

ETHNIC SELF-GOVERNANCE IN SERBIA

The First Two Years of the National Minority Councils

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Abstract

The 2009 Law on National Councils of National Minorities (LNCNM) created a new system of self-governance for ethnic minorities, over one-sixth of the population, in the Republic of Serbia.

The law establishes the legal framework for and empowers national minority councils (NMCs) to legitimately represent members of their respective minorities in matters of culture, education, the media, and official use of language, as pertaining to each minority. The NMCs can create institutions, organizations, and for-profit companies to promote their interests. Rights so granted vis-à-vis state organs are only consultative in nature, but still significant enough to be considered a prototype of ethnic cultural autonomy. The councils receive budgetary funds for their work but can generate their own income and receive aid from foreign and international sources as well.

The implementation, immediate consequences, and conflicts related to the LNCNM have a broad impact on ethnic politics in Serbia: they help determine how national minorities organize themselves to preserve their identity, what kind of relationships they develop, and how they relate to the Serbian state. This paper studies the precursors of the law and its implementation, the results and difficulties of the national minority councils, and suggests further research.

Keywords: cultural autonomy, ethnic self-governance, national minorities, Serbia

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Introduction

It might seem to be too early to study a new set of institutions not even two years old, created by legislative action of the Serbian Parliament on August 31, 2009, based on short previous experience. But we are talking about one sixth of the population in a newly-sovereign nation, a country that had recently been involved in severe political struggles and civil wars based on inter-ethnic conflict. Serbia and the several wider polities it had been part of between 1918 and 2006 have experimented with numerous divergent systems of minority institutions – and the lack thereof –, so that members of its national minorities and ethnic groups have a long and patchy, if not painful and only periodically happier, memory of treatment by various majorities.

The country's non-Serb ethnic groups represent over 17% of a total population of 7.5 million:¹ 3.9% Hungarians, 1.8% Bosniaks, 1.4% Roma, and nearly 10% of two dozen other ethnicities, according to the 2002 census.² Many ethnic groups have systematically suffered close to ten percent decrease in population

* This paper was presented at the *2012 World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities* in April 2012, held at *Columbia University*, New York.

¹ All Serbian statistics in this paper are treated without data from Kosovo (the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohia as the Serbian Government calls it). Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from the Republic of Serbia on February 17, 2008. As of March 20, 2012, it is recognized by 89 countries including 22 of the 27 member states of the European Union, Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, and others.

² See Appendix A for complete ethnic breakdown. As of March 20, 2012, there are no official data available on Serbia's ethnic structure from the October 2011 census. This is an unexplained oddity since many other results of the most recent census have long been made public.

over the past several census cycles. Although the Serb majority is also plagued by negative demographics, such decimation is existentially much more threatening to minorities. Therefore it is critical that the consequences of any new social-political-legal arrangement be analyzed as early as possible – and the policies in question adjusted, if necessary. There are several research projects underway both inside Serbia and internationally whose aim it is to examine the results of the establishment of national minority councils, but very few of them have actually published comprehensive findings to date.

Several foreign entities are monitoring the status of national minority rights including the results of the LNCNM. TransConflict's project,³ financed by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is limited to the experiences of the Albanian and Bosniak National Minority Councils and focuses on feeling thermometers, awareness campaigns, and capacity development. The German Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung's report⁴ had been completed before the LNCNM was enacted. The same holds true for the report "Ethnic Minorities in Serbia: An Overview"⁵ prepared by the Serbia Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Domestic analyses are not much more numerous or up to date, either. Some of the larger research projects that have recently sought out representatives of national councils to participate in their surveys are run by the Forum for Ethnic Relations (Belgrade) and the Center for Regionalism (Novi Sad). Their findings are, however, not yet publicly available.

Coordination of the work of national councils was transferred from the former federal, now defunct, Ministry of National and Ethnic Minority Communities to the Serbian Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, which was, in turn, recently merged into a new Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration, and Local Self-governance. Inspecting their websites shows that some resources, documents, reports, and analyses might have been scattered and lost in the process, or are temporarily unavailable online.

The only assessment available, prepared by a state organ in Serbia, is a 2011 report by the Ombudsman of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, entitled "Two Years of Implementation of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities."⁶ While most of its content merely compiles data and examples submitted by ten Vojvodina-based national councils, it does develop several critical questions about the system of national minority institutions, including a fundamental one, "whether all national minorities that have elected their national councils truly have the need for full minority self-governance as guaranteed by law."

The findings of this paper are based on examining various sources: (i) responses to a questionnaire⁷ sent to all 20 national councils in Serbia;⁸ (ii) analysis of primary sources including legal texts, program documents, election results, and reports by state organs; (iii) analysis of published views on conflicts and debates related to the merits of the LNCNM and minority self-governance in general; and (iv) informal interviews with leaders of national councils past and present. The paper aims to understand what the first experiences and fundamental conflicts are and to record and raise important questions about the present and future of national minority councils in Serbia.

As will be shown, many national minorities embraced the LNCNM and the opportunities created by its provisions. They organized and campaigned to register minority voters, elected national councils, and started activities projected by law. In doing so, they accumulated considerable experience, accomplished some of what they had planned to do, and encountered predictable and unexpected difficulties of financial, organizational, and other nature. Contacts and collaboration between national councils, on one hand, and state and municipal organs of Serbia, on the other, have been mostly positive except in a few cases in which fundamental disagreements arose about critical approaches to the issues at hand or about decisions made by state organs. National councils have sued and have been sued over divergent matters, and such lawsuits, including those that made it to Serbia's Constitutional Court, have been settled mostly to the satisfaction of the councils.

Several foreign governments have offered and provided financial help to enable or enrich the activities of the national councils representing their ethnic kin in Serbia. Hungary and Romania even used their European Union member status to influence Serbian legislation regarding matters related to their respective ethnic kin

³ "National Minority Councils in Serbia" <www.transconflict.com/programmes/institutions/nmc-serbia> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

⁴ Gojkovic, Nevena, "System of Minorities' Protection in Serbia" <www.kas.de/upload/auslandshomepages/serbien/Gojkovic_en.pdf> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

⁵ See at <www.osce.org/serbia/30908> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

⁶ See the report at <www.ombudsmanapv.org/omb/images/stories/dokumenti/istrazivanja/publikacije/Izvestaj-dve%20godine%20primene%20Zakona%20o%20nac.savetima.pdf> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

⁷ See Appendix C for the English translation of the survey originally administered in Serbian.

