

Ethnic Violence in Vojvodina: Glitch or Harbinger of Conflicts to Come?

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction..... | 1 |
| 2. Background..... | 3 |
| 3. Interethnic Incidents and the Numbers Game..... | 8 |
| a) Number and Character of Incidents..... | 11 |
| b) Victims..... | 15 |
| c) Perpetrators..... | 17 |
| 4. Responses to the Incidents..... | 21 |
| d) Police and Judiciary..... | 21 |
| b) The Government Response..... | 24 |
| c) Reactions in Vojvodina..... | 27 |
| d) The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians..... | 29 |
| e) The Kin State and International Response..... | 31 |
| f) The Media..... | 34 |
| 5. Conclusions..... | 38 |
| a) The Role of the State..... | 39 |
| b) Incidents and Minority Rights..... | 39 |
| c) The Role of Society..... | 40 |
| d) Internationalization and the Dialogue of the Deaf..... | 41 |
| 6. Next Steps..... | 42 |
| 7. Bibliography..... | 43 |
| 8. Appendix..... | 46 |

1. Introduction¹

Ethnically motivated incidents in Vojvodina have influenced international debates about Serbia over the past few years. This working paper attempts to reach a better understanding of the scale and nature of the incidents in 2004. It argues that while the incidents have been alarming, their real significance lies in the broader problems they shed a light on. The acts of violence, graffiti and damage to sites associated with minority communities shed light on three particular aspects to be discussed in the working paper. First, the political elites and institutions in Serbia have been responding only slowly and under international pressure to the incidents, which attests to the challenges of majority-minority relations in Serbia. Second, the incidents reveal the strong attraction of nationalism to the youth which grew up under the Milošević regime. Third, a pattern of separate lives has become a feature of majority-minority relations in Vojvodina, as is already a problem in other regions of Serbia. Altogether, the incidents and their context suggest that nationalism and strained minority-majority relations are not merely a passing legacy of the Milošević era, but more deeply engrained and will remain a formidable obstacle if not tackled.

On 29 September 2005 the European Parliament passed a resolution declaring “that the Serbian authorities mostly turn a blind eye to the violence” in Vojvodina and accusing “the central and local authorities of Serbia” for having “failed to insure respect for fundamental human rights.”² In addition, the resolution called on the pre-1990 political autonomy to be restored to Vojvodina. Shortly thereafter, the influential Serbian weekly *NIN* carried on its front page a picture of the president of the main Hungarian party in Vojvodina, József Kasza, next to the headline “The Threat of Greater Hungary.”³ What had happened? Was a new conflict in the making? After a wave of incidents in 2004, few had been noted in 2005.

The rhythm and timing of the domestic and international response to the incidents in Vojvodina have been disharmonious over the past two years. When minorities became targeted in a series of incidents since late 2003, nobody outside of Vojvodina paid much attention. While it was first noted widely in Serbia in April 2004, international attention cumulated in September 2004 with a declaration by the European Parliament. The number of incidents in the mean time declined, whereas the topic received dramatic attention in

¹ The authors would like to thank Aleksandra Vujić for her helpful comments.

² European Parliament, *Vojvodina: harassment of minorities*, P6_TA(2004)0016, 29.9.2005.

³ “Pretnja velije mađarske”, *NIN*, 20.10.2005.

September and October 2005. The Serbian media discussed the implied threats to the territorial integrity of Serbia and the simultaneity with the discussion on the status of Kosovo and possible independence for Montenegro. Minorities in Vojvodina and elsewhere in Serbia on the other hand noted their dissatisfaction with the state of minority rights. The violence in Vojvodina has been understood and responded to in contradictory ways. Either the story of the incidents is that of the failure of Serbian authorities and their implicit and explicit nationalism, or it is a tale of minorities trying to exaggerate a few incidents, often without any interethnic motivation, to either advance a more sinister agenda or for minority leaders to secure political power within their communities.

Both narratives of the incidents and their meaning cannot explain either what the incidents mean or what dangers they pose. This working paper argues that there have been a considerable number of serious incidents in 2004 (and many fewer in 2005), which are indeed worrying for the future of Serbia. They are less disconcerting due to their character. Most incidents were in fact graffiti or damage to properties. Physical attacks were nearly exclusively confined to bar fights, which often cannot be qualified as ethnically motivated, beyond the fact that the participants belong to different communities. While all minorities in Serbia, and in Vojvodina in particular, have been targeted, from Roma and Albanians to Hungarians and Slovaks, most international attention has focused on the treatment of the Hungarian minority due to the successful lobbying by the kin state. At the same time other minorities continue to be more frequently subjected to attacks, in particular Roma. This working paper argues that the concern arises from a) the profile of the perpetrators; b) the degree of interethnic segregation revealed by the incidents; c) the weakness of state response, d) the scale of nationalist reflexes in the Serbian media and e) the inability for an unbiased and effective international response. The incidents shed a worrying light on the nature of interethnic relations in Serbia and the residue of nationalism, or rather as will be argued here, a new form of grassroots nationalism. These conclusions do not suggest that the incidents will again increase or lead to any kind of larger conflict. However, they suggest that similar waves of interethnic tension can occur elsewhere in Serbia and radicalize the political scene, especially in light of the refocusing on 'status' and 'national' questions in 2006 with the future of the state union and the final status of Kosovo at stake.

2. Background

Although Vojvodina has experienced many border changes, mass murder and the expulsion of whole population groups in the 20th century, it has been spared large scale violence and war in the 1990s. Having become part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, this region was shaped by a distinct historical development. Vojvodina experienced a sharp demographic transformation during and after World War Two, first by the Holocaust which decimated the Jewish population in Vojvodina.⁴ After the war, the substantial German and parts of the Hungarian population were expelled by the victorious Partisan forces.⁵

Communist Yugoslavia encouraged new settlers to move from agriculturally disadvantaged areas in Croatia and Bosnia—often Partisans rewarded for their services—to Vojvodina. In a two-year period between mid-1945 and mid-1947 over 200,000 people moved to Vojvodina, around 90 percent of whom were Serbs and Montenegrins. This demographic shift and the new population in Vojvodina has become one of the key sources of tension in Vojvodina from the 1980s onwards. The rise to power of Slobodan Milošević began in 1987 over Kosovo. It was in Vojvodina, however, where he would be able to take control of another region of Yugoslavia for the first time. Originally Vojvodina (and Kosovo) were unable to exercise much autonomy from Serbia proper, but through constitutional amendments in 1968 and 1971, consolidated in the last Yugoslav constitution of 1974, the provinces acquired attributes similar to those the six republics. While formally subordinated to Serbia, the province of Vojvodina acted virtually like a separate republic, a source of dissatisfaction in the emerging Serbian nationalist discourse, which viewed the status of Vojvodina and Kosovo as deliberate attempts to weaken Serbia. When Kosovo Serbs, with logistical support by the Serbian regime of Slobodan Milošević, took to the streets of Novi Sad and later other towns and cities in Vojvodina, they protested against the ‘bureaucratic’ leadership in Vojvodina and for a dismantling of autonomy. Most of the protests in fact took place in towns with a majority of settlers who had moved to Vojvodina after 1945.⁶ There

⁴ Parts of Vojvodina were controlled by Hungary, others by Croatia and part of the territory was governed by the local German population. Milica Mihailović. 2000. *Jevreji na Jugoslovenskom tlu*. Belgrade and Podgorica: Forum za etničke odnose i Centar za toleranciju i dijalog, pp. 63-69.

⁵ Zoran Janjetović. 2000. *Between Hitler and Tito. Disappearance of the Ethnic-Germans from Vojvodina*. Belgrade.

⁶ Emil Kerenji, “From October 1988 to October 2000: Vojvodina Under Milošević,” Sabrina P. Ramet, Vjeran Pavlaković (eds), *Serbia Since 1989: Politics And Society Under Milosevic And After*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005, pp. 350-380.

emerged a division between settlers—those who reportedly opposed the autonomy—and the established Serb population which had strongly supported provincial autonomy and was committed to inclusive multiethnic governance. This line of division, doubtless to a degree imagined, remained potent in the following years. After the Vojvodina leadership resigned in fall 1988 in the face of mass protests, the province was stripped of its autonomy and minorities and political opponents of the Milošević regime were marginalized.

After World War Two, the wars of the 1990s brought about another major demographic shift in Vojvodina. Although Vojvodina had avoided the wars, it was the destination of a disproportionate number of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. Of the 379,135 refugees which fled to Serbia during the 1990s and still lived there in 2002, some 49.2 percent lived in Vojvodina, although the province only accounts for only 27.1 percent of the population of Serbia (without Kosovo). As nearly 93 percent of the refugees were Serbs, some 172,726 Serbs had temporarily or permanently found a home in Vojvodina. With the exception of the city of Belgrade, only municipalities in Vojvodina had seen an influx of Serb refugees larger than 2 percent of the total refugee population. Nine municipalities of Vojvodina accommodate nearly a third of the entire refugee population, which amounts to the same share as the city of Belgrade.⁷

At the same time, the number of minorities declined during the 1990s. The three largest minorities—Hungarians, Slovaks and Croats—saw a significant decrease in numbers between the 1991 Yugoslav census and the Serbian census of 2002. Thus in 2002 the three minorities amounted to only between 76 and 89 percent of the 1991 population figures, a decline mirrored also by most smaller minorities with the only exception of Roma. Both due to the decline of minorities and self-declared Yugoslavs and the influx of refugees, the Serb majority increased from just below 57 to over 65 percent of the population.

Table 1: Population Structure of Vojvodina, 1991, 2002 (only groups over 10,000 included)⁸

| | Census 1991 | | Census 2002 | | Ratio 1991/2002 |
|---------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-----------------|
| | In numbers | In % | In numbers | In % | |
| Serbs | 1,143,723 | 56.79 | 1,321,807 | 65.05 | 1.16 |
| Hungarians | 339,491 | 16.86 | 290,207 | 14.28 | 0.85 |
| Slovaks | 63,545 | 3.16 | 56,637 | 2.79 | 0.89 |
| Croats | 74,808 | 3.71 | 56,546 | 2.78 | 0.76 |
| Yugoslavs | 174,295 | 8.65 | 49,881 | 2.45 | 0.29 |
| Montenegrins | 44,838 | 2.23 | 35,513 | 1.75 | 0.79 |

⁷ Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjiska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, *Izbeglički korpus u Srbiji*. Belgrade, 2004.

⁸ Source: Zavod za statistiku, Srbija.

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|------|
| Roma | 24,366 | 1.21 | 29,057 | 1.43 | 1.19 |
| Romanians | 38,809 | 1.93 | 30,419 | 1.5 | 0.78 |
| Bunjevci | 21,434 | 1.06 | 19,766 | 0.97 | 0.92 |
| Rusyns | 17,652 | 0.88 | 15,626 | 0.77 | 0.89 |
| Macedonians | 17,472 | 0.87 | 11,785 | 0.58 | 0.67 |
| Others and undeclared | 53,456 | 2.65 | 114,748 | 5.65 | 2.13 |
| Total | 2,013,889 | | 2,031,992 | | |

During the 1990s, overt physical violence or the explicit threat thereof has been the exception in Vojvodina with the notable exception of the case of Hrtkovci and several other Croat-inhabited villages and towns.⁹ In Hrtkovci, members of the Serb Radical Party threatened the local Croat population, following the arrival of Serb refugees from Croatia in 1991. A local SRS official took over control of the municipality illegally and published lists of undesirable inhabitants and changed the name to “Srbislavci” in an attempt to rid the town of its Croat-sounding name. Although state authorities did intervene, some 350 Croat families left between September and November 1992.¹⁰

The absence of large scale organized violence in Vojvodina is hardly surprising considering that ethnic violence during the 1990s in former Yugoslavia was state-controlled, even if often carried out by paramilitary formations.¹¹ The Serbian state, key in supporting the uprising of the Croatian and then later the Bosnian Serbs, had no interest in instigating this kind of violence in Vojvodina. Not only was the province under tight Serbian control, the absence of a clear challenge by minorities—a consequence of the numerical dominance of Serbs and moderate platform of minorities—made Vojvodina an unlikely target. In fact, the smaller minorities in the Vojvodina were often taken to ‘prove’ the government’s inclusive policies and justify repressive policies against Albanians in Kosovo. Notwithstanding the government’s half-hearted attempts at ‘show-casing’ minorities in the 1990s, all minorities found themselves in a difficult situation after 1988/90. First, the erosion of the rights of the province meant that minorities had reduced access to governing institutions. This factor is especially significant when considering that most minorities in the Vojvodina might be numerical relevant at the provincial level, but are marginal at the republican level. Secondly, the emphasis of most majority political parties in government and opposition on ‘national’ issues excluded minorities from mainstream politics.

⁹ Humanitarian Law Centre, *Human Rights Violations in the Territory of former Yugoslavia 1991-95*. Belgrade, 1997, pp. 83-105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

¹¹ See Florian Bieber, “Approaches to Political Violence and Terrorism in former Yugoslavia,” *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 5, No.1 (2003), pp. 39-51.

Calls for greater autonomy of Vojvodina were met by the government with suspicion and were quickly dismissed as being secessionist. Cooperation between minorities and majority opposition parties emerged only gradually during the 1990s. The Democratic Opposition of Serbia (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*, DOS), which won the federal parliamentary and presidential elections in September 2000 against the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistički partija Srbije*, SPS), controlled by Slobodan Milošević, included the main Hungarian minority party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (*Savez vojvođanskih Mađara*, SVM; *Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség*, VMSz) and received support from the organizations of smaller minorities. In the first reformist Serbian government, the SVM president, József Kasza, became deputy prime minister. In the provincial government, minorities were included, foremost representatives of the Hungarian community. In the first years of democratic transition some competences were returned to Vojvodina in a series of legal reforms, in particular through the so-called Omnibus law which delegated responsibilities in the field of labor, pensions, health, culture and education to the Vojvodina authorities. In the absence of a new Serbian constitution and because of stiff opposition to a further devolution of competences by the Democratic Party of Serbia (*Demokratska stranka Srbije*, DSS) and other conservative parties, Vojvodina still lacks the autonomy it enjoyed in the period 1974-1990.

