

MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN THE PRIMORSKO–GORANSKA DISTRICT

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1. Minority Conditions

1.1. *Historical Overview*

1.1.1. *The Period up to Croatian Independence*

The region of today's Primorsko-Goranska District encompasses 14 cities, 21 municipalities and 604 settlements on the northwestern part of the Adriatic coast in Croatia. The oldest sources show that many representatives in the local government of Rijeka were Croats.¹ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the region witnessed the immigration of foreign merchants and craftsmen who became citizens of Rijeka. There was also an influx of peasants who took up agricultural labor in the Gorski Kotar region. After many years some of them managed to become patricians and occupied positions in city government. The richness of the opportunities for economic prosperity in Rijeka and the whole region continued to attract many people to come for the sake of business ventures. As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century Rijeka had become home to powerful merchant families from the Netherlands, Greece, Dalmatia, Boka Kotorska and Italy.

Rijeka underwent significant economic development during the nineteenth century. The economy was based on trade and seamanship. Trade, in most cases, was conducted with Italy. This period was a turning point in the denationalization of Croats and Slovenians, who sent their children to Italian schools to learn the language of commerce. It would seem that Rijeka turned itself into an Italian town, but the first official census refutes such an impression. In 1867 Croatian historian Franjo Rački wrote, "More than 89,000 Croats live in the district governed by Rijeka. In the coastal region of Rijeka on the Kvarner islands, as well as in the western parts of Istria, live an additional 125,000 Croats."² These data can be taken with reservations due to the inclinations of the historian, who may have been inspired to overestimate by romantic ideas of a national renaissance, but the data available from the first official census of 1851 do provide us with some facts. At that time, in Rijeka and its administrative district there were 12,598 citizens with the following distribution: 11,581 Croats (91.93%), 691 Italians (5.49%), 88 Jews (0.70%), 76 Hungarians (0.60%), 52 Germans (0.41%), 48 Czechs (0.38%), 13 English (0.10%), 10 French (0.08%) and 39 others (0.31%).

¹ Gigante, Silvino, *Fiume nel Secolo XV*. p. 121.

² Rački, Franjo (1867) *Rijeka prema Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb. p. 130.

It is interesting to note that the first census gave no indication of Serbs, although there is no doubt that they lived in Rijeka, and that an Orthodox church had already been built there in the eighteenth century.

However, according to the census of 1910, the population's composition had completely changed. Italians made up almost 47% of the population, Croats 31.71% and Hungarians, Germans, Czechs, English and French were still present. In addition, Serbs appeared (0.14).

Population data from the fascist period are rather interesting. In 1925 the foreign community constituted 30% of the total population. They were identified upon the basis of their native language so as to highlight the predominance of "real Italians" in respect to the non-Italian population.

While the fascist period was characterized by the Italianization of the region's population, the postwar period was marked by the opposite. Between 1945 and 1953 more than 200,000 Italians left the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, moving either to Italy or to the so-called A Zone controlled by the western Allies. 33,725 people vacated the region we are concerned with, 15,355 of them from Rijeka and its vicinity.³

During socialist reconstruction and the creation of the planned economy, the region was rapidly rebuilt and developed due to its strategic geographical position. The growth of heavy industry—shipbuilding, metallurgy and manufacturing—as well as the expansion of Rijeka's port, which became the largest and the most important in Yugoslavia, attracted large numbers of people who found opportunities for economic stability in Rijeka. This was accompanied by social and cultural changes, which transformed Rijeka into a truly multiethnic city. Despite state propaganda championing "brotherhood and unity," Rijeka did not perceive its ethnic diversity as imposed. It is important to mention that from 1948 to 1981 the population of Rijeka increased by 140%, growing from 69,000 to 164,000.⁴ Figures from the last three censuses on national structure are listed in the annex to this chapter.

During this period special attention was given to the Italian minority. The state constitution, the constitutions of local communities, special legislation and an international agreement with the Italian State granted a high degree of minority rights and autonomy to the Italian community. The Rijeka city statute from 1974 states in Article 11: "The workers and citizens of the municipality of Rijeka have been granted the freedom to express their national and ethnic identity, the freedom of cultural expression and the freedom to carry on cultural traditions, as well as the freedom to use their own language and alphabet."

