



# MINORITY AND ELECTIONS

Report on Status of National Minorities in Parliamentary Election Campaign 2007



**Youth Initiative for Human Rights**  
Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava  
Nisma e të rinjve për të drejtat e njeriut

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## **Minority and Elections**

Report on Status of National Minorities in  
Parliamentary Election Campaign 2007

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# Historical Heritage

According to the last census from 2002, there are in Serbia 1,100 citizens members of national minorities, which make approximately 15% of overall population.<sup>1</sup> Their status is characterized first and foremost by a high level of ethnic intolerance and.

Furthermore, the status of national minorities in Serbia has been determined by the crimes and atmosphere of fear, which governed the country in the 1990s. During Slobodan Milosevic's reign, grave crimes against minority communities were committed, not only in neighboring countries, but also in Serbia.<sup>2</sup> The most serious crimes were committed in Sanjak, against members of the Bosniak minority, in Vojvodina against the Croats, and in southern parts of Serbia, against Albanians. During the 1990s, Serbian authorities and various armed groups killed, persecuted and tortured the Bosniaks from Sanjak.<sup>3</sup> One of the consequences of these actions is drastic decrease of the number of Bosniaks in Sanjak.<sup>4</sup> The most serious crimes committed in Sanjak are the abduction of 17 citizens from the bus from Sjeverin to Priboj on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992<sup>5</sup>; abduction of 19 citizens from the bus from Belgrade to Bar, in Strpce, and their savage murder near Visegrad, February 17<sup>th</sup> 1993<sup>6</sup> and mass police raids, alleged weapon-searching actions, in 1992 and 1993, when several thousand people were detained and physically tortured, mainly from Pesterska visoravan.<sup>7</sup>

In Vojvodina, in 1991 and 1992, a large number of citizens of Croatian nationality were forced to flee their homes and go to Croatia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Population census in Serbia 2002: Serbian Statistics Bureau, Belgrade, 2002

<sup>2</sup> More about the crimes committed by Milosevic's regime, see ICTY indictments at: <http://www.un.org/icty/bhs/frames/cases.htm>, visited: January 8<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>3</sup> On crimes committed in Sanjak, see: publications of the Humanitarian Law Center, the Sanjak Human Rights Committee and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights

<sup>4</sup> Comparative analysis of the number of Bosniaks in two population censuses in 1991 and 2002 may be found in: *Implementation of the "Framework Convention for the Protection of Human Rights in Eight Multi-Ethnic Municipalities in Serbia"*, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Belgrade, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> More about Sjeverin abduction see articles and texts by Dragoljub Todorovic, legal representative of victims' families and lawyer of the Humanitarian Law Center, in: *Hague Among Us*, Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, 2006

<sup>6</sup> *The Strpce Abduction*, Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, 2003

<sup>7</sup> See above: n3

<sup>8</sup> For complete documentation on persecution and crimes against Croats, see: Marko Kljajic, *Kako je umirao moj narod [How My People Died]*, HRID, Subotica, 1997

Intimidations, threats and violence were mainly conducted by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), extreme ally of Milosevic's regime.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, names of towns and villages were changed, and Serbian refugees from Croatia housed there.<sup>10</sup> In the first half of the 1990s, the number of Croats in Vojvodina was decreased by several tens of thousands.<sup>11</sup>

Albanians in the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja were the subject of police and military torture, as well as mass ethnic cleansing in the spring of 1999, while the same actions were taken against their compatriots in Kosovo.<sup>12</sup> Many Albanians were forced to leave their homes and flee to Macedonia. During these actions, the police and military retained many private automobiles, agricultural mechanization vehicles and production machines.<sup>13</sup> Only a small number has been returned to original owners.

Not a single mass crime committed in Serbia in the 1990s has been fully investigated, nor have the persons responsible for them been prosecuted and appropriately punished. Court proceedings have been completed in the case of Sjeverin, where four perpetrators have been pronounced guilty and given long prison sentences.<sup>14</sup> However, Serbia has done nothing to help the victims and their families, or to acknowledge the state responsibility for the actions of top state officials in the past. This is largely conducive to minorities' mistrust and lack of confidence in the Serbian state.

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<sup>9</sup> For more about crimes committed by members of SRS, see ICTY indictment against Cojislav Seselj, available at: <http://www.un.org/icty/bhs/cases/seselj/indictment/ses-mi050715b.pdf>, visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>10</sup> See above, n8 and n9

<sup>11</sup> *Implementation of "Framework Convention", op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Albanians in Serbia*, Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, 2003

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Verdict passed by the Belgrade District Court, confirmed by the Supreme Court of Serbia, available at: <http://okruznisudbg.org.yu/content/2005/predmeti/prvos-tepenokriv/sjeverin>, visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007.

# Period after Democratic Changes

Following the fall of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, the situation regarding minority rights was gradually improving. A discriminatory law on special conditions for real estate business, which had stipulated that a minority member request permission in order to purchase immovable from a member of Serbian nationality, was abolished.<sup>15</sup> The federal Ministry for Human and Minority Rights was established, with Rasim Ljajic, member of Bosniak national community, appointed Minister.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 2002 the Law on the Protection of National Minorities was passed and estimated as good by a number of domestic and international agents.<sup>17</sup> In 2001, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia joined the European Council's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.<sup>18</sup> However, not much has been done regarding the Convention's actual implementation. Many legal provisions remain only an empty word.<sup>19</sup> The worsening trend has begun in 2004, after the new Government of Serbia had been established.

In 2004 the minorities were exposed to a number of physical assaults, the mosques in Belgrade and in Nis were torched, many Catholic and Protestant churches were stoned, while the Setet family moved out from Subotica to Hungary in October 2004 due to constant ethnically-motivated assaults.<sup>20</sup> In its Resolution from October 2004, the Council of Europe (CoE) expressed serious concerns about these incidents and formed a commission which was tasked to investigate the situation in Vojvodina.<sup>21</sup> The police and other state bodies failed to

<sup>15</sup> Law on Special Conditions for Trade of Immovables, Sluzbeni list SRS 30/89, published with amendments in: Sluzbeni list SRS 42/89 and 22/91

<sup>16</sup> More on Minister and the Ministry available at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.yu/srpski/index.htm>, visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>17</sup> Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, adopted on February 27<sup>th</sup> 2007, see: Sluzbeni list SRJ No. 11/02

<sup>18</sup> Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Council of Europe, ratified and enforced on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2001, in: Sluzbeni list SRJ, Medjunarodni ugovori, No. 6/98

<sup>19</sup> For implementation of transitional laws, see YIHR's 2005 and 2006 reports

<sup>20</sup> "I am afraid for my family", B92, September 17<sup>th</sup> 2004, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2004&mm=09&dd=17&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=151222](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2004&mm=09&dd=17&nav_category=11&nav_id=151222), visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>21</sup> "EP Resolution on Vojvodina", B92, September 16<sup>th</sup> 2004, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2004&mm=09&dd=16&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=151115](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2004&mm=09&dd=16&nav_category=11&nav_id=151115), visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

respond to these incidents accordingly, which only contributed to the overall impression about the state's reluctance to seriously reckon with perpetrators. Organized torching of the mosque in Nis in March 2004 was characterized by the prosecution as criminal act of violent group participation,<sup>22</sup> while no one has been charged for the torching of the Belgrade mosque.

Another form of pressure against minorities is the growing number of hate-speech incidents in Serbian media. Some dailies and weeklies are recognized as polygons for hate-mongering against minority communities.<sup>23</sup> It is already part of their regular vocabulary to use derogatory names for Albanians (Siptari) and Roma (Cigani), while portraying some nations as genocidal or criminal. In these media, much room is always given to political options which advocate hostile politics against minorities.<sup>24</sup> Hate-speech is mainly fostered by Press, Glas javnosti and Večernje novosti.<sup>25</sup> Courts straightforwardly refuse to act upon hate-speech charges, whereby they openly legitimize such discriminatory practices in Serbian journalism.<sup>26</sup>

On October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2006 the new Serbian Constitution was affirmed in the referendum and officially adopted and enforced on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2006.<sup>27</sup> The Constitution had been passed in the absence of any public discussion and without consultations with minority communities.<sup>28</sup> Having removed the right to minority representation in the Parliament and the right to equal representation in public institutions and bodies of local self-governance, the new Constitution decreased the previously

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<sup>22</sup> "Twenty six months for torching of mosque", B92, July 26<sup>th</sup> 2005, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2005&mm=07&dd=26&nav\\_category=16&nav\\_id=173351&fs=1](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2005&mm=07&dd=26&nav_category=16&nav_id=173351&fs=1), visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>23</sup> More on media in: Media Center's Press Board reports, available at: <http://www.mediacenter.org.yu/code/navigate.asp?Id=668>, visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, and YIHR's 2005 and 2006 reports on media

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> YIHR's hate-speech charges against the daily *Kurir* were rejected by the rulings of the First District Court in Belgrade. More on the case: YIHR's press release issued on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2006, available at: <http://www.yihr.org/Srpski/Saopstenja/Saopstenja%202006/Saopstenja2006html/ODBIJENA%20TUZBA%20ZBOG%20GOVORA%20MRZNJE.php>, visited on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>27</sup> The Constitution of Serbia, adopted and enforced on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2006, Official Gazette of RS No. 98/06

<sup>28</sup> More on the passage of the Constitution and the referendum see: *Implementation of Transitional Laws in Serbia 2006*, YIHR, Belgrade, 2006

attained level of human rights protection.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, by way of Article 1 of the Constitution, Serbia is defined as the state of Serbian people and other citizens.<sup>30</sup> Minority representatives have severely criticized and condemned the passage of the Constitution, as well as its content.<sup>31</sup>

## Elections legislation

The changes to the Law on Members of the Parliament in 2000 introduced the parliamentary threshold of 5%. This threshold was applied to all political parties, irrespectively of their constituencies, i.e. regardless of whether they gather national minorities or a majority constituency. In practical terms, this prevented national minorities to enter the Parliament of Serbia. In the following elections, in December 2003, only two MPs, representatives of Bosniak political parties, got seats in the Parliament, through Democratic Party list (DS). This prevented equal participation of national minorities in the highest legislative body of Serbia, which gravely violated domestic and international legal provisions. Not a single minority representative was part of the Government which was established in 2004.