Support for extreme nationalist parties reached a lowpoint in 2000. In the parliamentary elections in December 2000, the Serb Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS) received between 9.11 % and 15.12 % and the Socialist Party between 8.46% and 12.96% of the vote in the different districts of Vojvodina. In the subsequent elections 2002-2004, including multiple (failed) presidential elections, parliamentary and local elections, the Radical Party succeeded in emerging as the single largest party in Vojvodina (see table below). The strength of the party has been the result of a) the fragmentation of the democratic parties, b) decreasing voter turn out, c) the consolidation of the anti-reform block with the Radical Party and d) the disappointment with the transition process.

Since the voluntary surrender of its president, Vojislav Šešelj, in February 2003 to the ICTY, the party has adopted a generally less belligerent and more social populist agenda. It has not, however, abandoned its extreme nationalist platform and continues to reiterate its goal of creating a Serb nation-state including territories in Bosnia and Croatia (although nowadays supposedly through peaceful means). The party has not been able to translate its electoral success into political power in either the Serbian parliament or the assembly of Vojvodina. The party has, however, taken power in around 60 municipalities following the

2004 local elections, including a number of them in coalition with moderate parties (G17+) and minority parties (e.g. the Sandžak Democratic Party of Rasim Ljajić).

Table 2: Election results in Vojvodina, 2002-2004¹²

| | | SRS | DS | DSS | SVM | ZzT/ZzV | PSS | SPS | G17 |
|--|-------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Presidential Elections, 29.9.2002, 1 st round | votes | 245,310 | | 205,857 | | | | | 343,155 |
| | % | 26.35 | | 22.11 | | | | | 36.85 |
| Parliamentary Elections, 28.12.2003 | votes | 314,407 | 97,177 | 120,392 | n/a | 128,139 | n/a | 291,341 | 134,246 |
| | % | 31.88 | 9.85 | 12.20 | n/a | 12.99 | n/a | 7.61 | 13.61 |
| Presidential Elections, 13. 6. 2004, 1 st round | votes | 282,737 | 270,042 | 74,344 | | | 140,042 | | |
| | % | 33.60 | 32.09 | 8.84 | | | 16.64 | | |
| Local Elections, 19.9.2004 | % | 27.83 | 21.28 | 7.05 | 4.35 | 2.08 | | 6.93 | |
| Vojvodina Assembly ¹³ , 19.9.2004 | votes | 137,238 | 102,481 | 33,872 | 46,343 | 44,572 | 33,842 | 30,864 | 24,763 |
| | % | 29.05 | 21.69 | 7.17 | 9.81 | 9.43 | 7.16 | 6.53 | 5.24 |

Minority and regionalist parties on the other hand saw their support decline. Ahead of the 2003 parliamentary elections, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarian formed a pre-election coalition with the regionalist League of Social Democrats in Vojvodina (*Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine*, LSV) and other minority parties. Although this joint “Coalition for Tolerance” fared relatively well in the Hungarian inhabited areas of Vojvodina it failed to enter parliament due to the five percent threshold and low support for regionalist parties. The previously dominant Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*, DS) went into opposition, after loosing dramatically in the 2003 parliamentary elections amid a series of corruption scandals

¹² Not included are the failed Serbian presidential elections December 2002, November 2003, the second round of the first failed Serbian presidential elections 2002 and the second round of Presidential Elections 2004. The main candidates for the presidential elections 2002 were Vojislav Šešelj, SRS; Miroslav Labus, G17plus. For the presidential elections in 2004, the candidates were Boris Tadić, DS, Tomislav Nikolić, SRS, Bogoljub Karić, PSS, and Dragan Maršičanin (DSS, supported by G17plus, SPO/NS). The coalition Together for Tolerance (*Zajedno za Tolerancju*, ZzT) included the SVM, the regionalist LSV and the Bosniak SDP. The coalition Together for Vojvodina (*Zajedno za Vojvodinu*, ZzV) in 2004 was lead by the LSV but did not include the SVM. Source: Zavod za Statistiku Srbije, *Dnevnik*, 21.9.2005

¹³ Results for the seats elected by PR, the other half (60) seats are elected in a two-round run off.

and an internal powerstruggle following the assassination of prime minister and party leader Zoran Djindjić in March 2003.

The electoral success of the SRS and the end of the DOS government marked a watershed in post-Milošević Serbian politics. The more conservative climate was subsequently reflected in the new minority government of Vojislav Koštunica which received support from the Socialist Party of Serbia. In fact, already in 2002 with the escalating conflict between Zoran Djindjić and Vojislav Koštunica, radicals gained strength and the initial reforms came increasingly under fire. It is against this backdrop that Vojvodina experienced a serious increase in violent incidents direct against minorities.

3. Interethnic Incidents and the Numbers Game

As mentioned above, ethnically motivated violence was commonplace in parts of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Although Vojvodina was spared the large-scale violence which other regions saw, attacks against minorities occurred throughout the 1990s. While the end of the Milošević regime in 2000 reduced ethnic tensions in Serbia, ethnically motivated violence did not entirely cease. Particularly striking is the increase of apparently ethnically motivated violence against minorities in Vojvodina in 2003 and 2004. The violence took place over a protracted period, had no apparent cause and a low level of intensity. Nobody was killed and most incidents involved exclusively graffiti and property damage. As a result, both the intensity and degree of these incidents has been difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, both the blurred line between ethnically motivated incidents and confrontations between individuals who happen to be from different ethnic groups and the lack of public information from the Ministry of Interior has rendered a detailed assessment of the incidents which plagued the province for over a year difficult. While data is available on the incidents, it lacks reliability and the sources appear to contradict one another. The incidents have been recorded from a range of organizations, including the Serbian Ministry of Interior, minority organizations, and Vojvodina institutions. The variations in the data cannot be reduced to the different political interests of those publishing it, but the nature of the incidents have often rendered them difficult to classify, as will be discussed later. The Serbian Ministry of Interior alone distributed at least two different sets of data. The first report covered the period 1 January - 31 May 2004 and lists 294 incidents.¹⁴ The second report on the period 1 January - 31 August

¹⁴ 56 acts of vandalism of graveyards, 20 attacks at religious sites, 42 hate graffiti, 7 attacks at persons and 1 anonymous threat. 129 of these incidents involved ethnic Albanians. The report dates to the 22.6.2004 and is the one Predrag Marković, speaker of Belgrade's parliament, refers to in his press statement in

2004 counts 150 incidents of which only 67 allegedly had an interethnic background.¹⁵ The Vojvodina Secretariat for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities¹⁶ operates with different numbers. It published a report on anti-minority incidents in January 2005 that refers to a total of 178 incidents in 2003 and 2004. A fourth data set has been compiled by the different national minority councils at the request of the parliament committee on interethnic relations. These lists, however, are not systematic and a number of smaller minorities lack the infrastructure for detailed reporting.¹⁷ Another more systematic effort has been undertaken by the Ombudsman for Vojvodina in his annual report, who noted some 76 incidents in the period January-September 2004.¹⁸ Finally, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, a US-based Hungarian lobbying group, noted some 122 incidents between January 2003 and August 2005.¹⁹

beginning of July. As Marković collected information on the incidents throughout June it is possible that the MUP made the report on Marković's request. Contradicting this report, Minister of Interior Dragan Jočić claimed in a press conference in July 2004, that there had been a total of 44 attacks and 13 fights involving citizens with different ethnic backgrounds in all of Serbia (he noted that in Belgrade alone some 17 attacks took place against Roma, suggesting that the number of attacks in Vojvodina would be not more than half of the total. "MUP Spreman da suzbije ispade," *B92 Vesti*, 20.7.2004.) In the beginning of September, the report was distributed on the joint session of the parliamentary Committees for Security and Minority Rights in Subotica. According to Pavel Domonji, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Novi Sad, during the session Jočić said that only 67 incidents were ethnically motivated.

¹⁵ 18 physical attacks, 14 verbal attacks, 30 fights between individuals belonging to different groups, vandalism of graveyards and monuments, 26 attacks at religious sites, 6 damaging of other facilities, 21 anonymous threats, 42 hate graffiti. It is argued that only 5 physical attacks involved ethnic Hungarians and only 67 incidents have the contours of inter-ethnic incidents due to the fact that they concerned individuals belong to different national minorities. Figures cited from OSCE, *Background Report: Inter-Ethnic Incidents in Vojvodina*, Vienna, 13.10.2004, p.1.

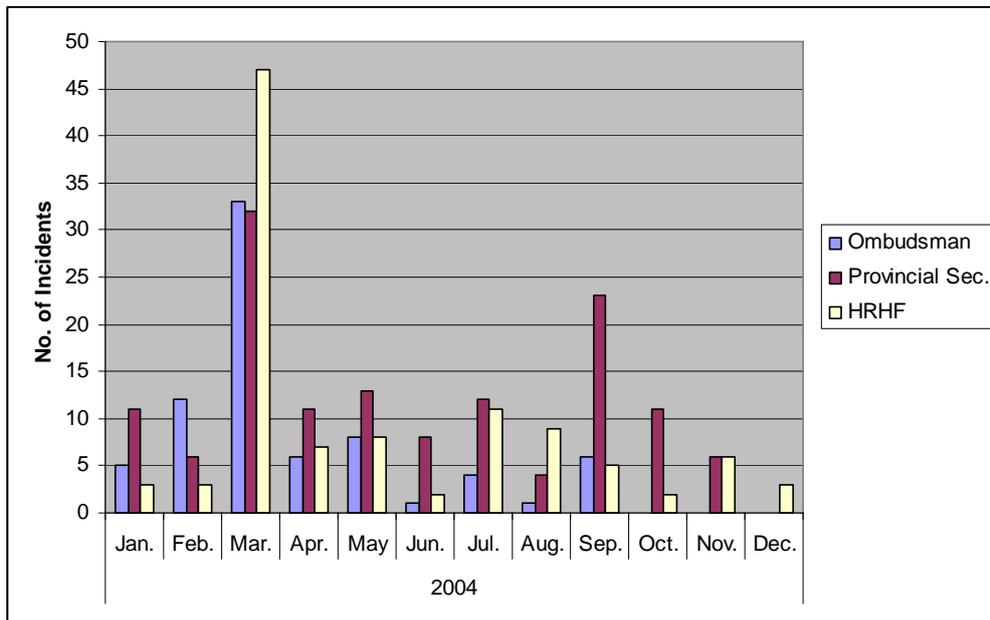
¹⁶ Secretaries are the equivalent of ministries at the Vojvodina level.

¹⁷ Committee on Interethnic Relations, *Aktuelna bezbednosa situacija na području Autonomne pokrajine Vojvodina*, 2004

¹⁸ Provincial Ombudsman, *Report of the Provincial Ombudsman on the activities, human rights practices and legal security in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for 2004*, Novi Sad 2005. Both the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights have also listed a number of incidents against minorities in their reports. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Serbia and Montenegro*, Belgrade 2005 pp.324-333.

¹⁹ Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, *Anti-Minority Aggression Intensifies in Vojvodina, Serbia During 2005*, July 2005.

Graph 1: Distribution of the Number of Incidents in 2004



The considerable variation between the different figures can be accounted for in a number of ways. In the first place there is a problem of how to define incidents and how to count them. For example, a large number of the incidents have been graffiti which is difficult to ‘count’ in a systematic manner. Secondly, there is the challenge of information. Not all victims report intimidations and threats to the police because they fear possible consequences and have no confidence that the police will investigate the case.²⁰ While some larger minorities, in particular the Hungarian minority, have the organizational infrastructure to gather their own data, the national councils of the smaller minorities lack the resources and networks to collect such information. Thus, on one hand the numbers available are probably underestimating the real number of cases due to unreported incidents. On the other hand, numbers are likely to be partly too high, as some incidents are included in different statistics, which apparently have no ethnic background. Especially property destruction and bar brawls are notoriously difficult to judge whether they had an ethnic background or whether the participants merely happen to be from different ethnic backgrounds. Despite these methodological problems, the existing reports reveal the same tendency: a marked increase of anti-minority incidents in late 2003/early 2004 and a substantial decline by the end of 2004 (see graph 1).