⁸ For a complete list of these councils, see Appendix B.

there. Despite all of this, there is no completely unresolved, severe conflict stemming from such international contacts and disputes – with the exception of the issues related to Serbia’s well-known objection to Kosovo’s statehood. This indicates a certain level of willingness to promote harmonious or, at least, non-confrontational coexistence by the various actors, Serbian and foreign.

Yet, there are ongoing challenges to the nature of the new institutions, including their rights and responsibilities and the electoral system that shapes them. In the case of several minorities, most notably among ethnic Hungarians in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, hard political battles are fought not so much between representatives of that minority, on one hand, and of the Serb majority in Parliament, on the other, but among the leading ethnic political party and four others of the same minority. The main points of contention are the level of rights to be gained and the nature of the electoral system by which the national councils are elected.

Some smaller minorities experienced difficulties electing and/or constituting their national councils; others got entangled in the political struggle among their ethnic organizations attempting to control the process or the nascent institutions. Some observers also point to the problem of the relatively lucrative nature of the so-called ethno-business, the sometimes vague and/or covert system of financing ethnic activities that fuels corruption in minority politics. I will visit all of these topics below.

Finally, it might seem to be too early to offer conclusions on the potential general success of the Serbian system of ethnic cultural autonomy. Several councils, especially the ones representing better organized national minorities, appear to be already successful, while others have difficulties fulfilling even their basic responsibilities. One often expressed dilemma is whether this uniform system of institutions equally suits all different “colors” and sizes, types and affinities of national minorities. It boils down to whether the institutions established based on the 2009 legislation and the level of rights and responsibilities delegated to them can create an atmosphere in which members of national minorities are, or can be, satisfied with their status in Serbia. While the jury is clearly out on many of these questions, this paper attempts to establish a baseline for future research on the results of the new institutions.

Terminology

I use the term *national minority* without the intention of debating its different definitions and connotations versus those of *ethnic minority* or any other similar term. For the purpose of this paper, it is not necessary to enter theoretical debate.⁹ This is simply the most frequent English translation of the Serbian expression *nacionalna manjina*, which is itself relatively new in the country.

Political and legal terminology of the former Yugoslavia (1945–1991) exclusively used the term *nationality* (*narodnost*, in Serbian) for minorities, in parallel with *nation* (*narod*, in Serbian) used for the South Slavic peoples of the now-defunct federation, perhaps to lend an aura of added dignity and avoid the potentially negative connotations of *minority*.¹⁰ Interestingly, the same term had been in official use in the Kingdom of Hungary under Habsburg rule between, roughly, 1790 and 1918.¹¹ In the era of Slobodan Milošević (1989–2000), usage was mixed, but as the term *national minority* prevailed in the newly democratic Eastern European countries after 1989, Serbia followed suit and started using this term for all non-Serb ethnic groups – except for those who declare themselves Montenegrins or Yugoslavs. (These two groups did not request to establish their national councils.)

In the Serbian title of the law (*Zakon o nacionalnim savetima nacionalnih manjina*), the word *national* appears twice: this redundancy might have been deemed necessary to emphasize the ethnic nature of the institutions and to distinguish ethnic minorities from all other types of minorities. The original title uses the plural form of both *minorities* and their *councils*, which is in accordance with the spirit of the Serbian language. But it is clear that the legislature intended to establish one national council for each national minority.

Article 1 of the LNCNM introduces a shorter term for the national councils of national minorities and thereafter refers to them as *national councils*. English translations, however, frequently deviate from that and use the less compact but, perhaps, more revealing term of *national minority councils* (NMCs). In this paper, whenever an abbreviation feels more practical, I use NMC, but other, spelled-out versions, except the complete long form, are not completely abandoned, either.

⁹ For a classic treatment on “ethnic” and “national,” see, for example, Smith, 1986.

¹⁰ Várady, 1995, pp. 159–60.

¹¹ Bindorffer, 2011, p. 37.

Precursors, Parliamentary, and Non-parliamentary Struggles

Even though the LNCNM established the national councils without much prior legal precedent in Serbia, there had been some precursors of this legislative construct and several forerunners of the institutional arrangements that directly led to the establishment of the new forms of ethnic self-governance.

When in late 2000 the Serbian state (then called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, FRY, comprising of the former Yugoslav federal units of Serbia, with Vojvodina and Kosovo, and Montenegro) finally got rid of Milošević's rule, most organized minority forces marched with the victorious Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), and some of them even played a leading role in that struggle. With the war decade over, it was clear that the status and protection of national minorities would come to the agenda and needed to be rethought and adequately regulated. But minority self-governance still took second, if not third, order of importance behind the aspirations of Montenegro and Kosovo for self-determination.

While the largest national minority in Serbia at that time, the Albanians of Kosovo, had stopped requesting autonomy and demanded nothing short of independence, the second largest ethnic community, the Hungarians,¹² had been fighting for multilevel ethnic autonomy with a detailed practical and theoretical program since 1994, part of which already resembled the future institution of national councils.

In fact, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (AVH) had set up its own Provisional Hungarian National Council (PHNC) as a self-initiative back in August 1999, more than a year before Milošević lost power in the September 2000 presidential elections. That original body, without real legal basis or jurisdiction, served as a model for later legislative efforts.

The February 2002 Law on Protection of Rights and Liberties of National Minorities (LPRLNM) contained the first legal mention of national councils. Since that law did not provide for detailed status, the first non-provisional national councils between 2002 and 2010 (created, first, by Hungarians, then Croats of Vojvodina, later followed by 13 other minorities) were based on regulation from an executive order by the then-Ministry of National and Ethnic Minority Communities of the FRY (later, State Union of Serbia and Montenegro). All elected representatives of each minority (in the federal, republican, provincial, and municipal assemblies) as well as representatives of their churches, civil organizations, and nominees of groups of at least one hundred citizens formed an electoral assembly, which in turn elected members of the national council of that minority.

