

Project “Strengthening Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom in Serbia” –
OSCE Mission to Serbia

Information in National Minority Languages and Case Study:
Hungarian-Language Media Outlets

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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

According to the 2022 population census, approximately 19.5 percent of citizens living in Serbia do not belong to the majority population—that is, they declare themselves as members of national minorities, define their national identity through regional affiliation, or decline to self-identify in this regard. Slightly over 12 percent declare themselves as members of national minorities, with 18 minority communities having more than two thousand members.¹ Although the total population of Serbia is decreasing from census to census, as is the case with the majority population, it is evident that national minorities are shrinking at a significantly higher rate, particularly in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (hereinafter referred to as AP Vojvodina), which is the most ethnically heterogeneous part of the country.

The reasons are manifold. In the 1990s, citizens emigrated due to war, insecurity, and a major economic crisis. Today, the drivers are primarily existential in nature - young members of minority groups leave more frequently and more easily for developed countries, sometimes their kin states (members of the European Union), or simply use kin-state passports to move further west². Deficits in democratic processes—both nationwide and within minority communities—also contribute to this trend.

These figures are a warning, indicating the need to establish new and more effective incentive mechanisms to preserve the country's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional identity in the long term. This identity represents not only a wealth of cultural diversity and interconnection, but also considerable developmental potential. National minorities, for instance, can act as a driver of cooperation between Serbia and their kin states across various fields, including public information. The decline in the number of national minority members creates new challenges for the realisation of their constitutional and legal rights, as well as those under international treaties ratified by Serbia³ - including those pertaining to minority information. The departure of young people is particularly concerning, as they are crucial both as potential creators and as consumers of new media platforms, which will be discussed in detail later.

DIVERSITY AMONG MINORITIES

Apart from size, minorities differ in the degree of alignment between national affiliation and minority language, sense of unity and mutual solidarity, political organisation and influence, population age structure, education level, perception of the majority's attitude towards the

¹Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia: Census of Population, Households and Dwellings, 2022

² [Program sa knjigom apstrakata; savremene migracije manjina iz Srbije.pdf](#); KAROLINA LENDÁK-KABÓK, STANISLAVA POPOV AND IMRE LENDÁK; The Educational Migration of Sub-state Ethnic Minorities on the Outskirts of the EU: A Case Study of Serbia, INTERSECTIONS, EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS, 6(2): 130–153; [Policy Brief on Youth Migration – MIGREC](#)

³ Here are just a few of the documents ratified by the state regarding the status and rights of national minorities, many of which also pertain to the right to information in the native language: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the European Convention on Human Rights, and various other universal and regional human rights treaties. Furthermore, there is Decision No. 4/03 of the OSCE Ministerial Council on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, adopted in 2003 at the Maastricht meeting, as well as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media ([The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age | OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media | OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities](#))

minority, and the presence or absence of a kin state. Informally, based on the degree of minority rights realisation, they can be divided into traditional, new and emerging minorities.⁴ They certainly differ in the tradition, quantity, and quality of native language broadcasting. According to a 2020 OSCE Mission study, a significant number of national minorities have no media outlets reporting in their language at all, while others enjoy a long tradition of native language broadcasting and a wide array of diverse media outlets⁵. This raises the question of whether minority policies - including media policies - should be tailored to specific characteristics, primarily population size and media tradition. In other words, whether what is legislatively suited to a larger minority with a well-developed cultural, educational, and media portfolio is automatically suited for a smaller minority lacking those assets.

According to the cited research, as expected, the Hungarian national minority has the largest number of media outlets in its language. This is due not only to the fact that it is the most populous minority community (2.77% of the total population) with a long history in this region, but also to the support to its kin-state, Hungary, provides across various areas, including public information in Vojvodina. This also introduces a certain controversy, elaborated further below: namely, that the donation process lacks transparency, which can further threaten media pluralism and discriminate against media outside political spheres of influence.⁶

NATIONAL COUNCILS AS KEY INSTITUTIONS FOR MINORITY INFORMATION

There are 23 National Councils of National Minorities and the Federation of Jewish Communities operating in Serbia⁷, serving as the institutional framework for self-government in culture, education, language preservation, and public information⁸. In the field of public information, they constitute a key institutional structure that strongly influences existing minority media models, directly or indirectly. Numerous studies and practical examples show that this influence leads—to varying degrees—to the instrumentalisation of media by minority political elites. This problem has persisted since the inception of national councils, specifically from the moment founding rights for certain media outlets were transferred to them and they were legally recognised as key actors in minority information⁹.

Regarding public information, constitutional and legal minority rights encompass reporting in the mother tongue, freedom of expression in minority languages, adequate funding for minority media content, and respect for multicultural and intercultural values, alongside political and media

⁴ Information in the languages of national minorities - recommendations for practical policies, Centre for Civil Society Development, 2017

⁵ Media outlets in the languages of national minorities - research and analysis, OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020: <https://serbia.osce.org/sr/node/473673>

⁶VMSZ, the largest political party representing the Hungarian community and exercising decisive control over the Serbian media landscape in this language, is a close partner of Hungary's ruling party, FIDESZ. In addition, both VMSZ and FIDESZ maintain coalitions and close ties with the ruling parties in Serbia. This creates an environment in which Hungarian-language media that take a critical stance towards political elites are subjected to discrimination.

⁷Members of 23 national minority communities have constituted their respective councils, while the Executive Board of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia performs the function of a national council for the Jewish community in accordance with the law.

⁸https://minljmpdd.gov.rs/sektori/nacionalne-manjine/nacionalni-saveti-nacionalnih-manjina/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁹See, for example, the publication "Media in Vojvodina – Political Compromise or Professional Reporting" (Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, 2010), as well as other analyses of minority media coverage in recent years.

pluralism. Under the legal framework, which has remained largely unchanged in this regard over recent decades, minority-language information in Serbia operates across three models: the first is represented by public broadcasters (RTS and RTV), mandated to broadcast content (also) in minority languages. the second consists of media outlets founded by national councils of national minorities (indirectly, through institutions, companies, or associations established to exercise the right to public information in minority languages), and the third comprises private media outlets (including the civil society media outlets).

MEDIA REFORMS AND MINORITY MEDIA - CHRONOLOGY AND KEY CHALLENGES

Since the onset of media reforms (which began following the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 and continue today), the primary challenge for minority information in Serbia has been and remains: how to guarantee national minorities their right to information and ensure adequate funding while safeguarding minority community autonomy, yet simultaneously establishing accountability mechanisms that ensure objective and professional reporting, media pluralism, editorial independence (including in multilingual media), and operational and financial transparency for outlets acting as specialised minority public broadcasters (i.e., media founded indirectly by national councils).

Considering the broader context of national minority status and public information in general, promoting media coverage of interculturalism, and fostering values of coexistence and diversity, is crucial. The goal is to build public information that acts as cohesive tissue, increasing mutual understanding between minorities and the majority, as well as among minority groups themselves, while countering ghettoisation and self-ghettoisation. Fostering interconnected diversity serves as a vital societal remedy - a matter that extends far beyond media policy. That holds profound political and social relevance, especially for a country like Serbia with its recent history of inter-ethnic conflicts.

LACK OF ATTENTION: CONFUSION AND DATA DEFICITS PREVAIL

OSCE analysis¹⁰ and the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025¹¹ (hereinafter: the Media Strategy) confirm what media experts have long warned: the minority-language media landscape is thoroughly confusing. Comprehensive research on the number and structure of minority and multilingual media is lacking (existing registries are highly unreliable), as is systematic data on how they function, receive funding, or meet citizen needs. This raises a fundamental question: how can strategic legal and policy solutions for minority information be formulated without solid data identifying the exact challenges faced? Regrettably, the situation regarding majority-language media is little different.

Two facts, however, are indisputable: media privatisation, carried out in 2015 and 2016, delivered a severe blow to minority-language information, particularly affecting multilingual media outlets of special social importance¹², while the political leverage exerted by National Councils of

¹⁰ Media outlets in the languages of national minorities - research and analysis, OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020, at [Mediji na jezicima nacionalnih manjina - istraživanje i analiza | OSCE Mission to Serbia](#)

¹¹ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2020/11/1>

¹² According to certain data, out of all media outlets subject to privatisation, as many as 43 had programmes in the languages of national minorities. Of these, nearly one third (14) were shut down, while some media outlets, despite

National Minorities over minority information since their establishment continues to compromise media pluralism and reporting aligned with public needs—a trend especially prominent in certain national communities.¹³

To an outside observer, the relative lack of attention given to minority information by both state authorities and media experts might seem surprising. It is a complex issue touching on public information and broader national minority rights that the state is obligated to uphold under domestic and international law. Furthermore, minority-language information was a central point of contention during years of media reform, driving frequent misunderstandings between political elites (majority and minority) and the media community.

For instance, media laws from the early 2000s¹⁴ envisaged state withdrawal from media ownership, yet privatisation was suspended by government decree under the pretext of protecting minority information. That decision generated prolonged legislative confusion on the media scene.

If we put aside the question of whether the Serbian Government was justified in suspending key reform provisions - it is fair to say that privatization a decade later did harm minority reporting. However, it is also true that over years of reform a great deal of energy was spent resisting changes designed to minimise political influence over media. In the process, opportunities to communicate and build long-term sustainability solutions for minority and multilingual outlets, especially those facing privatization, were lost. Notably, in 2007, several local media outlets introduced minority content overnight purely to gain exemption from privatization, illustrating that the decision often served to retain direct political party control over public media enterprises, undergoing ownership transformation, rather than genuinely safeguard minority reporting.¹⁵

MINORITY INFORMATION: CONFLICTING LAWS

In the field of media legislation, it has long been a cliché in Serbia that the laws themselves are not bad, but that the problem lies in their implementation. In other words, the media sector clearly shows how sound legal framework fails to yield qualitative progress in an environment lacking the rule of law. Regarding information in national minority languages, however, it cannot be said that the legal solutions were good. On the contrary, they were (and remain) inconsistent and insufficient, the laws defining this field conflict with one another, and executive authorities have on several occasions made decisions without any legislative basis - not only the 2007 decision discussed previously.

For instance, the 2004 decision of the Assembly of Vojvodina to transfer its founding rights in seven key newspapers published in Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Rusyn, Croatian, and Romani (later, national councils also became founders of newly launched newspapers in Macedonian, Bunjevac, and Ukrainian) to minority national councils was legally verified only five years later, through the Law on National Councils of National Minorities (hereinafter: LNCNM) in 2009. By contract, the provincial government undertook to continue subsidising the publication of these

the legal obligation to maintain programme continuity for five years, very quickly cancelled minority-language content, without facing any sanctions.

¹³ Media outlets in the languages of national minorities - research and analysis, Media Department of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020

¹⁴ Law on Broadcasting (2002) and Law on Public Information (2003).

¹⁵ <https://ndnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Manjinski-i-visejezicni-medijiFINAL.pdf>

newspapers to the same extent, even after the transfer.¹⁶ This decision, although understandable, created a two-decade-long discriminatory relationship by the state towards media indirectly founded by minority national councils located outside Vojvodina: until the adoption of the latest media legislation, they were in a significantly less favourable position regarding state subsidies.