Finally, not only the numbers in the reports and the responses to the incidents vary, but also the terms used to characterize them. In the public debate two terms have been particularly

²⁰ See Centre for the Development of Civil Society, *Etnički incidenti u Vojvodina*, October 2005.

widely used. Representatives of the state have described them largely as “isolated cases,”²¹ some minority representatives and NGOs on the other hand have used the term “atrocities” as used by Hungarian Human Rights Foundation and a draft resolution of two Hungarian MEPs in September 2004. The figures below will show that the incidents were not isolated cases, but constituted a widespread phenomenon in Vojvodina. At the same time, the term “atrocities” is grossly exaggerated,²² as only a few cases included violence against persons and there is no indication of systematic physical attacks against minorities or the systematic destruction of property or cultural sites.

a) Number and Character of Incidents

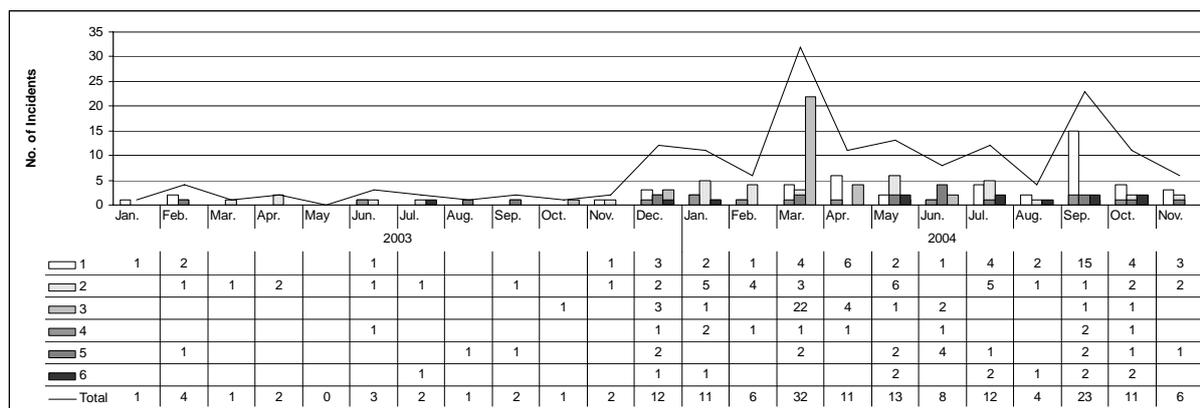
The difficulties arising from the numbers of the incidents is closely intertwined with the nature of the types of acts committed against minorities. Of the materials available, the two most comprehensive and detailed sources have been issued by the Provincial Secretariat for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities and the Ombudsman for Vojvodina, Petar Teofilović. Here, we shall focus on the data of the Vojvodina Secretary, as it covers a longer time period. Its report covers the period from January 2003 - November 2004 and includes short descriptions of most incidents. The purpose of Korhec’s report was to inform Vojvodina’s cabinet and to advocate preventive measures against interethnic tensions and violence.²³ The report lists 206 incidents over a 22 month period, with around 84 percent of the incidents occurring between December 2003 and November 2004.

²¹ Foreign minister Vuk Drašković for example called the events “single incidents” and “isolated acts of violence”. “Položaj vojvođanskih Mađara: Činjenica, kampanja i komentari,” *Vreme*, 16.9.2004.

²² The EP’s Ad-hoc mission to Vojvodina comes to the same conclusion concerning the term “atrocities.” European Parliament, *Mission d’enquête réalisée par la délégation ad hoc du Parlement Européen en Voïvodine et à Belgrade*, 29.-31. Janvier. Rapport, Bruxelles, 2.3.2004.

²³ Unlike other state institutions, such as the Ministry of Interior, the provincial secretary has displayed greater sensitivity to the issues, explained in part by the fact that the Secretary Korhec is a member of the Hungarian minority and a member of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians.

Graph 2: Incidents in Vojvodina by Categories and Total, 2003-4²⁴



The above graph shows all incidents in total over the period covered by report and classifies them according to different categories. The graph indicates a sharp increase of incidents in December 2003. The December 2003 total is three times higher as in the previous month. It is significant that the increase began before the anti-Serb riots in Kosovo in March 2004 and cannot be explained as a mere reaction to these events. In March 2004 the curve reaches its peak and returns in April to the level of the previous months. This level is maintained until October 2004, when it declines.

The individual types of incidents have been classified into six categories:

- Category 1: Nationalist graffiti, leaflets, and posters;
- Category 2: Damage to objects associated with one community, mostly religious objects, such as statues, tombstones or churches;
- Category 3: Damage to private property;
- Category 4: Verbal attacks and threats;
- Category 5: Physical attacks;
- Category 6: Fights.²⁵

Category 1: Nationalist graffiti, leaflets, and posters

The first category – slogans and phrases in public spaces with nationalistic content – mostly includes graffiti, which often was sprayed on the walls of cultural institutions. It was directed

²⁴ Pokrajnski Sekretarijat za propise upravo i nacionalne manjine, APV, Izvršno Veće Vojvodine, *Informacija o incidentima na nacionalnoj osnovi koji su se desili u Vojvodini u 2003. i u 2004. godini*, 10.1.2005.

²⁵ The differentiation between physical attacks and brawls was made because in brawls it is often very difficult to assess to what extent they were ethnically motivated.

against one minority or expressed general Serbian nationalism. Alarming violent language is frequently used such as: “Death to the Hungarians,” “We will kill the Hungarians,” “Death to Nonserbs,” and “Hungarians under the ice.” Often the graffiti demands that Albanians, Roma, Jews and even Chinese leave Serbia (“Napolje sa kinezima”, “Napolje sa šiptarima,” etc). There were some graffiti and posters with Hungarian nationalist content often referring to the Treaty of Trianon. The list of graffiti is probably the most incomplete. Often it remains unclear when it appeared and the perpetrators were seldom identified. Furthermore, quantifying graffiti is most difficult, as often large areas are covered overnight by graffiti by apparently the same persons with similar messages. In total, there have been some 61 instances of nationalist or anti-minority graffiti between January 2003 and November 2004. It is furthermore important noting the prolific use of graffiti in other region of Serbia, such as in Belgrade to promote a nationalist agenda. In particular supporters of the Serb Radical Party have made extensive use of graffiti in the electoral campaigns over recent years.

Category 2: Damage to Community Objects

The second category covers the damage to objects with symbolic meaning, particularly of religious buildings. Two kinds of incidents are typical. Often church windows were smashed, for example the windows of the Adventist churches in Zrenjanin, Srbobran, Novi Sad and Sremska Mitrovica, as the Orthodox church in Novi Sad and the Protestant church in Sombor. In most cases perpetrators were not identified.

Secondly, tombstones and other objects in graveyards were damaged. A representative case is the Catholic graveyard in Sombor, in which 20 crosses and tombstones were desecrated at the beginning of July 2004.

Frequently the target were churches and cemeteries associated with minorities. Nevertheless, a number of incidents involved also religious minorities, such as Jehova’s Witnesses.²⁶ In a few cases, Serbian Orthodox churches have been targeted.

In a number of cases, cemeteries were desecrated in towns with both Serb and minority inhabitants where the cemetery could not be symbolically ‘assigned’ to any community.²⁷ In total, the number of incidents is the approximately same as graffiti.

²⁶ For a comprehensive list see Branko Bjelajac, “Serbia: Increased attacks on religious minorities,” *F18News*, 9.6.2005. Available at: <http://www.forum18.org>

²⁷ Closer examination of the tombstones in question might allow for a clearer identification of the target, but is not provided in the report.

Category 3: Damage to private property

The number of incidents (41) which cover damage to private property is largely related to the riots in reaction to the violent riots in Kosovo in March 2004. The targets were shops, bakeries and houses belonging to Albanians or where rioters thought they belonged to Albanians, but belonged to either Roma or other minorities. According to the Ministry of Interior in the period 17-19 March 2004, 54 Albanian or alleged Albanian objects (shops, apartments) were damaged in Novi Sad alone. In Sombor, the police registered 35 cases.²⁸ This type of attacks continued on a lower level in April and May 2004. In addition to the difference in terms of the trigger (Kosovo) to other incidents, the attacks against allegedly Albanian properties were committed ‘publicly’, i.e. by large mobs and in view of the public, unlike much of the other categories of incidents.

Category 4: Verbal attacks and threats

The fourth category, verbal attacks, threats and other forms of discrimination constitutes the smaller share of the overall incidents. These include anonymous telephone threats against some journalists and politicians. It is likely that many verbal attacks were not reported, especially when directed against Roma.

Category 5: Physical attacks

The report lists 18 cases of physical attacks.²⁹ Most of them took place in May and June 2004. The victims were nearly always young Hungarians, beaten up by young Serbs. This was the case in beginning of May, when a 17 year old pupil on his way home from school was beaten up by a group of six or seven young Serbs in the center of Subotica.

Category 6: Fights

Finally, the sixth category covers more than ten bar brawls and fights, the so-called ‘kafanske tuče’, which are listed in the report. They largely took place in the period from May to August 2004. In most cases Hungarians and Serbs were involved, but there are also reports on fights between Serbs and Slovaks in and around the Slovak village Lug. In most cases the fights and brawls took place at private parties or in bars. Alcohol was involved and it is difficult to assess to what extent they had an interethnic background.

²⁸ Ministarstvo Unutrašnjih Poslova Republike Srbije, Uprava policije. *Informacija o međunacionalnim ekcesima gde su identifikovani izvršiooci u 2003. i 2004. godini*, 2.7.2004, p.3.

²⁹ It is surprising that the case of Zoran Petrović is included in the report since it had no interethnic background and was reported in detail in the press. The inclusion of the Petrović case points to some weaknesses in the quality of the report. Here the case was not included.

As the data suggests, ethnically motivated incidents are not new in Vojvodina, but took place at regular intervals in most categories before late 2003. Between December 2003 and October 2004, however, the increase of such incidents is dramatic.

Altogether, the most frequent types of incidents were the ones described in category one and two, i.e. graffiti and damage to minority community property, accounting for nearly two thirds of all incidents.

When compared with other countries, the number of incidents does not stand out particularly.³⁰ In Austria for example, with approximately four times the population of Vojvodina, some 436 complaints for prohibited racist/xenophobic acts were recorded for 2003. In the Czech Republic, some 236 racist crimes for 2003 and 209 for January through August 2004 have been officially registered.³¹ The total of 173 incidents for the one-year period December 2003-November 2004 thus constitutes a considerably higher number than in Austria and Czech Republic, but in no way amounts to a dramatic departure from racist violence/crime in the two countries. The number of incidents per 100,000 inhabitants thus ranges from 2.3 in the Czech Republic in 2003 to 5.3 in Austria for the same year and 8.5 in Vojvodina. With numbers 60 percent higher than in Austria and nearly at a quarter of those incidents that took place in the Czech republic, the scale of incidents is alarming but certainly within a range of violence which can be found in current EU members.³² The key in understanding the significance in the ethnically motivated violence in Vojvodina in 2004 lies thus not in the numbers alone, but in the repercussions on society and interethnic relations at large; the incidents on their own in fact revealed considerable weakness on the side of the state in its willingness to tackle anti-minority violence.

b) Victims

The incidents in Vojvodina have been generally been described as targeting minorities. To be more precise, one should qualify them as being interethnic and nationalist incidents. Long-established minorities were the general target of the attacks in 2004. In addition to traditional minorities, some of the graffiti and damage to property targeted new religious movements. In addition, also members of the majority have become victims or been targeted.

³⁰ There are many difficulties in cross-country comparisons of such incidents in terms of data collection, definition of what constitutes a racist incident, etc. Here, the example of Austria and the Czech Republic are given as both do have a good state reporting mechanism.

³¹ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *Racist Violence in 15 EU Member States. A Comparative Overview of Findings from the RAXEN National Focal Points Reports 2001-2004*, Vienna 2005, p. 123, 210. Available at: <http://www.eumc.eu.int>.

³² In Austria in 1999, some 717 incidents were recorded, just slightly less than in Vojvodina in 2004.

In most cases, these incidents involved bar fights between members of different groups. All the numbers regarding victims are, as other data regarding the incidents, to be considered with care, as many incidents remain unreported.

In the majority of the cases the victims were Hungarians, followed by religious minorities. Partly these are small religious communities such as the Baptists and the Adventists. Partly, violence was directed against Protestant and Catholic churches, which are connected to the Hungarian or Croat minority or other smaller national minorities. There has also been a clear chronological link to the targeting of some groups.

In March 2004 the victims were predominantly Albanian or communities which served as substitute targets, as elsewhere in Serbia. Whereas in Belgrade and Niš, the targets were mosques, mostly frequented by Bosniaks/Muslims. In Vojvodina, the primary targets besides Albanians were Ashkali.

Table 3: Targets of Interethnic Incidents, January 2003-November 2004³³

| | | | |
|---------------|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Hungarians | 82 | 8. Rusyns | 3 |
| 2. Croats | 19 | 9. Ashkali | 2 |
| 3. Serbs | 15 | 10. Bunjevci | 1 |
| 4. Albanians | 14 | 11. Gorani | 1 |
| 5. Roma | 12 | 12. Germans | 1 |
| 6. Jews | 7 | 13. Against minorities in general | 6 |
| 7. Slovaks | 6 | 14. Unclear | 9 |

Among the victims of the other incidents were minorities which had not before been targets of nationalism incidents like Slovaks and Rusyns. In the past, incidents have targeted larger minorities, such as Hungarians, Croats or Roma in Vojvodina. The smaller minorities had not been targeted either because they had not been perceived as a possible threat because of their small number or because their community was not associated with the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. Finally, as mentioned earlier, smaller minorities are often less visible and not the subject of pronounced ethnic stereotypes and surveys fail to indicate significant ethnic distance among Serbs to these groups. Nevertheless, in course of the anti-minority incidents in 2004, members of the smaller minorities became targets. The National Council of the Slovak Minority reports for example that the village Lug in Srem (Southeastern Vojvodina) was frequently attacked by groups of the neighboring village and 15 fights took place in

³³ Based on the data from the Secretary of Vojvodina for Regulations, Administration and National Minorities. The category of religious minorities includes acts of violence against religious minority institutions, which in many cases are associated with specific national minorities. In a series of cases, however, New Religious Movements, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, were targeted.

March and April 2004 alone.³⁴ In addition to the number of the incidents, the fact that small minorities became targets of Serbian nationalism points to a new dynamic in nationalism.

c) Perpetrators

Statistics and data on the number and targets of the incidents, as outlined above, remain sketchy and often unreliable. The data on perpetrators is even less reliable than on the incidents. One report from the Ministry of the Interior is the only source available (in the following MUP report).³⁵ This report was distributed at the joint session of the Serbian Parliamentary Committee for Security and the Committee for Interethnic Relations, which took place in Subotica in September 2004. It contains a list of approximately 45 incidents with the names and ages of the alleged perpetrators and the charges against them. Most of the identified perpetrators were between 15 and 25 years old.