The Law on Members of the Parliament was amended in February 2004,<sup>32</sup> when election threshold was abolished for minority parties. However, this was obviously the maximum the lawmakers were willing to do. Instead of adopting a solution which would both satisfy the minority interests and be widely accepted, the authorities decided simply to abolish the election threshold. In announcing the January 2007 elections, numerous problems emerged which showed that the status of minorities in election process was far from clearly regulated. According to the Law on MPs, each election list must collect the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> The Constitution of Serbia, Article 1, see above: n27

<sup>31</sup> "Protests against Neglecting Bosniaks", B92, October 16<sup>th</sup> 2006, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/u\\_fokusu.php?id=122&start=60&nav\\_id=215643](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/u_fokusu.php?id=122&start=60&nav_id=215643), visited on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006; "Elections to be held when the law says", October 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2006&mm=10&dd=04&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=214071&fs=1](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2006&mm=10&dd=04&nav_category=11&nav_id=214071&fs=1), visited on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006; "Halimi calls on boycott", October 14<sup>th</sup> 2006, available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/u\\_fokusu.php?id=122&start=75&nav\\_id=215343](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/u_fokusu.php?id=122&start=75&nav_id=215343), visited on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006

<sup>32</sup> Act Amendments to the Law on Members of the Parliament, adopted on February 25<sup>th</sup> 2004, Official Gazette of RS No. 18/04

minimum of 10,000 signatures, verified by court, in order to take part in the elections.<sup>33</sup> This applies to all political parties, coalitions, as well as all minority lists. This renders minorities' position unequal when compared to parties of majority constituency. The Serbian Election Commission (RIK) tried to amend this by stipulating in the Election Procedure Guidelines a requirement of 3,000 signatories needed for minority parties.<sup>34</sup> However, in amending the law by a decree-level provision, RIK violated its legal boundaries, whereby minority parties were placed in an awkward position to choose between winning a seat in the Parliament by way of an illegal procedure, or refraining from entering the Parliament altogether. The tension was resolved by the Serbian Supreme Court, which decided to reject the complaints at RIK's decree on minority lists.<sup>35</sup> In passing this decision, the Supreme Court invoked and relied on "the Serbian Constitution, international human and minority rights standards, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities".<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, it remain unclear why 3,000 signatories. This was a randomly determined number and as such it is not supported by any rational reasons. Another kind of discriminatory act was committed – the minorities with a small number of registered voters (Albanians, Slovaks, Roma, Croats and others) are made equal to those with large constituencies (Hungarians and Bosniaks).

Despite Supreme Court's decision and RIK's decree, a fact remains that minorities are not granted participation in legislative power. More specifically, no special legal regulation has been adopted to regulate this area.

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<sup>33</sup> Law on Members of the Parliament, Official Gazette of RS No. 35/2000, 57/2003 [decision USRS, 72/2003 - dr. law, 75/2003 - changes. dr. law, 18/2004, 101/2005 - dr. law i 85/2005 - dr. law, Article 43]

<sup>34</sup> Instructions on how to enforce the Law on Members of the Parliament, Article 23, Sub-section 1, Count 8, available at RIK's website: <http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/propisi/Uputstvo210107.doc>, visited on January 10<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>35</sup> "Complaints about minority election lists rejected", *Danas*, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

# Pre-election Campaign in Media

In the January elections, out of 20- election lists, six were recognized as minority ones, and thus exempted from the 5% election threshold.<sup>37</sup> These are: Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians – Jozef Kasa; the Coalition “List for Sanjak” – dr Sulejman Ugljanin; the Union of Roma in Serbia – dr Rajko Djuric; the Coalition of Albanians from the Presevo Valley; the Coalition “Hungarian Union” – Andras Agoston – Pal Sandor; and the Roma Party – Sajn Srdjan.<sup>38</sup>

Minorities are represented on other lists as well, One of the leading Bosniak parties, the Sanjak Democratic Party led by Rasim Ljajic, is part of the DS election list,<sup>39</sup> together with representatives of other minority communities: Slovaks, Ruthenians, Croats and others.<sup>40</sup> Since there is no coalition agreement between these minorities and DS, their parliamentary mandates hinge exclusively on DS’s good will. It remains to be seen whether in the next composition of the Parliament they would represent their own communities or would be forced to vote in keeping with the DS parliamentary group. The DS parliamentary group may even activate the mechanism of blank resignation and deny these MPs their parliamentary mandates if they refuse to vote for a DS’s proposal.

During the election campaign, all political parties made efforts to send positive messages to national minorities. Many parties emphasized the role of minority representatives on their election lists, while in their public appearances they all advocated equality of all ethnic communities in Serbia.<sup>41</sup> Even the extreme, right-wing Serbian Radical Party (SRS) used a number of individuals belonging to minority communities to emphasize their multi-ethnic tendencies. At one of SRS’s campaign events in Novi Sad, representatives of Hungarian and Slovak minority

<sup>37</sup> All election lists are available at RIK’s website.: [http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/propisi\\_frames.htm](http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/propisi_frames.htm), visited on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> Party election campaigns available at: DS – [www.zaboljizivot.com](http://www.zaboljizivot.com); LDP – [www.odnaszavisi.org](http://www.odnaszavisi.org); SRS – [www.srs.org.yu](http://www.srs.org.yu); DSS-NS – [www.zivelasrbija.org.yu](http://www.zivelasrbija.org.yu); G17 plus – [www.g17plus.org.yu](http://www.g17plus.org.yu); SPO – [www.spo.org.yu](http://www.spo.org.yu); SPS – [www.sps.org.yu](http://www.sps.org.yu)

addressed the gathering in their native languages.<sup>42</sup> The same was done by a representative of the Roma minority at a gathering in Vranje.<sup>43</sup> SRS representatives made another step – they invited the parties of national minorities to post-election cooperation.<sup>44</sup> According to one of the SRS leaders, minority parties are the only acceptable partners of SRS in the post-election Parliament.<sup>45</sup> Other parties, too, stress their willingness to cooperate with minorities in the formation of the future government.<sup>46</sup> These appeals may seem encouraging, but they also imply the trend of viewing the minorities as mere ornament in election campaign. Although they claim minorities to be part of their political agendas, the majority of political parties lay emphasis on the Serbian people, Serbian state, the Constitution which constituted Serbia as a country of, first and foremost, Serbian people, etc.<sup>47</sup> However, hate-speech instances (at least on national and religious grounds) have not been recorded during the election campaign, which should be noted as positive.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Report on SRS gathering in Novi Sad available at: [www.srs.org.yu](http://www.srs.org.yu), visited on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>44</sup> “Minorities, Dinkic, and then Ceda”, *Vecernje novosti*, November 28<sup>th</sup> 2006

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>46</sup> “Minorities can choose”, *Vecernje novosti*, December 29<sup>th</sup> 2006

<sup>47</sup> See above: n41

<sup>48</sup> YIHR legal team’s analysis of the media

# The Election Day

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights formed six monitoring teams, each with 13 monitors, all accredited by the Serbian Election Commission.<sup>49</sup> The teams monitored the election posts in minority communities. Two teams in Northern Vojvodina covered the municipalities of Subotica, Backa Topola, Kanjiza, Senta, Ada and Becej.<sup>50</sup> Two teams in Sanjak operated in the municipalities of Novi Pazar and Tutin<sup>51</sup>, while teams in Presevo Valley monitored the elections in Presevo and Bujanovac.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from election posts, the monitors visited minority parties' headquarters and election committees' offices. In Vojvodina, the monitors covered 34 polling stations in six municipalities: Subotica, Backa Topola, Kanjiza, Senta, Ada and Becej.<sup>53</sup> No irregularities in election committees' work or in the voting process itself have been recorded. Nor have representatives of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians and Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina had any objections as regards the election process.<sup>54</sup> A single objection noted was that in Senta and Subotica some citizens had not been registered in the election list. This, however, does not fall within the scope of election committees, but rather the Ministry for State Administration and Local Self-Governance, which is in charge of the central election list.<sup>55</sup> Monitors in Sanjak covered 31 polling stations, including those notorious for outbursts of violence.<sup>56</sup> Among them is the polling station No. 74 in Novi Pazar, where one person was killed in the elections in September 2006.<sup>57</sup> No major irregularities were recorded. In several polling stations noted were incidents of voting without IDs, as well as agitation and campaigning in front of the polling stations.<sup>58</sup> YIHR

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<sup>49</sup> RIK's decision of January 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 can be found in YIHR's documentation fund

<sup>50</sup> Municipalities where Hungarian minority makes the majority population, in: Republički zavod za statistiku, *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Republici Srbiji 2002. godine*, Beograd, 2002

<sup>51</sup> Municipalities where Bosniak minority makes the majority population, in: *ibid*

<sup>52</sup> Municipalities where Albanian minority makes the majority population, in: *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Report of the Vojvodina Monitoring Team, submitted on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, is stored in YIHR's documentation fund

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>56</sup> Report of the Sanjak Monitoring Team, submitted on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, is stored in YIHR's documentation fund

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

monitors were verbally assaulted in one polling station.<sup>59</sup> Considerable objections concerning the election list were made Novi Pazar. The YIHR monitors covered 25 polling stations in the municipality of Presevo, and 15 stations in the municipality of Bujanovac.<sup>60</sup> There were no significant irregularities in the election process. However, a large number of smaller disruptions has been noted: lamps and finger-spray were not used.<sup>61</sup> Where citizens refused to have the spray applied to finger, the election committee allowed it them to vote regardless.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, in several polling station in rural areas there has been a number of incidents of voting without IDs, or without any identity check.<sup>63</sup>

Generally, the elections unfolded correctly, with no major irregularities. A joint objection put forth by all parities, participants, citizens and non-governmental organizations was that the central election list had not been updated and completed. Consequently, this issue must be addressed in the future.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Report of the Presevo Valley Monitoring Team, submitted on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, is stored in YIHR's documentation fund

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>64</sup> See: CESID's preliminary report: <http://www.cesid.org/articles/download/files/Izvestaj%20o%20parlamentarnim%20izborima.doc?id=43>, visited on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2007

# Election Results

According to official data issued by the Election Committee, the election yielded the following results:

- Serbian Radical Party – 81 seats
- Democratic Party – 64 seats
- Coalition Democratic Party of Serbia-New Serbia – 47 seats
- G17 Plus – 19 seats
- Socialist Party of Serbia – 16 seats
- Coalition LDP-GSS-SDU-LSV – 15 seats
- Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians – 3 seats
- Coalition List for Sanjak – 2 seats
- Union of Roma from Serbia – 1 seat
- Roma Party – 1 seat
- Coalition of Albanians from Presevo Valley – 1 seat<sup>65</sup>

Hungarian, Bosniak, Albanian and Romani national minorities have their representatives in the Parliament. It is now entirely up to Democratic Party whether smaller national communities on their list – Croats, Slovaks and Bunjevci – would also have their parliamentary representatives. Since all political parties in the election campaign expressed willingness to cooperate with minority parties, larger national minorities (Hungarians and Bosniaks) are expected to be represented in the legislative power.

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<sup>65</sup> RIK's report available at: [http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/pro-pisi\\_frames.htm](http://www.rik.parlament.sr.gov.yu/cirilica/pro-pisi_frames.htm), visited on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2007



**Round Table  
MINORITIES AND  
ELECTIONS**  
Belgrade, December 12<sup>th</sup> 2006

**Dragan Popovic, YIHR:** The election campaign, this round table is a part of, is actually a part of a larger campaign designed to increase the number of voters at the January elections. We have noticed that election campaigns give much attention to national minorities, much more than is usually the case. However, the status and position of national minorities are not being observed systematically, neither are the election messages addressed to minorities, and vice versa, sufficiently analyzed. Rarely are the election results viewed through minority lenses, and are only seldom assessed from the standpoint of whether human and other rights guaranteed by international documents have been fulfilled – namely, the right to equal participation in public institutions. In the previous Parliament only two MPs were representing only their minority group, one group, and they had won their seats through Democratic Party's list. Representatives of national minorities are not present in the current Government. By this I don't mean to classify by nationality, but rather by political parties which gather minorities. Hence, if minorities are represented in neither the legislative, nor in the executive power, then the situation cannot be a satisfying one, and we mustn't reconcile with it. That's why we are trying to magnify this issue and make it more significant. Finally some of the conditions are met for the status quo to be changed. What has been done so far? The election threshold has been abolished for minority parties. But this is where they stopped. It is a lot, of course, because large minority communities can get seats in the Parliament and remain independent, but it is far from enough. Not only does condensing the whole regulative concerning the participation of minorities in the elections in one single provision of the law cannot solve the problem, but instead only opens a large number of questions. One of the questions often posed these days concerns the number of signatures needed to secure a minority list's participation in the elections. On one side there is a move by RIK which, although authorized to act upon election issues, regulates this issue by a decree-level act, while on the other there are radicals and socialists who threaten to request the cancellation of RIK's decision. In short, this is a situation of legal insecurity. In other words, the Supreme Court of Serbia may approve of a list on January 18<sup>th</sup>. Although this is not likely to happen, since it would be too scandalous, it is still dangerous to not have such an important question clearly regulated while the state remains silent.

