

Snježana Vasiljević

Ethnic Relations and Examples of Positive Practice in Eastern Europe

Introduction

The objective of this study is to show how some Eastern European countries have managed to launch the initiatives at the local level conducive to the creation of multiethnic societies. This is important not only because of achieving the goals set up by the international community but also because of providing some positive examples for others in the process of implementing programmes, initiatives and legislation for the advancement of multiethnic relations at local levels. The positive effects of particular examples of the positive practice of ethnic relations are often very difficult to bring about. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish between the examples of the positive and the negative practice, especially if we focus on the conflicts in sensitive societies such as the Western Balkans. However, it could be said that any practice that can contribute to the improvement of ethnic relations and to the protection of minorities could be considered a positive practice.

The region of the Western Balkans, despite the turbulent period during and after the war has - besides a lot of negative examples - also provided some examples of best practice concerning the advancement of ethnic relations at both the regional and the local levels. In this era of enlarging Europe and the numerous initiatives focusing on the improvement of ethnic relations and protection of ethnic minorities in the region of the Western Balkans, other countries bordering this region, such as Hungary and Romania, have also shown some positive examples of shaping multicultural societies in this part of Europe.

This study is divided into three parts: a short introduction, a review of the examples of best practice in the countries selected for this research and the conclusion of the study emphasizing that these examples can be used in the broader region for the purpose of maintaining peace and stability as well as for creating a society with developed and improved interethnic relations. The countries chosen for this study are Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia.

Examples of positive practice

Hungary

In Eastern Europe, Hungary is one of the best examples of positive practice in ethnic relations. The following examples will support this argument. A specific positive practice, known from the Hungarian experience, is the introduction of the institution of the ombudsperson for national minorities since this can substantially contribute to the improvement of the situation of minorities and to the promotion of their rights.¹ The institution of an ombudsperson for national minorities exists only in Hungary of all the East-European countries covered by this study. Even though in other countries similar duties are performed by ombudspersons for human rights, experience has shown that there is a need for additional mechanisms for the protection of minority rights. The Hungarian experience can serve as a good example for other countries in the region, as the state authorities should bear the burden of responsibility for the preservation of values and good inter-ethnic relations in a country. On the other hand, the local authorities should also share the burden of responsibility in fostering tolerance and good relations among different minority groups. The prestige of the Romany Local Government is high in the whole community. The Romany Minority Local Government of Nagykanizsa has a special influence in the county. It has provided different training for its members, as well as for the leaders of the local minority governments of the entire county.²

One of the examples of good practice at the local level are the school experiments in two Roma villages in the Alföld which represent innovative educational programmes in Hungary. The actors involved in these two experiments were the local governments and the public institutions. In the first village, the mayor initiated a new programme aimed at improving its school's level of education and the relationship between the school and the parents. In developing the level of

¹ One of the most important aims of the ombudsperson is to strengthen the confidence of citizens in state institutions. Anyone may turn to the Parliamentary Commissioner if s/he feels that the action of an agency, or as a result of an agency's decision, proceedings or negligence, a violation has taken place in her/his national or ethnic minorities' rights, or that the direct threat of such a violation is imminent. See for more details at the official site of the institution of the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights at: <http://www.obh.hu/nekh/en/index.htm>.

² One of the positive examples are the innovative educational programmes in Nagykanizsa. This good practice has resulted in an educational curriculum about the Romany minority for all students, the cooperation with all elementary schools in Nagykanizsa, the classes on the Romany culture and history, the relations between the ethnic and the Hungarian students have been greatly improved, the number of Romany students in high schools in Nagykanizsa increased by approximately 30 students. This has had a positive impact on the local practice though the local government has resisted attempts at transplanting these activities to other locations. Borbély Nagy, Éva, *Innovative Educational Initiatives in Nagykanizsa*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=37>.

education, the mayor hoped to bring to an end the practice that the children of wealthier non-Roma families attend school in the nearby city. The other objective of the alternative programme was to create a closer relationship between the Roma and the non-Roma inhabitants. The second programme attempted to integrate the Roma in the community while urging them to keep their traditions and values. The record of the various stages of the school programmes can serve as a good example for other multiethnic communities.

Despite the good educational programmes and activities at the local level, educational discrimination still exists. The local minority self-government has tried to eradicate educational discrimination on the local level. This can be seen in the following example of talent fostering and democratic training of the Roma secondary school students at Residence Hall Collegium Martineum in Manfa in southern Hungary. Talented Roma students are given the opportunity to study and live in the Hall where they take part in its democratic governance and receive guidance in how to become key players in the society. The actors involved in this initiative are the local NGOs, minority organisations, minority self-government and local leaders. The gifted Roma students from the secondary schools in the nearby city of Pecs are provided with high quality educational facilities and community-type accommodation at the Residence Hall. They learn - through the democratic governance of the Hall, the specialised courses and the meetings with the Roma and the non-Roma intellectuals and politicians - how to become more influential and socially mobile individuals as well as key players in building democracy for and within the Roma community. As most of these students come from highly segregated settlements, usually economically and culturally destitute hamlets, their chances of gaining access to the qualified job market and the political sphere are improved by their stay in the Hall. The good practice is the result of the application of local level initiatives involving international non-governmental partners.³

Romania

The second country chosen for this study is Romania. Due to the traumatic events in the 20th century Transylvania, the local ethnic and

³ Location: the good practice takes place in Manfa, a village close to Pecs in southern Hungary. Minority/target groups: talented secondary school Roma students from small, usually segregated villages from south-western Hungary. Aszalos, Zoltan, *Talent fostering and democratic training of Roma secondary school students, Residence Hall Collegium Martineum in Manfa in Southern Hungary*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=215>.

religious communities tend to live more or less isolated from each other in order to avoid confrontations. This, in turn, creates difficulties in learning each other's language and culture and in building up coexistence. In addition, there is a lack of forums and opportunities to inform people about the culture of different ethnic groups in Romania.

