

# **The Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the Protection of the National Minorities Between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary as the Best Practice for Successful Bilateral Cooperation in the Field of the Mutual Protection of National Minorities**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, bilateral cooperation of the Republic of Croatia in the field of the protection of the rights of national minorities with the states where the Croatian national minority live, and especially work and activities of the Intergovernmental Joint Committee (IJC) for the protection of the national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary, are described and analysed. Concluded in 1995 in Osijek and ratified by both states, this IJC was established to monitor the implementation of The Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Hungary for the protection of the Hungarian minority in the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian minority in the Republic of Hungary. The Republic of Croatia also has three other IJCs: with the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro. Members appointed by the two governments participate in the sessions of the IJCs. Participating in the IJC between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary are representatives of the Croatian national minority in Hungary, the Hungarian national minority in Croatia, and representatives of governmental bodies of the Republic of Croatia and Hungary responsible for areas of particular interest to the national minorities. Sessions of the IJC are held alternately in the two states. Sixteen sessions of this IJC have been held to date. The first was held in 1995 in Zagreb, and the sixteenth in Budapest in 2022. After the sessions, minutes are signed and delivered to the governments of both states. Minutes contain recommendations for the undertaking of concrete activities to improve the status, position and rights of national minorities. Prominent examples of successfully realised projects based on these recommendations are the Hungarian Media Centre in Bilje, Croatia, and the Croatian Theatre in Pécs, Hungary. Successful implementation of the recommendations means raising the level of minority rights and contributions to the overall development of both states – the IJC for the protection of national minorities is an important institutional framework and a good mechanism that demonstrates that the two national minorities are undoubtedly an excellent bridge connecting these two friendly and neighbouring states: the Republic of Croatia and Hungary.

**Key words:** Protection of the rights of the national minorities, bilateral agreements, Croatian national minority, national minorities in Croatia, Croats in Hungary, Hungarians in Croatia

## **1. Introduction**

This paper will provide basic information on the international protection of national minorities rights, as well as the legal framework for the protection of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian national minority in European states.

In the central part of the paper, work and activities of the Intergovernmental Joint Committee (IJC) are described and analysed. The intragovernmental body IJC has been established to monitor the implementation of the Agreements for mutual protection of national minorities. The Republic of Croatia has IJCs with the following countries: Hungary, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro. Thereby, special emphasis will be given to the work of the IJC established between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary. It is an internationally recognised instrument for the protection of minority rights, and it was presented as an example of the best European practice in the field of the protection of national minorities at the OSCE and the Council of Europe's conferences.

The research is based on the analysis of the national and international legal documents and other available materials in the field of protection of the rights of national minorities, as well as the personal experience and participation of the authors of this paper in numerous IJC sessions (from 2008 to 2014 as a member, and from 2014 to the present as deputy co-chair).

## **2. The Legal framework for the protection of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia and Croatian national minorities in European states**

At the beginning of this article, I provide some basic information on the legal framework for the protection of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia, which is well developed and widely set up. In the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, namely in its preamble, all 22 national minorities in Croatia are mentioned: Albanians, Austrians, Bosniacs, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Hungarians, Jews, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Italians, Turks, Ukrainians and Vlachs. Apart from the constitutional provisions, Croatia additionally adopted the Constitutional National Minority Rights Act, the Act on Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities, and other Acts. Protection of the rights of the national minorities is a very important issue in the Republic of Croatia. An important issue in Croatia is also the Croats living outside our state, and that issue is regulated in detail by the Act on the Relations between the Republic of Croatia and the Croats outside the Republic of Croatia. The Act defines three categories of Croats living outside Croatia: the constituent Croatian people in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, the autochthonous Croatian national minority in twelve European states (Republic of Austria, Republic of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italian Republic, Republic of Kosovo, Hungary, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia, and Republic of Serbia)<sup>1</sup> and numerous Croatian emigrants and their descendants in European and overseas states<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, I point out that the national minorities in the Republic of Croatia and our compatriots living abroad are very important in our umbrella strategic document of state, the *National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia 2030*, which was adopted by the Croatian Parliament in February 2021.