On the basis of press coverage and the victims' reports to the Nation Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority the council's secretary, László Varga, estimates that approximately a quarter of the perpetrators were refugees or from refugee families respectively.³⁶ Approximately 200,000 refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as IDPs from Kosovo live in Vojvodina. While there is no data on whether the perpetrators were refugees, it is often mentioned that refugees participated in the incidents.³⁷ It is impossible to estimate to what extent the refugees contributed to the escalation of violence in Vojvodina in 2004, but the interethnic violence and the general process of radicalization in Vojvodina, which manifests itself in the electoral success of the Serb Radical Party cannot be reduced to being an imported problem. In particular, the fact that most refugees have resided in Vojvodina for a decade or longer, if they came from Bosnia and Croatia, suggests that the social origin of the perpetrators, if they were to be often refugees, cannot explain the timing and nature of the incidents. In fact, when considering the

³⁴ Nacionalni Savet slovačke nacionalne Manjine, *Informacije o incidentima, koji su se dogodili u pojedinim vojvodanskim mestima naseljenim slovacima i o kojima je informisan Nacionalni savet Slovačke nacionalne manjine*, 13.5.2004.

³⁵ Ministarstvo Unutrašnjih Poslova Republike Srbije, Uprava policije, op. cit., p.1-2.

³⁶ László Varga, Interview, Secretary of the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority, Subotica, 3.3.2005.

³⁷ The head of the EP's ad-hoc mission, Doris Pack, stated after her visit to Vojvodina that the refugees in Vojvodina were not used to live in a multicultural environment and needed to be educated on this issue. This statement was considered as offensive and refugee organizations protested. Radenko Popić, the director of the committee for the help of refugees in Vojvodina said that Pack's comments were offensive and not true. Popić stressed that most of the refugees come from particularly multiethnic regions in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina and have no need for education in this area. See "Popić: Uvredljiva izjava Doris Pak," *B92*, 01.02.2005. The later published report of this mission deals with the issue in a more sensitive way by stressing especially the refugees' difficult economic situation. See "Fact-Finding Mission by the European Ad Hoc Delegation to Voïvodina and Belgrade (28-31 January 2005) Report". Brussels: European Parliament, 2 March 2005.

geographic distribution of the incidents and the regions of Vojvodina having the largest share of population from refugee communities, no clear correlation is detectable (see maps in annex). Furthermore, most refugees moved into predominantly Serb municipalities, whereas municipalities with a strong minority population received considerably less refugees.³⁸ At the same time, the fact that 49.1 % of all refugees live in Vojvodina and that the social and economic profile of this community resembles more that of Roma than of the majority population suggests a conflict potential which doubtlessly affected the incidents.³⁹ Not only the economic situation distinguishes the refugee population from the rest, social relations remain difficult and in many municipalities of Vojvodina relations between the established population and refugees are tense. These tensions only sometimes coincide with ethnic differences, for example in the case of Serb refugees from Croatia and Hungarians from Vojvodina, but often lack ethnic connotations.

Another question concerning the perpetrators is to what extent they were organized. At the beginning of the debate there were some claims that the Serbian secret service stood behind the incidents.⁴⁰ Other theories claimed that the incidents were instigated by the Serb Radical Party to polarize the political climate and gain support in the upcoming local elections and elections to the Vojvodina assembly.⁴¹ Supporters of this theory argue that the incidents decreased quickly after the elections and that the Serb Radical Party did very well in the elections. What contradicts this explanation is the fact that voters in Vojvodina had already in the December 2003 elections supported the Radicals more than elsewhere. It is well imaginable that some of the incidents—especially those where perpetrators were not identified such as church window smashing or graffiti—were organized. There is, however, no conclusive evidence to support this. It is argued elsewhere that incidents of such a large scale could not happen without coordination. When considering the reports of the incidents this argument is not convincing. It appears that most of the incidents happened spontaneously or involved a very low organizational level of small groups that were not connected to one another. The only exceptions are the demonstrations after the events in Kosovo. These clearly

³⁸ Municipalities with a Hungarian majority have a refugee share of the population between 0.97% (Senta) and 7.26% (Bačka Topola), Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, *Data on the Hungarian National Minority in the Republic of Serbia*, 2005, unpublished Report to the European Parliament on file with the author.

³⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005, The Strength of Diversity*. Belgrade 2005, p. 29. The reasons for the large number of refugees lies in a) the geographic proximity to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; b) family ties due to the wave of Serb settlers from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after World War Two (who took over properties from expelled Germans); and c) due to the relative wealth of the region. Information materials of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights.

⁴⁰ “Kasa optužio BIA za pojavu nacionalističkih grafita,” *B92*, 2.4.2004; “Napadi na Madjare uz podršku vlada,” *B92*, 10.6.2004; “Vlada da spreči napade na manjine,” *B92*, 10.6.2004.

⁴¹ Pavel Domonji, Interview, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Novi Sad, 23.3.2005.

had been organized and the violence in their aftermath must have been expected by the organizers.⁴²

In attempt to reduce the significance of the incidents, officials in Belgrade often stress that perpetrators were minors, drunk, and known troublemakers.⁴³ Some NGOs and minority organizations have challenged this interpretation claiming that there was coordination of the incidents and that the perpetrators were not only teenagers. However, perpetrators were neither 'only' drunk under age or instrumentalized puppets of political actors. The fact that most of the perpetrators were between 15 and 25 years old does not reduce the seriousness of the acts committed but makes them even more alarming, as it indicates a considerable readiness for violence among the youth. This is not a specific problem of Vojvodina. In March 2004 after the unrests in Kosovo the mosques in Belgrade and Niš were set on fire and a number of other targets were damaged. The profile of the perpetrators in these cases largely matches those in Vojvodina, both during the attacks on minorities in March and the incidents throughout 2004.

The age profile of most perpetrators draws attention to the broader phenomena of nationalism and violence among youth. This debate took place in Serbia in early 2005 in regard to violence between school children after a series of incidents in which one pupil was beaten to death by fellow pupils. The incidents brought attention to a long-standing pattern of high juvenile crime.⁴⁴ Surveys indicate a high degree of violence in schools, confirmed by both state institutions and civil society.⁴⁵ There has not, however, been a dramatic change since 2000, at least at the level of statistics. According to official statistics, the number of criminal offenses committed by juveniles during the period 1999-2003 peaked in 2001 and declined afterwards.⁴⁶ While the youth of the perpetrators has been used as an argument against the seriousness of the crimes, this fact actually sheds a troubling light on society in Serbia today. The perpetrators and their generation were not active participants in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but rather grew up during the violent 1990s. For the generation under 20, Yugoslavia no longer constitutes a concrete personal experience. This includes limited travels to other parts of former Yugoslavia, sanctions and international isolation, as

⁴² Human Rights Watch, *Dangerous Indifference. Violence against Minorities in Serbia*, October 2005, pp. 14-23.

⁴³ *Vreme* 13.1.2005, p. 18; "Koštunica: Incidenti su pojedinačni," *B92*, 8.9.2004; "Koštunica i Labus o potezu Budimpešte," *B92*, 9. 9.2004.

⁴⁴ See Davor Konjikusic, "School's Out, But Violence Is In," *Southeast European Times*, 27.6.2005.

⁴⁵ According to a survey by the Centre for Policy Studies, pupils report in 18.1% of primary and 12.5% of secondary schools other pupils bringing arms to school. 14.5% of pupils in primary and 17.9% in secondary schools know of cases when pupils beat teachers (vice versa the ratio is 21.9% and 12.5%). Milan Nikolić. 2005. *Education and National Minorities in Serbia*. Belgrade: Centre for Policy Studies, p. 16.

⁴⁶ See Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, webzrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu.

well as hyperinflation, war and an extreme nationalist social environment. The degree of isolation and its impact on the world view of this generation constitutes a troubling picture. A 2004 survey by the Student Union suggested that approximately 70 % of all students have not left the country (including to neighboring ex-Yugoslav republics).⁴⁷ A broader survey among the Serb population confirms this trend, with only 51.5% of 15 to 25 year-olds never having been abroad. Of those who have been abroad, only 31.1% did so more than once. Among all age groups over 15, the youngest group has traveled the least abroad, whereas among the 40-59 year olds around three quarters have been abroad. Obviously, the comparison is inherently problematic, as traveling is a cumulative experience, meaning that with age more opportunities arise to have traveled during ones' lifetime.⁴⁸ At the same time, the curve of citizens who traveled abroad clearly correlates the different generational experiences in regard to free travel during the 1970s and 1980s and the isolation of the 1990s.⁴⁹ This lack of exposure to other cultures and countries does have an affect on the world view of the generation. As a recent UNDP study on diversity in Serbia has documented, the highest level of ethnocentrism in Serbia can be found among 20-23 year-olds, followed by the over 60 year-olds.

Overall, ethnic distance has decreased since the 1990s. However, the decline has been far from linear and clear when considering the post-Milošević era; levels remain alarmingly high.

Table 4: Attitudes of the majority towards key minorities

| | Albanians | Muslims/ Bosniaks | Roma | Hungarians | Croats |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------|------------|--------|
| Trust in | 14 | 24 | 41 | 36 | 28 |
| Trust in Loyalty of | 13 | 23 | 50 | 36 | 25 |
| Rejecting Minorities... | | | | | |
| as citizen | 43 | 28 | 11 | 16 | 25 |
| as neighbor | 52 | 34 | 25 | 21 | 32 |
| as friend of child | 50 | 35 | 29 | 23 | 30 |
| as boss | 59 | 45 | 41 | 35 | 45 |
| marrying a close relative | 80 | 73 | 73 | 57 | 64 |

(Source: Strategic Marketing, 2004)

Interestingly, the social attitudes towards all key minorities improved in regard to earlier polling conducted in 2002, but in fact worsened since 2003.⁵⁰ The decline in attitudes towards

⁴⁷ Zelimir Bojovic. 2005. *Serbische Studenten sollen Europa kennen lernen*, Deutsche Welle, 19. July.

⁴⁸ On the other hand, traveling to other parts of former Yugoslavia today would not have qualified as foreign travel for those traveling there before 1991.

⁴⁹ UNDP, op. cit., p. 41.

⁵⁰ Strategic Marketing Research & International Republican Institute. 2005. *Public opinion poll: Attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Summary of the Key findings*. Belgrade. See also UNDP, op. cit., p.35.

minorities is a stark warning that democratic transition and the end of armed conflict does not per se lead to improved interethnic relations. The decline since 2003 can be explained by a combination of a number of factors. Firstly, there has been a conservative backlash since 2003, expressing itself in the revival of the Serb Radical Party and the more conservative government in power since 2004. Furthermore, the interethnic incidents in 2004 in Vojvodina have been highlighted by some mainstream media in an attempt to accuse minorities and their political leadership of exploiting the incidents. Finally, the riots in Kosovo in March 2004 against Serbs worsened interethnic relations in Serbia, not only towards Albanians, but also towards Muslims.

The perpetrators of the incidents constitute a too small part of the population of Vojvodina to draw conclusions on the larger state of society. At the same time, the social environment of the young generation and their nationalist and ethnocentric views suggest that the incidents have to be seen in this particular light. Thus, the violence in Vojvodina has to be seen as an expression of a particular type of nationalism associated with the post-Milošević era, rather than reducing it to a hold-over from the Milošević period.

4. Responses to the Incidents

In attempting to understand the meaning of the incidents in Vojvodina for Serbia, a focus has to be placed on the ways in which these have been confronted (or not) by different actors. A key criticism of minority groups has been the passivity of the state, whereas Serb media and politicians repeatedly accused minority politicians of instrumentalizing (or even inflating) the incidents for their own political goals. Here we will discuss the response of police and judiciary, the political elite and institutions in Belgrade and Novi Sad, as well as that of the key minority actors, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians and the involvement of the kin state Hungary.

d) Police and Judiciary

A key source of contention in regard to the incidents in Vojvodina has been the police response and the court processes involving the cases. The police have been repeatedly accused by Human Rights Organizations and minorities for failing to react appropriately to the incidents. Victims reported that the police did not act on their behalf and failed to protect them. The police apparently overlooked the nationalistic motives for the violence and considered the incidents as mere vandalism.

During March 2004 in Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad, the police response was patchy and problematic. Leaked transcripts of telephone conversations between the Minister of Police, Dragan Jočić, and the head of the Belgrade police at the time, Milan Obradović, suggest that the minister did not recognize the seriousness of the anti-minority violence on the night of the 17-18 March 2004.⁵¹ In Novi Sad, in the same night the police did not prevent the demonstrators from damaging the house of the Muslim community, Vojvodina's government and several Albanian bakeries. At the same time, they managed to block the demonstrators' way to a Roma and Ashkali settlement of the same mob. In fact, in a coordinated effort between police and the Vojvodina government, the police concentrated efforts to protect the Ashkali settlement rather than protect the other buildings in an attempt to reduce risk to human life.⁵² The police were unable to block a similar attack the following night in Veliki Rit, a poor suburb of Novi Sad, and to protect its mostly Ashkali and Roma inhabitants. According to the MUP report,⁵³ during these events 24 persons were arrested. As of April 2005 nobody had been sentenced, although the demonstration was taped by police.⁵⁴

The aforementioned MUP report contains only information on charges against perpetrators, but fails to provide information on further proceedings although some cases took place in summer 2003 a year before the report was written. According to the National Council of the Hungarian Minority and the Provincial Secretary Tamás Korhec, it has been difficult to obtain information from the judiciary on this issue.⁵⁵ A recent report by Human Rights Watch suggests that generally misdemeanor, rather than criminal charges were levied against perpetrators.⁵⁶ In only one case was a perpetrator accused of inciting ethnic, religious and racial hatred.⁵⁷ During the period January 2003 to June 2004, the interior ministry reported that the police had launched 50 criminal investigations in what the ministry noted were some 49 interethnic incidents. The police cleared up some 20 cases and arrested three persons. Most of the arrests were for desecration of cemeteries (15), property damage (8), participation in

⁵¹ "Džamija gori, Jočić se češlja," *Blic*, 8.6.2005.

