public schools;
- 4) minority representation in the Albanian parliament;
- 5) protection of cultural assets in the territory of Albania;
- 6) the signing of an Agreement on the Protection of National Minorities between Serbia and Albania;
- 7) opening a public Serbian school in Skadar and Fieri which would institutionally follow the program of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia;
- 8) introduction of the reciprocal principle in the funding of minorities in the two countries (Albanian minority in Serbia and vice versa);
- 9) introduction of a more effective and simplified procedure for acquiring Serbian citizenship for Serbs living in neighboring counties;
- 10) appointment of a priest in Skadar in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church to facilitate spiritual life in the town.

Pressed by the EU, Albania opened a Serbian-language school in January 2014. The school is located 150 km southwest of Tirana, in the village of Hamil near Fieri. In 2014 the school had 60 Serbian students. This was an important first step of the Albanian minorities to improve the situation of the Serbian minority.

In the spring of 2016 a memorial service for fallen Serbian soldiers was held in Skadar for the first time in 96 years.

Until 2017 the Serbian community in Albania was the most underprivileged national minority in Europe. In April

2017, again on EU insistence and in order to advance the Albanian EU accession process, the country passed the Act on the Protection of National Minorities, joining other European states in this respect. This legal act explicitly states that the Serbs are to be considered a national minority (among others). 'This Act regulates national minority rights in Albania pursuant to the Constitution of Albania, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe ratified in 1999, and other international agreements pertaining to human rights', this law states.¹ The law guarantees cultural representation and support, acknowledgement of ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics and traditions, as well as education and individual self-identification.

As the Constitution referenced in the Act on the Protection of National Minorities had not changed in the meantime, it remains unclear if had previously been violated to the detriment of the Serbian minority and its rights.

In late October 2017 Artur Popaj Popović gave an interview for the portal 'Kolumnista'. Mr Popović is a board member of the Association of the Serbian-Montenegrin Minority 'Morača – Rozafa' from Skadar. He stated the incumbent President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić had not kept his promises and highlighted the lack of a Serbian consulate in Skadar and a Serbian cultural center, university,

¹ Албанија признаје Србе као националну мањину, Полишика, 13.04.2017., <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/378350/Albanija-priznaje-Srbe-kao-nacionalnu-manjinu>

official school or TV broadcaster in Albania. He added that at the last census respondents who identified as minority members were charged a fine of 1,000 USD, although this could not be proved. According to a census conducted by the Morača – Rozafa association in the early 1990s, there were around 30,000 Serbs (mostly from Montenegro) in Skadar and its area. Most of them were concentrated in the town of Skadar, while the Orthodox population was most densely settled in Vraka, an area encompassing five villages in the Skadar area. Mr Popović pointed out that the Serbian minority in Albania received no government funding for the preservation of their culture and national identity. In 2017 the Serbian minority in Albania applied for funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (Office for Cooperation and Serbs in the Region); they received a million RSD, with half of this sum being used to cover the rent for the premises of the Morača – Rozafa association. One one-hour-long Serbian-language TV program is broadcast in Albania, and this only for twelve weeks a year. The reason is the lack of funding and the poor financial situation of the Serbian community in Albania.

In December 2017 the Government of the Republic of Serbia donated 100,000 Euros of financial aid to Albania to alleviate the effects of major flooding. In addition, it also donated aid in needed items (500 blankets, 500 bed-covers, 250 sleeping bags, 250 mattresses). Neither of the parties involved in this project broached the question of the Serbian minority in Albania.

In late March 2018 Biljana Živković, writer, gave an interview for the portal 'Slobodna Hercegovina.' Over the last ten years she visited Albania over twenty times and Kosovo and Metohija over 50 times, providing humanitarian aid, interviewing locals and reporting. Živković reminisces about her first visit to Skadar (the first Serbian capital, 490 – 1171), when she saw a semi-demolished church that had been converted into a mosque under Ottoman rule. She visited Skadar for the first time in 2007, after having met Pavle Jakoje Brajović, the chairman of the Serbo-Montenegrin association Rozafa from Skadar, at a conference in Belgrade. Brajović, an engineer and lawyer, received Živković in Albania together with other guests from Serbia and Montenegro. She visited the newly founded Serbian-language school. The staff was mostly made up of Montenegrin teachers who had been fired for denying the existence of the Montenegrin language. She concludes that the Serbs in Albania are fearful and in an uncomfortable position, adding that a part of the responsibility for this falls on SFRJ and the Serbs who lived there for having forgotten their compatriots in Albania.

Živković mentions that she has met many Serbs of the Orthodox as well as Roman Catholic and Muslim faith who knew they were Serbs and had learned Serbian in their homes, where the Serbian language tradition had been secretly passed down from generation to generation. The Serbian language, Cyrillic script, Orthodox faith and other pillars of the Serbian identity had been banned in Albania for decades.

She points out that the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, headed by Metropolitan Amfilohije, was the most deserving for the establishment of the Serbian school in Skadar. In addition to the Metropolitanate and Amfilohije, who have always supported the Serbian community in Albania when their mother country could or would not, some literature teachers from Belgrade, journalists and authors also deserve credit. By 2018 the school has been attended by a total of 1,500 students, and its library includes 2,500 books. Albanian security services have banned the import of historical and geographical books printed in Serbia. The Serbian school in Skadar is developing parallel to the Orthodox church in Vraça.

The Serbian-Montenegrin association Moraça – Rozafa has realized a commendable number of social activities in the last year, expanding its scope of activity compared to the previous years.

On 20 October 2017 the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati met with the representatives of Moraça – Rozafa association to promote a new minority bill (Law on the Rights and Liberties of National Minorities). The meeting was attended by the representatives of the Romani, Egyptian and Montenegrin minorities, all of which have been formally acknowledged in the new bill, along with the Serbian minority.

This law defines a national minority as a 'group of Albanian citizens and residents characterized by continuous and old ties to the Albanian state which exhibit different cultural, ethnic, religious and traditional features and

strive to preserve and advance them collectively as well as individually.'

Along with the general principles adopted from the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe pertaining to free self-determination, non-discrimination, free organization and gathering, freedom of religion, and equal participation in public life, the Law allows education in the minority language in traditional minority communities; the criteria for determining reasonable demands and the number of students are subject to the decisions of the Council of Ministers. The Law also guarantees the right to establish minority media and to be represented in state-owned radio and TV programs.

The Law allows the use of minority languages in official matters in municipalities with a minority population of 20% or more. This includes the use of the minority language in topographic signs in these municipalities, as well as official communication and correspondence.

On behalf of the Serbian national minority, Pavlo Jakolja, the chairmain of the 'Morača-Rozafa' association, and Simo Ajković, president of the Orthodox Association 'Sveti Jovan Vladimir', have thanked Minister Bushati for the initiative to prepare and adopt the highly anticipated minority bill after several decades of lobbying from minority associations. They have expressed hope that the new bill would secure equal representation and participation as well as the integration of the Serbian minority with full rights in education, culture and social matters.

Minister Bushati has pointed out the political prejudices his team faced during the drafting of the bill; however, the importance of the minority law and its crucial role in securing minority representation have outweighed any dissent, unlike in the past. He added that the law had been drafted in the spirit of European integrations and that it advances the full implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities issued by the Council of Europe. Lastly, he informed the minority representatives that the implementation of this law would not be completed by the adoption of the necessary accompanying legislation and promised to work towards changing the situation and improving the position of national minorities.

On 11 November 2017 the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Tirana organized a ceremony to mark the 99th anniversary of the end of the Great War, which was attended by the representatives of three Serbian associations: Morača–Rozafa, Sveti Jovan Vladimir and Jedinstvo, who laid commemorative wreaths for the fallen soldiers in the Serbian army. The occasion is traditionally commemorated throughout Serbia, Greece and Macedonia to honor Serbian casualties and the contribution of its people in ending destruction and establishing democracy in Europe and the world.

On 23 November 2017 the first session of the joint Serbo-Albanian chamber of commerce was held in Tirana and was attended by the representatives of both relevant ministries and a number of businessmen. In 2017 more than

100 entrepreneurs and 41 companies from Serbia attended the Panair fair in Tirana, showcasing products and services from the fields of agriculture, food industry, construction, chemistry, textiles and pharmacy. Marko Čadež, the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, stated that the economic exchange between Serbia and Albania had increased by a third compared to 2016 and that the number of joint economic endeavors and investments had also grown.

The rights of the Serbian minority in Albania were not discussed at this meeting. If the two chambers of commerce really do have an amicable cooperation, it could provide a good opportunity to help Serbs in Albania find employment and improve their financial situation. This economic boost could in turn help them achieve their political and other rights.

On 27 May 2018 (Whitsunday by the Julian calendar) a traditional *slava* ceremony was held at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Vrača near Skadar. The liturgy was held by the clergy of the Serbian and Albanian Orthodox churches with the blessing of the Archbishop of Albania Anastasije and the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije. The liturgy was attended by the faithful from Skadar, Vrača and the surrounding area, as well as some believers from Montenegro, who came to join in the festivities. In his speech Father Velimir thanked Archbishop Anastasije for having allowed the liturgy to be conducted in Serbian. After the liturgy the present adults and children received gifts with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije.

Civil rights and liberties can be political, economic, cultural, and personal. Political and personal liberties and rights are not implemented in Albania, especially in the case of the Serbian minority.

The Serbian community in Albania does not enjoy free political organization, freedom of press and the right to collectively criticize state organs and functionaries. The Serbian community has not had a representative in the Albanian parliament since 1990. Both Albanian and Serbian authorities are to blame for this state of affairs.

Personal rights and liberties of Serbs in Albania are essentially non-existent in terms of academic research and art. There is hardly any freedom of expression or intellectual freedom. The use of historical and geographical books printed in Serbia is banned. Until recently, the local Serbs were even denied national and religious self-identification and other rights usually enjoyed by national minorities in a democratic pluralist society.

The position of the Serbian community in Albania has improved over the last ten years, but the improvement has been largely formal. The Republic of Serbia must do what it can to help them achieve their fundamental rights both directly and indirectly via international institutions and organizations.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

Introduction

The Serbs have inhabited the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries. The region of Bosnia was mentioned for the first time as part of the Serbian state. However, over the following centuries Bosnia broke away from Serbia and began its own development. And yet, the ruling tradition of the Kotromanić dynasty has been reliably confirmed as fully or largely Serbian. After the fall of medieval Bosnia and the introduction of Ottoman rule, a part of the population converted to Islam, leading to divisions and rifts and the suppression of the Orthodox population, as well as the westward movement of the Serbian ethnic group. While the Muslim community became dominant in the eastern and central parts of present-day Bosnia, the Serbs were concentrated in the territory west of the Bosna River. Notwithstanding centuries of repression and frequent migrations to present-day Serbia (especially after its gradual restoration after 1804), the local Serbs did manage to keep their identity. The struggle for their rights was long and arduous: it had to withstand the political, social and economic hegemony of the Muslim population, as well as the influence of the Roman Catholic population (around 25%) which enjoyed the support of the Habsburg

Monarchy and Venice, both of which were not inclined to support the restoration of the Serbian state. Although in the relative majority, Serbs were suppressed and pushed aside, even after the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. The struggle was continued, but to no avail: by the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912, all Serbian associations were banned. Unsurprisingly, the pro-Yugoslav youth chose to raise arms against the occupation and annexation. WWI brought persecution, internment and deportation of Serbs, with at least 5,000 casualties. The Austro-Hungaria authorities used paramilitary militias largely comprised of Muslims and Croats to enforce persecution. No vengeance was systematically implemented after the end of WWI. The Muslims and Croats formed a joint state with the Serbs and were made equal. The most powerful (and the only major) Muslim political party, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO), was represented in most interwar cabinets and facilitated the adoption of democratic Vidovdan Constitution (Vidovdan – St. Vitus' Day). The feudal matter was eventually resolved through an agrarian reform, and the Muslims were given autonomy in family law as well as suffrage and political participation. WWII led to a great pogrom against the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The genocide² of the Croatian and Muslim

2 Croat and Muslim fascists (the Ustasha) killed at least 200,000 Serbs in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some older estimates suggested a maximum of 400,000 civilian victims. There were occasional acts of vengeance, but they were not conducted as part of a systematic or state-orchestrated ideological project.

Ustasha was not the result of the free and democratic will of these ethnic groups, but it did enjoy wide support, especially in its early stages. The genocide led to resistance, revolt and revolution accompanied by acts of vengeance, although not on a scale comparable to crimes committed by Bosniaks against the Serbian population in the 1990s. The socialist Yugoslav federation was formed after the end of WWII. The new regime encouraged the emancipation of the Muslim population into a new nation, with the word 'Muslim' now denoting a national or ethnic group rather than merely religious affiliation. Unlike the repressed and neutralized Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community received support and encouragement. However, the process of creating a mononational Bosnia was not yet completed at the time of the dissolution in SFRJ. In the Yugoslav one-party system, the Serbs still had the status of a constitutive nation in Bosnia (as did the Muslims and Croats) and enjoyed some rights. After the democratization of 1990, Serbian politicians – aware of the unfavorable international balance of power and the Croat-Muslim majority – were willing to agree to any compromise to ensure the survival of the reformed Yugoslav state. Despite violations of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement its cessation, Serbian representatives eventually accepted its independence and the creation of three cantons and full equality for the three sovereign and autochthonous nations. This was not in violation of multiethnic or democratic European principles. Namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only Europe-

an state with no ethnic majority. SFRJ broke apart by the will of the minority nations; the US and EU were unwilling to allow the Serbs to keep their existing rights and much less to acquire independence for themselves. The civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) was initiated by the Bosniaks and Croats³; the Serbs managed to defend themselves, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Srpska, whose army (VRS) essentially met all objectives proclaimed by the parliament of the fledgling state. Owing to the political, economic and finally military intervention of the US and its allies, the end of the war ensured the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a fragile state with a confederative organization, as stipulated in the country's Constitution adopted based on the Dayton Agreement. It had three nations (ethnic groups) and two entities – vaguely defined confederative-federative divisions called the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The entities were to share no more than three joint competences in their shared institutions. However, using the so-called Bonn Powers, the US and EU managed

3 The aggressive plans of Croatian and Bosniak nationalism is clearly reflected in the official statistics for the last year of peace (1991): on the eve of the war, around 500 people were killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and although they made up around 32% of the population, the Serbian share in these casualties was more than 70%, and 80% including other nations in the Yugoslav army, which was seen as the enemy by Bosniak and Croat forces.

Ненад Кеџмановић, Чедомир Антић, *Историја Републике Српске*, (ИП "Недељник": Београд, 2016), 298 (footnote 484).

to turn the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina into the only absolutist ruler in Europe with the exception of the Pope. From 1996 to 2006 different HRs have dismissed democratically elected presidents and MPs, arrested and interred citizens without a valid court order. Out of a total of 64 entity competences, which were transferred to the level of shared institutions, only three were removed based on the Constitution and other legislation, in other words with the consent of the representatives of the Republic of Srpska and the Serbian population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This led to the disbanding of entity armies, which was preceded by barbaric pressures and a false espionage accusation by the US. A similar scenario unfolded with direct taxation, which became an independent source of income for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as with the partial resolution of the arbitration concerning the inter-entity delineation of the strategically important territorial corridor near the town of Brčko, which ended in the creation of the Brčko District as a self-governing administrative unit and a shared condominium of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska. A series of events put a stop to this trend. Global changes after the 2001 terrorist attacks, the rise of the Russian Federation as a key global actor, and the overambitious approach of the Bosniak movement, which refused the so-called Butmir Package – a moderate version of unitarization that would have deprived the Serbs and Croats of some of their rights; and the political changes in RS in 2006, leading to the domination of SNSD, a political party

seen by the US and EU as unencumbered by the civil war legacy and therefore capable of a more assertive approach to the interests of the Republic of Srpska.

The Progressive Club began compiling reports on the political rights of the Serbian people in the region in 2008. The status of the Republic of Srpska and the rights of the Serbian population of Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been tackled in the past ten years. Reports of international diplomats and US and EU media claim that the leadership of RS has allegedly been striving to organize a referendum on the independence of the entity. However, even a cursory overview of the Progressive Club's previous nine reports suggests a different conclusion. In the last ten years the US has officially remained committed to implementing the Dayton Agreement, but semi-official circles and lower civil and diplomatic servants have consistently insinuated that B&H needs to be unitarized. Various officials have mentioned the creation of a unitary 'Bosnian nation', the abolishment of different educational programs and the abandonment of the national equality principle and 'entity voting'.⁴ Along with Bosniak nationalists, some US and EU circles support the abolishment of the nation-based order of appointing the chairman of the Council of Ministers and the instruction of the prime minister system at state level after the relative success of SDP B&H and Zlatko Lagumdžija in the Federation of B&H at the 2010 elections. RS was forced to implement an anti-constitutional reform of

4 The necessary consent of both entities in important political matters

the police and the judiciary. Due to these pressures and in a defensive effort, the leadership of RS has begun to announce a referendum to confirm the legitimacy of the Dayton Agreement. The referendum was initially meant to cover less important topics. RS was also victim of a campaign to introduce a unitary identification number for its citizens. Bosniak and Bosnian nationalists intended to use this change to replace administrative zones of entity police forces with a single uniform zone. Finally, social discontent in the Federation of B&H culminated in the violent demonstrations that demanded the abolishing of the entities. The years-long efforts to engineer a 'color revolution' in RS still persist. Threats of armed conflicts are often addressed to RS by the leaders of the Bosniak people (Izetbegović, Halilović) and some foreign dignitaries (Paddy Ashdown, Stjepan Mesić). RS was also targeted campaigns to present it as a 'genocidal creation' that needs to be dissolved. Most decisions of the Constitutional Court of B&H have striven to limit the autonomy of Serbs and Srpska. An illustrative example is the matter of the Republic of Srpska feast day and the change of the coats-of-arms of towns, municipalities and the entity itself. However, the Federation of B&H seems less inclined to abide by the Court's decisions. In the meantime, RS has never tried to retake its former competences of its own accord. Over the last ten years RS has tried to be as cooperative as possible; there are less functional states in Europe and the Balkans and, more importantly, whose institutions are much less effective and democratic processes slower and

less fruitful. RS has held one referendum – that of late September 2016 – about the celebration of the Republic of Srpska Day. The referendum was not recognized as legitimate by the EU and US, and yet the popular vote was later acknowledged in a decision of the Constitutional Court of B&H (despite the court having reached the end of its mandate before passing the judgment).

The war legacy is a separate problem. Srpska and Serbia have come to terms with and confronted their respective roles in the war to a much greater extent than the Bosniak, Croatian or American elites have done with any war waged by their respective countries and peoples. The leaders of Serbia and Srpska have been tried in a court of justice, with many of them found guilty. Srpska did not become independent; it has lost large important areas that had been inhabited by Serbs for centuries. The Serbs have lost a joint state, Kosovo and Metohija, and have wasted ten years that could have been used to promote progress and development. However, despite the 2007 ruling of the International Court which found Serbia not responsible for the alleged genocide, in early 2017 Bakir Izetbegović tried to re-actualize the matter and revisit the case. Notwithstanding years of facing the past, a readiness to compromise and the fact that the Srebrenica municipality had been led by a Bosniak majority despite being the minority population in the town, the first elections won by a candidate of the Serbian side caused a crisis that lasted for several days. In 2015, on the 20th anniversary of the crime against Bosniaks in Srebrenica, the then-Prime Minister of

Serbia Vučić was physically attacked and driven away. No perpetrators have been held accountable for the incident. The representatives of the US and EU have deemed the incident too petty to respond.

2017 – 2018

In 2017-2018 pressure on the institutions and citizens of the Republic of Srpska seems to have eased somewhat, with the key reason being the shift in the relations between the Great Powers. The victory of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and Russian troops against ISIS and pro-Al Qaeda forces, as well as the still unresolved status of Kosovo and Metohija and the political crisis in Macedonia, have taken the attention of US and EU policy makers away from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The importance of further interference and efforts to continue the revision of the Dayton Agreement (especially Annex 4, the basis of the Constitution of B&H) was diminished and reshaped by the fact that the only truly relevant constitutional question⁵ pertains to the status of Croats in the entity of the Feder-

5 Recent evidence suggests that the entire war was fought for around 6% of the territory; the ethnic confederative principle was unambiguous until the breakout of the war and the Bosniak leaders decided to demand the full stripping of Serbian (and Croatian) rights. The manoeuvres of Croatia and its various strategies of national unification led to the hostage position of the Croatian people in B&H and their lower level of autonomy and different status to that envisaged by the Washington Agreement of 1994. Ненад Кеџмановић, Чедомир Антић, *Историја Републике Српске*, (ИП "Недељник: Београд, 2016),...

ation of B&H and the operation of this uniquely complex administrative unit. Therefore, if any constitutional issue was to be broached, it would only highlight divisions within the Bosniak people, whose maximalist policy had prevented the process of creating a unitary and undemocratic B&H with Bosniak hegemony, and would suggest Bosniak unwillingness to allow the introduction of a fair electoral system and the appointment of legitimate Croatian representatives in the Presidency of B&H, and the matter of the unification or artificial and ineffective cantons with wide competences into two national entities for the Bosniaks and Croats. Despite the fact that B&H is usually a matter handled by mid-level diplomats and officials, the systematic political and media attacks on the status and rights of the Serbian people persist. Over the last ten years the political crises in B&H were never instigated by the democratically elected representatives of the Serbian people. To the contrary, it was the international envoys, Bosniak leaders and some Croatian politician and members of clergy who from the outset had a set of objectives that needed to be met. Some of these they tried to portray as EU standards or, even more vaguely, as 'European values.' Any resistance from the Serbian side – even the most reasonable and mildest – was always branded as an aggressive attempt at cessation and completing the 'genocide project.' the fascist theory about 'genocidal' peoples and states, much maligned by the democratic bloc in Serbia and Srpska when it had been applied to Croatia, was now used at almost any opportunity. The change of political

generations in RS, as well as the shift in international relations 2001-2005, has allowed new leaders to emerge in RS – individuals who had not been active during the civil war or had been critical of the incumbent leadership during the war. And yet they were expected to accept a certain role and share in the blame and to take part in celebrations to honor individuals and institutions that had persecuted their own people. When this failed to happen, the politicians who enjoy four fifths of the Serbian vote in Srpska and B&H were branded continuators of the genocide policy. Texts published in major regional media in the Serbian language provide plenty of illustrative examples of this. Al Jazeera, Radio Free Europe and N1 Info continue to publish texts that do not indicate that the war ended 23 years ago. Their conclusion is plain enough: the mere existence of RS and the Serbian people in B&H as something more than an underprivileged ethnic community within the artificial 'Bosnian state nation' represents a continuation of the genocide against the Bosniaks.⁶ An op-ed published in the *New York Times*, which could even be described as sympathetic to the president of RS Dodik, includes the following sentence: 'Mr. Dodik remains the president of the Serb autonomous region, a slice of territory nearly the size of Belgium. The region likes to call itself the Republika Srpska — a name given to the blood-soaked land by Mr. Dodik's

6 Mersiha Gadzo, 'Ratko Mladic's ideology lives on in Republika Srpska', *Al Jazeera*, 24 Nov 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/ratko-mladic-ideology-lives-republika-srpska-171124101753453.html>, (accessed on 04 June 2018).

predecessor, Radovan Karadzic, the convicted war criminal serving a 40-year sentence for genocide against Bosnia's Muslims.¹⁷ Hence, the Serbian people is not special in any way and enjoys no right to autonomy; this autonomy, the article seems to suggest, was secured (along with its identity) by someone whose primary aim had been the extermination of an entire ethnic group – the Bosniaks. It follows that the Serbs of B&H waged a religious war against the indigenous Bosniak population – a peace-loving nation that the Serbian chauvinists and settlers would deprive of their land, wealth and women. This text was not written an ideological activist or a chauvinist fanatic; however, it does reflect the dominant impression among the increasingly disinterested US and European politicians as well as the frustrated American and EU bureaucrats charged with Balkan matters.

The past year has seen no institutional change to the autonomy of RS. This was largely the result of the balance of power between the Great Powers and the tacit agreement about keeping the status quo in the Western Balkans. However, in every semiannual report the Office of the High Representative (OHR) blames RS for the failures of B&H and the lag in the implementation of reforms. Despite his attempts to present the reports as balanced and fair criticism, Valentin Inzko makes no effort to hide his opinion

7 Barbara Surk, 'Milorad Dodik Wants to Carve Up Bosnia. Peacefully, if Possible', *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/world/europe/dodik-republika-srpska-bosnia.html> , (accessed on 04 June 2018).

that RS and its leadership constitute the main problem in B&H. OHR reports, especially nos. 52 and 53, seem to suggest that the situation would rapidly improve if B&H was to be unitarized and if it were to join NATO and establish a political system that would allow the domination of the majority Bosniak population, all in the name of democracy and stability.⁸ Interestingly, Inzko does not seem to hold back in his views, especially in view of the fact that Austria is a neutral state and not a member of NATO, whose status was also determined based on the fact that it had taken part in global aggression on two occasions in the 20th century and both times in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the presentation of the 52nd OHR Report, the Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Vladimir Karpovich Safronkov has stated that the report was the least objective in the past eight years and added the following: 'It is clear to anyone who is at all familiar with the situation in B&H that the picture painted by the High Representative is far removed from reality; it is misleading and shows that the author has lost touch with reality'.

8 *52nd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN*, 06.11.2017 OHR, <http://www.ohr.int/?p=98189>, (accessed on 04 June 2018); *53rd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN*, 05/08/2018 OHR, <http://www.ohr.int/?p=99230>, (accessed on 04 June 2018). Despite major funding backing the activities of the OHR, these reports are not available on its official website in any of the languages spoken by the majority of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is worrying, he continued, that Inzko is leaning toward open Serbophobia, and that his daily activities have been reduced to clarifying relations with Banja Luka (RS) and lobbying in favor of Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic integration – 'despite of his mandate and the internal political reality of the country where he resides. He is under obligation to implement a harmonized line, not to execute somebody's individual orders, and be guided by personal animosities,' Safronkov stressed. According to him, the High Representative should not engage in antagonisms, but in fulfilling his obligations in good faith. 'This approach means encouraging the process of national reconciliation, respectful internal political dialogue, compromise and consensus, and, of course, respects the opinions of all parties'.

