

## **MENAGING CRISIS IN INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN VOJVODINA**

In the period from April to November 2005 the Center for Development of Civil Society carried out a monitoring of ethnic relations, conflicts and incidents in Vojvodina. The summarized findings of the monitoring were sent to relevant factors before the hearing which took place in Brussels on 13 October 2005. The complete findings of the monitoring were discussed at the round table discussion held on 2 November 2005. Beside that, the Center for Development of Civil Society carried out a systematic overt observing of key factors which form a policy of governing the multiethnic communities on 17 November 2005 in Novi Sad.

On the grounds of these materials and discussions the Center for Development of Civil Society steps forward with the following conclusions and

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The Center for Development of Civil Society (CDCS) very strongly supports the intensified activity of the Government of Serbia's agencies regarding prevention and suppression of the incidents on ethnic grounds. This especially applies to the more efficient work of the police in comparison to the situation in 2004.
2. The Center for Development of Civil Society welcomes a more successful harmonization between the activities of the administrative organs on different levels regarding prevention and suppression of ethnic incidents.
3. The CDCS regrets that the improved efficiency of the police has not been followed by a corresponding promptness of the prosecution. The latest investigation into the incident provoked by the organization "National formation" ("Nacionalni stroj") in accordance with the article 134 of the Penal Code suggests advances in this sense and the CDCS expects the work of the prosecution and the juridical organs to intensify.
4. The CDCS has concluded that a drastic decrease in number of incidents and improvements in the work of the administrative organs are results of the intervention of the international community: the Intervention of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (3 October 2004), the Special Rapporteur of the UN Secretary General (19 October 2004), monitoring of the OSCE (end of October 2004) and of the EU (beginning of February 2005), report of the Council of Europe

Secretary General (16 December 2004), visit of the OCSE High Commissioner on national minorities to Vojvodina on 16 February 2004, the extraordinary session of the Commission to the European Parliament for the South-Eastern Europe on 6 June 2005 have caused numerous changes regarding the number of incidents and the attitude of the authorities towards them.

5. The CDCS welcomes recent assurances of the authorities that the following measures will be taken: on the level of the State Union – forming of a commission which will investigate those incidents which have caused the greatest fear among the members of the national community, on the level of the Republic – a promise of an efficient deterring of the perpetrators and their punishment, improving of the national structure of the employees in juridical organs and in the police and reintroducing obligatory learning of the language of the community in the areas with a high percentage of the members of the national communities. The CDCS will especially focus its attention on keeping a promise that by the end of the year the Teachers Faculty will start its work in Subotica.
6. The CDCS warns about potential risky consequences of reducing the question of ethnic relations in Vojvodina to a question of exercising the rights of the members of the Hungarian national community. The CDCS also warns about the cases of violence and discrimination of the members of Croatian and Hungarian national communities. The data of the CDCS suggest that potentially the most jeopardized are the members of the national communities of Albanians, Roma, Ashkali and the members of other ethnic groups from the south of Serbia, close to the Muslim cultural circle and Islamic religion.
7. This especially applies to the case of a scenario which is not possible but not impossible either: repeating the situation from March 2004 when the ethnic incidents from Kosovo transferred to Vojvodina. The CDCS calls upon the administrative organs on all levels, as well as the international organizations, to pay attention on possible consequences of the process of solving the Kosovo issue on the ethnic relations in Vojvodina.
8. The results of the systematic observing carried out by the CDCS indicate that there is no feeling of jeopardy among the members of the elites of Hungarian and Serbian national communities in Vojvodina. On the other hand, the data indicate the presence of a feeling of jeopardy in large populations within majority of national communities in Vojvodina including the two largest ones. The national elites have a chance here to effectively influence the members of their national communities whether in a constructive or destabilizing sense.
9. In other words, a strong recommendation is made for the members of the national elites, including the one of the major group, to make use of the influence they have on their compatriots in the sense of developing the capacity for tolerance.

10. A non-democratic, predominant one-party character of the majority of the national councils in Vojvodina acts in a dysfunctional way: it challenges the oppositional factors within the community to become more radical. There is a distinct need to legally regulate the method of electing the members of the national councils in a deliberated and careful way. Democratic potential of a multi-party system should be used while their use for the purposes of ethno-entrepreneurship should be prevented. This is because the national councils are, beside the other things, potential agents not only of possible radicalization of ethnic demands, but of the stabilization of the inter-ethnic relations likewise. In this context, exercising the right to be informed in the language of the members of the national communities entails full attention.
11. The question of ethnic incidents is in a connection with the question of the method of electing the members of the national councils. Both questions are in a close connection with the problem of exercising the collective rights of the members of the national minorities. Overall exercising of these rights would relieve tensions within a nation between those members of a national community who make up a majority in an area and those who make up a minority in the local communities where they live. These tensions are a breeding ground for various radical, minority political options which additionally radicalize the extreme members of the ethnic majority. In other words, solutions like the following one would relieve the tensions within a national community and stop migrations of the members of the minorities from the southern and central part to the northern part of Vojvodina: a good example is a possibility of reducing the census of 15 signed-in pupils as a lawful condition of obligatory organizing of teaching in their mother tongue. This census has a psychologically repelling effect because in reality it discourages even the members of national communities in those areas where there are enough of them from signing in for schooling in their mother tongue. Reducing the census, seemingly paradoxical, would increase the number of those interested in schooling in their mother tongue which would create a series of positive effects in stabilization of ethnic relations. Among other things, assimilation would become slower and migrations on ethnic grounds would be under control. Besides, these solutions would make nonsense of various demands for territorial ethnic autonomy.
12. It is necessary to carefully study the possibility of articulation and realization of the interests of the members of national communities where they are not in majority in the total population.
13. The question of representation of the members of national communities in organs of the legislative branch of the power is still unsolved. The real census entails over 10000 votes and it is too high a number. It is necessary to change this legal solution.
14. The conflict between the ethnic Croats and Bunjevci is very explicit. A possibility that the state organs play a role of a mediator between these ethnic groups should be considered. Besides, an overall exercising of collective rights of the members of the Croatian national community (for

example, in the municipalities of Sombor and Apatin) would contribute to weakening the feeling of jeopardy of the ethnic Croats in Vojvodina and thus broaden their constructive approach to the question of Bunjevci. In this sense the CDCS welcomes introducing the subject Croatian language with elements of national culture in the secondary school in Subotica.

15. It is beyond understanding that the Federal Council for National Minorities has not yet been formed although it is predicted by the law.
16. The recommendations stated in item 1 and 3 directly relate to the Government of the Republic of Serbia.
17. The data show that transferring the work of keeping public order to the agencies of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina would bring the police closer to the citizens especially to the members of the minority national communities, stabilize the ethnic balance among of the members of the police force and increase the efficiency of its work.
18. The experience proves that some ethnic problems are solved fastest and most efficiently within the local community. As for some questions of exercising collective rights of the members of the national communities, even the province is too wide a frame (e.g. the question of competence of the school boards, or the questions of exercising some rights of the members of the scarce national communities, or the question of the financial support to the minority cultural institutions).
19. It would be good if some other NGOs beside the CDCS become engaged in a systematic monitoring of the ethnic relations, conflicts and incidents in Vojvodina.
20. It is absolutely necessary that organizations of the international community continue to carefully observe exercising of the rights of the members of the national communities in Vojvodina. Regarding the experience from March 2004 when the wave of ethnically motivated violence passed from Kosovo to Vojvodina, this attention of the international organizations could have an invaluable importance in the near future.

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