

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FROM SOUTHERN SERBIA

COVID-19 RESPONSE

JUNE 1 - 15, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring of civil society organizations in three municipalities in southern Serbia

The report includes monitoring of civil society organizations in three municipalities in southern Serbia: Bujanovac, Presevo and Vranje. Information is collected in cooperation with local organizations from these three municipalities. Local organizations collect information based on desk research as well as direct contact with other organizations and media in these three municipalities. The information that is presented in this report refers to **general information about the municipality itself, general information about civil society organizations, information about local media, general information related to Covid-19 as well as the response of civil society during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 virus.**

These three municipalities are multiethnic communities in southern Serbia, with Albanian, Serb and Roma populations. Since the Albanian national community boycotted the 2011 census, there is no official number of members of the Albanian national minority, but it is estimated that more than 100,000 of them live in southern Serbia. That is why the National Council for the Albanian National Minority is located in Bujanovac.

PREŠEVO

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- Preševo belongs to a smaller number of municipalities in Serbia where local elections will not be organized because early local elections were held on December 24, 2018. Therefore, the atmosphere of the election campaign in Preševo is not noticeable, regardless of the fact that parliamentary elections will be organized in this municipality.
- Five Albanian parties from the Preševo Valley (which includes three municipalities with Albanian population: Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja), at the initiative of the Acting Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, Gent Cakaj, signed a Joint List Agreement on 16 January 2020 for parliamentary elections in Serbia. Based on this agreement, all Albanian political parties operating in the territory of these three municipalities, except Democratic Parties of Albanians of former mayor of Preševo - Ragma Mustafa, will participate together in the parliamentary elections within the list 16 with a name Democratic Alternative of Albanians - Together for the Valley. During the election campaign, the Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, Gent Cakaj, realized a three-day visit to Preševo, Bujanovac and invited Albanians to go to the polls in large numbers.
- The Municipal Assembly of Preševo is on May 27 at its second session for 2020 adopted a plan called the "Preševo 2020 Aid Package", which includes a separate financial plan to help entrepreneurs, agriculture, students, NGOs and sports organizations after the Covid-19 pandemic. This plan does not provide assistance to the media, despite the large number of proposals by councilors of the local assembly of the municipality of Preševo that the media should be included in this package.

PREŠEVO

CSO activities

- YOLO (Youth Online Learning Opportunities) announced a round table in Preševo at the end of May, which would present the goals and opportunities provided by this e-learning project implemented with the support of the European Commission and the Erasmus + program. Due to the situation with the consequences of the pandemic and measures to combat the spread of Covid-19, this round table has been moved to another date, but due to the measures that are still in force, the idea of online implementation in the form of webinars is being considered.
- Be active 16 from Preševo, conducted an online discussion on "Mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic", where the psychologist talked to young people about the impact of the pandemic and mental health, how to deal with post-pandemic life and responsibility to society and public protection and community health.
- For the last week of the election campaign in Preševo and Bujanovac, the Organization for Development and Democracy Bujanovac announced the implementation of activities "Your vote is important" through which they invite young people who have the right to vote for the first time to go to the polls.

BUJANOVAC

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- Local media and portals paid the most attention to the election campaign for the upcoming local and parliamentary elections. Albanians, as a national minority with one united list from all political parties "Unification of the Valleys", are participating in the parliamentary elections.
- The local portal luginalajm.com published the latest news about Covid-19 on June 1, about new infected cases in Macedonia, while most of the news relates to the election campaign and the newly formed Government in Kosovo.
- The local portal titulli.com published the latest news about Covid-19 on June 4. Most of the published news is related to the elections, the participation of Albanians in the parliamentary elections with one united list, the formation of the government in Kosovo.
- The local portal bujanovacke.co.rs, which started publishing news in Albanian during the pandemic, has a special section on the website where they report on Covid-19.
- Local televisions RTV Spektri and RTV Bujanovac, during the state of emergency, broadcast online classes in cooperation with the National Council of Albanians. Now, most of the news is related to the election campaign.