Western opinions different to Inzko's have remained a rare occurrence over the past year. One of them was the voice of the US-based Institute for Stabilization and Transition, which published a report in late October 2017, describing the government of RS as the 'only functional government in the country.'⁹

In March 2018 a young man from Banjaluka called David Dragičević was killed. The circumstances of his death seemed suspicious and the investigation of RS police forces quickly became the subject of various speculations and

9 'Američki institut: BiH je neuspjela država u srcu Evrope', *Politika*, 25 October 2017, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/391377/Americki-institut-BiH-je-neuspjela-drzava-u-srcu-Evrope> ,(cajt posećen 04 06 2018).

protests.¹⁰ His family, friends and the general public began a series of protests that would go on for months. His death caused criticism from the opposition and the involvement of some political factors from the Federation indicated attempts to politicize a criminal investigation, not unlike the identification number and the ensuing protests.¹¹ The usually disinterested circles in the Federation suddenly began to pay attention to the situation in RS. The entire police force of the Republic of Srpska was subjected to frequent and systematic criticism.¹² And while this report by no means aims to assess the results of any police task force, a statement given by one of the Bosniak leader and the president of SDP Nermin Nikšić seems particularly illustrative. During a visit to Banjaluka, Nikšić referenced the Dragičević case and associated it with the 'reform' of the police force which had been suspended in order to gradually dissolve canton-level and entity-level police forces. The President of RS accused him of having instrumentalized the death of David Dragičević for his own political

10 "PRESS KONFERENCIJA MUP-a RS", Mar 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-YZWonWKdQ> , (accessed on 04 June 2018).

11 Namely, the Federation had refused to issue identification documents until the introduction of a unitary system in the entire territory of B&H, leading to the death of a baby who could not travel abroad for treatment.

12 'Vasković za N1: Dragičević je ubijen, evo zašto to tvrdim', *Pressing, BA.N1.INFO*, <http://ba.n1info.com/a258184/Vijesti/Vijesti/Vaskovic-za-N1-Dragicevic-je-ubijen-evo-zasto-to-tvrdim.html> , (accessed 04 June 2018).

purposes. Nikšić had previously paid a visit to the family of the deceased and written a text about it. Nikšić replied: 'I'm sorry that Milorad Dodik would even use the tragedy of the Dragičević family for political spins. Any police force that the people rise against needs to be dissolved.'¹³ The objective and means of this supposedly leftist politician seem clear enough after such a statement.

In late spring 2018 Bosnia and Herzegovina received an influx of migrants from the Near East and Middle East. This is a secondary route, also called the 'mosque route' because it passes through the Western periphery of the Balkans, an area inhabited by Muslims of various nationalities. All levels of authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina became concerned that a few thousand migrants could lead to an even larger influx, with some estimates suggesting as many as 50,000. The fact that the leaders of the opposition in RS had recently joined the Council of Ministers of B&H proved especially problematic. This was a unique case in an essentially consensual political system and it deepened the divisions in Srpska. The migrant issue upset the public. The government and sympathetic media in the country and RS informed the public that most of the migrants would be settled in camps in RS. However, nobody seemed willing to receive migrants and many of them ended up spending weeks in improvised tents in downtown Sarajevo. The leadership of the city was

13 'Nikšić odgovorio Dodiku: Policiju protiv koje se digne narod treba ukinuti', *Nezavisne novine*, 10. May 2018. <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Niksic-odgovorio-Dodiku-Policiju-protiv-koje-se-digne-narod-treba-ukinuti/477684> (accessed 04 June 2018).

unwilling to accommodate the migrants in army barracks and other large public facilities in the city and canton; similar initiatives were also refused by other parts of B&H. The President of RS Milorad Dodik publicly refused to accommodate the migrants during the holdup on their journey to the European states that had invited them and been complicit in the situation that has led to the escalation of their mass exodus. The migrant issue once again opened the question of the powers of the central government. According to the Constitution of B&H, the central government's duty is to coordinate the powers enjoyed by the entities, in the Federation, cantons and the Brčko District. The efforts of the Council of Ministers from the ranks of the opposition in RS to enforce their authority in the entity against the ruling coalition around SND were rather evident and unsuccessful. The Council of Ministers tried to set up a migrant camp in the Mostar area. The canton government (dominantly Croat) refused to allow this, with the Deputy Chairman of the Council Vjekoslav Bevanda claiming that he had not consented to the project and that it had been agreed between the Serbian and Bosniak ministers in the Council. Security Minister Dragan Mektić described the events as a 'coup d'état' and some even expected Ilija Lasić, the head of the police forces of the Herzegovina-Neretva canton, to be arrested.¹⁴

14 "Migranti stigli u Mostar nakon što je Mektić naredio uhićenje hrvatskog policijskog načelnika", *Direktno*, 18. May 2018., <https://direktno.hr/eu-i-svijet/dijaspora/napeto-bih-mektic-naredio-uhicenje-hrvatskog-policijskog-nacelnika-jer-zaustavio-migrante-pred-mostar-122956/> (accessed 04 June 2018).

RS Opposition in the Government of B&H

After the 2014 elections the government bodies of B&H (level of shared institutions) were slow to be formed, which eventually gave rise to a rather peculiar situation. Like several years ago in the Federation of B&H in the case of the Croat opposition, members of the opposition in RS now found themselves in power. Unlike the Croatian Party of Rights, the parties in the Coalition for Change (SZP) were not politically peripheral. Mladen Ivanić, the candidate of SZP, became a member of the Presidency of B&H. However, at the elections in RS, the opposition was almost defeated. Two years later, the parties in the ruling coalition won a sweeping victory at the local elections, leading to a crisis in the opposition, now led largely by new faces. Over the years the government in Banjaluka has claimed that the members of SZP in the Council of Ministers were not working in the best interests of RS. Security Minister Dragan Mektić has issued several statements accusing RS of trying to break away from Bosnia and Herzegovina. At a press conference in mid-March 2018 he accused RS of amassing paramilitary troops and having formed a parallel intelligence service.¹⁵ Notably, no Bosniak or Croat politician has claimed anything of the sort for years. In addition, the former Yugoslavia has seen six cessations and at least

15 Željka Domazet, "Mektić: RS pravi paraslužbe, mladi na obuci u Rusiji", *Glas Srpske*, https://www.glassrpske.com/novosti/vijesti_dana/Mektic-RS-pravi-paraslužbe-mladi-na-obuci-u-Rusiji/lat/257534.html, (accessed 04 June 2018).).

three failed attempts to do so over the last 28 years. The authors of this report were unable to find a similar case of a mid-level democratic official that had ever tried to defy the majority aspirations of its own people or republic. If the course pursued by RS after 1995 has been largely shaped in response to other ambitions, the following question needs to be asked: what is so different about the Serbian political elite and culture that makes its leadership so deeply divided and its state-building movement so ineffective and antagonistic towards a part of its own elite, which does not seem to desire the same things that the other nations had overwhelmingly wanted and eventually achieved?

During the last two years parliamentary life of RS has vacillated between two polar extremes. The MPs of the ruling coalition were trying to portray all of their actions as the defense of RS. However, after 12 years in power, the ruling coalition is now in a stage of establishing a regime not unlike those in Serbia, Montenegro and Hungary. On the other hand, the more or less only advantage of the opposition lies in its agreement with SDA and their coalition in shared institutions.

In November 2017 the National Assembly of RS suspended its discussion of a law on a referendum on the work of the Court and the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁶

16 „PREDOMISLILI SE Narodna skupština Srpske ODUSTALA od referenduma o Sudu i Tužilaštvu BiH“, *Blic*, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/predomislili-se-narodna-skupstina-srpske-odustala-od-referenduma-o-sudu-i-tuzilastvu/s8etpp9> , (accessed on 07 June 2018).

The procurement of arms by the Ministry of the Interior of RS gave rise to rumors encouraged by some circles in Sarajevo and EU that RS was allegedly establishing a Russian-trained paramilitary formation.¹⁷ Meanwhile, however, it transpired that the arming of the cantonal police task forces in the Federation of B&H had not been subjected to adequate control. The fact of the matter is that there is indeed an intact and advanced armaments industry in the Federation; furthermore, at the time of the uproar about the regular and necessary replacement of armaments by a secular, democratic and constitutional institution such

17 Pro-unitary and chauvinistic circles in Sarajevo and EU made it clear enough that they believed that the procurement of arms for the police force of RS was an international conspiracy. An illustrative example of this view is the text published on the influential Krug 99 portal:

„Nakon naoružavanja policije RS dugim cijevima, nastavk opasnih namjera i providnih obrazloženja“, *Krug 99 Sarajevo*, 18 March 2018., <http://krug99.ba/nakon-naoruzavanja-policije-rs-dugim-cijevima-nastavak-opasnih-namjera-i-providnih-obrazlozenja/> , (accessed 08 June 2018). HR Valentin Inzko seems to have a very different opinion, „Incko: Naoružanje MUP-a Srpske legalno, u kantonima kupuju kako ko hoće“, *Kontakt, radio, televizija, portal*, 06 June 2018., <http://mojkontakt.com/blog/2018/06/06/incko-naoruzanje-mup-a-srpske-legalno-u-kantonima-kupuju-kako-ko-hoce/> , (accessed 08 June 2018). However, the negative campaign was so strong that the matter was eventually addressed in the Report submitted by RS to the UN Security Council: „Деветнаести извјештај Републике Српске Савјету безбједности Уједињених нација“, April 2018, http://predstavnistvorsbg.rs/pdf_dokumenti/2018/19_izvjestaj_savjetu_bezbjednosti_un.pdf , (accessed 08 June 2018).

as the Ministry of the Interior, the Chairman of the B&H Presidency, Bakir Izetbegović applauded the procurement of arms in the other entity and even seemed to announce a possible armed conflict in the future: 'We will produce a moving howitzer and we are already working on it. Also, we will create a mobile transporter, we have made a rifle, and we will make the good tactical 12.7, multipurpose throwers of all possible calibers and all possible ammunition for it, and drones. So, we will be like that little man who is not big, but he is angry and well-armed, and everyone will have to think carefully whether they should get into conflict with him. They will never be able to knock on our doors again, without us having nothing to answer it with.'¹⁸ He added that the Federation of B&H needed to procure arms because Serbia and Croatia were doing the same.¹⁹

A session of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H requested by the Serbian MPs about the armament of the Federation was not held due to a non-quorum and the absence of Bosniak MPs. Other influential Bosniak politicians have also given inflammatory and belligerent statements, such as Sefer Halilović, a former general in the so-called Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who said that if the referendum in RS was to go ahead, it would be captured in 10-15 days. In January 2018 another Bosniak

18 'Izetbegović threatens with heavy weapons', *INDEPENDENT BALKAN NEWS AGENCY*, 18 April 2018; „Деветнаести извјештај Републике Српске Савјету безбједности Уједињених нација“ ..., 5–6.

19 *Ibid.* Иначе, Уставом БиХ је изричито забрањен сваки сукоб између ентитета.

party, the Citizens' Alliance (GS), called the ruling SDA to prepare for war and to arm the police forces in cantons with a Bosniak majority.²⁰ Interestingly, in the campaign to prove the militarization of RS an important role was played by Security Minister Dragan Mektić, who publicly stated that the rifles had been bought for a showdown of the government and its political opponents.²¹

And while an investment into the modernization of a legal police force caused endless debates and such an uproar, the US have given around 100 million USD of donations to the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it one of the countries with the highest US involvement. In the same year that saw heated discussions about alleged Russian influence in the US presidential elections of 2016, three major media projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been announced. All of them are headed by USAID and have a total worth of 12 million USD.²²

In the Federation of B&H, Croatia and some US, EU and even Serbian circles, the general opinion seems to be

20 „ГС: Грађани, немојте мирно спавати“, Грађански савезе, 13 January 2018, „Деветнаести извјештај Републике Српске Савјету безбједности Уједињених нација“..., 6.

21 „„ Dodiku stiže kontingent oružja, no naručio je još 5000 komada: „Čemu toliko oružja i za koga? Te puške nisu za borbu protiv terorizma““, Dnevnik, 16 February 2018, <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/svijet/dragan-mektic-dodik-kupuje-oruzje-radi-obracuna-s-politickim-protivnicima-a-ne-teroristima---506997.html> , (accessed on 08 06 2018).

22 „Деветнаести извјештај Републике Српске Савјету безбједности Уједињених нација“..., 10; Ibid, 14.

that RS is deliberately obstructing the functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in mid-April 2018, the chairman of the Constitutional Court Mirsad Ceman stated that RS had failed to implement only one out of nine decisions of the Constitutional Court (the one concerning enforcement procedure).²³ The most important unresolved constitutional matter remains the reform of the electoral law. Namely, despite the singular complexity of the Dayton constitutional system as a consensual government of three ethnic groups, it has continually enjoyed the majority support of the population and all three nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, since there are no electoral units for the appointment of Presidency members from the Federation of B&H, Croatian cantons have never evolved into a third entity. The Bosniak nationalist Željko Komšić (formerly a member of SDP B&H and currently of the Democratic front) served two terms as the Croat member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Komšić enjoyed merely symbolic support in areas with a Croat ethnic majority. Similarly, due to the lack of an effective mechanism to ensure national equality, the Croatian population could not appoint one of the two key offices in the entity, and in 2011-2015 Živko Budimir, the leader of the minor Croatian Party of Rights, served as the President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As indicated in our previous

23 Девет одлука није проведено, БН телевизија, 11 April 2018, <http://www.rtvbn.com/3903465/devet-odluka-nije-provedeno-> , (accessed on 08 06 2018).

reports, the idea to amend the electoral law was instigated by the *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* case of 2006. The plaintiffs claimed that the rights of the minorities outside of the three constitutive nations were being violated since they were ineligible for candidacy for some state offices, most importantly the presidency. This was a deliberate attempt to facilitate a fundamental revision of the 1996 Constitution and to allow the Bosniak/Bosnian relative majority to establish political domination and hegemony. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 2009; the public discussion about the implementation of the ruling began in 2010. The Republic of Srpska immediately made the necessary changes to enable all citizens of the entity to run for the Presidency, which essentially meant that the Serbian member would henceforth be recruited from the entity of RS rather than the ranks of the Serbian population. The Federation of B&H underwent a veritable crisis, which could not be resolved even after the appointment of Croatian representatives for the Presidency and the President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁴ The Bosniak hegemony in the Federation, introduced in 2011, could have been averted by a decision of the Central Electoral Commission. This outcome was prevented by HR Velantín Inzko, who enforced the decision previously made by Bosniak politicians. Just like in the conflicts of 1992, the 'foreign factor' proved decisive once again. Ef-

24 „Деветнаести извјештај Републике Српске Савјету безбједности Уједињених нација“..., 12.

forts to change the electoral law in the Federation have pushed the entity into a deep constitutional and political crisis, including electoral incidents and the suspended elections in Mostar, the second largest city in the entity.²⁵ At the elections scheduled for October 2018 Željko Komšić was to run for the Croat seat in the Presidency. In 2017 the Constitutional Court removed the problematic provisions from the Electoral Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but Bosniak MPs failed to ratify the changes in the parliament.

Over the past year (2017-2018) there has been no effort on the part of the US and EU to convince Bosniak representatives to implement the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The continued operation of the OHR and the presence of foreign judges in the Constitutional Court are similar matters. Statements of Serbian and Croatian political representatives (two out of three constitutive nations) suggest that they are not in favor of the continued operation of this institution. The OHR originally had no governmental powers and was limited to control duties; its powers were limited by the Constitution of B&H rather than merely the will of the HR and the countries that support its work. Almost 25 years after the end of armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, inter-

25 In 2010 the Constitutional Court ruled that the parts of the electoral law concerning Mostar were unconstitutional and that their implementation put the Croats in an unfair position. SDA obstructed the political implementation of this ruling. The municipal administration of Mostar has not been elected in a democratic procedure for ten years.

national government, initially introduced as a peace implementation body, does not seem to make much sense any more. Unlike Kosovo and Metohija where, as our previous reports have shown, the situation has at times been much worse and the safety of minority members at a lower level, or Macedonia, whose internal antagonisms make it even less functional than B&H, the involvement of foreign representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina has always been decisive and extremely biased.²⁶ Using the so-called Bonn Powers, the OHR has in the past dismissed democratically elected presidents without a court ruling, interred politicians and businessmen; nowadays, owing to a new clash of the Great Powers, the rise of Russia and China and the ensuing balance of power in the Peace Implementation Council, this Office serves as an auxiliary institution of the Bosniak national movement and stimulates instability with its unfair and unconstitutional actions, as well as the huge gap between its aspirations and powers on one hand and its real capabilities on the other.

26 In his memoirs Lord Ashdown described having influenced Chris Patten, one of the leaders of EU, to toe the line of his policy. Similarly, a foreign member of the Constitutional Court stated that the judges cooperate with the OHR and that 'the entire system was based upon the tacit consensus between the Court and the High Representative that the Court... will always confirm the merits of his legislation as can be seen from those judgments.' Joseph Marko, 'Five Years of Constitutional Jurisprudence in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *European Diversity and Autonomy Papers* (July 2004), 17, 18.

The Constitutional Court is in an even worse situation. There has hardly ever been a case where the foreign judges and Bosniak judges have voted differently. In a particularly bizarre turn of events, during the voting against the Republic of Srpska Day which coincides with the Orthodox feast of St. Stephen, a judge from Macedonia Margarita Caca Nikolovska voted against despite coming from a country which, although multiethnic and multiconfessional with around 30% of the population being Muslim, celebrates the 1903 revolt against the Ottomans as its central public holiday. The official name of this feast day is Ilinden (St. Elijah's Day) and in late 2018 there were even proposals to rename Macedonia as the Ilinden Republic of Macedonia.

At the first glance, the Republic of Serbia seems to have very harmonious relations with the Republic of Srpska. As with all undemocratic states, this is above all reflected in the relationship of the two presidents - Aleksandar Vučić and Milorad Dodik. Vučić has continued his habit of avoiding taking a stand in difficult matters: he opted not to visit Srebrenica for the commemoration of the massacre (an understandable choice in view of the still unresolved scandal concerning the physical attack against him, which seems to have involved members of Bosniak security services); he also chose not to attend the ceremony for the Republic of Srpska Day.²⁷ As indi-

27 Presidency Secretary of the President of Serbia Nikola Selaković and Minister of Defence Aleksandar Vulin attended instead. Obeležen Dan Republike Srpske, RTV Studio B, <http://studiob.rs/dodikcilj-je-ve-ca-samostalnost-republike-srpske/> (accessed on 09 June 2018).

cated in the Introduction to this report, in the previous year the institutions charged with the care of the rights of Serbs in the region and diaspora were not reinstated; the policies and strategies of the Serbian government and president remain unchanged, as does the funding allocated to the Serbs in the region and diaspora. Yet, political calculations and interests dictated by Serbia's unfavorable position in the resolution of the status of Kosovo and Metohija have encouraged Vučić and other leaders to pay frequent visits to the Republic of Srpska, culminating in Vučić's April visit to Eastern Herzegovina. The visit ended with many hopes and promises. The government of Serbia decided to send over 2.7 million Euros of financial aid to RS, with much of this sum allocated for cultural projects in Herzegovina and infrastructural projects.²⁸

The Serbian People in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosniak and Croatian parties believed that the establishment of three constitutive nations in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina would limit and later dissolve any independence of the Republic of Srpska. This did not happen because the return of exiled inhabitants and refugees had been merely symbolic, mostly Serbs as shown by the census of 2013. The Serbian people still have

28 „Vlada Srbije daje više od 2,7 miliona evra pomoći Srpskoj”, *TV N1info*, 07 June 2018., <http://rs.n1info.com/a394543/Vesti/Vlada-Srbije-daje-vise-od-2-7-miliona-evra-pomoci-Srpskoj.html> (accessed on 09 June 2018).

no constitutive status in four out of ten cantons in the Federation of B&H.²⁹ Furthermore, the quotas for Serbian civil servants and functionaries have not been met in many cases. The leaders of the Serbian people place the blame for this state of affairs on the Bosniak-Croat majority, US, EU and the authorities of RS. There is a notable difference in the position of Serbs in the Federation and Bosniaks and Croats in RS. Representatives of the US and EU often claim that the departure of Serbs from the Federation had been an organized project and that the few Serbs that have remained are loyal to the political parties based in Sarajevo and Mostar. This is, however, incorrect. The elected representatives of the Serbian people, who are still the majority population in the municipalities of Drvar, Grahovo and Glamoč, have tried to establish the Alliance of Serb Municipalities, but the initiative was blocked. Pursuant to the constitutions of B&H and the federation, Serbian representatives have requested constitutive status in the Canton of Herzegovina-Neretva in mid-2016, but the proposal has yet to be discussed in relevant institutions.³⁰

29 Srbi nisu konstitutivni u četiri kantona F BiH, *TV N1 info*, 11 June 2018. <http://ba.n1info.com/a203678/Vijesti/Vijesti/Srbi-nisu-konstitutivni-u-FBiH.html> ,(accessed on 11 June 2018); Boris Knežević, "ISTRAŽUJEMO Ko je kriv za DISKRIMINACIJU Srba u Federaciji BiH", *Blic*, 18. December. 2017. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/istrazujemo-ko-je-kriv-za-diskriminaciju-srba-u-federaciji-bih/hxv-jkk5> , (accessed on 11 June 2018).

30 Ibid.

In late May 2018 the Constitutional Court of the Federation of B&H confirmed the constitutive status of the Serbian people in three cantons with a Croatian ethnic majority.³¹

Our earlier reports recount how the Federation of B&H ignored the ruling of the International Court in Strasbourg concerning the equality of military officers, members of JNA and VRS, with others who enjoy tenancy and occupancy rights in the territory of this entity. Meanwhile, the Republic of Srpska has granted prewar tenancy rights to members of the Army of B&H and HVO.

In early December 2017 ethnic Serbs living in the Federation of B&H were given an unusually short deadline (60 days) to prove their ownership of land plots and other immovable property.³² Poor notification and recent practice suggest a possibility of abuse. It seems clear enough that this modernization of land registers hides an ambition of some circles in the Federation to complete the processes started during the civil war.

31 „Sud: Srbi konstitutivni u tri kantona Federacije BiH“, *TV N1 info*, 29. May 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a391871/Svet/Region/Sud-Srbi-konstitutivni-u-tri-kantona-Federacije-BiH.html>, (accessed on 08 June 2018).

32 „Srbima iz Federacije BiH počeo da teče rok od 60 dana da POTVRDE VLASNIŠTVO ili će IZGUBITI IMOVINU“, *Blic*, 06 December 2017., <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/srbima-iz-federacije-bih-poceo-da-tece-rok-od-60-dana-da-potvrde-vlasnistvo-ili-ce/wqk7p5p>, (accessed on 11 June 2018).

During the 15-year-long existence of the House of Peoples of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian people has been adequately represented for no more than four years (2010-2014).³³ The current composition of the House of Peoples reaches only two thirds of the Serbian quota, with 13 out of a maximum of 17 MPs. After the Serbian MPs appealed to the Constitutional Court of the Federation to rectify this situation they were informed that they had no right to submit such a document. Pursuant to the Constitution of B&H, any appellation must be submitted by two-thirds of the total number of MPs. Since this appeal had been submitted by 12 out of 13, the Constitutional Court chose not to acknowledge it.³⁴ Interestingly, both the Constitution and other legislation regulating Serbian MP quotas use the expression 'can/could' rather than 'must' be filled.³⁵ The Serbian people have no authentic delegates in the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Elections for the vice president of the Federation are usually farcical, since the 'civic' Bosniak parties tend to elect 'political Bosnians or Bosniaks' to these

33 „Srbi u Federaciji BiH: Narod uz čija prava nema glagola „morati““, *Srpska café*, 08 October 2017, <http://www.srpskacafe.com/2017/10/srbi-u-federaciji-bih-narod-uz-cija-prava-nema-glagola-morati/>, (accessed on 12 June 2018).

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

seats.³⁶ Analyzing their public statements it is difficult to find any activities concerning the Serbian people or the Serb-populated areas in the Federation. The concept of tri-ethnic constitutive status in the entire territory of B&H is difficult to implement 25 years after the war, and many registered voters have been settled elsewhere for decades.³⁷

The agreement of political representatives to continue using the ambiguous 2013 census supports a view of reality that has long been accepted in other countries that had participated in the war. The Serbian people have a symbolic presence in the institutions of the Federation of B&H, in Canton 10, where they have an absolute majority in three municipalities; they are almost entirely absent from public administration. With the exception of police forces, where their numbers keep declining, in all other institutions and public companies Serbs are underrepresented or entirely

36 The incumbent vice president of the Federation of B&H Milan Dunović is a member of Željko Komšić's Democratic Front and a veteran of the Bosniak Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Актуелни потпредседник ФБиХ Милан Дуновић је функционер Демократског фронта Жељка Комишића и сам ратни ветеран бошњачке Армије Р. БиХ. *Биографија Милана Дуновића*, потпредседника Федерације БиХ, <http://potpredsjednikfbih.gov.ba/biografija/> (accessed on 13 June 2018).

37 Elvir Padalović, „20 GODINA APARTHEJDA U BIH: Kako smo obrisali Srbe u Gorazdu, Hrvate u Bihaću i Bošnjake u Livnu...“, *Buka*, 23 February 2018, <http://www.6yka.com/novost/136123/20-godina-aparthejda-u-bih-kako-smo-obrisali-srbe-u-gorazdu-hrvate-u-bihacu-i-bosnjake-u-livnu> (accessed on 13 June 2018).

absent.³⁸ This state of affairs has not improved significantly in 2017–2018 compared to the previous reports. Despite many challenges and difficulties shared by all three ethnic groups in countries from where they had been displaced or exiled, a journalist of the Belgrade-based daily *Politika* has aptly summarized the situation in a 2016 title: *Bosniaks Deprived of Rights in Srpska, Serbs erased in the Federation of B&H.*³⁹ In the past years Serb politicians have claimed that Bosniaks enjoy more rights in RS than in some Croat-dominated cantons in the Federation. And while the Ministry of the Interior in RS employs around 700 Bosniaks, and official statistics show that a half of the prewar Bosniak population has returned, in 2016 the Federation of B&H employed no more than 13 Serbs.⁴⁰

38 Ibid.

39 Mladen Kremenović, „Bošnjaci u Srpskoj obespravljani, Srbi u Federaciji BiH – izbrisani“, *Politika*, 17 February 2016, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/349344/Bosnjaci-u-Srpskoj-obespravljani-Srbi-u-Federaciji-BiH-izbrisani>, (accessed on 13 June 2018).

40 Ibid.

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA⁴¹

Legal and institutional framework

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia ‘guarantees equality for all members of all national minorities’, and Serbs are recognized as one of the minority peoples. The Croatian Constitution guarantees members of all national minorities the freedom to express national affiliation, language, and script, as well as cultural autonomy. The equality and protection of national minorities in Croatia is regulated by the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities. Since 2012, a Human Rights Office has been tasked with taking care of and monitoring the realization of rights of national minorities in accordance with the Constitutional Law in Croatia. The Council for National Minorities also plays an important role as a state-level umbrella that connects the institutions and interests of national minorities.