The book you were given contains a report on the implementation of transitional laws, a legal analysis of the new Constitution of Serbia, as well as a short review of cases the Youth Initiative is handling on

behalf of victims before local courts. We can discuss about the new Constitution of Serbia if you like. In my opinion, the Constitution is very bad, especially when it concerns national minorities. We may discuss this later in detail, but let me present some of the constitutional provisions for now. The provision designed to regulate minority rights was literally copied from the small Charter, the Charter on Human and Minority Rights, which had been valid in the previous period. But in the process of copying, two rights have been omitted – the right to representation in the Parliament, and the right to appropriate representation in public services, state bodies and bodies of local self-governance. So far, no one has provided any kind of explanation as to why these two rights have been taken out. I don't believe it was an accident. I think they omitted the human and minority rights which they perceive as more difficult to materialize. By the way, international human rights law does not allow a once attained level of human rights to be decreased, but this is exactly what the new Constitution did. The media didn't find this topic interesting. Twenty eight non-governmental organizations from Belgrade wrote a letter recording every single human right which had been abolished or decreased by the new Constitution, but no one thought it relevant for publication. The fact that the new Constitution actually decreases the level of human rights in Serbia is simply not interesting for our media. But for me this was the most important topic, more important even than the passage of the Constitution or anything else locally. But our concerns were not met with matching response.

**Aida Corovic, UrbanIn, Novi Pazar:** I am so glad to be here today with you. Many special thanks to my friends from the Youth Initiative, who have organized this gathering. The topic is excellent and there are many reasons why we should discuss about it. As you know, I come from Novi Pazar, and whenever I arrive to Belgrade everyone asks me – what's wrong with you guys down there? What are you doing? Why do you keep killing each other? And you know what – I'm sick of these questions. I can't feel normal anywhere because everywhere I go I have to answer a bulk of questions because of the politicians who represent me either here in Belgrade or there in Pazar.

The fact is that passions are heated in Sanjak and that two political options are waging some kind of war. Still, responsibility is largely on the authorities in Serbia. I always have the impression that the authorities actually welcome the divisions within one minority group, because divisions enable easy manipulation of minority politicians. I

believe the situation is similar in other regions too. This is not a local Sanjak-phenomenon. Everyone is divided and serve only as marionettes to authorities in Belgrade.

Authorities in Belgrade act schizophrenically: there's always this gap between what they say and what is really done on the ground. Hence all those slogans about minorities being a stability factor, being important for democracy in Serbia and so on. But these slogans are uttered by high state officials, for example by Petar Ladjevic, Director of the Human and Minority Rights Service. But in reality minorities are portrayed as some sort of enemy, a destabilization factor, someone you should beware... So we live in a totally insane situation – we don't know if we are a stability factor for this country, or an enemy.

**Rajko Djuric, Union of Roma of Serbia:** After the introduction of multi-party system in Serbia, this is the first time the Roma have seriously gathered and prepared for the elections. This is a big step both for Serbia and for the Roma. I don't need to tell you how difficult it is to be a Rom in today's Serbia. Unfortunately, the authorities in Serbia have never responded adequately to our requests. The greatest problems are housing, education and health. Many have no ID, or are not even registered as citizens of this country. They don't have the right to vote, they don't have IDs, they don't have health insurance, and are recognized by unhygienic settlements.

Another thing is that the Roma must play a decisive role in the process of Serbia's democratization and its EU integrations. Large parties used to buy off Romani votes in exchange of flour or sugar. Lack of education and difficult economic situation are often abused for these purposes. And it wasn't only the nationalistic parties that did it. Many democratic parties bought off Romani votes. This phenomenon needs to be condemned, for this is no way to build democracy.

I know what it was like under Milosevic. I was forced to flee the country to avoid being murdered. It was hard times, but today isn't much better either. We didn't get what we expected after the political changes in 2000. Although Serbia joined the Program called the Decade of Roma, nothing has been done so far. Concrete programs must be introduced, people must be allowed to invest in this country without ending up robbed. Poverty is a general problem in Serbia, targeting the Roma and everyone else. Still, it must be acknowledged that the Roma are most

stricken by poverty. A strategy for combating poverty has been adopted, but here too nothing has been done so far. Strategies and wishes are not enough. Concrete things need to be done. I am a president of a party which runs for the Parliament in order to change this. We do not gather only the Roma – many esteemed individuals from other peoples are with us.

**Fabri Musliu**, journalist, Television Kosovo: Authorities in Belgrade are using numerous measures in order to exert pressure, which jeopardizes minority rights. This is the case in Southern Serbia, with strong military and police presence and with incidents occurring every day. Authorities tend to neglect this, giving their own explanations. But there always remains some kind of doubt, which first and foremost pertains to Albanians. And this doubt is confirmed in a number of polls and opinion surveys in which Albanians are least loved, of course – I won't say most "hated" – but occupy the first place when it comes to organized crime and some other issues. This doubt, or better – this image of bad Albanians, is present in the media every day. In the past, say, six years, since the political changes, I haven't come across a positive example in the press about Albanians, whether about those living in southern Serbia, or those in Kosovo. The latter are terrorists, all of them, and no difference is made to distinguish them. Also, the pejorative name "Shiptars" is used, and most alarmingly by Alesakndar Simic, advisor to Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica. And when he says this word, we see hatred in his eyes.

The question is, then – what is it that we should do to attract the members of these communities to be loyal citizens of Serbia, if the government is there to erect a wall, if it pushes them away. Prime Minister doesn't even have time to receive the representatives of Albanians from southern Serbia. This is concrete stuff I am talking about – Prime Minister or President are simply not willing to give a statement or an interview to the journalist in front of you, for Television of Kosovo. Who are they to communicate with if they refuse to use the media and to convey their message through the media to the members of another nation, whether in southern Serbia or in Kosovo. There are other examples, especially as regards Albanians.

My idea is that man should fight for his rights on his own, and he should give his best. But when it comes to collective rights, this has to be done collectively. In other words, members of minority communities, together

with authorities and the non-governmental sector, and especially the media. Why is it that the Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS), as a public service, hasn't re-introduced the program in Albanians language, which had been broadcasted until 1990 or thereabout? Why is it that the RTS does not have a program in Romani language, for example, if 150,000 or 200,000 Roma live in Serbia? Why is it that there are programs in other languages? The Television Novi Sad does maintain programs in other languages and it covers Vojvodina. But I think it is RTS's duty. This is one of the places where the rights of these people are realized. How many electronic media, newspapers or children programs in Albanian language does the government of Serbia finance? Two years ago I tried and filed a request for a children's magazine for southern Serbia. The request wasn't even considered. In conclusion, the situation is not good. The authorities must change its minority politics if it wants Serbia to move on, to become part of European processes. After all, we know very well that one of the main indicators of the level of country's democratization is precisely the status of its minorities.

**Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights:** Since the topic of this gathering is "Elections and Minorities", I'd like to address the issue of pre-election hysteria in search of minorities, which occurs in the face of every election. It is obvious that every time, in a pre-election period, minorities resurface to the fore. The political party which manages to "fish" the largest number of minorities to its election list stands better a chance, at least according to some estimations, of being supported by the international community and of obtaining the legitimacy that each civic party needs. But things are not as easy. Unfortunately, the Roma are most receptive to this kind of manipulation. Their poor social status is often abused. It is only in this period that Roma's problems become publicly apparent. This is degrading for the Roma themselves, who then divided into various different groups. Many parties begin to tear them apart, and a mass hysteria kicks off, aiming at catching as many Roma as possible. Special responsibility here is on Roma National Councils, state bodies established in accordance with the Law on National Minorities, the law which had been adopted on a federal level, but has never been transferred to the level of the Republic of Serbia.

In this sense, we must distinguish between several categories of national minorities. The main differences among them explode precisely in the pre-election period, which is then the division to friendly and unfriendly

national minorities becomes apparent. The Roma are always a friendly national minority that no one ever does anything for. There is this general belief, a racist one, indeed, which debases all Roma – a belief that Roma are okay as long as they remain in their shacks. Once the state becomes concerned with their status, whether for marketing purposes or before the elections, or because there is a special program to address this – the white man rebels and won't allow the Roma to leave their dumpsters, which is where they are believed to belong. This politics cannot be said to have been consistently applied to other minorities, which are politicized in another way. But when it comes to Roma, this is a typical politics, not even typical but racist, a politics with elements of strong racism.

When we discuss minorities, we shouldn't miss discussing the system of values we live in. We should proceed from the Constitution – both the previous one and the current one. I won't even address the issue of whether this is a state of Serbian people and other citizens, I don't want to waste my breath on it. I only want to talk about the fact that we have a Constitution with a number of omissions concerning the protection of minorities; next, there are laws. The Law on National Minorities, which should serve as a kind of framework, has not been amended, more precise mechanisms which enable the survival and social integration of minorities, as well as their political development are yet to be added. Most importantly, the actual implementations of the Constitution and the Law on Minorities, as well as of other related laws which directly or indirectly concern the minorities, are best reflected through the system values in this state. Furthermore, this system of values is best reflected through the media in this country.

When we discuss the media, we need to discuss a wide media scale, from electronic to print media, and we need to discuss a systematic media manipulation of minorities, whereby minorities are usually used as a symbol of disturbing tendencies in the country, while we, the majority, we are the providers... We always provide something. This is that political statements tell you. Politicians will never tell you about autochthonous minority rights, but will instead always narrate about our providing for minorities, about how kind we are to have provided for them. In this sense, the rhetoric about minorities used to be more correct. I am not saying that the politics used to be better, but the rhetoric fostered in the previous, Milosevic's period was more appropriate than today's. I don't want you to think that what I'm saying is totally unfounded. So let me,

then, cite several examples which best illustrate the bad, racist attitude toward minorities.

After Montenegro's proclamation of independence, in a program on TV Novi Sad – I think it was the state television, but I don't want another set of charges to be filed against me, so let's safely say in a program on TV Novi Sad – one of the guests was the president of DSS's parliamentary board. Now, this has nothing to do with the fact that DSS is my favorite party: what the guy said would absolutely disqualify him for good from any political work, in a municipal service even, anywhere, in any remotely normal country. One of the viewers was broadcast live in the program – he was justifiably angry at Montenegro and its independence, justifiably because the anti-independence campaign had been so strong, that Montenegro's independence was finally understood as national treason. In a most serious tone, the man asked the host and all guests – by the way, the guest in question was Aligrudic, the representative of the so-called democratic wing – how long will a vote from a Siptar in Montenegro be worth the same as a Serbian vote. Now, an appropriate answer to this question should be leaving the studio, or maintaining a clear distance from such an attitude, or giving an explanation, something like that. But Aligrudic, with no sign of disapproval, took part in a discussion about Montenegro's importance for Serbia. In other words, he didn't even notice! The level of discrimination is so high that he didn't even notice that the question actually resulted from the pathology we live in.

