

# **INTERETHNIC RELATIONS, PREVENTIONS OF CONFLICTS IN ZRENJANIN MUNICIPALITY; PRESENTATION OF ACTIVITIES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AT THIS ISSUE**

## **Summarized results of the project and the main recommendation**

The fact is that inter-ethnic relations in Zrenjanin municipality are one of the best on the territory of whole Vojvodina. There is no doubt the local government decidedly reacted on a few inter-ethnic incidents which happened during March in 2004 comparing to the previous authorities in the period of Kosovo war.

Ethnic incidents are doubtless colored by nationalism but this nationalism has been strongly connected to the regressive syndrome followed by xenophobia and egalitarianism. All these dimensions have been strengthening each other. On one hand citizens of Zrenjanin including those who live in villages near Zrenjanin are less poor than it seemed taking into consideration devastated economy. On the other hand, they feel quite insecure, scared for their future and in a social aspect very frustrated. The fact is that most of them are perfectly conscious that this unstable economic situation and psychological moment are perfect ground for development of nationalistic extremism.

Most of citizens who were asked to answer in the examination were pro-communistic and anti-Milosevic oriented.

There is a Serbian majority in municipality of Zrenjanin. Many of those who belong to ethnic groups such as Slovaks and Romanians are less demanding about their minorities rights comparing to the members of much bigger Hungarian ethnic group. One of the most important fact we have got through the project's research is that 56% of ethnic Serbs who were asked to answer in the examination 38% of them say that the status of their nation in Vojvodina is very bad. This result is significantly frustrating as it describes an extremely spreaded awareness that members of the majority group have been feeling jeopardized. Awareness of being part of the jeopardized group make people do irritating political moves. On the other hand make people tolerate them without thinking deeper of their consequences.

This wildly spreads awareness of belonging to the jeopardized majority group has got partly atypical aspect talking about Serbs who were part of the research in the municipality of Zrenjanin. **Results of the pool shows Serbs do not feel jeopardized on the territory of Zrenjanin but they do on the territory of Vojvodina.** We would like to mention one more time feeling that someone

belongs to the jeopardized ethnic group strengthen ethnic incidents on a certain territory. One of the results from the pooling shows that people who were asked to describe the perspectives of their nation in Vojvodina 15% of Serbs were optimistic and 62% were pessimistic about this question. This fact is frightening and very risky at the same time as it does make atmosphere where its very easy to do different sorts of manipulations. In this sense it is from a big importance to emphasize the role of qualified public such as political parties, media and NGOs.

When people were asked to answer the question about minority rights their attitudes varied. Those who belong to small minority groups were again less demanding about their ethnic identity even now when European standards about this issue are very high. But 17% of ethnic Hungarians, 13% of Slovaks, 2% of Serbs and 6% of Romanians **have got attitude that minorities should have a special ethnic rights. From all researches that the Center for Development of Civil Society has ever done these results are the worst.** On the other hand, when there was a question to be answered if minorities have got more rights than they should have 34% of Serbs answered positively.

People from Hungarian and Romanian ethnic groups who filled in the pooling have got almost the same attitude about their own ethnic groups in the municipality of Zrenjanin and in Vojvodina at the same time. On the other side, ethnic Slovaks think that the status of their ethnic group is much better in the municipality of Zrenjanin than on the whole territory of Vojvodina.

This is quite strange as for the reason there are two municipalities in Vojvodina and in one of them (Bački Petrovac) live absolute Slovak majority and in the other one (Kovacicica) live relative Slovak majority. On the other hand, in Zrenjanin municipality there was no open violence towards Slovaks as it was in Bačka Palanka, nor hidden violence as it was in Stara Pazova.

Most of respondents from all ethnic groups have got attitude that inter-ethnic relations are very bad in Vojvodina. This attitude is very threatening and can't be accepted as a well known influence of media or any other propaganda. Additionally, research shows the unexpected results that ethnic Slovaks and Romanians think serious ethnic tensions are only present between Hungarians and Serbs. Hungarians, from their point of view paid attention on a recent mass persecution of Albanians. What is very interesting is that almost no one mentioned Ashkalies who were the target group during March in 2004.

Trough the research we concluded Slovaks who live in the middle part of Banat territory have got a certain attitude that ethnic conflicts are actually between Serbs and other ethnic groups such as (Hungarians, Albanians and Croatians), but at the same time no one mentioned attack which happened on "Matica Slovačka", nor the attack on Slovakian church in Bačka Palanka. The point is, they keep neglecting on purpose their position. By the way, in a last few years it has been shown that there is no ethnic solidarity in Serbia and it would be very difficult to imagine it anyway in such a destructed system all in all. On the other hand Romanian ethnic group which is the most liable to

assimilation (statistic shows that the number of Romanians in Serbia failed from 38000-29000 between the census made in 1991 and the census made in 2002) accept the most Serbian nationalism towards Albanians and at the same time Romanian ethnic group shows such a strong anti-Hungarian chauvinism like they still have not heard for the new, strong entente of Bucharest and Budapest targeted to join European integration.

What is so important is adequate and detailed information about this issue. Slovaks and Romanians who live in villages are less informed about the conflicts than Hungarians. They live in big number in the city and in the city suburb named Mužlja. It would be essential to provide much better media appearance about these incidents and they should be in languages of minorities.