The first major legal challenge came right after the LPRLNM passed – and from an unexpected corner. It was not attacked by any majority political entity that opposed advances in minority representation but by one of the ethnic Hungarian parties and its civil-sphere and private allies questioning the constitutionality of the electoral system for the election of national councils. The Constitutional Court dismissed the challenge as unfounded.¹³

National councils had very limited authority based on the 2002 law but started to use their scarce powers nevertheless. Some of the more significant decisions made by the Hungarian National Council (HNC), for example, were later backed up by the Vojvodina provincial parliament and thus turned into legislative acts:

- The HNC created a list of Hungarian toponyms for cities, towns, and villages where ethnic Hungarians live. The ethnic names were later accepted and are now in official use. This is significant since it settled an issue of frequent conflict.
- It took over the founding rights (legal ownership) of Hungarian media organizations whose founder had been the provincial parliament.
- It helped establish the new Hungarian Teachers College in Subotica as part of the University of Novi Sad with Hungarian as exclusive language of instruction (a first in Serbia) as well as two magnet high schools, one for mathematics and natural sciences, and the other for the humanities.
- It created several foundations to pursue Hungarian research and other ethnic interests.

Since the intention after 2002 was to pass a new law specifically on national councils, the HNC did not want to, and probably would not have been able to, far overstep its original, limited authority by developing new practices beyond the law. Instead, it focused on pushing the legislative process and worked to help write

¹² Ethnic Hungarian political activity in Serbia was mostly led by the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (AVH, or VMSZ in Hungarian), a parliamentary party and a member of the governing coalition in the 2000–2003 and 2008–2012 election cycles.

¹³ For details of the conflict and the case before the Federal Constitutional Court, see Korhecz, 2010, pp. 62–75.

and promote the new bill. That effort, however, took seven years, and several times during that period it was on the brink of complete failure. In particular, the government of Vojislav Koštunica (2003—2008) showed no real interest in creating powerful minority institutions. Once Boris Tadić's Democratic Party formed the new government in 2008, legislative work could resume in earnest, since the AVH was now part of the parliamentary majority.

It still took several more months to move the LNCNM through the Serbian Parliament from draft bill to law. One must note that during the same period, the Serbian Parliament refused even to consider Vojvodina's Basic Law¹⁴ adopted by overwhelming majority in the provincial assembly.¹⁵ And then, right before the final vote, several small ethnic non-parliamentary parties and NGOs called again for the rejection of the bill because of the consultative nature, perceived "lack of strength," and general approach to the electoral system of the proposed national councils. Since opposing arguments were not entirely without merit, let us briefly touch on some of the major objections:

The national councils are weak. This criticism certainly has some basis in that the national councils have no legislative or taxing powers and can, based on the legal text, only "suggest," "propose," "recommend," or "give an opinion" to state organs of all levels in the fields of education, culture, public-service media, and use of language. Opponents are right in that the NMCs lack legislative (rule-making) authority. The law itself prescribes minute details of the election and modes of operation of the councils, and the minister in charge of regulating national minority affairs can call elections or even dissolve a national council, albeit for very specific reasons of inactivity or for disregarding rules.

Minority leaders fighting *for* the legislation, however, were well aware that the bill would not give them everything they wanted and certainly nothing even close to full ethnic autonomy. But they were convinced that this was the maximum they could achieve at the time, and that defeating their own bill would have meant another long delay, perhaps catastrophic, in securing the rights and means to gain impact on the most important issues critical for the continued existence of some ethnic communities. (Those were the minorities that had ethnic kin nation-states close by and attractive enough for immigration – like Croatia, Hungary, or Romania.)¹⁶ Thus, a rational stance prevailed: demands by out-of-parliament minority organizations for striking down the bill were rejected, and the LNCNM was enacted.

Voter registration. This aspect of the electoral system was challenged by opponents of the bill quoting several issues related to who gets to vote for members of national councils; who creates and maintains the special, national-minority voter lists; and what those lists are based on: state *fiat*, name analysis, or voluntary registration?

Opponents of the bill *demand*ed that state organs utilize existing general voter lists and determine who belongs to which national minority – as opposed to the drafted (and later, adopted) solution that called for creating separate, voluntary, opt-in national minority voter lists based on popular registration. Separate lists, once created, were to be maintained by appropriate state organs that already handle general voter lists.

Opponents even expressed doubt that minority organizations and parties "could be trusted" to conduct fair and honest registration. But their idea of "name analysis" of existing registries would have also run into difficulties. Any number of citizens may have completely "Serbian-sounding" names (especially since, for decades except between 1974 and 1990, Serbianization of personal names was an almost unchallengeable practice) yet would declare themselves, if fairly asked, members of one national minority or another. The reverse is also possible: there were "prominent" members of Milošević's most trusted circle who bragged about their "ethnic background" yet never felt or acted as a member of any minority, had no ties to any, and spoke no language other than Serbian (including his one-time chief of customs – who was after the fall of the Milošević regime indicted and convicted of major embezzlement).

As passed, the LNCNM retained the original solution whereby voter registration is conducted by minority organizations, registration lists so gathered are then turned over to and verified by state organs, official lists

¹⁴ The Statute of the Autonomous Province, in fact, incorporates constitutional principles, but the word *Constitution* – previously in use for both Vojvodina and Kosovo – had to be avoided at all costs, due to Serbian fears of Vojvodina's (mostly imagined) "secessionist tendencies."

¹⁵ This demonstrates two tendencies: the centralizing nature of Serbian politics and the fact that national minorities can play a much more significant role in Vojvodina than in the national parliament.

¹⁶ Sensing continuous challenge to their ethnic identity on top of lacking local economic opportunity and war conditions, members of those minorities had already been leaving Serbia in significant numbers since the early 1990s. This trend slowed down after the democratization of the country in 2000, but national minority leaders continually expressed fears of its renewal if ethnic institutions cannot be established or controlled locally.

are maintained by the Central Election Commission, and election notices are mailed by those state organs to voters who had voluntarily signed up.

Despite all criticism, the need for new, enabling, and binding legal arrangements proved to be too important to reject the entire bill because of its real or imagined deficiencies. The LNCNM was adopted on August 31 and came into effect on September 11, 2009.

General Provisions and Implementation of the LNCNM

The LNCNM is 43 pages long and consists of 139 rather detailed articles elaborating on the status of the national minority councils, areas and limits of their jurisdiction, their relationship to state organs, international and regional cooperation, methods of election (in excruciating detail), and their financing. NMCs are expected to manage their own internal structure (except their size, which is also regulated: they can have between 15 and 35 members, based on the size of the respective minority) and rules of operation, but their “external character” is explicitly prescribed in full detail.

An interesting solution in the LNCNM, given that Serbia does not recognize Kosovo, is that this law does not even pretend to be in effect on the territory of the breakaway province: There is only one vague mention of Kosovo in the transitional provisions with the sole purpose of allowing voters with permanent residence in Kosovo to vote elsewhere, in Serbia.