One of the most important Serbian institutions in Croatia is the Serb National Council (SNV) that emerged from the Erdut Agreement of 1996. and a Government

41 The report is written based on publicly available data from Croatia and Serbia, information from the governing bodies of both countries, data and analysis of international and other NGOs dealing with human rights, media, as well as interviews with members of the Serbian community in Croatia. All links listed in the footnotes were last checked on 1 July 2018.

Letter of the Republic of Croatia about peaceful completion of the integration. SNV functions as an umbrella organization of Serb self-rule in Croatia. SNV is linked to various cultural and economic institutions, such as SKD Prosvjeta and Privrednik. The Joint Council of Municipalities is operating in the area of Eastern Slavonia, Baranya and Western Srem - an advisory body that coordinates the activities of municipalities with a significant Serbian population. The Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), led by Prof Dr. Milorad Pupovac, emerged as the key political representative of the Serbian people in Croatia.

In accordance with the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, and based on the Law on the Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, Serbs have three guaranteed seats.

Since 2004, Serbia and Croatia have had a bilateral agreement on protection of national minorities in both countries. The agreement assures that national minorities will be guaranteed the right to preserve and express their national, cultural, linguistic and religious identity, the right to maintain and develop minority education, the right to media and fulfillment of minority members' special interests, as well as the right to establish cultural and educational centers and institutions in the territory of the Contracting States, and in that sense the states are obliged to actively monitor the realization of the cultural, religious and educational needs of minorities.

The number of Serbs in Croatia

According to the 2011 Census, there are 4,284,889 inhabitants in the Republic of Croatia, 328,738 of which are national minorities, or 7.67% of the total population. Among the national minorities, Serbs are the most numerous - 186,633 or 4.36% of the total population. Most Serbs live in the counties of Vukovar-Srijem, Osijek-Baranya, Sisak-Moslavina and Karlovac.

Compared to the census of 1991, when there were 581,663 Serbs in Croatia, twenty years later there are 395,030 less - that is, the population decreased by almost 68%. This is without counting about 106,000 people who declared themselves Yugoslavs in the 1991 census, most of which were Serbs.

According to the Croatian government data from 2010 (quoted in UNHCR's study 'Minority Return to Croatia - Study of the Open Process' of 2012), 130,220 Serb returnees were registered. According to SNV, about 133,000 Serbs returned to Croatia, majority of which were elderly (as much as 30 % were older than 65).

According to the same data, only one third of the returnees live in Croatia, which is 5% less than in 2006. From 2003 onwards, the number of Serbs leaving Croatia continuously surpasses the number of returnees (in 2009, 4,458 of them moved to Serbia, while only 755 returned).

Over the years, as we noted in previous reports, the number of Serbs in Croatia continued to decline, their return being hampered by several factors: the obstruction of

the Croatian authorities at all levels (from administrative, to political ones, through pandering to Croatian nationalists who directly challenge the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Serbs), postponing/avoiding the resolution of property and housing issues, as well as the problem of unpaid salaries/pensions during the war, unresolved status rights, abuse of war crimes issues (to perfidious pressures such as the so-called secret indictments).

Key events in the period from July 2017 to July 2018

Regarding the position of Serbs in Croatia, the following events marked the period of July 2017 to July 2018:

- Aleksandar Vučić's visit to Zagreb: The Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić paid an official visit to Zagreb on 12-13 February 2018. The visit, which had been announced and postponed for a long time, had two key features: the announcement of a new beginning in Belgrade – Zagreb relations, and the unpleasant atmosphere in which it took place.

After the President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar Kitarović was in Belgrade for the inauguration of Aleksandar Vučić as president of Serbia (May 2017), the Serbian and Croatian publications speculated on the visit of the Serbian president to Zagreb several times. Despite the announcements and speculations, due to tense relations between the two countries and the conflict between the Croatian government and the president, an official invitation from Zagreb had been postponed for a long time.

Finally, the invitation arrived on 30 January 2018⁴², and the president of Serbia visited Zagreb on 12 February. This was the first official visit of a Serbian president to Croatia since 2010.⁴³

The visit took place in the shadow of a then new escalation of relations between the two countries: primarily due to the conflict over the exhibition of Croatian crimes in Jasenovac, organized by Serbia at the UN headquarters in New York⁴⁴, as well as Croatian officials' protest regarding the statements of Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin⁴⁵. The visit itself was described as a chance to start resolving the burning issues in relations between the two countries, focusing on problems such as the improvement of bilateral political and economic relations, the fate of the missing persons, and the dispute over the Danube border.

42 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/kolinda-pozvala-vucica-u-posetu-hrvati-i-srbi-dva-stara-evropska-naroda-su-toliko/y0175my>

43 Tomislav Nikolić stayed in Zagreb in 2013, but to attend the ceremony of the country's official entry into the EU. Although the then Croatian President Ivo Josipović made an official visit to Belgrade in 2013, a return visit by Nikolić never took place, because no invitation was made from Zagreb.

44 <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/mvep-uputio-notu-veleposlanstvu-republike-srbije-u-zagrebu-zbog-izjava-ivice-dacic-a---504675.html>

45 <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/svijet/aleksandar-vulin-vucica-ce-u-zagrebu-docekati-ustase-na-trgovima-pokusat-ce-doci-do-njega---506030.html>

On the eve of President Vučić's visit, Dragan Vasiljković⁴⁶, better known as Captain Dragan, who was extradited to Croatia in 2015 by the Australian authorities and sentenced to 15 years in prison for war crimes in Split⁴⁷ in September 2017, addressed the president through his lawyer. Vasiljković complained about the verdict, which has now reached the Supreme Court of Croatia. In his address to the Serbian President, Vasiljković argued that Croatia had defaulted on promises given to the Australian authorities that he would be tried for three criminal offenses and not five for which he was being tried. The Serbian president remained silent on this issue.

In Croatia, the general view was that the visit was full of political risks⁴⁸, and that the two sides were very far from any progress in relations⁴⁹, while the message sent from Belgrade was somewhat more optimistic.⁵⁰

46 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3028731/kapetan-dragan-moli-vucica-da-se-pokrene-njegovo-pitanje-u-hrvatsko.html>

47 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/kapetan-dragan-dobio-15-godina-zatvora-osuden-je-za-ratne-zlocine-pocinjene-nad-hrvatskim-vojnima-i-civilima/6586317/>

48 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/davor-ivo-stier-predsjednica-je-riskirala-kada-je-pozvala-vucica-u-zagreb-ali-taj-je-rizik-bio-opravan/7000701/>, as well as: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3028417/vuciceva-poseta-hrvatskoj-i-dalje-tema.html>

49 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/komentari/srbija-za-napredak-prema-eu-mora-rijesiti-otvorena-pitanja-s-hrvatskom/6992952/>

50 See Rasim Ljajić's statement <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/posjet-aleksandra-vucica-hrvatskoj-prilika-je-da-se-pocnu-rjesavati-otvorena-pitanja/6997791/>

The visit, however, took place in a tense and unpleasant atmosphere. Firstly, Croatian government members sent several harsh messages to Belgrade, such as: a statement by the Croatian Defense Minister Damir Krstičević that 'Vučić is welcome to Croatia but we are expecting an apology for the Greater Serbia aggression against Croatia', or the statement by the Croatian Prime Minister Plenković immediately before the visit, that 'Croatia has no intends to give way to Serbia'⁵¹. In Zagreb, associations of Croatian 'Home defenders' (members of the Croatian army during the separatist war of 1991-1995) and members of the extreme right organized protests, which were dominated by chauvinist messages and Ustasha movement symbols. MP Miro Bulj tried to intercept the Serbian president as he was leaving the Croatian government building, while shouting at him.⁵² During the meeting of the Serbian president and Croatian Prime Minister Plenković, the Croatian side raised the issue of war compensation, although this topic was not agreed upon previously, when the agenda was being prepared.⁵³

After the visit, the president of Croatia stated that there were attempts to thwart the Serbian president's visit, and that she was surprised that Prime Minister Plenković

51 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3039708/plenkovic-hrvatska-nema-nameru-da-popusta-srbiji.html>

52 <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/miro-bulj-aleksandar-vucic-1225928>

53 <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/plenkovic-i-vucic-razgovarali-o-ratnoj-odsteti-ali-nisu-se-slozili-foto-20180212>

ić raised the issue of war compensation during the meeting with Vučić.⁵⁴

- The bankruptcy of Tesla Bank: Seven years since the launch of Tesla Bank, in February 2018, it ceased to operate.⁵⁵ The Council of the Croatian National Bank assessed that the rehabilitation of the bank is not in the interest of Croatia, nor is it necessary, and that there is no indication that private capital could save it. The bank's account was blocked and bankruptcy proceedings were started.

Founded in 2011 at the initiative of the SNV, the goal of Tesla Bank was to provide development loans to the Serbian population in Croatia. The bank's shareholders were the Republic of Serbia and AP Vojvodina with a total of 50.13 %, RTB Kapital with 9 %, Croatian companies Zvijezda, Končar and Đuro Đaković with around 9 %, Sladorana Županja with 4.9 %, two companies from Serbia with a total of 3.68 %, and small shareholders with 7.14 %. The total founding capital of the bank amounted to 4.8 million Euros.

Since its inception, the bank was operating with a loss. The key problem for the bank was providing adequate founding capital. Although the revitalization of the bank through recapitalization was announced in 2016, it did not happen. Belgrade and Zagreb failed to agree to jointly recapitalize Tesla Bank, and the entire project failed. The key

54<http://rs.n1info.com/a366099/Svet/Region/Grabar-Kitarovic-Nekisu-zeleli-da-osujete-posetu-Vucica.html>

55<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/hnb-predlozio-otvaranje-ste-caja-nad-tesla-bankom-foto-20180221>

representatives of Serbian political and cultural institutions in Croatia have distanced themselves from this bank since it became certain that it had financial problems.⁵⁶

- The Law on Defenders: In December 2017, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Law on the Rights of Croatian Defenders of the Homeland War⁵⁷, which marked Serbia as 'an aggressor' and the Serbs in Croatia as accomplices in the 'aggression' (the 1991-1995 conflict). The law, which expanded the rights of defenders in relation to the existing ones, was supported by 93 MPs, 15 were against, and three abstained.

In the text of the law - which describes the Croatian separatist war as 'domobranski (homeland-defending)' - it is said that it was a 'just, legitimate, defensive and liberating' war. Article 1, point (c) states: 'Croatian defenders of the Homeland War defended the Republic of Croatia within its internationally recognized borders from the armed aggression committed by Serbia, Montenegro and the Yugoslav People's Army together with an armed insurrection of a part of the Serbian population in the Republic of Croatia.'⁵⁸

The law was adopted with some corrections in the text, because 'paramilitary units from BiH' were removed from it, and the formulation 'a large number of members of the

56 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/tesla-banka-hrvatska/28146401.html>

57 https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2017_12_121_2758.html

58 IBID

Serbian national minority in Croatia' was replaced with 'part of the Serbian population in the Republic of Croatia'. Beyond this distinction, the text of the Law is practically harmonized with the 2000 Declaration of the Homeland War, which marked Serbia, among others, as the aggressor.

Three Serb representatives in the Parliament - Milorad Pupovac, Borislav Milošević and Dragan Jeckov (who support the current government of Prime Minister Plenković, which proposed this law) - abstained from voting, and no amendment to the text of the Law was sent from their representative group. In a statement to the Tanjug agency, Serbian parliamentary representative Borislav Milošević said: 'We did not file any amendments, and the law was adopted with 93 votes'⁵⁹, not wanting to comment on the fact that the SDSS did not oppose the adoption of laws, to which they had objections two months prior.

On this occasion, the leader of SDSS, Milorad Pupovac, stated that he understood the public in Serbia, which did not benevolently accept the fact that three Serbian MPs abstained in passing this law, and added that he wished they understood the position of his party in Croatia. He told RTS that the fact that they abstained from voting could have meant that they were against it. Pupovac explained to *Politika*⁶⁰ that they had not decided to make amendments to the law, which two months before the

59 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/393874/Sabor-Srbiju-oznacio-kao-agresora-srpski-zastupnici-uzdrzani>

60 same

adoption they called unacceptable⁶¹ - primarily because of the atmosphere that prevailed in the Parliament due to the Hague verdict to the Herceg-Bosna generals, but also because of what Slobodan Praljak did in the courtroom (the law was adopted one day after the 'Prlić and others' ruling, when Croatian General Slobodan Praljak committed suicide in a courtroom in The Hague, by drinking poison).

Official Serbia has assessed that the adoption of this law does not contribute to the reconciliation of the two sides, while some MPs - like Miodrag Linta - have estimated that the adoption of this law is an act of hostility. There was no reaction from the European Union to the adoption of this law.

- The initiative for changing the constitutional law on the election of minority members: In September of 2017, a member of the extreme right-wing Croatian Party of Rights, Anto Đapić, started an initiative to hold a referendum that would abolish a special list of minority communities representatives in the Croatian Parliament⁶². According to the amendments proposed, minority representatives would no longer be elected on separate lists but on the general electoral list. The number of MPs in the Parliament would also be reduced from today's maximum of 160 to 120, and proportionally, the number of represen-

61 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/2886632/zakon-o-braniteljima-neprihvatljiv-za-sdss.html>

62 <https://www.dw.com/hr/revitalizacija-ocvale-politi%C4%8D-ke-karijere-na-ra%C4%8Dun-manjinskih-prava/a-40637717>

tatives of national minorities would be reduced from eight to six. In addition, these six representatives of national minorities could not participate in the vote of confidence to the Government or in the vote on the government's final budget.⁶³

The initiative took off with the support of Željka Markić, the president of the association On Behalf of the Family, which was previously successful in collecting signatures for the Family Law. Former Croatian President Ivo Josipović said that the advocates of the initiative 'have some ideas that are not bad', but assessed that their ultimate goal was to 'remove and crush minorities',⁶⁴ which the advocates of this idea denied, stating that the initiative was 'not anti-Serbian but anti-corruption'⁶⁵. Soon, the coalition The People Decide was formed around On Behalf of the Family with the aim of collecting a sufficient number of signatures for the referendum.

The referendum initiative has defined two issues. First, aside from the question of whether they are for 'the Parliament having a minimum of 100, and a maximum of 120 representatives, it is also asked whether you are for members of national minorities having the right to elect up to

63 <https://kamenjar.com/zeljka-markic-kod-sprajca-manjinski-zastupnici-ne-trebaju-glasati-o-vladi/>

64 <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/josipovic-o-inicijativi-iza-koje-stoji-zeljka-markic-imaju-nekih-dobrih-ideja-ali-oni-samo-zele-zgaziti-manjine-foto-20180508>

65 <http://hr.n1info.com/a249785/Vijesti/Zeljka-Markic-Inicijativa-za-referendum-nije-antisrpska.html>

six representatives instead of the current eight.' The second issue is dedicated only to minorities and it states: 'Are you for national minority representatives deciding on all issues within the competence of the Parliament except for the confidence to the Government and the adoption of the state budget?' The People Decide initiative pointed out that it considered these issues crucial to 'better ensuring the will of voters and reducing political trade and corruption.'⁶⁶

By the end of May, The People Decide initiative representatives announced that they collected 397,024 signatures for the first question and 390,189 signatures for the second question.⁶⁷

Official Serbia did not react to this event, while the Serb leader in Croatia, Milorad Pupovac, stated that it was an 'antiminority and undemocratic initiative'⁶⁸. The two largest Croatian parties - HDZ and SDP - have announced opposition to a referendum that would, as was pointed out, lead to reduced minority rights.⁶⁹

66 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/burne-reakcije-nakon-inicijative-udruga-u-ime-obitelji-taj-referendum-je-totalitaran-hdze-od-njega-mora-ograditi/7306549/>

67 <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/inicijativa-narod-odlucuje-objavljuje-tocnu-brojku-prikupljenih-potpisa-za-referendum---519005.html>

68 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/burne-reakcije-nakon-inicijative-udruga-u-ime-obitelji-taj-referendum-je-totalitaran-hdze-od-njega-mora-ograditi/7306549/>

69 <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/andrej-plenkovic-i-davor-bernardic-prvi-put-jedistveni-su-protiv-jednog-referenduma---516223.html>

- The continuation of Croatian chauvinism towards the Serbs: This year, as in the previous years, Croatia has seen a high level of intolerance, hatred and a large number of chauvinist and racist outbursts against members of the Serbian national community.

Amnesty International, in the report on the state of human rights in Croatia for 2017/2018, stated that 'the policies of the Croatian authorities since December 2017 failed to analyze and adequately address the human rights violations that Serbs, Roma and sexual communities face'⁷⁰. And the Human Rights Watch stated that Serbs are a regular target of discrimination in Croatia.⁷¹

The Croatian Ombudsman's report for 2017 states in its Introduction that 'According to members of the Serbian national minority, there is a greater degree of social distance and prejudice, and hatred, which results in public expressions of intolerance'⁷². The Ombudsman's Report states that during 2017, Serbs were mostly victims of harassment on a national basis⁷³. When it comes to the use of language and script, the Ombudsperson states that 'the

70 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/croatia/report-croatia/>

71 <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/croatia>

72 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 8.

73 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 19.

Serbian language and the Cyrillic script still bear the stigma of crime and aggression. Thus, the results of the 'Attitudes and Perceptions of the National Public on National Minorities, Refugees and Migrants' research of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity, Citizenship and Migration of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zagreb, point out that a part of the majority population, especially in the areas heavily affected by the war, see bilingualism as a provocation, while bilingualism would be a symbolic recognition of integration into Croatian society to members of the Serbian minority.⁷⁴ A vivid example is that of a school in Pleternica, Slavonia, where the parents alarmed the school and the local government, and the county also responded, because the elementary school first graders received math assignments in Cyrillic, which turned out to be the Bulgarian variety rather than Serbian.⁷⁵

The report of the Croatian Ombudsman additionally states that 'representatives of the Serbian minority are pointing out that their members are facing pressure, harassment and insults because they are issued identity cards in which the information is written in Serbian and Cyrillic alphabet, for example by police officers, and that they there-

74 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 40.

75 <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/panika-u-pleternici-zbog-cirilice-u-skoli-a-nitko-nije-provjerio-o-kojem-jeziku-se-radi/1031128.aspx>

fore rarely opt for bilingual documents.⁷⁶ According to official data, about 3,000 ID cards are issued annually in the minority language and script in Croatia, of which the vast majority to the members of the Italian minority and only a few hundred to the members of the Serbian community.⁷⁷

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) is still a target of vandalism and administrative obstruction. The US State Department pointed out in a report on the state of human rights in Croatia for 2017⁷⁸ that the SPC in Croatia is facing problems with property restitution.

The removal of Serbs from voter lists has continued. From the Residence Act adoption in 2012 until April 2017, in Republic of Croatia, a total of 269,516 citizens were deleted from the voters' list and consequently, residence records, of which 152,974 Croats, 61,624 persons of unknown nationality, 40,103 Serbs, 3,638 Bosnians, 2,236 Albanians and 1,492 Roma. In correlation with the 2011 population census, 3.95 % of Croats and 21.5 % of Serbs were removed from the residence records.⁷⁹

76 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 40

77 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 40

78 <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277395.pdf>

79 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 48

The Serbs in Croatia believe that legal solutions are locally often made with the aim of preventing the development and strengthening of Serb communities. The ombudsman's report also states that the restoration of Serb houses in the areas that were under Croatian authorities' control of the during the war, and in which there were no war conflicts is postponed; the registration of the Serbian primary school in Vukovar is impeded; numerous Serb communities still do not have electricity, even though they did before the war: 'Available data shows that electricity needs to be (re)connected into 126 villages and hamlets, and that more than 500 returnee households are still without power, even though they had it before the war.'⁸⁰

In Croatia, Marko Perković Thompson is still one of the most popular singers. He glorifies the Ustasha movement in his songs and his concerts display Ustasha and other Nazi symbols. How deeply the Ustasha sentiment runs in Croatia is confirmed by the fact that Croatian soccer players at the World Championships in Russia celebrated one of the wins by singing an Ustasha song of Thompson's containing the verses 'Hear ye, Serbian volunteers, gangs, Chetniks, our hand will reach you even in Serbia.'⁸¹ Some

80 <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-2017/izvjesce-pp-2017/send/82-izvjesca-2017/1126-izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2017-godinu>, page 48

81 <http://www.rts.rs/page/sport/sr/%D0%A0%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B02018/story/2774/vesti/3178234/hrvatski-reprezentativci-slavili-uz-tompsonovu-pesmu.html>

western media reported about this event⁸², but there was no reaction from FIFA.

The Croatian authorities continued with the previously established practice of calling the Serbs in Croatia 'Croatian Serbs' and it is evident that the so-called 'Croatian Orthodox Church' (HPC) is still functioning. Although unrecognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church or any other official institution, this organization –rooted in the era of the Ustasha NDH – continued its work and was recognized by the Croatian authorities. In May of this year, with the support of the Catholic Church in Croatia, the promotion of two new books on the 'Croatian Orthodox Church' was organized and the bishop of the Catholic Church in Croatia stated that it would be 'logical' for HPC to officially exist.⁸³

- The growth of neo-Fascism and the 'For homeland - ready' greeting:

In the past year, there has been a continued glorification of the Ustasha movement and strengthening of neo-fascism in Croatia. Numerous incidents were reported about Ustasha/Nazi symbols being painted and insulting messages being written on Serbian houses and monuments.⁸⁴

82 <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/dejan-lovren-fascist-nazi-collaborator-ustase-song-bojna-cavoglave/>

83 <https://hrvatskapravoslavnacrkva.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/gk-o-hpc-13-05-20182.jpg>

84 <https://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/dalmacija/split-zupanija/clanak/id/511093/sramotni-ustaski-simboli-godinama-stoje-na-izlazu-iz-vrlike-vlast-ih-redom-osuuje-ali-nitko-ih-ne-diranbsp39to-crtaju-oni-sta-su-besposleni-i-samo-iu-po-kaficima39>

When it comes to Ustasha, the crucial event was a dispute over the memorial plaque with the message 'For homeland - ready' in Jasenovac, which was put up back in 2016.

In December 2016, in the center of Jasenovac near the Ustasha concentration camp, Croatian military veterans-discovered a memorial plaque with 'For homeland - ready' carved in, the greeting used in the Second World War by Ustasha members, Croats who were allies of Nazi Germany and who committed genocide against Serbs, Jews and Roma in the territory of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A debate was launched in 2016 on whether to remove the plaque, which was opposed by many in the Croatian authorities, including the minister of justice, who stated that there is no legal basis to remove this memorial.⁸⁵ The plaque was taken off in September 2017 only to be reinstalled immediately in Novska, just a few kilometers from Jasenovac.⁸⁶

After the reaction of domestic and international public on the Ustasha memorial in Jasenovac, the Croatian government established a commission in March 2017 - the 'Council for Dealing with Consequences of the Rule of Undemocratic Regimes.'⁸⁷ This move was a sort of concession to the Croatian right-wingers – instead of focusing on es-

85 <http://hrvatska-danas.com/2017/08/26/bosnjakovic-nema-zakonskog-uporista-za-skidanje-hos-ove-ploce-s-pozdravom-za-dom-spremni/>

86 <http://rs.n1info.com/a316209/Svet/Region/Uklanjanje-ustaske-table-iz-Jasenovca.html>

87 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/2649742/hrvatska-osnovala-komisiju-o-ustasama-i-partizanima.html>

establishing a clear relationship towards the Ustasha movement, it was grouped with a political system from the time of communist Yugoslavia, which indirectly enabled its relativization. The Commission had a 12-month deadline (until the beginning of March 2018), to submit recommendations to the government on what to do with 'Ustasha and Communist symbols' in the future. Immediately before the Commission's recommendations were announced within the body, a dispute arose when a part of the members insisted that communism and communist symbols such as the five-pointed star be equalized with the fascist symbols of Ustasha.⁸⁸ On February 28th 2018, the Commission submitted conclusions and recommendations stating that the Ustasha cry 'For homeland - ready' is unconstitutional, but in exceptional situations, with a previously obtained license, it is still permissible (when used within the symbol or coat of arms of the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS), as it was registered with their statutory provisions, and only to indicate the places where HOS members were killed), and that the five-pointed star is not an issue.⁸⁹ The Croatian prime minister rejected claims that this would contradict the Croatian Constitution, which in Article 39 prohibits 'racial or religious hatred or any form of intolerance.'⁹⁰

88 <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/sutra-se-ocekuje-odluka-odluka-vijeca-o-zabrani-petokrake-i-za-dom-spremni/1028720.aspx>

89 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3055316/hrvatska-za-dom-spremni-moze-ponekad-petokraka-nije-sporna.html>

90 <https://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>

Along with this case, Croatian right-wing MP Miro Bulj demanded a response of the Croatian government on 'Chetnik monuments in Croatia'⁹¹, i.e. the tombstones of Serbs who died during the war on the territory of today's Croatia. The Government of Croatia replied that these monuments can be removed 'only if they are the result of a punishable act,' said Bulj citing the response he received from the Croatian government.

The conflict over the interpretation of the past: World War II and the separatist war in Croatia in the 1990s:

Croatia continues to have serious problems with facing the past.

*For three years in a row, separate commemorations are organized for the victims of the Ustasha genocide in Jasenovac*⁹²: the official commemoration of the Croatian state and an independent commemoration organized by the Serbian and Jewish communities. The growth of the Ustasha movement in Croatia is mentioned as a reason for the boycott of the official commemoration. There is still a campaign of relativization of the number of victims in Jasenovac and the Croatian state is openly opposed to organizing manifestations that depict the crime.⁹³

91 <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/koji-je-stav-vlade-o-uklanjanju-cetnickih-spomenika-u-hrvatskoj-miro-bulj-na-facebooku-ostao-zgrozen-odgovorom-jadna-zemljo-napacena/6927009/>

92 <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/bojkot-drzavne-komemoracije-u-jasenovcu-trecu-godinu-zaredom-a-evo-kako-je-i-zasto-sve-pocelo-foto-20180421>

93 <http://rs.n1info.com/a359560/Vesti/Vesti/Izlozba-o-Jasenovcu-u-UN.html>

In 2018, like in the previous nine years, a commemoration was held for about 40,000 victims of Ustasha in Jadovno near Gospić.

At a gathering organized by the SNV, Jewish and Roma associations and Croatian anti-fascists, a new memorial plaque was presented with a chronology of events in the Gospić-Jadovno-Pag camps, where since 1941, thousands of Jews, Roma and Serbs were killed and thrown in the caves or in the sea.⁹⁴ Two commemorations have been held in Jadovno for years: one is organized by the SNV and supported by the Croatian state and the other organized by the Association of Descendants and Adherents of the Complex of Ustasha Camps Jadovno in 1941 from Banja Luka, and attended by representatives of the Republic of Srpska and Serbia.

Croatia has continued its historical revisionism that diminishes the role and crimes of the Croatian Ustasha regime in World War II, as well as the number of Serb, Roma, Jewish and other victims of crimes committed by Croats.

