

ECMI  
**SUMMER SCHOOL**



## **Newsletter # 1**

“Raising Awareness on Border Regions  
Conflict Dynamics”

European centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)  
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***The entries are in original style and the views expressed belong to the authors only.***



Robert Bosch **Stiftung**

# ECMI Summer School Alumni Newsletter

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## **I. NASIBA ABBASOVA: Reporting from Azerbaijan**

2013 is a very important year for the countries of South Caucasus, because it's the election year for all three countries of the region. (In Azerbaijan is Ilham Alijew and in Armenia - Serj Sarkisjan were elected again to the presidents). This report will be especially devoted to Azerbaijan and Armenia, because the particular consideration on the regulation of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between the two countries will be done. This conflict which still has not found the solution might be identified as a „frozen” conflict. Although the ceasefire exists since years, it is mutually shot almost every week. That is why the soldiers die in nowadays.

The last few months in Azerbaijan were entirely devoted to the presidential elections in October. That's why the “hot” election campaign and the TV debates were the most discussed topics at the time, so that the conflict was pushed slightly to the rear, despite of the fact that it was the center point of election platform of each candidate.

The plenary session of PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) by OSCE has recently taken place, where Azerbaijanian and Armenian delegations have participated. The President of Armenia Serj Sargsyan made a statement that Armenia is for the regulation of the conflict within the framework of the Minsk Group by OSCE. The head of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE Samad Sejidov has asked the President of Armenia: Armenia has occupied 20 % of the territory of Azerbaijan. Except Nagorno-Karabakh the surrounding villages are also occupied, which do not belong to it. Moreover, Armenia has territorial claims to its neighboring states Georgia and Turkey. Does not Armenia conceive that such a hostile policy towards the neighboring countries has no end? (The question has been translated from Russian to English as the original). The following answer has come (The answer of the Armenian president is too long, that's why only the part which concerns Azerbaijan has been taken): If Azerbaijan wants to handle this conflict militarily, than can be occupied not 20 %, but 25% or even more territory of Azerbaijan.

This was not the first time, when one or the other side was trying to put more pressure and to show their own power. That is why the threats with military intervention are always “in agenda”, which is, on the one hand, not a solution, and on the other hand, can't bring peace and at the same time damages significantly the process of peace negotiations.

At this point I want to emphasize that this conflict is conceivable only with a peaceful solution. It must be more done in that direction as well as an active dialogue between the two societies must be regulated.

## II. DORA KOMNENOVIC: Reporting from Croatia Cyrillicophobia in Vukovar: Whose Game Is It?

The last two months in Croatia have been marked by a heated public debate on the introduction of bilingual Croatian and Serbian signs (with Latin and Cyrillic script) on state buildings in the town of Vukovar. The Government's decision to introduce the usage of Serbian language and the Cyrillic script (i.e. to implement the Constitutional Law on the Rights of Ethnic Minorities) in about 20 municipalities where Serbs make up more than a third of the population, triggered a wave of protests across the country.

During the 1990s war, Vukovar has been besieged and heavily destroyed by the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian paramilitary forces. The city became sadly known for what was then considered to be the biggest mass killing of civilians in Europe since World War II, the Ovčara massacre, and it thus became a symbol of Croatian resistance. A multi-ethnic city before the war, Vukovar is now (according to the 2011 census) home to 9654 Serbs, 15881 Croats, 347 Hungarians, 58 Germans and 1743 others. Almost twenty years after the conflict, this small town on the border with Serbia continues to be profoundly divided along ethnic lines.

The placement of bilingual signs was followed by a violent reaction of a number of protesters, mostly Croatian war veterans who started tearing them down with hammers. As the leader of the veterans and the ad hoc created Headquarters for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar, Tomislav Josić, stated: «Cyrillic once came to Vukovar on tanks, and now it is coming with powerful police forces and cars». (Balkan Insight, retrieved on September 2nd, 2013). Besides smashing the signs, the protesters also covered late president Tuđman's and Vukovar hero Blago Zadro's busts with a black cloth, so that they «could not see the shame displayed in Vukovar» (Novi List, retrieved on September 10th, 2013). The Government and the representatives of the Serbian minority strongly condemned these acts of «chauvinist violence».

