

REALIZATION OF THE MINORITY AUTONOMY IN SERBIA

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The law passed in August, 2009 (Law on National Councils of National Minorities) made possible for the minorities living in Serbia the election of their national councils differently from the previous practices, directly, in a system of multiple nomination. Basic condition of this was the creation of the separate registers of certain minorities. The period between 11 November, 2009 and 11 March, 2010 was spent under the aegis of the creation of these registers, after which the competent Ministry of Human and Minority Rights proclaimed in which minorities the creation of registers was successful, and in which not. In May 2010, the election campaign had already started, and later, on the 6 June were held the elections. In Serbia all together 16 national minority elected their own national council directly, and 3 went on choosing indirectly, so in the system of electors. Since then, with the exception of one, all the national councils have been formed and have started functioning. The Hungarian National Council was formed through direct elections as well, its composition and institutional structure has gone through a significant transformation comparing to the previous composition and systemic construction.

Key words: Serbia, minority, autonomy, National Council of Hungary

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ELECTORAL PREPARATIONS

Following that on 11 March, 2010, the four-month period had ended, which was available for certain minorities of Serbia to form their registers of voters, started their processing. According to the relevant dispositions of the law passed in August 2009 (Law on National Councils of National Minorities) only the national minorities can elect directly their own national councils, in case of which „until the day of the declaration of elections the voters of the national minority have recorded 50% more - of the total number reduced by 20% - of those who belong to the national minority.”¹ Finally 16 registers of the national minorities met the engagements of this validity threshold. These were the Albanian, Ashkali, Bosniak, Bulgarian, Bunjevac, Vlach, Greek, Egyptian, Hungarian, German, Roma, Rumanian, Rusyn, Slovakian, Ukrainian and Czech national minorities, while in case of 3 national minorities (Macedonian, Slovenian and Croatian) the creation of registers finished without avail, so these kept on voting indirectly, through electors, their own national councils.

The electoral lists intending to enter the elections could launch their campaign in May 2010 among their potential voters. According to the law, only lists could compete with each other in the elections of national councils, individuals could not. It was commanded by law as well who and which organisations could set up a list and which could not. (71st segment: „List making nominator, according to the conditions of this present law, can be the group or organisation of voting citizens recorded in the separate register of voters of determined minorities, group of citizens and the political organisation of national minorities”) That is to say, the political organisations, parties belonging to other minorities and majority could not set up a list, only those who belong to the certain minority. At the same time, all the parties could form a group of citizens or a nongovernmental organisation in which they could suggest a militant of the party, and many of them took the advantage of this possibility.

In the elections for the mandates of the National Council of Hungary finally 5 lists were set out. According to the order indicated on the voting paper the lists were the following:

1. *Hungarian Union* (head of list dr. Tamás Korhecz, supporting party a *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*)

¹ The full text of the law in Hungarian can be downloaded from the website of the Hungarian National Council: www.mnt.org.rs

2. *Towards Europe as a Hungarian of Vojvodina* (head of list dr. Attila Csengeri, supporting party: *Democratic Party*)
3. *Hungarian Hope Movement* (head of list Bálint László)
4. *Hungarian League* (head of list dr. Tibor Murényi , supporting party: *League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina*)
5. *Handshake for the Hungarians* (head of list László Rácz Szabó, supporting party: *Hungarian Civic Union*)

Among all the national minorities living in Serbia the Hungarian was the largest, and this was manifested in the number of people put down on the register of voters. In spite of this, direct proportion cannot be detected among the headcounts of the certain national minorities and the number of lists set out in the elections. In many cases it is observable, that in the minorities with lower headcounts the political distribution is higher than in case of the minorities with higher headcounts. The ratio between the number of the people put down on the register and the lists launched on the elections is shown by the following schedule:²

