

REGIONAL HERALD FOR PROMOTION OF CULTURE OF MINORITY RIGHTS AND INTERETHNIC TOLERANCE

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Summary

Top story in this issue:

MINORITY POSITION WITHIN CONTEXT OF CURRENT POLITICAL EVENTS

Croatia is preparing for beginning of negotiation process with the European Union. Further democratization process, including implementation of minority rights, will play a major role there.

In Serbia and Montenegro as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina are holding local elections, the results of which won't be only indicators of current political status but may also have important influence on position of minorities and quality of inter-ethnic relations. The feature of this issue is identification of dominant minority problems and trends in their resolution, within context of current political events in the countries in the region. As indicators we used discussion on implementing most important Council of Europe document regarding minority rights - Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities, recently held in Croatia, or renewed interest in minority issues and inter-ethnic relations due to local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro.

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I BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. Minority Communities' Problems in FBiH: FOUR PILLARS OF OBSTRUCTION

Namir Ibrahimovic

The return process is hampered by returnees' inability to find work in their places of return because they are in minority or, translated into the harsh reality, because they are something or someone undesirable. Members of "constituent minorities" employed with state institutions, which must have a certain percentage of employees from other ethnic groups, are in a somewhat better position. Returnee police officers fare best as they get jobs right away, as well as state officials employed in the administration in municipal services. Teachers and professors who cannot return to their former positions in local schools are in a somewhat poorer position.

2. Branko Todorovic, Helsinki Human Rights Committee of Republika Srpska: SILENT ETHNIC ENGINEERING

Katarina Panic

Nationalist political parties are trying to achieve their war goals in peace in much more perfidious ways. Large numbers of returnees do not manage to reintegrate, they sell their property and leave the Republika Srpska. Human rights are most threatened in the areas of employment, education and healthcare.

3. Picture of Prijedor, Picture of Republika Srpska: WATER IS ALSO PRIVILEGE OF "LOCALS"

Katarina Panic

Court cases involving non-Serb employees collect dust for years. Ninety percent of returnees are unemployed. Monoethnic schools on the left bank of the Sana River. One doctor to 18.000 residents of Kozarac.

4. Following the Trail of the Local Election Campaign in BiH: ETHNO-NATIONALISM AS OUR FATE

Dusan Babic

International observers gave a positive assessment for this year's local elections in BiH, emphasizing the fact that international administration still has the last say in BiH. In this context, international representatives' passive stand on the aggressive approach of religious communities during the election campaign is surprising.

II CROATIA

1. LEGISLATURE GOOD, IMPLEMENTATION SLOW AND INCOMPLETE

Report from Seminar on implementation on Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities in Croatia

Goran Vezic

Representatives of minority associations and their MPs in Croatian Parliament, as well as several ministries and members of the Council for National Minorities discussed implementation of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities in Croatia at a seminar in Cavtat held at the end of September. Basis for discussion was official government report as well as alternative report on implementation of Framework Convention made by NGOs – Center for peace, legal advice and psycho-social support from Vukovar and Serb community from Rijeka .

Participants say that Croatia has good legislature but that implementation is slow and incomplete. At the same time, Croatian Government and its first moves encouraged minorities who think that their rights will be more respected during the next period, especially their problematic segments – like return of Serbian refugees, reconstruction and resolution of their status, as well as resolving social and integrative issues of Roma national minority.

2. GOVERNMENT AND ALTERNATIVE REPORTS HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE SAME TIME

Interview with Ljubomir Mikic, president of Center for peace, legal advice and psycho-social support from Vukovar and coordinator for creation of Alternative report on implementation of Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities created by Council of Europe

Stojan Obradovic

Monitoring implementation of provisions of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities created by Council of Europe may represent an important basis for initiating changes and improving position as well as realization of rights of minority members, said Mikic, explaining basic differences between government report and the Alternative report on implementation of Framework Convention.

Mikic says that respecting human and minority rights as well as complete integration of minorities in public, political, economic and cultural life in the countries in region represent the basis for important role of minority members as elements of cooperation in the region.

3. COUNCILS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES WILL BECOME FUNCTIONAL ONLY WHEN THEY HAVE CONDITIONS FOR WORK

Interview with Vojislav Stanimirovic, president of Independent Serbian Democratic Party

Goran Vezic

Serbian national minority, as most numerous and new minority in Croatia, has most problems. Stanimirovic says that laws dealing with minority rights are good, but finds lack of political will for their implementation in parts that don't require funding. Obstructions to implementation exist at lower levels, units of local government and self-government. "We find that Croatian government should use its political influence so that the good laws start being implemented in partice", said Stanimirovic, adding that councils of national minorities will only become functional in three or four years when they will be given sufficient funds.

He remarked that results of research conducted by Puls agency stating that as much as 85 per cent of exiled Croatian Serbs present a manipulation, explaining that polled refugees declined to express their positive sentiment because they feared they would have lost some rights in Serbia and Montenegro or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

By **STINA news agency**

In March 2004 Croatian government adopted its second regular Report on implementation of Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities. At the same time, non-government organizations – Center for peace, legal advice and psycho-social support from Vukovar and Serb

community from Rijeka made the so-called Alternative report on implementation of Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities in Croatia.

Government report analyzed in detail laws concerning realization and protection of national minorities' rights and answered complaints made by minority associations, while NGOs warned on the need for overcoming consequences of war (drastic cuts in the number of national minorities' members, return of refugees, reconstruction, punishment of war crimes, etc.)

III SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

1. VOJVODINA AFTER THE ELECTIONS

Mihal Ramač

Before the elections in Vojvodina there were claims that voting would turn into listing of population, that Serbs and Hungarians would both vote for their own extremists.

The ominous prognoses did not become a reality completely. Radicals did get major number of votes in 27 of all 45 municipalities, while Association of Hungarians of Vojvodina lost power in most of municipalities where Hungarian population is either relatively or absolutely the majority. As a rule, local leaders of Serbian radical party treat minorities more irreconcilably than their boss from Belgrade- deputy of party leader Tomislav Nikolić. It is logical to assume that radicals won't become more moderate after the winning of majority of votes on the local level.

2. OMBUDSMAN AND MINORITY RIGHTS

Dr Petar TEOFILOVIĆ, ombudsman for Vojvodina

Since the middle January 2004 a new regional board begun to work- Regional ombudsman - as an independent organ which takes care of protection and promotion of human rights and freedom, including the rights of national minorities as well. The decision regarding regional ombudsman strictly regulates that at least one of 5 deputies all together, has to be a member of national minorities.

So far, in the praxis of regional ombudsman, few requests were submitted in which client complained that he/she was discriminated for being a member of some of the local national minorities.

Very high tensions have been created lately because of the alleged menace of members of Hungarian national minority in Vojvodina. Regional ombudsman has begun a research regarding these incidents which is still in progress, and the results of the investigation will be presented either in a separate report or on the (first) regular yearly session, till the end of november when the term will for submission will expire.