Cyrillic plates were also removed from Vojnić, close to Karlovac and Krnjak, while nationalist graffiti appeared on the Orthodox Church in Dubrovnik. In mid October, Josip Rimac, a political analyst, expressed his concerns for a possible escalation of the Vukovar events, which would transform Croatia in some sort of Weimar Republic, should the Government not be able to exert its powers.

The above mentioned events had some resonance in other minority communities, too. For instance, an article published in the newspaper *La Voce del Popolo*, written in Italian and mostly read by the Italian minority, raised the question of bilingualism in Rijeka-Fiume, de jure granted in 1947 (de facto even earlier), abolished in 1953 (after Trieste became a part of Italy) and never restored. (*La voce del Popolo*, retrieved on September 30th, 2013). The author of the article and his interlocutor, an economist and cultural mediator, ask themselves whose responsibility is to (re)introduce bilingualism in Rijeka.

Since bilingual signs have been present on certain buildings in Vukovar since 1998, it is legitimate to ask ourselves why is that the new ones bother protesters so much? It needs to be said that a different party was in power back then (the centre-right HDZ), the same party that voted this law on national minorities and is now contesting its implementation. Clearly, the protests in Vukovar have been extremely politicized and someone is trying to gain political points. Perhaps the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and its unpopular leader, similarly to what has been the case with the *U ime obitelji* (In the name of the family) initiative?

As a young writer from Vukovar put it: «The problem in Vukovar is not Cyrillic script. It only comes down to whether you are left or right oriented. It's just the tip of the political ice-berg of a policy that

in Vukovar is taking too long» (Ivana Simić-Bodrožić in Nedjeljom u dva, broadcasted on HRT 1 on Sunday, October 20th, my translation).

Since early September, the signs have been taken down and put back repeatedly when finally an agreement between the Government and the Headquarters for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar has been announced in the press. The agreement consists in the removal of police forces and metal fences which were placed around bilingual plates. A new meeting has been scheduled and what will follow remains to be seen. The Headquarters have announced a referendum on the proclamation of Vukovar as an area of special piety.

Given that Croatian and Serbian are much less different languages than some would like them to be, I was able to briefly check how the whole situation has been presented by the media in Serbia. The accent was mainly put on the political game between the two major parties in Croatia (the above mentioned HDZ and the Social Democratic Party SDP).

Apart from these events that dim the picture of the minority rights protection in Croatia, the new school year has started with education in various minority languages: Albanian, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Slovakian and Slovenian.

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### **III. MERITA MECE:**

#### **Reporting from Albania**

#### **Low access to education of Roma minority in Albania**

Roma minority in Albania composed of four main Roma tribes (mostly located in Central, Southern, Eastern and Western parts of the country) and recognized as ethno-linguistic minority represents 0.3% of the total population or approximately 8,500 people (as per data provided by 2011 Census). Evidence indicates that Roma children have low access to education compared to non-Roma children: Pre-school enrolment rate (3-6) is 34% for Roma children versus 57% for non-Roma children; gross enrolment rate in compulsory education (7-15) is 48% for Roma children versus 91% for non-Roma children; gross enrolment rate (Upper Secondary Education 16-19) is 13% for Roma children versus 60% for non-Roma children.

According to Albanian Constitution of 1998, everyone has the right to education (Article 57) while persons from minority groups have the right to freely express their linguistic belongings, to study and to be taught in their mother tongue (Article 20). Although Albania has ratified various international treaties concerning promotion and protection of minority rights, the total number of Roma children that complete compulsory education remains very low. Thus, following 2003-2013 National Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Living Conditions, it also joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion to close the gap between the Roma and non-Roma population by developing its Decade Action Plan (2010-2015) which has set clear goals related to expansion of educational opportunities for Roma population. But research indicates that educational services have not been always used by Roma children although they have been physically accessible. Failure to school enrolment or high level of school dropout have been evident in many schools of the primary education for several reasons such as difficult economic situation of Roma families, low level of education of Roma parents along with their low level of participation in education and school activities, prejudice from non-Roma population and high level of skepticism on the role of education to achieve professional and economic success.