In this same period Italians used their language in communication with all government and public institutions. The institutions were obliged, upon request, to publish records in Italian. Institutions for Italians, such as kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and the publishing house *Edit*, were established. There was a local radio station broadcasting in Italian. The national theater featured Italian drama. Italian athletic and cultural associations were organized. The headquarters of the main Italian association, *Unione degli Italiani dell Istria e di Fiume*, was in Rijeka.⁵

³ Moravček, Goran (1990) *Rijeka, Prešućena Povijest*, Rijeka (independent publication). p. 152.

⁴ Klen, Danilo et al. (1988) *Povijest Rijeke*, Rijeka. p. 448.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 440–441.

Legal regulation on the particularities of Rijeka's Italian community was set forth in the statutes of Rijeka on June 26, 1987.⁶ It was inspired by the thesis that the Italian minority had been previously granted certain rights, which they had not been able to exercise. (At that time "new minorities" had yet to emerge following the fall of Yugoslavia.) The regulation granted Italians the right to use their language in communication with governing institutions, as well as the right to obtain certain governmental records in Italian, upon request. They were also given the right to display their national symbols, the right to proportional representation within the municipal assembly and other governmental agencies. Partnership with their country of origin, namely, Italy, was specifically supported and encouraged in Article 25. Article 25 also stated that the *Official Gazette* was also to be published in Italian whenever the Assembly tabled statutes, general records or decisions for public discussion. A special commission was set up within the municipal assembly to address Italian minority issues and act as an advisor. At least half its members were to be Italian.

Special attention was given to native language schooling. Education offered in Italian would include the system of preschool, primary school and secondary school, as well as adult education. According to Articles 138 and 139, the teachers at these institutions, for the most part, were to be Italian. Emphasis was placed on promoting cooperation with Italians from other municipalities in order to enhance educational conditions.

Other ethnic groups that represented the nations of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) were settled in Rijeka, but there were no specific regulations defining their status.

1.1.2. *After Independence*

After the first democratic elections in 1990, a clear tendency to define Croatia as a nation-state appeared. In that year the Croatian Constitution defined Croatia as "established as a nation-state of the Croat people and those of other nations and minorities who are its citizens and who have been granted equality with ethnic Croat citizens, as well as civil rights in accordance with the democratic norms of the UN and the countries of the free world."⁷ The constitution approves the official use of languages other than Croatian and the use of Cyrillic, or any other alphabet.

A special problem appeared for the members of the "new" nations of the SFRY, such as Bosniaks: everyone who was not an ethnic Croat was a minority.

1.2. *Legal Regulations of Minority Protection*

Croatian legislation defining the status of minorities is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and, specifically, the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic and National Communities and Minorities. This law encompasses the Charter of the Rights of Serbs and Other Nationalities in the Republic of Croatia, international conventions signed and ratified by Croatia, bilateral agreements

⁶ *Službene Novine* (The official gazette) (1987) No. 46.

⁷ The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (1990) *Narodne Novine* (The official gazette) No. 56.

between states, as well as agreements adopted by Croatia during the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in 1997. Additionally, there are legislative statutes and declarations pertaining to decision-making in local self-governance.

The Fundamental Provisions of the Constitution define Croatia as a nation-state and uphold the principle of minority equality: "Members of all nations and minorities are equal within the Republic of Croatia. They have been granted the freedom to express their national identity, use their own languages and alphabets and have cultural autonomy."⁸ Citizens are to obtain such equality through freely associating with each other "in order to maintain welfare or support social, economic, political, national, cultural and other beliefs and goals...."⁹ The equality declared by the constitution has to be confirmed in executive regulations and in practice. Executive, legal and institutional infrastructure are a precondition for the equal opportunity to realize civil and minority rights.

Croatian legislation is rather voluminous in defining the status of minorities, yet the nation is still searching for answers to these crucial questions.¹⁰