The Multicultural Academy⁴ is part of the events and programmes organised by the Intercultural Centre at the Pro Europa Liga (Tirgu Mures, Romania), an organisation which promotes communication and dialogue between different cultures, ethnic groups, religious communities, the preservation of otherness and differences, and the prevention of conflicts. This programme is also supported by the national NGOs, the international government organizations, and the international NGOs. The Academy is financed by the Heinrich Böll Foundation from Germany. The Academy is run the entire school year as a "travelling University," and has four sessions held in four different locations depending on which culture is in the focus of that particular session.

Another example of improving majority and minority relations in Romania is the Minority TV. The purpose of this programme is representation of minorities in public discourses and improving intercommunity relationships.⁵ The main goals of this minority programme are: to broaden the number and the spectrum of their viewers by presenting the culture of the ethnic minorities from the region of Dobrogea (Turkish, Tartar, Lipovene, Greek, Armenian, Albanian, Roma, Hungarians), and to inform them about their home country. The locations of the programmes vary: they are filmed in Dobrogea and abroad - in Turkey, Greece, Russia, and Hungary. To boost the coexistence of the Romanian majority with the minorities, the programmes are made in the Romanian language by Romanian journalists so that the majority population can learn about and understand the minority cultures around them. The programmes are structured as talk shows and interviews which present the traditions, customs, religion and social problems of the ethnic groups.

Concerning the education of the minorities, a good example of positive practice in Romania is the integration of the Roma children in the school

⁴ Haller, Istvan, Ardelean, Laura, *Multicultural Academy in Romania*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=148>.

⁵ MTC (Maritime Training Centre) TV is one of the three local televisions in Constanta (TV Neptun and Canal 56) broadcasting in the County of Constanta, with between 500.000 and 1.500.000 prime-time viewers. On Wednesdays, the MTC has a minority programme: "Convietiuiri la Marea Neagra" (Coexistence at the Black Sea). Musat, Dan and Beizadea, Haralambie, *Minority TV*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=155>.

in Valea Rece. The education of the Roma children in Valea Rece⁶ is an example of a combination of different sources and efforts in minority education. The education of the local Roma children was initiated by some Hungarian teachers from the town; they received financial help and know-how from the US Peace Corp. The Franciscan Order of the Catholic Church is also involved, mainly by providing monks for the spiritual education and the Roma language teaching, as well as two nurses for medical services. The legal base and help was provided by the OASIS Foundation, a local NGO with an environmental protection profile. They applied for financial assistance to different international charity organizations. A few teachers were recruited and paid by the County Educational Administration; also, three young volunteers from Scotland participated in the educational work. Also, two Roma teachers are now employed at the nursery school.⁷

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence in April 1992, triggering off the bloody war which lasted from 1992 to 1995. The Dayton Agreement, signed in November 1995, brought the war to an end. The results of this three-and-a-half year war were several hundred thousands casualties, more than twenty thousand people disappeared, some two million expelled and displaced persons, thousands of invalids, the destroyed economy and industry. The war significantly altered the demographic structure, so presently there are no precise data about the new demographic structure and the size of the population.⁸

⁶ Valea Rece is the poorest suburb of Tirgu Mures. 250 Roma families live there (with 3-5 children on the average per family) in squalour. Most adults are unemployed and make their living by collecting and selling recyclable materials. 85 percent of the population is illiterate, the children have difficulties in attending school and they quit after a year or two. Gorog, Ilona, *Education to integrate Roma children in school in Valea Rece*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=156>.

⁷ The Educational Centre has achieved very good results.. The number of pupils who enrol this state school is increasing yearly. In general, 90 percent of the children who attend this educational centre have improved their school performance. Every schoolyear, the children there are given school supplies and the teachers in the Roma educational centre monitor and encourage their pupils' educational efforts.

⁸ According to the 1991 census, Bosnia and Herzegovina had 4.38 million inhabitants, and the national structure was:

- Muslims, 1.9 million (43,7%)
- Serbs, 1.,4 million (31,4 %)
- Croats, 756.000 (17,3 %)
- Yugoslavs, 240.000 (5,5%)
- Roma and others, 100.000 (2,1%)

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1999.: *Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Available at: http://www.minelres.lv/reports/bosnia/bosnia_NGO.htm.