<i>National minority</i>	<i>Number of people put down</i>	<i>Number of electoral lists</i>
Albanian	26927	2
Ashkali	1148	3
Bosniak	96656	3
Bulgarian	13382	7
Bunjevac	8271	7
Vlach	28081	9
Greek	876	2
Egyptian	1549	2
Hungarian	138665	5
German	2203	2
Roma	56076	10
Rumanian	17417	6
Rusyn	8562	6
Slovakian	32657	5
Ukranian	2729	7
Czech	1135	1
TOTAL	436334	

ELECTIONS: 6 June, 2010

The elections, according to the previous announcements, were held on 6 June, 2010 in case of all the 19 national councils, and they were successful in case of 18. Only the National Council of Macedonia could not be elected that day, because in the general assembly in Pančevo did not participate the necessary number of electors dictated by the law. The election of the National Council of Macedonia was successful finally for the third time, so on 29 August, in the general assembly also held in Pančevo.³ The official results of the other two elections of national councils held in electoral system were already published by the ministry on the day of the elections, 6 June. According to this, the electoral assembly held in Belgrade in case of the National Council of Slovenia was also successful, where a council of 15 members were elected, as well as the assembly held in Subotica, where the electors chose the National Croatian Council with 29 members.

In case of the direct elections, the Central Election Commission decided by its order passed on 13 May, 2010 over the method and place of the opening of the voting places. Accordingly, the voters belonging to the certain minorities could cast their ballot all together in 858 voting places. The elections were held without any problem, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights published the official results on 9 June on their website. According to the published data, from in total 436 334 registered voters 237 792 were present at the

² The data is available on the website exposing the results of the elections, sustained by the ministry of human rights and minority affairs: <http://izbori.ljudskaprava.gov.rs>

³ The news of the press were published on the 29th August by the Pančevo Radio and Television: www.rtvpancevo.rs

urns on 6 June, which means a 54, 5% ratio of participation. The number of valid votes was 235195, while the number of invalid votes was 2508.

The ratio of participation in reducing order is demonstrated by the following schedule:

<i>National minority</i>	<i>Ratio of participation</i>
Greek	77,05%
Bulgarian	66,04%
German	63,73%
Ukranian	60,72%
Bosniak	56,46%
Albanian	56,31%
Rusyn	56,07%
Hungarian	55,46%
Roma	54,95%
Rumanian	54,45%
Slovakian	46,81%
Vlach	46,62%
Czech	46,52%
Egyptian	44,93%
Bunjevac	41,52%
Ashkali	38,85%
AVERAGE	54,50%

In consequence of the electoral results, most of the national councils became heterogeneous, so the certain mandates are shared at least among the representatives of two lists. In case of the direct elections, the Czech National Council, while in the electoral votes the Macedonian National Council were the only exceptions- in both cases the representatives of the list got most of the mandates.⁴

Since then, all the national councils have held their statutory meeting and started their work – with one exception.

THE BOSNIAK NATIONAL COUNCIL

The election of the council of the Bosniak national minority was successful on 6 June, however, the Council has not formed since then. Into the council of 35 members, the representatives of three lists got in: the Bosniak Cultural Community got 17 mandates, the Bosniak List got 13, the list named Bosniak Revival got 5 representative seats. Although the Bosniak Cultural Community led by Muamer Zukorlić mufti formed the national council on the 7th July – since two members of the list of Bosniak Revival joined them -, according to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights the séance was irregular because two thirds of the representatives were not present at the statutory meeting. The latest discussion in relation to this with the participation of the mission of Belgrade of the EBESZ the representatives of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights agreed with the leaders of the three Bosniak lists that they would continue their discussions over the formation of the Bosniak national council in December.⁵

THE NEW HNC

The competition for the mandates of the Hungarian National Council brought the sweeping victory of the Hungarian Union participating with the number 1. In total 138 665 people put down on the separate Hungarian register of voters, out of which 76903 people gave in their votes on 6 June, which means a 55, 46% ratio of participation.