The second example – I'll stop there – is the famous constitutional expulsion of Albanian people from Kosovo, which followed, at the moment when diplomatic war is being waged for Kosovo, a statement by Sanda Raskovic Ivic, Coordinator for Kosovo and Metohija, that Albanians should finally understand that they live on someone else's territory. This should be understood as official attitude of this state, since Sanda Raskovic Ivic didn't fall from the sky, she is an officially appointed coordinator for Kosovo. Several months later with such unfortunate blessing by the international community, these same Albanians who live on a foreign territory had been expelled from electoral registers because Serbia considers Kosovo to be its integral part, but does not consider Albanians to belong to it... Very consistent politics indeed: Albanians live on a foreign territory, they are the disturbing factor when it comes to the passage of the new constitution. Someone may think – well, that's politics, we all know that Albanians never voted. That's dangerous thinking. If you want Kosovo to remain integral part of your country

and if you want to find a solution which would apply to all, then the minimum of political correctness and decency is to test the will of the electorate in its totality. So when we from the Lawyers' Committee openly called it administrative ethnic cleansing, instead of asking how it came about, people accused of having resorted to tough language and of having accused others. In other words, no one cared about the fact that Albanian population was erased from electoral lists, only because on the pretext that they would vote against the Constitution. Furthermore, we were to blame for having tagged this move by its real name – Albanians had been erased from electoral lists. If you want Kosovo to be part of your territory, you have to count with every single inhabitant of this territory. On the other hand, if you don't want these people there, then this is called ethnic cleansing through administrative measures: erasing people from electoral lists.

I singled out these two examples only to show our authorities' essential misunderstanding of minority issues. They do not understand that the question of minorities is a highly sensitive issue which must be dealt with in another way, not by way of severing the ties, cutting, calling names and dividing the minorities into friendly and unfriendly ones. I also think that the question of minorities should not be dealt with only by minorities. Just like the women's question could not have become general until men too took it up, so the question of all those who have been deprived of their human rights, individual or collective, remains their private thing until others – members of minorities or not – start to deal with it, until they too start fighting for equal rights.

**Goran Miletic, Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights:** When representatives of the international community ask me about minority policy in Serbia, I can never explain it in two words. There actually are two words which explain it to some extent – double talk and blurring. Double talk is used to present the situation as great, to make the foreigners believe that minorities are the government's top priority and so on. Blurring refers to some of the international obligations and even some stipulated by domestic laws.

This was not patented in 2000. Both concepts had been practiced in Milosevic's time as well. At that time they came up with a ridiculously stupid idea in order to show their concern for minorities, although we very well remember the number of war crimes committed then. Anyway, with no invitation by the Council of Europe, which is a precondition

for the ratification of the Framework Convention, the then Parliament ratified the Convention. So no one asked them, no one appealed on them, but they wanted to show how great and worrying about minorities they really are.

When you say “minorities and elections” – what is that? It’s a precondition for what Dragan mentioned at the beginning of the panel and what has been accepted by the civilized world. Not only in European Union, and not only in Europe – participation in public life has become the principle of modern world. Representatives of any minority, especially racial, ethnic, national, linguistic and other, must be given the right to take part in public life of every country. My first question is – is this really that hard to achieve in Serbia? Had there been willingness, much work could have been done already. These are the first elections in without election threshold for minorities. That’s first.

Now to a question of why minorities aren’t overtly enthusiastic about participating in the elections. The answer has something to do with what Biljana said about the laws. Our minority laws are very bad. We’ve mentioned the Constitution – that too is very bad. Another thing is that important laws are lacking. Serbia does not have a law on national minorities and this too is a kind of blurring. When the law was passed, and it was passed on a federal level, its implementation was minimal. Something was implemented, something wasn’t. Furthermore, we don’t have a law against discrimination. A draft of this law has been held in abeyance for five years.

The second most important issue is that of dealing with the past, or short – justice. This was apparent in all multi-ethnic municipalities I have worked in. Imagine that you belong to any of the national minorities in Serbia. Imagine yourself as Bosniak and remember only the weapon-search raids throughout Sanjak. Remember Sjeverin, remember everything that happened there. Do you think that enough people have been held accountable? How many have been punished? These were serious violations of human rights. Do you understand what members of this ethnic group may feel if they know that their neighbor, brother, relative was killed, abducted or beaten in 1992 or 1993? These weren’t ordinary fights. These were systematic tortures on the pretext of weapon search. The perpetrators have not been punished yet. Instead, they remain in police forces and still walk by the same people in Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, and so on. I saw it myself. And if the same thing happened to you in Belgrade, I believe you wouldn’t sit idly.

Also, if you are Albanian in Serbia – what is it that do you remember? You can remember the disappearances which have never been uncovered. As a human rights activist I fully investigated the disappearance of a man from Presevo; we know exactly who was involved. The police has it all on file, but the completion of investigation is being delayed. Facts are here. I don't know if you'd be motivated to vote when you remember how in 1999 all workers in one factory were lined up and Albanians were told to make two steps forward. And when they did, the men opened the door and ordered them to leave. When one of them, still naively believing in democratic mechanisms of the state, came at the end of the month to pick up his salary, a man pointed a gun at him and said – Do you want me to pay you off in a bit different way? There's many such stories. Eviction from work, torture, and the same men, disguised as special police forces or something else, still walk freely. Would you want to take part in a social life in such state?

Think of the Croats. We remember Hrtkovci and many other things. Hungarians – there's this false presumption that Hungarians are totally ok in Serbia. That nobody touched them in the 1990s. That they are happy after 2000 too, and that all is great and ideal. But I remember a round table in Becej, when representatives of Hungarian minority talked about grave discrimination cases, and I was appalled to hear their Serb colleagues, from the same towns in northern Vojvodina, who confirmed this. Of course, the perpetrators were only rarely held accountable.

As for the Roma – assaults by skinheads, hate-speech, racism, this is still very much present and I can't see how you will motivate them when none of these criminal acts has been punished. The third reason is discrimination which continues to be practiced even after 2000. It seems to me, actually, that the two new governments find ways to justify such practices. I fully agree with what Biljana said: Djindjic's government did something about it. They tried to change something, but now... it seems to me that the politicians fully support every form of discrimination, through their statements and through neglecting the existence of discrimination. I remember when we presented this report on Albanians in Serbia 2002 or was it 2003, I can't remember, in Bujanovac. Rasim Ljajic took up our book and said – Well, you know, I have read this report but everything you are reporting on, all this was happening under Milosevic's rule.” Then we explained that the fact that these human rights violations most likely occurred as a consequence of

Milosevic's rule did in no way prevent the current government to do something about them.

Finally, my only message to representatives of national minorities is that it is certainly better to go to the polls, regardless of what's on the plate. It is better to vote because, as it says here clearly – not everyone is the same.

**Snezana Ilic, Center for Civil Society Development:** I'd like to return to the very foundations of this topic: political representation of minorities. This is today's topic, as far as I understood. First off, I want to stress that neither at the beginning of 2006 nor at the beginning of 2007 – just before the elections – Serbia has a legal framework which would pave the way for the implementation of the right to political representation. This very well fits in the overall picture of legal regulations, or better – irregularities in regulating the status of national minorities in Serbia. Concretely, this means that since 2000 no a single systematic law on minorities has been passed, that many issues have been deal with in passing or *ad hoc*, and largely through decrees. The most recent such decree was adopted in June 2006 when the human and minority rights service was established. Before that there was a decree from 2002. I am only mentioning the important ones which somewhat regulated the area of minority rights. Again, only through short-term decrees the establishment of national councils had been regulated as one of the key bodies of minority self-governance. The consequence is the legal vacuum and disordered status of Hungarian and then all other national councils.

Lack of systematic commitment to minority problems and within this commitment the resolution of their political representation and participation in public life has amounted to the present state of affairs with voluntaries, non-institutional and non-transparent ordering of this area as its prevailing features. However, it seems to me that minorities' right to political representation is least implemented in today's Serbia. There are serious indicators which show this. The issue of non-participation in political and public life is in fact an area where discrimination against minorities is still most apparent.

This was one of the necessary obligations which the international community set before the government of Serbia as a precondition for Serbia's European integrations. But as we see, Serbia managed to avoid

the inclusion of this obligation into the country's legal order. And so in November, two months before the elections, a non-legislative body such as the Election Committee (RIK) passes a decree-level act and a decision which could be easily overturned by the Supreme Court of Serbia, a decision which regulates, again short-term, only for these elections, minority participation in the elections. We shouldn't refrain from mentioning the political pressure which was exerted on this non-legislative body which is based on political, short-term, party-driven, election-oriented combinatory.

One chance was missed in 2004 when the law on elections was amended. Furthermore, amendments were introduced to the Law on the Election of MPs, and this was also a chance to make some order in this area. We were too lenient and political participation of minorities has not been legally and consistently completed. The work was only begun by election threshold decrease for parties and coalitions of minorities, and again there emerged one-party domination, domination of one power-center within the two largest minorities in Serbia – Hungarian and Bosniak. The issue of smaller minorities was not even touched upon, nor was the story concluded by the submission of electoral lists, which somehow coincided with RIK's decision. In short, it's been six years, since 2000, six full years, and not a single public discussion has been opened to include, for the sake of its own seriousness, minority representatives, or in this case the representatives of national councils, minority parties, majority parties, experts, and state institutions.

What would the inclusion of minorities into the Parliament mean for Serbia, in concrete terms? This cannot be only the mere fulfillment of the principles of justice. For, if there are a million and four hundred thousand people living in Serbia who belong to various minority communities, then this wouldn't be only the formal satisfaction of the thesis which claims the inclusion of minorities to increase the level of social and political cohesion. More concretely in our case, it would mean to open a larger maneuvering space in the Parliament of Serbia for those subjects, the heralds of a reformist pro-European politics, who could count with minority MPs, and thus decrease the political influence of extremist options, which had to be consulted or resorted to in decision-making processes.

I tried to address the basic contours of this problem: the current situation, immediately before the elections, and its roots in the past. This problem

has not been recognized. Minority issues in general never occupy any of the top places on the state's urgent-list and so this important segment of political representation of minorities has not been addressed. Thank you.

**Milan Sitarski, Belgrade Open School:** I am Milan Sitarski, from the Open School. I have a question for Mr. Djuric. As far as I know, and please correct me if I'm wrong, the only Roma party which won a parliamentary status on the local level in Serbia was the Roma Democratic Party from Bujanovac, if I'm not mistaken. They have two out of forty MPs in Bujanovac Municipal Assembly. Are they part of your list? If they are – how many of them? And if not – why not? Thank you.

