

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FROM SOUTHERN SERBIA

COVID-19 RESPONSE

July 4 -14, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring of civil society organizations in three municipalities in the south of 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 Municipality of Preševo, during July 9, welcomed a delegation of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo consisting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla, and the Minister of Justice Selim Selimi. The visit lasted one day, during which the Kosovo delegation met with representatives of the authorities, the opposition, businessmen, and they also visited the local Youth Office and the House of Culture.
- The situation related to the Covid-19 virus pandemic is the same, citizens do not have information about those infected and tested. The mayor of Preševo, Shqiprim Arifi, called on citizens to abide by the measures. Despite the fact that local institutions do not provide any information about the number of tested and potentially infected, the citizens of Preševo know the names of people who are treated in various hospitals in Serbia, and several self-isolated due to a positive result on a serological test.
- The President of the Democratic Action Party branch in Preševo, Ardita Sinani, held a press conference at which she accused the local authorities in Preševo of forgetting their citizens and the situation with the pandemic. She called on the government to get serious and take responsibility, to compile a strategy and professional working bodies to make it easier to manage the pandemic.

PREŠEVO

- Municipality of Preševo provided 3000000 RSD for co-financing of the project for realization of public interest in the field of information on the territory of the Municipality of Preševo. The media can apply for co-financing of the project between 100,000 RSD and 1,000,000 RSD. The competition is open until July 15.

CSO ACTIVITIES

- Municipality of Preševo awarded 6,000,000 RSD to 36 citizens' associations and sports associations on the basis of the annual competition plan for financing citizens' associations based in the municipality of Preševo.

BUJANOVAC

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- During the past period in the municipality of Bujanovac, apart from the news about a possible coalition and the formation of local government, most news concerned the Covid-19 pandemic, because the number of victims increased significantly in Vranje, and in Bujanovac, there are many newly discovered cases. According to the latest available information in Bujanovac, the corona virus was confirmed in 39 people, but the test results are awaited for another thirty.
- On the local portals, in addition to the news about the corona virus in the municipality of Bujanovac and Pčinja district, there was news about the consequences of the corona virus in Novi Pazar, and reports on the difficult situation in that city. The local portal also monitored the situation in Kosovo, because the number of infected people has significantly increased there as well.
- The local portal also published news related to the protests that took place in Belgrade last week.
- Local media also reported on the visit of the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, who visited Presevo and Bujanovac on 9 July.
- Bujanovac Red Cross and Tobacco Industry donated two UV sterilizers to the Health Center, which the director of this institution, Dr. Lela Jovanović, says will greatly affect the protection of medical staff.

BUJANOVAC

- More than 400 local entrepreneurs have applied for financial assistance that the Municipality of Bujanovac will pay from a donation from the Pristina authorities to repair the consequences of the corona virus epidemic. As a reminder, at the end of April, the Government of Kosovo approved financial assistance to the municipality of Bujanovac in the amount of 200,000 euros. Assistance will be given to those entrepreneurs who, due to measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus, were forced to stop working.
- Deputies of the Albanian Electoral List "Albanian Democratic Alternative - United Valley" met in Belgrade with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić as part of consultations on the composition of the new Government. Representatives of the Albanian minority were the first to meet with President Vučić in a series of consultations with parties that passed the census in the June 21st parliamentary elections, with the aim of forming a new government. Representatives of this list won three seats in the future convocation of the National Assembly. On this occasion, they submitted the requests they had presented to the governments of Serbia for years. These demands concern the integration of Albanians into the institutions of the system, state institutions, the problems that exist in textbook education and the non-recognition of diplomas from Kosovo. Shaip Kamberi, the first on the list of the united Albanian list, stated that the state's help was requested for economically underdeveloped municipalities where Albanians live, and added that after receiving answers to all requests, he would consider the offer to be part of the new Serbian government. He cited as a positive example the fact that 11 Albanian doctors were recently employed in Bujanovac and Presevo on Vučić's orders. One of their demands in the new government is the position of minister in the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government.

BUJANOVAC

CSO ACTIVITIES

- The people of Bujanovac also joined the action launched by the Center for Media Transparency and Social Responsibility from Vranje, to raise funds for Covid Hospitals in southern Serbia, and among the donors are companies and individuals.
- Humanitarian Foundation "Amaneti" continues its action of building a house in Trnovac, with the help of donors to both companies and individuals. The second action they organized included collecting money for packages for 200 children without one parent. They also announced an action of collecting undamaged furniture that people no longer need in order to be distributed to those who need that kind of help.

VRANJE

Political situation, media and Covid-19

- As many as 197 patients were hospitalized in four COVID hospitals in the Health Center Vranje, the latest data are from the Clinical Center in Nis, which maintains a database for all hospitals of this type in southern Serbia. Of the stated number, the presence of coronavirus was confirmed in 115 patients, while the rest were tested and are waiting for results. With 161 citizens in self-isolation due to suspicion of COVID, Vranje returned to the "top ten" cities in Serbia, according to data from covid19.gov.rs . The latest information shows that ZC Vranje is considering opening the fifth COVID hospital, since the existing capacity is almost fulfilled.
- Protests were held in Vranje with the participation of several dozen citizens. The protest passed peacefully and without incidents, and the citizens gathered in front of the Municipal Assembly building. The column of demonstrators, after gathering at the assembly point near the City Assembly of Vranje and shouting derogatory slogans at the expense of the local government and the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, went on a protest walk through Partizanski, Ivo Lola Ribara, November 29, Belgrade and back through the central city promenade to the building local parliament. At the head of the column was a flag that read "Down with the SNS." Demonstrators tore election posters of the Progressives from the side facade of the building of the New House of Culture in Vranje. After three days, the protests were stopped.

VRANJE

CSO ACTIVITIES

- As part of the action organized by the Center for Media Transparency and Social Responsibility (CMTDO), 491,949 dinars have been paid to the Center's account so far, and 171,421 dinars through the donation.rs website. The spontaneously initiated action of the Center for Media Transparency and Social Responsibility to raise funds for Vranje's COVID hospitals started a real avalanche of humanity in the south of Serbia. The action will last until Friday, July 17, when the donation will be handed over. In addition to Vranje's COVID hospitals, at the insistence of the citizens in Vranje, part of the donation will be redirected to the hospital in Surdulica. So far, due to urgent requests, the following have been delivered: washing machine and dryer, 30 pillows, 2 pulse oximeters, two digital thermometers, 100 masks, 100 pairs of gloves, 5 liters of soap, 10 liters of asepsol, 12 liters of alcohol and napkins, the fourth newly opened COVID hospital in Vranje. Each donor is registered and the list of donors is updated daily on the center's website, so far there are over 200 of them. Among the donors are numerous individuals, all companies not only from Vranje, but also from Bujanovac, Preševo and Trgovište, as well as public companies. The action was organized under the slogan "Our city, our people, our country".

VRANJE

- Bora Stanković High School in Vranje was a partner of the citizens' association "Svet reči" in Velika Plana in the six-month project "Serbian Youth Network Against Corruption", which was realized under the auspices of the US Embassy in Belgrade. After the training in November in Velika Plana, the celebration of the World Anti-Corruption Day was organized in Vranje, and then ten more workshops on corruption. An important segment of this project was media visibility, so the organizers prepared letters of thanks for the media that followed the activities in the previous months. Among them are six media houses that reported on the activities of Vranje high school students and letters of thanks will be handed to them at the Vranje high school. Representatives of 20 cities and municipalities of Serbia, ie 13 regions, 23 schools and 3 civil society organizations participated in the project.