In her book *European System for the Protection of the Rights of National Minorities*, Mazur Kumrić (2017) provides an overview of international activities, discussions, opinions, recommendations, resolutions, and charters defining the concept of a national minority. We can say that these documents highlight the importance of this issue and the importance of taking appropriate activities and measures towards this very important segment of many European societies and states.

Regarding the international documents encompassing this topic, which are ratified in our state, it is important to mention some of them: the United Nations' *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 1966 (particularly article 27 thereof) and *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, 1992; then the Council of Europe's

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<sup>1</sup> Croats came to certain parts of some of the mentioned states (e.g. Syrmia, Boka Kotorska or Hungarian Podravina) at the same time that they came to the territory of today's Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are among the oldest populations in these places. They also began to move to some of these areas in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing in large waves from the then (and today's) Croatian territories, primarily in the face of the onslaught of Ottoman conquerors, as well as for other economic and political reasons. Special attention should be paid to the fact that despite various difficulties, they managed to preserve for many centuries their Croatian identity, rich traditional culture, and specific local idioms of the Croatian language. They never lost awareness of their connection with the "old homeland". The institutions of the Republic of Croatia continuously strive to achieve the best possible communication and cooperation with members of autochthonous Croatian communities and to support them in preserving and developing their Croatian linguistic, religious, and national identity. More information on communication and cooperation with members of indigenous Croatian communities, their numbers by individual countries, and their key challenges and achievements can be found in Bošnjak (2019).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the *Act on Relations of the Republic of Croatia with Croats Abroad* was adopted by the Croatian Parliament on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2011, and that on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2019, the Macedonian Parliament decided to change the name of its state to the Republic of North Macedonia.

*European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, 1992 and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, 1994; and also the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's recommendations and guidelines, such as *The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*, 1996 and *The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age*, 2019.

Part of the legal framework also represents the signed bilateral agreements for the mutual protection of national minorities (with Hungary, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Italian Republic). Four agreements enabled establishing the Intergovernmental Joint Committees (IJC) to monitor the implementation of the agreements, but the agreement with the Italian Republic is very short, somewhat deficient, and asymmetric, and so there is no possibility of establishing an IJC<sup>3</sup>.

National minority rights are also an important issue, generally or within the field of education and culture, in several documents concluded with the aforementioned states and others: the Republic of Austria, Slovak Republic, Republic of Kosovo, Romania, etc.

The Republic of Croatia ensures a high level of protection for all national minorities living in our state, while the position and status of members of the Croatian national minority are regulated differently in the mentioned twelve states, in accordance with the legislation and assumed international or bilateral obligations of these states, as well as different historical and political circumstances. Croats have a defined status, i.e., they are recognised as a national minority (a national minority, nationality, linguistic minority, or people's group, in accordance with the legislation of a particular country) and accordingly enjoy certain minority rights in Hungary, Romania, Montenegro, the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Serbia, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Kosovo, the Czech Republic and in the Italian Republic. In the Republic of North Macedonia, they are not formally recognised, but there is a bilateral agreement between the two states on the mutual protection of national minorities, while they are not recognised as a national minority and do not have any special rights in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Slovenia.

Finally, with all the above, we cannot say that there are firm and binding international legal documents in the field of protection of national minorities, but

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed information on bilateral and multilateral documents, and the work of Intergovernmental Joint Committees can be found in Bošnjak (2020).

it is commonly believed that the level of protection of minority rights and freedoms is an expression of the democracy of a particular state<sup>4</sup>.