The law gave 120 days for each national minority to generate its own registry based on which, and conditioned by a numeric formula, its national council could be elected by direct ballot, or, failing to produce such a voter list, through an electoral assembly. The rule was this: Direct elections are to be held by a national minority if more than 50 per cent of its members (per the 2002 census), reduced by 20 per cent, register to vote. If the voter list contains fewer than that “magic number,” then the method of election is indirect, through an electoral assembly. When the LNCNM went into effect, there were already 15 national councils functioning in Serbia based on the incomplete provisions of the earlier, 2002 law and the subsequent ministerial regulations.

During the voter registration campaign conducted in late 2009 and early 2010, over 436,000 members of various national minorities registered for minority voter lists – each voter was allowed to register on one list only.¹⁷ On June 6, 2010, members of 16 national minorities voted in 161 of 167 municipalities of the country to elect their new councils by direct ballot with a turnout of almost 240,000 voters or 54.47 per cent of those registered. Three other minorities (Croats, Macedonians, and Slovenians) were to elect their councils the same day through electoral assemblies instead of direct ballot.

As prescribed by the LNCNM, elections for the national councils were organized by the Central Election Commission of Serbia that was required to, and did, verify the results within 92 hours. While only two formal complaints were registered, statements by candidates and angry press conferences by party leaders as well as media reports recorded a relatively large number of technical difficulties and irregularities. Nevertheless, the general assessment among 170 foreign observers was that voting was conducted in a democratic atmosphere. In OSCE Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos’s view, expressed just before polling stations closed, elections were held without larger problems.¹⁸

But election complications after the voting could not be avoided. The Minister of Human and Minority Rights dissolved the Bosniak National Council immediately after its first, constitutive meeting because, according to the decision that was fiercely contested, it lacked the required quorum when elected representatives from two of the three party tickets boycotted it.¹⁹

That single case already makes it abundantly clear that the NMCs – just like a national parliament – cannot escape the fate of continuous political struggle for their control, no matter how strong the core need of a national minority for the preservation of its identity, language, and culture, and no matter how forcefully some ethnic leaders argue that fundamental minority interests should come “before politics.” Among 19

¹⁷ Well over 50 per cent of members of minorities registered, but it is an open question what percentage of willing voters “merit” separate representative bodies of ethnic self-governance.

¹⁸ “Of course there are problems just like in any other election. My impression so far is that the process is normal with minor difficulties.” Interview by Amb. Kypreos in daily *Blic*, June 6, 2010 <www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/192727/Najveci-odziv-biraca-u-Vojvodini-i-Sandzaku> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

¹⁹ This incident resulted in many months of negotiations among the three tickets of Bosniak parties and between each of them, on one hand, and the Ministry in Belgrade, on the other. Several repeated elections were scheduled, postponed, and canceled. Currently, the Bosniak National Council, as constituted through an electoral process, is the official NMC for Bosniaks living in Serbia.

national council ballots in 2010, only one had a single ticket (list of candidates from one party), all others had two or more tickets, and five had over half a dozen tickets.²⁰

Reality quickly showed the sagacity of the ideas put forward by Tibor Várady, one of the leading legal experts on Serbian minority issues. A former Minister of Justice in the short-lived, US-backed, anti-Milošević, rump-Yugoslav federal government of Serbian-American businessman Milan Panić (1992–93), Várady had warned against restricting pluralism to the ethnic aspects of autonomy:

“It would be extremely dangerous from the point of view of any minority group, since a minority structure requires pluralism for its very existence. If a minority structure is [to prevail,] it is of vital importance for the survival of the community to have pluralism. If it were not so, everybody who does not fit in this structure would fall out of [their] nation as well.”²¹

We will see that, almost twenty years later and under very different, indeed much more favorable conditions, national councils are still struggling with the difficulty of how to champion minority rights and interests and, at the same time, secure pluralism within their intra-minority political and social structures. Most minorities have more than one ethnic political party, and some mainstream Serb-majority parties have entered the race for minority votes and even the elections for NMCs. Pluralistic representation of national minority interests is thus a given, but it also results in fragmentation.

Jurisdiction of the National Councils

Provisions of the LNCNM require the Serbian legislature and other state and municipal organs to seek and consider the views of the national councils before making relevant decisions. The four areas in which the state delegates some of its prerogatives to the national councils are: education, culture, public-service media, and official use of language – as pertaining to the national minority in question.

This is why some see the established level and scope of authority of minority organs as cultural autonomy and not self-governance. In each of the first three fields, the national councils can either establish their own institutions, take over partial or full founding (i.e., ownership) rights over existing institutions, or participate in the management of institutions remaining in public or state ownership. They can also designate existing institutions in state or public ownership as being of particular importance to a national minority. The fourth area is somewhat of a different nature as we will see.

Education. On all levels of education, from preschool to post-secondary, the national councils can either establish their own institutions or take over founding rights of existing ones. They can also participate in the management of schools through providing proposals, recommendations, and opinions to the Ministry and other state organs in charge of educational policy, nominations to school boards and principals as well as syllabi related to national history, culture, language, and textbooks. Even though final decisions remain with state organs, they must take into consideration the views of the national councils if those are transmitted to the state.

There have been 17 cases in which municipal organs neglected to solicit, or rejected submitted proposals – and a national council sued them. Significantly, the ensuing court cases have been decided in favor of the national councils.

There has been a very interesting case where members of a national minority (ethnic Hungarians, in particular) complained against their own national council for using voter registration as one of the criteria when awarding post-secondary scholarships. The case was referred to the Ombudsman of Human and Minority Rights in Vojvodina who decided that the Hungarian National Council did not violate antidiscrimination laws. The Ombudsman only requested that the contested condition not figure as a decisive factor in awarding scholarships.

This area of jurisdiction has already proven to be of highest importance to those minorities that have a large number of schools where the languages of instruction include the language of that minority. Due to the diasporic nature or geographic distribution of many national minorities in Vojvodina and Serbia, securing elementary and secondary education in their native languages is difficult, so this issue is of utmost concern to parents in those communities. The affected national councils therefore devote extraordinary attention to

²⁰ For the exact number of tickets per ballot, see column 7 in the table in Appendix A.

