

# CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FROM SOUTHERN SERBIA

**COVID-19 RESPONSE**

**June 15-25, 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 will be presented in the 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

- The citizens of Presevo voted in the June 21 elections only in the parliamentary elections. No major irregularities were reported during the Election Day in Presevo. Based on preliminary results, about 18,000 voters exercised their right to vote, most of who voted for the Albanian Democratic Alternative - Together for the Valley list (more than 15,000 votes). The high turnout is attributed to the invitation of Gent Cakaj, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, who paid a three-day visit to Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja during the election campaign, and on that occasion called on Albanians to go to the polls and support the Albanian list.
- In the reception center for migrants in Presevo, about 30 migrants who have so far stayed in the reception center in Bujanovac have been transferred. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia announced that the reception center was not closed, but that it was being renovated.

# PREŠEVO

## CSO activities

- Last week, the non-governmental association Livrit Creative Center, founded by young artists in Presevo, who officially plan their work on the realization of projects in the field of culture and art, was officially opened in Presevo.
- Within the project "Human Rights for all" implemented by the association "Be Active 16", a public debate was held in which the President of the National Council of Albanians in Serbia, Ragmi Mustafa talked to young people from Presevo about the goals and priorities of the National Council, Albanians in Serbia and the achievements of the National Council of Albanians so far.

# BUJANOVAC

## Political situation, media and Covid-19

- For these two weeks elections were the main topic in all local media, both electronic and traditional. All media reported to the citizens on the election campaigns of all local parties that participated in the elections.
- Radio Television Spektri organized a show with candidates for mayor in the local elections, in which they discussed their plans and programs for managing the municipality for the next 4 years.
- Radio Television Bujanovac, in addition to covering election campaigns in various places, also organized a show with women candidates for councilors in the Municipal Assembly, who after that show signed a kind of memorandum of cooperation in which they agreed that regardless of which party emerges as the winner of the election, they will demand that one of the management functions be entrusted to women.
- All content published by the portal [www.titulli.com](http://www.titulli.com) in this period was related to the parliamentary and local elections, and in one of the news it was stated that despite the fact that Albanians are participating in the elections with the joint list Albanian Democratic Alternative "United Valley", that elections are poorly promoted. The joint list consists of five Albanian political parties, while the elections are being boycotted by the Albanian Democratic Party, led by Ragmi Mustafi.

# BUJANOVAC

- The news was also published on the portal <http://www.titulli.com> that some politicians from Kosovo are asking for the issue of Albanians from the south of Serbia to be a topic of conversation between Belgrade and Pristina in Washington.
- Portal [www.Lugina-lajm.com](http://www.Lugina-lajm.com) published the news that the local self-government, with the help of a donation from the Government of Kosovo (which during the COVID 19 pandemic gave a donation of 200,000.00 euros to fight the coronavirus), bought equipment for the Health Center in Bujanovac, as well as a new ambulance which, according to the director of the Health Center, Lela Jovanović, is better equipped than they had so far.
- The [Bujanovacke.co.rs](http://Bujanovacke.co.rs) portal announced that the councilor in the Municipal Assembly of Bujanovac, Ljiljana Andrić, is at the same time on the local list of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, as well as on the parliamentary list of the United Democratic Serbia. This, in principle, legal, but certainly unusual case largely reflects the state of democratic and political consciousness in Serbia.
- In the local elections on Sunday, June 21, 20,958 citizens of Bujanovac exercised their right to vote with the right to vote out of 43,480 registered voters, which gives a turnout of about 48 percent. Citizens were able to vote for a total of 9 electoral lists. The winner of these elections is the Democratic Party led by Nagip Arifi, followed by the united list of the Serbian Progressive Party, both parties won 10 seats in the assembly, followed by the PDD led by Driton Rexhepi which won 8 seats. The winner of the local elections in Bujanovac, Nagip Arifi, the holder of the list of the Democratic Party (DP) and the candidate for mayor, stated that the party has no red lines towards any political option and that it is necessary to wait for official results and start forming a ruling majority.

# BUJANOVAC

- The election campaign overshadowed in public the topic of the still current corona virus pandemic. According to the testimony of the media that covered the election campaign, the virus was not the subject of pre-election activities, nor did citizens use protective equipment during the assemblies. The situation in the city is identical as in regular circumstances, which means that cafes and other catering facilities are full of guests. Such a picture was not spoiled by the news about the difficult epidemiological situation in the Pčinja district, as well as the news that one person from Bujanovac was infected.
- After the elections, topics related to the announced dialogue between the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina, which was supposed to take place on July 27 in Washington, dominated.
- Local media published the news that the National Kitchen in Bujanovac will be open from July 1, as well as that the Reception Center for Migrants was temporarily closed due to renovations, and that the protégés who stayed there were transferred to the Reception Center in Presevo.