### **3. Intergovernmental Joint Committees for the protection of national minorities**

IJCs are established to monitor the implementation of the bilateral agreements for the mutual protection of the national minorities. The coordinating body on the Croatian side is the Central State Office for Croats Abroad. On the proposal of the Central State Office, the Government of the Republic of Croatia appoints the Co-chair, Deputy Co-chair, Secretary, and the members of the Croatian part of the IJCs. Members are representative/s of the national minority and representatives of governmental bodies responsible for the areas of special interest for persons belonging to the national minorities. The co-chair in all four IJCs is the State Secretary of the Central State Office Mr Zvonko Milas, and I am the Deputy Co-chair. The IJCs with Hungary and the Republic of Serbia have approximately 15 members each from different governmental bodies and three national minority representatives. The Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro IJCs each have six or seven members from different governmental

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<sup>4</sup> It is very important to have a better legal framework that provides certain conditions for nurturing a specific minority culture, language, and national identity, but for these rights to be consumed appropriately, public opinion and the attitude of the majority people towards members of a particular national minority and their home state are equally important. I am therefore pleased to say that, for example, in Hungary and Romania both of these conditions are met – the status is defined, and the social atmosphere is positive with a high level of minority rights and social inclusion achieved. On the contrary, unfortunately, I must mention the Republic of Serbia as an example of a state where rights are relatively well defined (although there are still many unfulfilled commitments, such as the key one – ensuring representation), but the real problem is the negative attitude towards Croats and the Republic of Croatia. According to a February 2019 survey by *Faktor Plus* agency, Croats are the most hated group in Serbian society with 45% of the survey participants demonstrating negative feelings towards them. I hope that the process of ‘decroatisation’ carried out by Serbian institutions will be stopped. This can be achieved by stratification and declaring the so-called Bunjevac language as official, which undoubtedly belongs to the corpus of the Croatian language. At the same time, Serbian institutions should stop denying the existence of the Croatian language, given the centuries-old diachrony and the development of the Croatian language in every sense. As an example of a state where rights are not defined in the best way, but there is a very positive relationship between the domicile state, the public, and the majority of people, we will mention the Republic of North Macedonia. Fortunately, there are no examples of states in which a good legal framework has not been established and where at the same time the attitude of the majority people and the domicile state toward Croats is negative.

bodies and one national minority representative. Of course, the other side has approximately the same composition.

IJC sessions are attended by diplomatic representatives of both states of the rank of ambassador and consul general.

However, I want to stress that the key role in the functioning of the IJCs is held by the representatives of the national minorities. They are the most important members of IJC: they give assessments of recent situations, reflect on the measures taken and activities, and give suggestions for new recommendations.

The task of the IJCs is to assess the implementation of the Agreement and to submit recommendations concerning the implementation of the Agreement. IJC recommendations are entered into the minutes and signed by the co-chairmen of both sides. They are then given to the governments of both states concerning the key issues and topics of vital interest for both minorities: culture, education, information and official use of minority languages, representation in the public services, and the representative bodies.

Sessions of the IJC should be held once a year in one of the two states. However, for many reasons, this is very difficult to achieve in practice. So, I am very proud that we have succeeded in 2018 in holding sessions for all four IJCs. In 2019, IJC sessions were held with Serbia (March), North Macedonia (July), and Hungary (December). After that, for a long period, sessions could not be held because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but we had good communication with some of our partners even, under those specific circumstances. As a result, successful IJC sessions were held with the Republic of North Macedonia (November 2021) and Hungary (December 2022) as soon as the circumstances permitted.

### *3.1. The Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the protection of national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia*<sup>5</sup>

*The Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro for the protection of the Croatian minority in Serbia and Montenegro and the Serbian and Montenegrin minority in the Republic of Croatia was signed in Belgrade in 2004.*

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<sup>5</sup> In the Republic of Croatia, the Decision on the Promulgation of the Act on the Ratification of the Agreement was published in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 03/2005, and the Agreement entered into force on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2005 (Publication in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 05/2005).

The state Serbia and Montenegro ceased to exist in 2006. On 3 June 2006, Montenegro officially declared independence after a verified referendum on the decision. The legal successor of the Agreement from 2004 is the Republic of Serbia, and a special bilateral agreement was concluded with Montenegro in 2009.

