

## **National Minorities in Europe and their Protection Issues: Legal Institutions and the Civil Society Contributions**

### **Flensburg, European Center for Minority Issues: Monitoring the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**

On July 5, 2013 the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) organized a high-level experts' conference on "Shaping the Frame Across the Cycles", on Monitoring the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), in Flensborghus, Flensburg, Germany.



*From the open conference "Shaping the Frame across the Cycles", Flensborghus 5*

The conference sought to present the experts' views in the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention (ACFC) for the first 15 years of its existence. In the frame of the conference the ECMI staff as well as the invited professionals provided the chronicles of the ACFC; its launch, activities, actions, achievements as well as impediments it faces. It is to be mentioned that the ECMI managed to gather the most outstanding experts in regards to the ACFC, among them being the first president of the ACFC, Prof. Rainer Hofmann. The conference was divided into three sections. To begin with the mandate of the ACFC was described, afterwards the enforcement mechanisms were discussed and lastly, the monitoring systems were under discourse.

The conference was also a tribute to Rainer Hofmann. Moreover, the outcomes of the conference are to be published in a "Festschrift" in honor to Hofmann for his dedicated excellent experience in the Advisory Committee.



*Professor Hofmann and the audience of the conference*

In the end it is to be mentioned that the conference, full of scholastic and pragmatic analyses regarding the minority issues, their protection and the protection structures, strengths and weaknesses (among which the "monitoring fatigue" of the Council of Europe Member States) was also spiced with warm opening and closing words as well as pleasant coffee breaks which provided an excellent floor for further discussions and debates.

The European Centre for Minority Issues, see also under [www.ecmi.de](http://www.ecmi.de), is funded by the Danish and German governments as well as by the one of Schleswig-Holstein state in North Germany. It has also very efficient outlets in the Caucasus (Georgia) and Kosovo and has an excellent record in any European minority issue, running also an outstanding standing and electronic library.

### **Tom Lantos Institute, Budapest: Norms and Practices of Minority Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe**

In the same token, acknowledging the primacy of ensuring non-discriminatory and tolerant environment for the diverse national minorities as the basis for the societal development

and secure atmosphere, the National University of Public Service and the Tom Lantos Institute organized International Summer School on Minority Rights: Norms and Practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe in Budapest, Hungary, from August 4-10, 2013. To the point, the Summer School was organized very painstakingly and meticulously, taking into account the interests and priorities of all and each of the participants.

During the widely comprehensive, academic and at the same time interactive lectures it was highlighted that inclusion and participation are the forces contributing to raising the national minorities' awareness of their duties, responsibilities as well as rights and privileges. Additionally, it was argued that solidarity is an inseparable component for having civic society as well as encouraging pluralistic democratic systems. The whole programme of the Summer School could be divided into two parts. Firstly, the international norms, practices and mechanisms in managing the ethno-cultural diversity in Europe were presented. In the second part of the programme the implementation of minority rights were analyzed. To fulfill the objective various case studies were deployed, among them being Muslim Turks of Western Thrace in Greece, Jewish life and Anti-Semitism, the Hungarian minority protection system, the Serbian system, the Romanian practice as well as the situation in Kosovo. Additionally, the implementation of the Roma rights was discussed.



*In the Budapest "classroom"*



The Tom Lantos Institute was launched in the context with the long-time US Congressman Tom Lantos, who as Hungarian had survived the Holocaust and was among those American Congressmen who knew perfectly what was going on in different European countries, what led him also to chair the US Delegation for the inter-parliamentary talks with the European Parliament. So it was logical that in the frame of the Summer School, the participants paid a visit to the Jewish Community House in Budapest, where they received the hospitality of the Hungarian Jews, enjoyed an interesting and also entertaining presentation on “Jewish Communities in Central Europe: Revival and Inter-Ethnic Relations Viewed Through Jokes” as well as walked to see the two Synagogues in Budapest. It is to be mentioned that this was not the only occasion to have a meeting with the national minorities’ communities in Hungary.

*EUFAJ's Ofelya Sargsyan before the door of a Jewish Synagogue*

There was also a field trip to Szentendre, a small town not far from Budapest. Here, an informative and exciting meeting was waiting for the participants. The representatives of the Serbian community presented the history, activities and life of the Serbs in Hungary. Moreover, a Serbian museum and two Orthodox churches were visited.

What is to be added is that the Summer School provided an excellent ground for the experts in the field to have very comprehensive and all-inclusive discussions and debates on various issues related to the minorities, their rights, implementation structures, fatigues as well as successes. The programme was a unique occasion to enrich academic knowledge and skills with the help of the scholars as well as the participants who were all open-minded and sensible specialists of the field, as post graduates or Ph.D. candidates, or in public administration, NGOs or journalism. It was interesting to have discussions with them both in the realm of the lectures as well as during informal meetings.

All in all, the Summer School provided wonderful memories to all of the parties. It enabled to enlarge the scope of knowledge on national minorities, establish new contacts as well as have a nice time and sightseeing in the wonderful capital-city of Hungary, Budapest.

Both the conferences "Shaping the Frame Across the Cycles" held by ECMI and the Summer School on Minority Rights organized by the National University of Public Service and the Tom Lantos Institute were covered by Ofelya Sargsyan, M.A., Junior Editor at the European Union Foreign Affairs Journal (EUFAJ).



*Anna-Maria Bíro (2nd from the right), Director of Tom Lantos Institute in Budapest, Ofelya Sargsyan from EUFAJ (left), and two participants from Romania and Great Britain.*



*The participants of TLI Summer School at a group picture, during the hot weather of Budapest in the*

*beginning of August 2013, with Anna-Maria B ro (center), Director of the Tom Lantos Institut, Ali Huseyinoglu (next to Biro from the left) and Balazs Vizi ( 1<sup>st</sup> in the last row from the right )*