The present state of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very poor. A number of citizens are deprived of their elementary rights to live in their own homes and to use their property, the freedom of movement is restricted and risky, the educational system is strongly influenced by the ethnically-dominated political and state authorities in the entities, and there is blatant discrimination in employment as well. The position and status of the ethnic minorities is similar to the political and economic environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The position of the ethnic minorities, primarily the Bosnian Roma, is almost the same in both entities - very bad and disturbing. The Roma make the largest minority group.⁹

The creation of a multiethnic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be a significant step in the improvement of ethnic relations in the Western Balkans. Therefore, several examples of positive practice will be looked into in this chapter. The first example is an initiative for providing legal aid and information to refugees and displaced persons. The Centre for Information and Legal Assistance (CIPP)¹⁰ provides legal aid and information to refugees and displaced persons wishing to return to their pre-war homes, in particular to the region around Zvornik (Bosnia), and from that region to other parts of Bosnia (1998-2000 and beyond). It also educates local authorities regarding the displaced persons' right to return. The CIPP¹¹ focuses on solving property claim disputes, often employing mediation to settle such problems so that displaced persons can go home. The CIPP also collaborates with some research organizations to study the quality of judicial processes in the Serbian entity of Bosnia.

⁹ Before the war, about 25 minority groups apart from the Roma, very small in size, lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Solely in the area of the town of Prnjavor (Western Bosnia), before the war there were 23 nationalities. However, after the war, there remained only the Roma and Jews out of all the former minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A special emphasis is to be given to the so-called "new minorities" which were created as a direct consequence of the war, that is, due to the "ethnic cleansing" and the persecution, and which are characteristic for Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are composed of the members of all three Bosnian /Herzegovinian people (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) who live in the entity whose constitution does not envisage their people as constitutional.

¹⁰ The Centre for Information and Legal Assistance was founded in the spring of 1998, and began its legal aid programmes at that time.

¹¹ The Centre for Information and Legal Assistance's existence is the result of the local grassroots initiative, assisted by the grants from international governmental and non-governmental organizations. There is no concrete aid forthcoming from the local or national government of Bosnia. At times there has been implicit resistance from the local Zvornik government to the CIPP's programs, due to some disagreements regarding the goals. But at present there is at least a minimum level of cooperation. Lippmann, Peter, *Center for Information and Legal Assistance (CIPP) provides legal aid and information to refugees and displaced persons wishing to return to the region around Zvornik, Bosnia, and from that region to other parts of Bosnia (1998-2000 and beyond)*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=167>.

Before the war, out of the Zvornik¹² municipality's population of 81.000, approximately 60 per cent were Muslims and the rest were Serbs. A few months into the war, the entire Muslim population had been expelled, and the Muslim-owned property brought under the control of the new Serb-dominated government. Many homes were taken over by the Serbs who had been displaced from various locations in the Muslim-Croat Federation (Bosnia's other entity), such as Tuzla and Sarajevo. Thus in the post-war period the displaced Serbs in the Zvornik area and the displaced Muslims in Tuzla and other parts of the Federation, all encounter problems regarding the restitution of their pre-war property. In addition, there are both Muslim and Serb refugees in the neighbouring countries and further abroad who would like to return home.

The next example focuses on the initiatives in Srebrenica. The Bosnian town of Srebrenica witnessed the worst atrocities in Europe since WWII. More than 8.000 Muslims were massacred there during the occupation by the Serbian military in 1995. After many years, the refugees are beginning to return and the aid has started to flow into the region. In 2001, eight citizen groups formed a network, the Forum of Srebrenica NGOs, in a joint effort to make their voices heard and, even more important, to create a joint lobby for Srebrenica's economic and social reconstruction, and for the return of the refugees. The forum was sponsored by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), which was active in Srebrenica from 2000 through 2002. To show that reconciliation is possible even in the town and the region of Srebrenica, the staff members of the mentioned organisations are both Muslims and Serbs.

Due to the financial support it has enjoyed, the Forum created a website for the local NGOs to help channel the information on the relevant projects and to inform the donors and policy makers about the conditions in the town. One of the Forum's numerous important activities are the organised pre-return visits of displaced persons to Srebrenica, as well as of the displaced persons still in Srebrenica to their homes. Those visits are planned and coordinated by the Forum's affiliate organisations. For example, it has taken the displaced Serbs from Srebrenica to Glamoč, Donji Vakuf, and Sarajevo, and has organized visits and resettlement projects of the displaced Muslims from the regions of Tuzla and Sarajevo to the villages around Srebrenica. The forum also supports sports and cultural programmes that help to bring together young people from both entities in the long-term interest of

¹² Zvornik, situated on the river Drina, is one of the largest towns along Bosnia's eastern border with Serbia. During the war this area was one of the first to be taken over by the Serbian separatist forces (in April-May of 1992). Today, Zvornik lies in the heart of the eastern half of the present-day Republika Srpska, one of Bosnia's two post-war entities.

reconciliation and coexistence. For example, it has organized some indoor soccer tournaments among three municipalities in the Federation and three in the Republika Srpska.

Civil society is playing an important role in building peace and stability. The vital role of the NGOs in Srebrenica is mobilizing the resources and the will to heal the deep wounds and facilitate social integration. Another organisation (The Centre for Legal Assistance) provides legal counselling for the returning refugees. The Forum members organize training courses as well. It is not enough to return to your home but also to find work or be able to set up a business of your own. The organization "Srebrenica 99" was established and launched for the same purpose in mid-1999¹³. In the summer of 2000, in spite of occasional violent opposition, this organisation enabled the first group return of refugees to several villages near Srebrenica. Besides Srebrenica 99, some other actors were involved in this project e.g. the local NGOs, the ministry, the national NGOs, the international NGOs, the minority organizations and some local leaders. The purpose of establishing Srebrenica 99 was to help the displaced Muslims still living in refugee camps and abandoned homes in the cantons of Tuzla and Sarajevo to return to the municipality of Srebrenica. The formation and operation of Srebrenica 99 is based solely on the local citizen initiative. The organization has received some valuable assistance from the Tuzla Canton government. However, Srebrenica 99 has received no assistance from the local authorities in Srebrenica.