²¹ Várady, 1995b, p. 48.

applying their powers in the field of education. In most cases this is done through participation in the management of schools, through numerous proposals to the minister in charge (since education, just like many other areas of public policy, is extremely centralized in today's Serbia) to offer classes and school extensions with fewer students than prescribed by law, through advocating the use of textbooks from their kin states abroad, establishing school bus service, and creating boarding schools for children living in remote areas without schools in their native language. National councils of many minorities have also been very active in nominating and pushing through their own representatives for school boards and principals, and even successfully sued local self-governments when those refused NMC candidates.

Culture. This is a very popular and less contested area of jurisdiction for the national councils, particularly among minorities with a somewhat lower stake in the school system.²² Just like in the area of education, national councils can establish their own organizations, participate in the management of existing state and public entities, or make recommendations to state organs for the distribution of resources dedicated to cultural activities. They can also designate institutions, buildings, and objects as of particular importance for the preservation of national identity and heritage of a particular national minority.

Media. National minorities in Serbia (based on former constitutional guarantees in the former, pre-war Yugoslavia) have had a relatively long history of development of multilingual mass media. Novi Sad Radio and Television, for example, was the first electronic media organization in Europe to broadcast regular programming in five languages including 24-hour radio programs in at least one minority language. While this right and practice were significantly diminished in the 1990s, open demand started growing again after the first truly democratizing elections in 2000. While state-run media never regained its previously celebrated multicultural status, many new broadcast organizations sprung up, particularly on the local and regional levels, which currently form the basis of minority-language information systems in even more languages than ever before. Online media in minority languages can now also compete for state and national council-based funds as well as for internationally available project-based financing. The only limits to the success of these new media organizations and projects are the size of their "native," natural audience and competition from the rest of the media market.

Here, too, national councils can found (and finance) their own media organizations, take over founding rights of existing ones (which is more frequently the case, especially because of the relatively rich past in this area as mentioned above) and/or participate in the management of public-service media and press organizations.

In the information arena, most conflicts related to national council ownership have arisen among politically competing entities of the same national minority. These contested situations are not very different from political conflicts in countries with strong public media presence – Hungary comes to mind with its internationally criticized new Media Law – where current government forces steer or force public media to heavily support the policies of the government, or even the politics of the parties in power. The difficulties generated by such bias are compounded in minority status since there are no sufficient markets available to support competing private media as counterbalance.

The ongoing debate is therefore between forces claiming that minority media and press must be "primarily" supportive of fundamental minority interests and those – usually in the political minority within the given national minority – who claim that freedom of the press should trump those "special" national minority needs and interests. Examples for this are provided by several waves of protests and even threats of strike by public-media workers over decisions of their own national council, which, they felt, were intruding into their autonomy of public-service journalism, down to arbitrary, politically motivated dismissals of editors who "did not meet expectations" by their national-council superiors, or even shutting down public commenting channels at online media sites.

Another surprising attack on the LNCNM was mounted by the Association of Serbian Journalists that filed a request with the Constitutional Court to limit the rights of national councils to manage public-service media organizations in their minority languages. The request does not state the exact case in point, but it came after the HNC dismissed, for political reasons, the editor-in-chief of its daily newspaper *Magyar Szó* in mid-2011. The Court requested an explanation from the Republican Parliament, and the case is not yet decided as of March 2012.²³

²² These are minorities that, for numeric, linguistic, geographic, or other reasons, are less interested in maintaining or establishing schools of their own.

²³ For the document filed with the Constitutional Court, see the Association website: <www.uns.org.rs/Storage/

Official use of language. This area is obviously of vital importance for the preservation of almost any ethnic or national identity. While in pre-Milošević Yugoslavia it was unheard of that someone could be abused in the street just for speaking a minority language, the 1990s brought that pain, too, upon members of several national minorities in Serbia. Even the democratic transition in post-Milošević Serbia has not been able to eradicate this threat, which still includes, after 12 years of democratic rule, cases of physical battery, mostly by members of the Serb majority against minorities.

The 1974 federal constitution of the former Yugoslavia guaranteed the official use of several minority languages, including the promulgation of federal legislation in Albanian and Hungarian. It also created legal conditions for the official use of national-language personal and geographic names including government-issued identification cards and traffic signs. Most of this was largely dismantled by the Milošević regime.

It is thus not surprising that the rebuilding of the legal framework for official use of minority languages was very important for national minorities in Serbia. This area is also regulated by a number of other laws specifically governing national minority rights and the official use of language. A very liberal, 15 per cent presence in any given municipality now suffices for local official use, subject only to the good will of municipal authorities for its implementation – and, sadly, to criminal instincts of vandals who still frequently destroy or damage multilingual public signs in ethnically mixed parts of Vojvodina.

This area of jurisdiction delegated to national councils is somewhat different than the other three, since there are no obvious institutions that “represent” official use of language. Rather, all or most state organs and sometimes private entities need to be required to adhere to norms of multilingual operation – which is a much more difficult task.

National councils thus play an important role in prodding state and, especially, municipal organs to implement the letter and spirit of existing legal requirements and options, which is not always easy since it really depends on the political will of often non-minority leaders of those local municipal organs.

National councils have the prerogative to determine traditional minority-language names of local geographic units where that particular minority language is in official use (as provided for by other legal acts), and such names thereupon become official.

Difficulties arise when the appropriate state organs neglect or refuse to acknowledge the right to the official use of minority languages. Open resistance is rare, but national councils must push hard in order to coerce less willing municipal and other state organs to respect the letter of the law. Traffic signs and institutional signs on public buildings are relatively easy to erect, but they are also easily and frequently damaged by usually unknown offenders. Courts are also required to conduct trials in minority languages and to secure interpreters if necessary, but members of national minorities are often reluctant to demand their rights in fear of retaliation through other means, or of plainly being labeled as incompetent or overdemanding.

Issuance of official documents is another area where national councils can play a significant prodding role. As red tape still flourishes in Serbia, citizens are often required to apply for various documents to state organs only to have to supply the same paperwork to yet other organs. Sometimes it is next to impossible to get both “official” ends of the process chain to issue and accept documents in minority languages, even when only the name of the citizen is printed in their own minority language.

Communication with state organs and public services is still conducted mostly in Serbian even in areas of high minority presence. This is more humiliating than many would imagine since many services are still state-operated: the post office that still handles most private financial transactions and bill payments, all utility companies, the health clinics, the pension fund, and the veterinarian service. Banks, stores, and gas stations are also reluctant to hire multilingual staff, even though central state organs like the police have recently started to emphasize the importance of and show an example in communicating in the language of the citizen and customer.