Croatia passed the abovementioned Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic and National Minorities at the end of 1991. This law was updated in 1992 to meet conditions for Croatia's international recognition.¹¹ It defines the standards for the protection of national minorities over ten chapters. The first three define the protection of human rights of national minorities and institutionalize the right to cultural autonomy. The fourth chapter regulates the participation of minority representatives in representational bodies and other government agencies. Proportional representation within the Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Croatia, as well as in the institutions of the highest legal authority are granted to national minorities with more than 8% of the total population. Communities that have less than 8% have the right to elect five representatives for the Assembly's Chamber of Representatives where all minorities are to be represented. Their representatives are obliged to protect minority interests. In accordance with this mechanism, in the second multiparty elections, Serbs won 13 seats and Czechs-Slovaks, Ruthenians-Ukrainians, Hungarians, Italians and Jews won one seat each. After the October 1995 elections, the number of representatives from the Serb community that were elected was reduced to only three. This was due to the fact that a section of the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic and National Minorities, which doubtlessly corresponds with the standards of the international community, was suspended. In addition, the suspended section has not been reimplemented. This is because, after the exodus of Serbs, none of the remaining minorities counted for more than 8% of the total population, which meant that none of them could use the rights granted to them by law. This is important in the elections for the Chamber of Representatives of the Assembly and other institutions of local self-governance. Also, it must be mentioned that the percentage of minorities within the total population has not been officially confirmed because there has been no official census.

⁸ The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (1990) *Narodne novine* (The official gazette). Article 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 43.

¹⁰ Tatalović, Dr. Siniša (1997) *Manjinski narodi i manjine*, SKD "Prosvjeta," Zagreb. p. 99.

¹¹ The Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic and National Communities and Minorities (1992) *Narodne novine* (The official gazette) Nos. 27, 34.

1.3. Minority Organizations in the Primorsko-Goranska District and Rijeka

The diversity and richness of minority organizations in Rijeka reflects the city's heritage and uniquely characterizes it and the region in comparison to other parts of Croatia. The fact that precisely here the Serb community in Croatia began operating in 1991, when the war was at its height, attests to the tolerant climate of the region. A compilation of the sundry minority cultural organization follows:

The Italian Community, has a particular role and importance as the city's oldest minority organization. The special position of the Italian Community has its roots in the tradition, history and culture of Rijeka. The forerunner to the Italian Community was the Italian Cultural Club, also from Rijeka, established in 1946. The organization emerged from the need of Italians to express their own cultural, national and religious identity. The Italian Community advocates and contributes to the development of civil society and respect for linguistic plurality and multiculturalism of all the ethnicities residing in Rijeka. Various cultural and artistic groups are active within the cultural association *Fratelanza*. These include choirs, a chamber and mandolin orchestra and the artistic society *Romolo Venucci*. This organization has gained respect from long-term and constructive operation and received Rijeka city awards for the years 1993 and 1996.

The tradition and experience of the Italian Community provide a good example of how other minorities can organize themselves. The difficult position of new minorities, living in new conditions and searching for reliable opportunities, have led members of these communities to ask for assistance in establishing their own ethnic organizations.

Slovenski dom Bazovica is an organization of Slovenians that has been operating for 50 years in Rijeka. The Croatian Constitution does not recognize Slovenians as a minority, but this does not prohibit this organization from actively participating in the public and cultural life of the city. After the establishment of Slovenia and Croatia as independent states, this organization became a place where Slovenians from the Primorsko-Goranska District gladly came to participate in a variety of clubs—from traditional singing and dancing groups and amateur acting associations to youth-oriented computer education programs. The organization provides youths with supplementary education in their native language and cultural environment. It also organizes “consular days” of the Republic of Slovenia during which Slovenians from Rijeka and Primorsko-Goranska district can solve particular problems regarding Slovenia's consular services.

The Serb Community of Rijeka was established in 1991 under the sound conviction that issues of nationality and democracy do not necessarily exclude one another. Its basic goal was to prevent the ghettoization and isolation of the Serb population due to the wartime conditions of increased tensions, accumulated hatred and an extremely negative attitude toward Serbs. Until 1994 the Serb Community acted within an umbrella organization that joined Serbs from Rijeka, Istria and Gorski Kotar, but in December 1994 it became autonomous.

Although the Serb Community encountered harsh financial conditions as well as the unwillingness of many local Serbs to take an active role in public activities, it managed

to realize its primary goals. In order to enhance dialogue with other ethnic communities, and especially the majority population in Rijeka, the Serb Community took the initiative to coordinate the activities of the city's minority associations in order to define common goals and improve communication among them. Good relations with local authorities resulted in the realization of certain programs that were unheard of in other Croatian cities. The success of the Serb Community's public forums, literature evenings, meetings with other ethnic communities and its ongoing presence in the public sphere generated ample momentum for the continuation of its activities. After 1996, when the Croatian Government stopped financially supporting Serb Community projects, all of its activities were transferred to the Serb Cultural Association, *Prosvjeta*, in Rijeka. It became involved in a wide range of publication activities including a children's magazine *Bijela Pčela*, a newspaper *Artefacti* and Serbian poetry. Publication activities were handed over to a subcommittee of *Prosvjeta*, which is now exclusively involved in the realization of cultural and educational programs. After these changes, the primary activities of the Serb Community were carried out through its Human Rights Committee. Since 1994 the committee has responded to more than 4,500 requests, appeals and calls for help and provided information on the protection of rights. It is worth mentioning that the committee has assisted members of other, non-Serbian national groups, including Croats. The position of the committee, as well as the Serb Community, is that human rights are universal and independent of nationality.