Another organisation established to support the return of displaced persons to their homes is the Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs (DISS)¹⁴. The purpose of this initiative was to inform the Serbs displaced from Sarajevo and its suburbs during or shortly after the 1992-1995 war about their right to return. The organisation, responsible for advocating the protection of human rights and equal legal status for all three main ethnicities in Bosnia, has been encouraging the two-way return, that is of Muslims and Croats to the Republika Srpska, as well as of Serbs to

¹³ Lippmann, Peter, *Srebrenica 99, an organization based in Tuzla, north-eastern Bosnia: struggling to establish the return of Muslims displaced from Srebrenica and nearby villages (1999-2001 and beyond)*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=173>.

¹⁴ The DISS is purely a non-governmental initiative that arose out of local needs. It initially met with some opposition from the local government but recently, as a result of international pressure, this opposition has decreased and in some instances even turned into mild support. The Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs was formed in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza, in February of 1996. The DISS was founded by a small number of Serbs who remained in Sarajevo after the reunification, with the goal of advocating the two-way return and respect for human rights. The main target of DISS's programmes are the displaced Sarajevo Serbs living in the eastern part of the Republika Srpska.

Sarajevo. Besides the DISS, other actors such as local NGOs, local governmental institution, international NGOs, minority organisations, and local leaders, have played an important role in this process.

Having outlined several examples of best practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we might conclude that the described practices, in general, have helped to decrease interethnic tensions and to foster the peace-implementation process and the democratisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The local government, the media and the international organizations represent the key actors in this process of improving interethnic relations and conflict resolutions. It is also important to point out that those actors have helped to foster the development of independent media and the future democratisation of public space by means of their peacemaking activities.

Croatia

In December 1991 the Croatian Parliament passed the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of National and Ethnic Communities or Minorities in the Republic of Croatia.¹⁵ Passing this law was a precondition for the international recognition of Croatia as an independent state in January 1992. At that time, Croatia, like the other states created on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, had envisioned a relatively high degree of the protection of the collective rights of their minorities.¹⁶

The current situation concerning the protection of minority rights is much better than previously, due to the recently adopted Constitutional Law on Minority Rights Protection and the strong pressure from the European Union concerning the Croatian application for joining the EU. The adoption of this new Constitutional Law on Minority Rights Protection can definitely be considered a positive practice in this field. The Stabilisation and Association Process will take some time and during that period Croatia is obliged to take all the necessary measures to improve the position of its ethnic minorities and the ethnic relations in general in order to contribute to the fostering of the regional cooperation in developing multiethnic relations in the Western Balkans. However, the main objection of the international community is that the Croatian authorities have demonstrated a lack of political will regarding the protection of the Croatian Serbs and the safeguarding of their right to

¹⁵ The Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of National and Ethnic Communities or Minorities in the Republic of Croatia, *Official Gazette* 65/91.

¹⁶ The right to education in the minority scripts and languages at all levels of education, the right to the official use of the languages, various opportunities for the preservation of ethnic, language and religious identity and the institution of the political representation of minority interests.

return to their pre-war domiciles in Croatia. It is therefore very difficult to find good practices at the government level that promote positive relations between the ethnic groups.

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia¹⁷ stipulates that Croatia is a state “established as the national state of the Croatian people and other peoples and minorities who are citizens of Croatia ... and the state guarantees them equality with the citizens who are Croats as well as the national rights on the basis of the democratic standards of the UN and the states of the free world.” The constitution guarantees the official use of other languages and the Cyrillic alphabet and other alphabets besides the Croatian language and the Latin alphabet under the conditions regulated by the special law.

At the internal political level the issue of the minority rights and the position of certain minority groups were treated differently than at the level of the central government in Zagreb as well as at the level of local authorities. From the creation of the Croatian state, the central authorities' treatment of this issue depended on the pressure by the international community. A consistent and long-term and systematic policy of minority protection applying the European standards and principles has not been a priority. Local self-governments and authorities have responded to this problem differently. Some districts have no minority groups or their number is negligible. Other districts have sizeable national minorities but the support for the realization of their collective rights has only been rhetorical.

The good practice in Rijeka is very important for Croatia and all minority communities. In supporting the activity of minorities there are three kinds of objectives: the goal is for the minorities to preserve their identity, culture, language and religion. The local government in Rijeka is democratic, operates by the European standards and supports all its inhabitants while respecting their differences. The common interests of the ethnic minorities and the local government bring about social harmony and contribute to the fundamental principle: equality and understanding without discrimination.¹⁸

¹⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, *Official Gazette* 41/01.