The support for the commemorative gathering in Bleiburg⁹⁵, which traditionally promotes the Ustasha

94 <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/komemoracija-u-jadovnom-i-nova-spomen-ploca---521645.html>

95 This is about a World War II event, when around ten thousand Ustasha forces and civilian refugees tried to break through to the Allied forces in Austria through Bleiburg to escape the Yugoslav partisans, but the Allies sent them back. On that occasion, a large number of Ustasha were killed in the clashes with the Partisans, the rest were captured and a part was executed. There are numerous controversies between Croatian and Yugoslav/Serbian historians about the interpretation of this event.

movement and symbols, is growing more and more openly in Croatia with the participation of local Catholic Church representatives. At the commemoration in April 2018, the Mass was led by the Zadar Archbishop and the President of the Croatian Bishops' Conference, Želimir Puljić. The Croatian Parliament was the patron of the rally, and the President of the Parliament, Goran Jandroković, addressed the gathering⁹⁶. Numerous Croatian officials were among the participants: the BiH Presidency Member Dragan Čović, Croatian Minister of State Property Goran Marić - the envoy of President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, and veteran Minister Tomo Medved on behalf of Prime Minister Andrej Plenković. The commemoration was attended by the Vice President of the Croatian Parliament, Milijan Brkić, the President of the Parliamentary Committee for War Veterans Josip Djakić, the MPs Ante Babić, Ivan Sipić, Bruna Esih, Zlatko Hasanbegović and Željko Glasnović and Secretary of the Parliament Davor Orlović. Interestingly, the organizers invited the participants not to bring out any Ustasha symbols this year due to rigorous police control.⁹⁷This year, a counter-meeting called 'No to Ustasas' was organized, where representatives of antifascist organizations from Europe gathered, and the mayor of Bleiburg expressed concern because the gathering 'at-

96 <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/443319/komemoracija-u-povodu-73-godisnjice-bleiburske-tragedije>

97 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bleiburg-ustaski-simboli/29215485.html>

tracts sympathizers of the Ustasha regime from all over.⁹⁸

In August 2017, as well as in previous years, Croatia held a state ceremony to celebrate the Operation Storm of August 1995. The central ceremony was held in Knin, and the Croatian armed forces took part in the celebration. The manifestation is dominated by nationalistic and chauvinistic messages that label Serbs in Croatia as criminals and Serbia as 'an aggressor': During Operation Storm about 2,000 Serbs were killed and at least 250,000 were banished from Croatia. According to the records, which are consistent with the Croatian side, a total of 2,400 persons are considered missing from the territory of Croatia, of which 1,400 are Serbs, 403 are Serbian citizens, and the rest are Serbs who reported their disappearance to the Serb Commission, expelled and exiled.⁹⁹ None of the perpetrators have been convicted of these crimes.

In November 2017, the Hague Tribunal adjourned the verdict in the Prlić case. The Hague Court confirmed that there was an organized criminal enterprise aimed at ethnic cleansing of parts of BiH, headed by the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman. Croatia has announced that it

98 See above

99 From the guest appearance of Veljko Odalović, the president of the Government Commission for Missing Persons on RTS, reported in Blic. Godišnjica 'Oluje': Srbija će insistirati na rasvetljavanju sudbine svih nestalih, Blic, August 2nd, 2013. , <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/396791/Godisnjica-Olsite> visited on July 15th, 2017.

will challenge the verdict findings.¹⁰⁰ The court also confirmed the first-instance verdict of 20 years in prison to Slobodan Praljak. During the reading of the verdict, Praljak cried out that he rejected it and drank poison which led to his death.¹⁰¹ This event launched a new wave of Croatian nationalism directed primarily against the Serbs. Praljak was portrayed as a hero by most Croatian media and certain politicians¹⁰², even though he was convicted of the most severe war crimes. A commemorative meeting was held in Zagreb, attended by ministers and senior political officials from Croatia.¹⁰³

Bilateral relations

Although Belgrade and Zagreb have been announcing the need to improve relations in the past year, no serious effort has taken place. Both sides considered the Serbian president's visit to Zagreb in February 2018 a major event, but it did not lead to a shift in relations. On the contrary, before the visit as well as after, the relations between the

100 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/2954719/reakcije-u-hrvatskoj-nakon-dogadjaja-u-hagu.html>

101 <http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/SOKANTNA-SNIMKA-Pogledajte-trenutak-kad-je-Praljak-u-sudnici-popio-boci-cu-s-otrovom>

102 <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/zasto-vodeci-svjetski-medi-ji-o-praljku-govore-jedno-a-hrvatski-nesto-sasvim-drugo/1011196.aspx>

103 <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/komemoracija-za-praljka-bez-drzavnog-vrha-no-uz-shakespeare-a-i-klapu-draca-fo-to-20171211>

two countries continued to deteriorate with numerous cases of demarches, protest notes and hostile statements on both sides.

On the eve of the victims of the Ustasha genocide in Jasenovac commemoration in April 2018, Croatia declared Serbian Minister of Defense Alexander Vulin an undesirable person.¹⁰⁴ Serbia responded in equal measure, proclaiming Croatian Defense Minister Damir Krstičević an undesirable person.¹⁰⁵ That same month, the president of the Croatian Parliament was in Belgrade with the delegation of parliamentary representatives. Then, an incident occurred in the Serbian Parliament when members of the right-wing Serbian Radical Party, according to them, trampled on Croatia's flag in parliament and made negative remarks at the expense of Croatian representatives. The Croatian delegation then cut their visit to Serbia short.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Croatia delivered a protest note to Serbia which the Serbian ambassador in Zagreb refused to receive, saying that the Serbian president 'Vučić had experienced worse unpleasantness in Zagreb, and he did not interrupt the visit'.¹⁰⁷

104 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/3113263/zagreb-vulin-nepozeljan-u-hrvatskoj-.html>

105 <http://www.novosti.>

106 <http://rs.n1info.com/a380847/Vesti/Hrvatska-delegacija-prekinula-posetu-Srbiji.html>

107 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/1/politika/3110125/vucic-u-zagrebu-doziveo-gore-neprijatnosti-pa-nije-prekidao-posetu.html>

During the past year, there was also talk about an arms race between Belgrade and Zagreb, on which occasion, both countries sent unofficial messages that they were stronger than the other side and that they were arming themselves.¹⁰⁸

There have been significant shifts in the relations between the two countries on the business plan. According to the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the total trade between Serbia and Croatia in 2017 amounted to 1.027 billion Euros, a 14.2 % increase compared to the same period in 2016. Exports to Croatia amounted to 550.6 million Euros, which is 17.5 % more than in the same period of 2016. Imports from Croatia increased by 10.3 % compared to the same period in 2016, and amounted to 476.3 million Euros. Serbia thus recorded a surplus in commodity exchange in the amount of 74.3 million Euros. The import coverage by exports was 115.62 %.¹⁰⁹

In April 2018, a representative office of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce was opened in Belgrade. As mentioned, the President of the Croatian Parliament, Goran Jandroković, was in Belgrade on that occasion, which was the first official visit of a senior Croatian politician to Serbia in the previous few years.¹¹⁰ On the eve of President of

108 <https://www.apnews.com/4ebe8e506b8e4caaaeace9ea6e113fab>

109 <http://pks.rs/Documents/Centar%20za%20bilateralnu%20saradnju.pdf>

110 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/13/ekonomija/3107868/hrvatska-privredna-komora-posle-pet-godina-ponovo-u-beogradu.html>

Serbia's visit, the Croatian government adopted the bill, and in May the Law on State Property Management¹¹¹, which enabled Croatian authorities to manage real estate from the former SFRY for which legal property relations have not been resolved. These changes in the law damaged a large number of companies from Serbia and other republics of former Yugoslavia with property in Croatia, taken during the war. Serbian economists have estimated that these changes are actually an attempt to forestall the verdicts of the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on the lawsuits of Serbian companies whose property was seized.¹¹²

Serbia and Croatia still have not made a concrete move to resolve the territorial dispute over the Danube border. Also, there has been no progress in solving the issue of unpaid pensions for Serbs from Croatia in the period from 1991 to 1996.¹¹³

Regarding the European integration of Serbia, Croatia has repeatedly tried to block Belgrade's progress towards the European Union, whether by opening new negotiation chapters¹¹⁴, or through the speeches of Croatian deputies in

111 <https://direktno.hr/domovina/evo-koje-novosti-donosi-novi-zakon-o-upravljanju-drzavnom-imovinom-123644/>

112 <https://medium.com/@SvedokOnline/%C5%A1amar-iz-zagreba-dan-pre-poziva-vu%C4%8Di%C4%87u-da-do%C4%91e-u-po-setu-7cbc98d5639e>

113 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/2625512/kada-ce-zagreb-resiti-pitanje-srpskih-penzija.html>

114 <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska-je-bila-izricito-protiv-otvaranja-poglavlja-33-u-pregovorima-srbije-s-eu-1213422>

the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, where they regularly present negative attitudes towards Serbia.

Republic of Serbia and Serbs in Croatia

Through the MFA's administration for Diaspora and Serbs in the region, Serbia maintains regular contact with representatives of Serbs in Croatia gathered in the SDSS. Over the past year, there have been no records of significant investments from Serbia to the Serbian communities, nor any organized activity in terms of economic strengthening of the Serbian regions and the preservation of Serbian identity and culture in Croatia. As previously mentioned, the only major investment ever made by the state of Serbia - Tesla Bank - ended with its glorious departure into bankruptcy.

The role of the international community

It is evident that despite numerous examples of intolerance, chauvinism, and hatred towards Serbs in Croatia, as well as frequent attempts by Zagreb to abuse its position of EU member state to block Serbia's progress, the international community, most of all Brussels, is ignoring this problem. European officials have for years refused to comment on numerous Belgrade-Zagreb incidents and the violation of the rights of Serbs in Croatia that are guaranteed by the local laws and constitution. At the 5th anniversary of Croatia's accession to the EU, European Commis-

sion President Jean-Claude Juncker said that 'Croatia has a positive role in the EU'.¹¹⁵

Conclusions and recommendations

The situation of Serbs in Croatia is extremely bad, and it's getting worse year after year. The fact that the Serbian communities are not being invested in, that there is no interest of the Croatian authorities to help the return of banished Serbs, as well as open violations of minority rights of Serbs by various Croatian authorities and institutions show that the position of the Serbian community in Croatia is unsustainable. The Serbs are politically and economically almost completely broken, stigmatized and under constant public pressure, which is likely to cause their disappearance in the next few decades.

Serbs are regularly exposed to systematic hatred and discrimination on a national, religious and every other identity basis. Almost everything that has to do with Serbian identity (language, script, religion, cultural and national symbols) is marked as negative in the Croatian public. For decades, the stigmatization of Serbs in public (especially political) discourse dominates in Croatia, and they are regularly portrayed as enemies of the Croatian people and the state.

It is a cause for concern that national extremism and fascism in Croatia in recent years has been strengthened

115 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/3185771/junker-hrvatska-ima-pozitivnu-ulogu-u-eu.html>

by the official (state) support, through relativization of Croatian crimes against Serbs, Jews and Roma in World War II, the separatist war of 1991-1995, and the re-popularization of the Ustasha fascist greetings 'For Homeland - Ready', the use of which is still allowed in certain ways, even though it is contrary to the constitutional provision prohibiting the spread of national and religious hatred.

It is a devastating fact that the international community, despite numerous analyzes of human rights violations of the Serbian minority, is openly ignoring the rise of Croatian national extremism and neo-fascism, which is most often expressed against the Serbs.

When it comes to the Serbian community in Croatia, it is small, weak in terms of funding and personnel, and largely adapted to the needs of the Croatian political elite.

Serbia still does not have a planned and well-organized policy towards Croatia. Unlike Croatia, which has a very definite (negative) attitude towards the Serbs in Croatia and the Serbian state, Serbia's position is reduced to a policy of reaction to the negative steps of Zagreb, without a deeper strategic plan in terms of improving the situation of Serbs and the position of Serbia.

In such circumstances, it is a question whether it is possible at all to determine any policy that would contribute to the preservation and improvement of the position of the Serb minority in Croatia. Any activity of Serbia on this issue, if it aims to be successful and not just a 'performance' for the public, should be guided in at least three fields: direct investments into the Serbian community in

Croatia and strengthening ties with Serbia; advocating with both the Croatian authorities and the international community to fully respect the rights of Serbs; motivating the international community to show greater interest in systematic discrimination and violence that Serbs in Croatia have been exposed to for years.

HUNGARY

The Serbian community of Hungary does not rank among the major Serbian communities abroad. According to the 2011 census, there is slightly over 10,000 Serbs in Hungary, with 7,200 of these identifying with the ethnic group/nationality and only 2,800 self-identifying as Serbs using the criterion of mother tongue or the language used in their immediate environment (in 2011 these were the criteria used in Hungarian censuses). This makes the Serbian community the 6th largest out of 13 officially and legally recognized national and ethnic minorities in Hungary.

Hungarian Serbs have a small but well-organized community; they are dispersed throughout the country, with a somewhat higher concentration in the Southern Great Plain (administrative seat in Szeged) and the Pest County (administrative seat in Budapest). Interestingly, the small village of Lórév (Serbian: Lovra) still has an ethnic Serbian majority and a Serbian-language elementary school like in Budapest, Deszk (Serbian: Deska) and Battonya (Serbian: Batanja). Furthermore, the number of Serbs in Hungary has grown by 150% as the result of the country's better treatment of our compatriots, which has included free self-determination, as in the case of most other national minorities in Hungary. However, although the census of 2011 showed an increase compared to the 2001 census, the number of Serb inhabitants in rural areas seems to be

dropping, which constitutes a worrying trend. Interestingly, the census has revealed the Serbian minority as one of the most educated in Hungary, with 26.6% university degree holders and only 10.1% having no qualifications.¹¹⁶

Table 1. Minority ethnic groups in Hungary 2001-2011¹¹⁷

Ethnic group	Republic of Hungary	Roma	Germans	Romanians	Slovaks	Slovaks	Slovaks	Slovenians
2001.	10.198.315	189.984	62.105	7.995	17.693	15.597	3.816	3.025
2011.	9.937.628	315.583	185.696	35.641	35.208	26.774	10.038	2.820

Hungary pursues an active policy for its compatriots in the region, as evidenced by some steps taken by its government to support the economic position of Hungarians and the program to facilitate the acquisition of dual citizenship. The citizenship procedure was simplified eight years ago and since then as many as 180,000 Serbian citizens have received Hungarian citizenship¹¹⁸. It is important to note that not all of them are members of Hungarian minority in Serbia; some are Serbs or others who meet the criteria of being born within pre-1921 Hungarian borders or in the period 1941-1945, and a basic knowledge of the Hungarian language. In 2016 Hungary launched a three-year program which includes 20 billion HUF of aid and 30

116 HCSO 2011, table 2.1.6.1.

117 HCSO 2011, table 1.1.6.1.

118 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1382&side=12>

billion in affordable loans for Hungarian citizens in Vojvodina (totaling about 165 million Euros¹¹⁹); this sum was later increased to a total of 75 billion HUF (250 million Euros)¹²⁰. These funds are distributed by the Prosperitati Foundation and mainly used for agricultural investments, purchasing homes or launching independent businesses. Contracts have been signed with 6,488 small and 23 large businesses. After having changed its legislation in 2017, Hungary expanded its scope of activity and now Hungarian families that have a baby receive a one-off contribution of 64,000 HUF and a starting account with 42,500 HUF, which can be accessed after 18 years and by that time reaches 72,000 HUF (unless the parents decide to pay their own funds into the account, which is also possible) at an interest rate of 3%.¹²¹

This form of support to the Serbian population of Hungary has never been recorded. The Serbs enjoy no financial support from their mother country and even have difficulties acquiring Serbian citizenship due to bureaucratic obstacles and red tape, as well as a very expensive administrative procedure. One of these difficulties is the way of writing Serbian names and surnames in Hungarian documents.

119 http://rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/madjarska-kreditira-vojvodjanske-madjare-sa-160-miliona-evra_686584.html

120 <http://www.prosperitati.rs/sr/madarski-ministar-spoljnih-poslova-peter-sijarto-posetio-sombor>

121 <http://www.gradsubotica.co.rs/obveznice-za-beb-koje-su-rodjene-van-madjarske/>

The increase in the Serbian population was accompanied by a growth of the number of children attending school in their mother tongue. In 2017/2018 the first grade of the elementary school of the education center 'Nikola Tesla' in Budapest, the only Serbian-language school in Hungary that caters to children of all ages, from preschool to high school, was attended by 18 students, more than ever before, and most of these first-graders have come from the center's childcare and preschool. The number of high school students is at an all time high as well. The Serbian boarding school can accommodate up to 124 students, with an additional 64 places in the Tekelijanum building (one of the largest Serbian endowments outside of Serbia, in the very heart of Budapest). The preschool, elementary school and high school in the Education Center 'Nikola Tesla' (probably the most popular Serbian institution in Hungary) had 489 children and students, with 51 in preschool, 129 in elementary and 280 in high school, continuing the growth trend. In Lórév there are 18 kids in preschool and 11 in elementary school.¹²² However, most of the students are enrolled in high school, many of them from Central Serbia and neighboring countries in former Yugoslavia. The main attraction of this Serbian school (est. 1993) in the Hungarian capital is easier access to European and Serbian universities and top-notch education ensured by quality teaching and strict discipline. During the next school year the total number of students is

122 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1487&side=54>

expected to exceed 500, which would ensure more funding (pursuant to Hungarian legislation) and more jobs.¹²³

The 2011 Constitution recognizes nationalities rather than national minorities and defines Hungary as the state of one (Hungarian) nation, with the nationalities being its constitutive part and having the right of association if its organizations are 'civilian'. Their organization is defined in the Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (also known as the Minority Act), which recognizes three levels of self-government: local, regional and national. The umbrella self-government organization of the Serbian minority is the Serbian National Minority Self-Government (SSM) seated in Budapest, which has its own budget. Its highest body has 15 members and is headed by Vera Pejić-Sutor. In addition to this national-level body, Serbs also have regional minority self-government in the Pest County and the Serbian self-government in Budapest, as well as 27 local self-governments in Serb-inhabited settlements.¹²⁴ As the umbrella organization SSM handles matters in the fields of culture, education and media, and protects Serbian interests in Hungary. For the first time since 2014 minority nationalities don't have their own MPs but only representatives, as none of the minorities can reach the 22,058 threshold required for a minority electoral list. Serbian and other minority rep-

123 Прилог ПТВ-а 4.9.2017. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-CFd6pYuRv4>

124 Политика – Трајање мањине 15.06.2015. - <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/330415/Trajanje-manjine#!>

representatives can attend plenary sessions and give their opinions on relevant topics; in other words, they can join discussions if they concern minority matters, but do not have voting rights. The Serbian representative is Ljubomir Aleksov (chairman of the SSM until 2014 and long-serving mayor of Lórév) who does a very good job of using his presence in the parliament to the benefit of the community, and hence the current situation can be considered an improvement to the previous year. The minority representative cannot vote, but can address cabinet members to make contacts and improve relations. The Hungarian government has recently increased its funding of minorities by 200%, which provides adequate funds for Serbian organizations. However, Serbs in Hungary would like to have full representation in the parliament, just like Hungarians have in Serbia.

SSM manages several cultural institutions: the Cultural and Documentation Center, Teaching and Methodological Center, the Serbian Institute, the Serbian Theater and a *Serbian weekly (Srpske nedeljne novine)*. Until recently Serbian institutions were struggling to survive due to lack of funding and a very unfavorable system of financing minority institutions, but the situation has drastically improved since 2015. In 2017 SSM received a total of 1,115,555,000 HUF; the funds were then distributed to the abovementioned institutions and elementary schools in Battonya and Budapest. All four Serbian elementary schools are now managed by SSM, which has allowed more consistent government funding.¹²⁵

125 Ibid.

Serbian education keeps improving, with more and more cultural events and cooperation with various figures and representatives from Serbia. An illustrative example is the traditional event 'The Month of Serbian Culture in Hungary' organized by the Cultural and Documentation Center every fall since 2010,¹²⁶ along with a number of programs such as the 'Pest Literary Omnibus' which invites authors from Serbia and other countries¹²⁷; theater plays at the playhouse in Budapest which hosts prominent Serbian actors, and various other festivities.¹²⁸ In late 2017, at the request of many members of the Serbian community in Szeged, the leadership of the local self-government and town council decided to bring back the ball in Szeged, one of the most prominent minority manifestations in Hungary. The ball, attended by Serbs, Croats, Hungarians and Bunjevci, was held for the last time in 2012, with an appearance by the singer Zvonko Bogdan. Last year, after initial fears that the ball would not be a success, 70 guests from Hungary and Subotica came.¹²⁹ The feast of Vidovdan (St. Vitus' Day) is commemorated annually in the Serbian community of Hungary, with liturgies in churches and a series of festivities and other programs throughout the country.¹³⁰

126 <http://www.rts.rs/page/rts/sr/Dijaspora/story/1518/vesti/1175026/mesec-srpske-kulture-sirom-madjarske.html>

127 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1531&side=46>

128 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1533&side=46>

129 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1601&side=34>

130 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1443&side=61>

However, Serbian-language media continue to be marginal. The weekly *Srpske nedeljne novine* (SSN) remains the only regularly published printed newspaper (short news bulletins are also available online). However, the weekly and the two-hour radio program broadcast at the Pécs Radio (with a Serbian-language desk) every day using obsolete technology, are in need of modernization. For years the management of the weekly has been negotiating with the Hungarian Post and insisting on timely deliveries of the newspaper to registered subscribers. After a lengthy correspondence, the management of SSN has concluded that the Hungarian Post has proved incapable of providing timely delivery (a service paid for by SSN) and has instead begun to work with local delivery services and informing subscribers to personally intervene with their mailmen.¹³¹ Electronic media provide a weekly 30-minute program in Serbian called *Srpski ekran* (the Serbian Screen), which has a very unfavorable timeslot; the main channel of the Hungarian public broadcaster broadcasts programs in Serbian for a total of 26 minutes a week. This is by no means sufficient and the problem is often mentioned by the Serbian community of Hungary. SSM has recently established its own online radio station Srb.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is classed as a historical church organization in the Constitution of 2012, which allows it to receive subsidies from the state, offer religious education in schools and enjoy tax relief; this also guar-

131 <http://snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1753&side=4>

antees religious freedom to the Serbian community. The Constitution does not class all confessions as equal; some are recognized but unsubsidized (Baptists, Muslims) and others are unrecognized and tolerated (subject to the Law on Public Gathering). The Serbian Orthodox Church (the Eparchy of Buda) has 44 churches; however the number of believers in rural areas continues to decrease and the churches are becoming increasingly difficult to manage despite government subsidies. This year Hungary has donated one million Euros for the restoration of Orthodox churches and the reconstruction of the museum of the Eparchy of Buda in Szentendre, which will be housed in the complex of the former Serbian teaching school – the famous Preparandija in Szentendre. The town of Szentendre has another seven Orthodox churches¹³² (due to the rise of Serbian culture in the 18th and 19th century, especially in Buda, Pest and Szentendre, with many cultural institutions established at this time¹³³). Serbian representatives believe that some help from Serbia is due in this field, at least in the form of engaging professionals to carry out the restoration works in churches.

The building of Preparandija (est. 1812 as the first Serbian school for teachers) was recently given back to the Serbian community, but its restoration has proved a costly

132 <https://www.ekapija.com/news/2065870/spc-dobija-muzeje-u-budimpesti-i-sentandreji-pocinje-obnova-crkvenih-zdanja-u>

133 Драган Вукелић – Положај српске националне мањине у Мађарској

endeavor and is expected to be completed by the end of 2018. Other major projects include expanding the capacity of the school and high school Nikola Tesla and the building of a new facility for daycare and preschool, as well as the opening of a Serbian school in Szeged. The expansion of the Serbian school in Budapest is currently underway and should be completed in 2018; a formal takeover ceremony is being planned. This includes expanding the premises of the preschool and the library, which will be opened to the public from 1 December (rather than catering to students only) as a separate organizational unit.¹³⁴

The Hungarian government has promised to allocate almost a billion HUF over the next three years for funding various projects in the field of Serbian education in Hungary: 147 million in 2018; 429 million in 2019; and 422 in 2020 (over three million Euros). The funds will be used to expand the schools in Budapest, Lórév and Battonya and to restore the building in Szentendre which is to house the Serbian Educational Center.¹³⁵ The Hungarian government has agreed to provide another 44 million HUF for the Serbs of Szeged to restore the military cemetery in the town; to mark the centenary of WWI 564 tombstones of Serbian and other soldiers have been restored.¹³⁶

In June 2017 an unpleasant and unsettling incident occurred: the Serbian cemetery in Budakalász (Serbian:

134 <http://snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1624&side=29>

135 <http://snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1710&side=13>

136 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1567&side=40>

Kalaz; 15 km north of Budapest) was desecrated and 20 tombstones were demolished. The Serbian community saw this incident as an attack on the community itself and the neighborly relations between the two countries. However, from the 1990s such incidents are few and far between, and the overall position of the Serbian minority in Hungary seems to be improving. The disbanding of the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora of the Republic of Serbia is one of the major complaints of both the Serbian community and the Hungarian civil servants. There is no institutional channel of communication with the Serbian embassy and Serbian institutions are difficult to reach. At a meeting in Timișoara in late 2017, the members of the Permanent Conference of Serbian Organizations in the Region, among them the Serbian delegate in the Hungarian parliament and the chairwoman of SSM, have asked for the following: to reassess the institutional framework for the cooperation of Serbia with its diaspora (a duty previously managed by the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora); easier access to and a simplified procedure to acquire Serbian citizenship; representation of Serbian expat communities in the Serbian parliament; and the potential introduction of a new category – the status of a member of the Serbian people.¹³⁷

Over the last few years the status of Serbs in Hungary has improved. Increased funding ensures the stable operation of Serbian institutions, while SSM's management of schools has

137 <http://www.snnovine.com/sr/index.php?page=news&id=1586&side=37>

resulted in improved Serbian-language education. Owing to constant initiatives and efforts, the Serbian community manages to maintain and even expand its cultural scope of activity, a crucial element for the life and functioning of the Serbian community. Inter-ethnic tensions have eased, and incidents against the local Serbs are much less frequent. According to the representatives of the Serbian community, an important reason behind this improvement is the harmonious relations between the two countries. The media situation remains somewhat of a problem: insufficient channels of information and inadequate presence in electronic media, which severely limits the use of the Serbian language. The presence of a delegate in the parliament is an important improvement, but minority delegates have no real political influence. The Serbian community in Hungary keeps reminding us of the importance Hungary ascribes to its diaspora, even organizing annual meetings attended by ethnic Hungarians from all over the world to discuss strategic matters. On the other hand, Serbs in Hungary usually meet Serbian diplomats only after official bilateral meetings and have few opportunities to inform them of the problems faced by the minority. More moral and political support is necessary and more pressing than any financial help Serbia might be able to offer. The Republic of Serbia needs to come up with a general (cultural, educational and economic) strategy for the Serbs in Hungary and to lend some support to Serbian-language media and education. In formal contacts with Hungarian officials the Serbian side needs to focus more on the position of the Serbian minority.