Eight sessions of this IJC have been held to date: The first in Belgrade in 2005, the seventh in Belgrade and Monoštor in 2018, and the eighth on 1-13 March 2019 in Zagreb and Pakrac.

Since the third session in Belgrade and Subotica, sessions last for two days; the first day in the capital city and the second in a place of special interest to members of a national minority. In this way, the focus on minority issues is further demonstrated.

I am sad to say that after the last two parliamentary elections in the Republic of Serbia (in June 2020 and April 2022), new Co-chairs and IJC members were not appointed. We therefore do not have a partner for communication and cooperation, since the previous Co-chair is no longer in service. Nevertheless, we are ready to continue working in this IJC and wait for the Serbian part to make a move.

### *3.2. The Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the protection of national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and Montenegro*

*The Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and Montenegro for the protection of the Croatian minority in Montenegro and Montenegrin minority in the Republic of Croatia was signed in Zagreb in 2009.*<sup>6</sup>

Three sessions of the IJC have been held to date: The first in Podgorica in 2015, the second in Zagreb in 2017, and the third on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2018 in Podgorica. After the third session in Podgorica, we visited the Croatian minority institutions in the Bay of Kotor, as well as the Bishop of the Diocese of Kotor and the Mayor of the City of Tivat.

In this IJC, the official part lasts for one day, but there are always various activities after sessions, visits among the national minorities, and meetings with officials at the state and local levels.

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<sup>6</sup> In our state, the Decision on the Promulgation of the Act on the Ratification of the Agreement was published in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 09/2009, and the Agreement entered into force on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 (Publication in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 07/2011).

Unfortunately, as in the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro did not appoint a new Co-chair and new members of the IJC after the parliamentary election in August 2020. Despite some difficulties in the functioning of the Montenegrin government, we hope that they will appoint their part of the IJC soon.

### *3.3. The Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the protection of national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of North Macedonia*

*The Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia for the Protection of the Croatian minority in the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian minority in the Republic of Croatia was signed in Split in 2007.*<sup>7</sup>

Five sessions of the IJC have been held to date: The first in Skopje in 2009, the second in Zagreb in 2010, the third in Skopje in 2018, the fourth in Zagreb in 2019, and the fifth in Skopje on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2021.

The situation with this IJC is much better. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we were and are in continuous and close communication with our partners from the Republic of North Macedonia.<sup>8</sup> Soon after the parliamentary election in July 2020, they appointed the new Co-chair and members of the IJC, and so we held the fifth session of the IJC in Skopje in November 2021. This was the first official session since December 2019 and the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>7</sup> In the Republic of Croatia, the Decision on the Promulgation of the Act on The Confirmation of the Agreement was published in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 03/2008, and the Agreement entered into force on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 (Publication in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 05/2008).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that during the third session of this IJC, the (then) Macedonian Prime Minister Mr. Zoran Zaev received the delegation of the Republic of Croatia headed by the State Secretary of the Central State Office and Co-Chairman of the IJC Mr. Zvonko Milas as the first foreign delegation after Macedonia and Greece signed the Agreement in Prespa (about the name of the state – the Republic of North Macedonia). Mr. Zaev stressed the importance of developing bilateral cooperation with the Republic of Croatia for his state, showed interest in the work of the MMO, and expressed understanding of the importance of resolving outstanding issues of Croats living in North Macedonia. It was concluded that it is crucial for the Republic of North Macedonia, as soon as the conditions are met, to appropriately define the status of the Croatian national minority in accordance with the signed Agreement between the two countries from 2007.