⁵² Centre for the Development of Civil Society, *Ethnic Incidents in Vojvodina after Internationalization*. Zrenjanin 2005, p.26.

⁵³ See 2.1.

⁵⁴ Tamás Korhec, Interview, Vice-President and Provincial Secretary for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities, Novi Sad, 23.3.2005.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Korhec and László Varga, Secretary of the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority, Subotica, 3.3.2005.

⁵⁶ On the other hand, the five young Hungarians who were sentenced for the beating of a Serb in the town of Temerin (see below) in June 2004 to jail sentences between 10-15 years. The sentencing has by criticized by the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians as being discriminatory. "Kasa: Pred Evropskim sudom kršenje prava manjina u Vojvodina," *Danas*, 10.11.2005.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p. 26. The ministry in its own report apparently takes a narrow approach and notes that none of the physical attacks on Hungarians were motivated by ethnic, religious or racial hatred. Ministarstvo Unutrašnjih Poslova Republike Srbije, Uprava policije, op. cit., p.1.

fights (2), threatening peace (2) violent behavior (2) and inflicting light physical injury (2). However, in most cases, perpetrators were sentenced to relatively low financial penalties for breach of public order and peace. The ministry notes some 10 misdemeanor cases against 39 persons in 2003 and in the first half of 2004.⁵⁸ According to a 2005 report on incidents involving the Hungarian minority of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, 28 criminal charges were brought against individuals regarding offenses, including 11 Serbs and three Hungarians and 20 charges were brought forward on offenses against public order and peace, including 39 Serbs and 21 Hungarians. With the decline of incidents in 2005, the number of charges brought forth between January and August 2005 decreased to four for criminal acts and two for offenses against public order and peace, involving four Hungarians, three Serbs and one Muslim.⁵⁹

The relative leniency of the police, at least until October 2004, and of the judiciary is in part the consequence of the fact that many perpetrators are underage and that courts and police generally did not consider or underestimated the ethnic dimension of the crime. Beyond these two aspects, the originally weak state response highlights two particular problems.

First, the public administration, in particular the police, has not been fully reformed since the end of the Milošević regime. As a consequence, nationalism among some staff and lack of professional awareness of the sensitivity of the incidents remains a problem. Furthermore, minorities remain underrepresented in public service. As the table below highlights, Hungarians, while constituting over 14 % of the population of Vojvodina, constitute only slightly more than five percent of the police force and public prosecutors.⁶⁰

Table 5: Share of Hungarians in key sectors of the public administration in Vojvodina⁶¹

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|----|--------|
| Population of Vojvodina (2002) | | | 14.28% |
| Judges | Municipal Courts | 31 | 8.80% |
| | District Courts | 4 | |
| | Commercial Courts | 4 | |
| Public prosecutors and deputy public prosecutors | | | 5.43% |
| Employees in the Ministry of Interior (including Police) | | | 5.81% |
| Members of the Provincial Parliament | | | 20.00% |
| Members of the Provincial Council | | | 23.80% |
| Employees in municipal and city administrations in Vojvodina | | | 14.99% |

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.1-2.

⁵⁹ Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Data on the Hungarian National Minority, op. cit.

⁶⁰ It is important to note that the small share of Hungarians in police is not only based on the Milošević legacy, but also on the lack of interest among minority members of joining the police forces.

⁶¹ Source: Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Data on the Hungarian National Minority, op. cit.

Second, the political leadership did not attribute sufficient importance to the incidents and did not make the investigation and prosecution of ethnically motivated violence a priority until these had received substantial international attention. In regard to the March 2004 violence, both the Minister of Interior and the judge in the case against defendants for the burning of the mosque in Niš expressed understanding for protests, if not the violence itself in light of the violence in Kosovo.⁶²

The weak state responses doubtlessly encouraged the perpetrators and contributed to a social atmosphere in which nationalistic violence appeared to be tolerated. According to the president of the Hungarian National Council, after the visit of Prime Minister Koštunica to Subotica in September 2004, where he met with local authorities of police, judiciary and administration, the attitude of the police improved noticeably. This coincides with a sharp drop of the number of incidents taking place. Consequently, the apparent effectiveness of the response suggests that if the incidents had received adequate political attention earlier, a more assertive intervention by the police and judiciary could have reduced the number of incidents. The reaction of the police and the judiciary thus cannot be reduced to the lack of resources or lack of sensitivity at the local level, it had its rationale in the broader political framework. Thus, we shall next discuss the reasons for the hesitant and delayed government response.

b) The Government Response

In early March 2004, three months after the elections, the Serbian parliament finally elected Vojislav Koštunica as the new prime minister. Since then he has been presiding over a coalition formed by his Democratic Party of Serbia, the liberal party G17+, and the smaller coalition of the Serbian Renewal Movement (*Srpski pokret obnove*, SPO) and New Serbia (*Nova Srbija*, NS). Koštunica's coalition does not hold a parliamentary majority and has relied on the Socialist Party of Serbia for support. After Djindjić's reformist government, the new government has come to represent in many ways a reorientation towards more conservative and nationalist policies and a slowdown of the reform process.

Part of the reason for the initial passivity of state institutions was the interlude between the elections in December 2003 and the formation of the new government, when Serbia was without an effective government. The care-taker Živković government had been unable to act decisively, as it lacked the necessary legitimacy following the dramatic losses of DS in the

⁶² Human Rights Watch, op. cit., pp.16; 46-7.

December 2003 elections and power struggle within the party, which Zoran Živković lost to Boris Tadić.

The new government represented by Koštunica and deputy prime minister Miroljub Labus first responded to the incidents by holding a series of meetings with the leader of the SVM, Jozsef Kasza. The talks remained declaratory and produced few tangible results. For three months this remained the only visible response from Belgrade. In the beginning of July 2004, the president of the Serbian parliament, Predrag Marković, was the first politician in Belgrade to admit that there was a serious problem in Vojvodina. His press release, which actually announced the next local elections, noted that the number of the “interethnic excesses” in Vojvodina was “worrying”⁶³ and referred to the numbers given in the first MUP report.⁶⁴ Koštunica followed Marković’s example a few days later and condemned all ethnically motivated incidents. In his press release he stated that it was “unavoidable to work on the prevention of the incidents and on the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust and tolerance between the national communities.”⁶⁵ At the same time, the Minister of Interior Dragan Jočić maintained that most of the incidents did not have an interethnic background,⁶⁶ and emphasized the fact that perpetrators were school children under “the influence of alcohol.”⁶⁷ In July and August 2004 there was a second round of meetings without results between Koštunica and a broader circle of different minority representatives from the minority councils. In addition, Rasim Ljajić, the State Union Minister for Human and Minority Rights, went to Budapest to meet with Hungarian officials.⁶⁸

Only in September 2004 did Koštunica visit several towns in Vojvodina to talk with officials of the police, the judiciary and the administration. A joint session, as mentioned above, of the Serbian parliamentary Committees for Security and for Interethnic Relations was held in Subotica on the issue and included representatives from minorities. During the discussions a dispute arose on the figures presented by the Interior Minister Dragan Jočić, who maintained that there had been only 67 ethnically motivated incidents. The meeting produced no further results. Later, in September 2004, Koštunica discussed the issue with Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, in Brussels, while the President of Serbia and Montenegro Svetozar Marović invited the Hungarian President

⁶³ “Lokalni izbori 12. ili 19. septembra,” *B92*, 9.7.2004.

⁶⁴ Marković also asked the local police presidents, local authorities and the mayor of Subotica to report on the incidents. The reports were included in the material for the joint session of the two parliamentary Committees for Security and National Minorities in Subotica beginning of September.

⁶⁵ “Koštunica osudio incidente,” *B92*, 14.7.2004

⁶⁶ “Kasa: Jočić ublažava napade na Mađare,” *B92*, 24.7.2004; “SVM traži Jočićevu ostavku,” *B92*, 5.7.2004.

⁶⁷ “Dragan Jočić: Groblja su oštećivala uglavnom deca,” *Danas*, 21.7.2005.

⁶⁸ “Koštunica rešava probleme u Vojvodini,” *B92*, 18.7.2004.

Ferenc Madl, who visited Serbia and specifically Vojvodina during a three-day visit in the beginning of September. A further response of the government was the establishment of the Council of National Minorities, which brings together all the national minority councils with key resources ministries.⁶⁹

Altogether the reaction of the Koštunica government to the incidents was passive and indecisive at least until July 2004, if not in fact until September 2004. Not Koštunica but Marković, a member of the government coalition's more moderate party G17+, was the first to address the problem. It remains unclear why Koštunica did not react to the incidents. There are a number of possible reasons for the delayed response. First, the incidents actually began during the Živković government, which was weak prior to the elections in December 2003 and was unable to act decisively between the elections and formation of the new government. The incidents in Vojvodina were only one of the pressing issues on the agenda of the Koštunica government. It was also confronted with the trial of the murderers of prime minister Djindjić, economic and political reforms and cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Second, the government displayed a weak and indecisive public profile, especially during its first year in office, due to the often contradictory positions of the coalition members on key issues of reform. Thirdly, the minority government had to rely on the support from SPS, which made it reluctant to take positions which might weaken the backing of the Socialist Party. Finally, the reservations of the conservative DSS towards minorities and its opposition to Vojvodina's autonomy made a close cooperation between the government and authorities in Vojvodina and the minority parties unlikely. The fact that Koštunica (reluctantly) began to take action against the incidents in beginning of September, half a month before local and regional elections in Voivodina, suggests that electoral tactics could not explain the weak government response. As the Koštunica government failed to condemn the interethnic violence from the start, it indirectly contributed to their escalation. First it dealt with the incidents as if they were a—in a narrower sense—political problem and tried to reach a solution through talks with the most influential representative of the Hungarian minority Kasza. Confronted with increasing international attention Koštunica took action and appears to have chosen a double strategy. He exerted pressure on the police to treat the incidents with more care and by doing so contributed to their decrease. The noticeable change of the police's attitude indicates that the

⁶⁹ "Premijer Koštunica najavio formiranje saveta nacionalnih manjina," *Danas*, 10.9.2004. The council is foreseen as a federal-level institution in the FRY law on national minorities, but as national minority councils only exist in Serbia, the establishment of the Serbian council reflected the reality that only minorities in Serbia had formed national councils. The Council of National Minorities received a secretary, Petar Lađović, but has met only a few times since its establishment.

government controls the police and that indeed earlier, firmer actions could have prevented the escalation. But in fact Koštunica downplayed the significance of the incidents in his public statements.⁷⁰ He and other member of the government maintained that the incidents were only sporadic and that an internationalization of the issue was unnecessary.⁷¹

The government strategy was aimed at satisfying the international community as well as its voters in the upcoming local elections in October 2004. By reducing the significance of the incidents it obtained the former, although it could not stop the issue's internationalization. The repeated claims that the incidents were only isolated cases failed to convince the international community, but were intended for domestic consumption.

c) Reactions in Vojvodina

The institutions of Vojvodina have only recently regained some of the competences they had lost in the late 1980s due to the centralization under Milošević. The province has been governed by a reformist government, in power since 2000, and received additional competences through the aforementioned Omnibus Law in 2002.⁷² Nevertheless, the areas of responsibility of the provincial authorities remain limited. The provincial institutions are thus neither responsible for the police nor for the judiciary and therefore had only limited power to act against the incidents. Furthermore, the assembly of Vojvodina is not able to legislate, reducing the ability of the province to tailor laws to its specific needs.

In addition to the response by the Vojvodina branches of Belgrade-based parties which largely overlap with those of the headquarters, there is a need to consider the response of the provincial institutions and in particular the regionalist and minority parties represented therein. Here we consider the response of the regionalist perspective by Nenad Čanak, president of the Social Democratic League of Vojvodina and speaker of the Vojvodina assembly until late 2004 and the SVM—the main party representing the Hungarian minority in

⁷⁰ “Koštunica: Incidenti su pojedinačni,” *B92*, 8.9.2004; “Koštunica i Labus o potezu Budimpešte,” *B92*, 9.9.2004.

⁷¹ “Ocenjujući etničke probleme u Vojvodini ministar Ljajić je januara 2005. pored ostalog izjavio: »na Jugu Srbije smo imali oružani konflikt, a u Vojvodini kafanske tuče, nekada sa elementima etničkog konflikta, a nekada klasične tuče ljudi u alkoholisanom stanju, ali su nesumnjivo svi ti incidenti imali političke reperkusije. To je poslužilo kao povod za političku i medijsku eksploataciju i internacionalizaciju. (...) Ja ne mogu da budem u svim kafanama i da razvađam ljude. (...) Tako da mislim da je to jedan naduvan problem i da se to sve više i uviđa u međunarodnoj zajednici. Mnogi predstavnici međunarodne zajednice su mi rekli da nisu mogli na prvi zahtev Mađarske koja je ušla u EU da odgovore negativno, nego su to pitanje na taj način otvorili, sa dubokom svešću da problem nije onakav kakav se predstavlja.«” *Vreme*, 13.1.2005, p.18, cited in Centre for the Development of Civil Society, *Vojvodina posle internacionalizacije*, Zrenjanin 2005.

⁷² See for an English version of the document: www.osce.org/documents/fry/2002/02.123_en.pdf.

Vojvodina, headed by József Kasza, deputy prime minister in the Djindjić and Živković governments.

