

NATIONAL MINORITIES: THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN INTEGRATION OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY

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The Roma have recently got a status of a national minority in Yugoslavia and thereby the right to the support of the state and the media to the formation of the Roma editorial offices in different regions. However, there are only four or five Roma journalists in Yugoslavia, while the region of South Serbia is covered by some 400 local media, of which not more than 10 broadcast only few programmes in the minority languages.

All to-date socio-psychological researches into the problems of the Roma deal with social and ethnic distance indirectly – mainly via the formation of stereotypes and prejudices about Roma.

Measured by a classical Bogardus scale in one of the sociological researches conducted by Professor Bogdan Djurovic:

- 24% Serbs and 13% Yugoslavs refuse to have friends among Roma;
- 30% Serbs and 16% Yugoslavs refuse to have Roma neighbours;
- 15% Serbs and 6% Yugoslavs do not want to live in the same state with Roma;
- 79,5% Serbs and 58% Yugoslavs would not live in a marriage with Roma;

In addition, we should take into account that other national minorities demonstrate a relatively high level of distance from the Roma.

The Roma have been and still are subjected to ghettoisation, discrimination and segregation; they are exposed to racism in all sub-systems of the society: economy, politics, culture, education, information. Numerous specialists in the Roma community, looking for a key solution to the »Roma future« most frequently in economy and the political space, fail to recognise that the most painful forms of ghettoisation and discrimination exist in the sphere of education, information and culture.

Almost all post-socialist societies are multi-ethnic and multi-religious. There is no social stability and progress without harmonisation of multi-ethnic relations within so complex societies. Nor can there be any improvement of the position of the Roma if their acquired equality remains unrecognised.

Under the definition accepted by UNESCO, culture is a unity of knowledge and values which are not acquired through a special form of education, but which are accepted by each member of a community, while a cultural identity represents only a feeling of self-confidence of the members of a community.

The media in Serbia

Every citizen or a group may form a newspaper agency, a radio or a TV station through a simple registration, or a simple entry of a company in the registry.

During the course of the last 5 years, the number of daily and periodical publications exceeds 2,500 magazines, while the number of TV stations has doubled (around 120); there are about 400 different radio stations, of which most are private.

According to some people in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, there are more than 1,300 media within the Serbian territory. The exact number is not known even to them.

As from 5 October 2000, most of the stations and newspapers have a pro-state orientation.

The rules and procedures governing imports of foreign magazines have been liberalised and simplified, so that now all important world's newspapers and magazines are also available in Yugoslavia (mainly in Belgrade only).

The current situation with the press is as follows:

1. There are 12 dailies, which are available throughout Yugoslavia
2. There are 3 regional dailies in Serbia
3. Vojvodina has two dailies, published in Hungarian
4. Kosovo and Metohija have 3 dailies – 1 is published in Serbian and 2 in Albanian language
5. There are 20 weeklies and periodicals within the whole territory of Yugoslavia
6. There are 6 news agencies in Yugoslavia
7. As far as I know, there are 44 different newspapers which are published in the minority languages and almost all are periodicals. Most newspapers are published in Albanian and Hungarian languages and some are published also in Slovakian, Czech, Bulgarian and Russian languages. Only 1 magazine is published in the language of the Roma (Chavorikano lil); in addition, there is a magazine which has been published over the past 66 years with interruptions though (Romano lil – the Romani newspaper).
8. 10 dailies have their web sites
9. 6 TV stations broadcast their programmes via Internet

10. Radio and Television of Novi Sad broadcasts radio programmes on Serbian and Hungarian languages 24 hours a day and the programmes in Slovakian, Russian, Rumanian languages during several hours a day and few programmes in Ukrainian and Romani languages (every Sunday at 08,00 “the best broadcast time” in the territory of Serbia where the Roma from South Serbia are mainly ignored as they are treated as Moslems and where a prevailing system is that of a regime)

11. In Vojvodina, RTS television programmes are broadcast in Serbian, Hungarian, Rumanian, Russian, Slovakian and Roma languages.

12. About 40 magazines published in Vojvodina are published in the minority languages, mainly as bilingual magazines.

Programmes in the minority languages

There are about 400 local media in the region of South Serbia of which only 10 broadcast few programmes in the minority languages.

For the time being, the radio programmes are broadcast in the Romani language in Novi Sad, Belgrade, Vršac, Deronje, Trstenik, Kruševac, Prokuplje, Niš in Yugoslavia and in Podgorica in Montenegro.

At present, there are 3 media in Nis which broadcast the programme in the minority languages (2 in Bulgarian and 2 in the Romani language). For the time being, Nis Radio continues to broadcast in both Bulgarian and Romani language, although there are some indications that the Radio will stop broadcasts in the language of the Roma.

Most of the people working in those media as journalists lack adequate qualifications. This is specifically true for the local broadcasters in South Serbia.

The viewership of the broadcasters in that area exceeds 2 million people, while the region of Nis itself includes the area inhabited by more than 600,000 people. Some broadcasters from Nis are seen by more than 1 million viewers.

Concerning the media, the Roma in Serbia have four private radio stations (one in Belgrade, another one Nis and two in Bujanovac) and one TV station in Nis which has a regional character as from August 2002, since it covers the area of almost the whole of South Serbia. Most of employees in those media have only secondary school qualifications (except three or four professionally trained journalists). The stations do not have a developed programme concept which is why it is not possible to discuss their quality. It was not before August that RTV “Nisava” began to create its programme scheme, which is why it is still too early to discuss its quality.

A small number of journalists among the Roma

There is an extraordinary need for education in the field of journalism in both the minority media and the media the owners of which belong to the majority. The state of Yugoslavia has not demonstrated a specific wish to enable the Roma to realise their legal rights, which can be concluded from numerous stories about the minority rights, and particularly those of the Roma and their needs. Such stories do not yield any results, let alone the genuine attempts to do something. Everything remains a dead letter.

There are only four or five journalists among the Roma in Yugoslavia and they are members of the Association of Journalists of Yugoslavia (SNJ) and the Union of Journalists of Serbia (UNS).

The role of the media in terms of the Roma is extraordinary. The Roma who now have a status of a national minority – for the time being on paper only – should be strongly supported by the media in forming the Roma editorial offices in different regions, which should be encouraged by the state both financially and in any other form of assistance.

Naturally, the state also has the obligation to ensure that the Roma, who now have a status of a national minority, have an adequate media space on the channels of the state television – RTS – which the state has provided to all other national minorities which acquired the same status before, although they are not any bigger communities than the Roma community.

Thus, there is no place for chauvinism or nationalism here, especially among the media stakeholders at the regional level, in RTS. Such people who are blocking the progress in inter-ethnic and multi-cultural co-operation – which is why they should not be doing their current jobs – often say: »You, the Roma, should be happy with the programmes in the Romani language. You want money. What money you are asking for when you should be working as volunteers without any payment«. At the same time, the funds intended for the formation of the Roma editorial offices and their activities are being spent in various ways, for various purposes other than the original ones.

The satisfaction of social and cultural needs of the Roma should not lag behind the satisfaction of the needs of any community or a national minority. On the contrary – those attempts should exceed usual norms.

Wherever they are, the Roma have always demonstrated so strong ability to integrate in a community they live in that they have never caused any problems to

the majority communities in terms of ethnicity and confession of faith or in class and social terms.

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