

Federation of Young Serbs of Europe

Analysis of the Position of the Romanian National Minority in the Republic of Serbia

Note: This analysis has been written by members and representatives of the Federation of Young Serbs of Europe, registered under number 667228695033-13 in the Transparency Register of the European Parliament. It is important to emphasize that this does not represent the official stance or analysis of the Republic of Serbia or its official representatives in any way. However, we hope that this analysis will contribute to understanding and resolving disagreements regarding the position of the Romanian national minority in the Republic of Serbia, providing valuable insights for both sides.

Romania and Serbia have maintained friendly relations for centuries. It is important to note that at no point in history—whether under socialist or monarchical regimes, or as republics today—have these two countries been in conflict. On the contrary, Queen Natalija Obrenović Sturdza-Kesko, of Romanian descent, and Queen Maria Karađorđević, also of Romanian heritage, serve as symbols of friendship and mutual respect. These historical ties underscore the continuous efforts to nurture the amicable relations between the two nations. As an old saying goes, *“Romania has only two friends: Serbia and the Black Sea.”*

This analysis serves as a reasoned response to the letter sent by Mr. Sturdza Serban Dimitrie, a Member of the European Parliament from the Republic of Romania, addressed to H.E. Marta Kos, European Commissioner for Enlargement, dated January 8, 2025.

Serbia, like Romania in the past, is undergoing the process of European integration. Since 2004, the Republic of Serbia has been actively engaged in this process. Currently, 22 out of 35 negotiation chapters have been opened, and Serbia is committed to addressing the challenges identified in these chapters, including issues related to human and minority rights, as outlined in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. To date, Serbia has submitted five state reports and is currently under monitoring by the competent bodies of the Council of Europe. The most recent report dates back to 2022.

Unfortunately, in your letter to European Commissioner Marta Kos, you refer to a resolution from 2008, whereas since then, Serbia has submitted three additional implementation reports on the Framework Convention, along with five other state reports. Serbia has taken significant steps to improve the position of national minorities, particularly in terms of the use of minority languages and education. According to data from the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, in addition to Serbian, 12 minority languages are officially recognized in Serbia.

It is important to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia differentiates between the Romanian and Vlach national minorities. We acknowledge that this approach may cause certain disagreements; however, according to Serbia’s interpretation, we refer to Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which states:

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"Every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not to be treated as such and shall not be put at a disadvantage as a result of that choice or of the exercise of the rights which are connected to that choice."

Thus, if an individual identifies as Vlach, they have the right to do so, with Vlach as their mother tongue.

The Romanian national minority is among the largest in the Republic of Serbia. In terms of population size, it ranks eighth among national minorities (if Yugoslavs are considered a national minority, which, according to the Constitution and legislation, they theoretically are). The minorities with larger populations than Romanians are Hungarians, Bosniaks, Roma, Albanians, Slovaks, Croats, and Yugoslavs. While Romanians rank seventh among the 19 officially recognized national minorities, this does not diminish their significance, as each of these 19 national minorities has its own National Council, playing a crucial role in preserving and promoting cultural and linguistic rights.

According to the Law on the Official Use of Languages (2018), in settlements where a national minority constitutes more than 15%¹ of the population, based on the latest census results, the names of public institutions, local government units, settlements, squares, streets, and other toponyms must be written in the language of the respective national minority. In accordance with this provision, the Romanian language is officially used in 9 local government units, while the Vlach language is officially used in 12 local government units.

Mr. Sturdza claims that there are 241 localities in Serbia with a significant Romanian population. However, according to official census data and the Law on the Official Use of Languages, the Vlach language is in use in 12 localities, while the Romanian language is officially used in 9 municipalities. The following is a list of municipalities units with 15% or more Romanian residents, along with the number of settlements in each:

- Alibunar (10 localities)
- Bela Crkva (14 localities)
- Vršac (24 localities)
- Žitište (12 localities)
- Zrenjanin (22 localities)
- Kovačica (8 localities)
- Kovin (10 localities)
- Plandište (14 localities)
- Sečanj (11 localities)

This totals 125 settlements within 9 municipalities where there is a significant presence of the Romanian minority—not 241, as previously stated.

In the Fourth Opinion on the Implementation of the Framework Convention, adopted on June 26, 2019, the Advisory Committee did not specifically highlight this issue, further

¹ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_sluzbenoj_upotrebi_jezika_i_pisama.html

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demonstrating that Serbia respects the rights of its citizens to self-identify. Another proof of Serbia's respect for individual identity is the 2022 census, which registered over 27,000 Yugoslavs, despite the fact that Yugoslavia has not existed for more than two decades. Therefore, we believe that the right to self-identification should not be imposed upon the citizens of Serbia or its institutions.

One of the most inaccurate claims in Mr. Sturdza's letter relates to the number of Romanians in Serbia, which he estimates to be approximately 330,000. It is likely that this figure includes those who identify as Vlachs. However, according to the 2022 census, the actual number of Romanians in Serbia is 23,044, distributed as follows:

- 3,449 in Central Serbia
- 19,595 in Vojvodina

Meanwhile, the number of Vlachs is 21,013, with the majority in Central Serbia (20,828) and only 185 in Vojvodina.