In the field of minority-language information, the current LNCNM¹⁷ takes a completely different approach to this topic from media experts, as well as from the solutions proposed in the Media Strategy and new media laws. Starting with general views: the aforementioned law focuses exclusively on the rights of national minorities to information in their mother tongue, while completely ignoring citizens' rights to objective, high-quality information, media pluralism, and the absence of political instrumentalisation of the media.¹⁸ Although representatives of journalists' and media associations have repeatedly requested to be included in discussions regarding solutions in this law, they were never enabled to do so. This issue persists to this day, including the issue of conflicting legal solutions, which will be addressed later.

Over the past decade, the representatives of journalists' and media associations have called not only for amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, but also for the introduction of mechanisms in media laws to safeguard the editorial policy of media outlets published (indirectly) by national councils of national minorities? They have done so not only because of the specific role of these media outlets as minority public broadcasters financed by taxpayers' money, which entails particular obligations and responsibilities, but also because numerous incidents have been recorded in which founders and publishers have engaged in unequivocal political interference with editorial autonomy and media freedoms. To name just a few: from the political dismissal of "Magyar Szó" Editor-in-Chief Csaba Pressburger in 2011¹⁹, the dismissal of "Pannon RTV" Editor Rudolf Mihók²⁰, the firing of six "Magyar Szó" journalists, and the dismissal of the Editor of "Libertatea"²¹, to the recent partisan misuse of the Slovak-language newspaper "Hlas L'udu"²².

MINORITY (INFORMAL) PUBLIC BROADCASTERS

All in all, ever since national councils of national minorities were granted the right to (indirectly) found media outlets - thereby exempting themselves from general media law regulations stating that a media founder cannot directly or indirectly be the state, its institution, enterprise, or another

¹⁶Minority and Multilingual Media in the Context of Law Enforcement, IJAV, 2016

¹⁷https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_nacionalnim_savetima_nacionalnih_manjina.html

¹⁸It is noteworthy that similar provisions were included in the Action Plan for the Realisation of the Rights of National Minorities, which contains a separate section dedicated to freedom of expression and the position of the media in national minority languages. The Government of Serbia adopted this strategic document in 2016, and it constitutes an integral part of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) in the EU accession process. The approach to information in national minority languages outlined in this document is characteristic of the overall stance taken both by the Republic of Serbia and by the kin-states of national minorities: attention is directed primarily towards the rights and financial sustainability of media in national minority languages, while significantly less focus is placed on freedom of expression in those languages, the quality of media content, media pluralism, and the obligations of national councils of national minorities in ensuring citizens' rights to truthful, timely, reliable, and comprehensive information.

¹⁹<http://www.ndnv.org/2011/06/24/presburger-je-smenjen/>

²⁰http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/backa/smenjen-direktor-panon-rtv-rudolf-mihok_274026.html

²¹<https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/politicki-pritisci-na-nedeljnik-libertatea-smene-na-hitno-sazvanoj-telefonskoj-sednici/>

²²<https://autonomija.info/nasilje-u-backom-petrovcu-nije-bilo-medjunacionalni-incident-vec-osveta-naprednjaka>

legal entity financed wholly or partly from public revenues - media experts have advocated increasing their accountability. This means aligning the operations of these media outlets with basic public broadcasting principles. Such accountability implies operational transparency, structured staffing policies, and other mechanisms to safeguard media professionalism, editorial autonomy and media pluralism, and to enable objective, high-quality reporting in the interest of citizens rather than political elites. Conversely, with few exceptions, national councils of national minorities—supported by the majority political elite—have pursued the opposite.²³

For example, the 2014 Draft Law on Public Information and Media contained a provision protecting the editorial autonomy of national council media, but during parliamentary debate it was dropped following a political agreement between majority parties and the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (AVH). At the time, AVH official Bálint Pásztor publicly stated in the National Assembly of Serbia that his party would vote for the media laws precisely because this article was removed from the draft Law on Public Information and Media (hereinafter: LPIM) at AVH's request.²⁴

Majority and minority politicians agreed on another point as well - interculturalism in the media is unnecessary for this society²⁵. This decision was particularly unusual, given that media experts insisted on legal recognition of media interculturalism as a matter of public interest. Why was this important? We have already addressed the political and social significance of media content that enhances communication and understanding among different communities, but in this particular case another crucial factor was at play. Although media laws confirmed the state's withdrawal from media ownership, the state committed to supporting public interest in the media sphere through a competitive co-financing system. This, therefore, represented an opportunity to improve survival and development prospects of multilingual media outlets. Why this did not suit political parties remains a matter of speculation. It appears as though multilingual media outlets were deliberately allowed to go down the drain.

SELF-REGULATION IN THE ABSENCE OF LEGAL SOLUTIONS

In the absence of legal solutions, initial initiatives emerged after 2014 from both minority communities and media experts to protect editorial autonomy in national council media through self-regulation. An internal code of ethics was drafted and promoted for joint adoption by, on the one hand, national councils of national minorities and, on the other, their institutions or media-publishing enterprises. The principles underlying this document mirrored those of public broadcasters and the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics²⁶: truthful, impartial, comprehensive, and timely reporting; editorial independence; freedom from funding sources and political pressure; prohibition of all forms of censorship, etc.

Such a document was adopted by the Rusyn community in 2019 and by the Ukrainian community in 2021. Practical implementation experience has been mixed, yielding both positive and unfavourable outcomes²⁷. It has been shown that this document may prove effective, though it is

²³ <https://far.rs/sr/2019/03/14/sejdinovic-kampanja-nacionalnih-saveta-protiv-resenja-iz-nacrta-medijske-strategije/>

²⁴ <https://far.rs/sr/2020/09/30/nedim-sejdinovic-kome-smeta-interkulturalnost>

²⁵ [Otvoreni Parlament | Sedmo vanredno zasjedanje, 2014-08-01.; Manjinski-i-visejezicni-medijski-FINAL.pdf; Microsoft Word - sr_m.docx](#)

²⁶ <https://savetzastampu.rs/dokumenta/kodeks-novinara-srbije>

²⁷ [Boris Varga: Samoreglativni medijski kodeks može da sačuva nezavisnost manjinskih medija - Vojvođanski istraživačko-analitički centar "VOICE"](#)

not necessarily so. However, owing to this variable effectiveness and because most minority councils showed no interest in the initiative, it soon became evident that statutory amendments were necessary to establish legal safeguards protecting these media's editorial policies from both minority and majority political elites.²⁸

MINORITY INFORMATION AND PUBLIC BROADCASTERS

In exercising national minority rights to information on public broadcasters, several key challenges have been observed over an extended period. The first is the dramatic inconsistency in content in minority languages between the two public broadcasters. While Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV) broadcasts programmes in as many as sixteen languages, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) - falling far short of citizens' needs - produces minority programmes on a purely symbolic level²⁹. This practice discriminates against “non-Vojvodina” minorities, such as Albanians, Bosniaks, Vlachs, and Roma.

The second problem is broader, affecting all informational content produced by public broadcasters. Executive state power exerts unambiguous political influence over the editorial policy of public broadcasters³⁰, in sharp conflict with the legal framework governing them. In addition to general issues of editorial autonomy issues, minority editorial boards and programmes face political influence from national councils of national minorities. This leverage is exercised through the legal right of national councils to provide opinions on candidates for editors-in-chief of minority-language programming in public broadcasters. This provision remains in the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, directly contradicting the Media Strategy, its Action Plan³¹, and the new Law on Public Broadcasters. Although non-binding, this opinion is routinely implemented in practice.

Finally, while RTV deserves praise for maintaining an extensive network of minority-language programming, its minority editorial boards face severely constrained human and technical resources, leading to a reduction in both the volume and quality of programming.³²

PRIVATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY MEDIA OUTLETS

Numerous studies and analyses confirm that the process of project co-financing for public interest content in the media sphere in Serbia, introduced by 2014 legislation, has been completely compromised. Implementation problems were evident almost from the outset. It can be said that this process has entirely missed its original objective. As a reminder, project co-financing was intended as a mechanism by which the state financially encourages high-quality, scarce media content aligned with the public interest and professional standards. In practice, however, it has been transformed into a system where substantial funds from republican, provincial, and local budgets are used to reward loyal media outlets, including those that radically and routinely violate the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics.³³ Despite numerous amendments to laws and bylaws

²⁸ <https://voice.org.rs/boris-varga-uspon-i-pad-internog-etickog-medijskog-kodeksa-u-niu-ruske-slovo>

²⁹ <https://ndnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Informisanje-na-jezicima-nacionalnih-manjina-na-sporednom-koloseku.pdf>

³⁰ <https://crt.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Javni-medijski-servisi-u-Srbiji.pdf>

³¹ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2020/148/1>

³² <https://ndnv.org/2025/04/bezbednost-i-izazovi-novinara-slovackih-redakcija-rtv-a-na-protestima-vecinu-bas-i-ne-zanima-sta-radi-manjina/>

³³ <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/istrazivanje-medija-birn-savet-za-stampu-krsenje-kodeks-oglasavanje/>
<https://savetzastampu.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Izvestaj-Sufinansiranje-medija-koji-krse-eticke-standarde.pdf>

defining this process, and despite the introduction of new, theoretically improved procedures intended to enhance it, the situation continues to deteriorate qualitatively, as confirmed by recent ANEM research³⁴.

Regarding national minorities, the project co-financing mechanism was primarily intended to foster media pluralism by co-financing lacking, high-quality content, thereby supporting minority media operating in the public interest and unsusceptible to political pressure. In short, it was meant to serve as an alternative to both public broadcasters and informal minority public broadcasters (media founded by national councils).

Minority information was under two provisions (Article 15, Paragraphs 2 and 7) in the legal definition of public interest within the LPIM, which were intended to facilitate its co-financing.³⁵ Public interest is defined as truthful, impartial, timely, and comprehensive reporting in the mother tongue of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia belonging to national minorities, as well as the preservation of the cultural identity of the Serbian nation and national minorities residing in the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

What directly threatens media pluralism is Article 25 of the LPIM³⁶, a provision that has survived all legislative amendments, which stipulates that project proposals submitted to competitions for improving the quality of information for national minority members must obtain an opinion from the respective national council of national minorities. In fact, media pluralism is endangered more by practice than by the legal wording itself. Although this opinion is legally non-binding, it is almost invariably adopted without question. Here, too, we observe a legal discrepancy - under the Law on National Councils of National Minorities (hereinafter: LNCNM), national councils submit not merely an opinion, but a formal proposal for the allocation of funds - a legally more binding act.

The magnitude of the problem is best illustrated by the fact that certain private and civil society media outlets in minority languages have ceased applying for co-financing competitions, knowing they cannot secure a positive opinion from national councils. Yet, these are precisely the outlets that ensure a of media pluralism and reporting in accordance with the LPIM, the public interest, and professional standards.³⁷ This practically seals a complete monopoly for national councils over minority-language information. Furthermore, evidence shows that the vast majority of content in minority media is restricted to culture, folklore, or sport, while political and social topics are either covered strictly for promotional purposes or heavily filtered.³⁸

MAJORITY MEDIA TYCOONS FEIGNING MINORITY INFORMATION

Even greater problems have emerged in recent years, representing a total mockery of project co-financing and a direct undermining of national minority rights. Namely, insufficient funds are allocated for minority and multilingual information and even those limited resources are awarded

³⁴ <https://api.anem.org.rs/storage/assets/analiza2025.pdf>

³⁵ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 15, paragraphs 2 and 7.