Matica slovačka was established on December 3, 1994 in Rijeka upon the initiative of several resident Slovaks. Its focus was the preservation of the Slovak language and folklore. Several groups were established, including a women's vocal group, a children's folklore group and a chess club. *Matica slovačka* is relatively open to the public and thus has cultivated good relations with Croats and minorities alike.

The Democratic Community of Hungarians in Croatia, an association in the Primorsko-Goranska District, was established in 1994 and has more than 250 members. Its activities emphasize the development and preservation of Hungarian language, culture and customs. A library and reading room have been established, in addition to folklore, vocal and dance clubs. The organization is deeply rooted in Rijeka due to historical relations between Hungary and the city.

Češka beseda Rijeka was established on September 17, 1994. It operates within the Czech Union of Croatia based in Daruvar in Western Slavonia. The goal of the association is the cultivation of the Czech language and cultural traditions. *Češka beseda* offers a library, a theater society and a folklore club that brings together members of all ages.

The Albanian Community of the Primorsko-Goranska District was established on May 1, 1994. Its goal is the preservation of the Albanian national identity through the cultivation of Albanian culture, tradition and language. It also aims to strengthen the friendship between Albanians and the other inhabitants of Rijeka and the district, be they Croats or other minorities. The Albanian Community organizes public forums, lectures, roundtables and experts' gatherings, through which it offers its culture and tradition to the wider

public. A reading room, the cultural association *Shota* and supplementary classes in Albanian for Albanian children have been organized.

The National Community of Montenegrins of Rijeka was established in order to cultivate and preserve the Montenegrin cultural identity. Its activities encompass publishing, a club, and the organization of lectures and forums aimed to introduce Montenegrin culture to the wider population.

The Macedonian Cultural Association Ilinden is culturally focused. In addition to organizing exceptional exhibitions, lectures and concerts, they have put on the very successful “Macedonian Nights” festival, which brilliantly exemplifies the associations motto: “The world must be seen as nothing more than a playing field for the cultural competition of nations.”

The National Community of Bosniaks represents a “new” ethnic community in Rijeka. Although they do not exist in the Croatian Constitution as a minority, Bosniaks have managed to facilitate different activities. War trauma, a variety of problems in their home country and the struggle for the political and public recognition of Bosniaks are the major concerns of this community. Their recognition and emancipation are at the center of public discussion in Rijeka. After a struggle which put Rijeka’s democracy to the test, the local government gave them permission to construct a mosque. Less tolerant segments of the population, some even living outside the city, had requested a ban on its construction.

The Roma Association of Rijeka is an organization that is trying to get first-time recognition for Rijeka’s Roma community. Confronted with organizational setbacks and the other obstacles that block Roma from economic and social emancipation, this community faces problems that are indicative of Roma questions in Rijeka.

These eleven associations make Rijeka significantly different from other Croatian cities. Despite organizational and financial hindrances, these groups are trying to maintain a constant presence in the life of the city. Beyond their focus on minority interests, most of them have a civic orientation, thus reflecting the climate of civil society in the city. Their further emancipation and presence in the public life of the city depends on themselves as well as the support of the majority population and local authorities. It is important to say that, due to the lack of legal regulations on specific minority rights—such as with the law on the official use of minority languages, which still has not been passed despite having been discussed several times within the Assembly—particular rights are nevertheless enjoyed through activities fostered by minority associations.

2. Minority Problems

2.1. Political Representation

2.1.1. The Primorsko-Goranska District

The district's borders reflect historical, traffic flow and economic factors; it is considered a unit of local self-governance within the Republic of Croatia.¹² The District Assembly is a representational institution of local self-governance and has a district head as the executive authority of the district.

Article 19 of the Constitution regulates the right of minority communities to be represented in local self-governance. Minorities are to be represented in proportion to their percentage of the population, as is regulated by the statutes of the local community.