**Rajko Djuric:** Contrary to our expectations, the Union of Roma of Serbia is the fourth strongest political party in Serbia according to relevant analyses. It is fourth because there are 800,000 Roma in Serbia. I am very grateful to our colleague for having provided this figure. Of course, the police in every country has accurate data about minorities and so, consequently, about Roma. The state “secret” says 620,000 Roma. According to official statistics, the number is 108,000. These are familiar phenomena.

We have maintained excellent cooperation with this Roma party from Bujanovac. They will be our parliamentary candidates – we have 250 candidates. Furthermore, as democratic and civic party, we do not gather only Roma. There are six Jews on our list, but also Milos Sapic, Aleskandar Sapic's father, and also a young violinist, assistant at the Academy of Music, Stanko Madic, who has been “approached” by other parties, and many other – Serb biochemists, legal experts, even Hungarian and Croats, and so on...

Allow me only a brief remark about national councils. Of course, formally, this is an important institution. But, to limit my remark only to the Roma National Council – this body has been established for Rasim Ljajic's purposes. Apart from three or four honorable individuals, the rest are the worst scam. Look what they are doing! They use state money to make new political parties. In other words, they *a priori* spit on the Constitution in order to win parliamentary seats, be granted immunity, because their choice is between the Parliament and the prison.

**Dragana Solomon, BIRN:** It just occurred to me that about a year

ago one tabloid published on its front page “Hungarian priest arrives to Novi Sad to slaughter a child at a Mass”. On a front page. The role of the media, the mainstream media, is what concerns me, the media we read in Belgrade. Are they aware that, as media, they should serve as a kind of forum to reflect the society they write about – and the society in Serbia is still multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, multi-national. So you read the papers in Belgrade and you can’t see beyond Belgrade. The headline piece of news is that the Mufti is re-marrying for the second or third time... Also, only few travel to the south of Serbia to report about the situation there, or about how other people live in the region, while at the same time the media purports that Albanians in southern Serbia have been given everything they need.

In this sense, I think these elections would be very interesting to whether any of these parties will get seats in the Parliament and thus start fighting for their rights, for the rights of citizens they represent. Above all, I am interested – I’m sorry that Riza Halimi is not here today – whether Albanians from southern Serbia would follow their parties and for the first time participate in the parliamentary elections after so many years. Also, it would be interesting to see, if Mr. Ljajic wins, how this would be manifested in Sanjak and in the municipality of Novi Pazar. In short, I only think that we should all somehow influence the way minorities are presented, especially by the media in Belgrade, who are simply deaf when it comes differences which do and should exist in this country. That’s all.

**Aida Corovic:** I only want to say a couple of words, this is important to me, about national councils. My impression is that national councils are really a trap, and I’m glad – well, as much as one can be glad – that Roma and Hungarians think the same. There are so many horrible things happening. I want to say something about the Bosniak National Council, which is, literally, Sulejman Ugljanin’s Masonic Lodge. I don’t sit at home doing embroidery, on the contrary – I am very active locally. I swear I don’t know who the members of the Bosniak National Council are. On top, to make things worse, last year an Rasim’s and some parties close to his made an initiative to change the Council and to establish an electoral Parliament. Signatures were collected and then all of a sudden – silence. When we asked what was going on, we learned that Rasim had been received a slap or a friendly advice from Mr. Loncar, who had simply informed him that this was not the time for turbulences. This is very indicative of the extent to which large parties, DS and DSS in

this case, manipulate with, and when needed literally pull out, Rasim Ljajic and Sulejman Ugljanin. These are Bosniak representatives, but the situation is obviously the same with other minorities. They are literally used as handkerchiefs, use them and throw them away. Unfortunately, they are not thrown away, because they've been around for fifteen years, always the same faces, and this is getting obscene.

**Tomislav Zigmanov**, Fund for an Open Society, Novi Sad: It is good to hear that minorities are discussed in Belgrade in this way – openly, competently, together with representatives of minorities, which is rarely the case, at least like this. It is not good, however, to always hear the same non-governmental organizations talk about this, always trying to inject into the public space the issue of minorities. Also, it is not good that such a small number of media and citizens take interest in this. This only shows you which place on the agenda the minorities occupy today. It sits on the margins and is being pulled from under the carpet only in the face of important political events. This time it is the event of elections. Two or three months ago it was the event of the Constitution. I will try to avoid the arguments already discussed and the problems already elaborated. Let me point to several moments which I believe to be essential.

This time, again, minorities are literally placed in the position to choose whether to accept something or not, although they had not been asked to take part in the decision-making process. The same happened around the issue of the referendum on the new Constitution. Let me remind you, minorities had not been included in the drafting of the Constitution, nor had they been asked to participate in the decision-making process. They only took part at the very end, at the referendum. The same thing happened how. Minority representatives, except the two representatives of one Bosniak party, did not take part in the process which would define the rules of the game focused on minority interests. It's interesting, because this time again, I repeat, the representatives of minorities and minorities which are not part of the political elite... we need to make this distinction because the minority scene is quite pluralized.

The interest of Hungarians and Bosniaks, which matches the minority interest of Serbia, does not have to match the Romanian or, say, Ruthenian community's interests, which has 15,000 members dispersed territorially. So, when we talk about "minorities" we have to bear in

mind that this is a pluralized and hardly reducible issue, so what suits one community does not automatically suit everyone else. The second moment – we all know that in political matches something may suit the political elite but at the same time may mean absolutely nothing to minorities, or may not have any relevant consequences. In this sense, when we discuss the problem of minorities – minorities and elections – we must bear in mind the following moments. Firstly, apart from the fact that they were brought in a “take-it-or-leave-it-situation”, the minorities respond to this challenge differently. There is one atypical situation, which concerns the minority community of Albanians in Southern Serbia. Representatives of political parties from Southern Serbia went to Albania to some sort of consultations with their homeland, which is legitimate, of course, but is also a sign of infantile behavior, because if there’s no way for them to reach an agreement autonomously, one may freely ask about future consequences to some plural processes within this Albanian minority community.

The next issue is also problematic and it concerns the inclusion of minority representatives into large parties’ electoral, parliamentary lists. We all know that according to the new Constitution, parliamentary mandates belong to political parties, not to MPs. It remains to be seen how this plurality within, say, the Democratic Party (DS) would play out. Minorities will most likely be not on a leash, but on a remote control, so to speak. They will have to accept, obediently, every decision made by the DS’s Governing Board, in which they take no part, and this may cause considerable problems because, as we know, this model did not survive in Bosniak community, who were first on a DS list and then joined another option.

And finally, there is a significant number of minorities who do not belong anywhere. These are small minorities, with no political articulation within their own communities, mainly invisible, like Ruthenian, German or Czech minorities in Vojvodina, who have several thousand votes, who due to their internal problems or historical legacy, cannot articulate their interests but continue to be somewhat active in this field. They should also have the right to political representation in the decision-making and legislative institutions, such as, among other, the Parliament of Serbia, simply because the state is often in a self-congratulatory mood, prizing itself for having managed, despite all difficulties and the wars, to maintain a high number of minority communities, between 28 and 32. But how many of them are in the Parliament? One or two,

right? This only tells you about the absence of ethno-cultural aspects of justice in our society.

Let me mention one more thing, pretty general. Serbia lacks a minority policy, every government lacks a clear concept of this policy. In Djindjic's period there was good will to conceptualize it. But when a country lacks a minority politics which would in a systematically just way, unilaterally and strategically allow minorities' integration into the political and social life in Serbia, then we can't really talk about policy. Policy is a serious thing, which requires institutional, systematic, serious efforts and procedures to resolve a problem. Ours is a pre-modern community system, when a group is trying to do something in a non-institutional, non-democratic way.

**Andrej Nosov, YIHR:** Hello, everyone. When you ask today some TV speakers and hosts who read out the news in the 1990s, when you ask them – hey, you used to be a TV speaker, you used to report on “criminal NATO alliance” and a number of similar things, they tell you – oh well, you know, I was only doing my job. So when you ask Rasom Ljajic today – what is this? He'll tell you – oh, I was only doing my job, no one wanted to take the responsibility, you know, so I took it. Through political analysis lenses, this may well be true. Let me remind you that Rasim Ljajic was also someone who took the responsibility for the cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. Right, there's no one else in the government of Serbia or today's political elite who would be willing to take the responsibility of managing and leading the National Council for Cooperation with the ICTY.

Let me take up where Goran left off. I have many Albanian friends. One day we were heading to Sarajevo, and we were pulled over by police on one of the border crossing. In front of us there were four jeeps. You can only imagine what was in them... Around that time Milan Lukic could have been inside, maybe Mladic, perhaps even Karadzic, doesn't matter. Anyway, they drove through, even though they were not state or diplomatic vehicles, I'm positive about that. We were in an ordinary car, two colleagues from Kosovo, one of whom has a Macedonian passport which says her residence is in Prishtina. We had suitcases in the trunk, with various seminar materials. We spent two or three hours at the crossing. They examined everything, because there is reasonable doubt that her passport is, god forbid!, false. There are no hints, but a she has an Albanian name, and her address in Prishtina is written in her

Macedonian passport. Why is she here anyway, at this crossing? Where is she going? Shouldn't she return to Prishtina and stay there? This is, in a nutshell, how they treat minorities. A state official, a clerk, is only doing his job, so he pulls you over, does something to this person, and then you try to inform the media about the incident.

I only want to remind those who have been following the YIHR activities, that two weeks ago we received from one of the Belgrade courts that the use of the word "Shiptar" wouldn't qualify as hate-speech. This court believes that the word can be used when the speaker feels that his/her Serbian national interests have been threatened. Furthermore, the court ruling goes on to define on 20 pages the history of Kosovo, the history of Serbia and so on. Then there is this daily newspaper – I don't know if it should even qualify as such, it's certainly more like joint criminal police endeavor – the daily "Kurir" which every day publishes jokes about Roma... The Humanitarian Law Center is handling a number of such joke-related court cases, which were nothing but an innocent joke, right? We have the right to joke, don't we? One of the key arguments used by the court is that Albanians, too, call themselves "Shiptars", so why should be care when... no, I don't want to repeat the whole case, the one that concerns eating unpeeled lemon and Albanian hats. Then there are these most liberal circles in Belgrade. The weekly "Vreme" published an article about the Albanian question in the Balkans, but failed to provide a single photo of urban, young Albanian population. Albanians always wear their traditional hats, they are always 60 or older and they always do business around the mosque. Any other case is not an adequate Albanian for the Serbian public opinion to recognize him as Albanian.



**Round Table**  
**MINORITIES AND**  
**ELECTIONS IN VOJVODINA**  
**Subotica, December 16<sup>th</sup> 2006**

**Stanka Parac Damjanovic, NGO Agency for Local Democracy:**

In cooperation with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, we are monitoring the status and treatment of national minorities in the elections, as well as their participation in the future Parliament. The second reason why we have embarked on this monitoring process is the fact that we have already cooperated with the YIHR, an organization deserving high esteem for its work in human rights protection. They also have influence in the Council of Europe, which, as you know, regularly monitors human and minority rights situation. The YIHR submits to the Council of Europe relevant information about the situation on the ground. For us, as an organization engaged exclusively in local self-governance, this is extremely important. The new CoE monitoring mission's report contains precisely these problems. On the one hand, it is the problem of the inherited level of minority representation in power structures and public service, while on the other hand it seems the government is giving up minority rights protection and improvement of their status. That's why it is important to discuss these problems all the time, and I sure hope this round table would contribute to it.