³⁶ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 20

³⁷ For example, the well-known bilingual media outlet Storyteller (Slovak and Serbian) withdrew from state and local funding competitions because the National Council of the Slovak National Minority would not give them the green light. More at: <https://www.uns.org.rs/sr/desk/vesti-iz-medija/174881/-ministarstvo-milione-namenjene-informisanju-nacionalnih-manjina-dalo-medijima-milosavljevica-i-stijakovica.html>

³⁸ <https://ndnv.org/2025/06/sta-manjinske-zajednice-zele-od-svojih-medija-i-da-li-ih-ti-mediji-zaista-cuju>

inappropriately and without respecting procedures. Most of the funding goes to outlets that, contrary to the project “terms of reference”, report exclusively in Serbian and are owned by media figures close to the ruling authorities³⁹. Meanwhile, media outlets continuously producing minority-language content receive mere crumbs from competition funds—if they receive anything at all or even manage to participate.⁴⁰

Principally, private and civil society media reporting in minority languages are vulnerable on multiple fronts, making their long-term sustainability highly questionable - especially if they offer critical coverage of political elites, which should be the duty of all media outlets acting as public watchdogs. In addition to being blocked from accessing state funds, they face limited audience sizes, further undermining their chances of survival. They rely on the so-called crowdfunding campaigns⁴¹ (which in Serbia have proved ineffective even for majority media outlets addressing incomparably larger audiences) and sporadic, non-systemic donations from international funds.

EXODUS OF YOUTH AND ITS IMPACT ON MEDIA

Alongside these systemic challenges, nearly all minority-language media fall victim to the broader trend mentioned earlier: population loss, particularly among the youth. The age structure within minority media outlets is increasingly unfavourable, leading to weaker engagement with younger generations. Young people are losing interest both in consuming these media products and in pursuing careers in journalism altogether. Digital trends, such as multimedia production, social media engagement, and artificial intelligence integration, are largely neglected. Addressing this deficit requires active, coordinated effort from the state, national councils, kin states, and international donors alike⁴².

MINORITY INFORMATION IN THE MEDIA STRATEGY AND ITS ACTION PLAN

The Media Strategy for 2020–2025 was adopted in January 2020⁴³, several years behind schedule. The previous strategic document covered the period 2011–2016. It is already clear that the announced upcoming strategy will also be significantly delayed, as work on it - and even preparatory steps - has yet to begin. In December 2020, the Serbian Government adopted the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Public Information System Development Strategy for 2020–2025, containing measures to be implemented by the end of 2022 at the latest⁴⁴. A new Action Plan (for 2023–2025, or 2024–2026) has still not been adopted, despite repeated announcements in reports by the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications.⁴⁵

The drafting of the Media Strategy spanned three turbulent years, marked by distrust and intense friction.⁴⁶ According to experts, the resulting document represented a major theoretical step

³⁹ <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/sampion-medijskih-konkursa-za-medije-bivseg-oficira-jna-samo-od-ministarstva-informisanja-vise-od-200-000-evra/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/ministarstvo-milione-namenjene-informisanju-nacionalnih-manjina-dalo-medijima-milosavljevica-i-stijakovica>

⁴¹ A crowdfunding campaign is a public effort to raise funds from a large number of individuals, usually via the Internet, with the aim of supporting the operation of a media outlet or a specific media project.

⁴² <https://ndnv.org/2025/06/sta-manjinske-zajednice-zele-od-svojih-medija-i-da-li-ih-ti-mediji-zaista-cuju>

⁴³ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2020/11/1>

⁴⁴ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2020/148/1>

⁴⁵ <https://mit.gov.rs/tekst/10221/izvestaji-o-radu.php>

⁴⁶ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/medijska-strategija-put-ka-medijskim-slobodama-ili-paravan-pred-eu>

forward, owing to its broad inclusiveness. As anticipated, the key problem of this document—just as with other strategic and legislative solutions, not only in the media sphere—lies in its implementation. There were delays in the implementation of many measures, and an even greater number have not been carried out to this day. Research indicates that the strategy was also inadequately presented to the broader journalistic community;⁴⁷ creating a problem that has persisted even after the adoption of the new media laws. Many media outlets remain unaware of key legislative innovations, such as reporting requirements to the Business Registers Agency (BRA).⁴⁸

Regarding minority-language reporting, the Media Strategy accurately diagnosed nearly every systemic weakness outlined above, which is encouraging. Concrete measures were also envisaged—largely adequate—for the advancement of minority-language reporting. Unfortunately, most of these measures remain a dead letter on paper, even when incorporated into new legal acts.

The Law on Public Information and Media⁴⁹ and the Law on Electronic Media (LEM)⁵⁰, derived from the strategic document, were adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on 26 October 2023. In June 2025, the National Assembly of Serbia adopted amendments to three laws: the Law on Electronic Media, the Law on Public Broadcasters (LPBs)⁵¹ and the Law on Public Information and Media, aimed at aligning with EU standards and advancing the media environment, i.e. implementing the Media Strategy. However, the process of enacting or amending the law faced public criticism for a lack of transparency, short public consultation periods, and insufficient inclusion of media experts and professional associations.⁵²

The Strategy acknowledges that the institutional role of national councils of national minorities poses a “risk to the editorial independence of media” established by them. Given that these media outlets are publicly funded, it stresses the need to align their content more closely with the public interest. It also highlights financial sustainability challenges for all media outlets in minority languages and notes the “inadequate fulfilment of minority reporting obligations by the national public service broadcaster” (namely RTS). The document emphasises that the growth of revenues from distribution fees paid to public broadcasters should enable technical improvements as well as the “development of production in minority languages”, while noting capacity constraints of minority editorial boards and programmes within public broadcasters.⁵³

The document further states that the management boards of media publishers founded by the national minority council, as well as the editors-in-chief of those media outlets, should be selected through procedures that guarantee “editorial independence”. Information in the languages of national minorities is also highlighted under the section “Quality, Plural and Diverse Media

⁴⁷ <https://localpress.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Strategija-razvoja-medijiskog-sistema-Srbije-i-njena-implementacija-1.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/koalicija-za-slobodu-medija-zasto-baza-medija-apr-a-jos-uvek-nije-uskladjena-sa-zakonom/>

⁴⁹ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnom_informisanju_i_medijima.html

⁵⁰ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_elektronskim_medijima.html

⁵¹ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnim_medijiskim_servisima.html

⁵² <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/sve-je-odjednom-zamrlo-rad-na-medijiskim-zakonima-bio-kupovina-vremena-i-zamajavanje-za-usvajanje-ne-postoji-politicka-volja/>

⁵³ Media outlets in the languages of national minorities - research and analysis, Media Department of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020

Content Meeting Information Needs of Various Social Groups,” listing measures to enhance objectivity and source diversity and media content in minority media outlets.

Beyond establishing the mentioned guarantees for editorial independence of the media outlets through mechanisms protecting editorial policy from the influence of founders and through “sanctions for acting contrary to these guarantees”, the Strategy also calls for mechanisms requiring management boards in the media outlets whose publishers’ founders are national councils to give full and respectful consideration to “the input of the editorial board when appointing or dismissing editors-in-chief.”

Criteria for selecting management board members mirror those for Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (hereinafter: RAEM) Council members: members should be media professionals with “documented achievements or relevant academic work in media field”. They should be media workers, economists with media experience, telecommunications engineers specialising in media service technology, or media professionals with a legal background. Directors face similar requirements, according to the document, with the added condition of “experience in media management and proven success in work.” The ultimate goal of these procedures is the professionalisation of the media and the protection of editorial integrity.

The Strategy also stipulates a measure that envisages “stable, transparent and non-discriminatory financing” for media outlets founded (indirectly) by national councils, “equally for all publishers in the territory of the Republic of Serbia,” with the aim of discriminating against the media of national councils that are registered outside AP Vojvodina, which have already been discussed. It then calls for incentives for media not founded or co-founded by national councils in order to boost media pluralism, along with “clear criteria for allocating funds through competitive co-financing” targeting the production and distribution of media content in national minority languages.

Measures further include maintaining and improving the quality of media content in the languages of national minorities on public broadcasters, and introducing incentives for the establishment, development and functioning of civil society media outlets, supporting multilingual media, and “increasing professional staff working in the media outlets in the languages of national minorities.” Attention is also drawn to small national minorities unable to exercise their right to information.

With regard to public broadcasting, this document notes that strategic goals are only partially met, and that the areas in which the goals are not met are: the need to inform socially vulnerable groups, the need to report in the languages of national minorities (referring to RTS), and the provision of impartial and independent information (especially with regard to the news programmes). RAEM Council independence is highlighted as essential for the independence of public broadcasters, including minority language programmes. One of the reasons why RTS fails to fulfil its obligations regarding the production of minority programs is, as this broadcaster claims, the lack of funds. The

Strategy proposes directing a portion of increased distribution revenues towards "developing production in minority languages"⁵⁴

Finally, the document recommends recognising the production of media content that promotes interculturalism as a distinct aspect of the public interest.

ACTION PLAN 2020-2022

One of the five core objectives of the Strategy and its Action Plan is to increase the objectivity and diversity of sources and content in minority-language media outlets.

By the fourth quarter of 2022, mechanisms were scheduled to be established that would lead to the adoption of internal bylaws in media outlets (indirectly) founded by national councils, modelled on the Rusyn and Ukrainian communities. Paragraph 3.3.3. stipulates that by the 3rd quarter of 2022, the LNCNM should be amended by deleting Article 21, paragraph 4, which practically means that national councils will no longer have the right to provide opinions on candidates for editors-in-chief of minority-language programming at public broadcasters.⁵⁵

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy 2020–2025, under Item 4.1, which is fully dedicated to information in the languages of national minorities, envisaged a series of measures for the period 2020–2022 aimed at enhancing the objectivity, diversity, and quality of minority-language media content, as well as strengthening the editorial independence of media outlets (indirectly) founded by national councils. The main guidelines and measures are:

- Strengthening editorial independence, through statutory changes designed to ensure that national councils, when acting as media founders, cannot directly manage editorial policy or serve as members of the governing bodies of these media outlets.
- Management boards and directors of these media outlets must be qualified media, economic, legal, or technical experts, without discrimination.
- Special emphasis is placed on the need to prevent political or partisan influence on editors-in-chief.
- Target values implied an increase in the volume of public-interest media content in minority languages, as well as content that preserves national identity.
- Provisions were made to create stable and transparent nationwide funding sources for national minority media outlets (indirectly) founded by national councils.
- Project co-financing had to be based on clear criteria and project evaluation procedures, to foster media pluralism in minority languages.

⁵⁴ The Media Strategy states: that Radio Television of Serbia believes that significant additional revenue could be generated from distribution rights, provided that various distribution platforms pay licensing fees to the public broadcaster. Radio Television of Serbia considers that room for collecting fees from distribution platforms already exists under current regulations, particularly regarding OTT and non-linear distribution. The public broadcaster expects the payment of distribution fees to be recognised as a strategic commitment. The resulting increase in revenue would enable technical upgrading and technological development, the repayment of existing loans, as well as the expansion of minority-language production. Another challenge facing the public broadcaster is the inability to improve its staffing structure and rejuvenate its editorial boards under the constraints of wage caps and public sector hiring freezes.