As the main autonomist party, the LSV had taken a consistently critical position of the Belgrade authorities during the Milošević period and generally pursued a minority-friendly policy. However, Nenad Čanak did not take a firm attitude towards the incidents and their internationalization. On one hand he sharply criticized the Belgrade government for its passive reaction to the interethnic violence and demanded the resignation of Koštunica and Jočić. On the other hand he maintained in December 2004 that the incidents were only bar brawls that had been instrumentalized for political means.⁷³ Čanak is the strongest advocate of Vojvodina's autonomy and has been trying to internationalize the issue of regional autonomy for years. One might have expected that the anti-minority incidents would have offered a good occasion for Čanak to raise the question of autonomy in the international arena, which he did when he met with a delegation of the Council of Europe in September 2004. If Vojvodina controlled the police and the judiciary, Čanak noted, the problem of interethnic incidents would be resolved.⁷⁴ Surprisingly, on other occasions Čanak did not support the internationalization and criticized the Hungarian minority institutions and the SVM for doing so. "History has shown," Čanak noted "that every time a mother state tried to internationalize the situation of its diaspora, it had bad effects on the diaspora itself. I wouldn't draw the parallel to the events ten, fifteen years ago, when it was said that the Serbs in Knin had to be protected. We all know how this ended."⁷⁵ To understand his ambivalent attitude towards internationalization it helps to examine inter-party relations in Vojvodina. Čanak's LSV and the SVM, as well as the Sandžak Democratic Party (*Sandžačka demokratska partija*, SDP) of the State Union Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Rasim Ljajić, participated together in the coalition *Zajedno za toleranciju* (Together for Tolerance) in the parliamentary elections in December 2003. The coalition failed to pass the 5 percent threshold and as a consequence the parties which had been previously represented in parliament lost their seats. The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians formed closer ties to the Democratic Party, cooperating and supporting each other's candidates in the local elections and provincial elections in 2004.⁷⁶ This has been one of the reasons why Čanak's coalition *Zajedno za Vojvodinu* (Together for Vojvodina) lost in the local elections, winning only seven

⁷³ Public discussion organized by the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung, Novi Sad, 28.11.2004.

⁷⁴ "Čanak za vojvodjansku policiju," *B92*, 6.9.2004.

⁷⁵ "Čanak kritikuje Beograd i Budimpeštu," *B92*, 18.8.2004.

⁷⁶ "Zajedno na izborima. Potpisan protocol o straškoj saradnji DS i SVM," *Dnevnik*, 15.5.2004.

seats in the Vojvodina assembly.⁷⁷ The response of the LSV and Nenad Čanak thus has to be viewed through the prism of the split between the largest minority party and the largest autonomy party. This development has largely been a consequence of the faltering support for autonomist parties, making them a less desirable partner for minorities. The alliance between autonomists and minority parties has never been as tight as it might at first appear. The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, as well as some other Hungarian parties, have been contemplating the idea of either a Hungarian cultural autonomy or territorial autonomy of the municipalities in mostly Northern Bačka which are predominantly inhabited by Hungarians. More autonomy for Vojvodina alone, considering the Serb pre-dominance has thus been seen as being insufficient for the minority. In the government of Vojvodina, however, autonomists, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians and Democratic Party continued to form the governing coalition even after the 2004 elections.

d) The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians

The issue of the incidents was first raised by the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, the largest Hungarian Party. Its president József Kasza was deputy prime minister in the Serbian government as part of the DOS coalition 2001-2004, but, as mentioned earlier, lost his position as deputy prime minister and his party failed to clear the 5 percent threshold in the December 2003 elections.

Already in April 2004 Kasza called on Hungary to use its weight as a future member of the EU to put pressure on Serbia in regard to the treatment of minorities and characterized the incidents as ‘atrocities’.⁷⁸ This term was later also adopted by the Hungarian foreign minister and Hungarian lobby groups.⁷⁹ Kasza furthermore declared a very high number of incidents⁸⁰ and in some occasions even accused the Serbian state or the Serbian secret service respectively of supporting the incidents.⁸¹ The dominant role of Kasza in drawing attention to the incidents resulted in a situation where the incidents were first addressed in bilateral meetings between Kasza and representatives from the Serbian government. After Deputy Prime Minister Miroljub Labus had met with Kasza once, Koštunica discussed the issue with

⁷⁷ The DS has now 34 seats and the SVM 11 seats. In the provincial elections 2000 Čanak's LSV participated as a part of the DOS coalition and gained 24 seats.

⁷⁸ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 30.4.2004.

⁷⁹ Nicholas Wood, ‘Attacks Against the Hungarian Minority in Serbia Are Increasing,’ *New York Times*, 17.9.2004.

⁸⁰ “Kasa: Vlada ne sprečava incidente,” *B92*, 25.8.2004.

⁸¹ “If the investigating organs, if the BIA cannot find the perpetrators, then they are the perpetrators themselves. The agency has done such work before,” “Kasa optužio BIA za pojavu nacionalističkih grafita,” *B92*, 2.4.2004. On another occasion he described the incidents as “organized actions with the aim to put the members of the minorities under physical and psychical pressure.” “Vlada da spreči napade na manjine,” *B92*, 10.7.2004; see also “Napadi na Madjare uz podršku vlada,” *B92*, 10.6.2004.

Kasza at least twice in 2004. Both meetings were followed by a dispute between the two on what had been agreed upon. According to Kasza, they agreed in the first meeting in April 2004 that changes of local authorities such as the heads of the police, judges and prosecutors, would be made only with the consent of the local administration. Kasza publicly complained that Koštunica failed to keep the agreement. According to him, just a few days after their meeting all heads of the police in Vojvodina had been replaced, without discussing or even informing the local governments.⁸² After the second meeting in July 2004, Kasza maintained that they had agreed to form a multiethnic police in Vojvodina's regions that included significant shares of national minorities.⁸³ Koštunica on the other hand immediately denied this.⁸⁴ It remains unclear if and what kind of consent had been reached in these meetings, but it is unlikely that Koštunica would agree to an interethnic police force in Vojvodina. Kasza never went into detail but the interethnic police force was associated with the one established in southern Serbia after the end of the conflict in 2001 with international assistance. Considering the establishment of this force as a post-conflict measure, suggests that a similar police reform in Vojvodina would have been exaggerated and even problematic.⁸⁵ Even less imaginable is the idea of Koštunica sharing the competencies of Belgrade concerning police and judiciary with the local governments in Vojvodina. The meetings had little impact on either convincing the government to change its policy nor did they result in a rapprochement between minority representatives and government. More problematical, it transformed the incidents into a topic of political negotiations, rather than one of state effectiveness and minority rights.

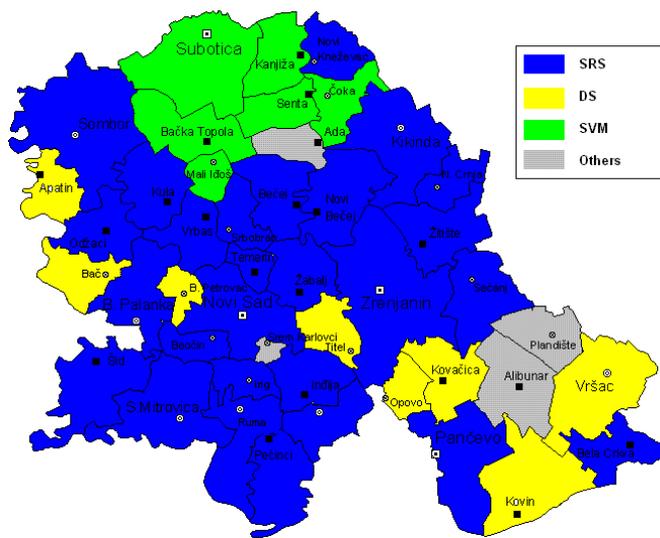
Early on, the SVM sought not only a dialogue with the Serbian government, but also involved Hungary as kin state. Already by April 2004 Kasza had met with the president of the Hungarian parliament in Budapest to discuss the incidents. The internationalization of the incidents with the support of the kin state can be interpreted both as a reaction to the originally weak state response and as a strategy to increase electoral support for the party within the Hungarian community. Kasza incorporated the incidents into his pre-election campaign and attempted to mobilize the Hungarians to vote in the September 2004 local and provincial elections.

⁸² "Šta zamera Koštunici da nije poštovao dogovor s SVM," *B92*, 21.4.2004.

⁸³ "Multietnička policija ideja Kostunice," *B92*, 17.7.2004.

⁸⁴ The press release states that in the meeting the importance of minorities' participation in all state and public functions had only been discussed, see *B92*, 15.7.2004.

⁸⁵ The establishment of a multiethnic police in Southern Serbia as a conflict management tool often subordinated quality to inclusion. Furthermore, there has been criticism of weakness of the force in regard to the omnipresent Gendarmerie (*Žandarmerija*), a special police unit which maintains a strong presence in the region.



Map 1: Strongest Parties in the Vojvodina Elections, September 2004⁸⁶

The results show that the SVM failed in this strategy, losing in the local and provincial elections in September 2004. In Subotica, the SVM lost nearly half of its 30 seats dropping to 16 seats in the town council, as did the main Croat party, the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina (*Demokratski savez Hrvata u Vojvodini*, DSHV), losing 7 of its previous 12 seats.⁸⁷ Throughout Vojvodina, the support for the SVM declined sharply, losing 7 of its 18 seats in the Vojvodina assembly and Hungarian minority parties provide mayors in four instead of previously eight municipalities.⁸⁸

The political instrumentalization of the incidents has not only been (unsurprisingly) criticized by Serbian authorities and media, but also by other minority representatives and other Hungarian parties, in particular by the Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians (*Demokratska stranka vojvođanskih Mađara*, DSVM) of András Ágoston.

e) The Kin State and International Response

The international response to the incidents has been shaped by the strong international scrutiny Serbia faces in the field of interethnic relations and the influential role of Hungary as a kin state taking full advantage of its newly gained membership in the European Union. After the incidents were first raised by the SVM, the Hungarian government addressed the problems in Vojvodina several times in the form of inquiries with the Serbian and State Union governments. After the failure of addressing the incidents on the bilateral level, the Hungarian

⁸⁶ Adapted from “Radikali najjači, demokratski blok većinski,” *Dnevnik*, 21.9.2005.

⁸⁷ “Policija u izbornoj komisiji,” *Dnevnik*, 22.9.2004.

⁸⁸ Jan Briza, “Srbi i Mađari nisu u zavadi,” *Dnevnik*, 10.10.2004.

government began involving international organizations, in particular the EU and the Council of Europe. This process of kin state involvement accelerated in June 2004.⁸⁹ The Hungarian Interior Minister Monika Lamperth noted during her visit to Subotica that the Hungarian government was forced to report Serbia and Montenegro to the Council of Europe if the situation in Vojvodina did not improve.⁹⁰ In addition to the government of Hungary, the opposition, led by the conservative party *Fidesz* also took up the issue of the incidents.

Hungarian members of the European Parliament (EP) issued a draft resolution on Vojvodina which was passed in mid-September. Although the EP did not use the term ‘atrocities’ as suggested in the draft,⁹¹ it sharply condemned the situation in Vojvodina. It spoke of the ongoing intimidation of minorities, especially of the Hungarians, and expressed its concern that the Serbian authorities have been ignoring the incidents and violating fundamental human and minority rights. The EP reminded Serbia and Montenegro that the protection of human and minority rights is a basic precondition for the continuation of the Stabilization and Association Process with the EU.⁹² The second international organization which dealt with the issue was the Council of Europe (CoE). Since Serbia and Montenegro had been accepted only conditionally in 2003, the organization has been issuing regular reports monitoring the progress of Serbia and Montenegro in the field of democratization and human rights. The Secretary General addressed the problems in Vojvodina in his information on “Compliance with obligations and commitments and implementation of the post-accession co-operation programme” in September and December 2004. Additionally, the Committee of the Ministers of the CoE adopted a resolution in November 2004, warning that the “protection of national minorities should receive greater attention from law-enforcement agencies regarding especially the effective investigation and prevention of violent incidents recently committed against persons belonging to Hungarian and some other national minorities.”⁹³ A resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also took up the issue of

⁸⁹ In this month an American congressman of Hungarian origin started to make the problems of the Hungarians in Vojvodina public. The SVM informed the Helsinki committee in Washington about the incidents. The Hungarian Minister of Defense said that if the problem were not going to be solved they would request a examination of the issue in the European Council. See “SVM o napadima na madjarsku manjinu,” *B92*, 23.6.2004. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Belgrade wrote a open letter and attached to this a list of anti-minority incidents. The Centre for the Development of Civil Society mentions in its report *Vojvodina posle internacionalizacije* as the beginning of the internationalization 6 July, when the head of the OSCE mission, Mauricio Massari, addressed the issue, see also *B92*, 15.7.2004.

⁹⁰ See “Sve češći napadi na nacionalne manjine,” *B92*, 21.6.2004.

⁹¹ See “Motion for a Resolution tabled for the debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law pursuant to Rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure by Isván Szent-Ivanyi and Jelko Kacin on behalf of the ALDE Group on the continuing atrocities against minorities in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia and Montenegro.”

⁹² European Parliament, *Vojvodina: harassment of minorities*, 16.9.2004.

⁹³ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, ResCMN(2004)12, 17.11.2004, see <https://wcm.coe.int>.

the incidents in Vojvodina and called on the Serbian authorities to properly investigate these and sanction perpetrators. Furthermore, it warned against “all attempts to politically exploit interethnic tensions for political purposes, whether locally or internationally.”⁹⁴

The strategy of internationalization chosen by Kasza and both the Hungarian government and opposition had several effects. International pressure contributed largely to the decrease anti-minority violence. The sharp decline of the incidents in October 2004 clearly coincides with the increased international pressure and the response by the government.