But, to respond to this increasing phenomenon, the Ministry of Education and Science undertook various important steps. Thus, under the umbrella of “Zero tolerance to school dropout” strategy, the “Second chance” program mainly targeting education of Roma children has been implemented followed by the distribution of school books for free for Roma children who study in compulsory education, scholarships for Roma children who came from the most vulnerable families and food support scheme. But research indicates that all these initiatives did not provide positive results to curb the phenomenon of school dropout of Roma children because they were not properly implemented, harmonized and coordinated. So, 17% of Roma children benefited school books for free at national level due to lack of clarification of the institution which should standardize the procedure of confirmation of ethnic origin of a Roma child that is necessary for educational institutions; “Second chance” program suffered from targeting inefficiency because it left out Roma children who never enrolled to school. But even the high percentage of attendance of Roma children (about 67%) who had formerly abandoned the school in this program demonstrated that the education system failed to keep them in normal classes with other children, while their teaching quality has never been in the focus of the inspection from the respective Regional Directorates of Education; Very few Roma children benefited scholarships from local government units while food support scheme only fostered segregation of Roma children in special schools.

#### **Conclusions**

Despite the good will of the Albanian government to ensure social inclusion of Roma children in education system, various active incentives implemented so far did not always yield positive

outcomes for the children of Roma community. Lack of proper monitoring mechanisms to ensure their efficient implementation and good quality along with the lack of relevant structures and instruments to confirm the ethnic origin of Roma children and encourage both, cultural and ethnic diversity in the schools have hindered the opportunity of increasing school enrolment and attendance for Roma children in Albania.

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## IV. TIJANA MIHAJLOVIC: Reporting from Kosovo

According to the data from Kosovo government, there were built and fixed 76 houses in 2013 for the returnees throughout Kosovo and finalized 21 infrastructure projects.

The persistent absence of a sustainable solution for approximately 235,000 displaced persons (DPs) from Kosovo continues to pose a major challenge for all concerned. Returnees in Kosovo south from Ibar are still confronted by serious obstacles to their sustainable reintegration, including limited access to public services, property rights and socio-economic opportunities; the deteriorating security situation in returns sites and tensions between receiving communities and potential returnees in certain areas.

### **Kidnapped persons:**

Over 2500 Serbs and non-Albanians have been kidnapped and murdered in Kosovo and Metohija from 1999. So far, 299 earthly remains of the individuals from the list of the missing persons have been exhumed and handed over to the families, while the destiny of over 540 kidnapped Serbs is not revealed. For the crimes against these people, none of the criminals has ever been arrested or sentenced yet.

### **Cultural heritage:**

Out of 1.300 churches existing in Kosovo, out of which around 150 damaged (including around 10.000 icons) in the period from 1999. The process of rebuilding is still slow, but according to the EU Office in Kosovo Report for 2013, there has been some progress, although slow.

The same applies for 256 devastated orthodox graveyards (5261 gravestones) which have all been in a poor shape.

**Access to justice (north Kosovo):**

Starting from 15 July 2013, Serbian Courts in north Kosovo work with limited capacities in line with April Brussels Agreement; the same applies for EULEX court.

**Security (some incidents and events from august to October 2013):**

Ethnic tensions, although redacted after March 2004 violence, remain present and frequent, while incidents continue to occur not only as ethically, but also as politically motivated.

As part of the implementation of the April 19 agreement, “Serbian police stations operating in northern Kosovo were gradually closed,” says the EU report, adding that “Serbian authorities also ceased the payment of salaries to Kosovo Serb police officers already employed by the Kosovo police in the north.”

**Timeline:**

15. 08. In village Lovčin Potok, Leposavića, north Kosovo, Ms. B. Jaćimović (78), Serbian, was robbed and murdered.

26. 8. 2013. Three Kosovo Albanians physically attacked, beaten up and took vehicle from Mr. Marko Stankovic from Gnjilane, eastern Kosovo.

19. 09. 2013. A member of the EU mission in Kosovo, EULEX, has been killed near the town of Zvečan in northern Kosovo, while three others were wounded. The attack was strongly condemned by EULEX, but also Kosovo and Serbian government high representatives, while the process of finding culprits is still not completed.

30. 09. 2013 Van that is used by local Serbs as a transport to north Mitrovica was stoned, but nobody was injured. The driver reported that it is not the first case of attack and that Kosovo Police has been informed previously also.

01.10.2013. Reported case of Serbian villagers due to mistreatment by Albanian neighbors and occupation of property

3. 10. 2013. Monks from orthodox monastery Zociste, south Kosovo reported frequent threats (for the eight times) to the Kosovo Police. Representative of Kosovo Police, Mr. Ismaili, who was called after the incident, refused to take the report in the monastery and left it without making a report.