⁵⁵ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_nacionalnim_savetima_nacionalnih_manjina.html

- The production of content promoting interculturalism - namely, open and interactive communication among national communities - will be recognised as being in the public interest.
- National councils of national minorities are required to provide advanced opinions to public authorities issuing calls for media content co-financing regarding the specific content needed by a particular community to improve the quality of information.
- Incentives are envisaged for media publishers broadcasting content in minority languages whose founders or co-founders are not national councils of national minorities, in order to strengthen media pluralism.
- Ensuring an adequate volume of public-interest media content and content preserving national identity in minority languages.
- Increasing the number of qualified personnel working in minority-language media outlets through incentives.
- Establishing new educational programmes and expanding existing ones to train personnel for work in minority media outlets.
- Expanding university budget funded slots for members of national minorities in faculties and study programmes that educate personnel for minority media.
- Supporting projects focused on the continuous capacity-building of journalists and media workers engaged in minority media outlets.
- Exercising the right to information for the least numerous national minorities, particularly those that do not have their own media outlets.⁵⁶

Given that the deadline for most of the planned actions was the fourth quarter of 2022, and that media law amendments only began in the second half of 2023, it is clear that implementation has suffered severe delays. Some measures have not been implemented to date, nor has implementation even commenced, regardless of whether or not they were incorporated into media or other legislation. Certain measures, by all accounts, will remain merely wishful thinking on paper. Nevertheless, the authors of the Strategy deserve credit for accurately diagnosing the systemic flaws of minority information and proposing meaningful solutions to improve it, regardless of whether they are realistic or not.

In the following section, we will address which of these measures were included in media laws, whether other laws were amended accordingly, and whether these provisions had practical consequences. Furthermore, we will examine what has been implemented so far among the listed measures that do not require legislative change.

MINORITY INFORMATION IN THE NEW LAWS: TOO HIGH A PRICE PAID

The media community (a term commonly understood to encompass the relevant media and journalist associations and media experts) can be said to have achieved a kind of Pyrrhic victory with regard to both the text of the Media Strategy and the laws derived from it. Naturally, this applies not only to information in the languages of national minorities. Many solutions proposed by the community - clarified and refined through numerous professional gatherings over the past decades with the goal of improving the media landscape and media professionalism - found their place in the strategic document and the laws. Regrettably, however, in many cases, they have

⁵⁶ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2020/148/1>

remained a dead letter on the paper. In effect, they have not influenced media reality, nor have they improved media practice or brought it closer to serving the public interest. On the contrary, sound statutory provisions - paradoxically, yet logically in an environment lacking the rule of law - are producing increasingly adverse consequences for the media landscape, particularly concerning the influence of the state (i.e., ruling political elites) over the media landscape.

It also gives impression that, primarily the Media Strategy and its accompanying document, the Action Plan for its implementation⁵⁷, and to a somewhat lesser extent the laws, imposed excessively complex and numerous demands on all media actors. Due to limited capacities, as well as the insufficient functionality of state bodies and institutions, these demands could not have been met even if political will had existed. And there was none. Put simply, the only success of the Media Strategy has been the revision of media laws mostly in accordance with its provisions, and even that success, as noted, is highly questionable. The new 2023 LPIM tasked the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, or the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, with oversight over the implementation of this law. Oversight entails an inspection service, carried out by the Ministry and the Secretariat over the enforcement of the law and the regulations adopted on its basis. Although a Department for Regulations, Oversight, and Inspection in the Field of Public Information was established within the Ministry, more than two years later, inspection oversight has still not begun to function.⁵⁸

On the other hand, measures envisaged by the Media Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan that did not require amendments to laws and other regulations, but rather various affirmative actions by state bodies, remained mere aspirations waiting for better times. There is no evidence whatsoever of their implementation, even though five years have passed since the adoption of these documents. The problem also lies in the fact that other ministries and institutions tasked with activities from the Action Plan fail to recognise the importance of these actions and remain very passive in fulfilling their obligations. In anticipation of a new Action Plan, the Ministry expects other ministries and institutions to become more actively involved in its implementation.⁵⁹ We may be mistaken, but the impression is that the interest of both majority and minority political elites is to preserve the current configuration of the media scene - both in the majority and minority languages - or, in other words, to maintain the status quo.

As previously noted, it remains a serious problem that there are no relevant mechanisms to systematically monitor the practical implementation of media laws and the Media Strategy. This is particularly problematic concerning the complex media landscape in minority languages. Independent researchers frequently encounter closed doors when seeking information on the implementation of laws and strategic documents from national councils of national minorities and state institutions.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Maja Milenković, Head of the Department for Regulation, Oversight and Inspection in the Field of Public Information at the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, addressed this issue at the roundtable "Public Information in the Bulgarian Language", held on 15 October 2025, in Dimitrovgrad, organised by the OSCE Media Department and the local portal "Far."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

LET'S TURN TO THE GOOD NEWS

Let's turn to the good news instead. In Serbia - as previously noted - there was two-decade-long discriminatory attitude towards media outlets whose founders (indirectly) were national minority councils located outside the AP Vojvodina: until the adoption of the new Law on Public Information and Media, they were in a significantly less favourable position regarding state subsidies. From the provincial budget, an average of around 300 million RSD was allocated annually over a prolonged period for national council media, while these amounts were considerably lower for non-Vojvodina media outlets on an individual outlet basis. Since 2022, AP Vojvodina has been increasing the amounts allocated to media outlets founded by national councils. Thus, for example, in 2022, it allocated 390 million RSD⁶⁰, in the following year and in 2024 it increased this to 490 million RSD⁶¹, and in January of this year, the funding allocation decision amounted to as much as 530 million RSD⁶².

Under the 2023 Law on Public Information and Media, the right to budget financing for media outlets whose publishers were founded by national councils of national minorities was extended to the entire territory of the Republic. Article 13 of the LPIM contains the following provision (paragraph 2): "The Republic of Serbia, i.e., the autonomous province, shall provide a portion of funds from the budget for the publication of newspapers in minority languages. Publishers of newspapers founded by national councils of national minorities registered in the territory of the Republic of Serbia shall have the right to co-financing." However, although more than two years have passed since the adoption of the new LPIM, the Government of Serbia has still not adopted a decree further regulating the manner of exercising the right to co-financing for newspapers founded by minority national councils in Central Serbia.

Interestingly, during the public consultation, there were intentions to completely abolish budget co-financing for national council media outlets, but, this idea was fortunately abandoned. Had that plan been carried out, it would have severely damaged minority-language media outlets and national minority rights in Serbia in general.⁶³ Namely, media experts, recognising the vulnerable position of minority reporting, have over the past decade advocated equal working conditions for media outlets (indirectly) founded by national councils nationwide, but "in such a way as not to jeopardise the funding levels enjoyed by national council media operating in the territory of AP Vojvodina."⁶⁴ Therefore, the media profession did not call for an end to subsidies for these media outlets, which represent not only an informational but also a cultural asset for minority communities, but rather for this process to be transparent and for mechanisms to be introduced to safeguard the editorial policy of these media outlets based on the principles of public broadcasters.

⁶⁰ https://www.kultura.vojvodina.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Odluka_inf22.pdf

⁶¹ https://www.kultura.vojvodina.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Odluka_nac.manjine24.pdf

⁶² <https://www.kultura.vojvodina.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Odluka-Listovi-jez-nac.manj-25.pdf>

⁶³ We discussed this with several media experts who participated in formulating solutions for minority information in the Media Strategy and the Law on Public Information and Media. Media expert Veljko Milić from the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina also spoke about this at the event "Self-Regulation and Information in the Languages of National Minorities," organized by the OSCE, Rusko Slovo, and IJAV, held in Petrovaradin on September 11, 2025

⁶⁴ Media outlets in the languages of national minorities - research and analysis, Media Department of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020

SIMPLY PUT: THE LAW IS BLOCKED

Given that funds are allocated to national council media outlets from public revenues outside public calls for proposals, media experts requested that funds be awarded according to clear criteria. They also demanded that media publishers whose founders are (indirectly) national councils of national minorities make their work transparent, specifically by publishing reports on their websites or through other channels, which they would submit both to national councils and to state authorities. This would enable not only the monitoring of public spending, but also the evaluation of achieved results. From this emerged a simple legal obligation for publishers founded by national councils of national minorities to publish an annual financial statement. This provision, therefore, did not fully reflect the intentions of media experts. Another problem is that an inspection of these media outlets' websites (or those of their publishers) shows that this provision is still not being implemented in practice.

For the most part, these media outlets and their publishers receive substantial public funding, yet citizens have no information on how that money is spent. In particular, it remains unclear whether the funds are used in the public interest – namely, reporting in line with public needs – or for the promotion of political elites.

We have already discussed how, in the absence of prior legal solutions, the media community – including media experts from minority media outlets – decided to establish self-regulatory mechanisms to protect national council media outlets from political influence over editorial policy. This involves an internal code of ethics to be jointly adopted by the national councils of national minorities, on the one hand, and their institutions, foundations, or companies that act as media publishers, on the other. In the meantime, this document, which provided internal guarantees for truthful, impartial, comprehensive, and timely information, editorial independence, and work aligned with the public interest, also became a legal obligation⁶⁵.

Unfortunately, here too we are witnessing the obstruction of legal solutions. As we heard at the conference “Self-Regulation and Information in National Minority Languages”, held in September 2025 and organised by the Publishing Institution “Ruske Slovo” and the OSCE, only the Rusyn and Ukrainian communities possess this act, which they adopted on their own initiative in 2019 and 2021. The LPIM contains no sanctions for publishers who fail to comply with this provision.

The internal act introduced mechanisms to protect editorial policy by defining personnel policy, primarily concerning the selection of the editor-in-chief. This provision was also incorporated into the law in simplified form, with the intention that it would be further elaborated in internal acts: when appointing the editor-in-chief of these media outlets, the publisher must obtain the editorial board's opinion on the candidate, which will be decided by secret ballot. This practice had already existed in certain national council media outlets before the internal acts, but its inclusion as a statutory provision is certainly a welcome development. Although the opinion is non-binding for the publisher or founder, it nevertheless represents an act of internal democracy and an exercise of the right to express a professional stance. A major issue, however, is that in the absence of rigorous

⁶⁵ LPIM, Article 17, paragraph 3: “The realization of professional and ethical standards in the media established by national councils of national minorities shall be guaranteed by the internal Code of Ethics adopted by the national councils of national minorities and the media publisher founded by the national councils of national minorities. The internal document sets out in detail the relationship between the founder and the publisher established by the national minority council.”

monitoring of the implementation of the law, we will be unable to determine whether this mechanism is actually being put into practice.

Generally, with regard to national council media outlets, the purpose of the law is to align these media outlets more closely with the operating principles of public broadcasters. As they are predominantly funded from the budget, mechanisms must exist to protect the public interest, particularly mechanisms that ensure editorial policy remains independent of the founder. We have already mentioned staffing policy concerning the appointment of the editor-in-chief. However, the law also sets out principles for selecting the governing bodies of these media outlets.

It stipulates that membership of the management board is incompatible with the positions of president of the national council of national minority, president and members of the executive board of the national council of national minority, holders of public office, officials of political parties, and persons whose membership in the governing body could lead to a conflict of interest in accordance with regulations governing the prevention of conflicts of interest in the exercise of public office. Members of the governing bodies of these media outlets are selected from among prominent experts in fields relevant to the operations of media whose publishers were established by national councils of national minorities (experts in media, culture, management, law, and finance).⁶⁶

For the most part, all these provisions represent a consistent implementation of the Media Strategy, but to reiterate – although the new Law on Public Information and Media was adopted nearly two years ago, they have still not been put into practice.