KOSOVO AND METOHIJA – KOSOVO-UNMIK

- **Failure to comply with the Brussels Agreement**

The period 2017-2018 has seen no progress in the negotiations between Serbia, the EU and Kosovo-UNMIK, or in the further implementation of the Brussels Agreement. Despite the fact that Serbia has made many concessions to the Kosovo authorities – ranging from the entrance of Serbs to the Albanian-dominated Kosovo police forces, the judiciary, the resolution of border control issues, ownership of certain immovable property, and the country code – the formation of the Association of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) has yet to begin. This community with very limited powers – a concept conceived with the clear intention of not granting the small and isolated Serbian community the very same rights once enjoyed by the homogenous and numerous Albanians in SFRJ – was met with general disagreement from the Albanian side. And while the incumbent President of Kosovo-UNMIK and signatory of the Brussels Agreement Hashim Thaçi has done little to implement the agreement, the Prime Minister of K-U Ramush Haradinaj has declared that he will inspect the agreement to assess if it should be implemented. Be that as it may, just as they had tried to form ZSO with an Albanian majority, in addition to stalling the Albanian politicians are likely to compile its statute with much more limited powers than stated in the Brussels Agreement.

While the Brussels Agreement awaits implementation, the diplomatic conflict concerning the recognition of Kosovo-UNMIK continues. By mid-July 2018 Kosovo-UNMIK had been recognized by 111 UN member states as the Republic of Kosovo (Albanian: Republika e Kosovës) or 58% of a total of 193 members of the UN. Last year two new UN members recognized Kosovo-UNMIK, and three (with the fourth pending) have withdrawn their recognition: Madagascar¹³⁸ and Barbados¹³⁹ have recognized Kosovo, while Surinam¹⁴⁰, Burundi¹⁴¹ and Liberia¹⁴² have withdrawn their recognition. This is certainly a great success of the

138 „Madagaskari e njehshtetin e Kosovës“, *Telegrafi*, 25 November 2017, <https://telegrafi.com/madagaskari-e-njeh-shtetin-e-kosoves/>, (accessed on 14 June 2018).

139 „Barbadosinjhëpavarësinë e Kosovës“, *Koha*, <http://www.koha.net/arberi/75744/barbadosi-njeh-pavaresine-e-kosoves/>, (accessed on 14 June 2018).

140 „Суринам повукао признање Косова“, *PTC*, 31 OCTOBER 2017, [HTTP://WWW.RTS.RS/PAGE/STORIES/CI/STORY/1/POLITIKA/2922887/SURINAM-POVUKAO-PRIZNANJE-KOSOVA.HTML](http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/1/politika/2922887/surinam-povukao-priznanje-kosova.html), (accessed on 14 June 2018).

141 “Note Verbale”. Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation (Burundi), 15 February 2018. Retrieved 25 February 2018, http://mfa.gov.rs/sr/images/slike/desktop/17022018_nota_01.jpg, (accessed on 14 June 2018).

142 „Liberija povukla priznanje Kosova; Dačić: Ovo je dokaz da supovlačenja U PUNOM ZAMAHU“, *BLIC*, 20. 06. 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/liberija-povukla-priznanje-kosova-dacic-ovo-je-dokaz-da-su-povlacenja-u-punom-zamahu/ehe3tgs>, (accessed on 20 June 2018).

Serbian policy. However, ever since his inauguration in the summer of 2017, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić has advocated a quick resolution of Kosovo's status, claiming that the 'frozen conflict' was not in Serbia's interests and that the country needed to accept 'difficult solutions' and 'face reality.' During his visit to the Russian Federation, Vučić explored the possibility of acquiring Moscow's support for some form of recognition of Kosovo's independence. Statements given by Serbian officials seem to suggest a readiness to recognize Kosovo 'if they are given something in return'. In March 2018, the Progressive Club has learned, the two sides met in Germany to discuss a potential territory exchange, allegedly agreeing to exchange the areas north of the Ibar River for the ethnically compact lands around Preševo (west of the main motorway and railroad, both of which would remain in Serbia). These negotiations were cancelled due to the unsympathetic attitude of the US, more specifically its mid-level officials who have gotten used to Serbian concessions and are unwilling to accept a compromise unless the leadership of the US promotes such an outcome as a political objective. Later on, Vučić mentioned a non-territorial compensation. However, in 2018 the pressure to resolve the matter of Kosovo-UNMIK has certainly abated. Despite this, Vučić has recently announced a referendum for Serbian citizens to speak their minds about a yet undetermined question concerning the status of the province.

- **Frequent attacks against Serbs continue in Kosovo and Metohija; however, the number of these attacks has increased in 2017-2018**¹⁴³

This year has seen several aggravating circumstances, including: suspended negotiations; the arrest of Haradinaj in France; and the boycott of Kosovo institutions by the Serbian representatives in response to the general situation, with these attacks becoming increasingly frequent.¹⁴⁴ The attacks became so recurring that Greg Delawie, Ambassador of the traditionally pro-independence US, described a 'worrying number of incidents against members

143 „Brnabić: Priznanje Kosova ne bi bilo kompromis“, *N1 info*, 19 June 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a397535/Vesti/Brnabic-Priznanje-Kosova-ne-bi-bilo-kompromis.html> ; Novi napadnaSrbenakosovu: KamenovanaprodicaZarić, 24.01.2018, <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/hronika/novi-napad-na-srbe-na-kosovu-kamenovana-porodica-zaric-2018-01-24>; Napad na srpske novinare na Kosovu, 20 April 2018, <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/napad-na-srpske-novinare-na-kosovu/>; Нови инцидентна Косову: Напад на амбуланту у селу Новакe, 31 May 2018, <https://standard.rs/2018/05/31/novi-incident-na-kosovu-napad-na-ambulantu-u-selu-novake/>, (accessed on 21 June 2018).

144 „Учестали напади на имовину Срба на КиМ“, РТС, 14. ЈАН 2018, [HTTP://WWW.RTS.RS/PAGE/STORIES/CI/STORY/124/DRUSTVO/3002576/UCESTALI-NAPADI-NA-IMOVINU-SRBA-NA-KIM.HTML](http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/124/drustvo/3002576/ucestali-napadi-na-imovinu-srba-na-kim.html) , (accessed 14 June 2018); „Вучић: Напади на косовске Србе координисани и испланирани“, *Нови Стандард*, 08 June 2018, (accessed 20 June 2018).

of the Serbian community in Kosovo.’¹⁴⁵ Early this year, the tension reached its peak with the murder of Oliver Ivanović, president of the opposition party SDP, resistance leader in 1999/2000, and a reformist politician who had served in democratic Serbian governments and had been subjected to a judicial persecution by the provisional institutions of Kosovo and Metohija.¹⁴⁶ Four years ago, one of Ivanović’s close associates was killed under unclear circumstances. The authorities in Belgrade immediately began eulogizing Ivanović (after having bitterly criticized and maligned him shortly beforehand), claiming that the perpetrators were Albanian extremists.¹⁴⁷ Soon thereafter they began accusing Albanian institutions of obstructing the course of justice.

The ICTY indictment for war crimes against Ramush Haradinaj, president of the very influential Alliance for the

145 „Američki ambasador za KiM: Uznemirujuć napadi na Srbe“, *Danas*, <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/americki-ambasador-za-kim-uznemiruju-ci-napadi-na-srbe/>, (accessed on 20 June 2018).

146 Убијен Оливер Ивановић, погођен са шест метака из пиштоља, РТС, 16 JANUARY 2018, [HTTP://WWW.RTS.RS/PAGE/STORIES/CI/STORY/134/HRONIKA/3004194/PUCANO-NA-OLIVERA-IVANOVI-CA.HTML](http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/134/hronika/3004194/pucano-na-olivera-ivanovic-ca.html), (accessed on 20 June 2018)

147 Serbian opposition members in Kosovo and Metohija, however, have few doubts and unanimously accuse the leaders of criminal groups who had been controlled by the authorities in Belgrade even before the rise of SNS. „Rada Trajković: Shvatili ko je Oliver tek kada ga više nema“, *N1-info*, 17 January 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a357485/Vesti/Vesti/Rada-Trajkovic-o-Oliveru-Ivanovicu.html>, (accessed on 20 June 2018).

Future of Kosovo, is still active. In early January 2017 he was arrested in France, but the French judiciary was neither independent or strong enough to have him extradited to Serbian judicial organs. Nine months later, Haradinaj became the Prime Minister of Kosovo. MPs from the Serbian List voted in favor of his appointment. After his appointment, Haradinaj said that the Serbian List, which became part of the government with three ministers, did not make any special demands in return for its support to his cabinet.¹⁴⁸

In late March 2018 the Office for K&M in Kosovska Mitrovica organized a segment of the 'interior dialogue' about Serbia's position on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija. This seemingly benign attempt to dilute, relativize and legitimize the systematic yielding of official Serbia, took a more dramatic turn after the Albanian authorities refused to allow the representatives of the Serbian government led by Marko Đurić to enter the territory of K-U. The Serbian delegation ignored the ban and attended the meeting, which was interrupted by the special forces of the Kosovo police who violently attacked the attendees. Despite his status of a director of a government office (equal to ministerial rank), Marko Đurić was arrested, beaten and paraded along the streets of Mitrovica in a de-meaning manner. According to some sources, criminals as-

148 „Haradinaj izabran za premijera Kosova“, Blic, 09 September 2017, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/haradinaj-izabran-za-premijera-kosova/63qw51g>, (accessed on 20 June 2018).

sociated with the terrorist paramilitary organization Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/OVK), tugged at Đurić's tie and took photographs while they held him down with his hands behind his back. This incident caused a harsh response of the Serbian public. However, many tried to point out that the incident was meant to divert attention and that both sides had profited from it. As a result, the delegates of the Serbian List and the Serb ministers in the government of Kosovo-UNMIK announced their withdrawal from these institutions. The media later speculated that the withdrawal had been merely formal and that they continued to perform their duties and support Haradinaj's cabinet. Despite a multitude of reasons for boycotting institutions (the lag in negotiations even though Serbia has fulfilled most of its duties and the Albanian side hardly any; unresolved attacks and murders; the attack on Marko Đurić), in early May members of the Serbian List were hosted by Prime Minister Haradinaj at the anniversary celebration of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo.¹⁴⁹

The matter of the privatization of the Trepča Mines was once again actualized in 2018. Two years after the

149 „PILI I SLAVILI SA RAMUŠEM: Srpska lista na rođendanu Haradinajeve stranke!“, *Srbin.info*, 05 May 2018, <https://srbin.info/2018/05/05/pili-i-slavili-sa-ramusem-srpska-lista-na-rodjendanu-haradinajeve-stranke/?lang=lat> (accessed on 21 June 2018); It is therefore unsurprising that the pro-regime and tightly controlled TV Happy broadcast a very sympathetic interview with Ramush Haradinaj conducted in Serbian. *Cirilica TV HAPPY*, 17 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvHEQ1d7gJw> (accessed on 21 June 2018).

adoption of the Trepča Complex Act by the Kosovo assembly, the Kosovo authorities have failed to change this state of affairs, especially in Serb-dominated areas (four out of thirty mines). The ownership dispute, in which the international administration did not share the view of the Albanian authorities in Priština, remains unresolved. The mining complex is split into two parts, with one managed by an Albanian, and the other by a Serb; the authorities of Kosovo-UNMIK continue their attempts to exclude Serbia and Serbs from any decisions concerning the management of the complex.¹⁵⁰

Since his inauguration as the President of Serbia, on eleven occasions Aleksandar Vučić has highlighted the need for difficult compromises and stated that Serbia must receive some kind of compensation if it is to recognize Kosovo. In June 2018 Prime Minister Ana Brnabić declared that 'Kosovo *had been* Serbian'. The Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić has said on multiple occasions that a division of Kosovo and Metohija would be a fair solution. In many cases such statements were followed by attempts to backtrack. Recognition was therefore reinterpreted as

150 „„Кохадиторе“: Трепча под јавно-приватним партнерством“, *Политика*, 11 June 2018, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/405333/Koha-ditore-Trepca-pod-javno-privatnim-partnerstvom>, (accessed on 21 June 2018); Pro-American sources have tried to deny or at least ignore these aspects of the Trepča ownership issue. „Трепча двије године стоји у мјесту“, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/trepca-rudnik-mitrovica/29109505.html> (accessed on 21 June 2018).

'coming to terms with reality' instead of recognition of independence, and the division as delineation rather than renouncing sovereignty in a part of the territory. In 2018 the Serbian government was not subjected to major pressure for a rapid resolution of the status of Kosovo. However, Vučić continued a campaign seen by many as being aimed at preparing the general public for the recognition of Kosovo's independence.¹⁵¹

Along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Metohija is the political entity from whence the largest number of volunteers (proportionate to their respective populations) has joined the terrorist armies in the Near East.¹⁵² In the last ten years terrorist groups including Albanian members from Kosovo and Metohija were stopped from executing terrorist attacks in the US on several occasions.¹⁵³ In the past year the US has warned its citizens to avoid traveling to Kosovo and Metohija due to the ter-

151 „Vučić najavljuje odluku za Kosovo“, *TV BN*, 25 February 2018, <http://www.rtvbn.com/3894306/vucic-najavljuje-odluku-za-kosovo> (accessed on 21 June 2018).

152 Estimates suggest that in 2017 around 300 volunteers from Kosovo and Metohija fought in Syria and Iraq. „Još jedan BOMBAŠ SAMOUBICA sa KOSOVA poginuo u Siriji“, *Blic*, 21 June 2017, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/jos-jedan-bombas-samoubica-sa-kosova-poginuo-u-siriji/vdcccqz4>, (accessed on 22 June 2018).

153 Although the US took part in the armed conflicts against the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, Croatia and B&H, just as it had led the NATO campaign against Serbia and Montenegro, not a single Serb-organized terrorist attack has ever been recorded.

rorism threat.¹⁵⁴ In mid-May 2018 the accused were found guilty for planning a terrorist attack during the football match between Albania and Israel in 2016.¹⁵⁵ The accused were allegedly working toward the creation of the Islamic State in the Balkans. Two persons were arrested in Kosovo for 'promoting terrorism' in late December 2017.¹⁵⁶ The Kosovo media reported last summer that a young Albanian woman called Čamilje Tahiri was in charge of ISIS female training camps, adding that 44 women from Kosovo and 60 from Bosnia and Herzegovina were currently fighting for the Islamic State.

154 „Stejt department: Oprez na Kosovu zbog terorizma I nemira“, *N1 info*, 13 January 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a356408/Vesti/Vesti/Stejt-department-Oprez-na-Kosovu-zbog-terorizma-i-nemira.html> , (accessed on 22 June 2018).

155 Zana Cimili, „Grupa sa Kosova osuđena zbog planiranja terorističkog napada“, *N1 info*, 18 May 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a389081/Vesti/Presuda-za-terorizam-na-Kosovu.html> , (accessed on 22 June 2018); „Grupa sa Kosova osuđena zbog planiranja terorističkog napada“, *N1 info*, 18 May 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a389081/Vesti/Presuda-za-terorizam-na-Kosovu.html> , (accessed on 22 June 2018).

156 „TERORIZAM NA KOSOVU Uhapšene dve osobe zbog promovisanja ekstremističkih grupa“, *Blic*, 20 December 2017, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/terorizam-na-kosovu-uhapsene-dve-osobe-zbog-promovisanja-ekstremistickih-grupa/4v90rcy> (accessed on 22 June 2018).

REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA **(Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)**

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK. In the Middle Ages, the Serbian state covered the areas between the rivers Vrbas and Lab and between the Sava and the Adriatic Sea. At the time of the greatest rise of medieval Serbia, the state territory moved and spread further to the south, following the valley of Vardar to the Aegean Sea. Along with the expansion of state territory, the population also moved.

The specific gravity and importance of the territory of today's FYROM is certainly at the equal or greater level of importance as that of Kosovo and Metohija, both for Serbian people and for Serbian statehood. In FYROM, a large part of the medieval heritage is related to the time of the centennial reign of the Nemanjić dynasty and their successors¹⁵⁷.

The Ottoman conquests (XIV-XVI century) led to a wave of national migrations. From the Vardar area, today's Kosovo and Metohija and parts of Serbia and Montenegro, a large number of Christians moved to southern Hungary (primarily Srem, Banat and Bačka), Slavonia, Croatia, the western parts of Bosnia, today's Slovenia. By 1557, the Serbian people had the opportunity to achieve at least spiritual and ecclesiastical unity within the Patriarchate of

157 Vladimir Ćorović: *Istorija Srba*"

Peć which far exceeded the borders of the medieval Serbian states.

Within the Peć Patriarchate, the Macedonian territory was still on the ethnic periphery of the Serbian people. In the time that followed the First Serbian Uprising, there was great immigration to Serbia, and among the areas the population was settling from included parts of present-day FYROM. The beginning of the educational campaign of the Serbian government in the early 1870s was quite a success. Nevertheless, the decision of the Ottoman Porte to establish an exarchate and give priority to the Bulgarian church organization led to the conflict of the two national movements. Although by 1912 the Serbian authorities managed to win the election of three Serbian bishops in Macedonian dioceses, only about a third of Orthodox believers in the region remained faithful to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, while probably about two-thirds were faithful to the Bulgarian National Church, the Exarchate. After the integration of the area of today's FYROM into the Kingdom of Serbia, there was no opportunity for their assimilation. In the Yugoslav monarchy, Macedonia was neglected. The Faculty of Philosophy was established in Skopje, but the issue of Macedonia was suppressed by the difficulties the state experienced regarding the relations between Serbs and Croats. Administrative attempts to suppress the individuality of the population of Macedonia and the conflict with the Bulgarian comitadji have not permanently changed relations in the area.

FYROM as a separate entity appears at the end of the Second World War, after the communist revolution. Establishing statehood implied the creation of a new nation and the founding of an independent church. To the communist regime, 'Macedonia and Macedonians' as a notion did not matter and they did nothing to define these concepts and create a certain basis of existence. The only 'success' achieved in this 'blind street of Macedonian ethnogenesis' is, in particular, the separation of the terms 'Macedonian' and 'Serb'. The mantra of 'Yugoslavisim' and the 'weak Serbia - strong Yugoslavia' approach (as formulated by Moša Pijade, derived from the original maxim 'weak Serbia - strong Communist Party' - coined by the last Secretary General of the criminal Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov) created, among others, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia without further ideological foundations of existence. There were no collective rights for the Serbian people in the NR and SR Macedonia. Even at the time of SFRJ, there were open issues and differences with Greece over the republic's name, but the problem never escalated above incidental objections during mutual state delegation visits. The collapse of the communist regime and the disintegration of the SFRJ left FYROM totally unprepared, regardless of the fact that its exit from the common state was, one could say, 'the easiest' and without war.

The referendum question by which FYROM established its independence in the disintegration of the SFRJ contained, besides the term independence, a question of po-

tential (con)federation and joining to another state. The majority of Macedonian citizens answered 'YES'.

Perhaps they have, symbolically and already in the first step, determined the outcome.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SERBIAN STATE TOWARDS SERBS IN MACEDONIA. It wouldn't be a mistake to say that the negligence of the Serbian state towards our people on the territory of Macedonia has lasted for almost 9 decades. After the fall of the communist regime and the disintegration of SFRJ, the situation did not change. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ) recognized the new state without imposing certain conditions regarding the position of the Serbian people, its political, cultural and religious rights. The secret Milošević-Gligorov agreement, which did not put these issues on the agenda, was a real indicator of (non)agency. The changes of 2000 did not bring anything new; it could even be said that the situation deteriorated further – the proverbial lack of interest of the Serbian political establishment, occupied by the illusion of European integration and accompanying mantras, a bad international position, economic problems that have been solved with a condescending attitude towards international creditors, complete inaction, modest or non-existent financial and material allocations, and the absence of any desire to create a strategy towards the Serbs in the region (not only in FYROM). The moments when there seemed to be an outline of some kind of strategy and organized approach was merely form without any substance, more the result of a need to justify the existence of the Ministry

of Diaspora at the time, than a genuine desire to do something concrete. Everything was reduced to occasional visits and interviews with selected representatives of Serbs from the region, more as a formality than in order to take concrete steps.

The approach remains unchanged to this day; there are no reactions to major security challenges and provocations. Serbs in the region are, as a rule, used on the Serbian internal political plan before the elections.

The rich Serbian cultural and historical heritage on the territory of FYROM is completely left to oblivion.^{158 159}

The rarely organized hearings in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia where the representatives of the Serbian people from the region would present their views and information on their status represented more form than substance. Assistance did not follow.

Perhaps the most obvious recent event that shows the complete lack of understanding of current issues as well as a lack of desire to do anything by the current ruling establishment in Belgrade was a visit by representatives of the Macedonian Assembly to the Serbian Assembly. The delegation of the Macedonian Assembly included, among others, the President of the Assembly Talat Xhaferi and Ivan Stoilković, the Chairman of the Commission for Cooperation with Serbia. The statements of the repre-

158 <http://www.srbi.org.mk/sr/drushtvo/1762-srpsko-kulturno-nasledje-u-makedoniji-prepusteno-zaboravu>

159 Ivan Jastrebov: „Stara Srbija i Albanija“

sentatives of the Serbian people from FYROM, and those of Maja Gojković, the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament and Ana Brnabić, the Prime Minister of Serbia, were diametrically opposite. Serbian officials, in their proverbially condescending attitude, emphasized friendship and mutual support in the Euro-Atlantic integration, completely ignoring the burning problems of the Serbian community that they 'forgot' to point out and of which the wider reading and viewing audience would not have known had they not heard them from Serbian community representatives through a series of interviews with the Serbian media, outside the official protocol.

It remains to be seen whether Ivan Stoilković's proposal to form a joint interstate commission that will deal with the rights of Serbs in FYROM and Macedonians in Serbia will be heeded.

Taking care of Serbs outside of Serbia is also a constitutional obligation¹⁶⁰ since 2006, about which literally nothing has been done. And those things that were on occasion done would have been better left alone.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF THE SERBIAN PEOPLE IN MACEDONIA. According to the 2002 census, 35,938 Serbian people were registered in FYROM which represented 1.78% of the total population¹⁶¹. Since 1991,

160 The Mirovdan Constitution of September 30th 2006, article 13 (http://sllistbeograd.rs/documents/ustav_republike_srbije_lat.pdf) (all websites mentioned in this chapter were accessed on 27. July 2018)

161 <http://www.stat.gov.mk/>

when there were 42,775, their number fell by as much as 16%. In addition to the disintegration of SFRJ and the withdrawal of federal administration, the reason for the decline in the number of Serbs should also be sought in assimilation that endures with undiminished intensity.

This information, however, is no longer valid enough since a new census was supposed to take place in 2011 but it was interrupted due to political disagreements between the Albanian and Macedonian political structures.¹⁶² The problem with the census, i.e. the Albanian boycott, lies in its possible results which could show that there isn't even 20% of Albanians on the territory of FYROM. Namely, after the first armed conflict between Albanian terrorists (NLA) and the Macedonian security forces, the 'Ohrid Agreement' (August 13th, 2001) was reached, which gave only the appearance of a multicultural story because, essentially, it carried the potential of dividing society on ethnic grounds due to favoritism towards the Albanian national minority. Under this agreement, among other things, the introduction of the Albanian language as official in all municipalities where Albanians are at least 20% of the population was specified. The Serbian people benefited from this agreement in only two municipalities, Kumanovo and Staro Nagoričane. In fact, this 20% limit is the real reason for the census boycott, since it would certainly show

162 Prekinut popis u Makedoniji, RTS, October 11th, 2011 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/Region/970672/Prekinut+popis+u+Makedoniji.html>

that Albanians do not reach that 20%. According to the amended preamble of the Constitution of FYROM, all ethnic communities, including Serbs, 'take responsibility' for the future of the state.

The fact that the citizens of FYROM, and especially the members of the Serbian community, can gain Bulgarian citizenship much more easily than Serbian, shows the carelessness of Serbia toward this very aggressive Bulgarian assimilation policy.

According to all of the above, as well as according to the data from numerous 'Macedonia in Figures' publications, issued by the Macedonian State Statistical Office, year after year, the data is getting progressively worse and more tragic. For the exact degree of dropout and reduction of members of the Serbian community we will still have to wait for the next census. The new Law on Bilingualism (by which the Albanian language will be introduced as official on the entire territory of Macedonia) will probably force the Albanians to agree to the census because the process of federalization and the decommissioning of the Macedonian state (by implementing the 'Tirana Platform') exceeds the provisions of the 'Ohrid Agreement'.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF SERBS IN MACEDONIA. The religious rights of Serbs in Macedonia do not exist. The SPC is forbidden, the persecution and pogrom of its priesthood has been going on for years (the persecution and imprisonment of Bishop Jovan - the head of the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid, which is canonically united with the Serbian Orthodox Church). Bishop Jovan is in fact, Mace-

donian – Jovan Vraneševski). A great number of attempts to solve the problem between the SPC and the canonically unrecognized MPC (founded in 1967) over the last 26 years (the 'Niš Agreement' of 2002, etc.) have failed.

In Serbia, apart from the SPC and the Progressive Club, not a single organization or institution has reacted to the denial of religious freedom of the Serbs and the persecution of the clergy.

ECONOMIC SITUATION. The Serbian community shares the difficult economic situation in FYROM with other citizens of the country. It would be interesting for macroeconomics connoisseurs to know that FYROM has been under the full patronage and control of international financial institutions since the declaration of independence. Unlike other countries in the region, FYROM followed through on all the tasks imposed by these organizations, it has reduced its debt to a very low level, but the economic situation is still poor, perhaps the worst in the region. The measures introduced by the IMF and the World Bank have not yielded any results. The parameters that are imposed also on Serbia and are considered a crown achievement in the domain of measuring success and development have proved to be a complete failure, of which FYROM serves as the best evidence.

Also, we can notice another legality that politicians in Serbia mostly completely ignore. Political problems can be solved exclusively by political, not economic decisions. No economic decision will solve political problems, especially not in our region.

From an economic point of view, Serbia held the position of FYROM's most important foreign trade partner until early 2013; the relations between Serbia and FYROM began deteriorating at the end of June and early July of 2013, when FYROM passed a regulation restricting the import of wheat and flour. Serbia, as well as other CEFTA countries, threatened with reciprocal measures. The government in Skopje decided to abolish the disputed regulation.¹⁶³ The crisis recurred during 2017 and early 2018, only to end in some sort of compromise¹⁶⁴ after the mutual accusations and threats by Serbia of reciprocal measures¹⁶⁵, which leaves the possibility of a further escalation of the conflict.