My first impression is that this election campaign has begun much too early and that it would take a long time to finish. Many political parties give ample promises to minorities, whose representatives will be able to check the seriousness of these promises soon after the elections. I believe that we will be witnessing numerous abuses. So far the campaign has not provided any guarantees that the politicians would refrain from general manipulation of citizens, and hence of minorities. The civil sector should work hard, because political parties have managed to occupy the whole of public space, which makes it difficult to decipher with of their election messages are serious.

**Caba Sepsei, Democratic Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians – DSVM:**

We are all aware of all shortcomings of the new Constitution. The fact is that it does not give anything to minorities. On the other hand, it should be noted that it does not forbid anything either. This is where I see an opportunity opening. Many minority rights hinge on future laws, which will be adopted by the new Parliament. In short, this means that the Constitution could be supplemented by good laws. That's why it is important to have as many minority representatives in the new Parliament as possible. The referendum results here in Subotica are pretty interesting. It is a fact that the largest number of people, percentage-wise, voted against the Constitution here. So they did vote, but more

than 20% voted against, of which the largest number were Hungarians. Still, many people didn't vote at all, so it's difficult to estimate who "obeyed" which party. My point about the election threshold is that this move is simply not enough. Even worse – a certain kind of manipulation has been made and it concerns the number of signatures needed to be collected for each minority list in order to make it eligible to compete in the elections. RIK's decision is discriminatory too. Compare the 3,000 signatures needed for a Hungarian party with 10,000 required for a Serbian party, and the disproportion is obvious. There are 20 times less Hungarians than Serbs in Serbia, so an appropriate figure would be 500 signatures. And what with other smaller minorities like Slovaks or Ruthenians.

To me it seems that the authorities are doing everything to ensure the so-called honest Hungarians, Bosniaks, Albanians... Just like it used to be under Milosevic. Again, minorities cause deep mistrust. That's why we can never rely on large parties. They can never really represent minority interests. We've seen that in the Vojvodina Assembly. Democratic Party threatened our MP with expulsion from the DS's MP board unless he votes the way the party had decided. So there's no independence or decision-making in keeping with the interests of minority people an MP belongs to. Unfortunately, our homeland, Hungary, maintains the same attitude – it doesn't see it as wrong and doesn't lend enough support to Hungarian parties in Serbia.

**Gabor Kudlik**, NGO Open Perspectives: Currently, minorities are treated under the Byzantine politics in today's Serbia. Minorities are openly distrusted. Democratic government didn't do much to change the situation. There is no space for NGOs to work. They are still treated as mercenaries, aren't allowed to work freely, hostility against NGOs is constantly heated. This is not a good atmosphere for democratic development. All that minorities got, they got thanks to international community's pressures. Now we see that the OSCE and the Government of Albania are committed to motivate Albanian parties to run at the elections. I don't understand this – why did Albanian representatives need to go to Tirana to make a union and run at the elections jointly, as a coalition? Sanjak is a similar story – the Bosniaks there are deeply divided. There are clashes and incidents among Bosniaks. Authorities in Serbia are to be held responsible for this – they cause hostilities and divide the minorities in order to easily manipulate them.

As regards the signatures, I think this must be done in a much more professional way. Here is a paradoxical situation – Mr. Sepsei collected 4,500 signatures as mayor candidate, but had only 1,500 votes. This

shouldn't happen. The state must harshly control the signatures, ID numbers and everything else. Otherwise, petitions lose any meaning. The problem is that some Hungarian parties have lost every support among Hungarian electorate. The last local elections showed this clearly. In the Subotica Municipal Assembly there are 67 MPs, but only 19 are Hungarians, although we outnumber everyone else in this municipality. The problem, then, has much to do with minority representatives who are not good enough, who aren't trusted. Minority representation has been resolved or is currently being resolved in all surrounding countries, only Serbia is lagging behind. In Croatia a resolution on guaranteed parliamentary mandates has been adopted, in Romania too, Hungary is doing something similar, only on the local level, but it will soon cover the national level too. Everyone is accepting the standards. Serbia will also have to do this.

**Svetislav Milankovic**, NGO Agency for Local Democracy: I fully agree that the legislation in Serbia isn't good and that it provides no guarantees to minorities. However, I should stress that the situation in the region isn't much better either. For example, Croatian solution is totally senseless, where one man represents several national minorities, Czechs, Germans, Ukrainians... Who does he represent, whose interests? There are many trades there, give-and-takes, several dozens of people elect an MP in the Parliament and this totally loses meaning. Hungarians are not divided only in Serbia, they are divided in Croatia too, mainly to those supported by FIDES or by the Socialist Party in Hungary. As far as I know, the situation is similar in Slovenia too. Serbs in Croatia have won seats in the Parliament thanks to the fact that they do have their own political parties. In Serbia this is also the only way for the minorities to defend their interests. But the atmosphere is obviously not ripe for this job to be done through parties of civic orientation. Serbia is not a civic state, and consequently – it does not have civic parties. I really don't understand why minorities are thrashed about having national parties, while Serbs are allowed to have them.

Another thing I want to stress is that for the first time now we have a pretty clear situation at the elections. Everyone found their natural ideological partners. It is completely appropriate that the DSS make a coalition with Velja Ilic and Palma. On the other hand, there is DS with minorities, the radicals... Everyone has assumed their positions, and citizens won't have much trouble deciding. The lists have never been as ideologically clear as they are now.



**Round Table**  
**BOSNIAKS ANDELECTIONS**  
**Novi Pazar, December 19<sup>th</sup> 2006**

**Aida Corovic, Urban In:** On behalf of the organizer, I wish you a warm welcome. I thank the Youth Initiative for having launched this campaign. We already had one round table in Belgrade, which was also organized by the YIHR. A distorted version of my speech in Belgrade reached Pazar, so let me clarify what I said then. The distorted version was inserted by the Regional television. At this round table in Belgrade we all agreed that Serbia lingers in a schizophrenic situation. From government representatives, such as the director of Minority Service, Petar Ladjevic, or Djordje Vukadinovic, analyst closely related to the government, we hear that minorities are a sort of threat, not only Bosniaks, but also Albanians and Hungarians. In other words, while official politics sends a message which qualifies minorities as a stability factor, an atmosphere is being created in which minorities are perceived as threatening. This is what I said at the conference in Belgrade. At one point I also said that citizens are ashamed of their politicians, precisely because everyone always asks about the situation in Sanjak, what is going on there, why do you always fight... I said that right now Sanjak lives in peace which looks frightening. Bajro Omeragic accused me of having spat on our MPs, while an NGO which exists only as a name on a piece of paper accused me of being ashamed because I am Bosniak. Sanjak is filled with manipulations, and this is certainly one of the ways. Strings are pulled by large parties from Belgrade. That's why it is important to hear all of you today, both from political parties and from NGOs. Let's hear your message to our local politicians and to politicians from Belgrade and to the foreigners. There has been some rumor that the OSCE will more seriously deal with our area, which is very important. It is important that the OSCE help us here, and to monitor these elections closely.

**Ramiz Crnisanin, Sanjak Intellectual Circle:** Many things are overdramatized in Sanjak. There is no understanding of the concept of multi-party system. Parties fight for power using all means at their disposal. We had some extreme situations here, but I don't link them exclusively to the elections. There is another motive involved. In 1925, when I was born, three men were killed during the elections and about 300 people were eliminated by Pasic and his regime. Without the Bosniaks, Pasic could not form the government, and so the July Constitution was adopted with their help. The regime, however, organized mass killings. It is different now. This doesn't happen now, now we have inter-Bosniak clashes. We cannot change the people. But the leaders are dishonest. I simply can't believe that someone is honest if he says – I wouldn't have

a cup of coffee with him, but I want to talk to him. We are the best example of the fact that minority representation doesn't mean much. I wish we didn't have these representatives, because then they could attack authorities. Whether minority representatives would be good people, democrats, who only care about the interest of citizens, rather than their own – that's up to us. Let's not over-dramatize, nothing spectacular will happen.

**Edija Skrijelj**, Sanjak Democratic Party, candidate): To some extent I agree with Crnisanin that perhaps sometimes it is better not to be represented at all, than to be represented by those who remain silent and vote against our will. People should be educated and explained why the elections are important. Through the elections we choose the people who will advocate our interests. We cannot allow them to go to Belgrade and not know what is happening in Pazar. This is misuse. When we ask them later to do something, they tell us – you have your representatives. The authorities in Belgrade allowed this to happen in Sanjak. They need this situation in order to do their other business. Had we had representatives who thought of their people, the Government wouldn't have done their other businesses so easily. I am an optimist – we must not let Belgrade order us how to live, we must choose our own representatives. There can be no road to Europe if control is to be maintained through creation of clashes. We refuse to be an ornament in the Parliament, to be the object of someone's self-congratulations, we have to take part in it. We need more of these open talks, this is the way to solve problem.

**Alija Halilovic**, Civic Forum: This is a burning issue for our area. I'd start off with the statistical data about the participation of Bosniaks in power structures in Sanjak. Take into consideration the census data from six municipalities, and compare them with election results. Sanjak is still democratically colored. The analysis shows that the Bosniaks always opted for democratic options. We always recognize a democratic candidate and a democratic option. But things were always taken away from us more than given to us. Citizens didn't get anything, only some individuals had personal gain, those linked to the government. The government is not honest with the minorities, they obviously have a problem, not only with Bosniaks, but also with Vlachs, Bulgarians, Albanians, Hungarians, etc. If the regime is prone to favor one particular group, trades with it, then this is a way to deepen the gap among the Bosniaks here. We see that all minorities are torn apart, crumbled – it suits the authorities. Services

or individuals in these services are tasked to break the minority groups. Efforts are often made to prevent the homogenization of minorities, or any kind of agreement within a minority group. The authorities in Belgrade would depend on minorities if the minorities were united. The international community must understand that our government does not want to follow a democratic path toward Europe. We all lose here, especially we who are so deeply divided. There will be no consensus until the regime wants us divided. How will the youth agree on anything when no perspective is offered to them? Democratization must unfold through decentralization and through the acceptance of responsibility. Otherwise, we will never get out of this mud pond.

**Samir Bisevac, Dentist:** I like the talk about the Constitution. After this Constitution has been passed, I am again disappointed in this country. Again we are not equal citizens, no matter how hard we try. The Constitution closes the door on us in this country. Everyone asks me what nationality I am when they hear my name. I can't wait for us to reach that state when the citizens of Serbia would finally understand that we, too, exist. I am glad to see that we are all taking part in the elections, even the Albanians from Presevo. We all expected to move faster toward Europe, but it seems that only individuals are moving closer, by leaving the country, by moving out, because there is no life here. We have the will and the power to exert pressure on Belgrade, all we need is to wake up and be aware – we have been sleeping. The Constitution was adopted by way of fraud and someone should be held accountable. The future authorities will have to understand that we, Bosniaks, are also citizens, and not just “the rest”.