As a European Union-required property restitution law came into effect in 2011, many citizens of national minority background needed to get copies of birth certificates of their own and of their ancestors. Originally, the state-prescribed blank form was printed in several foreign languages but not in any of the local minority languages. The Hungarian National Council submitted an initiative, based on the LNCNM, that new forms be designed and put into official use labeled and accepting manual entries in languages of local national minorities. This is another successful example of applying pressure to implement existing regulations – without such pressure, apparently, progress just doesn’t happen, or is much slower forthcoming.

International Cooperation and Financing

Although not a separate area of jurisdiction, the LNCNM provides for the right of national councils to freely cooperate with international and regional organizations, sister institutions, and even governments in kin states (or native countries) of their respective national minorities.

National councils are invited to cooperate or, at least, must be consulted by state organs of Serbia when the latter negotiate bilateral agreements with native countries of national minorities living in Serbia as well as international agreements if such agreements are to be directly pertaining to the rights of national minorities, or when such bilateral agreements are being monitored.

The right for direct international cooperation has already proven extremely valuable, indeed essential, since Serbian government funds and local contributions are not sufficient to finance the projects and operations, no matter how modest, of existing national councils, as disclosed by their representatives. The councils are empowered to cofinance activities from their own commercial sources and private donations, but, in a state of general economic distress still overburdening Serbia 20 years after the beginning and 13 years after the end of armed conflicts, this is an unrealistic expectation. Major funding from foreign sources is thus critically important for the fulfillment of legal tasks and prerogatives of national councils.

Expected and contested “fair distribution” of such foreign funds, at the same time, triggers numerous conflicts of interest within the ranks of at least some national minorities. Since national councils are elected in open and contested voting processes, be they direct or electoral, they are usually dominated by the most successful or efficient ethnic parties or representative organizations of each national minority. No matter how unbiased their decisions are, they are almost always challenged or criticized in turn by those circles of the same nationality that did not succeed in securing dominant slices of power within the national council. These disputes are sometimes elevated to international levels as “losing sides” take their grievances to the foreign funders, or try to compete for favors among potential supporters in kin states. The Serbian state has so far wisely and adeptly kept out of those quarrels.

The Serbian Parliament and the Provincial Assembly of Vojvodina dedicate certain funds from state budgets to support the work of national councils. These funds vary annually and are not guaranteed either in absolute or relative figures. Still, there is a relatively well-designed method of funds distribution among the existing national councils based on a fairly complex system of criteria. Those include the size of the national minority, the number of educational, cultural, and media organizations its council operates, recurring and singular projects they plan, and other similar and relevant factors. The rules are designed to minimize subjectivity.

National councils report rather diverse structures of actual financing, but none of them is completely satisfied with available funds. Some of the smaller ones, like the Macedonian National Council, secure their funds entirely from the Serbian state. The Croatian National Council gets most of its funding from the state and relies on support from the Republic of Croatia on a project by project basis while its independent revenue is negligible. The operational budget of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia²⁴ consists of 10 per cent state funds, 15 per cent foreign aid, and the rest is obtained from its own sources. The Hungarian National Council secures half of its budget from Serbian state funds, nearly 50 per cent from aid received from the Government of Hungary, and less than half per cent from its own sources. Being the largest national minority in Serbia, the Hungarian community operates the largest number of educational, cultural, and media organizations and thus has a much higher need for funding than any other minority.

Leaders concerned with securing transparency point to a disturbing phenomenon called ethno-business. Especially in less organized environments, cunning political operators might become sole distributors of domestic and foreign aid meant to support minority activities and then funnel some of the funds into private coffers or into maintaining their own clientele. Complaints against such practices were especially frequent under the conditions of international economic sanctions during the 1990s, but as examples of some neighboring countries also demonstrate, such corruption in minority politics has not been completely eradicated.²⁵

²⁴ The FJCS is specifically categorized as an NMC by law.

²⁵ See a description of ethno-business in Carstocea, 2011.

Conflicts and Dilemmas

Beyond the difficulties experienced on election day and during the constitutive phase of the new NMCs in 2010, additional problems have hampered the system of ethnic self-governance. Most of them belong to the class of intra-minority power struggle as already described in the case of the Bosniak minority. Similar conflicts have been difficult or nearly impossible to handle for the Ministry in charge of the process. Various groups of Albanian, Roma, and Macedonian organizations have been alternately criticizing state organs and each other and bringing charges against rival groups or the Ministry itself for “trying to dominate” the respective national councils, for “playing favorites,” or “advocating for party friends” on behalf of the governing coalition. Each of those cases represents a fairly complicated matter, and this paper is not the place to disentangle them.

Another category of conflicts is characterized by cases in which separate ethnic groups, usually supported by external forces, vie for the representation of the “same national minority” and question the ethnic distinction that opposing groups claim. One of the more telling examples is the situation with the Croatian and Bunjevac minorities. Some Croats in Serbia and the Government of Croatia consider Bunjevacs to be Croats, but Bunjevacs themselves insist on their separate ethnic status.

Serbian legislation is “generous” in that its definition of *national minority* is rather general and vague. Article 2 of the 2002 FRY Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, still in effect in Serbia, defines national minorities as:

“... any group of citizens of [now the Republic of Serbia] numerically sufficiently representative and, although representing a minority in the territory of [Serbia], belonging to a group of residents having a long[-]term and firm bond with the territory of [Serbia] and possessing characteristics such as language, culture, national or ethnic affiliation, origin or confession, differentiating them from the majority of the population and whose members are distinguished by care to collectively nurture their common identity, including their culture, tradition, language or religion.”

So it is relatively easy for a group of citizens to be treated as a national minority in Serbia.²⁶ Such a liberal and inclusive solution, however, might lead to an overly divided mosaic in which minorities are less efficient in securing their own rights and liberties due to their internal fragmentation, large number, and small size. Examples of fragmentation can be found in the conflicts among Albanized Romani groups of Ashkalis and the [Balkan] Egyptians.