CULTURAL RIGHTS OF SERBS IN FYROM. The Serbian Community NGO, the Serbian Cultural Center, the Spona Cultural and Information Center (founded in April 2010) and the TV program 'Vidik' represent the last line of the defense of Serbian cultural identity in FYROM, especially given the problems they face, the very modest means allocated for this purpose by the government of FYROM, and the increased pressure from the Albanian factor that seeps deeper into the pores of all parts of the FYROM state and administration.

163 <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/pres-servis/vesti-od-znacaja?lang=lat>

164 <https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/vazno/10452/Beograd-i-Skoplje-postigli-dogovor-o-bra%C5%A1nu.htm>

165 <https://www.danas.rs/ekonomija/ljajic-sutra-uvodimo-kontramere-makedoncima/>

The Association of Serbs and Macedonians Cultural Artistic Society (CAS)'Sveti Sava' Tetovo, CAS 'Sprski Vez' from Kumanovo and the United Serbian Community from Bitola are the bearers of many activities aimed at preserving the Serbian national identity in FYROM.

The most important event is the St. Sava Academy, on the occasion of the Serbian national holiday in FYROM. It is an absolutely superb region-wide national and cultural event. The national holiday of Macedonian Serbs, organized by the NGO Serbian Community in FYROM and the Serbian Cultural Center is celebrated throughout FYROM, by organizing the so-called 'St Sava week' in several cities of FYROM. It was announced, however, that the new Law on Public Holidays will abolish this holiday!

On March 24, the commemoration of victims of the NATO aggression on Serbia and Montenegro is organized.

The changes that took place after the 2017 election significantly worsened the cultural position of the Serbs, primarily because they have been completely outcasted from the public, political and cultural life of FYROM. The financing of cultural events by the official Skopje has been completely denied. The best indicator of the situation is the fact that the Serbian community in FYROM received a total of 10,000 Euros for the celebration of the national holiday (St. Sava Day), which is also a national holiday, and a total of 500 Euros for the commemoration of the anniversary of the Battle of Kaimakchalan. At the same time, Macedonians in Serbia received 470,000 Euros from the Serbian state for their activities.

The only way out of this difficult situation would be to reach an agreement that the Republic of Serbia take care of Serbs and Serbian historical heritage in FYROM, and FYROM to do the same for their compatriots in Serbia.

POLITICAL-SECURITY SITUATION IN FYROM AND THE SERBIAN COMMUNITY.By the changes in 2017, the takeover of the only municipality in which Serbs exercised power after repeated local elections, their exclusion from public and political life, and finally the expulsion of the Serb community from the process of redefining the Macedonian state –the political rights and integration of Serbs reached the lowest level since FYROM became independent.

The Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia (DPSM)¹⁶⁶, led by Ivan Stoilković, has been the most organized party of Serbs in Macedonia from the independence of FYROM until today. After the 2002 elections, the Serbs entered the Assembly and have been present in the FYROM's government since 2006. The representatives of DPSM participated in the exercise of power in certain municipalities, such as Staro Nagoričane and Čučer-Sandevo along the Serbian border. It should be emphasized that DPSM, in its fight for the rights of Serbs in Macedonia, often had confronted certain NGO structures from Serbia, supported by official Belgrade.¹⁶⁷

166 www.dpsm.info

167 Makedonija: Srbi nesložno proslavljaju Savindan, 26. 01.2011, <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Ex-YU/112868/> Makedonija-Srbi-nesložno-proslavljaju-Savindan

Until the new government election in 2017, representatives of the DPSM took up several relatively high positions in the FYROM government and administration,¹⁶⁸ and from these positions, using very modest financial means that the FYROM government allocates for national minorities, were trying to help improve minority rights of Serbs.

During 2010, 2011 and 2012, the political status of Serbs in FYROM did not change significantly. As a certain step forward, we should mention the establishment of the 'Mixed Commission for the Implementation of the Minority Agreement', which has been in force since 2005. The members of the commission were appointed in June and November of 2009. In mid-April of 2010, the Cultural Information Center of Macedonian Serbs 'Spona' started its work in Skopje. During 2010 and 2011, the deterioration of relations between DPSM, the only Serbian party in the Assembly and a certain part of the Serbian non-governmental sector, along with representatives of official Serbia, continued. The conflict was most visible during the celebration of 'St. Sava day', when DPSM organized a central celebration in Skopje, during which the Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski spoke, while the Central Council of Serbs organized a separate celebration, attended by Serbian government representatives, in the village of Kučevište.

168 The status of Serbs in the region – The Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Serbia. After the formation of government, the party representative became the deputy minister of culture, and its candidates became the heads of several important public companies.

In December 2010, the Serbophobia of the Macedonian political elite once again became apparent. When the President of the DPSM stated at the Assembly that the 'Stone Bridge' in Skopje is also called 'Dušan's Bridge', a member of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), Radmila Šekerinska, the national coordinator for Euro-Atlantic integration, told him to 'go to Serbia', and later to 'move to Priština'.¹⁶⁹ In addition to being an MP at the Assembly and a Macedonian citizen, Stoilković, just like his ancestors, was born in Macedonia. Šekerinska never apologized to Stoilković and the general public, arguing that it was a false accusation. She was not relieved from high office. The official Serbia, by default, stayed silent.¹⁷⁰

During the election campaign in Serbia, a coalition of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) also had a party of Macedonians in Serbia in its membership. Nevertheless, despite the announcement he made, the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Gjorgelvanov, canceled his attendance at the inauguration of Tomislav Nikolić.¹⁷¹ As

169 Kome smetaju Srbi u Makedoniji?, 15.12.2010, <http://www.smedia.rs/spress/vest/284/Ivan-Stoilkovic-Radmila-Sekerinska-skandal-u-Sobranju-proterivanje-Srba-iz-Makedonije-lider-DPSM-Kome-smetaju-Srbi-u-Makedoniji.html>

170 Makedonci sačuvali Srbomrsca!, 30.12.2010, <http://www.smedia.rs/vesti/vest/53387/Ivan-Stoilkovic-skandal-u-Sobranju-DPSM-Dusanov-most-u-Skoplju-Radmila-Sekerinska-Makedonci-sacuvali-Srbomrsca.html>

171 "Ni Ivanov ne dolazi na Nikolićevu inauguraciju", Blic, June 8th 2012, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/327490/Ni-Ivanov-ne-dolazi-na-Nikolicevu-inauguraciju>

a result, the DPSM, in coalition with the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), which President Ivanov is a member of, froze its relations with the President of the Republic of Macedonia.¹⁷²

Due to the Albanians' resistance to take part in the census in FYROM, it was stopped. Probably fearing that it may reflect that they make up for less than 20% of the population, the Albanian representatives left the institutions in charge of maintaining the census, thus interrupting it.

The Serbian and Macedonian governments have agreed to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the First Balkan War. This decision is all the more important because the monuments from that time have been defiled both by the Bulgarian occupiers and the Macedonian Communist authorities after 1945. Also, the organized revision and political abuse of the Balkan wars, as seen after 1990, would not have been possible had the official Macedonia not participated. The information available to the Progressive Club indicates that official Serbia stopped financing the restoration of the memorial complex Zebrenjak in early July of 2012.

An increasing number of security challenges and political crises in Macedonia, which tend to escalate on the basis of ethnic conflicts between Macedonians and Albanians, negatively affect the position, rights and security of the Serbian community.

172 "Ivanov bojkotuje Nikolića, Srbi Ivanova", RTS, June 11th 2012 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/Region/1119538/Ivanov+bojkotuje+Nikoli%C4%87a,+Srbi+Ivanova.html>

After the six Albanians accused in the ‘Monster’¹⁷³ case were sentenced to life imprisonment on June 30th 2014, FYROM was shaken by riots. Organized via social networks, Albanian demonstrators across FYROM clashed with the police and attacked state institutions’ buildings seeking the release and retrial of their six compatriots. In Skopje and other Macedonian cities clashes occurred between Albanian demonstrators and police, and the protests took on a religious-extremist dimension¹⁷⁴ that raised attention and concern in other countries of the region.¹⁷⁵¹⁷⁶¹⁷⁷ Ivan

173 On the shore of Smiljkovo (Smilkovsko) Lake near Skopje on April 12th 2012, bodies of five Macedonians were found. The brutal murder caused a turbulent public reaction. The Albanian extremists were immediately accused. It was suspected that the murder was retaliation for an earlier death of an Albanian, in conflict with the police. After a while, the police arrested a group of Albanian suspects in the “Monster” operation. In addition to the fact that the police from tried to draw attention away from the issue of nationality, by calling them of Islamic extremists, some Macedonian analysts and dissatisfied Albanians claimed that Serbia and Serbians were behind everything. ALBANCI: KRIVI SU SRBI I MAKEDONCI, Kurir, December 5th 2012, 16

174 “Makedonska policija privela najbliže saradnike vladike Jovana Vraniškovskog, Blic, May 25th, 2012
<http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/324713/Makedonska-policijaprive-la-najblize-saradnike-vladike-Jovana-Vraniskovskog>

175 Intifada u Skoplju?, RTS, July 5th, 2014

176 ALBANCI: KRIVI SU SRBI I MAKEDONCI, Kurir, December 5th 2012, 16

177 “Stoilković: Klicanje džihadu nema veze sa pravima Albanaca”, Večernje novosti, July 10th, 2014

<http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:500129-Stoilkovic-Klicanje-dzihadu-nema-veze-sa-pravima-Albanaca>, (accessed on 19 July, 2014)

Stoilković, the leader of the only Serbian parliamentary party, warned that Albanian protests in FYROM had nothing to do with democratic rights and urged, first of all, the neighboring countries to support the Macedonian government. Stoilković also warned that 'everything that happens to the Macedonians in this region in the future will also happen to us (Serbs), every possible detriment is common to us.' This ethnic tension is worsening the general security situation in Macedonia, and is particularly a threat to minority communities, including the Serbian.

The Serb minority community and Serb insignia has been, in fact, the target of attacks by extremist chauvinist Albanian groups and organizations.

Immediately after the monument to Emperor Dušan in the center of Skopje was uncovered at the beginning of December 2013, several Albanian groups and organizations reacted by saying that he had been 'a usurper of the Western Balkans' whose likeness had no business being in Skopje.¹⁷⁸ Shortly thereafter, a group of thirty Albanians damaged the monument. The Albanian organization regarded the installation of the monument as a reflection of 'Serbophilia' and took it as proof of the anti-Albanian character of the project 'Skopje 2014'.¹⁷⁹

In January 2014, the president of the Centar municipality of Skopje (the territory of contains the 'Bridge of civilizations' with 29 sculptures of significant historical

178 "Car Dušan smeta Albancima u Skoplju", RTS, December 7th, 2013

179 Ibid.

figures) announced the removal of the monument to Emperor Dušan and 11 other monuments because, as he stated, 'there is no documentation on who ordered, built or put them up'.¹⁸⁰

This announcement of the president of the Centar municipality of Skopje about the removal of the monument to Car Dušan within the project 'Skopje 2014' will be realized in the future, with the announcement of the new Minister of Culture in the new Government that the complete project will be revised.¹⁸¹

In May 2015, a new Albanian terrorist act took place in the territory of Kumanovo. It is important to emphasize that the aforementioned Albanian terrorists (commanded by the well-known members of the terrorist KLA) came from the territory of Kosovo-UNMIK to the territory of Kumanovo where the majority of the Macedonian Serbians live. It is indicative that the region of terrorist action is located about 10km from the US military base 'Bondsteel' making it impossible that the US military had not noticed the preparations and intentions of the terrorists. There is unofficial information that the Serbian security services also informed their Macedonian colleagues about the preparations for this act, but when asked by the Macedonian authorities about the truthfulness of these allegations, the NATO crew from Uroševac responded that they do not have such information.

180 "Skoplje, skidanje Cara Dušana". RTS, January 24th, 2014

181 "Talanje", Radio Beograd, radio program June 28th, 2017

In essence, this 'insurrection' could be interpreted as a warning to then Prime Minister Gruevski for his plans to build the 'Turkish Stream'. Also, this event represents the beginning of a power shift in FYROM to be played out after the following elections.

The most serious reaction to the conflict in FYROM was expressed by the Russian Federation, whose foreign ministry pointed out that 'this situation in FYROM is foremostly affected by a serious lack of rule of law and security in Kosovo, which is obviously a consequence of the unresolved Kosovo problem as a whole.'

During 2015 and 2016, there were instances of 'territory marking' with religious symbols in Skopje, and the churches and mosques were being counted. On the planned construction site for a 55-meter high cross, the Albanians raised the construction foundations, demolished the fence, set up a camp on the site of the cross and put up the flag of Albania, which was a direct violation of the rights of Orthodox Christians to freedom of religion, precisely by its suppression by such actions and aggression towards religious symbols.

In February 2015, the billboards with the inscription 'Stop the Serbian assimilation of the Macedonian nation' were displayed in Skopje, the supposed work of the founder of VMRO and former Prime Minister Ljubčo Georgievski. The aforementioned billboards disturbed the Serbian community. As a rule, the Serbian government did not respond.

In the light of this event, let us list some later research results from 2017.

According to the portal 'Sputnik' and the newspaper 'Danas' from Serbia, from June 27th to July 3rd of 2017, the agency

'M Prospekt' conducted a telephone survey for Macedonian television 'Telma'. According to the survey, out of the total number of respondents, 44.3% declared that Serbia was the friendliest towards Macedonia, while 14.8% answered for Albania, and 11.2% for Bulgaria. 17.9% of respondents said that no neighbor was friendly towards Macedonia.¹⁸²

Let us be reminded of the 'Analysis of the current political and security situation in the Balkans' from May 2017 in the realization of the Progressive Club¹⁸³ as well as the condemnation of the negative campaign directed at Mr. Ivan Stoilković.¹⁸⁴

The crisis, elections and the forming of a new government in 2017, in which the Serbs were not represented, and the takeover of their only municipality after the second round of local elections represent a definite milestone, Serbs are completely cast out of public and political life, and are cast aside from the process of redefining of the Macedonian state.

Ivan Stoilković is using the position of the President of the Commission for Cooperation with Serbia at the Macedonian Assembly to the fullest extent, in order to improve the political position of Serbs and point to the increasingly more difficult situation.

182 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/regioni/201707061111810648-makedonija-anketa-simpatije-srbija/>

183 <http://www.napredniklub.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Analiza-stanja-u-regionu-NK-maj-2017-final.pdf>

184 <http://www.napredniklub.org/staljinsticke-intrige-i-kampanja-protiv-ivana-stoilkovica/>

Since the referendum and independence, the Macedonian state and the Macedonian people have been showing weakness. FYROM is an unstable state with a politically deeply divided Macedonian majority, open disputes with all its neighbors, and a severe problem of historical ethnogenesis absence (the name issue) and identity problem. None of the Macedonian politicians in the last 27 years of FYROM's existence as an independent state did anything to solve these problems. Such a thing was never expected of the pro-Bulgarian VMRO-DPMNE (whose founder Ljubčo Georgievski in the meantime became a Bulgarian citizen and politician, and a member of the Bulgarian right-wing party GERB, led by Boyko Borisov), nor can it be expected from SDSM and Zaev who are the successors of Macedonian communists.¹⁸⁵

The name issue, present even before the independence, escalated completely on its first day. Some sort of 'solution' was found in the construct of 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', more in order to complete the great powers' goal of dissolving SFRJ than to solve the problem between Greece and the new state. Since 1992, negotiations over the name of the state have been held (in 1993, the UN recognized the state under the name FYROM) in Vienna.¹⁸⁶ The mediator in the negotiations was Matthew Nimetz. Over time, various potential solutions have been

185 <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/Istorija-na-partijata.aspx>

186 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/bez-napretka-o-imenu-makedonije/5q8fs3z>

proposed, all of which have failed because of the inability to overcome the problem of the existence of the 'Macedonia' noun in the name of the state.

Conflicted interests and diametrically opposed attitudes expressed through the attempts of the Macedonians to preserve the state, Greece's efforts to prevent the appropriation of a part of its legacy via an 'erga omnes' solution, Albanian irredentism embodied through the process of federalization and fulfillment of the items of the 'Tirana Platform' and finally the interest of NATO to round up this region under its umbrella make a solution that's relatively universally acceptable difficult to reach. The leaders of the Macedonian people see the NATO membership as the last chance for the survival of the state, just as the Albanians and Greeks realize that this is the last chance to get something more before that potential membership.

It is very likely that the price of this country's temporary survival will be renouncing of the name 'Macedonia', which will in turn cause a complete and utter failure of the already feeble attempts at creating an identity for the Macedonian people, and after which they will, subject to Bulgarization and Albanian irredentism, disappear with the country. In this sense, the fate of the Serbian community in Macedonia is the same as for the majority of people.

No matter the outcome of the negotiation, the legitimacy of the result will be more than suspect. The ruling establishment did not provide political negotiation capacity because any agreements they may reach would be dif-

difficult to implement on the ground. To change the constitution, they would need a 2/3 Parliament majority, President Ivanov himself opposes any constitutional changes and finally, the Republic Electoral Commission hasn't yet been formed, which would again require a 2/3 Parliament majority and without which it would be impossible to organize the announced referendum. Let us not forget that the constitutional changes and the 'erga omnes' solution are the ultimate demands of the official Athens.

Although they represent the dominant majority of at least 75%, by a series of patronizing political moves and complete subordination to the foreign element, the Macedonian state came into the situation that no official institution, including the government, can be formed without an Albanian element. The crowning moment was the 'May Agreement' of 2008, according to which the government must be formed by the strongest Macedonian and strongest Albanian party. At the crucial moment, after 10 years of implementation and the parliamentary elections of 2017 (a classic 'color revolution' spiced with flagrant violation of the Constitution during the election of the Chairman of Assembly), when it became necessary to take down the 'disobedient' VMRO-DPMNE and Prime Minister Gruevski, Zoran Zaev, the President of SDSM, came to power.

The security situation of the Serbian people is becoming progressively difficult year by year, as the Albanian element is getting stronger and the Macedonian establishment (primarily because of the deep division) is increasingly subject to pressures and blackmail, especially those

of the 'International Community'. No event that worsens relations between Macedonians and Albanians takes place without involving the Serbs, directly or indirectly. These events have resulted in increased violence in Serb-inhabited areas and ever more frequent cases of defamation of Serbian insignia. As tensions between Albanians and Macedonians intensify, even the few Serbs remaining in FYROM will be compromised.

The Assembly has not been spared the Serbophobic rhetoric by representatives of the two dominant national communities. The occasional disputes between official Serbia and official FYROM also have negative consequences on the political rights of Serbs. The participation in the NATO aggression against Serbia, recognition of the so-called Kosovo, voting for Kosovo's accession to UNESCO, Official Belgrade's occasional support to the NGO sector among Serbs in confrontation with the only official representatives of Serbs in Macedonian institutions, the complete absence of interest in Serbs in FYROM in Belgrade (even in cases of flagrant violation of rights, security and dignity), all fundamentally threaten the position of Serbs.

We cannot help but draw certain parallels in the events and the intense anti-Serbian hysteria in Macedonia and in Montenegro. For starters, let us notice the symbolism, correlation and connection of events. The true instigators and initiators throughout history have never lacked ideas in that sense. On the same day that the assault on the Assembly took place, the criminal and terrorist Ramush Haradinaj (today the Prime Minister of the terrorist creation, so-called Kosovo) was released

from custody in France and the Montenegrin parliament adopted the North Atlantic Treaty. Symbolically, the Macedonian and Montenegrin scenarios continue to match: in both countries, a problem with the religious rights of Serbs and the canonically unrecognized churches (the Montenegrin and Macedonian Orthodox Churches), a proverbially condescending attitude towards the Albanian element and the 'international community', a deep division in the national majority, best reflected in voting yes for all kinds of 'suspicious' decisions with the help of the Albanian minority, the attack on the Parliament – the attempt of a 'coup' in Montenegro, the involving of Serbs into all dubious events, and when this is not enough for the complete masquerade, 'finding' the Russian influence.

The ruling establishments are constantly 'fighting against the Russian virtual influence' and all for the benefit of some third party. The expulsion of the Russian diplomats because of another apparent action in a series of 'false flag' ones (similar to the recent 'murder' of journalist Arkady Babchenko), far from and without any connection to FYROM, reveal the true essence of the official Skopje – an occupied regency rather than a legal and legitimate government of a sovereign state in 21st-century Europe.

2017/2018. In August 2017, the representatives of the so-called Kosovar authorities and the Macedonian officials signed a protocol on the establishment of the 'Stančić' border crossing.¹⁸⁷

187 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/1/politika/2839542/sporazum-pristine-i-skoplja-o-granicnom-prelazu.html>

On August 21st, 2017 all FYROM Serbian Embassy employees withdrew. The MFA of FYROM received a note from the MFA of Serbia stating that the officials were called for 'consultations'.¹⁸⁸ On that occasion, the Ambassador Dušanka Divjak Tomić did not comment on the decision, but referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister Dačić. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić said that the reason for the withdrawal of personnel lies in 'offensive intelligence', according to evidence obtained from Serbian security services. He stated that the above activities involved 'great powers', denying that he was referring to Russia. This event was associated with a potential new candidacy that should be submitted to UNESCO in the name of the so-called Kosovo. Macedonian officials have stated that when forming a position, they will have in mind the position of the EU administration. The new Macedonian Prime Minister Zaev said that Macedonia would vote 'neutral', which was a turning point in relation to the decision of the Macedonian government in 2008, when they voted *for* the so-called Kosovo in UNESCO.

It is interesting to note that on that same day the Macedonian news agency 'Makfax' stated that the Government of FYROM prepared a proposal for admission of the so-called 'Kosovo in UNESCO, citing this as the reason for withdrawing Embassy staff.

188 <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/sputnjik-o-razlogu-povlacenja-osoblja-srpske-ambasade-makedonija-predlagac-ulaska/6re9nhj>

The mentioned affair can be interpreted as a continuation of the one related to the conflicts in the Assembly and the presence of the Serbian service officers during the aforementioned events. It is important to note that the initiative of Ivan Stoilković to form an Inquiry Commission, which would examine these events and check who else was present during the unfortunate events, was swiftly rejected by the ruling Macedonian establishment.

When asked in November 2017 what the situation with the rights of Serbs in FYROM is and whether something has changed since the arrival of Zoran Zaev as Prime Minister, Ivan Stoilković answered 'a lot has changed and not for the better. The new authority has deprived us of the 'Agency for Minority Rights' that we were in charge of (local elections of October 2017) and one municipality run by Serbs in FYROM (the Old Nagoričane), under an undemocratic and unjust campaign'. OSCE failed to condemn this in spite of the calls and evidence presented to them.

To make the situation worse, a new Law on holidays is being announced, the primary aim of which will be the abolition of the Saint Sava Day as the national holiday of Serbs in FYROM. It is important to note that some Serb elements in Macedonia participated in this campaign of undemocratic seizure of the Municipality, besides the official Skopje.¹⁸⁹

189 <http://srbin.info/2017/10/25/apel-iz-makedonije-antisrpska-politika-nove-vlasti/>

The end of 2017 marks the crisis of the new Macedonian government. The government was left without the support of another Albanian party, and so it remains 'hanging' on two independent MPs. After the departure of the Albanian party 'Besa Movement', the 'Alliance for Albanians' (Ziadin Sela) decided to leave the coalition as well.

January 15th, 2018. The Assembly has ratified an agreement on friendship, good neighborly relations and cooperation with Bulgaria.¹⁹⁰ It is indicative that both sides declared that they were not happy with the agreement?! Let us note, this Friendship agreement was signed on August 1st, 2017 by Zaev and Borisov, and which the opposition VMRO-DPNE demanded to be rejected¹⁹¹, and then called for a referendum¹⁹² because, as they say, it didn't respect the Macedonian interests, nor recognize the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, it allowed the Bulgarians to rewrite history textbooks etc. Soon after, the Bulgarian parliament (unanimously!) ratified this agreement.¹⁹³

Those who were until yesterday accused of 'Bulgarophilia' became 'Serbomans', and those former Communists self-pro-

190 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/makedonija-ratifikovala-sporazum-o-prijateljstvu-s-bugarskom/ndeey18>

191 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/makedonija-opozicija-trazi-povlacenje-dogovora-o-dobrosusedskim-odnosima-sa-bugarskom/m0lf877>

192 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/vmro-dpmne-ce-traziti-referendum-o-dogovoru-sa-bugarskom/xdxdbb2>

193 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.299.html:706896-Bugarska-jednoglasno-ratifikovala-sporazum-sa-Makedonijom>

claimed 'Serbophiles' have now become ardent 'Bulgarophiles'. They made a contract with Bulgaria and implemented the 'Tirana Platform'. So, in the new Macedonian politics, the position of Serbs is similar to the position of Macedonians', says Ivan Stoilković.

March 14, 2018 will be remembered as 'another dark day for democracy in Macedonia'¹⁹⁴. Contrary to the parliamentary, legal and constitutional procedure, the Assembly adopted (64 votes 'FOR', none 'AGAINST' or 'SUS-TAINED') the Law on Bilingualism, which Ivanov, under the force of law, would have to sign. We have no dilemma that 'international guardians of democracy' in this case will demand 'legality'.

In particular, the controversial President of Assembly arbitrarily rejected all the amendments of the opposition and put the law to the vote. There was almost a physical altercation between Nikola Gruevski and Talat Xhaferi. Whether the law will be implementable in practice (and to what degree) and which further problems it will generate it remains to be seen, because the implementation of this law will require wider and deeper changes in the Macedonian legislation and Constitution.

During the session, modestly attended demonstrations were held in front of the Assembly.

After President Ivanov's refusal to sign, The Macedonian Parliament adopted a bill on the extension of use of

194 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/komentar-i/201803141114900348-makedonija-zakon-dvojezicnost/>

the Albanian language in Macedonia for the second time, on the basis of which it would become the second official language. Let's note that even after the second vote and confirmation of the law in parliament, and although obliged by law, the President of Macedonia refused to verify it. The Constitutional Court of Macedonia is to decide on the constitutionality of the law in question. The officials of the Government and Assembly call for the criminal responsibility of the President which cannot be activated until the end of the mandate. A possible change of power is also not a realistic option, because the ruling establishment doesn't have the necessary two-thirds majority in the Assembly.