¹⁸ The Primorsko-Goranska region has 14 towns, 21 communes and 604 villages on the north-western side of the Croatian Adriatic coast. The oldest sources show us that in the local government in Rijeka there were many Croatian representatives. Foreign tradesman, artisans and peasants settled here and became citizens of Rijeka. In the course of several generations some of them became noblemen and got a seat on the city council. The possibility of economic prosperity and openness of the local people attracted many people to the region to launch some economic activity. This historical ethnic mixture primarily consists of Italians, Slovenes, Roma, Serbs, Muslims and Montenegrins. The ethnic minorities make up more than 25% of the population of the Primorsko-Goranska region. Stankovic, Zoran, *Ethnic Communities and National Minorities in Primorsko-Goranska District*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=77>.

The signing of the peace agreements of Erdut and Dayton in 1995 signalled the end of the war in the Balkans, but it only heralded a host of other problems related to the re-establishing of an environment conducive to the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups. A number of non-governmental organisations have arisen and seem to be filling the void that has resulted from this absence of political will to rebuild or stabilise what have historically been multiethnic communities in Croatia. One of the examples are the projects of the Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights, Osijek (hereafter called the Centre for Peace), exemplary of the good practices enabling the creation of viable multiethnic communities.¹⁹ Headquartered in the troubled region of Eastern Slavonia, the Centre for Peace is involved in a number of projects across the region falling under one of the three project areas developed by the Centre: the Human Rights Promotion and Protection Project; peace education, geared toward organizing workshops for psycho-social support; and peace-building, geared toward the rebuilding of trust between Croats and Serbs. These programmes aim to apply the “good practices” established by some Croatian non-governmental organizations in the attempt to facilitate the implementation of the agreements reached in Dayton and Erdut regarding the resettlement and repatriation of Croatian citizens of Serbian ethnicity to their pre-war places of domicile in Croatia.

The Info-Klub Vukovar (NGO) is an example of a communal and open local public forum for the Serbian and Croatian communities in Vukovar. It provides a place where people can meet, and also to realise that not only have they common concerns and problems but also that regardless of their nationality or ethnicity they can work together on solving these problems or be better informed about local issues or services.²⁰ This 'meeting place' takes two forms: one is physical, i.e. Info-Klub is a place where people can drop in any time of the day to read newspapers and magazines, surf the Net or use PCs. There is also a playstation for

¹⁹ These projects are particularly interesting for at least two reasons: first, they are in line with the requirements of the international community for the successful implementation of the Erdut and Dayton agreements. Secondly and more importantly, these projects of the Centre for Peace are implemented at the grassroots level, and deal with the concrete post-war problems people are faced with in their everyday life. These problems will not be remedied overnight or in the near future, as there are numerous obstacles which must be overcome, including the financial, logistical, and psycho-social ones.

²⁰ The current practice results from the initiative at the local rather than the regional level, as the PGDI has entered into a partnership with the Association for Peace and Human Rights Baranja. Info-Klub, initially a PGDI's project, now comprises 11 branches, seven of which are currently active (four are temporarily closed; 2 of which, if reopened, will be operating at a different location). Gosselin, Tania. *Info-Klub Vukovar (NGO): building a communal and open local public forum for the Serbian and Croatian communities in Vukovar, Croatia 1999-*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=163>.

teenagers. Second, Info-Klub regularly organises debates or citizen forums where people are free to join the discussion on the local public issues and concerns. The following example focuses on a project initiated and operated by a local NGO from Vukovar called Projekt Građanske Demokratske Inicijative (PGDI). The task of Info-Klub is to provide for the citizens the relevant information regarding local public issues and to facilitate contacts and communication between the Serbian and the Croatian communities in a town that was nearly completely destroyed in the war.²¹ Apart from providing a physical place where the citizens can obtain this information and meet regardless of their nationality (according to the coordinator, most of those who visit the Klub are young people), the Info-Klub organises round tables or civic forums for all citizens of Vukovar.

Serbia and Montenegro

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia came into being in 1992 as a federation of the constituent republics of Serbia and Montenegro, two of the six republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact, three constitutions are in effect: the Federal Constitution of April 1992, the Serbian Constitution of September 1990, and the Montenegrin Constitution of 1992. There is some incongruity between these three fundamental documents, particularly regarding the Serbian Constitution, which had been adopted before the Federal Constitution. A large number of republican laws have not been brought into line with the federal laws, and furthermore, such major federal legislations as the Criminal Code, the Minorities Protection Act and others are not implemented in Montenegro.²² However, at this point, the adoption of the new Minorities Protection Act might be considered a positive practice in this field.

The Yugoslav, Serbian, and Montenegrin Constitutions and the Kosovo Constitutional Framework guarantee equality before the law and equal protection of the law to all, including those belonging to national

²¹ The first Info-Klub opened in 1998 in Bilje as a locale where people could come to read newspapers and magazines, mingle and assist one another. After a year, the Info-Klub entered into a partnership with another NGO, the Association of Peace and Human Rights 'Baranja', and the organisers decided to expand their activities by opening the Info-Klub branches in other towns of the region. Info-Klub Vukovar opened its doors in March 1999. In April 2000 it became a fully-fledged organisation (while remaining part of the Info-Klub network).