It is pleasant to state that an official and informational institution in the municipality has been working very hard to provide special edition written in languages of minorities such as Hungarian, Slovakian and Romanian in a well known local newspaper.

When we talk about the attitude towards minorities and especially about violent acts towards people who are part of minorities groups it is more than visible they have got totally different status comparing to other ethnic groups.

The situation is more or less the same from the perspectives of other ethnic groups from which Hungarians have got a positive attitude and Romanians after Serbs have negative attitude. Appropriate protection of ethnic Albanians, Ashkalies and Roma as well as informing the public about previous inter-ethnic conflicts is highly necessary.

Ethnic Hungarians are much more faced with intolerance and aversion from ethnic majority in the municipality of Zrenjanin as for this reason it is obvious they have more understanding for violent acts towards other ethnic minorities. In any case more understanding than other two ethnic groups included in the project research. This situation can be partly explained through the fact that there is a great number of Hungarians in the municipality as well as on the territory of Vojvodina.

It should not be forgotten that both Serbs and Hungarians only go over 3% of the whole population in Vojvodina. As for this fact Vojvodina is bi-national. Other smaller ethnic groups do not lessen tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic majority-Serbs, on the contrary the invisible support which has existed to one of two rival sides makes the whole tensed situation in Vojvodina even worse.

Answers we have got from ethnic Serbs about violent acts towards Albanians were very interesting. The sample of asked people were from a close neighborhood of those Albanians who were treated badly in the period of NATO bombing. Very common answer was :” I don’t know”. It is not easy to conclude if this was because people were consciously lying or because they were repressing their thoughts unconsciously. On the other hand it might be because people are simply not aware that

Albanians in the municipality should not be treated differently comparing to the rest of population in Zrenjanin.

The truth is it is more than noticeable that the attitude towards Islamic groups is much more different than the attitude towards other ethnic minorities. Abuse of rights of the old ethnic groups in Vojvodina has rarely been reflected through physical attacks. At the same time bad attitude towards people who have Muslim names have been mainly lessened and reduced. It is the same when we remember victims during 1991 as well as during 2004.

There is a question which certainly follows the issue of inter-ethnic conflicts and that is the question of good and relevant informing the public and a certain education about the mentioned problems. Generally the population has not been well and enough informed even though the editorial stuff in the local newspaper as well as at the local radio station has been working very well and hard in the recent few years. Even 43% of all examinees says they did not know for any violent acts towards ethnic minorities in March 2004 in the municipality of Zrenjanin. The question of good and proper public informing is as important as a professional education of not only young and immature part of population but also education of adults as well.

It is also worth to mention that the final results of this pooling shows that the attitudes of Serbian population in the municipality of Zrenjanin to violent acts towards the minorities groups are much more less than in the previous researches the CDCS did on the territory on Vojvodina and Serbia.

Examinees suggested to the local government different sorts of preventable methods. It is of course reasonable some of suggestions surpass its authorities. At the same time it should not be forgotten the fact that the local government is part of a big social mechanism closely connected to the governmental institutions and civil society. As for this reason if the local self-government can't enlarge its own authorities regulated by law that it can limit its influence.

Population of Zrenjanin suggested following things: to aggravate punishments towards those who cause inter-ethnic incidents, to improve economy in aim to make available more jobs which would preoccupate people, lessen their frustration and ethnic intolerance, to organize a relevant educational system for all citizens no matter of age, when these problems show up the local self-government should react urgently revealing openly to the public problems (first of all through media), to cooperate closely with police, to take charge of innovation in a communal field such as: to limit the time of serving all alcohol drinks in pubs as this would certainly lessen the possibility of more frequent incidents. Some of municipal bodies have already taken over the responsibility to urgently act about these serious problem.

When members of minority groups were asked to express their personal opinion about desirable prevention of the local government authorities at the ethnic incidents, very often we got very

specific answers. It was extremely noticeable that there has been a certain intolerance and light discrimination towards ethnic minority groups. It was also clearly visible that the existence of a motive such as the economical frustration is a fundament of ethnic incidents being much more closer to ideas of ethnic groups than to ideas of ethnic Serbs. This particularly makes the whole problem even more complex and difficult to be resolved as for the fact that the issue of development in and undeveloped country is probably the most complicating topic especially if we take into the consideration inheritance from the previous wars, UN embargo and the complete economic destruction we have. The fact is the local government have not got enough authorities to take over more freedom by having influence on economic field and other problems in aim to resolve them. On the other hand it is absolutely legislative to influence on education of public and informing them trough the media as well.

No doubt, that even when we talk about this issue and all possible preventions of the local government we can't forget the fact that it still depends a lot on the state and provincial authorities, for example: on the educational field. On the other side we have to mention the second restrictive factor which is doubtless Belgrade media, more powerful and influential factor than the local media in any way. At the same time it spreads its influence on political attitudes among the great auditorium and on the whole public especially among those who are part of ethnic minorities groups.

In conclusion, comparing the number of incidents in 2004 in the municipality of Zrenjanin to other municipalities on the territory of Vojvodina we can see that number of incidents have been highly reduced which is the consequence of urgent reaction and responsible attitudes of the local government authorities in this municipality. It actually gives us a positive picture of responsibilities taken over by authorities to prevent and resolve all incidents on ethnic bases.

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