'The Tirana platform, despite the fact that it 'does not exist', has begun its implementation. And one of its basic requirements, bilingualism, becomes Macedonian reality. From the multicultural state of Macedonia, it becomes a two-nation state, 'said Stoilković.¹⁹⁵

A piece of evidence for this is the repeated request of Ali Ahmeti, the leader of the ruling Albanian party DUI, to condemn the 'genocide' over the Albanians in the Parliament 104 years ago. Majko Pandeli, the Minister for Diaspora in the Government of Albania, orchestrated and coordinated his statement, supporting the request.¹⁹⁶

The situation, which in the end, and in spite of the recent reconstruction of the Government, will most likely

195 http://danas.rs/svet.1160.html?news_id=Dela+da+se+realizuje

196 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/28861610.html>

be solved by irregular parliamentary elections, and is also complicated by the fact that VMRO-DPNE left the parliament (because of the arrest of their members) and there is no one to put a vote of confidence on the agenda for the government. The loss of 7 MPs leads us to two possible scenarios: unscheduled elections in 2018 or unscheduled elections joined with the presidential election in the spring of 2019.

It should not be ignored that even this slender majority is not an obstacle to the implementation of the items from the 'Tirana Platform' (Law on Bilingualism), in the same way the plan for the elimination of the border between Albania and Macedonia was realized. Perhaps this thin majority will 'stimulate' Zaev to accelerate these processes for the sake of a longer term in power. The fact is that the Albanians will leave him to his fate as soon as they realize the plans they inscribed by bringing Zaev to power. An excellent indicator if this is the attitude of the Albanian parties that left the government to support the laws 'of crucial importance for the Albanians'.¹⁹⁷

After the next parliamentary elections, it is not impossible for Albanians to submit a request for the new Prime Minister to be from the circle of Albanian politicians.

In late 2017 and by mid-2018 (in anticipation of the NATO summit in July 2018), the issue of the future of the Macedonian state is being actualized, especially since the

197 <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/regioni/201712291113989008-makedonija-skoplje-albanci-zaev-vlada/>

'Ohrid Agreement' was overthrown by the arrival of the new Government in 2001. The process of degradation continues. The declarative efforts of the official FYROM for the 'European path' and NATO membership will certainly not help the preservation of the Macedonian state, not even in the approximate form of what it is today.¹⁹⁸ One of the solutions, the Anglo-Saxon Atlantistic establishment's bid, is state federalization. It is mentioned in the public that the plan is for FYROM to be transformed according to the Belgian model. Thus, the new state would consist of two republics - on the west from the Albanian Iliride, on the east from the Macedonian Republic of Macedonia, while the capital Skopje would be a special, mixed district. Bearing in mind that such a proposal, it is being said, will not have the support of VMRO-DPMNE it will encounter new difficulties that underline the necessity of changing the current Constitution through a referendum or in the Assembly.

It is questionable whether even those potential dividing lines among federal units, as we are aware and convinced that this is the last step before the creation of a third Albanian state on the territory of the Balkans and then also the 'Great Albania'. It is an indirect assistance of sorts to the Macedonian people that the creation of this new Albanian state in the Balkans does not suit any of its neighbors, quite obviously Serbia, Bulgaria, which at a critical histor-

198 <http://iskra.co/region/savetnik-slobodana-milosevica-plan-je-bio-da-makedonija-nestane-odmah-posle-agresija-nato-na-srbiju/>

ical moment will turn its back on the Euro-Atlantic hegemony, and even Greece, exhausted by its membership in the EU and NATO, and to which a significant Albanian national minority in the north represents a potential 'noose'. This is one of the turning points for the future, something that can make a complete turn and the local distribution of forces in the Balkans, from the arduous need to stop an aggressive, destructive and 'wild' Balkan element at the very start.¹⁹⁹

CONCLUSION. The Macedonian state is threatened, the predominant majority is deeply divided, an establishment which has significantly changed the foreign policy priorities rose to power, the realization of the 'Tirana Platform' has been launched, the federalization and the country's dissolution. The agreement on good neighborly relations with Bulgaria opens a wide door to further assimilation policy, now through the 'national engineering' of Bulgaria in the domain of history and historical facts.

Shaky and without solid foundations, the Macedonian national identity is endangered. The connection with the only foundation, the Serbian Orthodox Church, is interrupted, an unrecognized MPC has no possibility or power to represent any kind of a cohesion factor.

The ever-smaller Serbian community has been completely cut out from public and political life, removed from the process of redefining the Macedonian state and in a

199 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/analize/201712281113976082-makedonija-federalizacija-podela-belgija/>

suspicious way bereft of the only municipality (Staro Nagoričane) it managed. The financial resources for the Serbian community in the field of culture and identity-preserving projects and heritage are being taken away.

The abolition of the 'Saint Sava Day' from the national holiday calendar and the removal of the Serbian people from the list of constituent peoples are imposed as the next expected moves by the new Macedonian state establishment, which will seal the fate of the Serbian people in the territory of today's FYROM.

All this is witnessed by the official Belgrade, which is neither willing nor able to adequately protect the Serbian people.

MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is a secular country with no national minority; it is a member of NATO and, according to the President of the European Council Donald Tusk, the leading candidate in European integrations.²⁰⁰

Montenegro became independent and left the union with Serbia after the 2006 referendum was approved by 55.5% of voters, narrowly passing the 55% threshold. The referendum has been very controversial in many respects, and its narrow result bears evidence to the deep-rooted polarization of the Montenegrin society.

The regime of Milo Đukanović is the only political survivor from former Yugoslavia that still remains in power. In the first years of independence, the local Serbian population encountered no major problems. The first Report on the Rights of the Serbian People in the Region²⁰¹ (Progressive Club, 2009) noted several institutional obstacles in the field of education and minority language media, as well as proportional underrepresentation and dual citizenship, and attacks against the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC).

200 <http://www.bankar.me/2018/04/25/crna-gora-prednjaci-u-procesu-evropskih-integracija/>, (all websites mentioned in this chapter were accessed on 27. July 2018).

201 *Извештај о политичким правима српског народа у региону за 2009. годину*, Напредни клуб, Београд.

Milo Đukanović's opportunism – over the years the Montenegrin leader has been a great pro-Serb advocate, partner and proponent of the Milošević regime, and an anti-Serb politician who uses ethnic antagonism to further his own purposes – did not allow the guaranteed rights of the Serbs to be immediately violated. On acquiring independence, the Serbs were equal to all others. However, the newly acquired independence seems to have awakened a chauvinist side of the Montenegrin authorities and led to increased violations of Serbian freedoms.

More serious isolated incidents began to occur in mid-2009, around the same time as the introduction of institutional solutions that excluded the Serbs from the Montenegrin state system. On 19 August 2009 the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (Crnogorska Pravoslavna Crkva, CPC) – a self-proclaimed and canonically unrecognized organization that might be more aptly described as an NGO – launched an attack against the property, clergy and faithful of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of SPC at the Church of the Transfiguration in Ivanova Korita, in Njeguši near Cetinje. The attack was headed by Dragan Čavor, the owner of Niksen-Trade-Čavor, who has never been held accountable despite having inflicted light wounds on police officers.²⁰²

In September 2009 the then Minister of Spatial Planning and Environment Branimir Gvozdenović announced

202 *Извештај о политичким правима српског народа у региону за 2010. годину*, Напредни клуб, Београд.

the removal of the Church of the Holy Trinity from Mount Rumija near Bar.

The elections of 23rd May 2010 were an important event. The opposition bloc called 'Better Montenegro' (coalition of Serbian parties, the Serbo-Montenegrin SNP and some minor Montenegrin and one Bosniak party) experienced a drop in almost all 14 municipalities where the elections were held. DPS came to power in Žabljak; in Andrijevica the coalition narrowly remained in power by co-opting an SDP delegate. Insensitivity to the problems of the Serbian community was one of the reasons behind the poor turnout. In June the draft amendments to the Law on General Education was proposed for discussion, with the aim of introducing the new norm of the Montenegrin language as the official language used in schools. No solutions were proposed to organize education in Serbian, even as a minority language, although estimates suggest that it is used by 30-50% of the population.

Late 2009 seemed to have heralded the beginning of flagrant violations of the rights of the Serbian community in Montenegro. Tensions around the controversial referendum had long abated and now the church found itself targeted under the guise of the country's secular organization. Due to the decades-long totalitarian government and non-democratization, the average citizen was expected to be disinterested in religious matters and hence any ecclesiastical matters could be managed discreetly. Isolated incidents against Serbs became increasingly frequent. The attack against the church was followed by the language issue,

heralding Đukanović's end goal: to deprive the Serbs of all rights and consistently treat them as second-rate citizens.

In July 2011 a census was held in Montenegro. The un-sanctioned behavior of Montenegrin nationalists on the occasion of the referendum had paved the way for rigging any future polling. The census results were contested by the opposition (SNP, NSD, DSS) and the Serbian National Council (est. 2008); NSD and others announced that they would be filing formal complaints, but no progress was made. Namely, according to the results of the Statistical Office of Montenegro – Monstat, the share of Serbs had dropped from 31.99% to 28.77% and 0.34% of Serbo-Montenegrins (a total of 29.11% using the methodology of the 2003 census). This meant a decrease of around 10% (200,000 persons), despite Monstat's birthrate statistics indicating a growth of the Serbian population; NSD's and SNP's (the only Serbian parties allowed to follow and participate in the census) sample of 206,000 respondents indicated around 33% of Serbs; a similar figure was suggested by the pro-DPS Center for Democracy (34% based on a normal distribution of collective samples).²⁰³

The 2006 Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms and the Montenegrin Constitution of 2007 divide languages into Montenegrin on one hand and Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian on the other.²⁰⁴ Special 'national' classes were expected to be formed, as had already been done

203 www.cedem.me/sr/programi/istrazivanje-javnog-mnjenja

204 www.skupstina.me/cms/site_data/ustav/ustav-crne-gore.pdf

in Montenegro to facilitate the education of ethnic Albanians in their own language. However, as a compromise, a subject called Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature was introduced. However, new textbooks were printed only in Montenegrin, using its new orthography and grammar, as well as the newly revised Latin alphabet. The name of the subject is often abbreviated to Montenegrin language and literature. This essentially meant that in 2011/2012 Serbian children had already started their transition to the Montenegrin language, as there were no textbooks in the Ijekavian dialect of Serbian.

In 2011 the Karadjordjević family appealed to the ECHR in Strasbourg demanding the restitution of its property in Cetinje, Rijeka Crnojevića and Miločer, stating that the property had been confiscated illegally and that the Montenegrin Petrović dynasty had been granted a special property status.

Official Podgorica continued its negative attitude towards SPC eparchies, treating them as organizations rather than legal subjects. It demanded renewed registration despite existing rights and historical presence and signed special agreements with all other religious communities (Catholic, Islamic and even the tiny Jewish) except the Serbian Orthodox community.

After the controversial referendum and census, encouraged by these unresolved cases, official Podgorica began to commit major irregularities during the electoral process.

The presidential elections of 7 April 2013 ended with both candidates proclaiming victory: the ruling party's

candidate Filip Vujanović and the real victor Miodrag Lekić. According to the State Electoral Commission, the margin was eventually revealed to have been 7,000 votes; however, in the month leading up to the elections, 8,000 new persons were added to voting lists and registered to vote.²⁰⁵ On behalf of the EU, the head of the EU Delegation to Montenegro Dirk Lange immediately expressed support for all three opposition demands concerning investigating potential electoral abuses, but the matter never progressed any further and Filip Vujanović became the President of Montenegro.

In 2013 the process of removing Serbian authors from textbooks was completed. Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, St. Sava, Stevan Sremac, Milorad Pavić and Branko Radičević were replaced by Ognjen Spahić, Sreten Asanović, Esad Mekuli and Musa Ćazim Ćatić.

The local elections of 2014 were also blighted by irregularities.

The Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina encountered a very peculiar problem: the regime had to replace their immigrant status with the status of a foreign citizen with permanent residence in Montenegro, thereby depriving them of public health-care.²⁰⁶

205 www.in4s.net/index.php/politika/srbija-cg-srpska/vujanovic-zaboravio-da-potpise-zahtjeve-za-7000-građana

206 *Извештај о политичким правима српског народа у региону 2014*, Напредни клуб, Београд.

The 2014 Law on National Symbols bans the use of 'non-Montenegrin' symbols during international meetings and political, academic, cultural, artistic and sports events featuring Montenegrin representatives, regardless of others.

In July 2014 a meeting called the Pan-Montenegrin Council was held and demanded all sacral structures managed by SPC to be put into state ownership, without specifying if this was to be done with the property of all other religious communities. In addition, it adopted a resolution declaring the decisions of the 1918 assembly of Podgorica invalid.²⁰⁷

On 5th June 2017 Montenegro officially became a member of NATO, although this decision was not made at a referendum and had not won two-thirds of support in the Montenegrin parliament.

All of these unconstitutional and unlawful processes were completed by the middle of this decade. The Serbian people are left to their own devices, enjoying little support from its mother country or the relevant international factors. The authorities in Podgorica have not been held accountable for violating its own legislation, always to the detriment of ethnic Serbs who make up 30% of its population.

One of the key reasons behind the anti-Serb policy of Milo Đukanović is the regime in Serbia. However, until 2012 there was some interest from Serbia for its compatriots in Montenegro and there were occasional official

207 ЦПЦ *би да прекраја историју!*, Вести онлајн, www.vesti-online.com

initiatives to help ensure their lawful rights. For example, on 27 January 2010 the then Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić attended St. Sava's Academy in Bijelo Polje and a General Consulate was opened in Herceg Novi. The Ministry of Culture spent almost a quarter of its funds for 2012 to sponsor media projects and programs of the Serbian community in Montenegro.

Since the rise of Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić to key offices in Belgrade, the relationship towards Serbs in Montenegro has turned into ignoring, and in many cases even siding with Milo Đukanović. For his part Đukanović supported Nikolić's presidential run in 2012. According to information circulating in the media, the relationship between them was established through persons from the criminal and political underground who live abroad. In January 2013 Đukanović and Nikolić met and jointly stated that the relations between the two countries had overcome the most challenging stage and that they are to be seen as a positive example to other countries in the region. Having been appointed Prime Minister, in his exposé Aleksandar Vučić mentioned that the construction of the highway Belgrade-Bar would be one of his main priorities, but failed to mention any of the problems faced by Serbs in Montenegro and propose potential solutions.

The past year (mid-2017 to mid-2018) was marked by political struggles, the persistent activities of the Serbian parties and the National Council and the people's leader Andrija Mandić, as well as systematic violation of the rights of one third of Montenegro's population.

The canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC) – a church with no monkhood and led by the defrocked priest Miraš Dedeić – radicalized its struggle against SPC. In October 2017, shortly before the public debate on the Draft Law on Religious Freedom, Dedeić slapped an older lady twice in the face in public²⁰⁸, but has not been held accountable. At the same time CPC sent new demands to the relevant organs of Montenegro, asking them to allow CPC priests to officiate in SPC churches and monasteries and to revise land registers and the status of the ‘unlawful legal entity of the co-called Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral’; the Ministry of the Interior was asked to investigate the identity and citizenship of SPC priests in Montenegro.²⁰⁹

In 2017 the Montenegrin Ministry of Human and Minority Rights distributed funds for religious communities. The much smaller and uncanonical CPC and the Islamic community, which has much fewer believers, received more funding than SPC: CPC received 58,015.7 Euros; the Islamic community 55,888.31 Euros; and SPC 44,183.41 Euros.²¹⁰

To add insult to injury, Miraš Dedeić’s Easter address contained statements offensive to the Serbs: ‘Instead of

208 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/incident-u-kotoru-mitropolit-crnogorske-pravoslavne-crkve-udario-stariju-zenu/9yvzk4p>

209 http://www.monitor.co.me/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7977:crnogorska-pravoslavna-crkva-ni-na-nebu-ni-na-zemlji-policijski-parastosi-i-liturgije&catid=5659:broj-1407&Itemid=7058

210 <http://www.novosti.rs/вести/планета.480.html:707089-Mitropoli-ja-SPC-dobila-14000-evra-manje-od-nepriзнate-Crnogorske-crkve>

admitting its sins and begging forgiveness for all of its wrongdoings against Montenegro, Montenegrins and CPC as a step towards forgiveness and reconciliation, the Serbian church continues to arrogantly assault all Montenegrin values.²¹¹

None of these incidents have elicited a reaction from Serbia. The fascist tone of the Montenegrin regime and chauvinists enjoys the support of official Podgorica, which has failed to sanction Dedeić's physical assaults and provides more financial support to this canonically unrecognized organization than to any canonical church.

By the beginning of this school year (September 2017) Serbian-language teaching had yet to be introduced and there was still no textbook for learning the Serbian Cyrillic script, but the Montenegrin educational system had decided to introduce English-language teaching programs for first-graders in Podgorica, Petrovac, Berane and Nikšić in all subjects.²¹² In contrast, until 1916 the following subjects were mandatory in Montenegrin schools: divinity, Serbian language, arithmetic, Slavonic reading, geometry, geography, Serbian history, nature and science, calligraphy, popular and church singing, sports and military training.

In Danilovgrad, supported by their teachers, pupils of various nationalities put up a poster with a message that

211 <http://www.alo.rs/vesti/region/mitropolit-cpc-izvredao-spc-u-vaskrsnoj-poslanici/157127/vest>

212 <http://www.novosti.rs/вести/планета.480.html:684177-Crna-Gora-U-klupama-100000-djaka-FOTO>

loosely translates as 'St. Peter²¹³, blight on thy face, no Cyrillic script in thy school' as an act of protest against the persecution of the Cyrillic script and Serbian language.²¹⁴ Despite being minors, pupils in Montenegro have been sanctioned by the authorities when they chose to commemorate the anniversary of the bombing of Montenegro in 1999 or when they say something about the Serbian segment in the history of the country. Serbian classics have long been removed from textbooks, but contemporary Serbian authors fare no better. On 3rd March 2018, World Writers Day, the chairman of the Journalists' Association of Montenegro Novica Đurić noted that the most gifted Serbian writer in Montenegro was unemployed, with publishers in Podgorica refusing to publish his books. Using the Cyrillic script is unacceptable in today's Montenegro. The status of a 'deserving creator' was given to many authors including some high-school students, but none of them are ethnic Serbs.²¹⁵

In 2017/2018 a teaching plan for the subject called 'Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian language' was adopted. The Ministry of Education published the Report on the Public Debate about the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Elementary Education.' Listing those who had sent their proposals, complaints and suggestions,

213 St. Peter of Cetinje, Petar I Petrović-Njegoš, Prince Bishop of Montenegro at the turn of the 18-19th century

214 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:693471-Djaci-u-Crnoj-Gori-brane-cirilicu>

215 <http://www.srna.rs/novosti1/574464/srpski-pisci-u-crnoj-gori-obespravljani-na-rubu-egzistencije.htm>

the report mentions '19 groups of teachers of the Montenegrin language'. However, since there is no subject under this name in Montenegrin school, the Ministry of Education made a grave mistake, once again violating the 2011 agreement between the regime and opposition parties – to have the subject previously called 'Mother Tongue' re-named as Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian language and literature.²¹⁶ Veselin Matović, a teacher of Serbian and the editor of the journal *Slovo*, has noted many examples of suppression and negation of Serbian literature and authors in the textbooks for Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian language and literature. 'In existing readers and textbooks, bibliographical information for authors includes their national identification. All writers born in the territory of present-day Montenegro are labeled as Montenegrin, but those from other regions are identified in different ways, for example those from Vojvodina have no national label. Very deliberately, Miloš Crnjanski and Petar Kočić are not given national identifications. There is not a single author who was born in Montenegro that has been described as a Serbian writer. And that is the most dangerous message of all, because if there are no Serbian authors in Montenegro – now or in the past – then there is no Serbian language or people in Montenegro.'²¹⁷ Thus various writers inexplicably appear as Montenegrins: St. Peter

216 <http://www.intermagazin.rs/u-duklijanskoj-crnoj-gori-srpski-je-jezik-u-sluzbenoj-upotrebi-ali-nije-u-upotrebi/?lang=cir>

217 Ibid.

of Cetinje, Njegoš, and even Jelena Balšić, the daughter of the famous Serbian medieval ruler Prince Lazar.

In addition, since there are no Serbs among elementary and high school principals, daycare managers and hospitals, the situation seems even more alarming. Momčilo Vuksanović, the chairman of the Serbian National Council, has requested an urgent meeting with the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić to discuss these issues. Vučić has not seen him yet.

The Constitution of Montenegro is clear enough in its provisions about the Serbian language: Montenegrin is the official language and Serbian is a language in 'official use'²¹⁸, which gives the Serbian community wide-ranging rights to use their language. However, nowadays there are more signs in Chinese than in Cyrillic in Podgorica.

The problem with the codification with the newly created Montenegrin language is being solved in a rather nonsensical way, by attempting to suppress the autochthonous language of the majority of the population, both Serbs and Montenegrins, as even the results of the faulty census show that the majority in Montenegro uses the Serbian language. It is important to note that the American Committee for Codification has stated that Montenegrin represents a variant of Serbian.

In April 2018 Momčilo Vuksanović underlines that the Serbian media operating in Montenegro under the auspices of the National Council of Montenegro face major problems due to the lack of funding and the negligent attitudes

218 *Constitution of Montenegro*

of the authorities in both Podgorica and Belgrade. The Serbian television, radio, portal and the Serbian Newspapers (Srpske novine) are all facing imminent shutdown, leading to 19 out of 40 staff being made redundant. The Serbian media are also being criticized for broadcasting Russian programs and portals such as Sputnik and RT.²¹⁹

There are no Serbs in leading or managing positions; according to official statistics, there 7% of civil servants are ethnic Serbs. Conversely, most unemployed persons awaiting employment are members of the Serbian people.

The past year has seen several local and one presidential election. Each of these processes was plagued by various affairs and pressures on the opposition. At the local elections held in November 2017 in Mojkovac, Petnjica, Cetinje and Tuzi, and in Berane and Ulcinj in February 2018, the ruling DPS won the majority of votes, but the electoral procedure was plagued by many irregularities. There are photographs that bear evidence to ballot buying (bribing) by DPS in Berane; in Ulcinj, according to the Albanian Forza, construction material was distributed in villages to bribe the local voters.²²⁰ The Democratic Front (DF), the true opposition to the Đukanović regime, has always done its best to respond adequately. After the May elections in Podgorica and another 10 municipalities, DF

219 <https://www.in4s.net/vuksanovic-srpski-mediji-u-crnoj-goripred-gasenjem/?lang=cir>

220 <http://www.novosti.rs/вести/планета.480.html:709956-LOKALNI-IZBORI-U-CRNOJ-GORI-Kupovina-dusa-na-sve-strane-opozicija-kivna-na-policiju>

proposed withholding recognition of electoral results due to constant terror, extortion, pressures, usage of forged IDs and other forms of unlawful behavior by the DPS.²²¹

At the presidential elections of April 2018 Milo Đukanović won 54% of votes. A memorable moment in the campaign was the grotesque takeover of a Facebook fan page managed by a 'huge fan of Milo Đukanović' for a few years before DPS officially took over the page. The opposition candidate Mladen Bojanić experienced the usual backlash of the dictatorial regime. This time, 9 ballots with the same serial number were discovered in Ulcinj. A peculiar feature of these elections was that 190,000 voters chose to abstain; to put things in perspective, Milo Đukanović won a total of 180,274 votes.

Đukanović was immediately congratulated by Hashim Thaçi, Ramush Haradinaj and Aleksandar Vučić^{222 223}, who pointed out the importance of Montenegro's European journey, regional stability, and shared projects. At his inauguration Đukanović declared that 'Montenegro would become the next member of EU instead of the provincial Serbia'²²⁴.

221 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/poziv-na-proteste-demokratski-front-ne-priznaje-rezultate-lokalnih-izbora-u-crnoj/m2pz3ew>

222 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3107157/vucic-cestitao-djukanovicu.html>

223 <http://rs.n1info.com/a380075/Svet/Region/Rezultati-izbora-u-Crnoj-Gori.html>

224 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/201805201115669990-djukanovic-zakletva/>

On 20 March 2018 Milan Knežević, one of the leaders of DF, was arrested and sent to prison in Spuž for having pushed a policeman at a peaceful opposition protest. He spent four months in prison and was then released on probation.

The retired general of the Serbian police Bratislav Dikić is also being kept in a Montenegrin prison on suspicion of 'encouraging terrorism.' Dikić has been locked up in a solitary detention unit for over 600 days.²²⁵ The retired general has been left to fend for himself with no involvement of the Serbian authorities and no concern for his legitimate rights. This attitude has once again shown that official Serbia prioritizes the interests of the current regime over the Serbian people or citizens. During a meeting with the Prime Minister of Montenegro Duško Marković (the proud owner of unlicensed seven guns and rifles, a fact that has caused much controversy in the Montenegrin media²²⁶), the Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić declared that the Serbs in Montenegro must not challenge the sovereignty of Montenegro or tackle settled issues such as its NATO membership, adding that Serbia must do its utmost to protect the rights of Montenegrins in Serbia.²²⁷

This statement and Vučić's congratulatory message to Đukanović, along with many other statements of Serbian

225 <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/info/dikicevo-stanje-kriticno-37-dan-starjkuje-gladu-srpski-general-umire-u-crnogorskom-zatvoru-2018-03-15>

226 www.dan.co.me/Dusko-godinama-krio-oruzje

227 <http://rs.n1info.com/a357573/Vesti/Vesti/Dacic-Srbi-u-Crnoj-Gori-da-ne-preispituju-njenu-drzavnost.html>

politicians about the two countries' bilateral relations, essentially renders Serbian politicians complicit in the violation of the rights of Serbs in Montenegro. Their vassal behavior toward the EU and even Milo Đukanović, Vučić, Dačić and Brnabić, like Tadić and Nikolić before them, are directly encouraging the regime in Podgorica to continue systematically demeaning and the local Serbs and aggravating their increasingly difficult position.

This process began with the referendum of 2006 and the controversial and narrow victory of the secessionist faction. Difficult and irrational as it might be from a pragmatist point of view, the struggle for democratic Montenegro must begin with an analysis of this process. The Serbian elite seem largely oblivious to this, but this is the message sent by the members of DF. On 21 May 2018 (the Montenegrin Statehood Day), the supporters of DF organized a mass protest, declaring that 'DPS was celebrating the 12th anniversary of a referendum it had rigged.'²²⁸ They also repeated the facts concerning the controversial referendum and noted that many had suddenly switched sides. Court proceedings against opposition leaders Andrija Mandić, Nebojša Medojević and Milan Knežević were described as purely politically motivated.

The rights of Serbs in Montenegro have hit an all-time low since 2006. Their mother country and international powers seem disinterested, leaving them at the mercy of

228 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/regioni/201805211115681430-podgorica-protest-dps/>

the criminal regime of DPS and Đukanović. The Democratic Front and the Serbian National Council are leading the struggle for the rights of the Serbian population and the democratic future of Montenegro and all of its citizens. However, to ensure the victory of DF and democracy, Serbia's involvement seems necessary, in the form of taking care of its own people and involving important international actors, who must recognize their own interest in the fostering of democratic institutions in Montenegro to replace the current dictatorial regime. Until then, the Serbs can do little except have faith in their own persistence, endurance and defiance.