The District Assembly of Primorsko-Goranska seats 40 members, plus a president, two vice presidents, a district head and a deputy head. The representatives who composed the first District Assembly, which convened on April 14, 1993, gained seats on the basis of the results from the February 7, 1993, election. The first Assembly sat 39 Croats and one Italian.¹³ The 1997 statistical yearly of the district gives information on the representatives, providing such criteria as party membership, age and education, but offers no data about minority representation. The legal framework mandated that minorities living in the Primorsko-Goranska District were to be represented in the most recent composition of the District Assembly. According to the Secretary of the District Assembly, the current Assembly has replaced its Italian member with a Serb. In both, minority representatives were elected to the vice presidency.

Article 38 of the district statute regulates the permanently functioning agencies of the Assembly. One of the agencies, the Commission for Minority Issues, established, in March 1999, is made up of representatives from political parties that participate in the District Assembly. The commission decided that minority representatives should always be invited to its sessions.

Article 30 of the statute resolved the question of minority representation, stating that if the elections failed to achieve adequate minority representation, the number of Assembly members was to be increased. The Serb minority was to appoint one member if they had less than 8% of the total number of voters, and three members if they had more than 8% of the total number. The remaining minorities—Italians, Albanians, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Czechs, Hungarians, Macedonians, Slovenians, Roma, Jews, et al.—were to appoint one member each.¹⁴ Notably, the decision effected those minorities which Croatia's original constitution had not recognized.

According to the positive regulation (the Law on the Election of Members of Representative Institutions of Local Governance and Self-Governance), there is no institution of special lists for the members of a national minority. Nevertheless, Article 10 of the above quoted law defines that "members of ethnic and national communities or

¹² The Law on Local Self-Governance (1993) *Narodne novine* (The official gazette) (1992) No. 90; (1993) No. 94; (1993) No. 117.

¹³ Data from the Secretary of the Assembly as of November 4, 1998.

¹⁴ The Statute of the Primorsko-Goranska District (1998) *Službene novine* (The official gazette) No. 2.

minority that have less than 8% of the electoral body on the state level have the right to be represented in the representational institutions of the unit of local self-governance, i.e., of the unit of local governance and self-governance (district) in accordance with the procedures prescribed by the statute of those units.”

In Article 77, the transitional and final decision on the issue stated: “The number of minority members in the Assembly, which was set in Article 30, paragraph 3, of this statute, is to be brought into accord with the census.” How this was to be done was not defined. According to the last census, Serbs accounted for 8.79% of the population. This meant that, in accordance with the statute, the District Assembly was to be adjusted so as to include two more Serbs and one representative from each of the remaining minorities. This did not happen. The present structure of the District Assembly is not in accord with the provisions of the statute. The elections have produced neither the lawful nor accurate representation of minorities at the District Assembly, though it may be conceded that minimal representation was achieved twice.

There is no reason not to implement of the statute since it clearly states that minorities have the right to be represented and precisely defines the number of representatives they are allotted. Whether this shall happen depends on the political will of the parties controlling district government. With five representatives minorities would control 12.5% of the District Assembly—only half of the percentage of the minority population in the district.

Financial indicators for minorities show that there has been continuous political concern for them in the Primorsko-Goranska District. What is worrisome is the downward trend in financial support. Therefore, we provide the following data on the financial assistance the district has given to minorities (7 kuna = 1 USD in the spring of 2000):

- 1994: 693.911,00 kuna;
- 1995: 428.000,00 kuna;
- 1996: 350.000,00 kuna;
- 1997: 375.000,00 kuna;
- 1998: 360.500,00 kuna.

Financial support in 1998 reached only half of the amount provided during the war-year 1994. Such orientation neither can be justified nor accepted as part of a policy aimed to decrease the district budget. Modest resources had already been additionally decreased by the November 1998 amendment of the budget.