ABANDONMENT OF TRIPARTITE GOVERNING BODIES

One draft version of the Media Strategy included a provision that, according to media experts from minority communities⁶⁷, could significantly improve the functioning of media outlets founded by national councils. It concerned the establishment of tripartite management boards for these media, in which representatives of national councils, editorial board representatives, and independent experts from the minority community or civil society delegates would be equally represented. According to some legal experts, this model was abandoned because it would infringe upon the autonomous rights of media founders (national councils) and contradict the provisions of the LNCNM. It remains unclear whether that is indeed the case, since the selection of governing bodies for these media outlets, under that same LNCNM, is conducted according to the provisions of the founding act of the institution, foundation, or enterprise established by the national council, and that act must comply with the laws regulating public information and media, as stated in the second paragraph of Article 19.⁶⁸

Therefore, had this provision been included in the LPIM, national councils would have been obliged – at least in theory – to amend their founding acts and define mechanisms for selecting

⁶⁶ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnom_informisanju_i_medijima.html

⁶⁷ <https://voice.org.rs/boris-varga-uspon-i-pad-internog-etickog-medijskog-kodeksa-u-niu-ruske-slovo>

⁶⁸ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_nacionalnim_savetima_nacionalnih_manjina.html

tripartite governing bodies. It remains to be seen whether this idea, strongly supported by media experts, will be put into practice during a future cycle of media reforms.⁶⁹

MINORITY INFORMATION AND PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICES – LEGISLATIVE DISCREPANCY

Representatives of national councils of national minorities, as well as representatives of minority media outlets, actively participate in drafting media legislation, which is a logical and efficient practice. By contrast, media experts and representatives of journalists' and media associations are excluded from shaping legal solutions that address the status of national councils of national minorities, specifically, they are prevented from taking part in drafting the Law on National Councils of National Minorities in relation to provisions concerning the field of public information. This closed approach has led to inconsistencies between this law and media legislation, as previously discussed, and also to a higher degree of misunderstanding between the expert community and representatives of national minorities.

The intention of the authors of the Media Strategy and (LPBs)⁷⁰ is to ensure the institutional independence of public broadcasters, meaning that only their internal bodies take part in selecting editors-in-chief within the public broadcaster. In this context, national councils lose the right to express opinions on candidates for editors-in-chief of minority-language programming on public broadcasters: this provision has been excluded from the new LPBs. Although the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy⁷¹ specified that this provision should also be removed from the Law on National Councils of National Minorities by the end of the third quarter of 2022, this simply did not happen. It is still contained in Article 21 of this law⁷². And it remains doubtful whether it will ever be removed.

It is concerning that representatives of minority political elites publicly reject the proposed solutions for minority information contained in the Media Strategy and media laws, which likely indicates the reasons for the persistence of these legislative discrepancies, as well as the intention to maintain them.⁷³ We have already discussed the decade-long problem of conflicting laws governing minority-language information, and by all indications, this practice is set to continue.

⁶⁹ “The problem of the dominant influence of national councils and political parties on the staffing policy of minority media outlets compromises their autonomy, professionalism, and independent editorial policy. Therefore, alongside the application of the Internal Media Ethical Code, a renewed initiative to introduce a tripartite management board model is proposed, in which three members would be nominated respectively by the national council, the staff, and the broader professional community”, says media expert Boris Varga, who is also director of the Newspaper Publishing Institution “Ruske Slovo”.

⁷⁰ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnim_medijskim_servisima.html

⁷¹ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2020/148/1>

⁷² https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_nacionalnim_savetima_nacionalnih_manjina.html

⁷³ “We believe that a strategy was born in Serbia, despite our protest, which attempts to call into question the competences of national councils regarding public information. It seeks to strip away constitutional rights that pertain not only to information, but also to reduce the competences of national councils. We cannot allow that!”, said Jenő Hajnal in 2021, who was serving as president of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority at the time. (<https://www.vajma.info/cikk/vajdasag/26042/Hajnal-Jeno-Ovodak-epulnek-2021-ben-s-kibontakozik-a-tehetsegprogram.html>)

PROPOSAL AND/OR OPINION – THE COLLAPSE OF PROJECT CO-FINANCING

Another discrepancy illustrates this. The LNCNM stipulates that national councils submit proposals for the allocation of funds for projects submitted to public competitions announced by public authorities, with the aim of improving the quality of information for members of national minorities. The LPIM, however, states that national councils only provide an opinion on projects. From a legal standpoint, a proposal is more binding than an opinion, although in practice even the opinion of national councils has very frequently been treated as binding, thereby granting national councils a key role across all three segments of minority-language reporting.

Under the LPIM, national councils should submit recommendations to the authorities announcing co-financing competitions for public interest in public information, specifying the media content required by a particular national minority within that authority's jurisdiction to enhance the quality of reporting in the mother tongue. Now, the project co-financing model was intended precisely to ensure media pluralism in minority-language reporting. In other words, it was meant to fund missing high-quality content and create an alternative to minority media under strong national council influence. Ultimately, it aimed to secure a critical approach to the work of national councils and foster public debate within the community. It is doubtful whether national councils will recognise that these types of content are missing.

We have already noted that the entire project co-financing system has collapsed and turned into its exact opposite. This is also evident in the sphere of minority reporting, not only because national councils play a decisive role in this process and refuse to issue a positive opinion on projects submitted by publishers who take a critical stance towards their work and the ruling minority political elites⁷⁴. The problem has taken on new dimensions because, recently, a significant portion of the money intended for minority-language reporting has gone to media outlets perceived by the public as close to the authorities. These outlets produce minority content solely to meet project requirements, thereby further rendering the project co-financing system meaningless.⁷⁵

The inclusion of interculturality within the defined segments of public interest in public information under the new Law on Public Information and Media is undoubtedly a welcome development.⁷⁶ As a reminder, project co-financing specifically denotes co-financing in the public interest, which should logically mean that media content incorporating elements of interculturality receives more substantial funding. This, in turn, would foster greater understanding among national communities, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, recognising interconnected diversity as a beneficial societal remedy in a country burdened with a traumatic history of interethnic conflicts. However, because the project co-financing system fails to function as intended, this provision currently remains merely a noble idea awaiting better times.

⁷⁴ We have already pointed out that certain minority media outlets no longer even submit project proposals to the authorities in Serbia for media content co-financing competitions because they know they will receive a negative opinion from their national council.

⁷⁵ <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/ministarstvo-milione-namenjene-informisanju-nacionalnih-manjina-dalo-medijima-milosavljevica-i-stijakovica>

⁷⁶ LPIM, Article 15, paragraph 11: “Support for the production of media content aimed at promoting tolerance, gender equality and intercultural dialogue, as well as preventing all forms of discrimination in the public sphere to enhance mutual respect and understanding among citizens living in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender or religious identity.”

When examining project co-financing, we also arrive at the matter of foreign funding that certain media outlets receive from their kin states, as previously noted. Consider the case of RTV Pannon from Subotica (television, radio and a web portal), published by the foundation of the same name established by the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority. Pannon generates significant revenue both from Hungary and through project co-financing, which places independent Hungarian-language media outlets at an even greater disadvantage.⁷⁷ This case underscores the urgent need to establish mechanisms that guarantee transparency and clear criteria for media donations originating from kin states.

OTHER OBLIGATIONS – AS IF THEY HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN

To summarise. Obligations regarding the adoption and amendment of media laws, in relation to the Media Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan, were significantly delayed in their implementation. We have already mentioned that they have still not been fulfilled to this day when it comes to the LNCNM. The fact that legal provisions have still not come to life in practice is not the only disappointing outcome. It is equally disappointing that the activities to be carried out by state bodies and independent regulatory bodies (ministries, provincial secretariat, the Protector of Citizens, RAEM) under the Media Strategy and Action Plan have been completely forgotten. The plan for these activities had, in fact, envisaged their implementation by the end of 2022 at the latest.

This, for example, applies to: incentives for media publishers broadcasting content in national minority languages whose founders or co-founders are not national minority councils, aimed at strengthening media pluralism; increasing the amount of media content of public interest in national minority languages, as well as content preserving national identity; increasing the number of professional staff working in minority-language media through incentive measures; establishing new and expanding existing educational programmes to train staff for work in minority media; increasing the number of state-funded university places for students belonging to national minorities in faculties and programmes training staff for minority media; support for projects focused on continuous capacity building for journalists and media workers engaged in minority media; exercising the right to information for numerically small national minorities, especially those lacking their own media.

We have already noted that some research indicates that numerous media outlets are unaware of what the media law amendments introduced regarding their specific obligations. One gains the impression that certain institutions are equally unaware of the activities assigned to them by the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy. For instance, in the annual reports of the Protector of Citizens, we have not identified a single activity related to the implementation of the Media Strategy – at least concerning the provision of information in national minority languages.⁷⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

Representatives of the media community, civil society, international organisations and institutions must exert strong pressure on state institutions to establish the rule of law across all sectors, including public information in minority languages.

⁷⁷ <https://nuns.rs/orban-kupuje-uticaj-u-srbiji-preko-vojvodanskih-medija/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/izvestaji/godisnji-izvestaji>

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, as well as the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, must urgently begin supervision and inspection in the field of public information, in accordance with the LPIM.

It is essential for the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, in cooperation with the media community and representatives of national councils and national minority civil society, to prepare regular periodic reports on the implementation of media laws and the Media Strategy regarding public information in minority languages, containing evaluation mechanisms as well.

The Government of Serbia should adopt, as soon as possible, by-laws further defining the method of exercising the right to co-finance newspapers founded by minority national councils in Central Serbia, pursuant to Article 13 of the LPIM.

Through amendments to the rulebook defining data submission and the operation of the Media Register, the Ministry needs to offer a solution that allows the register to specifically categorise the database of media outlets reporting in national minority languages, facilitating research into this complex field.

The RAEM needs to actively monitor the representation of minority languages in public broadcasting programmes, in accordance with the LPBs, publish annual reports, and establish indicators for measuring the quality and diversity of content.

The Protector of Citizens should incorporate the right to information in national minority languages, and the exercise of that right, into its annual reports, alongside proactive oversight of the implementation of the Law and the Media Strategy. Particular attention should be given to those provisions of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy that constitute its direct obligations.

The Ministry of Education needs to develop and fund programmes for the education and professional training of personnel working in minority media outlets, including quotas and scholarships for students from national minority communities.

In subsequent stages of media reform, it is essential to achieve full alignment across all legal enactments that directly or indirectly govern the provision of information in national minority languages. Amendments to all laws (including those regulating the operation of national minority councils) must be carried out in line with the existing Media Strategy through an inclusive process involving relevant representatives of state institutions, minority communities, and journalism and media associations.

Future strategic and legislative solutions should strengthen mechanisms that enable adequate funding for minority-language media content, protect freedom of expression in minority languages, prevent political influence, and promote political and media pluralism. This applies to public broadcasters and outlets founded by national councils, as well as to private and civil society media that report (also) in minority languages.

In further media reforms, it is necessary to take into account the differences among national minorities in Serbia, not only in terms of population size, but also in relation to the tradition, quantity and quality of public information in their native languages. Minority policies, including media policies, should be tailored to the specific characteristics of individual national communities.

