

ETHNIC INCIDENTS IN VOJVODINA

This research presents one part of the series of projects carried out in 2004 and dedicated to the increased number of ethnic incidents in Vojvodina and a partial change of their aspects and contents. It is complementary to different activities, such as a round table discussing this subject organized on June 10th, 2004 in cooperation with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Novi Sad, different circular announcements based on the material obtained through press clippings and different projects of practical character directly concerning either the latest ethnic incidents in Vojvodina or their connection with the burdens of the past in this regard. This research is methodically the closest to the one used to question the inhabitants of the community of Zrenjanin in August 2004 about the ethnic relations, violence on ethnic bases and the actual and desirable role of the local self-government regarding preventing and solving the ethnic incidents.

As the research in the Zrenjanin community dealt with a peaceful milieu, the one whose most important results are summarized now was carried out in places where there were the most ethnic incidents in 2004 or which were for some other reasons characteristic for observing this phenomenon in its developed form. The research was realized in Subotica, Tavankut, Djurdjevo, Bačka Planaka, Temerin and the suburbs of Novi Sad called Adice. The selection of places where the data were collected is understandable due to the number and structure of ethnic incidents, which could be observed in other material put on this site.

In collecting the data the open-ended questions were used almost exclusively because they were the only suitable to crash the barriers of fear and conformism in the minds and statements of the asked persons. During conversation it often happened that the basic content of the answer changed in the course of the interview, which was achieved by asking question successively about actually the same topic. This enabled getting true information.

The open-ended questions led inevitably to dispersed answers so the category “other” is very frequent in the findings. This could not be avoided. The basic frequencies regarding the used sample as well as the research findings are presented in PowerPoint and could be found in this site. In this short text only some comments on findings will be summarized.

It is important to underline that the used sample does not enable making estimations for the population of Vojvodina in total, nor for the ethnic communities in total. The findings can be used for making estimations about the members of the ethnic communities in those places where the data were collected.

The ethnic Croats, Serbs and Hungarians were questioned in the research in Subotica, in Tavankut, the Croats, in Djurdjevo, the Ruthenians and Serbs, in Temerin, the Hungarians and the Serbs and in the suburbs of Novi Sad, Adice, Ashkali.

The respondents are a little less poor than the average citizens of Serbia. The economic problems bother them above all, as well as they bother the respondents in many other researches; these are by far the most important questions for two thirds of the respondents and the ethnic relations in Vojvodina can be rarely seen in the answers as the most important for them. The absolute majority of the respondents¹ (52%) think of the Tito's period as an ideal one, a "Golden age" in the history of our country. A big relative majority (49%) think that the promising way of developing of our country was left in the time when Milosevic overtook the power or during his governing. The other answers to this question are very dispersed. 53% of the respondents determine the time of Milosevic's governing as the worse time in the history of our country. The respondents are almost as egalitarian as the citizens of Serbia asked in a series of other researches on probability samples. When asked about the desirable ratio between salaries, 38% of them stand for equal salaries for everybody employed or for the salaries, which will range from 1 up to 3. The liberal attitude according to which the differences in salaries should not be limited, is stood for by 32% of the respondents. In total the respondents are of very egalitarian and of anti-Milosevic opinion and above all occupied by the problems of surviving in the conditions of the social transition.

When asked to define the position of their own nation in Vojvodina, 71% of the asked Croats estimate the position of their nation as "good", 59.8% of the Hungarians, 83.6% of the Ruthenians, 69% of the Slovaks, 67.6% of the Serbs and 66.7% of the Ashkali. Discrimination or other forms of jeopardizing their national community in Vojvodina is noticed by 25.8% of the Croats, 29.9% of the Hungarians, 9% of the Ruthenians, 10.3% of the Slovaks, 20.7% of the Serbs and 26.6% of Ashkalias.

However, the state of interethnic relations in the community where they live is believed to be good by 64.5% Croats and bad by 32.3% (in Subotica), by 71.3% and 18.4% of the Hungarians (in Subotica and Temerin, and it continues respectively), 77.6% and 16.4% of the Ruthenians (Djurdjevo near Žabalj), 79.3% and 10.3% of the Slovaks (Bačka Palanka), 89.2% and 4.5% of the Serbs (in several communities) and 80% and 13.35 of the Ashkali. (Adice, Novi Sad).

The next question about the rights of the members of the national minorities was exclusively given in a closed form so that further diachronic comparisons could be done. The formulation of the question was: "The members of some national minorities in Vojvodina complain about their position. Do you think they should be offered some new additional rights in relation to the ones they already

¹ All the percentages are rounded to whole numbers for the purpose of an easier review

have? The offered answers were: 1. I am not familiar with this problem 2. they should be given all civil rights 3. special minority rights should be provided for them 4. they already have too many rights 5. other”.