What could be the reason for such conduct? Firstly, not even as of 1999 had the Assembly established a commission for the development of a systematic financial support policy for minorities. This proves that not enough attention was given to this problem on the institutional level, despite claims of support and lip-service to the existence of a climate of tolerance. Secondly, not only have the parties in the Assembly failed to develop a program for the promotion and protection of minority rights, they have not even discussed the matter. Party policy, as well as the paltry number of minority representatives, has limited what they have been realistically able to accomplish. There have been no minority representatives in the Assembly except the Italian and the Serb. The presence of these two was not due to the realization of standards established to protect minority interests. In 1998 the Serb representative initiated the question of minority representation to the

Assembly, but to no effect. Outside of opportunities to articulate their needs through the newly established Commission for Minority Issues and their lone representative, minorities have not been in a position to exercise a decisive impact on the conduct of the Assembly. Due to this, the Serb Community in Rijeka campaigned to have ethnic minority organizations—as opposed to organizations representing internationally recognized countries—accorded the status of users of budgetary funds. Success in this would have automatically increased the realization of minority rights, but, due to bureaucratic obstacles and political pragmatism, the initiative was placed on hold. If such an initiative had been accepted, there would have been direct confrontation with other associations characterized by their national affiliation, which would present immense political risk, unacceptable even for the most unyielding opposition parties.

It must be said that the minority organizations themselves are also responsible for the current problems. Most of them are satisfied with their status and folkloric public offerings. “Cultivation of ethnic identity” is a goal that disturbs nobody, opposes nobody and requires no sacrifices, while political goals can create polarization and a negative attitude toward a particular community.

Although this region differs from other parts of Croatia in respect to political and cultural tolerance, the fact remains that good will toward minorities usually takes place on informal levels. Political emancipation resulting from minority representation in government can only help to increase the protection and emancipation of minority rights. Therefore, our efforts should be directed toward this goal and the solidification of Croatia’s democratic character. The future will show whether there is a resistance to the introduction of minorities into the public system and representative governance, or whether their lack of participation has been the result of an intentional act by most minority organizations to maintain a positive public reputation.

2.1.2. *The City of Rijeka*

The current Rijeka city statute was ratified on October 22, 1997.¹⁵ As we have seen, the situation in respect to minority rights is radically different from the period before Croatian independence. This is especially visible in the emergence of “new” minorities.

Article 6 of the statute permits the use and display of national flags and minority symbols. As well as protecting minorities’ right to equal participation in public affairs, Article 7 guarantees them cultural autonomy and the freedom to express national affiliation and use their own language and alphabet. Article 8 specially regulates the status of the Italian minority, particularly the use of Italian in public affairs and the self-governing activities of the city. As resources allow, the city is to support the educational and cultural activities of the Italian minority.

Article 38 regulates the proportional representation of minorities at city council. If the elections do not achieve proportional representation, the number of minority councilors is to be increased to the number necessary for achieving the representation required by law. Due to the fact that this municipality regulation is less precise than the district’s, the single Italian seat the Rijeka City Council was the only one granted to minority groups.

¹⁵ *Službene novine* (The official gazette) (1997) No. 22.

If the representation of other minorities is to be determined by the prescribed 8% quota, regulations would have to make it possible for a minority with more than 8% of the population to automatically receive three seats at city council. Though such a regulation meets the standards of national regulations, it lacks a provision for separate elections from which minorities would send representatives to institutions of local self-governance. Councilors who also happened to be members of minority groups ran in the last elections; however, their success depended firstly on their membership in particular political parties, so that these parties' interests were protected. Such "representatives" are beyond the reach of influence, and the results of their involvement in the protection and promotion of minority rights is negligible. This is visible in city policy and legislation and in the total absence of discussion on minority rights issues in city government. The current composition of the Rijeka City Council has had no discussion on minorities in the city, nor has it passed any legislation that would make it possible to define its policy toward minority organizations.

A permanent five-member Minority Issues Commission operates within the Rijeka City Council. The commission acts as a consultant, recommending ways to assist the activities of minority communities. It also examines minority conditions, issues assessments on the level of implementation of minority rights and acts with the aim to ensure minority rights. Nevertheless, praxis has shown that the commission lacks the real political power needed for the effective consideration of minority needs.

Consequently, it is necessary to more closely examine the relation of minorities to the political system. In Croatia, minority organizations are seen in the same vein as any other citizen association with social activities programs, a narrowly defined scope of action and occasional short-term initiatives. The orientation of such organizations does not adequately address minority concerns because the organizations are strictly formulaic, and regulated by law. In addition, the representational character of such organizations is rather questionable. In all of Croatia there are quite a few organizations of Serbs, Roma, Germans, et al. It would seem as if the intention of authorities is to "generate" the largest possible number of organizations as examples of democracy and tools to combat the political organizing of "problematic" minorities.