²² *The Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities*. Available at: http://www.minelres.lv/coe/report/FRY_NGO.htm.

minorities and ethnic groups.²³ The Serbian and Montenegrin Parliaments have special bodies dealing with the issues related to the exercise of minority rights (Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations in Serbia, and Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms in Montenegro). The representatives of minorities serve on these committees. In addition to the Federal Ministry for National and Ethnic Communities, the Montenegrin Government has a department for national ethnic groups which ranks as a ministry and is headed by a representative of a minority group. There is no ministry in Serbia specifically responsible for the protection of minority rights. The provincial administration of Vojvodina has also set up the Secretariat for Regulations, Administration and National Minorities, which is headed by a representative of the ethnic Hungarians, the largest minority community in Vojvodina. The Kosovo Assembly has the Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities made up of two members of each community elected to the Assembly.

One of the legal duties of the state and local authorities is to promote special measures for the protection of minority rights. Some special measures promoting the equality between the minorities and the majority have always been taken to deal with the effect rather than the cause. Such measures are most frequent in the areas in which the minority communities are the majority population, and are taken by the relevant local authorities through the institutions set up by the local community. After the armed conflicts in 2000 and 2002 in the southern Serbian municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Međeda, Serbia adopted a crisis-resolution plan. The plan, which includes the measures to promote the equality of all the communities in the area, was in principle supported by the Albanian community but its implementation leaves much to be desired. The first significant measure was the dissolution of the existing local assemblies and calling of early local elections. The result of the elections is that now the Preševo, Bujanovac, and Međeda Assemblies, for the first time reflect the ethnic makeup of the population. Some proposed amendments to laws have not always taken into account the real needs of persons belonging to minorities in the areas where they are in the majority. The planned abolition of the

²³ In all three constitutions, Yugoslavia is defined as a national state. This is an essential constitutional prerequisite for determining and guaranteeing minority rights. The protection of human and minority rights is envisaged to be in the jurisdiction of the new state-union of Serbia and Montenegro. The activities of the present Federal Ministry for National and Ethnic Communities would be continued by a new Ministry of Human and Minority Rights: "The laws of the FRY shall be applied in the affairs of Serbia and as the laws of Serbia and Montenegro." *Constitutional Charter of the State-Union of Serbia and Montenegro*. Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.yu/Facts/const_scg.pdf.

Court in Bački Petrovac (Vojvodina), for instance, shows that the needs of the Slovak community have largely gone unacknowledged.²⁴

Before the enactment of the Minorities Protection Act, the Roma community had the status of an ethnic group and was formally in the position of inequality in respect to both the majority population and the other minorities. This law, however, accorded the Roma the status of a national minority and the authorities were obliged to adopt the legislation and the measures that would “improve the position of persons belonging to the Roma national minority.” Yugoslavia thus became the eighth European country to legally declare Roma a national minority, wishing to promote their social integration. An inter-ministerial group on the Roma rights was established to draw up a programme of the affirmative action measures for the Roma. The group is made up of officials from different federal, republican and provincial ministries; its activities are coordinated by the Federal Ministry for National and Ethnic Communities. In mid-September 2002, the Ministry signed an agreement with the international organisations in Yugoslavia about the formation of an expert group to formulate a strategy for the integration of the Roma community. This strategy, which includes the issues of housing, education and employment, is expected to be ready by the end of the year.

The example of Subotica²⁵ shows us that in multiethnic states the issue of equal representation of different communities in different areas of social life, government and the economy is a sensitive problem. Moreover, if different ethnic communities have a strong sense of separate national identity and if, furthermore, they are politically organised, these issues require some extra attention. In Subotica²⁶ one of the important issues that the local-government deals with are financing cultural activities and the policy of appointments and employment. In financing culture, the local government has used a

²⁴ *Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo*. Available at: www.minelres.lv/coe/report/FRY_NGO.htm.

²⁵ Korhecz, Tamás, *Subotica - Maintaining the Haven of Multicultural Coexistence during Extreme Nationalism*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=68>.

²⁶ The town of Subotica is located a few kilometres from the Hungarian border. It is the second largest town in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Republic of Serbia) with more than 100.000 inhabitants. Three strong national groups dominate Subotica: Hungarians, Bunjevac-Croats and Serbs. The largest ethnic group in Subotica is Hungarian. The standards of minority protection have substantially diminished after Milošević's takeover. Furthermore, these changes have resulted in an overall centralisation of social life. Education, mother-tongue education of national minorities, official use of languages, electronic media, all interior matters, etc., have become the exclusive domain of the federal authorities. Autonomous provinces and municipal local governments have lost almost all of their previous influence in these areas. Korhecz, Tamás, *Example of Subotica*. LGI Case Studies database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/28.PDF>.

variety of actions and measures. One of them, for example, is the presentation of the existing and the establishment of new cultural institutions founded and financed by the municipality (e.g. the City Library, the National Theatre, Radio Subotica, the Municipal Museum, etc.). Another example is the most important long-term objective: the reconstruction of the major national cultural centres in the city. Besides, there are other activities of the municipal government such as financing other cultural associations and events in Subotica and Vojvodina. Concerning the appointment and employment policy it is important to stress that one of the main objectives of the local government in Subotica since 1992 has been the preservation of the ethnic representation in the town administration and public companies. Most important among these institutions are local government officials, municipal administration and public companies and institutions established by the municipality. The financial and appointment policies of the local government in Subotica have never been nationalistic and have always shown respect for the multiethnic character of the town. However, in Serbia, the cultural and the linguistic diversity have been exploited by the regime to cause conflicts, discrimination and domination, even though they have often been allegedly recognised as an asset. The policymakers in Subotica have proven that the political divisions along ethnic lines do not necessarily result in a policy of domination and exclusion, but can produce mutual respect as well.

