

Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

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Serbia

The situation of the minorities in Serbia

1. Serbia is, step by step, coming closer to the European Union and has now achieved the official candidate status. The government is committed to the European way and their willingness to change is evident in many areas, for example the extradition of the war criminals Karadzic, Mladic and Hadzic. With the independence declaration of Montenegro on the 03 June 2006 and Kosovo on the 17 February 2008, a new period and state reorganization has started in Serbia. Though the way to a democratic society is difficult, because minorities and many human rights are still not respected in the country. More members of minorities should be represented in public administrations
2. Disadvantaged minorities in Serbia include the Roma, Ashkali and the members of the Egyptian minority RAE, mainly from Kosovo. The situation of the Sandzak-Bosniaks plus the Kosovo-Albanians is also in some parts problematic. In addition the number of attacks against homo-, bi-, and transsexual people has increased. Indeed the Serbian government has regulations for the protection of national minorities, but the practical relevance is limited, because there are no sanctions for offenses and the state has no financial means. In the public sphere prejudices against certain minorities are still wide spread. Since 2003 some minority councils exist, which support the interests of their ethnic groups, but there is still an under-representative number of minorities in administration, justice, police etc. The government should actively work against these developments. Guarantee the access to education, employment housing and medical care for all citizens of Serbia

Roma

3. The economical and social situation of the Roma-minority is particularly bad. The number of Roma in Serbia can only be estimated and varies between 250,000 and 500,000 including the 22,000 to 46,000 Roma from the Kosovo. The missing social integration is one of the biggest problems of this minority. Many Roma do not possess personal identification documents, which thus blocks access to basic rights. The discrimination against them becomes noticeable in the areas of education, employment, housing and healthcare. The missing documents make the access to education much harder. Over 80 % of the Roma in Serbia are illiterate. 66 % of the children are registered at primary schools, but only 13 % of them graduate. Without any mental or physical detraction they are often sent to special schools, where their rate is overrepresented.
4. Also, access to the employment market is in general very difficult for Roma. Responsible for this are mainly the widespread societal prejudices and the low education levels. The unemployment rate among the Roma population in Serbia is very high. More than 80% are unemployed and even with a degree it is difficult to get a job. They mostly work as unskilled laborers in factories, as waste collectors, street cleaners, or do similar low-level work. In 2010 only 1.9% of the unemployed Roma were reported to the national employment

agency. The low number is explained by the fact that for the registration an officially registered accommodation is necessary, which the majority of Roma do not have. The access to housing for Roma is difficult, especially in the cities. Therefore, they often live in informal settlements far away from any infrastructure. Their settlements are often located on the outskirts of the city and their houses consist of brick, sheet metal and cardboard. The states of the accommodations are catastrophic. There is usually no access to electricity, water and sanitation. A necessary step for the improvement of the areas of education, employment, and housing for the Roma would be easier access to personal identification documents. These are the base for access to all rights and all citizens of Serbia should be entitled to these equally.

5. Until 2010 the access to healthcare was denied for Roma without a official registered address. The result is a poor state of health, which, reflected in a comparison to the rest of the population have lower life expectancy. Since July 9, 2010 the procedures Act allows the Roma without official accommodation to obtain a health book and thus better access to the health system.

6. A report by the ERRC in the May 2012 showed that the amount of discrimination against the Roma in recent years has increased. Violence and hate speeches have occurred in the public and the private sector. Most attacks on Roma have taken place in the capital Belgrade. Since April 2009, 17 cases of collective evictions were documented. According to the ERRC and other organizations it is estimated that 2500 Roma were evicted from their living quarters. Many families were left homeless or displaced, and had to live in inhumane conditions. In 2012 there were again forced evictions of Roma families. On behalf of the Serbian government a commercial building was to be erected and 33 Roma families were to 'leave' their homes. After local protests, the eviction was postponed for the time being. 20 of the families are internally displaced persons from Kosovo. The government said that they have received support for their return to Kosovo. However, they returned to Belgrade, because permanent reintegration in Kosovo with safety and dignity could not be guaranteed. Since April 2012 the Roma in Belvil, an informal settlement in Belgrade, were threatened with expulsion from their homes in order to build an access road.

7. The authorities failed to hold consultations with stakeholders and created no specific resettlement plans. Only after several protests by human rights organizations, the eviction was temporarily stopped. The victims were given no information about the place of their resettlement nor the type of accommodation. Finally, they were to be resettled in prefabricated houses, but the implementation failed so far. It is required that any evacuation must always be carried out in consultation with stakeholders and in compliance with international standards. This includes provision of appropriate replacement accommodations. Minorities should be better protection and forced evictions should be immediately cancelled.

Albanians

8. In the border region of southern Serbia to Kosovo (municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, Medvedja) live mostly ethnic Albanians. So far there is little progress that the Albanians attain more positions in the municipal councils. In 2009 existing tensions caused various violent incidents. In February 2010, a policeman of Albanian origin, and his wife and two passers-by were injured by a car bomb.

Bosnians:

9. The position of Bosniaks in Sandzak is still difficult. There are disadvantages due to a significant under-representation of Bosniaks in police, judiciary and administration. Till this

day a successful election of the Council of the Bosniak minority has failed because of political conflicts. In September 2011 the unrecognized council claimed the government to put the discrimination of the Bosniaks to an end. In the foreground stands the economic disadvantage of the Sandzak region. As with all other minorities in Serbia, the situation is not equivalent to the standard of the European human rights conventions.

Refugees and Displaced Persons

10. In June 2012 the UNHCR published a report on the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Serbia. There are still 73,358 refugees, mostly Croatian Serbs and 97,286 displaced persons from Kosovo in Serbia. The situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Kosovo give cause for serious concern. Many of them have either no possibility to return to Kosovo or are scared. Indeed the Roma from Kosovo were recognized as IDPs, but they neither have fundamental rights nor given other protective measures. They live in poverty and the support that they receive from the government or other organizations is inadequate. According to the UNHCR in 2011 a total of 1,143 persons returned voluntarily to Kosovo. There should be more financial and emotional support for IDPs.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation

11. Among the population the prejudices against homosexuals are widespread. Many a time there were violent attacks on homosexuals: In October a lesbian woman in Belgrade was stabbed and seriously injured. In Novi Sad, a gay man suffered in an attack and received cuts and injuries. In June 2010 for the first time a gay pride event took place in Belgrade where 1000 participants were protected by 5000 policemen. A part of the city was devastated by opponents of the parade. The October 2011 planned Gay Pride parade was banned by the government and thus infringes the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Freedom of speech, beliefs and expression should be ensured by the authorities.