BUJANOVAC

CSO activities

- The local government finances projects for civil society organizations every year. This year, on June 11, the results of the competition were announced and a decision was made to finance 49 organizations.
- Although the state of emergency in Serbia is on May 6, civil society organizations in the municipality of Bujanovac have not started implementing their activities that were planned before the declaration of the Covid-19 virus pandemic and the state of emergency.
- The Organization for the Development of Democracy from Bujanovac undertook several volunteer actions during the state of emergency in cooperation with the municipal headquarters as well as in providing free legal aid.
- Cultural and humanitarian organization "Dituria" organized volunteer actions and distribution of food packages to the most vulnerable families.
- The humanitarian organization "Shpresa" helped the most vulnerable families by distributing packages of basic foodstuffs. To them, the donors were people of good will, entrepreneurs from the local community, and individuals from abroad.
- The Future organization postponed all activities for a while, first due to the pandemic, and now due to the local elections, because the focus of the citizens is primarily on the elections.

VRANJE

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- The Election Commission of the City of Vranje announced 8 electoral lists for the election of councilors in the Assembly of the City of Vranje. The first is the list of SNS "Aleksandar Vucic-For our children," the second "Dragan Markovic Palma - United Serbia", number three is the list "Ivica Dacic-Socialist Party of Serbia", number four is "Serbian right Vranje-From people to people ", the fifth is" Dr. Vojislav Seselj-Serbian Radical Party ", the sixth" Broom 2020 - Let's clean Vranje-Oliver Stojkovic ", the seventh is" For the Kingdom of Serbia-for royal Vranje " and under number eight of the electoral list" For Brotherhood and Unity ".
- In the morning of June 9, it was noticed that the window of the premises of the City Board of the Serbian Right in the very center of the city was broken. The premises of the City Board of the Serbian Right are located in the very center of the city.
- Radio Television Vranje d.o.o. which has been a private media house since 2015, organized a draw for free dates. Representatives of the list who wanted to attend the draw, and those who did not attend were given free appointments, which they can use if they wish. The pre-election program, which presents local electoral lists, lasted from June 9 to 15.

VRANJE

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- According to the latest available data, on Monday, June 7, 8 people positive for the Covid-19 virus were registered, it was announced through the official website of the Government of Serbia. A total of 37 samples were sent to the Covid laboratory. At that time, several persons with confirmed presence of Covid-19 virus were registered only in Belgrade (17) and Novi Pazar (12).
- When it comes to people in self-isolation, statistics show that Vranje with 116 people in that respect is second in Serbia, just behind Leskovac (255). This information came a day after the Public Health Institute said that the situation in Vranje and the Pčinjski district was becoming more stable, that it was uncertain, but that the measures had yielded results.
- As a reminder, the factories where the corona virus was registered were closed two weeks ago. Teams were also formed to control whether the measures are implemented in those factories that work on the implementation of disinfection and protection measures.

VRANJE

CSO activities

- During the state of emergency, the Opra Roma Movement of Serbia distributed humanitarian packages to members of the Roma community, which contained food and disinfectants. Now, they are committed to the election and, as they say, efforts to prevent vote buying, which was noticeable during the previous elections.
- For the purposes of Roma people, they organized talks between representatives of political parties and the Roma community on 16, 17 and 18 June. The goal is for Roma to get acquainted with the programs of political parties when it comes to their rights in a direct conversation, and to decide on that basis to whom they will entrust their vote. This organization will also organize the collection of 10,000 signatures in support of the Roma Community Manifesto, which will be announced after the elections. The manifesto of the Roma community will actually be a document with very precise requirements concerning the Roma population.
- The Roma Center for Democracy during the state of emergency dealt mainly with the rights of children with disabilities. In the Development Counseling Center - where children with disabilities can receive therapy and professional help, which is part of the Children's Dispensary for Preschool Children's Health at the Vranje Health Center Health Center - during the state of emergency caused by the corona virus pandemic, employed where there every day, but the children, as the parents told the portal of the Coalition for Transparency of Southern Serbia (KTJS), "do not receive or schedule appointments for therapies". The head of the Development Counseling Center, Nenad Mladenović, did not respond to calls and messages from journalists.

JUNE 01-15, 2020



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The logo for Civic Initiatives features the word "Civic" in a large, light grey font above the word "Initiatives" in a smaller, light grey font. To the left of the word "Initiatives" are four stylized human figures in red, holding hands in a line.