Macedonia

Of all East-European countries, Macedonia has had a specific and eventually successful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. During the democratisation period, the interethnic relations and the question of minority rights were the topmost domestic political priorities. Fortunately, the actions taken by the government regarding the solution of the minority rights problems have fostered Macedonian democratisation and stabilised the country.²⁷ Supported by the policies of the central authorities, the local governments in Macedonia have been able to protect and promote the welfare of ethnic communities. This approach “reduces the presence of the central government in all social fields and enables practical problem-solving and the satisfaction of citizens’ needs and interests at an institutional level, in the concrete surroundings of the place where they permanently live and work.”²⁸ In

²⁷ Idas Daskalovski, 2000: *Minority Political Participation and Education in the Municipality of Chair*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/10.PDF>.

²⁸ Najcevska, Mirjana, 1995: Democratic Local Government and Appropriate Territorial Division Can Prevent Ethnic Conflict, *Annual of the Institute for Sociological, Political and Judicial Research*, Skopje, p.25.

this view, the municipality is the key to successful democratic development in a given multiethnic state.

The Republic of Macedonia is a country which also had its share of ethnic violence due to the armed rebellion of the Albanian minority against the Macedonian state triggered off by the Kosovo war of 1998/1999 and its aftermath. Even after the peaceful resolution of this conflict, ethnic tensions still persist. The progress of Macedonia is constantly hindered by this interethnic mistrust. Fear, lack of communication, and divergent visions of the country's future stand in the way of the optimal utilization by Macedonians of the advantages a multicultural society has to offer. The Macedonians and the ethnic Albanians - along with the small percentages of Turks, Serbs, Vlachs, and Roma - live caught in a web of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. But although Macedonia is one of the most ethnically mixed countries of the former Yugoslavia, its society is profoundly segregated. The segregation in all spheres of life along ethnic lines is profound. The TV and radio stations are controlled and operated either by their Albanian or Macedonian owners and broadcast exclusively in their respective languages from their respective viewpoints. Private clubs, theatres, and restaurants rarely cater for constituencies different in any significant way. The public school system is also heavily segregated. Children of a single ethnicity grow up together, speaking one language in the classroom. Friendships are formed within their respective groups and rarely cross religious and cultural lines. A general lack of communication across ethnic and linguistic barriers inhibits interethnic understanding and hardens ethnic stereotypes. Therefore, education plays a crucial and fundamental role in developing and transforming people and societies.

The project "Mozaik" was implemented mainly in the western part of Macedonia and covered the cities of Skopje, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Struga and Debar because they are ethnically mixed. In the cities of Gostivar, Struga, Debar and Kumanovo the percentage of the population of Albanian ethnicity is very high and there is a need to establish some co-operation between different ethnic groups. Because of this, the target groups in this project were the four- to six-year-olds, both of the Albanian and the Macedonian descent.²⁹ This project has two

²⁹ The "Mozaik" interethnic kindergarten project in the Republic of Macedonia expresses explicitly its involvement and commitment to this (including both transformation and conservation). It is their objective to maximise children's self-reliance and self-confidence through their participation in decision-making; offer children a new and non-competitive model for solving conflicts among themselves; develop in the children respect for different cultures and languages through equal use of the two languages and contact between the two different cultures; show that the bilingual and bi-cultural education can be successful and that modern interactive and child-centred methods are worth replicating in the state educational system. Mirjana Najcevska, *Bilingualism in a Kumanovo Kindergarten*, available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/08.PDF>.

main objectives - introducing into the kindergarten-level education a bilingual approach and a child-centred pedagogy, which includes conflict resolution skills. The major actors involved in the project were: a government ministry (the Macedonian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), the media, an international NGO (Search for Common Ground in Macedonia), educational institutions, the Swiss Agency for International Development; the Ethnic Conflict Resolution Project (ECRP) of the Department of Psychology, University of Skopje. Eventually, the Mozaik project should be integrated into the public (and future private) system, and its public activities could then be financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Another similar project is "Babylon". The "Babylon" Project exists in eight Macedonian cities and Tetovo is one of them. It is a centre where children from different nationalities can come together and learn some new things in the fields that the centre offers.³⁰ Although Tetovo is among the biggest cities in Macedonia it does not have a place where children from different nationalities can get together to have a good time and at the same time learn something. The "Babylon" centre is the only place of this kind in the city. The project "Babylon" is designed to bring together children from all nationalities together at the same place and try to build friendships that will overcome the antagonisms that have been building for years. The project's main aims are improving the interethnic relations by assembling children of different ethnicity in a place called "Babylon" and involving local authorities in the project. The actors in this project are the local government, the local NGOs, the media, some international government organizations and some international NGOs.³¹

Conclusion

The anti-discrimination policy represents one of the means in the fight against ethnic intolerance and the protection of minority rights. The European Union put this issue on the agenda for all the countries wishing to join the EU. Since the countries of Eastern Europe have

³⁰Project Babylon - an activity centre for children from different ethnic nationalities in Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia, June 1999 - end of 2003. Location: Tetovo, the third largest city in Macedonia with approximately 50.000 inhabitants. The whole Tetovo region has approximately 200.000 inhabitants, 70 per cent are ethnic Albanians, 25 per cent Macedonians and the rest are Turks, Roma and Serbs. Since the project was regional, children from the surrounding villages also attended the centre. The situation in Tetovo is very complicated because different nationalities very rarely mix. There are neighbourhoods where only Albanians or Macedonians go, etc. The same happens in the schools where children are divided according to their nationality. People have prejudices against each other, another obstacle to achieving a better life and mutual understanding.