Serbs are an ideal example of this. There are a variety of Serb organizations in Croatia, some of which are favored by the state, while others are denied financial support or any assistance whatsoever. Additionally, local self-governance is responsible for deciding which associations in their jurisdiction are worthy of support. A municipality may decide to channel support to a minority community, an association or any other group. It could be claimed that this model leads toward the democratic decentralization of governance, but it obviously has a damaging impact on minorities, as it did in the case of Rijeka. There is no doubt about the political intention, formally expressed in the statute, to meet minority needs within the city. However, there remains the fact that minority organizations are exclusively financed by cultural foundations.

If it is currently impossible for minority organizations to operate outside of the laws on associations, then it is crucially important for the city of Rijeka to define its position on minority issues. The city should support minority organizations as it does quality social services and cultural programs. It should formally state that it is vital for Rijeka to bring its eleven minority organizations out of their relative passivity and enable them to truly

represent the members of their communities and create an environment of cultural diversity that is unknown in other regions of Croatia. This should be implemented through the active support of minority organizations.

The preconditions for these developments are already in place. The city and minorities openly communicate with each other, but on behalf of the city there is a lack of clearly declared support. Minority associations still struggle for survival, lack office space and the basic material preconditions for operation and are unable to employ the necessary minimum of professionals. Programs and projects concerning first aid, the dissemination of information, interethnic communication and the cultivation of dialogue, mutual respect and appreciation, etc., are all carried out in inadequate conditions and often without the necessary experts.

3. The Implementation of Minority Rights

In Croatian legal and political practice minorities have not been given due attention. From the very beginning of the creation of the Croatian state, the attitude of the central authorities in Zagreb toward minorities was dependent on pressures from the International Community, and not in accordance with European standards based on long-term, systematic policies of minority protection.

Rights in cultural autonomy are the least obstructed for the minorities which had permission to exercise them before Croatian independence. The Italian community is one such minority. After independence, problems arose in defining the status and rights the new minorities, i.e., those with affiliation to other nations in the SFRY. A basic principle in Croatian constitutional law is that certain rights depend on the population of a particular minority group in respect to the total population. This part of the constitution was suspended after the 1995 exodus of Serbs from Croatia. The local government in different regions have reacted differently to this problem. It has not been a great issue in regions that have a negligible number of minorities. In regions with significant minority populations, local government interest in their rights is often not more than declarative. It seems that the “European regions” in western Croatia have the most liberal views in respect to minority rights issues. Their orientation may be the result of political pragmatism or the product of the consistent implementation of international legal standards and mechanisms for the protection of minority rights in the region where they live. The historical accommodation of cultural diversity in Rijeka and the liberal nature of the Primorsko-Goranska and Istria Districts reflect the centuries of integration of members from different nations—the *convivenza*, as the locals call it. Regardless of the cause, everyday life in the region shows that, through dialogue and mutual understanding between local authorities and minority groups, visible and satisfactory results are achievable. Such results affirm local authorities as members of the European community and demonstrate their desire to respect the diversity that is the foundation of European culture and civilization.

Although the problem of political representation has not been solved in the Primorsko-Goranska District, nor in Rijeka, the existing climate is a positive influence on the attitude of the local government toward minority communities. The mere fact that eleven different

minority organizations exist attests to the atmosphere of tolerance and the collective appreciation of diversity. In independent Croatia the citizens of Rijeka and its district elected parties without a nationalist orientation. Such a political climate naturally leads to the consideration of minority needs. For example, in order to make its tolerance and multiculturalism more transparent, the city organized the Ethno Festival, the first of its kind in Croatia, held from November 28 to December 5, 1996. All the minorities in Rijeka were invited. The acceptance and support of the citizens of Rijeka gave the festival showed it was a success. This festival is slowly developing into a standard way for minorities to present their achievements. The city of Zagreb used the same model in organizing a similar festival in 1997. In addition to these festivals, minorities actively support public and cultural life on St. Vitus' Day.

It is important to reiterate the participation of Italian minority in cultural life of the city. The Italian Community—with its four primary schools, one secondary school, Italian theatre, publishing house and a center where diverse activities such as language classes and dance parties have been organized—presents an integral part of what we call a city culture.