10. 10. 2013. One person was injured in a shooting in the Zvecan municipality in northern Kosovo. The injured young man has been taken to hospital in Mitrovica and received medical aid, while no details about the incident have been released.

14. 10.2013. An explosion took place at the apartment of Nebojsa Maric, north Mitrovica. Nobody was injured. Maric works at Department of Finance in the municipality in northern Mitrovica and has been a candidate of SLS for November’s elections but has left the party few days before incident.

19.10.2013. In the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica a bomb was thrown on the terrace of the apartment of Ninoslav Djeric, a candidate for the councilor of Citizen Initiative “Srpska”. No one was injured.

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## **V. IRENA MNATSAKANYAN: Reporting from Armenia**

The following report aims to provide an overview of the current situation of minorities in Armenia which will be updated on monthly basis, if any changes occur. As mentioned in my last paper on ``Real and Imagine Borders`` Armenia is the only mono ethnic country in the South Caucasus, populated with ethnic Armenians that constitute 98% of the population and the rest 2% form other minority groups mainly Yezidis.

There are 20 villages in Armenia, which are populated by Yezidis. In all the villages their language is taught and Yezidis also have their newspaper and radio. The Government of Armenia each year provides financial resources to the community.

Armenia`s minorities are scattered across the country and don`t form local majorities in any part of the country. The latter are located in remote areas of the country. Historically Armenia was the most popular destination for Yezidis migrating from the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire. According to the last report of the Republic of Armenia under Article 15, paragraph 1 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages almost 40,620 Yezidis live in Armenia.

The constitution of the Republic of Armenia gives equal language and cultural rights to all minorities in Armenia and the 2004 Law on Administrative Governance allows representatives of all national minorities the right to present official letters in their first language accompanied by translation in Armenian. The Law on Radio and TV Broadcasting gives minorities the right to transmit information in minority languages and forbids any propaganda against minorities.

In May 2001 the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified by Armenia and other 32 countries. By signing it Armenia undertakes to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities including to preserve their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.

In 2007 the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages was adopted by Armenia. As part of the European Charter in Armenia, Assyrian, Yezidi, Greek, Russian and Kurdish languages gained a status of national minority languages. In accordance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, national minorities enjoy the right to use their minority language without obstacles.

It was not until 2004 that the Armenian Government Department for National Minorities and Religious Affairs was established and began analyzing and coordinating action programs in pursuance of the charter. One of the Department`s staff members is Yezidi. The Department helps to devise the program of government measures, makes recommendations in respect of its implementation ensuring the preservation and development of the traditions, languages and cultures of nationals belonging to national minorities. In April 2004 a building was set aside by Armenian Government Decision N565-A to provide a cultural centre for national minorities. The building was renovated in 2006 and at present serves as an office for organizing courses in, inter alia, the teaching of national minority languages. Moreover in February 2004 the Armenian Parliament passed a law governing administration and administrative processes, which allows applications to the Armenian administrative authorities to be submitted in national minority languages. In addition the State continues to subsidize the newspapers and other periodicals for national minorities. The ministry of culture provides subsidies in order to include in the periodicals of the minorities a section published in their mother tongue. Article 14.1 of the Constitution prohibits any discrimination against national minorities on grounds among others (sex, race, and skin color, ethnic or social origin) of language. The use of their languages by national minorities is protected not only by the Constitution, but by a number of domestic laws: for example the Government of Armenia has a Linguistic Policy Program, which states that the respect for linguistic and cultural diversity and the promotion of development of

national minority languages and culture is one of the conditions for ensuring of good reputation of the Republic of Armenia in international relations. The main goals of the program are:

- To promote the rights of all citizens to receive education in their native languages.
- To promote the effective linguistic communication and mutual understanding in conformity with Council of Europe standards
- The use of the potential of various academics among national minorities who will provide a mother tongue instruction and education in order to protect the national minority rights.

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## VI. RASHAD SHIRINOV: Reporting from Azerbaijan

Nothing that could be considered significant and extraordinary happened throughout summer and fall 2013 in Azerbaijan regarding minority and borders in Azerbaijan.

In august Azerbaijani secret services arrested several persons of Lezgi nationality. They were members and relatives of members of the organization called Federal Lezgi National-Cultural Autonomy (based in Russia). Those persons travelled to Azerbaijan and were detained by Azerbaijani Ministry of National Security. The official background was that those persons were engaged in separatist activities in Azerbaijan and were advocating for the rights of Lezgi and Avar communities in Azerbaijan. According to Azerbaijani sources activity of the Autonomy was Kremlin's pressure against Azerbaijan, Particularly before October 9<sup>th</sup> Presidential Elections.