³¹Koceski, Sreten. *'Project Babylon' - an activity centre for children from different ethnic nationalities in Tetovo, R. Macedonia, June 1999 - end of 2003*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=169>.

always been multicultural societies, history has shown us numerous examples of positive and negative experience in interethnic relations. Eastern Europe has always been interesting for researchers who study the issue of minority groups. This is especially important now when Europe is struggling to be united and stronger than ever. East-European countries have undergone a period of transition and stabilisation and each country offers instances of both the positive and the negative practices concerning ethnic relations.

This article attempts to show that there have been numerous examples of best practice in every country that can be used for a further implementation of laws, programmes and measures in the countries of Eastern Europe. It could be said that all these examples have contributed to the stability and the improvement of the ethnic relations in this region. Some of the countries, such as Hungary, Romania and Croatia, have made significant headway in the protection of minority rights on both the national and the local levels; some of them, e.g. Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, are lagging but following in their footsteps. However, a lot remains to be done in order to achieve high standards of human rights protection. The issue of regional cooperation proposed by the EU for the countries wishing to join the EU is extremely important in speeding up this process. The improvements of inter-ethnic relations, the implementation of positive legal norms and the measures to protect minorities' rights, including the promotion of multicultural societies are some of the steps that are necessary in order to produce some progress in this field. The examples of best practices can be very helpful for those responsible for the implementation of the laws and measures related to this purpose. In that respect, the burden of progress is placed on the main actors in this process, such as the state and local authorities.

References

Aszalos, Zoltan, *Talent fostering and democratic training of Roma secondary school students, Residence Hall Collegium Martineum in Manfa, Southern Hungary*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=215>

Borbély Nagy, Éva, *Innovative Educational Initiatives in Nagykanizsa*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=37>

Burka, Viktória, *Alternative School Experiments in Two Roma Villages in the Alföld*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=55>

Constitutional Charter of the State-Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.yu/Facts/const_scg.pdf

Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of National and Ethnic Communities or Minorities in the Republic of Croatia, *Official Gazette* 65/91

Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, *Official Gazette* 41/01

Constitutional Law for the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in the Republic of Croatia, *Official Gazette*, 154/02

Daskalovski, I., 2000: *Minority Political Participation and Education in the Municipality of Chair*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/10.PDF>

Gorog, Ilona, *Education to integrate Roma children in school in Valea Rece*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=156>

Gosselin, Tania, *Info-Klub Vukovar (NGO): building a communal and open local public forum for the Serbian and Croatian communities in Vukovar, Croatia*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=163>

Haller, Istvan, Ardelean, Laura, *Multicultural Academy in Romania*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=148>

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1999: *Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Available at: http://www.minelres.lv/reports/bosnia/bosnia_NGO.htm

Koceski, Sreten, *Project 'Mozaic' for kindergarten level education, Macedonia*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=177>

Koceski, Sreten, *'Project Babylon' - an activity centre for children from different ethnic nationalities in Tetovo, R. Macedonia, June 1999 - end of 2003*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=169>

Korhecz, Tamás, *Subotica - Maintaining the Haven of Multicultural Coexistence during Extreme Nationalism*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=68>

Korhecz, Tamás, *Example of Subotica*. LGI Case Studies Database. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/28.PDF>

Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities. Available at: http://www.minelres.lv/coe/report/FRY_NGO.htm

Mountcastle, Amy, *Return and Trust Rebuilding - Pakrac and The Bench We Share*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=74>

Musat, Dan, Beizadea, Haralambie, *Minority TV*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=155>

Najcevska, M., 1995: *Democratic Local Government and Appropriate Territorial Division Can Prevent Ethnic Conflict*, *Annual of the Institute for Sociological, Political and Judicial Research*, Skopje

Najcevska, M., 2000: *Bilingualism in a Kumanovo Kindergarten*, available at : <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/08.PDF><http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2000/26/08.PDF>

Lippmann, Peter, *Center for Information and Legal Assistance (CIPP) provides legal aid and information to refugees and displaced persons wishing to return to the region around Zvornik, Bosnia, and from that region to other parts of Bosnia (1998-2000 and beyond)*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=167>

Lippmann, Peter, *Srebrenica 99, an organization based in Tuzla, north-eastern Bosnia: struggling to establish the return of Muslims displaced from Srebrenica and nearby villages (1999-2001 and beyond)*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=173>

Lippmann, Peter, *The Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs, an organization working to educate displaced Serbs about their right to return to Sarajevo (1996-indefinite future)*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=168>

Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights, Hungary. Available at: <http://www.obh.hu/nekh/en/index.htm>

Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Available at: www.minelres.lv/coe/report/FRY_NGO.htm

Stankovic, Zoran, *Ethnic Communities and National Minorities in Primorsko-Goranska District*. Available at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=77>