⁴ The data is available on the website exposing the results of the elections: <http://izbori.ljudskaprava.gov.rs>

⁵ The question of the Bosniak National Council has still not been solved. According to the latest press news, Svetozar Čiplić, minister of human rights and minority affairs proclaimed the new elections of national councils for the day 17 April, 2011 in case of the national Bosniak community, since it was not formed legally until the date determined by law, so until 6 December, 2010. At the same time, dr. Mevlud Dudić, president of the Bosniak National Council, formed by the representatives of the Bosniak Cultural Community but not recognised by the ministry, announced according to press news: “they are not interested in these elections and they do not even recognise them”.

The certain lists got the following number of votes and the corresponding mandates:

LIST	<i>Votes obtained</i>	<i>Number of seats</i>
Hungarian Union	58900	28
Towards Europe as a Hungarian of Vojvodina	10176	4
Hungarian Hope Movement	2114	1
Hungarian League	2528	1
Handshake for the Hungarians	2569	1

The newly formed Hungarian National Council held their statutory meeting on 30 June in the saloon of the city hall of Subotica, which elected the president of the council in person of dr. Tamás Korhecz.

The Hungarian National Council both in composition, organisational structure, in functioning has gone through significant changes. It passed a new order of affairs and new basic regulation related to its own functioning, this last one completely transforms the structural construction of the Council. The Committee of Management was ceased (the members of which according to the previous practice were doing their job voluntarily) and instead an institution of civil service was formed, where paid officials were working in the area that they were in charge of. The number of constant committees was transformed and reduced as well. The Hungarian National Council held their séances with monthly frequency, thus in 2010 they held six discussions. During these countless resolutions were carried out and decisions accepted. Among these, the most important ones are:

- accepted a strategy of improvement of education for the period between 2010-216,
- accepted a suggestion about the opening of Hungarian faculties for less than 15 students,
- determined the schedule of institutions with highlighted importance in viewpoint of the conservation of the Hungarian cultural identity, so all together pointed out such 37 institutions in the direction of which soon the members elected by the corporation are going to participate
- determined the important Hungarian cultural and artistic awards, official and amateur events, and official and amateur register of regional and village events of Vojvodina, which got special seats in the cultural strategy coming out
- took on co-founder rights in case of Pannonia Radio and Television,
- accepted a clause concerning the establishment of the Hungarian National Theatre of Vojvodina,
- launched a school bus programme from September in the area of Subotica town, the aim of which is the insurance of the possibility of studying in mother language in case of those first-year students close to the home of whom there is not going to be available Hungarian faculty,
- carried out a scholarship-programme as one of the most significant innovations for the years 2010/2011 which can be received by those young students who finished their primary and secondary educations in Hungarian language and were accepted in a Serbian university.

AFTERWORD

The negative consequences of the global financial crisis affected Serbia as well. Following the 3% reduction of the GDP in 2009, in 2010 the social gross product increased by 1%, the indebtedness abroad is about 24 billions of Euros, the unemployment rate is valued to be 20%, and the process of joining the European Union is going drawlingly. On the other hand - or exactly because of this -, the law passed in 2009 on National Councils of National Minorities meant a new, significant advance in the field of minority defence, the elements of which could serve as models for other countries in Southeast European, but in European level too. We can find several examples in many European countries for separate register and the direct minority elections, and the municipality corporations elected this way possess certain spheres of action everywhere, however the Serbian solution created such a combination of these two political elements that creates the legal base of personal autonomy, thus gives the possibility of conserving their cultural identity for all the national minorities. The experience during that half year passed since the elections of the national councils however shows that only the Hungarian national community could take the advantage of this possibility yet. Definitely due to the organisation and numeric data, the Hungarian community systematically fills in that territory of life which was created by the new law, while in the rest of the national councils yet could not be experimented any significant change comparing to the period before the pass of the law.

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Thank you for your kind collaboration. *Editor-in-Chief*