Some analysts say the arrest was a signal to Kremlin that Azerbaijan controls situation in the country. The issue of arrested Lezgi activists was discussed during Putin's visit to Baku in August.

Another issue was the sudden turn in the case of Hilal Mammadov, the jailed leader of Talish community and editor in chief of "Talishi Sado" (Voice of Talish) newspaper Hilal Mammadov. Right before elections he unexpectedly changed his irreconcilable position and said he was supporting Ilham Aliyev's candidacy at elections. He is still in jail.

## VII. MALKHAZ TORIA: Reporting from Georgia

September and October of 2013 marked by raising new tensions over the Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia. So-called "borderization" process has been underway since the September 2013. Georgian villages along the conflict zone Dvani, Ditsi and Adzvi witnessed the drawing new demarcation lines by Russian soldiers in this region of Georgia. The barbed-wire fences, which run through these villages, caused serious humanitarian problems for local residents leaving them without their farms, houses, and cemeteries (they were forced to dismantle their houses in a short period of time).

After the recognition of South Ossetia's independence by Russian Federation, this separatist region delegated the protection of the "state" borders to Russia. On September 12, 2013 the president of Russia Vladimir Putin confirmed this border agreement and signed it. Consequently, Russian officials used this agreement as legal justification in order to stake out South Ossetia's "proper" territorial boundaries indicated in Soviet maps when it was an autonomous region within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.

Georgian officials condemned this action as a grave violation of international law. The president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili made a speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 2013 condemning "the annexation of Georgian lands by Russian troops". He called for a session of the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss the advancing the occupation line. However, his political rivals, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and chairman of the parliament Davit Usupashvili called this initiative a PR stunt and rejected to attend the meeting.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia called on international community to provide assistance to end Russia's ongoing illegal activities. The United States, the European Union, and NATO expressed their concern relating these problems. In particular, they warned that these actions are inconsistent with Russia's international obligations, disrespects Georgia's territorial integrity and causes serious problems for local populations. Moreover, again they called on Russia to annul its recognition of Georgia's breakaway regions.

Apart from this, there were several waves of protests initiated by various circles of Georgian society. Particularly, on September 28, 2013 Georgian journalists gathered in Dvani standing in human chain with the motto "no to creeping occupation" and singing national anthem. Then, Georgian students organized symbolic rallies against the Russian occupation and called on international community to influence Russia to end the process of borderization.

Later on, suddenly, the Russian border guards disappeared and this intensive process of drawing borderlines has abruptly ended. It seems that the withdrawal of Russian troops is a temporary step, however it was met with positive and optimistic feelings within local population.

Protest against the participation of Georgian athletes in Sochi Winter Olympics Games in February of 2014 was another important and problematic issue that highlighted the political processes in Georgia during these two months. Demands for boycotting the Sochi Olympic Games set off after the news of making the Russian pilot, who bombed Georgian villages during the Russian-Georgian war of the August 2008, as a torchbearer. In particular, a petition to protest the Olympic games appeared online on October 8, 2013. The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and Transparency International Georgia prepared this petition but soon other NGOs and many citizens joined it. The petition was addressed to the prime minister, the minister of sports and the Georgian Olympics Committee. Authors and followers of the petition called on the government to consider the intensive process of creeping annexation and violations of human right along the new borderlines and revoke the decision to participate Georgian athletes in the Olympic games. According to them the boycott will be a clear manifestation for the international community that Georgia will never accept

the occupation of its territory. The petition has been published online and over 10,000 persons have signed it already.

On the other hand, President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili is confident that the case of the torchbearer is just a beginning and Vladimir Putin will use the Olympic games to “humiliate” Georgia and popularize Abkhazia as an independent state. But, Bidzina Ivanishvili and his government do not propose the clear decision on this issue. There is no sign of an intention to boycott Olympic games. On October 10, 2013 the Minister of Reintegration Paata Zakareishvili even stated that the citizens’ petition should not influence the government’s decision regarding participation in the Olympic games. All in all, despite the latest borderzation process in the Georgia-Ossetian conflict zone, Georgian government keeps trying to normalize relations with Russia. However, there are no optimistic expectations that Russian government will not politicize this global event.

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