The combined total of Romanians and Vlachs is 44,057, which is 7.5 times lower than the 330,000 figure cited.²

For historical context, in 1948, when the Romanian population in the former Yugoslavia was at its peak, there were 63,000 Romanians. This confirms that the claim of 330,000 Romanians in Serbia is inaccurate.

Under the Law on National Minority Councils, which ensures that national minorities are adequately represented in dialogue with Serbian institutions, both the Vlach and Romanian national minorities have their official representatives:

- Romanian National Minority: Valentin Ardeljan
- Vlach National Minority: Novica Janosević

According to the Law on National Minorities, funding for the work of national minority councils comes from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and local self-governments (JLS). In 2023, the Vlach and Romanian national minorities received the following allocations:

- Vlach National Minority: 9,076,227 RSD (~78,243 EUR)
- Romanian National Minority: 16,567,218 RSD (~142,820 EUR)
- Budget of AP Vojvodina for the Romanian National Council: 4,182,000 RSD (~36,000 EUR)

To our knowledge, the Romanian People's Party does not exist in Serbia. The only similar organization is the Vlach People's Party.

We fully agree and call on the relevant ministries and institutions to increase oversight of mining activities in the Bor and Zaječar districts. It is crucial to ensure that the Chinese company Zi-Jin complies with European regulations and standards to protect both the environment and the rights of the local population.

² <https://popis2022.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/5-vestisaopstenja/news-events/20230428-konacnirezpopisa>

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Media and Information in the Romanian Language : In 2021, a total of 374,018 minutes of content was broadcast in Romanian on RTS1, RTS2, RTS Svet, and RTV Vojvodina. Additionally, 1,054,892 minutes were aired on Radio Belgrade and Radio Novi Sad.

For media projects supporting national minorities, funding allocations were as follows:

- Vlach minority: 7 projects – 3,700,000 RSD (~31,896 EUR)
- Romanian minority: 500,000 RSD (~4,300 EUR) from the Serbian state budget
- AP Vojvodina: 350,000 RSD (~3,000 EUR) for additional projects
- Newspapers publishing content in Romanian: 61,980,000 RSD (~534,310 EUR) in 2023

Total funding for Romanian-language media in 2023: Over 540,000 EUR

Culture : For cultural events in 2023, funding was distributed as follows:

- Romanian national minority:
 - 880,000 RSD (~7,500 EUR) for 8 projects
 - 16,660,000 RSD (~144,310 EUR) in AP Vojvodina for 18 projects
 - Total: 20,525,000 RSD (~176,939 EUR)
- Vlach national minority:
 - 430,000 RSD (~4,000 EUR) from the Serbian state budget

Education and Language Use : For the 2024/2025 school year, the following student numbers were recorded for education in the Romanian language:

- 657 students attended full education in Romanian
- 1,675 students took Romanian as an elective subject
- 101 students attended full Romanian-language education in high schools

Funding allocations for education in the Romanian language (2023):

- AP Vojvodina:
 - 163,796 RSD (~1,200 EUR) for Romanian-language test preparation
 - 470,000 RSD (~4,200 EUR) for research in the Department of Romanian Studies
- Serbian state budget: 1,773,796 RSD (~15,291 EUR) for education in minority languages, covering:
 - Training of educators, teachers, and professors of Romanian³

These measures ensure adequate teacher coverage and the continued promotion of the Romanian language in Serbian schools

Jurisdiction and Church Affairs : We believe that the jurisdictional issue between the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and the Romanian Orthodox Church (RPC) should be resolved through an open and constructive dialogue between the two churches, with minimal state intervention. The key lies in mutual agreement that respects the autonomy and specificities of both sides.

³ <https://www.pravniportal.com/upis-u-skolu-na-jeziku-nacionalne-manjine/>

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While state institutions can and should provide support in this process, the final resolution must emerge through ecclesiastical consensus, in the spirit of Christian understanding and cooperation.

The issue of RPC jurisdiction in eastern Serbia has become particularly relevant due to the presence of Romanian Orthodox Church clergy and religious sites in this region. Additionally, during the visit of Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs to Romania in 2022, an agreement was signed between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of Romania, granting property rights over the "Lućafarul" building to Romania. This reflects a willingness for dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes.

We firmly believe that this dialogue-based approach, rooted in mutual respect, represents the best path toward a lasting resolution of this complex issue.

For the preparation of this text, we relied on official documents from the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue of the Republic of Serbia, specifically:

- ***Information on the Status of National Minorities in the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 2023***
- ***Census of the Republic of Serbia, 2022***
- ***Information on the Status of the Romanian National Minority in the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 2023***
- ***Information on the Status of the Vlach National Minority in the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 2023***

These official sources provide relevant data on the position of national minorities in Serbia and were crucial in understanding and analyzing current issues related to jurisdiction and inter-church relations.

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