Foreign interference has also been observed in those divisions. The most salient example is the Romanian Government’s February 2012 threat to veto EU candidate status for Serbia because of the alleged discrimination against members of the Vlach minority in Serbia. Interestingly, representatives of the Vlach National Council prefer that “Romania leave us alone.”²⁷ The conflict seems to revolve around the desire of Romanian authorities to have the Vlachs in Serbia declare themselves as Romanians, whereas the relatively large Vlach group, supported by the Belgrade authorities, prefers a separate status.²⁸

The Hungarian Government has also used its veto threat on Serbia’s EU candidacy. The Hungarian action was publicly coordinated with leaders of the Hungarian community in Serbia. Through it, Budapest lent effective support to parliamentary efforts of the leading ethnic Hungarian political party in the Serbian Parliament. Namely, in the fall of 2011, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians fought to annul a surprisingly discriminatory provision in a rushed piece of Serbian legislation that reintroduced the notion of collective guilt against members of ethnic communities who – themselves, or their ancestors – had been forcibly drafted into military occupying forces during World War II. In the light of warnings from Budapest, the Serbian Government realized it was a major roadblock on its road to EU candidacy and managed to push through parliament a mitigating provision.²⁹

²⁶ “All groups of citizens termed or determined as nations, national or ethnic communities, national or ethnic groups, and nationalities, and which meet the conditions specified [by paragraph 1 of this] Article shall be deemed national minorities for the purpose of this Law.” Article 2, paragraph 2 of the LPRFNM.

²⁷ Statement of Vlach National Council President Radiša Dragojević <www.vlasi.rs/index.php?id=250&cat=5> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

²⁸ The conflict was quickly resolved between Bucharest and Belgrade in early March, 2012.

²⁹ The AVH’s four seats in the Serbian Parliament were not sufficient to prevent the original legislative damage, so contacts between the governments of Serbia and Hungary in the matter proved critical to modify the Restitution Law

As another example of international political partnerships, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán personally supported AVH President István Pásztor's ticket in the May 2012 Serbian parliamentary election campaign. Such high-level support is expected to have a negative impact on the chances of other Hungarian parties in Serbia planning to campaign separately, and against the AVH, in coalition with other, non-Hungarian ethnic parties. These two cases are not primarily related to the work of the national councils. But the smaller ethnic Hungarian parties – that had already fought against the law on national councils before –, together with some representatives of minor Croat and Slovak organizations, have recently renewed their demand for the revision of the LNCNM. Unsuccessful efforts by the smaller ethnic Hungarian parties in Vojvodina to curry favors with Budapest had been visible before: the inter-party struggle to secure the Hungarian Government's support provides a clear example of how the very possibility of foreign aid can influence minority politics.

Conclusions and Emerging Questions

Although this paper, perhaps, emphasizes problems more than achievements of the national minority councils in Serbia, the difficulties and dilemmas experienced by the system of minority cultural autonomy do not imply complete failure of the institutions. In fact, the LNCNM has been praised by officials of the European Union, Members of the European Parliament, several neighboring governments, and ethnic political parties in the region as a worthy, forward-looking model of ethnic self-governance. Although not explicitly labeled that way, it can count as an example of *personal autonomy*³⁰ that might fit the needs and situation of certain types of national minorities elsewhere. Personal autonomy is especially relevant when territorial autonomy would be rather difficult to achieve based on geographic distribution of a very mixed population and, in the case of Serbia, somewhat exaggerated fears of Vojvodina's improbable secession.

Nevertheless, serious questions remain. First of all: Can a strictly uniform and tediously detailed legal framework provide optimal solutions for all kinds of diverse minority situations and varying levels and needs for ethnic cultural self-governance in Serbia and elsewhere?

Secondly, it is clear that the Serbian approach inherited a strong tendency for uniform solutions for diverse needs. Some of the consequences are already visible through the problems that less organized minorities have encountered in trying to elect or constitute their national councils. How can this hurdle be overcome without deeper reforms and without “perforating” a network of otherwise desirably equal treatment of minorities regardless of their size and intensity of foreign support?

Thirdly, does the current system represent a limit to “achievable autonomy,” or it can be further developed towards an even more comprehensive ethnic self-governance that would include some legislative (rule-making) role and financial powers (in proportion with the contribution of minority taxpayers) as well. To this question, we can add an even more general theoretical one: Is “full autonomy” of national minorities even possible? Or, is it even desirable, as opposed to proportional ethnic representation within a nationally integrated political sphere?

This paper did not set out to resolve or even research these questions and dilemmas. But it is sufficient to see that representatives of national minorities in Serbia, along with state organs, have an important and significant responsibility to find answers to these and other questions as they endeavor to make the current system work for themselves and the community at large.

Future research should explore more deeply the results of the LNCNM in securing an equal and satisfactory status for national minorities and compare it to other solutions worldwide. Clearly, a time horizon longer than the current one will help assess the ability of national minority councils to fill the space created by law and find the ways to realize their own ideas through the existing institutions.

through another piece of legislation by the December 2011 deadline when an EU decision was expected, only to be later postponed, on Serbia's candidate status.

³⁰ For definitions and descriptions of various types of ethnic minority autonomies, see Lapidoth, 1997, pp. 29–36, and Balogh, 1999, pp.134–5.

Appendix A

Ethnic Structure and National Minority Voter Lists in Serbia. Based on the 2002 Census (without Kosovo),³¹ the 2009/2010 Minority Voter Registration, and the June 6, 2010 NMC Elections.³²

<i>Ethnic Groups</i>	<i>Self-Declared As</i>	<i>Per Cent of Total Population</i>	<i>Registered for a Minority Voter List</i>	<i>Per Cent of Ethnic Group Registered</i>	<i>Voted (per cent)</i>	<i>Number of Candidate Lists</i>
Total Population	7,498,001	100.00	436,334	n/a ³³		
Serbs	6,212,838	82.86				
Hungarians	293,299	3.91	138,665	47.28	55.46	5
Bosniaks	136,087	1.81	96,656	71.03	56.46	3
Roma	108,193	1.44	56,076	51.83	54.95	10
Yugoslavs	80,721	0.92				
Croats	70,602	0.94				
Montenegrins	69,049	0.92				
Albanians	61,647	0.82	26,927	43.68	56.31	2
Slovaks	59,021	0.79	32,657	55.33	46.81	5
Vlachs	40,054	0.53	28,081	70.11	46.62	9
Romanians	34,576	0.46	17,417	50.37	54.45	6
Macedonians	25,847	0.34				
Bulgarians	20,497	0.27	13,382	65.29	66.04	7
Bunjevacs	20,012	0.27	8,271	41.33	41.52	7
Muslims	19,503	0.26				
Ruthenians	15,905	0.21	8,562	53.83	56.07	6
Ukrainians	5,354	0.07	2,729	50.97	60.72	7
Slovenians	5,104	0.07				
Goranians	4,581	0.06				
Germans	3,901	0.05	2,203	56.47	63.73	2
Russians	2,588	0.03				
Czechs	2,211	0.03	1,135	51.33	46.52	1
Jews	1,158	0.02				
Egyptians	814	0.01	1,549	190.29 ³⁴	44.93	2
Šokacs	717	0.01				
Ashkalis	584	0.01	1,148	196.58 ³⁴	38.85	3
Greeks	572	0.01	876	153.15 ³⁴	77.05	2
Turks	522	0.01				
Others	7,344	0.11				
Regional affiliation	11,485	0.15				
Undeclared	107,732	1.44				
Unknown	75,483	1.01				

*

³¹ Data in columns 1—3 from: <webrzs.stat.gov.rs/axd/Zip/VJN3.pdf> Last accessed: March 20, 2012.