On the other hand, the internationalization contributed to the ongoing processes of radicalization of the Serbian majority and polarization of society in Vojvodina. The negative impact of the internationalization on the perceptions of the majority are visible when analyzing the media response, as will be done in the next section. The direct link between the internationalization and the Radical party victory in the 2004 elections is more difficult to assess due to a lack of clear empirical data. The SRS improved its election results in Vojvodina already in December 2003, i.e. before the interethnic violence increased, receiving 31.88 % of the voters’ support, 6 % more than in Central Serbia. In the second round of the presidential election in 2004, however, the Radicals’ candidate Tomislav Nikolić was supported less in Vojvodina than in Central Serbia (43.16% in Vojvodina, 45.84% in Central Serbia). After the provincial elections in September 2004 the party gained 36 seats in the provincial assembly, more than any other party. It is altogether plausible that the incidents contributed to the success of the SRS. The European Parliament certainly did not do moderate forces in Vojvodina a favor by passing its resolution only a few days before the provincial and local elections.

Arguably, the successful internationalization of the incidents on behalf of the SVM has been an encouragement to other minorities to voice grievances more prominently. At the same time the dynamics of the discourse around the incidents in Vojvodina have already polarized the Serb majority. In late October 2005, the main Croat political party, the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina, accused the government of tolerating discrimination against Croats. The party particularly suggested that Croats are discriminated against in public service, as well as in regard to the use of language and by the recognition of the Bunjevci, a community Croats suggest are actually Croats.⁹⁵ In the most recent case, a number of deputies

⁹⁴ Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 1397, Functioning of the democratic institutions in Serbia and Montenegro*, 2004.

⁹⁵ “DSHV tvrdi da država odgaja ksenofobiju i neprijateljstvo prema drugim nacijama,” *Dnevnik*, 25.10.2005.

in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe initiated a resolution to condemn the Serbian government for “an artificial separation between the Romanians of Vojvodina and the Romanians of eastern Serbia by refusing to recognize the latter group's self-designated ethnic identification (Romanians) and imposing the ethnic tag of ‘Vlachs’ on them,” and for not protecting the rights of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Serbia.⁹⁶ The response of the Serbian media is unsurprising. The tabloid *Blic* in response asks suggestively “And now Serbia is breaking the rights of Romanians?!”⁹⁷ Altogether, one can agree with the words of the Hungarian Council’s Secretary, László Varga: “Internationalization wasn’t a good solution, but it was the only one.”⁹⁸ The dominant role of the kin state and the non-systematic and rather ad-hoc interest the incidents received thus tainted the international intervention and in fact raises larger questions about the ability of international organizations to effectively address such incidents.

f) The Media

The media was a key actor in creating an atmosphere that fostered anti-minority violence. Both underreporting on minorities and the incidents, as well as a nationalist discourse and world view in large parts of the mainstream media account for the significance of the media in the context of the incidents in Vojvodina and their social importance. A particular phenomenon is the spread of tabloids with strong nationalist messages and a tendency to sensationalize politics. The lack of clear ownership structure of many media and the inadequate implementation of laws against hate speech contribute to the negative role media play.⁹⁹

For the purpose of this study, the popular tabloid *Večernje novosti* was chosen to illustrate the reaction of the Belgrade media toward the anti-minority incidents. The daily with a circulation about 270,000¹⁰⁰ is together with *Kurir* the main tabloid with a strong conservative and nationalist point of view. The coverage of *Večernje novosti* is compared to the coverage of two other newspapers, the liberal quality daily *Danas* from Belgrade and the regional daily *Dnevnik* from Novi Sad, both with an estimate circulation of 20,000.

The violence in Vojvodina only received limited attention from the Belgrade media and only came to the foreground after the incidents had been ongoing for several months. *Danas*

⁹⁶ Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Draft Resolution, Violation of the human rights of the Romanian ethnic minority in Serbia*, Doc. 10726, 17.10.2005.

⁹⁷ “Sad Srbija krši i prava Rumuna?!” *Blic*, 2.11.2005.

⁹⁸ Interview in Subotica, 3.3.2004.

⁹⁹ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, *The Press: an Unchanged Matrix*, Belgrade, December 2004. The research included ten Serbian newspapers from March-August 2004.

¹⁰⁰ There is no independent data on the print run of media. According to *Večernje Novosti*, the average circulation in 2004 was 271.175. “Rastu: Tiraž, dobit, prihod...,” *Večernje Novosti*, 28.2.2005.

began reporting on the incidents for the first time in June 2004 on the occasion of a statement of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, which warned in a public letter against interethnic violence in Vojvodina. Even the daily *Dnevnik* from Novi Sad reported astonishingly little on the issue. Nevertheless, both *Danas* and *Dnevnik* are exceptions in the Serb media scene. The huge majority of the media did not notice or ignored the anti-minority trend and in fact failed to inform and warn the public.¹⁰¹ *Večernje novosti* addressed the problem for the first time in August 2004 but it only devoted more attention in September 2004 as did most of the Serbian press. According to the Helsinki Committee, “the Belgrade press started covering them [the anti-minority incidents] only in September when the issue was internationalized.”¹⁰² There was, however, one exception. Already by the end of June 2004 one incident from Vojvodina made its way into the headlines of Belgrade media. However, here the victim was a Serb. The case of the Serb Zoran Petrović who was beaten up in the small town Temerin north of Novi Sad occupied the public debate for weeks. The case became so important that even the Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Rasim Ljajić, visited Petrović in hospital to determine whether the fight had an ethnic motivation.¹⁰³

On 26 June 2004, a Saturday morning, policemen found Petrović on the street critically injured and unconscious. He was rushed to hospital and a few hours later five young Hungarians were arrested. The suspects confessed that they had beaten up Petrović because he had molested their female friend. Until this point the case did not seem particularly uncommon. Unusual was what the perpetrators had done to Petrović who was found naked with a wooden rod in the anus, the pubic hair burned and dirtied with urine. Probably these circumstances attracted the attention of *Večernje novosti* who brought a short report on the incident the following Monday. The nationality of the victim and the perpetrators was mentioned but was not referred to as a motive for the attack. The incident was rather presented as a criminal act, a local scandal which only because of repulsive details gained short media attention and was to be forgotten the next day.¹⁰⁴ Some Serbian politicians, however, appear to have recognized the possibility to instrumentalize the case and asserted a nationalistic background. The DSS compared it with the notorious Martinović case, which inflamed the Serbian public in the 1980s over the treatment of Serbs in Kosovo.¹⁰⁵ The SPO

¹⁰¹ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, op. cit., p.17.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰³ The Minister’s intent was to calm the situation and to stress that the incident had no nationalistic background. But by visiting Petrović he also gave the case an importance that it did not deserve and contributed to additional public attention.

¹⁰⁴ “Pronađen nag sa džakom na glavi,” *Večernje novosti*, 28.6.2004.

¹⁰⁵ Djordje Martinović was a Serb farmer in Kosovo who was rushed in May 1985 to hospital to remove a broken beer bottle from his anus. Martinović claimed that he had been the victim of masked Albanians,

was convinced that the incident was a reaction of Hungarians who had expected a victory of the Radicals' candidate Tomislav Nikolić in the Serbian presidential election. The Hungarian perpetrators, according to a rather incoherent statement of the SPO, had hoped for an increase of interethnic tensions and were disappointed after the victory of the moderate Boris Tadić.¹⁰⁶ Nikolić himself complained that the police informed the public only after the elections and maintained that knowledge on the Petrović case would have improved his results in the elections. Considering this response, the day after the first short article, *Večernje novosti* reported in detail on the case and quoted the reactions of politicians which drew attention to an interethnic background. In addition, *Večernje novosti* included long interviews with the mother and the girlfriend of Petrović. In the course of the interviews it became obvious that the fight was not ethnically motivated. *Večernje novosti* is fair enough to admit this and did not directly question the Petrović's credibility who – as soon as he had regained consciousness – denied any nationalistic background of the incident.¹⁰⁷ *Večernje novosti's* rival *Kurir* took a very different line, maintaining that the nationalistic background had been suppressed. According to *Kurir*, Petrović not able to remember the night of the fight and assess the motivation of the perpetrators due to his injuries. *Kurir* also mentioned Hungarian nationalist graffiti¹⁰⁸ near the spot Petrović was found and suggested a connection between the fight and the graffiti. *Kurir* omitted to report that the graffiti had been there long before Petrović was beaten up. In summary: a common attack or fight was instrumentalized first by Serbian politicians and then by the Serbian media in order to show that the Serb majority was under threat, not the minorities. This interpretation fits in the larger pattern of the Serbian media coverage which perpetuates a “sense of self-pity and a feeling of permanent endangerment.”¹⁰⁹ Although *Večernje novosti* acknowledged that the incident had no ethnic background, most of its readers will remember it vaguely as a case where a Serb was beaten up by five Hungarians.¹¹⁰

In September 2004 the internationalization of the incidents reached its peak: the European Parliament and the Council of Europe discussed the issue, premier Koštunica met

who had tied him up and inflicted the injury on him. Albanian sources, however, maintained that Martinović was a homosexual who had injured himself accidentally. See Julie Mertus, *Kosovo. How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 95-121.

¹⁰⁶ Before constructing this argument the SPO should have had a closer look at the timetable: Petrović was beaten up a day before the elections which were held on 27 June 2004.

¹⁰⁷ See Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, op. cit., p.95.

¹⁰⁸ “I believe in God, I believe in one homeland. I believe in one God's justice, I believe in resurrection of Hungary. Amen.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.6.

¹¹⁰ For some people Petrović became a second Martinović figure. In Novi Sad at a match some fans had a transparent saying: “Temerin. Osveta. Veternik.”, “Provokacije,” *Večernje novosti*, 6.9.2004.

with Javier Solana and the Hungarian president Ferenc Mádl came to Belgrade and Vojvodina on a three-day visit. One of the first consequences of the internationalization was the fact that the Belgrade media could no longer ignore the issue and had to report on the anti-minority violence in Serbia's northern province. In addition, the approaching elections of Vojvodina's assembly attracted further attention. Unfortunately the internationalization hardly had a positive influence on the way in which the media reported on the issue. *Večernje novosti* reacted to the increasing international pressure more and more aggressively in their coverage and developed several strategies in argumentation in order to support the nationalistic spectrum in Serb society.

First, *Večernje novosti* argued that the incidents were not a widespread phenomenon but isolated cases. According to the daily, the citizens of Vojvodina learned about existing ethnic tension in the newspapers, not from their everyday life.¹¹¹

Second, *Večernje novosti* reversed cause and consequence. The incidents, so one of its recurring arguments, were the results of the power politics of the Vojvodina Hungarian political elite. After the SVM had lost their seats in Belgrade's parliament, it instrumentalized isolated anti-minority incidents in order to gain influence and support. In the first sentence of the first article on the issue which appeared in August, Kasza and Čanak are accused of having fanned interethnic tensions by internationalizing the incidents.¹¹² The harsh Kasza- (and to a lesser extent Čanak) bashing is part of almost every article in *Večernje novosti* on the issue. While in power, argues *Večernje novosti*, Kasza failed to care about minority rights and only discovered this concern after losing in the 2003 elections.

Third, the internationalization is considered as a strategy of Kasza to strengthen Hungarian autonomy in Vojvodina or even secessionism which Kasza allegedly supports. Consequently, internationalization is discredited and equated with secessionism. At times, the fear that Vojvodina can become a similar problem like The Hague or Kosovo is articulated.¹¹³

¹¹¹ "Nije svaka tuća rat," *Večernje novosti*, 06.09.2004; "Sukovi obavezno uoči izbora," *Večernje novosti*, 7.9.2004.

¹¹² "Status Vojvodine srpsko-srpsko pitanje," *Večernje novosti*, 08.08.2004. Its very unlikely that Kasza and Čanak did a statement together on the issue as they did not share the same view (see above).

¹¹³ Before the internationalization of anti-minority incidents in Vojvodina made its way to the headlines of the Belgrade press, the internationalization of Vojvodina's autonomy was fiercely discussed on occasion of the so-called Subotica initiative. By means of this initiative the leader of Vojvodina's League of Socialdemocrats Čanak tried to obtain international support to reconstruct Vojvodina's autonomy in March 2004. Although his initiative was without success an intensive bashing of "autonomy-minded" started in Belgrade. Conspiracy theories about the European Union (and especially Germany) supporting alleged separatist movements in Vojvodina were spread and still appear frequently in different media and the internationalisation of the anti-minority incidents is associated with these.

Fourth, ‘attack is the best form of defense’ has been the strategy when *Večernje novosti* published the article “Manjina sve manja.” In this article and on other occasions the daily accused Hungary of discrimination against the Serb minority in Hungary.

The internationalization forced *Večernje novosti* to report on anti-minority violence but at the same time opened up the possibility to focus its coverage on the process of internationalization. *Večernje novosti* never discussed in depth the incidents and their cause or possible measure to improve interethnic relations in Vojvodina. For *Večernje novosti* and its readers “the problem,” as the DSS member of parliament Željko Tomić puts it, “is not a lack of tolerance, but the Hungarian politician Kasza.”¹¹⁴

5. Conclusions

The increased number of incidents against minorities in 2004 drew renewed attention to nationalism and volatile minority-majority relations in Serbia. The renewed international interest, including the September 2005 resolution of the European Parliament in fact confused the situation in Vojvodina in 2005, as the intensity of the incidents had long subsided.

Both NGOs, the State Union Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Provincial Secretariat for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities noted a marked decrease of anti-minority incidents since October 2004 (see table below). In 2005, the number of incidents has been more than five times lower than in the previous year, even though data suggests that the level is still higher than in 2003.