ROMANIA

The last population census in Romania shows a population decline. Data from the 2011 census has revealed that Romania now has 6 million less inhabitants than at the previous census.²²⁹ This population decline is also reflected in the decline in the number of Serbs in Romania: 29,080 in 1992; 22,256 in 2002; and 18,079 at the last census. The main reasons for the population decline in the Serbian community are decreasing birthrates, increasing mortality (especially in rural areas), assimilation through mixed marriages and migration to Western EU countries. However, this gloomy statistic is impossible to rectify and the representatives of the Serbian community are worried that in a few decades there might not be any Serbs in Romania.

The Serbian community is concentrated in four counties in Banat, with most of them living in the counties of Timiș (10,102 or 55.88% of the Serbian community); Caraș-Severin (5,036 or 27.86%); Mehedinți (996 or 5.56%); and Arad (849 or 4.7%). 6% of the Serbian community live in the remaining 29 counties (a total of 1,097 persons).

Most Serbs (56.97%) belong to the adult age group (14-60 years of age); they are followed by the elderly (60+, 34.62%)

229 http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf

and children (0-14, 8.41%). Despite a relative balance in the share of sexes, there are more women among the elderly.

The Serbs are the third most educated national minority in Romania, with 99.12% literate members and 98.38% having some education: 55.27% with 10 years of education and 15.81% with college or university degrees. Around 60% of census respondents specified Serbian as their mother tongue.

At the 2011 census there was 42.12% of a working age, with most of them employed (93.98%). The passive population is larger (57.88%), with most being retired, pupils or college students. Among the working population, 68.93% are employed with 797 self-employed and 1,365 entrepreneurs. In regard to profession, agriculture workers are the most numerous, followed by craftsmen, qualified workers, technicians and handymen; professionals with intellectual or artistic jobs make up 17.95% of the Serbian population.

Following European legislation, the collective rights of the Serbian and other minorities in Romania is regulated by the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), which guarantees protection from any form of discrimination, involuntary assimilation or segregation, as well as rights including education in the mother tongue and religious and moral education of children. However, Romania has yet to pass a special Law on National Minority to specify minority rights. The draft has been awaiting discussion in the parliament for a long while. According to the Serbian delegate in the Parliament, the holdup is the result of the unrealistic demands of the Hungarian community.

The institutional framework for the protection of minorities in Romania includes the Council for National Minorities, with three representatives of the minority communities represented in the Parliament. The role of the Council is communication with national minorities and their organizations, as well as analyzing and supporting minority language education. Serbian representatives have expressed satisfaction with the Council's activities, especially its Judicial Committee, which is tasked with verifying and indicating relevant situations pertaining to minority rights and activities. The Department of Inter-Ethnic Relations²³⁰ at the government of Romania has been described as particularly important.

Serbs in Romania are integrated into government institutions. Their political and institutional participation is channeled through political parties with Serbian memberships and the Serbian Council in Romania, the umbrella organization of the community.

Article 62 of the Constitution of Romania guarantees minority representation in the Parliament and the Serbian community has one delegate. Delegates are elected based on the positive discrimination principle; the Serbian delegate won 8,500 votes, comfortably passing the needed 3,000 vote threshold, which bears evidence to the integration of the Serbian community. The Serbian representative sees his status as equal to that of other minority delegates and MPs. He is a member of the minority caucus which

230 <http://www.dri.gov.ro/en/>

includes another 18 minority MPs, and the vice-chairman of the Committee for Culture, Art and Media.

According to the Serbian representative Slavomir Gvozdenović, members of the minority caucus have regular meetings with ministers (education, culture, administration, etc.), and the Prime Minister and Deputy PM of Romania to discuss specific minority problems: school system, infrastructure, administration and major projects. This has allowed the survival of rare schools and contributed to improvements in local infrastructure.

Minority representatives are involved in passing new laws or amending and revising existing legislation. Gvozdenović was in constant contact with the Association of Former Bărăgan Deportees and was actively involved in the drafting and passing of the Law on the rights of this category, with 3-4,000 Serbs reaping the benefits of this legislation, as well as 1,000 former political detainees in Romania.

On 8 March 2018 the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić paid a one-day visit to Romania. He met with the President of Romania Klaus Werner Iohannis to discuss the following topics: bilateral cooperation (political and economic); Serbia's accession to the EU (Romania is to chair the EU in the first half of 2019); minority issues in both countries; common interests in cooperation in the Western Balkans; and the situation in Kosovo and Metohija. President Vučić also met the Romanian PM Viorica Dăncilă to discuss Euro integrations, economic cooperation, bilateral relations and the position of national mi-

norities in both states. They concluded that the two countries needed to work toward opening new border crossings, the reconstruction and modernization of the railway Belgrade-Timișoara-Europe, and the construction of the Belgrade-Timișoara highway. Vučić had meetings with the President of the Senate Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu and the President of the Chamber of Deputies Liviu Dragnea. In April Bucharest hosted a quadrilateral meeting attended by President Vučić and the PMs of Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, focusing on regional projects, Serbia's EU succession and the EU prospects of the entire region. The Romanian Minister of Defense Mihai-Viorel Fifor visited Serbia in 2017²³¹ and on 31 May 2018 the Romanian minister received Aleksandar Vulin.²³² After friendly talks Vulin and Fifor announced the evolution and improvement of existing military cooperation and stated that Serbia and Romania were guarantors of peace and stability in the Balkans. Romania has refused to recognize the independence of Kosovo and Metohija and supports Serbia's policy of not agreeing to the formation of a Kosovo army. The Serbian delegate in the Romanian parliament has met with several Serbian ministers and state secretaries and is in constant contact with the General Consulate in Timișoara and the Embassy in Bucharest, as well as with the Embassy of Bos-

231 <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/11920/ministar-vulin-rumunija-i-srbija-nemaju-nijedno-otvoreno-pitanje-11920>

232 <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/12641/nastavak-saradnje-sa-rumunijom-12641>

nia and Herzegovina in Bucharest (the ambassador is an ethnic Serb), the Office for Diaspora and Serbs in the Region and many cultural institutions (Matica srpska, SASA, Association of Writers of Serbia, etc.). The cooperation with these institutions is satisfactory; however, he pointed out that the majority of Serbian expats were unhappy about the disbanding of the Ministry for Diaspora and its reduction to an Office with a partially unresolved status.

The Serbian community in Romania does not have a separate political party to protect its interests, so the Council of Serbs in Romania (CSR, seat in Timișoara) performs these functions. The main activities of CSR include promoting national awareness, Serbian-language education and cultural heritage. In addition, CSR is responsible for fostering ties of the Serbian community in Romania with their mother country. At the 62nd Belgrade Book Fair, CSR showcased its publications at the stall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Council notes that, although small, the Serbian community in Romania ranks among the most active and best-organized among the 20 officially recognized minorities in the country.

During the Business Forum 2017 at the manifestation 'Dani Vojvodine', the chairman of the Serbian umbrella organization in Romania (Association of Serbs in Romania, est. 1989, seated in Timișoara) Ognjan Krstić said that the tourism exchange between the two countries was on the rise and satisfactory on both sides. Welcome improvements would include infrastructure and larger accommodation capacities to allow longer stays to replace one-day

trips or transitory stops. Krstić believes that EU programs and regional programs would encourage potential investors and improve these services. Over the next few years Novi Sad²³³ and Timișoara²³⁴ will have the chance to organize joint programs and become attractive destinations for tourists from all over the world. Tourists could spend a few days in each of the two cities and to learn about the history of Banat, shared by both nations. Krstić expects these joint programs to take off over the course of this year owing to the efforts of both towns and municipalities.

Each year CSR organizes many cultural and art events to safeguard and promote the Serbian national identity. Romania provides financial support for the activities of CSR, offering subsidies for funding cultural and artistic programs and paying the salaries for the staff of relevant institutions. These subsidies comprise the bulk of financial aid received by CSR; in 2017 these subsidies reached 700,000 Euros. Like in the previous years, there was no direct funding from Serbia.

Act 489 of 28 December 2006 guarantees religious freedom for all Serbs in Romania. The Eparchy of Timișoara of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) is an officially recognized religious institution in Romania and enjoys all rights and liberties. In addition, the Romanian state pays the salaries of SPC priests in Romania. The Eparchy of Timișoara has 55 parishes in the Romanian part of Banat.

233 <http://novisad2021.rs/>

234 <http://www.timisoara2021.ro/>

Despite the traditionally warm relations between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches, one of the problems is the restitution of SPC's property in the Eparchy of Timișoara and Makin dom in Timișoara.

A Christmas ceremony was held at the Serbian Cathedral in downtown Timișoara. The participants included pupils from the Serbian school Dositej Obradović and other Serbian youth. The program included religious songs and performances of the choir of the Cathedral Church in Timișoara, one of the two oldest choirs in SPC. Despite their dwindling numbers, the Serbs in Romania, especially in Banat, have remained loyal to Serbian customs, traditions and culture.

Although they belong to the well-educated part of the population, one of the main problems faced by Serbs in Romania has to do with education. Due to the ever-decreasing number of pupils, there are fewer and fewer possibilities to attend Serbian-language schools. The Serbian community can legally establish its own Serbian-language schools, even if there is fewer than the usual 15 pupils per class (15 students is the threshold for minority-language education specified in Romanian legislation; in practice, however, an even smaller number is tolerated if the Ministry of Education of the County Board of Schools give their consent). However, in the counties of Timiș, Caraș-Severin and Arad only six elementary schools still offer education in the Serbian language. After WWII there were around 60 Serbian schools and 9,000 students; today there are six 4-year schools with one teacher each and the Serbian

high school Dositej Obradović in Timișoara, with a total of 230 pupils. In 2013/2014 there used to be seven 4-grade schools; in 2012/2013 10 Serbian-language schools and pre-schools were shut down and one teaching position was made redundant (in Belobreșca). In the fall of 2010 4-grade schools were shut down in Veliki Semikluș (Rom. Sânnicolau Mare), Čenej and Sematron.

The Serbian high school Dositej Obradović in Timișoara offers programs from the first grade of elementary to the fourth (senior) year of high school. Unlike Serbian seniors from other counties in the region, very few students from Timișoara decide to continue their education in Serbia (due to financial reasons and few scholarships, as well as language problems, because most begin learning Serbian only after being admitted to the school). A way to rectify this problem would be to waive admission tests in Serbian universities or to offer free education and scholarships for the most deserving students.

University education in Serbian is offered at the Departments of Serbian Studies at the universities of Bucharest and Timișoara.

The media situation is satisfactory and not much has changed in the past year. *Novi temișvarski vesnik* is a bi-monthly publication; the bi-annual *Književni život* is the only literary publication in Serbian in Romania. Banat Link, the first Serbian-language radio station, has been working since 2009. Radio Timișoara broadcasts a two-hour weekly program in Serbian, and the 25-minute TV program *Srpski vidici* from the regional studio in Timișoara of the

Romanian public broadcaster, but the program is available only in Banat. These media are funded by the Romanian state, i.e. CSR as proxy, distributing funds received from the state. The Republic of Serbia does not contribute to the funding of Serbian media in Romania.

The Serbian community in Romania is satisfied with its cooperation with institutions in Serbia. Over the course of the past year, the leaders and representatives of SCR have met with an advisor from the Office for Diaspora, the Minister of Education and MPs from the Board for Relations with Serbs in the Region, etc.

The relations between Serbia and Romania are generally warm and friendly, with intensified diplomatic contacts in the last year.

REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

In the last ten years the position of the Serbian people in Slovenia is at a rather low level, with few positive tendencies on the horizon. Serbs have continually been the largest minority that has been deprived of its rights for years and has still not been given official status as a national minority. 2002 data suggests that at the time 38,000 Serbs were living in Slovenia (around 2% of the total population). In contrast, Slovenes are recognized as a national minority in Serbia, although there are merely 4,000 of them.²³⁵

Over the last ten years there have been various trends and events that have changed and shaped the position of the Serbian people. The Serbian community in Slovenia seems no less neglected by its own mother country than the state it inhabits.

2009 and 2010 have seen signs of progress which have given hope to the Serbian community that it would finally realize its rights and receive its dues. One of the positive steps has been the Law on the Status of Citizens of Former Yugoslav States, which provided a three-year window for applying for Slovenian IDs. This was an attempt to recti-

235 www.stat.gov.rs: „Становништво према националној припадности“, Републички завод за статистику Србије, 2011. (all websites mentioned in this chapter were accessed on 27. July 2018).

fy the injury to many inhabitants of Slovenia who did not have a resolved citizenship status. In the early 1990s the government of Slovenia had given a 6-month deadline for everyone to submit documents necessary for acquiring the citizenship of the fledgling state. Those who failed to meet the deadline were essentially erased from all documents, which of course constituted a breach of their human rights.

The process of 'erasing' was done by secret acts of the Ministry of the Interior of Slovenia in 1998, covertly and without informing the interested parties. The deadline for submitting application for restitution and revision of the erasure decision, pursuant to the law of 2010, ended on 24 July 2013, but many could not provide all of the necessary documents on time. The law was supposed to restore permanent residence to erased inhabitants and rectify this unconstitutional decision. This year ECHR informed Slovenia that the law had to be enforced and that it needed to restore the right of permanent residence to those who had lost it and to allow acquiring Slovenian citizenship. Amendments and revisions to the law applied to over 25,500 people, most of them ethnic Serbs. By 2010 7,300 residents received Slovenian citizenship and 3,600 regained their right of permanent residence.

The following year, 2011, also brought new hope for the Serbs. For the first time since 1992, Serbian-language classes were organized in Ljubljana, at the Serbian Cultural Center Danilo Kiš. The Slovenian Law on Elementary Education of 1996 allows teaching minority languages and culture in additional classes, in accordance with the

International Agreement. Despite being unspecific or inaccurate and hence open to restrictive interpretations, this stipulation does allow for the possibility of establishing Serbian language and culture classes for the members of the Serbian minority with no changes to the current Constitution. The Italian and Hungarian minorities enjoy all legal and institutional rights, although both are much smaller than the Serbian community. In 2011 a Board of the National Assembly of Serbia met with a delegation of the Slovenian parliament to explore ways to improve the position of Serbs in Slovenia and vice versa. No specific results have been achieved.

The position of Serbs in Slovenia took a turn for the worse in 2012. On 28 June 2012 the government of Slovenia decided to disband the body that included the representatives of unrecognized national minorities.²³⁶ This council had been established in Slovenia pursuant to the Declaration on the Position of National Community Members of Nations in Former SFRJ. In the same month ECHR ruled in favor of 11 persons who had appealed to the court to resolve their unconstitutional erasure from the Register of Permanent Residence of the Republic of Slovenia, and asked Slovenia to pay compensation to the erased citizens. However, the then Slovenian PM Janez Janša said that the country did not have the funds to reimburse them and that they were considering how best to implement the

236 Available at www.dnevnik.si: http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/aktualne_zgodbe/1042538717

ECHR ruling.²³⁷ More specifically, the court ruled that the government was to pay 20,000 Euros in damages to six of the 11 erased and 30,000 Euros to the plaintiffs in court expenses. Of course, if these sums were to be paid to the several thousand erased citizens, the government would have to pay a considerable sum from its budget. ECHR also ruled that Slovenia was to come up with a compensation plan for all erased citizens by 24 July 2013. To rectify its own unlawful decision, the state offered to reimburse 50 Euros for every month that they had been erased and deprived of their rightful status. Marko Novak from the Association of Deported Residence of Slovenia declared that Slovenia was aware of its duty, but that the wronged persons did not find this method of compensation suitable.²³⁸ As a result 645 new complaints were lodged with the ECHR in Strasbourg.

One of the key events in 2013 was the visit of Slavka Drašković, the director of the Office for Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, in late May 2013 to discuss the status of the Serbian community with Slovenian officials.²³⁹ She also met with the members of the culture center Danilo Kiš and visited the elementary school Livada in Ljubljana,

237 Available at www.blic.rs: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/jansa-slovenija-nema-novca-za-izbrisane-drzavljanee-eks-ju-republika/j2hc4p1>

238 Available at www.blic.rs: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/slovenija-ignorise-izbrisane-gradane/6ltyghm>

239 Available at www.rts.rs: <http://www.rts.rs/page/rts/sr/Dijaspora/story/1518/vesti/1331996/slavka-draskovic-kod-srba-u-sloveniji.html>

which offers Serbian-language classes as additional school activities. Nikola Todorović, Slovenia's representative in the Assembly of the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, said that the visit marked a watershed in the relations between Serbian associations in Slovenia and Serbian institutions.²⁴⁰ The Serbian representative was assured that a Council that would include the representatives of unrecognized national minorities would soon be reinstated after having been dissolved in violation of the Declaration on the Status of Former Constitutive Nations of SFRJ in Slovenia.

In April 2014 the Council of Europe issued a report on minority languages, calling for Slovenia to recognize Serbian, German and Croatian as traditional minority languages. In addition, EC asked Slovenia to implement measures to increase awareness of minority language and education.²⁴¹ In 2014 parliamentary elections were held in Slovenia, with the coalition led by Miro Cerar emerging victorious. Unfortunately, the Serbian party gave its support to a political party that failed to reach the threshold and therefore lost the opportunity to directly participate in key decision-making.

On 20 February 2015 the Alliance of Serbian Associations in Slovenia once again repeated its demand to be given the status of a minority. In March a meeting between the chairman of the Slovenian Board of Culture Dragan

240 Ibid.

241 Available at www.blic.rs: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/savet-evrope-pozvao-sloveniju-da-prizna-srpski-jezik/0x91x2y>

Matić and the chairman of the Board for Diaspora and Serbs in the Region Janko Veselinović was held. The Serbian representative repeated this demand, but the meeting did not result in any palpable progress, with the Serbs still being unreasonably denied their rights. 2015 did indeed bring some advances, such as the signing of international agreements between the retirement funds of the two countries and electronic exchange of information, which should facilitate the position of citizens in both countries.

The key event in 2016 and 2017 was the decision of 3 October 2016 to establish the National Council of Serbs in Slovenia, which essentially replaced the Alliance of Serbian Societies as the umbrella organization. The newly formed Council will focus on the institutional recognition of all minority rights to the Serbian community.

2018

The position of Serbs in Slovenia has not changed in the current year. The same problems are still there, and there are no visible efforts to change this unsatisfactory state of affairs. This paradoxical situation – with Slovenia and Serbia sharing the responsibility – is hardly surprising in view of long-standing problems faced by generations of Serbs throughout the former SFRJ.

Official statistics from 2012 show that there are 38,964 persons who self-identify as Serbs in Slovenia (approx. 2% of the total populations). It can be assumed that this number is in fact much larger, but many inhabitants who feel

like Serbs do not identify as such for reasons unknown. In part this is the result of economic and social circumstances that make life more difficult for minority members.

In 2017 the National Council of Serbs in Slovenia was formed in Ljubljana; the founding ceremony was attended by members of the Slovenian Parliament including the parliament chairman (speaker) Milan Brglez and the representatives of the Serbian government. Branislav Rajić, an MP in the Slovenian parliament, was elected the first chairman of Council. The first assembly of the Council was held in September 2017 to adopt a strategy and plan of action for the association. The main topic was the discussion on the draft strategy for the preservation and promotion of the cultural and national identity of the Serbian community in Slovenia, and improving relations between the local community and the institutions of the Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Serbia.²⁴² The main objective of the strategy is the drafting and adoption of a very important document that will provide an outline for the future actions of Serbian associations in Slovenia and the institutions of Serbia and RS in an aim to solve long-standing problems and preserve the identity of Serbs in Slovenia.

In early 2018 a delegation of the government of Serbia led by PM Ana Brnabić visited Slovenia to discuss co-operation between the two countries. On this occasion,

242 Available at www.stajerska.eu: <http://stajerska.eu/2017/09/27/nacionalni-savet-srba-slovenije-preuzeo-inicijativu/>

trade exchange between Serbia and Slovenia was said to have grown 16% in the past year and to have exceeded 1.5 billion USD. However, worryingly, the exchange is always characterized by a deficit to the detriment of Serbia. In view of the territorial and population difference between the two, this phenomenon deserves a more thorough analysis.²⁴³ A minor incident occurred during the visit. The daily *Delo* published an article titled *Army criminals are a Serbian natural asset*. The event was in itself damaging to the Serbian community in Slovenia, because the text portrays their nation in a negative context; however, a more alarming aspect was the fact that official Serbia and Serbian associations in Slovenia chose not to respond at all. Reports on the visit contain no reference to any discussions that might have included topics such as the position of Serbs or the potential institutionalization of their status.

This year has seen little progress in education and media representation of Serbs. Since they have not yet received the status of a national minority, they have no opportunities for schooling in their mother tongue; Serbian language lessons are only available as extracurricular and only in one school in Slovenia. Due to the same status reasons, the Serbian language is not used on TV and is limited to press and online media. With the support of the Office for Cooperation with Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, the portal "Naš glas" has been established and is expected

243 Available at www.beogradski-glas.rs:<http://beogradski-glas.rs/poseta-srpske-premierke-ane-brnabic-sloveniji-promasaj-brdu-kranja/>

to focus on cultural events and news relevant to the Serbian community in Slovenia.²⁴⁴

The position of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) in Slovenia has not changed much in the last year. The territory of Slovenia belongs to the Metropolitanate of Zagreb and Ljubljana, headed by Metropolitan Porfirije. Although there have been suggestions to set up a separate metropolitanate of Ljubljana, this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Despite the centennial presence of SPC in present-day Slovenia, the state seems unwilling to resolve some of the key problems faced by the Church. One of the main issues is the restitution of land plots in Celje and Maribor to SPC, which once held churches that were demolished during WWII. The land has since been expropriated and is no longer used for religious structures, although they are needed and the Church does have lawful rights to these plots.²⁴⁵

In the context of the entire former SFRJ, Serbs in Slovenia are not under as much pressure as their compatriots in some other countries. Economic reasons, Serbia's disinterestedness and Slovenia's policies have led to the decline of the Serbian community in Slovenia. Conversely, as economic reasons lead to new migrations to Slovenia from Serb-populated areas, no major change in the size of the Serbian community is expected to take place in the near future.

244 Available at www.cenzolovka.rs: <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/region/nakon-gasjenja-lista-srbi-u-sloveniji-pokrenuli-portal-nas-glas/>

245 Available at www.novosti.rs: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:708068-Slovinci-ne-vracaju-SPC-zemlju-i-ikone>

CONCLUSION

Ten annual reports of the Progressive Club about the political and other rights of the Serbian people in neighboring countries in the Balkans and Central Europe provide a comprehensive and ugly chronicle of the deprivation, neglect and persecution of the majority of 1.7 million Serbs who still live in these areas, some of which had been Serbian for centuries. Throughout this ten-year period the Serbian people has become dramatically deprived of its rights in Montenegro too. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina it has been virtually eradicated from the political and cultural scene. In Croatia it has suffered institutional efforts to de-value it and limit its existing rights through an ongoing campaign of chauvinism and antagonism in a part of the elite, the Roman Catholic Church and wide segments of the society. In FYROM the Serbian people has lost important political positions and rights acquired post-2001, while the matter of religious rights has not progressed at all. Inequality and neglect of lawful rights is also present in the territory of Kosovo-UNMIK. In Albania, despite some formal changes, the limited and narrow rights remain unchanged. In Slovenia, the issue of the 'Erased' has been partially resolved, but the Serbian community has yet to be given the status and rights of a recognized national minority. Some progress has been made in Hungary and Romania, countries where Serbs have historically been a national minority.

A decade of surveys and analyses has revealed the shameful attitude of the EU, especially UK, Germany and France, to the inequality and rights of the Serbian people. This is not the result of adherence to domicile laws and non-interference in matters of minority rights in other countries; to the contrary, it is an unfair relationship with double standards and an antagonism towards the Serbian people, partly due to political pragmatism and the relationship with Russia, and partly due to old prejudice and the need of an outlet for self-imposed multi-ethnicity concepts and illusion of a 'garden' society which the elite in these countries believes to have achieved at home. Over the past ten years the US and EU have mostly tried to maintain the status quo. In most countries except the Republic of Srpska/Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Hungary, this status quo is unfavorable for the local Serbs. Washington and Brussels have done nothing to protect basic and lawful rights in these seven countries and entities, although they have displayed frequent interest about minority rights in Serbia, especially those of their protégés, despite their much better position than that of Serbs in neighboring states. The attack on the Republic of Srpska was not called off; instead, it was merely suspended since the issue of the limiting or dissolving its constitutionally guaranteed autonomy became a matter of contention between the Russian Federation and the US/NATO. Fear of extreme Islamism and the Bosniak refusal to implement the Butmir reform package that would have led to gradual unitarization of B&H have also diluted the efforts of the

US and EU to limit the rights of or dissolve the Republic of Srpska. However, a negative attitude remains; in the case of now former US Ambassador to Sarajevo Maureen Cormack (2014-2018) and HR Valentin Inzko and some of their EU colleagues it can even be described as aggressive and essentially ignorant.

The Republic of Serbia has not formulated a consistent and clear policy towards the Serbian people in the regions. Institutions have been dissolved and vague strategies abandoned. The relationship towards expats in neighboring counties has been selfish, political and instrumentalized to promote the personal popularity of politicians such as Aleksandar Vučić, Tomislav Nikolić and Boris Tadić. Situation significantly worsened after 2012. and political changes in Serbia. New government established ad hoc policy of improvisation abolished institutions and neglected continuous and long-term policy. Being known as radical nationalists members of Serbian progressive regime opted for populism and defended mostly interest of their party and government stability.

The Progressive Club demands the same rights for the Serbian people as for other European nations: the same rights as those enjoyed by Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija for the Serbs of the Republic of Srpska; the same rights enjoyed by Albanians in FYROM for the Serbs of Montenegro; full rights defined by the Erdut Agreement, Plan Z4 and the Constitutional Law on Human and Minority Rights for the Serbs in Croatia; full rights and reciprocity for the Serbian people in other countries.

From the US and EU we demand a fair treatment unburdened by historical antagonism, cultural racism and inequality.

From the Republic of Serbia we demand a clearly defined policy and funding similar to that provided by Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia to their respective minorities in other countries (since the funding allocated by Serbia is tenfold smaller, even proportionally).

From the government and opposition of the Republic of Serbia we demand the formulation of a nation-wide program and unity until the final resolution of the entity's status.

We demand that the policy of taking care of Serbs in neighboring countries should become one of the pillars of state policy and incorporated into all segments of national, foreign, economic, educational and cultural policy. We advocate the reinstatement of bodies charged with implementing the diaspora and expat policy, as well as the de-partization of these bodies.

Let the new decade mark the beginning of a new political age for expat Serbs in neighboring countries.

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