³² Data in columns 4—7 used to be available at: <izbori.ljudskaprava.gov.rs>. Last accessed: August 1, 2010.

³³ Not applicable: Only relevant rows are filled in columns 5—7.

³⁴ Over-100% entry is acceptable since registration rights were not tied to previous declaration as a member of a national minority. Each citizen of Serbia may register for any, but only one, national minority's voter list.

*Appendix B**List of National Councils of National Minorities in the Republic of Serbia*

(Native or Serbian organizational names and web addresses are listed where available.)

National Council of the Albanian National Minority
N/A – N/A

National Council of the Ashkali National Minority
Amëza e Ashkalive – www.ashkali.net

National Council of the Bosniak National Minority
Bošnjačko nacionalno vijeće – www.bnv.org.rs

National Council of the Bulgarian National Minority
Nacionalni savet bugarske nacionalne manjine – www.nacsavbg.org.rs

National Council of the Bunjevci National Minority
Bunjevački Nacionalni Savet – www.bunjevci.net

National Council of the Croatian National Minority
Hrvatsko Nacionalno Vijeće – www.hnv.org.rs

National Council of the Czech National Minority
Česká Národní Rada – www.savetceha.rs

National Council of the Egyptian National Minority
Nacionalni savet egipatske nacionalne manjine – N/A

National Council of the German National Minority
Nationalrat der Deutscher Minderheit – www.nationalratdm.org.rs

National Council of the Greek National Minority
Εθνικό Συμβούλιο της Ελληνικής Εθνικής Μειονότητας – www.nsgnm.sdcafe.rs

National Council of the Hungarian National Minority
Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – www.mnt.org.rs

National Council of the Macedonian National Minority
N/A – N/A

National Council of the Roma National Minority
Nacionalni savet romske nacionalne manjine – www.romskinacionalnisavet.org

National Council of the Romanian National Minority
Consiliul Național al Minorității Naționale Române – N/A

National Council of the Ruthenian National Minority
Национални совет рускей националней меншини – www.rusini.rs

National Council of the Slovak National Minority
Národnostná rada slovenskej národnostnej menšiny – www.rada.org.rs

National Council of the Slovenian National Minority
Nacionalni svet slovenske narodne manjšine – www.slovenci.rs

National Council of the Ukrainian National Minority
Національна рада української національної меншини – www.ukrajincisrbije.rs

National Council of the Vlach National Minority
Nacionalni savet Vlaha – www.vlasi.rs

Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia³⁵
Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije – www.savezscg.org

³⁵ The Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia is registered as an ethnic-religious organization (founded in 1919 in Belgrade, then the capital of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes). Its Executive Board is explicitly and uniquely authorized by Article 134 of the NCNMA to also function as a national council of a national minority. This is the reason why various texts report the number of NMCs as either 19 or 20.

*Appendix C**Survey of the Status and Activities of National Councils of National Minorities in Serbia*

[The questionnaire below, in its Serbian original, was sent to all NMCs (twenty organizational or leaders' e-mail addresses as publicly listed on the website of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration, and Local Self-governance. Response within a short deadline came from seven national minority councils. The following respondents gave their consent to use their names publicly (while all other information obtained from respondents is used anonymously):

- Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia
- Hungarian National Council
- National Council of the Bunjevac National Minority
- National Council of the Croatian National Minority
- National Council of the Macedonian National Minority in the Republic of Serbia
- National Council of the Ruthenian National Minority

The author wishes to thank all those who submitted responses and allowed the use of the information they provided.]

Questionnaire

I. STATISTICAL DATA ON YOUR NATIONAL MINORITY

National minority:

1. Number of citizens who declared themselves as members of your minority
 - In the 2002 census:
 - In the 2011 census:
2. Number of citizens who registered for the special voter list of your national minority:

II. THE ELECTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF YOUR NATIONAL COUNCIL

3. Method of election:
 - Direct ballot:
 - Electoral assembly:
4. Date of election/assembly:
5. Number of citizens who cast their vote in the election for the members of the national council:
6. Number and names of parties that submitted tickets for the election for the members of the national council:
7. Election results (number/percentage of votes, and number of mandates won by ticket):
8. Date of establishment of the national council:
9. Number of seats on the national council:

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

10. How do you finance the work of the national council?
 - Per cent of budget coming from the state:
 - Per cent of budget secured as own commercial income:
 - Per cent of budget from private donations:
 - Per cent of budget from international aid (please list main sources):
11. Are you satisfied with funds received from the Serbian state?
12. Are available funds sufficient for the financing of activities of your national council?
13. How many individuals regularly participate in professional activities of your national council?
 - Full-time:
 - Part-time:
 - As volunteers:

14. Have you assumed founding rights of the following types of institutions (and if so, which ones):
 - Schools:
 - Press, radio, and television:
 - Websites:
 - Other cultural institutions:
15. Do you collaborate with other national councils of national minorities in Serbia and with the Directorate for Human and Minority Rights of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration, and Local Self-governance? If so, what is the content of such collaboration?
16. Do you collaborate with representatives of other governments or foreign NGOs, especially in the countries where your ethnic kin lives as a majority?
17. Have there been debates among members and organizations of your minority about the solutions offered by the Law on National Councils of National Minorities?
If so, what are the most important issues and/or disagreements?
18. Are you satisfied with the status and jurisdiction of national councils?
19. What are the most important problems hindering the work of your national council?
20. What are the most important plans of your national council for the next few years?

IV. GENERAL COMMENTS

Do you wish to add anything not solicited by the questions above?

Do I have your permission to use the name of your national council as the source of information you provide?

*

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Tibor Purger: “Ethnic Self-governance in Serbia. The First Two Years of the National Minority Councils.” *Délkelet Európa – South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 3. No.2. (Summer 2012) 18 p.

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