

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

November 25, 2004

No 8

Top story in this issue:

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION
OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**

Political representation of national minorities causes much controversy and doubts among transitional and, especially, post-conflict countries such as former Yugoslav countries.

All of them are in some way forced to pass "minority" laws giving them special rights because of the lack of democratic tradition, undeveloped democratic institutions and attempt to remedy conflict with specific minorities. However, the special institutions and mechanism of minority protection open up the question of their need, protectionism and, in the end, whether they can be implemented in practice. Special legal solutions aren't alone a guarantee of adequate protection and realization of minority rights. There are more and more voices warning that legislative needs to be followed in step with change of political and social consciousness of relations between majority and minorities in order to create conditions for complete political affirmation of minorities and general inter-ethnic dialogue and tolerance.

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I BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. National and *constitutive* minorities in state institutions VITAL NATIONAL INTEREST ONLY IN COSNTITUTIVE NATIONS

Namir Ibrahimović

Both Entities' parliamentary assemblies contain Councils of People, which take decisions through national consensus. These 'upper houses' of the parliament are designed to maintain national equality, however, in the carved-up Bosnia and Herzegovina they seem to act as hindrance to the progress of the country.

2. The Council of People of Republika Srpska GUARDIANS OF VITAL NACIONAL INTERESTS

Katarina Panić

If you manage to successfully number all institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (or its entities), which, directly or indirectly, have the role of protecting and vigilantly guarding national interests, it will occur to you that this country has no other problems, at least not problems more important than national interests. In Republika Srpska, some of them include: Commission for Constitutional Issues, Council of People, Council of People and RS Assembly Joint Commissions, Council for the Protection of Vital National Interests... On that occasion, we have asked the expert for constitutional-legal issues, Miroslav Mikeš, to clarify the way in which the Council of People of Republika Srpska functions.

3. Minority political rights in Republika Srpska „MORE OTHER“ THAN OTHERS

Katarina Panić

Electoral law in BiH prescribes that minority associations will in the future be entitled to propose lists of their candidates, in municipalities where up to three percent of their members live. In the cases that over three percent of them live in a municipality, as we have in Prnjavor, Banja Luka and Prijedor, than they will have two delegates in the local parliament. The strongest objection stated by national minorities remains the issue of their definition by BiH Constitution.

II CROATIA

1. LOCAL MORE IMPORTANT THAN PARLIAMENTARY

By Ivica Juric

Representation of minorities in Croatian parliament by the course of election of minority representatives is important in this phase of democratic development of Croatian society, but is by no means crucial. Much more important issue is the functioning of minority representation at local level as well as the functioning of minority self-government. There are many open issues. Systems and institutions that are providing for minority rights at local level need to be started and completely developed. That local political level is most important for minorities is held even by minority parliamentary representatives. It is important that not only minorities and their associations see the truth in that, but also representatives of local and other authorities.

2. CONTROVERSIAL RIGHT

Davor Gjenero

Croatia is among rare countries in Europe that provide special protection of minority voting right at parliamentary level. Since minority representatives can be put into a situation where they can be the tipping stone for Croatian government, the right has been creating much controversy and doubts. On the other hand, protection of special rights of national minorities and the institution of positive discrimination that is meant to contribute to realization of rights of national minorities at local level and in everyday life is still revving up.

3. MINORITIES ARE PROTECTED NOT ONLY BY LAWS BUT ALSO BY MAJORITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Interview with **Bogdan Rkman**, president of Executive Board of Independent Serbian Democratic Party (SDSS)

Interviewed by **Mladen Obrenovic**

Largest national minority in Croatia - Serbian national minority - has three seats in Croatian parliament out of eight reserved for national minorities. Representatives of Serbian minority are also present in local self-government representative bodies as well as numerous institutions of minority self-government - municipality, city and county councils of national minorities. However, Serbian political representatives say that the institutions and mechanism of political representation of minorities still haven't completely lived up to their vision.

They stress the fact that laws are not enough in protection minority rights. Also needed is the majority consciousness which will accept minority rights and support their implementation.

III SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

1. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF CROATIANS IN VOJVODINA

By Tomislav Zigmanov

The issue of political representation of minorities in Serbia has not been adequately solved till now, nor have some significant steps been made towards that direction. However, it has to be stated that the so called federative Law on Minorities Rights Protection from February 2002 had brought first normative parts which directly state the rights of national minorities to be represented in representative bodies. Since October 5th a number of international documents regarding this issue have been adopted. Still, this new legislative frame doesn't seem to be enough for a more significant change of current state.

2 ELECTIONS AND REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

By dr. Tamas Korhec

Without comprehension of Vojvodina as a multicultural, European region, we are not able to understand the significance of representation of national minorities in the most important representative body of Autonomous Region of Vojvodina.

In the last elections in September 2004, the electoral limit for the political parties of national minorities had been reduced. However, the number of 3000 necessary notarized signatures of voters for candidacy of lists of national minorities parties turned out to be an insurmountable obstacle for almost all political parties of national minorities and organizations. Only the strongest Hungarian political party SVM managed to gather enough signatures for an

independent electoral list and to obtain representative mandates in the Parliament of Vojvodina.

Despite this, national structure of the Parliament of Vojvodina today is nevertheless multi-national and typical for Vojvodina. Besides Hungarians, in the new session of the Parliament of Vojvodina there are 3 Slovaks and one representative of Croats, Bunjevci, Romanians and Ruthenians. These representatives have been elected from the lists of «large», «Serbian» parties, with which the parties of national minorities had been in a coalition during the elections.