In further media reforms, consideration should again be given to making the governing bodies of media outlets (indirectly) published by national councils tripartite, meaning they would include representatives of national councils, editorial staff and, as the third group, representatives of citizens or the civil sector. This would bring this model closer to the statutory governance model used for public broadcasters.

Trust needs to be rebuilt among representatives of minority elites, minority civil society organisations, and the media community, specifically media experts. A dynamic public debate among these stakeholders should be actively promoted through various forums.

Interstate funding and financial support for media from kin states must be transparent and directed towards strengthening the technical and professional capacities of minority media outlets, training in the use of new technological platforms, project management, and other measures to enhance sustainability, as well as advancing media professionalisation. Mandatory public disclosure of criteria and donation amounts from kin countries must be introduced to prevent opaque political influence and protect media pluralism.

International donors should increase their support for minority and multilingual media, specifically prioritising intercultural content and media outlets that foster media pluralism and uphold professional standards in minority languages.

Internal codes of ethics in media entities (indirectly) founded by national minority councils are a legal obligation that, unfortunately, is not observed in practice. Therefore, state authorities, media professionals, experts, and civil society organisations must join forces to compel national councils to adopt and effectively implement these documents. The experiences of the Rusyn and Ukrainian communities show that internal enactments can be an effective mechanism for protecting editorial and staffing policies, provided that national councils and editorial boards show a genuine willingness to apply them consistently in practice.

Internal enactments must not remain a “dead letter on the page”; the way they are applied must be assessed as broadly and as frequently as possible. The same applies to other new statutory obligations of these media outlets and national councils, such as the composition of governing bodies and financial transparency. Therefore, the implementation of internal enactments should also be subject to legal compliance monitoring carried out by both institutions and civil society organisations.

Media outlets (indirectly) founded by national councils of national minorities must fulfil their role and adhere to the operating principles of public broadcasters, which is also their legal obligation. This means that through diverse, balanced, high-quality programming across news, education, culture, and entertainment, they help realise the public interest, thereby meeting the needs of all segments of a given minority community, as well as society as a whole. This also implies the possibility of monitoring the performance of these media outlets.

Media publishers founded by national councils must regularly publish their annual financial reports in accordance with the law. It is also important to make their overall annual performance reports publicly available.

The Law on Public Information and Media recognises interculturality in the media as a social value, specifically as a matter of public interest. Efforts must be made to ensure that this provision does not remain merely declarative. Instead, incentive mechanisms should be used to substantially

support content that promotes tolerance, intercultural dialogue and exchange, the prevention of all forms of discrimination, and the strengthening of mutual respect and understanding among citizens living in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, or religious identity.

Public broadcasters must begin consistently respecting the law, first and foremost Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), which must incorporate minority-language programming into its broadcasts to an adequate extent, as mandated by the Law on Public Broadcasters. It is equally essential that this programming be of high quality.

Finally, by respecting existing laws and improving media legislation, the process of project co-financing for public information must be enhanced so that it genuinely serves the interests of citizens. In this context, it is necessary to ensure full transparency of the process, the unimpeded operation of project evaluation committees – which will be composed of independent experts delegated by representative associations with no conflicts of interest – and the allocation of adequate financial resources. In this regard, it is essential to guarantee the presence on the committees of competent individuals in the field of minority information, as well as representatives of journalist and media associations or civil society organisations focused on media issues.

Through the stable funding of media outlets founded by national councils of national minorities, the state at all levels is not exempt from the obligation to co-finance other media content in minority languages, and must do so in accordance with the principles of media freedom, pluralism of opinion, and non-discrimination. For this reason, it is imperative to immediately restore the rule of law in the area of competitive co-financing of the public interest within the public information sphere. The opinions of the national councils of national minorities regarding project proposals must not be binding.

It is necessary to provide specific incentive measures for electronic media outlets that feature content in minority languages (for example, by eliminating or reducing costs such as digital dividends, fees for SOKOJ, OFPS, and other related charges).

Programmes and incentive measures are needed to build the capacity of minority media outlets, particularly in adopting new information technology platforms and in project management, including the use of international (cross-border) projects. Online media outlets can help fill the gaps created by the decline of traditional media platforms reporting in minority languages. International donors can also be involved in this initiative.

Launch platforms for cooperation between editorial boards for programmes broadcasted in minority languages and those for programmes in Serbian, aimed at content sharing, joint research, and strengthening intercultural dialogue. This cooperation can and should also be cross-border, with a specific focus on the kin countries of Serbia's national minorities.

Annexes

Case study: Hungarian-language media

INTRODUCTION

When analysing the “minority” media landscape in Serbia, the situation of the Hungarian media scene in Vojvodina emerges as a primary case study. The reasons for this include the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians’ (AVH) almost uninterrupted participation in all governing coalitions from the end of 2000 to the present day⁷⁹, as well as the crucial role played by AVH representatives in defining and amending the legal framework on minority rights throughout these 25 years. Furthermore, the AVH has maintained absolute dominance over the political, cultural, and social life of Hungarians in Vojvodina/Serbia for at least 25 years (if not longer), exercising this control over staffing policies and funding through the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority (NCHNM)—initially as a temporary body, and subsequently established by law.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the NCHNM often serves as a model for other minority national councils in Serbia in terms of organisation, funding and influence.

The further shrinking of space for media pluralism, the non-implementation and/or circumvention of the provisions of the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia (from 2020)⁸⁰ and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy⁸¹ (from 2020), together with the very strong influence of the AVH and the NCHNM, which is entirely dominated by the AVH, are the main features of the Hungarian-language media scene in Vojvodina.⁸²

The AVH is a party that is part of the ruling coalition at all levels of government in the Republic of Serbia (national, provincial, and local) and is a partner of the ruling Fidesz party in Hungary.

“PARTNERS”

On 10 May 2025, a gathering titled The Second Media Meeting of the Southern Regions was held in Doroslovo, where the president of the AVH told representatives of the attending media—both from the public broadcasters and from the so-called national council media—in Hungarian that⁸³ “politics and the journalism community” should be partners, as they share a common responsibility. He therefore advocated for a “regular exchange of views”.

⁷⁹ [SVM i u Republici i u Pokrajini zadržao svoje pozicije u vlasti | Savez vojvođanskih Mađara | Oficijalna stranica SVM-a](#)

⁸⁰ [Strategija razvoja sistema javnog informisanja u Republici Srbiji za period 2020–2025. godina: 11/2020-10](#)

⁸¹ [Akcioni plan za sprovođenje Strategije razvoja sistema javnog informisanja u Republici Srbiji za period 2020–2025. godina, u periodu 2020–2022. godina: 148/2020-3](#)

⁸² [SVM potpuno kontroliše medije čiji je osnivač Nacionalni savet Mađara - Autonomija; Profesionalni mediji na mađarskom jeziku u nemilosti Saveza vojvođanskih Mađara - Vojvođanski istraživačko-analitički centar "VOICE"](#)

⁸³ <https://szmsz.press/2025/05/10/pasztor-az-ujsagi-roknak-ugyanannak-az-eremnek-a-ket-oldala-vagyunk/>

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Paragraph 4 of Article 21 of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities⁸⁴ (2018) has not been deleted. This provision states that “*national council 4) gives opinion on candidates for editors-in-chief of programmes in the languages of national minorities in public broadcasters, if public broadcasters have programme editors in the languages of national minorities;*”. This is in direct contradiction with the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2020–2025, in the period 2020–2022⁸⁵ – hereinafter the Media Strategy (adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 30 January 2020) and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2020–2025, in the period 2020–2022⁸⁶ (adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and published in the “Official Gazette of the RS” No. 148 on 10 December 2020) – hereinafter the Action Plan. In the Action Plan, under point 3.3.3, the deletion of that paragraph of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities is explicitly required by the third quarter of 2022, with the aim of ensuring the institutional independence of public broadcasters (PBs), meaning that only the internal bodies of public broadcasters may participate in the selection of editors-in-chief and editors-in-charge.

It is important to note that the then president of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority stated as early as 7 January 2021 that he could not allow the implementation of the Media Strategy and Action Plan (sic): “*We consider that a strategy has been created in Serbia, despite our protest, which seeks precisely to call into question the jurisdiction of the national councils regarding public information. It seeks to strip away constitutional rights that pertain not only to information, but also to reduce the competences of national councils. **We cannot allow this!** With this, people from the so-called free press and independent media are attempting to corner not only the national councils, but the Serbian government itself. The government would like to satisfy the conditions of the European Union, but I fear that, in doing so, the national councils will be placed in a situation that carries a serious danger.*”⁸⁷.

Thus, despite the clear commitment of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, a formal lever of influence on the editorial policy of PBs has been retained by bodies elected in elections (national councils of national minorities), namely centres of power (so-called minority self-governments) operating outside the PBs structure. Neither the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia nor any other institution in the Republic of Serbia possesses such a right: to issue an opinion regarding the selection of PBs’ editors in charge of programmes or editorial boards in the Serbian language.

⁸⁴ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_nacionalnim_savetima_nacionalnih_manjina.html

⁸⁵ https://www.media.srbija.gov.rs/medsrp/dokumenti/medijska_strategija210_cyr.pdf

⁸⁶ <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2020/148/1>

⁸⁷ <https://www.vajma.info/cikk/vajdasag/26042/Hajnal-Jeno-Ovodak-epulnek-2021-ben-s-kibontakozik-a-tehetsegprogram.html>

On 5 June 2025⁸⁸, information regarding the open call for editors-in-chief was published on the Radio-Television of Vojvodina website, stating, inter alia: “In accordance with the provisions of Article 23, paragraph 1, item 10) of the Law on Public Broadcasters (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 83/2014, 103/2015, 108/2016, 116/2020, 129/2021, 142/2022 and 92/2023), Article 21, paragraph 1, point 4) of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 72/2009, 20/2014-CC Decision, 55/2014 and 47/2018), and in conjunction with Article 25, paragraph 1, point 11) of the RTV Statute (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 3/2015, 34/2018 and 95/2021), the Director-General shall obtain the opinion of the national councils of national minorities, and the national councils of national minorities shall provide an opinion on candidates for the Editor-in-Chief of programmes in the language of the respective national minority.

Formally and legally compliant applications for editors-in-chief of media that provide media services in the languages of national minorities shall be forwarded to the relevant national councils of national minorities for an opinion.”

Under the new Law on Public Broadcasters⁸⁹ (enacted after the publication of the aforementioned open call), the powers of the Director-General no longer explicitly require them to request the opinion of national councils of national minorities on candidates for editors-in-chief; however, the right of those councils to issue an opinion has been retained in the Law on National Councils of National Minorities.

In this regard, the news about the visit of Goran Karadžić, Director-General, to the headquarters of the AVH party and its president on 12 July 2024 may be significant⁹⁰. This is likely the only political party whose headquarters a Director-General of RTV has officially visited in recent history. Accompanying Karadžić to the AVH headquarters was his predecessor in the role of Director-General, albeit in an acting capacity, Jožef Klem. He was Deputy Director-General in February 2017 when the cooperation agreement between RTV “Pannon” and RTV Vojvodina was signed.

