

Hungarians

Profile

According to the 2002 census, there were 293,299 Hungarians in Serbia, or 3.9 per cent of the population. Most live in Vojvodina where they make up some 14 per cent of the population, and a majority in 8 municipalities. Hungarians speak Hungarian and most are Roman Catholic, but there are communities of Calvinists, Methodists and Unitarians.

Historical context

Before 1918, Vojvodina was a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It was administered from Budapest and had a large Hungarian population. Following the defeat of Austro-Hungary in World War I, Vojvodina became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Hungarians suffered discrimination after the First World War, when many of their properties were seized under the guise of land reform. During World War II, Hungary was allied with Nazi Germany and Hungary annexed sections of Vojvodina in exchange for supporting Hitler's invasion of Yugoslavia. After 1945, possibly as many as 30,000 Hungarians were murdered in revenge.

Under the 1974 constitution, Vojvodina acquired rights of autonomy analogous to those given to Kosovo. Hungarians had substantial collective rights, including more than 200 Hungarian-language elementary and secondary schools, a daily newspaper, and regular radio and television transmissions broadcast from Novi Sad. Vojvodina's autonomy was revoked in 1989. Although not as strongly targeted as the ethnic Croat community in Vojvodina, Hungarians were pressed to leave during the 1990s, and at least 50,000 Hungarians left for Hungary after the outbreak of war. Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj is currently on trial for war crimes at the ICTY, and one charge in his indictment covers his alleged role in the 'ethnic cleansing' of ethnic Hungarians from Vojvodina. In 2002, Vojvodina regained many competencies it lost when its autonomy was taken away in 1989. Many Hungarian and other minority representatives continued to argue that Vojvodina should have many more powers, including in fields crucial for minority protection, and control from Belgrade is the major problem.

Current issues

Turnout for the constitutional referendum in October 2006 was particularly low in Vojvodina, where some political leaders and some 20 civic organizations urged a boycott. Only an estimated 14 per cent of ethnic Hungarians voted. The new constitution led to greater centralization of power in Belgrade, and a diminishment of the province's authorities. Despite political discontent, incidents of ethnic violence against ethnic Hungarians have dropped in the past few years.