# BUJANOVAC

## CSO activities

- The Organization for Development and Democracy distributed leaflets on Thursday, June 18, inviting young people from Bujanovac to go to the polls on June 21. This campaign is part of the project "Your vote is important", which this organization is implementing with the financial support of the Swiss Embassy in Serbia.
- Youth basketball club Play 017 continues to entertain children in the villages of the Bujanovac municipality, and in the action of giving basketball hoops on Friday, it was Košarno's turn. "Another action of our club. This time we made the children happy in the village of Košarno, municipality of Bujanovac. At the request of the locals, children and their parents, we decided to help. A few years ago, the school in this village did not have students. Fortunately for all of us, the school will get new students and they will learn and play in it again ", said the representative of the club

# VRANJE

## Political situation, media and Covid-19

- On June 21, local elections were held in Vranje, in which 42,164 voters voted, ie 60.14% of the number registered in the voter list. According to the results published by the City Election Commission, the most votes (21,780) were won by the list Aleksandar Vučić- For our children and will have 38 councilors in the local parliament. The second-placed group of citizens is the Serbian right Vranje, which won 7,429 votes, ie 13 mandates. The result of this extremist organization, whose leader is known for numerous speeches calling for violence, is more than surprising and worrying, but it has also indirectly influenced the biggest scandal related to the recent parliamentary elections. According to unofficial information, there was a massive vote buying by this organization, thanks to which the Union of Vojvodina Hungarians profited from the republican elections in Vranje, in that the citizens, in addition to circling number 4 in the local elections (where Serbian right was), did the same when voting in the parliamentary elections (Union of Vojvodina Hungarians was on number 4 on parliamentary list). The situation becomes additionally absurd if we take into account the fact that at the last census, only six inhabitants of Vranje declared themselves as members of the Hungarian national minority. In addition to these two lists, 8 councilors from the list of Ivica Dacic - Socialist Party of Serbia won 4,624 votes, and 6 councilors from the list Dragan Markovic Palma - United Serbia, by 3,630 citizens of Vranje. According to the data of the City Election Commission, due to the violation of the provisions of the Law on Local Elections, voting was annulled at a total of three polling stations.

# VRANJE

- According to official data from the Institute of Public Health (ZZJZ), the epidemiological situation related to the corona virus pandemic in Vranje is assessed as "unfavorable". All capacities in the two COVID hospitals in Vranje have been filled and solutions are being sought for the hospitalization of newly infected persons. ZZJZ reports that there are asymptomatic cases, but that moderately severe clinical pictures with pneumonia predominate. Due to the poor functioning of the system, the test results are in some cases long-awaited, which makes it difficult to determine the true number of infected, but current statistics indicate that more than 20 patients are registered every day, while the number of tested is usually 5-6 times higher. The authorities assessed that "the activity of the virus is significant, and the spread is very accelerated".
- According to a northern Macedonian portal, unverified information appeared that it was possible to buy a forged negative PCR test at the Nis airport, as well as at the gas stations in Vranje, for 50 and 65 euros, respectively. The Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that they had not received any reports on this case, but that they would also inform the competent prosecutor's offices, on whose order the police would take all necessary actions to determine the accuracy of the media's writing. They say "do not have any knowledge of it", as well as that the terminal building of the airport is "under constant surveillance". On the other hand, the Government of Northern Macedonia announced that from Friday, June 26, it will open all borders without the need for PCR test and quarantine.

# VRANJE

- As part of the measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, professional operational teams have been set up to monitor the situation in the areas of: provision of passenger transport services, retail trade, catering services and services in shopping centers and similar facilities, schools and preschools and institution founded by the city of Vranje, and the strengthening of controls by the sanitary inspection, labor inspection and traffic inspection has been announced.
- Legal entities and entrepreneurs, who perform activities in the field of retail trade, services in the field of catering, as well as services in shopping centers and similar facilities are obliged to take all necessary preventive measures. Measures include: organizing the work process that ensures the maintenance of physical distance, ie the distance between two people of at least two meters, mandatory disinfection of furniture, machines, tools and devices for work after the service is provided to each individual user and the use of protective equipment, masks and gloves by employees. In order to ensure the protection and health of employees, employees and parties, the employer is obliged to provide all, general, special and extraordinary measures related to the hygienic safety of facilities and persons.

# VRANJE

## CSO activities

- After an internal dialogue with the Roma community and a dialogue with the leaders of the political representatives of the electoral lists, the Opra Roma movement Serbia continued the campaign “Good for Roma, good for Serbia”. During the Opre Roma election campaign, Serbia encouraged thousands of its supporters to go to the polls and value their vote. According to them, in these elections, the imperative was for the Roma to go to the polls in as large a number as possible, to prevent any kind of pressure and manipulation on Roma voters, for the Roma to vote freely from their beliefs. The organization states that this is important for the Roma, but also for the democratic legitimacy of the elections in Serbia. The Opra Roma Movement of Serbia monitored and analyzed the turnout of its supporters in 12 locations throughout Serbia: Aleksinac, Prokuplje, Pirot, Smederevska Palanka, Bor, Bac, Zajecar, Surdulica, Vladicin Han, Vranje, Pavlovac and Krusevac. The turnout of their supporters in these locations is 89%, which represents a very high turnout, and they point out that we are proud to have had the opportunity to contribute to higher voter turnout by organizing a dialogue with political candidates, publicly calling for voting through videos and other content.

**JUNE 15-25, 2020**



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