In mid-December 2024⁹¹. Bálint Pásztor, President of the AVH, informed the public that, prior to his guest appearance on the Second Programme of RTV Radio (the Hungarian-language programme), he had held a *“short meeting with the heads of RTV’s Hungarian-language editorial boards: “The acting editor-in-chief of the Second TV Programme, Andrea Juhász, the acting editor-in-charge of the Hungarian-language TV Programme Editorial Board, Ágnes Vojvodić, and the acting editor-in-chief of the Hungarian Editorial Board of the Second Radio Programme, Erika Hegediš, and I reviewed the areas in which they are counting on my assistance.”*

⁸⁸ https://rtv.rs/sr_ci/rtv/konkursi

⁸⁹ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnim_medijskim_servisima.html

⁹⁰ <https://www.maglocistac.rs/politika/direktor-rtv-a-goran-karadzic-u-poseti-svm-u-od-septembra-kvalitetnija-programska-ponuda-na-jezicima-manjina>

⁹¹ https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1133388484845850&id=100045241264015&_rdr

According to unofficial information, Bálint Pásztor also held a meeting in spring or summer 2024 with Andrea Juhász, then a journalist in RTV's Hungarian-language radio editorial board who had previously worked for RTV "Pannon". Shortly after that meeting, on 1 August 2024, she was appointed Acting Editor-in-Chief of RTV Television's Second (so-called minority) Programme. Soon after Andrea Juhász's appointment as Acting Editor-in-Chief, on 26 August 2024, Bálint Pásztor personally appeared on the Hungarian-language television programme Napjaink (Our Days), thereby ending an unofficial, years-long AVH boycott of that show. The AVH had not boycotted the Hungarian-language radio broadcasts.

MANAGEMENT AND EDITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN PBs

The new Law on Public Broadcasters grants the Director-General of PBs the authority previously held by the PBs Management Board, namely the appointment (previously: selection) of editors-in-chief.⁹² This, to put it mildly, indirectly violates the explicit provision in the Media Strategy and Action Plan, which states that management and editorial functions within PBs should be separated, given that the manager (Director-General) independently appoints editors.

RTV terminated its cooperation with the "FoNet" news agency in July 2025⁹³, having done the same with the "Beta" news agency several years earlier. This has significantly reduced the range of information sources available for the editing of news programmes.

ALL TO SIGN!

Under Article 17 of the Law on Public Information and Media ("Official Gazette of the RS", Nos. 92/2023 and 51/2025)⁹⁴, it has been defined (since 2023) that:

"The operating principles of media outlets whose publishers were founded by national councils of national minorities must be aligned with the operating principles of public broadcasters.

The editorial policy of media outlets whose publishers were founded by national councils of national minorities shall be independent of the founder."

According to information published on 7 November 2023 on the Szabad Magyar Szó (Free Hungarian Word)⁹⁵ portal following the announcement of elections: *"Employees at the daily newspaper "Magyar Szó" were forced against their will on 6 November to sign the list of supporters for the AVH, an employee working there confirmed to the "Autonomija" portal."* It was added that the employee, who requested anonymity, told Autonomija that *"Editor-in-Chief Márta Várjú entered the newsroom in the afternoon and told the journalists to organise themselves*

⁹² [Zakon o javnim medijskim servisima](#)

⁹³ <https://nuns.rs/rtv-otkazao-saradnju-sa-fonet-om/>

⁹⁴ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnom_informisanju_i_medijima.html

⁹⁵ <https://szmsz.press/2023/11/07/a-magyar-szo-ujvideki-munkavallaloit-felszolitottak-es-kivezenyeltak-a-vm-sz-listajanak-tamogatasara/>

and go to sign the AVH list. She called those who were not in the building by phone. She stated that those who did not go to sign could face problems.”

It is also noted that “in the photograph published on the Magyar Szó website and in the print edition of the paper, the Editor-in-Chief, Márta Várjú (Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper since 2011), can be seen signing a document supporting the AVH party, accompanied by the Vice-President of the AVH, Elvira Kovács. In the background of the photograph, awaiting her turn to sign, is Edvina Erdődi, Acting Director of the newspaper's publisher, with a note stating that she is a member of the AVH. In a second photograph, also published on the Magyar Szó portal, a group of employees can be seen beside a table, likewise signing the list of support for the AVH.”

This concerns the daily newspaper “Magyar Szó”⁹⁶ (Hungarian Word), whose publisher was founded by the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority.

In 2004, the Assembly of Vojvodina transferred the founding rights of minority-language newspapers to minority national councils. In practice, this means that these media outlets are largely financed from public funds, while their management and editorial structures are determined by the national councils of national minorities.

On its website, “Magyar Szó” lists among its supporters the State Secretariat for National Policy of the Government of Hungary, the Hungarian state-owned Bethlen Gábor Fund, the Hungarian National Cultural Fund, and the Provincial Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

A similar situation exists with the Hungarian-language weekly “Hét nap”⁹⁷ (Seven Days) whose publisher was likewise founded by the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority. In this weekly (which has an online edition, as well as a rather irregularly updated online edition in Serbian), not a single person holding political views that differ from the policies of the AVH can be found among the public figures interviewed. This is also a publication whose publisher was founded by the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority after the Assembly of Vojvodina transferred founding rights over minority-language newspapers to minority national councils in 2004.

On its website, “Hét nap”⁹⁸ lists among its supporters the State Secretariat for National Policy of the Government of Hungary, the Hungarian state-owned Bethlen Gábor Fund, the Provincial Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and the Hungarian state news agency.

FROM WEEKLY TO MONTHLY

Unlike the “newspapers of the Hungarian National Council”, the private weekly “Családi Kör”⁹⁹ (Family Circle) was brought to the brink of closure. In May 2025, it was announced that the paper’s

⁹⁶ <https://www.magjarszo.rs/>

⁹⁷ <https://hetnap.rs/>

⁹⁸ [Hét Nap Online](#)

⁹⁹ <https://csaladikor.com/>

publisher, the Foundation “Sloboda štampe” (Freedom of the Press), had decided to switch to monthly publication. In a statement to RTV’s¹⁰⁰ Hungarian-language television editorial board, the Editor-in-Chief of the weekly, János Tőke, said: *“Several factors contributed to the transformation into a monthly magazine, including the irregular delivery of issues to subscribers via the postal service, mass emigration, and the fact that representatives of Hungarian interests have sought to oppose Családi Kör wherever possible – to cite just one example, since 2022 the Hungarian National Council has not recommended a single one of our funding applications.”*

In recent years, “Családi Kör” has positioned itself as a critic of the authorities, both in relation to the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority (NCHNM) and to the AVH.

All members of the current convocation of the NCHNM are from the AVM list, as it was the sole list participating in the most recent NCHNM elections (whereas previous elections featured multiple lists).

The Sloboda štampe (Freedom of the Press) Foundation is also the publisher of the aforementioned news portal “Szabad Magyar Szó” (Serbian-language edition title: „Slobodna reč”).

On its website, the Foundation defines itself as follows: *“The “Sloboda štampe” Foundation was established in June 2017 with the task of contributing to the openness, fairness and freedom of public discourse in the Hungarian language (as well as in other languages) in Vojvodina and Serbia. In an era when an increasing number of media outlets succumb to state-party assistance and control, independent media outlets are becoming ever rarer and – owing to the historic economic and political catastrophe of post-Yugoslav Serbia – an ever smaller number of citizens can afford regular purchases of serious print media. The sphere of truthful, comprehensive, fair and objective reporting is thus becoming increasingly narrow.”*

As part of Measure 4.1 (Increasing the objectivity and diversity of sources and media content in national minority language media) the Media Strategy envisaged the following activity: **“Incentivising publishers of media broadcasting content in the languages of national minorities whose founders or co-founders are not national councils of national minorities, in order to encourage the production and distribution of programme content in national minority languages and foster pluralism in media content in national minority language reporting.”**

The Law on Public Information and Media, in Article 13 “Exercising the right to information of members of national minorities”, defines this in the following manner:

*“To enable members of national minorities to exercise their right to information in their own language and script, and to preserve their culture and identity, the Republic of Serbia, the autonomous province, or the local self-government unit shall allocate part of the funds, through co-financing or other operating conditions, to media outlets that publish information in the languages of national minorities, via the body responsible for public information. The Republic of Serbia, or the autonomous province, shall allocate part of the budget funds for the publication of newspapers in the languages of national minorities. **Newspaper publishers established by***

¹⁰⁰ https://rtv.rs/hu/t%C3%A1rsadalom/t%C3%B6bb%C3%A9-m%C3%A1r-nem-hetente-jelenik-meg-a-csal%C3%A1di-k%C3%B6r_1626828.html

national councils of national minorities registered in the territory of the Republic of Serbia shall have the right to co-financing.

The criteria for the allocation of funds, the manner of distribution, and the determination of the amount of funds referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article shall be regulated by the Government through a specific act.”

It appears that “Szabad Magyar Szó” is attempting to secure its survival through crowdfunding; indeed, in an address to readers on its portal, the following is stated: *“Our problem is that we cannot produce more of our own material because around twenty local self-governments approved zero dinars for our submissions, while the Hungarian National Council—citing fabricated reasons originating from party headquarters—has not recommended our funding requests for years. Let us help one another! For twenty dinars (€0.17) per day, become a subscriber to Szabad Magyar Szó; by doing so you will get rid of pop-up ads, be able to read articles appearing in the Plus section, and last but not least, contribute to ensuring that Szabad Magyar Szó remains the most widely read Hungarian-language website in Vojvodina and reports on even more local topics!”*

CO-FINANCED FROM BOTH SIDES

The RTV “Pannon”¹⁰¹ media outlet from Subotica, comprising one television station, two radio stations and a web portal, is likewise controlled by the NCHNM – that is, the AVH. The Director (specifically, the Director of the “Panonija” Foundation) is appointed directly, and the Editor-in-Chief indirectly, by the NCHNM.

The newly established civil society organisation, the Vojvodina Hungarian Plenum (VHP), founded in May 2025, issued a public statement noting that broadcast materials from TV “Pannon” can frequently be seen on the AVH Facebook page, despite the “Pannon” website stating that copyrights belong exclusively to that media outlet. The VHP raises the question of whether, and since when, a written agreement has existed between “Pannon” and the AVH regarding the syndication of content.

Bálint Pásztor, President of the AVH, regularly (weekly) “appears as a guest” on one of the radio stations (“Szabadkai Magyar Rádió” – Subotica Hungarian Radio) within the RTV “Pannon” system. This bears a striking resemblance to the system in Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán regularly (weekly) “appears as a guest” on the main channel of the state radio.

The RTV “Pannon” also lists on its portal the State Secretariat for National Policy of the Government of Hungary and the Hungarian state-owned Bethlen Gábor Fund among its supporters.