The Serb Community seeks affirmation within the city through different programs. For example, this community organizes a traditional chess tournament where all national minority and the representatives of the city participate. Additionally, the Serb Community organizes a whole range of lectures and discussion forums on the problems of human and minority rights, which have the goal to introduce the public with the conditions of human rights and opportunities for the use of those rights within Croatian legal system,

Slovenians are also an inseparable part of cultural life of the city. This has been primarily manifested through the outstanding theater group and through the Slovenian-language school that is open for all citizens of Rijeka.

Days of Macedonian Film was again organized in 1997—after a break of six years. Success of this event is an indicator of readiness and openness of audiences from the city of Rijeka for artistic trends that come from the Macedonia.

Minority goals are the cultivation and preservation of ethnic identity, the prevention of assimilation and the affirmation of solidarity. Minority organizations conduct a wide range of activities to implement these goals. Their common interests are the protection of human rights and a peaceful, civilized life based upon tolerance as well as the affirmation of their place in their region and country.

4. Conclusion

In 1998 the Croatian Helsinki Committee published *Srbi u Hrvatskoj—jučer, danas, sutra* (Serbs in Croatia—Yesterday, today and tomorrow), a book which marked a turning point in the discussions on human rights in Croatia. The book emerged from roundtable discussions held on October 18–19, 1996. The discussions were a forum for diverse opinions, but the thesis dominating them was that Croatia's integration into the European Community. Its democratization essentially depends on the position the government takes toward minorities, and especially Serbs, who were, until recently, described as an "enemy nation." Serbs have no need for special rights or an exclusive status in respect to other

ethnic groups. Indeed, this ethnic group needs to be treated the same as any other ethnic group in Croatia.

Democratization at all levels of government is of common interest of Croats, Serbs and the other minorities. In order to achieve it, the following are a few of the steps that must be taken:

1. The integration of all minority communities into Croatian society. The inclusion of Serbs as equal citizens and an equal minority group is of particular importance in overcoming the consequences of the recent past.
2. The repatriation of more than 400,000 Serbs who have had refugees status since 1991.
3. The reconciliation of Serbs and Croats in Croatia.
4. The preservation of the identity of all ethnic communities living in Croatia. This is not for the sake of separatism or exclusivity, but rather out of respect for the legal system and human rights, and to meet the demands of tolerance in a democratic society.

Trends and processes initiated in the Primorsko-Goranska District and the city of Rijeka set an admirable example for other regions of Croatia on how to create the conditions for a multicultural and tolerant society. Therefore it is to be expected that the political representation of minorities will be achieved nationwide in the near future.

Annex
*Population in the Municipality of Rijeka from the Last Three Censuses*¹⁶

Nationality	1971		1981		1991	
		%		%		%
Croats	221,818	81.95	220,246	72.44	244,806	75.76
Albanians	643	0.24	862	0.28	1,560	0.48
Bulgarians	68	0.02	34	0.01	54	0.02
Montenegrins	971	0.36	1,018	0.34	1,094	0.34
Czechs	205	0.07	212	0.07	197	0.06
Greeks	13	-	13	-	28	0.01
Hungarians	706	0.26	578	0.19	622	0.19
Macedonians	477	0.18	501	0.17	621	0.19
Muslims	1,770	0.65	3,294	1.08	7,007	2.17
Germans	104	0.04	109	0.04	171	0.05
Poles	52	0.02	59	0.02	57	0.02
Roma	46	0.02	234	0.08	504	0.16
Romanians	38	0.01	37	0.01	40	0.01
Russians	100	0.04	78	0.03	59	0.02
Ruthenians	54	0.02	53	0.02	55	0.02
Slovaks	86	0.03	90	0.03	120	0.04
Slovenians	6,112	2.26	4,821	1.59	4,633	1.43
Serbs	21,619	7.99	21,808	7.17	28,399	8.79
Italians	3,460	1.28	2,231	0.73	3,972	1.23
Turks	50	0.02	75	0.02	53	0.02
Ukrainians	49	0.02	42	0.01	75	0.02
Vlachs	-		-		3	-
Jews	239	0.09	10	-	28	0.01
Rest	106	0.04	173	0.06	298	0.09
Undecided	1,757	0.65	1,315	0.43	10,563	3.27
Yugoslavs	8,102	2.99	40,158	13.21	10,781	3.34
Regional belonging		-	774	0.25	2,564	0.79
Unknown	1,962	0.73	5,163	1.70	4,721	1.46
Total	270,660	100	304,038	100	323,130	100

¹⁶ *Statistical Yearly of the Primorsko-Goranska District* (1997) Rijeka. p. 36.

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