The opinion that special minority rights should be provided for the members of the minorities have 32.3% of the asked Croats, 19% of the Hungarians, none of the Ruthenians, 10.3% of the Slovaks, 2.7% of the Serbs and 20% of the Ashkali. **The members of the minority communities are very frightened which can be seen from these answers. In the time of the research they were mainly ready to reject their national rights in order to protect their elementary human rights to life and property.**

The majority of the respondents, as it was seen, think that the members of the minorities should be only provided with the usual civil rights. Only among the Croats were there more of those who insisted on minority rights, which are anyway guaranteed by our legislation and high international principles, than those satisfied with “mere” civil rights. On the other hand, 38.7% of the Serbs think that the minorities already have too many rights, but it is also the opinion of 1.1% of the Hungarians, 9% of the Ruthenians, 6.9% of the Slovaks and 6.7% of the Ashkali. **The members of the minorities are more than frightened. When somebody says he needs not the rights he has and which have been exercised for decades, it means that the situation in that area is bad.**

The respondents mainly give untrue answers to the questions about the state of the international relations in Vojvodina and their community. The absolute majority describes them as “good”, in Vojvodina in 58% of the cases, and in the community where the respondent lives, in 79% of the cases. The majority of the answers are also untrue to the question about the cases of violence on the ethnic bases that the respondents know of. Only 34% of them give such examples and it should be repeated that the research was carried out in those very places where there were most incidents and where almost all adult inhabitants were informed about them. Fear was behind the untruth here too. **The fear itself is an important finding regardless of whether it was based on facts. When it exists, it acts as a fact and in worse situations, as one of the catalysts of the conflicts.**

The direct questions crashed the barrier of insincerity, fear and conformism in the answers of the respondents. To the question “How to improve the inter-national relations?” only 21% of the respondents answered that the inter-national relations were good and that they should not be improved. It was seen that to the direct question 79% of the respondents said that the inter-national relations in their community were good and when asked about the Province, the relating part was 58%. The presented manner is one of the ways of controlling the frankness of the answers; even a mere comparison of frequencies, i.e. consistency of the answers, point to the real state of matters of the inter-national relations in Vojvodina.

A thesis of the jeopardized rights of the ethnic Serbs who are majority is more and more present in Vojvodina. To the question about whether there are jeopardized rights of the Serbs in Vojvodina, 58.4% of the asked Croats gave negative answer, 43.7% of the Hungarians, 55.2% of the Ruthenians, 55.2% of the Slovaks, 73.2% of the Ashkali and 38.8% of the asked Serbs. Among those members of the ethnic minorities who did not explicitly deny that the rights of the Serbs in Vojvodina were jeopardized, a very frequent answer was that they did not know anything about that. Among the Serbs 16.2% answered that the Serbs were jeopardized only in the north part of Vojvodina, 17.1% answered that the Serbs were jeopardized, but without stating its content, some complained that they saw a request to speak the language of the surroundings as an act of jeopardizing, 9% of the respondents of the Serbian nationality said they saw other aspects of jeopardizing their rights, etc. **These findings are very bad although they are still not dramatic.** It should be borne in mind that according to the results of the census in 2002 the ethnic Serbs make almost two thirds of the population in Vojvodina and that fear also, regardless of whether it is based on facts or not, is something that acts as a fact which helps start a conflict.

At the very end of the questionnaire there was a question "What can members of the other nations change in their behavior so you could feel safer?" This is a key question and it speaks more clearly than those directly formulated answers about the state of the inter-national relations. There were none among the respondents of the Croatian nationality who was completely satisfied with the inter-national relations (i.e. without a demand that the members of the majority in the Province (the Serbs) or in the community (the Hungarians) change something). A greater tolerance of the members of the two mentioned ethnicities is explicitly demanded by even 84% of the asked Croats.

The asked Hungarians in 32% think that the Serbs should not change anything and 37% demand from the Serbs to be more tolerant towards the members of the minor national communities (a great number of the answers had to be put into "other answers" due to their diversity of contents). 66% of the Ruthenians have no objection to the behavior of the Serbs, while 6% of them demand more tolerance. The relating percentages are among the Slovaks 42% and 21% respectively, and among the Ashkali 27% and 54%. The finding regarding the Ashkali from Adice is a dramatic one and such was their position in March 2004 when only a robust action of the police saved them from a lynch mob. 35% of the asked Serbs have no objection to the behavior of the members of the minority national communities, 11% think that they are obliged to speak the language of the ethnic majority in public places, 31% say that the members of the minorities ask more than they are entitled to. The findings are bad; they need further analysis based on the collected material, a new research after the internationalization of the problem of Vojvodina in September 2004 before the Council of Europe and developing a mechanism for directing the crisis.