At the beginning of 2021, the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS) published an article entitled “*Orbán ‘buys’ influence in Serbia through Vojvodina media outlets*”, reporting that Hungarian taxpayers had funded the operations of Hungarian-language media outlets in Serbia to the tune of approximately €12 million between 2011 and the end of 2019¹⁰². CINS stated that RTV

¹⁰¹ <https://pannonrtv.com/>

¹⁰² <https://www.cins.rs/orban-kupuje-uticaj-u-srbiji-preko-vojvodanskih-medija/>

“Pannon” received the majority of the roughly €12 million allocated to all Hungarian media outlets registered in Serbia for news content, operational capacity and organisational development, as well as the acquisition of real estate and media properties. István Bodzsár, then Director of RTV “Pannon”, told CINS that they enjoyed “very good cooperation” with MTVA (Hungary’s state media system), but claimed that the specific details of this arrangement were a “*business secret*”. In 2013, MTVA announced that RTV “Pannon” would serve as its “*Vojvodina correspondent hub*”.¹⁰³

According to CINS, the “Pannonija” Foundation – the owner of RTV “Pannon” – received approximately €302,000 through 31 provincial and local calls for applications for co-financing media content of public interest in Serbia between 2015 and early 2021, based on the database of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia (UNS). In addition to RTV “Pannon”, funding was also awarded to the oldest Hungarian-language daily newspaper in Serbia, “Magyar Szó”, the oldest weekly newspaper, “Hét Nap”, as well as Express TV and radio (URKO – the owner of the television channel “Express channel” and the radio station “Régió Rádió”¹⁰⁴), the news portals “Vajdaság Ma” and “Jó reggelt Vajdaság”, along with roughly twenty other media outlets. Furthermore, at least €36,000 was disbursed to journalists’ associations.

The “Pannonija” Foundation is regularly awarded funds through public calls for the co-financing of projects for the production of media content in the field of public information. For instance, on 3 December 2024, pursuant to a decision by the Mayor of Subotica¹⁰⁵ the foundation was allocated a total of RSD 900,000 (from a total distributed sum of RSD 4,600,000) across three projects (“Subotica - Art Nouveau and Tourism Capital of Northern Bačka”, “Traditions, Cultures, Tastes - Everything That Connects Us”, and “Sports Life of Subotica”). In 2023, the allocation decision was issued in May, totalling RSD 2.3 million. The “Pannonija” Foundation has also received funds through public calls for project co-financing in the field of public information in other municipalities. For example, in the Municipality of Mali Idoš for 2023, it was awarded RSD 200,000¹⁰⁶ for the “TV Pannon” project titled “The Colorful Everyday Life of Mali Idoš”.

On 17 January 2022, information was published on the RTV “Pannon” website stating that, from that day onwards, the Info Centre (topolyai Infó Központ), its affiliated “Régió Rádió”, and the television channel “Express channel” would continue operating under RTV “Pannon” from Subotica. It was noted that “the local media centre could no longer survive in its old form following the privatisation process that began in 2014. This change in ownership ensured its continued operation.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ <https://www.vajma.info/cikk/vajdasag/14864/A-Pannon-RTV-lesz-az-MTVA-vajdasagi-tudositopontja.html>

¹⁰⁴ <https://media1.hu/2021/02/28/orban-kormany-szerbia-vajdasagi-mediabefolyasszerzes-magyarorszag-i-adofizetok-penzen/#:~:text=magyar%20ad%C3%B3fizet%C5%91k%2C%20%C3%A9s%20a%20Vajdas%C3%A1gi%20Magyar%20Sz%C3%B6vets%C3%A9g,Reggelt%20Vajdas%C3%A1g%20v%C3%A9lem%C3%A9nyport%C3%A1l%20%C3%A9s%20m%C3%A9g%20mintegy%20h%C3%BAsz>

¹⁰⁵ <https://subotica.ls.gov.rs/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Resenje-o-raspedeli-sredstava.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ https://maliidos.rs/documents/sluzbeni_list/2023_14_sr.pdf

¹⁰⁷ <https://pannonrtv.com/rovatok/tarsadalom/topolyai-info-kozpont-pannon-rtv-reszekent-mukodik-tovabb>

On 2 April 2024, on the occasion of its 20th anniversary, the Facebook page of Regional Radio (Régió Rádió)¹⁰⁸ noted that “Serbian-language programming takes place every working day from 9:00 to 13:00, after which listeners have the opportunity to tune in to the Subotica Hungarian Radio programme, while on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 8:30 on 107.9 MHz, broadcasts in the Montenegrin and Slovak languages can be heard.” In the historical overview of the media outlet, it is mentioned that the Association for Regional Communication “URKO” from Pačir became the owner of the former “Public Information Company Bačka Topola” (JIPBT), which subsequently changed its name to “Information Centre LLC Bačka Topola” (ICBT). Régió Rádió and “Express channel” were originally launched within JIPBT. Since 17 January 2022, ICBT has operated as part of RTV “Pannon”.

On 12 September 2023, Cenzolovka reported that, over the preceding five years, a total of RSD 74 million – approximately €632,000—had been allocated from the budget of the municipality of Bačka Topola for the co-financing of projects for the production of media content in the field of public information, noting that “available financial resources are divided among 13 to 16 media projects, with the largest support consistently granted to the exact same local media outlets”. It added that, during the 2019–2023 period, the largest sum was traditionally awarded to “Information Centre LLC Bačka Topola, under which Regional Radio (Régió Rádió) and the cable television channel Express Channel operate”.¹⁰⁹

“Cenzolovka” emphasises that although the Information Centre came under the umbrella of RTV “Pannon” at the beginning of 2022, “up until June 2023, Szabolcs Szabolcsi was listed as the director of these two Bačka Topola media outlets. He is also the President of the Council of the Local Community of Pačir, served as the head of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (AVH) in that village, and was the party candidate for Deputy in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.”¹¹⁰

MEDIA STRATEGY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY

In the NCHNM Media Strategy¹¹¹ for the period 2024–2029 (adopted at the session of the NCHNM on 10 November 2023), it is concluded that the principal casualties of the media privatisation imposed by the 2014 law were local radio stations broadcasting programmes in minority languages, including Hungarian. Consequently, the Hungarian editorial board of Radio Subotica was unable to continue its work; RTV “Pannon”, which was then “on the rise”, largely “took over the staff and tasks” of the editorial board and established “Subotica Hungarian Radio”, which today plays a “significant role in informing the Hungarian community”.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/100064568235198/posts/radio-regije-danas-puni-20-godina-javno-informativno-preduze%C4%87e-ba%C4%8Dka-topola-je-2/800467925448808/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/sta-se-sve-finansira-kroz-medijske-projekte-iz-budzeta-opstine-backa-topola-mediji-bez-novinara-sadrzaji-bez-javnog-interesa/>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/sta-se-sve-finansira-kroz-medijske-projekte-iz-budzeta-opstine-backa-topola-mediji-bez-novinara-sadrzaji-bez-javnog-interesa/>

¹¹¹ <https://www.mnt.org.rs/magyar-nemzeti-tanacs-tajekoztatasi-es-mediafejlesztési-strategiaja-2024-2029>

Regarding the Information Centre in Bačka Topola (ICBT), the media strategy states that it currently operates as an independent LLC *“because retaining the 107.9 MHz frequency is crucial”*, but that the licence for this frequency expires at the end of 2024, after which RTV “Pannon” will apply for the frequency. It adds that the studio in Bačka Topola also functions as a correspondent branch and that operational funds are secured *“partly from the support of the Municipality of Bačka Topola, partly from donations, national and international grants, as well as from production activities”*.

In this media strategy, obtaining a provincial frequency for the three media outlets of RTV “Pannon” is defined as one of the key objectives. The NCHNM also aims to have RTV “Pannon” recognised as an institution entitled to direct state aid in Serbia.

In addition to the media outlets operating under RTV “Pannon”, “Magyar Szó”, “Hét Nap” and the public broadcaster JMU RTV, the NCHNM Media Strategy explicitly mentions “Vajdaság Ma”. It notes that although Vajdaság Ma does not fall within the “founded group” of the NCHNM, it receives “project funding and support from the kin-state”. The strategy also cites Családi Kör (at the time a weekly), describing it as “belonging to the circle of publications founded by the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority”.

The private news portal “Vajdaság ma”¹¹² (Vojvodina Today) lists the State Secretariat for National Policy of the Hungarian Government and the Hungarian state-backed Bethlen Gábor Fund as its financial supporters. On the portal, the “Serbia” section is dominated by news covering the activities, statements and press releases of state officials and public authorities. In the “Hungary” section, coverage of opposition activities in Hungary is virtually non-existent.

Among religious and church media outlets, the NCHNM Media Strategy highlights the Hungarian-language programming of “Radio Maria”, which is sustained by voluntary donations and shares broadcast frequencies with a “local Orthodox religious radio station and the Croatian editorial board of Radio Marija”. It also references the Hungarian-language print publications “Hitélet” and “Hírvivő”.

CALL FOR PROJECT CO-FINANCING – AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

Among online media outlets publishing in Hungarian, “Bečejski mozaik”, a member of the Online Media Association (AOM) since 2017, deserves mention. On 18 June 2025, “Bečejski mozaik” published a report entitled: “How the media budget is distributed in Bečej: Drips and drabs through public calls, sub rosa for the compliant”¹¹³, which serves as an illustrative example of the public media co-financing system. The report states that the Municipal Council of Bečej published *“the results of the call for co-financing media content, but failed to provide specific justifications. Only one million dinars was allocated – barely ten per cent of the total RSD 9.36 million earmarked for public information in the 2025 budget. The remainder of the funds, much like the previous year, will likely be distributed outside the formal competitive call process.”*

¹¹² <https://www.vajma.info/>

¹¹³ <https://becejski-mozaik.co.rs/na-konkursu-na-kasicicu-a-podobnima-ispod-zita/>

The report further adds: *“Bečejski mozaik rejected the allocated sum of 50,000 dinars. Editor-in-Chief Vladan Filipčev proposes that this money be redirected towards repairing at least one of the “smart” pedestrian crossings, which were installed two months ago for over €340,000 and are already malfunctioning or out of service.*

Such an outcome of the public call was expected, given that throughout 2024 the editorial board was subjected to political pressure, threats, and discrimination – including obstructed access to information of public importance.

For this reason, the print edition of Bečejski mozaik was shut down in January 2025 after 27 years, as we were unwilling to compromise, act contrary to the journalistic code of ethics, or stop investigating events and phenomena that are not to the liking of the local authorities.”

The Media Strategy also emphasises the following: *“Numerous problems have been identified in the implementation of the public fund allocation system through project co-financing. These were identified both through domestic monitoring of the process and in the European Commission's negative progress reports on Serbia's EU accession.”* It further notes that *“public calls for financing media content are becoming virtually the sole source of income for the survival of local and regional media.”*

In the aforementioned article, “Bečejski mozaik” also draws attention to the following: *“During the amendments to the Law on Public Information and Media, amendments stipulating that criterion for public procurement in the media sector must be clearly linked to the realisation of the public interest and compliance with professional standards were not adopted. Consequently, this area will remain susceptible to the favouring of select media outlets, the non-transparent expenditure of taxpayers' money, and abuses.”*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The adoption of new media laws intended to derive from the Media Strategy and Action Plan has not brought about the changes envisioned by the Media Strategy and Action Plan in the Hungarian media landscape in Vojvodina.

The funding system in the Republic of Serbia remains focused on maintaining media outlets controlled by the minority national council, that is, the political party controlling that council, which enjoys an exceptionally strong position relative to both official Budapest and official Belgrade.

The public broadcaster has not been freed from the indirect influence exerted by national councils of national minorities over staffing policy and, consequently, editorial policy.

Under these circumstances, a rapid erosion of the remaining pluralism and public interest in the Hungarian media scene in Vojvodina and Serbia can be expected.

To prevent such an outcome, political will is required for the literal implementation of the documents adopted by the Government of Serbia: the Media Strategy and Action Plan from 2020.