Table 6: Incidents directed against the Hungarian Minority¹¹⁵

| Types of Incidents | 2003 | 2004 | 1-8/2005 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. Physical Attacks | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| 2. Fights | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| 3. Damage to objects of the catholic church | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 4. Damage to catholic graves | 11 | 17 | 6 |
| 5. Graffiti and distribution of pamphlets | 3 | 25 | 3 |

Considering this sharp drop, attention should focus primarily on whether the right lessons have been learnt from the incidents in 2004 to prevent or at least effectively combat such an increase in violence in the future. In conclusion, we shall focus on a) the importance of the

¹¹⁴ Željko Tomić, Interview, DSS, MP, Member of the Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations, 16.3.2005.

¹¹⁵ Source: Ministry for Human and Minority Rights.

incidents and what they mean for Serbia and b) what measures have and need to be undertaken to prevent a renewed escalation.

The incidents reveal the tentative nature of progress in the field of ethnic relations in Serbia since the fall of the Milošević regime. This working paper makes the argument that the incidents should not be overly dramatized and seen as part of an organized plan against minorities, but at the same time should not be merely considered a weakening hold-over from the Milošević era. Altogether the ethnically motivated acts shed light on the state, Serbian society and the protection of minorities, as well as on the function of internationalization in reducing interethnic tensions.

a) The Role of the State

After having been the primary source of minority rights violations for a decade, public authorities, first and foremost the police, found itself in the curious position of protecting the rights of minorities. Although institutional inertia, underrepresentation of minorities (and their concerns) and opposition among members of police and judiciary can partially explain the passivity in the first months, the responsibility falls to decision-makers. Once the government took a more assertive line in regard to the violence, the number of incidents dropped off and police action and judicial procedures increased. The strong role of a passive government indicates both the primacy of politics over rule of law, but also points to the reluctance of some elected officials to recognize the seriousness of the incidents. Underestimating the international and interethnic repercussions of a weak state response cannot be explained exclusively through passivity itself, but is anchored both in a deep-rooted skepticism towards minorities, the accompanying nation state paradigm and the lack of sensitivity towards interethnic relations. This problem is particularly striking in Serbia due to the fact that diversity is concentrated in regions (parts of Vojvodina, Sandžak, Southern Serbia, etc.) and frequently not perceived in Belgrade.

The change of state policy as a result of external pressure compounds the general reservation toward externally imposed policies—in particular in the field of minority rights—and the weakness of domestic reform processes.

b) Incidents and Minority Rights

The incidents point to a dilemma. Much emphasis by the EU, the Council of Europe and other international organizations in recent years has been on strengthening minority rights

regimes in the Western Balkans to overcome the legacy of nationalism and exclusion. Arguably, Serbia has introduced extremely positive legal measures to protect minority rights. Implementation and legal details have lacked in Serbia, as is the case of similar regimes in the region (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina). In Vojvodina, however, minority rights have been considerably better protected than in the rest of Serbia due to an established tradition of minority rights and the transfer of competences to the province after the fall of Milošević in the field of education, among others. The incidents at the same time suggest that improving the protection of minority rights in itself is insufficient to improve interethnic relations. Although the incidents triggered (reasonable) demands from some minority groups for better defined minority rights, the remedy for incidents is not minority rights. While some domestic institutions and international organizations recognized the importance of tolerance and interethnic communication, this aspect of improving majority-minority relations has been neglected. Minority language schooling or curricula are only useful in a context where majority children do not learn only the negative stereotypes about minorities.¹¹⁶ Closely linked is the weakness of the international minority rights system, represented primarily by the Council of Europe, which was unable to exercise any pressure on Serbia and Montenegro to take action against the incidents. The European Union, despite lacking standards and a serious monitoring regime in regard to human and minority rights, was much more effective due to lobbying by a member state, Hungary.

c) The Role of Society

It would be false to extrapolate the general state of society in Vojvodina from some 200 incidents over three years. Nevertheless, the incidents are indicative of larger social problems which this paper has sought to identify. First, the nationalist orientation among teens and youth in their early twenties and the parallel lives minorities and majorities lead in parts of Vojvodina.

The fact that the 15-25 year olds make up nearly all of the caught perpetrators of the incidents and that the same age group in Serbia holds more ethnocentric views and has been more isolated than older citizens is alarming. Considering the 1990s, this might not be surprising. Yet, considering that 18 year olds will have had a good share of their education after the end of the Milošević regime and were 12 when NATO bombed Serbia, 8 when the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, 4 when Yugoslavia broke apart and born the year

¹¹⁶ See Conference Report, *Preparing for Europe: Education for National Minorities in Serbia and Montenegro*, 9-11.11. 2005, Wilton Park Conference WPS05/17. Available at: <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/themes/regions/pastconference.aspx?confref=WPS05/17>.

Milošević came to power. As the response of media and political elites indicate, are nationalist views present and legitimate in public discourse. The weak public condemnation of the incidents by large parts of the media and political elites only reaffirmed the legitimacy of this type of expression. Furthermore, the incidents constitute a repertoire of acts, amalgamated from the symbols and patterns of behavior legitimized in the wars of the 1990s and the social frustration of the transition period.

In addition, the incidents highlighted the emergence of parallel lives between minorities and majorities in Vojvodina.¹¹⁷ This ‘parallelism’ has been a feature of minority-majority relations in parts of Serbia for decades. In particular in Kosovo, a near complete division of public life of Serbs and Albanians has shaped the region at least since 1990, if not earlier. Similar problems have also arisen in Sandžak. The segmentation of public life is the consequence of ethnic distance and stereotypes, as well as structural and institutional divisions. Vojvodina has traditionally not been marked by this type of social divisions between communities, with the exception of Roma, who are segregated from mainstream society throughout the country. The incidents in Vojvodina indicate a worrying change. In large parts of Vojvodina, the life of minority and majority members runs on parallel tracks with few meeting points. The incidents often bore witness to this trend: bar fights most frequently focused on Serbs attacking Hungarians at a bar/club/discotheque associated with Hungarians (or vice-versa). Fights between groups of youth took on an ‘ethnic’ dimension exactly because social ties have become more mono-ethnic. Thus, conflicts which have little to do with ethnicity quickly take on ethnic features, as social group divisions coincide with ethnic belonging.

d) Internationalization and the Dialogue of the Deaf

There has been a close correlation between the sharp drop of the incidents and internationalization of the issue in October 2004. It is certainly impossible to determine conclusively whether the international interest was the primary cause in reducing the incidents. However, there is little doubt that the police began taking the incidents more seriously and conducting more arrests and thorough investigations after both Hungary and international organizations took note. Ironically, while the internationalization might have had a positive impact on the conduct of state institutions, it most certainly had negative repercussions on the social perception of the problem and probably contributed to the polarization of society. The negative reaction of Serbian media to the international interest in

¹¹⁷ Centre for the Development of Civil Society, *Novi etnički sukobi u Vojvodini*, Zrenjanin, August 2004.

minority issues and the fear of ‘internationalization’, as well as the often categorical rejection of criticism by domestic political elites, has further consolidated the negative view of external intervention. The fact that much of the international interest was triggered by intervention of the kin state and international organizations themselves struggled with a nuanced approach to the problem further worsened the perception.

6. Next Steps

Responses to the incidents have not all been negative, but also triggered more innovative initiatives in Vojvodina, which are likely to address some of the root causes. The only concrete initiative to date has come from the Vojvodina Secretariat for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities. It focuses on promoting grass-roots activities targeted at improving interethnic relations, in particular among pupils. The project for “Promotion of multiculturalism and tolerance in Vojvodina”¹¹⁸ was launched in September 2005 with support from the government of Hungary, the USA embassy, the OSCE mission and a private company (Bambi), but without support from the republican institutions.¹¹⁹ The project comprises several smaller initiatives such as a media campaign for multiculturalism, a quiz about minorities’ tradition and history, a sporting “cup of tolerance,” targeting mostly pupils.¹²⁰ Considering a budget of only some 23 million Dinars (270.000 Euros), the project can only constitute a small step. A broader initiative is clearly needed to prevent repetition of the violence.

The sensitive status discussions over Kosovo and continued strong support for the Radical party in Serbia suggest that there is no reason to believe that the incidents of 2004 cannot repeat themselves in the same or greater intensity. A stronger police response and prosecution by the courts/judicial system is only one aspect of addressing the incidents. Without the emergence of an alternative value system, punishment alone might quell the extreme expressions of intolerance but it cannot address the root causes.

¹¹⁸ A problem of the proposal is the uncritical use of the term “multiculturalism” which is used throughout the whole proposal. Neither a closer understanding or definition of this concept is given nor its limits and problems are discussed. A more critical dealing of the terms “multiculturalism” and “tolerance” is therefore necessary. Considering the uncritical use of the term multiculturalism in considerably less multicultural regions such as Kosovo by international organizations makes this less surprising.

¹¹⁹ Centre for the Development of Civil Society, *Etnički incidenti u Vojvodini*. Zrenjanin, 25.11.2005.

¹²⁰ Provincial Secretary for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities. 2005. *Project. Promotion of Multiculturalism and Tolerance in Vojvodina*, Novi Sad, February. Some of the proposals run the risk of replacing old with new stereotypes, such as emphasizing the “joint resistance against the Turkish invasion.”

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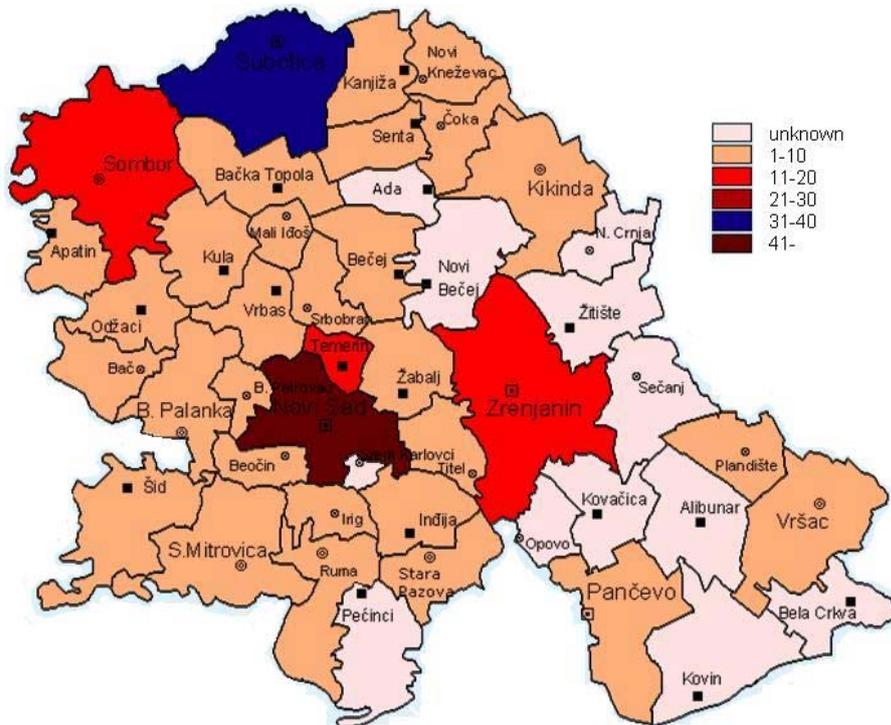
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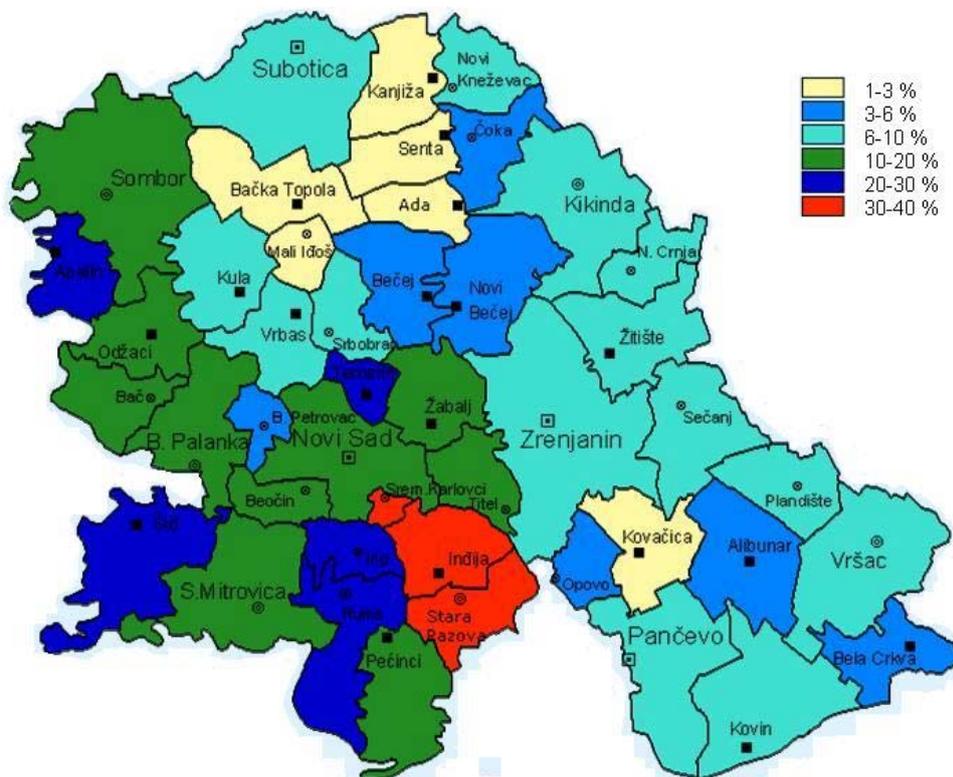
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8. Appendix



Map 2: Number of Interethnic Incidents, 2003-4
 (Map prepared by Provincial Secretary for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities).



Map 3: Refugees Population in Percent
 (Map prepared by Provincial Secretary for Legislation, Administration and National Minorities).