**Edija Skrijelj:** Let me only pick up on the Constitution issue. The Constitution is bad, sure, and one of the priorities should be the change of the Constitution in the new Parliament. Not much different is the situation with the national anthem, the national coat of arms, the flag. The present national anthem drags us back to the past. Why would we hail the king and mention only the Serbian people. Unfortunately, our two representatives did not voice their protest against it. Everyone tells us – well, you had your representatives in the Parliament, why didn't they oppose it? Our children should love the national anthem too, just like we used to love our national anthem in the past. Tears should roll down their cheeks, like they did when we heard “Hej, Sloveni”. Only then will Serbia be a modern European country. I hope this will all change soon.

**Dzemil Divanefendic, Youth Forum of SDP:** I think the whole Constitution should be changed – it's bad throughout. It's the same model we have in Sanjak – the same scenario, each government has its own Bosniaks, its own Albanians. The new Constitution only formalized the current state of affairs and this is problematic. I won't waste my breath on how the Bosniaks behave in the Parliament. I suggest that the text of our national anthem be changed, the music is ok, just like they did in the Soviet Union with their national anthem. The only solution for us is maximal participation of international factors, of European Union, in the elections and overall – in the promotion of European values. Pressure should be exerted on the politicians in Belgrade to give up Garasanin's politic, the Nacertanie, which they still adhere to. Pressure should be exerted on everyone, on the citizens too, to make them take part in the democratic processes. I am happy that military cooperation between Serbia and NATO has begun, this will help. In a few years I expect better situation, with decreased unemployment rate. People do politic here because they have nothing else to do. And so there are many people with strange ideas.

**Redzep Tahirovic, Bosniak Democratic Alliance:** I'm glad to see there are discussions like this one. I am here as a representative of Bosniak people, not the minority. But this did not prevent me from coming. Human rights of Bosniaks are constantly violated in Sanjak. The elections are only one of the factors that violate human rights and disrupt everyday life here. Everywhere in the world the elections are perceived as the expression of popular will, but in Sanjak they are much more than that. People are scared of the elections, because blood is spilled on the streets then, everyone is worried. I am afraid too. The negative things are created in the power centers in Belgrade, in Sanjak they find their marionettes as Bosniak representatives. In my opinion, this Constitution is anti-democratic, anti-civilized and anti-Bosniak. Article 202, which none of the politicians dared speak about publicly, says that rights are not guaranteed to minorities in the event of war. This needs to be said aloud, publicly. When we protested against this article, one of the representatives of local government qualified us as enemies. As long as the non-governmental sector's influence is this small, there will be no move forward in the political parties either. Parties are interest-based organizations – when they need our votes, they are everywhere. As soon as the elections are over, they are gone. The notorious Bajro Omeragic shows up on TV every ten days and is a shame for Bosniaks. There

is this Regional TV which we all subscribe to, but which is the main disruption here. More and more it resembles the RTS from the 1990s. Every program begins with Sulejman Ugljanin's activities. Round tables like this one should be organized in other towns throughout Sanjak, not only in Pazar. In other towns too people want to hear something new, some new voices.

**Munir Poturak**, Sanjak Democratic Party: I am glad to have been invited to this gathering. The status of minorities has changed drastically in this country since 2000. In the 1990s there were severe violations of human rights in Sanjak, the reason why the political changes in 2000 were so important. We heard much about disagreements among Bosniaks, about the relationship of the authorities toward Sanjak, migrations, and the like. I can see that you are worried. On behalf of the SDP I am telling you that wherever we go, every gathering, we tell people to beware of incidents. We are trying to educate people, with the help of non-governmental organizations, we are telling them how to behave in particular inflammatory situation. We are trying to compose multi-national monitoring boards at each polling station. There will be several mobile OSCE's teams and of other institutions as well, which guarantees that everyone wants to see these elections go without incidents.

As for disagreements within the Bosniak community – we often talk about the minimum of national interests which would gather all Bosniaks together. This is relevant in other minorities as well. Albanians have five or six parties, Hungarians too. Serbs are also divided – Serbia is divided into those who follow the retrograde politics and those who want the future. This has good and bad sides. Greater clashes may occur if divisions are insisted on. This is not only our problem, the problem is the system which needs to be changed. As a candidate, I only wish to explain, both to myself and to you, what happens when the politicians go to Belgrade and forget about their home, forget who they are and where they came from. This is when NGOs should jump in and tell people what is happening. The referendum was a big mistake, we all know that it was rigged, but Europe decided not to see the fraud.

**Dragan Popovic**: Let me only briefly abuse the title of this table's host and assume the role of devil's advocate, since the other side is absent. Ms. Skrijelj, you are right when you say that MPs in the current Parliament haven't done much for the citizens – by which I mean Bajro Omeragic and Esad Dzudzevic. But let me also remind you that they had been

elected to the same Parliamentary list of which you are a member today. This is also the list that voted *for* the Constitution: it would have been impossible for the Constitution to be adopted had it not been for your list's votes. This also needs to be discussed – why are you forced to chase after the big parties from Belgrade and beg them to put you on their list? On the past Parliament you had your representatives thanks to a DS' decision to put them on the list. But it may have happened just as well that they remained deputy ministers, in which case the Bosniak minority would not have had a single representative in the Parliament. In other words, in this country it is possible that the largest national minority remain without seats in the highest legislative body. More minorities will now enter the Parliament, but the question remains whether they would vote in line with their MP boards or they will retain autonomy to vote independently.

As for these MP boards which you brought up, I always have this feeling that the two largest parties locally are tightly tied to the politicians in Belgrade – Ugljanin to Kostunica, Ljajic to Tadic. At some point they were all in power, local, republican or federal. And still, my colleagues from NGOs and I have been struggling for three full years for the municipality of Priboj to acknowledge Bosnian language as official. Neither Ugljanin nor Ljajic have been doing this, but NGOs from Belgrade, Pazar and Priboj. Instead of committing themselves to everyday problems, you are forced to chase Ratko Mladic and your representatives to answer one of the most difficult questions in Serbia.

**Munir Poturak**: I think you're confusing something here. You treat Bosniaks as a specially protected species, which does not have the right to do high politics. This means that a Bosniak cannot be a president. If democratic options create the conditions for Serbia to go ahead, we have a chance. Every opportunity should be used. We need to help this democratic option to win, and this is exactly what made us become part of this coalition. No matter how hard we cry and whine, we know that everyone's position is difficult.

**Bisera Sekerajic**, European Movement in Serbia, Novi Pazar: I won't talk about the present situation, which everyone knows. We are part of the so-called Balkan passage. All regimes were involved in total devastation of this region. That's why we need to be as concrete as possible. I'll give two recommendations. The first one is addressed to all political parties and concerns their responsibility. First and foremost, this is about their

campaign. A shift must finally happen, the politicians must start giving realistic promises, more about economy, or the campaign will unfold on the level of mutual accusations and denials. In the case of latter, the electorate will be disappointed and forced to vote for those someone told them to vote.

The second recommendation concerns the international community. I cannot stress this loud enough, we need strong presence of the OSCE monitors. If possible, they should be in all voting stations. Otherwise, the elections will be rigged, as before, The OSCE should be included.

**Zibija Sarenkagic, Cultural Center Damad:** Last night we heard that the status of 80% of Bosniaks has been solved. That, we were told, is the accomplishment of the present Government. Bajro Omeragic said this, a member of the Parliament. The only thing that essentially changed here is that my life is a bit safer, since there are no wars around us anymore. The rest remains the same. I can't stand constant appeals to unity. Democracy must respect the right to be different. What are we to choose from if everyone agrees with everyone else? Of course, it's getting a bit out of control here.

I want to say that there are good non-governmental organizations whose work is not externally commissioned. These NGOs have proved their value and worth through their work. So we don't need Belgrade to tell them what to do. There are no representatives of state institutions at this gathering – we are all non-institutional. There are no operating institutions here, because state institutions operate as part of a fiefdom of political parties. Kostunica clearly told us that he would remain in power forever if we return to the Middle Ages. Furthermore, there is no one representing the interests of the region. They accuse us of having another home, as if we really have a place to go to. We don't have another home, this is our country and I feel it as mine. But when local politicians talk with their colleagues from Belgrade, they simply forget to talk to local Serbs too. Let's try to re-create in local Serbs the affection for Sanjak, which did exist within the Partisan movement, for example. No one is thinking about Sjenica and Nova varos. Roads and highways are being built to link Sanjak with Kraljevo... There are no roads through Sanjak.

The point is that we are regime's hostages, because the politics has become a safe haven for those who have nothing else to do. Or we

have made it a polygon for mutual accusations. There are more than 18 political parties here, but many don't even have an office or a fax machine. The coalition in this region is represented by one party and several official seals. And we keep swallowing it all. We expect the politicians to start working on themselves, to stop acting like Kostunica – sorry, I'm not informed. Well, inform them!

Also, this country's duty is to respect the Charter of youth participation in public life. There will soon be a time when parties will fight for young members. I fully support every form of youth activism, except demonstrations with flags and the like.

The way Belgrade looks at minorities is summarized in what one educated and smart woman said after the elections – it doesn't make much difference. That's a view from Belgrade. And of course, there have to be two Serbias. I always opt for this division. The other, the second Serbia must drag along the whole country.

Finally, what should minorities do in the elections? It is in line with the spirit of democracy for the voters to punish the politicians in the elections. If we sit idle and do not work with our voters for another four years, they will be fooled again. It seems to me that all Bosniaks should go to the polls and let's finally see the fight between SDP and SDA. Or to boycott the elections. Our minority may be left with no support whatsoever. Hungarians are supported by Hungary, Albanians are backed by the OSCE – we are not supported by anyone.



**Round Table  
ALBANIANS AND  
ELECTIONS**

**Bujanovac, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2006**

**Behlul Nasufi, Center for Multi-Cultural Education:** I wish to thank the Youth Initiative for having organized this round table. It is a highly respectable organization and we truly appreciate your efforts. I want to say that the situation in the Presevo Valley is quite complicated presently. There are about 45,000 Albanians in Presevo and Bujanovac. This is not counting Medvedja. If everyone voted, Albanians could count on three seats in the Parliament, or two for sure, but the third too would be possible to get. But, even though a joint list of four Albanian parties had already been registered and signed, two withdrew later and decided to boycott the elections. These were the Democratic Party of Albanians and Junuz Musliu's party. This will diminish our chances in the elections, and makes it realistic to expect one seat in the Parliament. I am not familiar with the reasons for their withdrawal, I guess it's pressure, but I can't be sure from whom. In any case, I believe this was a highly irresponsible decision which will be difficult to explain to the voters or to the international community. How do you explain an outsider that you had a chance to realize your rights, but you've missed it? The way the Government of Serbia is acting is also dangerous – obviously, they have been trying to divide the minorities all along. This is not the case only in Presevo Valley. The same happens in Sanjak and in Vojvodina. Look at national councils – the Hungarian National Council is all Kasa's, while the Bosniak Council belongs wholly to Ugljanin. That's not a good policy. On the other hand, there's this problem which you mentioned, Dragan, concerning the number of signatures. That too is very dangerous, because we can't possibly collect 10,000 signatures.

