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The Rusinian and Ukrainian languages in the Current Laws of Serbia

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Языковые права русинов, украинцев и других национальных меньшинств в законодательстве Республики Сербия

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The aim of the research is to determine the language rights of the Rusin, Ukrainian and other national minorities as fixed in the laws of the Republic of Serbia.

Rusins and Ukrainians began to settle in the territory of modern Serbia from the middle of the 18th century, when the government of the Austrian Empire made a decision to populate the lands seized from the Ottoman Empire. At present, according to the 2011 Census, the number of Rusins and Ukrainians in Serbia is small: less than half a percent in total: 14,246 (0.20%) and 4,903 (0.07%) people respectively. Based on the 1981 – 2011 census results in Serbia, data are given on the negative dynamics of the absolute and relative number of Rusins and Ukrainians, as well as the number of those who have Rusinian (Rusin) as their mother tongue. Most of Serbian Rusins and Ukrainians live in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: 13,928 and 4,202 respectively (2011).

Despite the fact that Rusins make up 0.2% of the population of Serbia, and Ukrainians even less than 0.1%, they were officially recognized as

national minorities, whose rights (including language) are recognized and protected by the state. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in the relevant section (Art. 75 and 79) provides for a broad implementation of the language rights of the national minorities in record management, education, place name labels and signs, media, etc. in autonomous provinces and units of local government where such minorities form a considerable part of the population.

In addition to the Constitution, implementation of the language rights of the national minorities is regulated by a number of republican laws. For example, in 1991 a law was passed "On the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets", which stated that minority languages can be introduced into official use in municipalities and provinces by basic laws (statutes) of the territorial-administrative units.

These rights are confirmed and specified in the law of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia "On the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities" (2002). According to this law, local governments are obliged to introduce into official use the language and alphabet of a national minority which makes up at least 15% of the total population according to the latest census. If a language has this status before the adoption of the law, the status is reserved for it, regardless of the number of people who speak it at the time of the latest census. The law also explains in detail what is meant by the "official use of minority languages": their use in court proceedings and in government, in communication with the authorities, in the publication of documents, in official records in ballots, etc. In addition, the names of the local government units, settlements, squares and streets, bodies exercising public functions, etc. are also given in the language of the national minority.

It should be noted that, although Rusins do not make up 15% of the population in any of Serbia's municipalities, six communities have the Rusinian language in official use in their municipalities.

The right of municipalities to approve the official use of minority languages and alphabets is also fixed in Serbian laws "On Local Self-Government" of 1999, 2002 and 2007.

In 2005, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) of the Council of Europe, and committed itself to the protection and development of ten such languages in Serbia (including Rusinian and Ukrainian) and two in Montenegro (Albanian and Romani).

The Council of Europe adopted ECRML in 1992, and today 33 of the 47 states which are members of the Council of Europe signed and 25 ratified it. The Charter in its main part (Part III) consists of a set

of obligations in relation to regional or minority languages, of which the states that signed the document should select and ensure the implementation of no less than 35 paragraphs and subparagraphs of six articles in this Part (it contains seven articles in total).

According to the law on the ratification of the Charter, the Republic of Serbia has committed itself to ensure that the language rights of national minorities are observed in the following areas: education, court proceedings, administrative and public activities, media, culture, economic and social life and cross-border exchanges.

The article concludes that, although the national minorities in Serbia amount to about 12% of the population (and the number of people who did not give Serbian as a mother tongue is even smaller), the language rights of this category of the population are widely and fully reflected in modern Serbian legislation: in the Constitution of the state and in a number of special laws. The federal and international documents describe in detail the possibility of public functioning and development of the minority languages. However, it should be noted that Serbian legislation delegates a large part of these obligations to the units of regional and municipal levels: provinces and communities. Accordingly, to have a complete idea of the language rights of the Rusinian, Ukrainian and other national minorities of Serbia is possible only after considering the regional and local laws, which will be done in the following publications.

Keywords

Rusins, Ukrainians, Rusinian language, Ukrainian language, national minorities, Serbia.

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