Another thing that also needs to be changed is the election threshold, which existed in the past, and which basically prevented us from taking part in the elections. This created a habit within the electorate to abstain from the elections. The authorities are largely to blame for this. The CoE reports tell about the affirmative action measures for minorities in Serbia. But it should be stressed that the only measure taken is the abolishment election threshold. Other areas have remained untouched, especially when it comes to the number of signatures needed to compete in the elections. Furthermore, the municipal court in Bujanovac is engaged in a series of obstruction activities. For example, the court verifier refused to come on site because it was St. Nicola's Day. As far as I know, St. Nicola's is not a national holiday. As for incidents, I don't expect any incidents during the elections, especially not like those we saw in Novi Pazar. People may be pressured not to go to the polls, but this is already the case, while we in the phase of collecting signatures.

**Fatmir Hasani, PDD, Stirling Board, Director of elementary school in Bujanovac:** It's true that we could win two seats in the Parliament, the third would be very difficult to get, perhaps only with impossible amount of work. Although the loss of two parties will weaken us, I still believe that we are strong enough. Add all board members, and you'll see that the parties running for the elections are stronger than those favoring the boycott. The greatest problem are actually our people who declare themselves as great patriots, those whose opinions are a bit extreme. It is our duty to prove both to the international community and to the authorities in Serbia that we are willing to positively influence the European integrations and Serbia's joining the European Union. I am quite disappointed that some parties will file a complaint to the Supreme Court of Serbia against RIK's decision and thus try to prevent some minorities from entering the Parliament. Finally, not a single politician, except for Cedomir Jovanovic, has expressed willingness to cooperate with Albanian parties. Also, not a single state institution contacted us about the elections.

**Galip Beqiri, Director of local library in Bujanovac:** Today, instead of negotiating with other Albanian parties, we fight with them. We need this dialogue. But it is clear now that Serbs are not the only ones who have a problem with their patriots. We have the same problem. I am afraid of possible clashes in smaller villages. There will be no problems in Veliki Trnovac or Bujanovac, but anything is possible in smaller villages. At this moment, we cannot collect 10,000 signatures. But I'm not discouraged by this. One must know that in our region it is usually the man, the head of the family, who signs the petition. Add women and younger members of households to 3,000 or 4,000 signatures, and you easily get 14-15,000 votes. This secures one seat in the Parliament, but I believe that we can expect two. I hope that local TV stations will play a positive role in all this. Unfortunately, the television in Presevo is controlled by DPA and is party-driven through and through. This is not the case in Bujanovac. Still, there is one private television in Presevo, so I hope we will manage to reach our voters.

As for signatures, I am seriously concerned about this obstruction coming from the court. I want to stress that there is only one register here and only one court verifier. On top of it, this verifier does not speak Albanian. A few days ago in Veliki Trnovac there was a very long queue in front of the court. Only because the municipal court is so careless.

**Dzahid Ramadani**, Director of RTV Bujanovac: I am Director of the municipal television and I can promise equal treatment of all political parties. Unlike the Presevo television, we won't call for the boycott. I want to stress how much Albanians gained since they won the local power in Bujanovac. Today the municipal administration works excellently, unlike the court, the police or registry which are all under state authority. This is another reason why citizens should vote. It is our civic duty, but also a unique chance for Albanians to vote for Albanians. In any case, abstaining from the elections is not a good option. If we vote, there is some chance for us. If we don't – there's none. We cannot call on the citizens to vote in local elections and abstain from parliamentary elections. That would be a politics of double standards, without any consistent principles. I am sure it would mean a lot to everyone to hear the voice of Albanians in the Serbian Assembly.

**Nehat Aliu**, Chief of Social Service Department in the Municipality of Bujanovac: After many years of boycotting, we decided to finally take part in the elections. I know this hasn't been an easy decision and we are aware of all potential dangers. But we believe this to be the right path. Since we have been taking part in the political scene since 1990, we are well versed and we know how to judge the situation. This is why we decided to participate in the elections this time. We have always advocated for institutional resolution of problems. This finally gives results. I believe this step, our winning Parliamentary seats, to be important for the solution of Albanian problems in Serbia. When we took the power in Bujanovac, we showed that we have no vengeance. On the contrary, we offered to cooperate with everyone. We wish to become part of higher leadership levels, in the Serbian Assembly.

The way the Serbian government acts is also a problem. They were here just recently, led by the Prime Minister, to open a factory. No one remembered to visit the local self-governance structures. The Government communicates exclusively with local Serbs. Albanians are avoided. That's not a good politics. The special military police forces have been around for a while, just like during the Operation Saber. They patrol the streets, armed and dressed in uniforms. This brings some discomfort among citizens. It was clear to us already when the new Constitution was being passed that no one would ask our opinion.

**Muhamed Jasari**, history teacher and education servant: Unfortunately, not much has changed over the years. We still strongly oppose any good

project. Had it not been for the international community, we wouldn't have had this much right. I am happy to see multi-lingual titles, because the right to use native language leads to the respect of other minority rights as well. Serbia is about to take a big test today. Among other things, the test concerns the number of signatures required for the election list. If Serbia fails this time, it will be given some very mad points. They can't let that happen, I think. But if it does happen, the parties advocating the boycott will win another argument in their favor.



**Round Table**  
**ROMA AND ELECTIONS**  
**Nis, December 21<sup>st</sup> 2006.**

**Osman Balic, Union of Roma from Serbia, Vice President:** First off, let me thank you for having noted that we need this kind of gathering, and for your willingness to help. In today's Serbia all parties foster autism when it comes to Roma. Both the government and the opposition are characterized by empty promises. The result of their politics is that as of January 1<sup>st</sup> we need visas for Bulgaria. Had it not been for Cedomir Jovanovic, political death would have overshadowed the scene. These elections are characteristic because national minorities will take part in them. This is what gives them weight. We know that minority participation in power-structures is one of the tools to measure the level of country's democratization. After these elections we are likely to have a large number of minorities in the Parliament. This means that they would be given the opportunity to assume the responsibility which they have been throwing on others. I sincerely hope that the Supreme Court of Serbia will not annul RIK's decision. I am fully aware that the decision is not legal, but it is a chance for the minorities to win their parliamentary seats. Paradoxically, the rule of law begins with minorities and their place in the Parliament.

In these elections, Roma are gathered in two political parties – the Roma Party and the Union of Roma from Serbia. These are our resources at the moment. Their seats in the Parliament would enable the implementation of two important documents: Poverty Reduction Strategy and action plans of the Decade of Roma. Poverty Reduction Strategy is a serious strategic document which has not been implemented so far. It lacks operational elaboration. It bears great importance for the Roma. This document was the reason why I had joined a national party once. I was in the Civic Alliance of Serbia and in the Democratic Party, but my expectations were let down. The question of Roma is not a political, but an ethnical problem. Roma are in a phase of biological extinction. Of 100 Roma, only one lives long enough to see his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is an extraordinary piece of information in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am tired of listening to all those stories about how it is impossible to introduce sewage system in this place or other, or how it is impossible to pave the road with asphalt.

For example, the greatest problem in Nis today are rigs, those horse-drawn carts. Nothing else is a problem! We need to clear the streets of all the people whose survival hinges on collecting the secondary resources... They are starving, but the police are there to neatly fine them. There are cases where democratic parties buy off the Roma votes

for 500 dinars. This happened recently in Leskovac, and it will happen in these elections too, I am sure of it. Luckily, one of the most important Serbian intellectuals, Rajko Djuric, came back to Serbia and decided to lead the Union of Roma from Serbia. This gives us hope that we will have at least one MP.

**Aladin Jumerovic, Association Amaro Drom:** We lost one historical opportunity for the Roma and other minorities to realize their constitutionally guaranteed right to have seats in the Parliament. This way, everything remains open. It is clear that the majority is afraid of minorities. Roma are currently most endangered in Serbia. Official records give a figure of 105,000 Roma in Serbia. It is of course clear that the number is bigger. Here in the Nis region there is about 40-50,000 Roma. But census data were written down in pencil! People were told that national affiliation was unimportant, that it doesn't need to be recorded. Political parties which gather majority population don't care about minorities. I believe that only minorities can fight for minority rights. Democratic parties promised us a lot, but we didn't see any of that. They fooled us every time. In Ovcepoljska Street, where Roma live, the authorities promised sewage system and pavement. After a while they totally forgot about it. The Red Star settlement here in Nis has been of temporary nature for the past 50 years, only because someone once decided to register it as temporary. There is no certainty, although there are big and valuable houses there. Osman rightly pointed out that nothing has been done with Poverty Reduction Strategy. One of the provisions says that minorities must be present in municipal structures. In reality, these are just words. No one cares about changing things. I don't think that election turnout will be over 40%.

**Rade Vuckovic, RTV Belami, Roma Program Director:** Greetings to everyone. You have good ideas, but it's pity that we aren't on TV now... That's the place to discuss the Roma problems. That's the way to make everyone aware of the nature of these problems. That's the way for ordinary people to be heard. I hope Roma parties will manage to do something for ordinary people. The big parties only brought us disappointment. It doesn't matter who – what matters is that these people should be Roma. Only Roma can help Roma.

**Hasan Nucic, "Sait Balić", Association of Roma:** I have been around for 40 years, I am well familiar with the social status of Roma. The main problem is that freedom is not guaranteed to Roma in Serbia. If

something happen to a Hungarian, Hungary finds out. Other minorities are in a similar position. A Rom has no one to back him up. We are left to ourselves. “Gipisies, get out!” was sprayed over the fortress and it remained for months. No one cared. In the end, we decided not to make a fuss about it – first and foremost, because we are peaceful and we don’t want any conflicts. If we can sit around a table together, drink and chat, then we can do politics together too, and it in the Parliament together. We are people and a people, like everyone else. Roma have always sided with Serbs, we fought for Serbia. One of the ministers was a Rom, Damjanovic, from the SPS. He was a shame for all of us. People like that should represent us never again.

**Dalibor Tanic**, student of journalism: It is well known, since the introduction of multi-party system, that the Roma electorate was only a voting machinery. I personally saw an official in Zitoradja buy off the votes of Roma, my neighbors. Finally there is the Union of Roma from Serbia and Professor Rajko Djuric is with us. I believe they can help Roma in the future. My generation is indifferent, not interested in politics, they never vote. We need to work hard to change this. People must be educated about elections and about their importance. They need to be explained how important the elections and every vote are. I hope this is finally an opportunity for young Roma to gather, intellectuals, and do something for their community. I am 100% willing to take part in this and help the Union of Roma from Serbia as much as I can.

**Milan Stefanovic**, CESID and Protecta: I want to welcome YIHR’s efforts in this area. Let me use this chance to present the work of the two organizations I work for. CESID is engaged in a large-scale election campaign design to motivate as many citizens as possible to go to the polls. In twelve towns across Serbia we will be conducting a special campaign to include the minorities, especially the Roma, in the election process. One of the selection criteria was the existence of municipal coordinators of Roma-related issues. This has been done at OSCE’s recommendation, who is also supporting the whole program. The program focuses on education of Roma, on their being registered in election lists, while forty people will take part in CESID’s election control seminars and will eventually be our election monitors.

The project will be implemented within the de-centralization coalition. This is not only about the transference of authority from national to local power-level, but also from one-national to multi-national

governance. I believe this is very important. It is very sad that Roma will win their parliamentary seats by way of a violation of the law, by which I am referring to RIK's *de facto* illegal decision. This is conflict of two interests: the rule of law and the interest of Roma to enter the Parliament. I am happy to see them in, but I am just as sad to see that it happens this way.