#### **4. The Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the protection of national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary**

*The Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Hungary for the protection of the Hungarian minority in the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian minority in the Republic of Hungary* was signed in Osijek in 1995.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after signing the Agreement and the ratification in both states, to monitor the implementation of the Agreement at the governmental level and in accordance with Article 16 of the Agreement, the IJC was established. Sessions of the IJC have alternated between the two states: the first session on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1995 in Zagreb, the second in Budapest in 1996, the third in Zagreb in 1997, the fourth in Budapest in 1999, the fifth in Osijek in 2001, the sixth in Pécs in 2002, the seventh in Zadar in 2005, the eighth in Budapest in 2006, the ninth in Zagreb in 2007, the tenth in Budapest in 2008, the eleventh in Zagreb in 2009, the twelfth in Budapest in 2012, the thirteenth in Zagreb in 2017, the fourteenth in Budapest in 2018, the fifteenth in Zagreb in 2019, and the sixteenth on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 in Budapest (Photograph 5, Photograph 6, Photograph 7).

In the IJC between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary, representatives of the Croatian national minority in Hungary and the Hungarian national minority in Croatia participated, as well as the representatives of the governmental bodies of the Republic of Croatia and Hungary responsible for areas of particular interest to the national minorities.

Our communication with our Hungarian colleagues is very good and equally intensive, not only during the formal sessions, but even more so between and especially before sessions. We analyse and comment on different suggestions of the representatives of both national minorities and try to find sustainable solutions. It is always useful to find reasonable and implementable solutions for various needs and desires. Of course, sometimes we do not have the same attitude, but our dialog is always constructive, argumentative and with mutual respect. Mr. Zvonko Milas and Mr. Ferenc Kalmár, Co-chairs of this IJC, conduct sessions in a good way, and our last three sessions were very successful and efficient.

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<sup>9</sup> In our state, the Decision on the Promulgation of the Act on the Ratification of the Agreement was published in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 08/1995, and the Agreement entered into force on the 22th of April 1996 (Publication in the Official Gazette – International Treaties 01/1997).

## 5. Achievements of the Intergovernmental Joint Committee for the protection of minorities between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary

This IJC has yielded many achievements, the most important of which are the regional use of the official minority languages in both states and participation in the representative bodies at the local, regional and national levels, including parliamentary representation in both states: Member of Croatian Parliament (*Hrvatski sabor*)<sup>10</sup> and spokesman (i.e. non-voting MP) in the Hungarian National Assembly (*Országgyűlés*). Besides that, significant progress has been made in the culture and information by supporting institutions and associations in both states. This means enabling information in the mother tongues, establishing cultural centres for both minorities, and supporting many different cultural activities. Special attention is also given to education and higher education: enabling teaching in the mother tongues, and establishing the study of Croatian language and literature at universities in Hungary, and the study of the Hungarian language and literature at universities in Croatia.

As previously stated, after the sessions, minutes with the recommendations are signed and delivered to the governments of both states. In this case, both governments consider them very seriously and responsibly and accept the recommendations, demanding the undertaking of concrete activities, which should improve the status, position and rights of the national minorities.

Our good cooperation is internationally recognised and appreciated. I had the special honour, together with my Hungarian colleague Mr. Csaba Pákozdi, to present the work and activities of this IJC as an example of the best European practice in the field of the protection of national minorities at the OSCE's *Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting* in Vienna in November 2016<sup>11</sup>, and at the conference *Best practices in the field of national minority rights* organised during the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of Europe in Budapest in

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<sup>10</sup> The Croatian Parliament (*Hrvatski sabor*) now has 151 members. Of those 151, three seats are dedicated to Croats abroad and eight to national minorities in Croatia: Three are dedicated to the Serbian minority, one to the Italian minority, one to the Hungarian minority, one to the Czech and Slovak minority, and two to other national minorities in Croatia. The Deputy Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Mr. Furio Radin is the representative of the Italian minority, and the vice-president of the Croatian Government, Ms. Anja Šimpraga, is also the representative of the Serbian minority. Before Ms. Šimpraga, the vice-president was Mr. Boris Milošević, who was also member of the IJC between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia, as was Mr. Robert Jankovics, MP in the Croatian Parliament, representative of the Hungarian minority, and member of the relevant IJC.

<sup>11</sup> *OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) III: National Minorities, Bridge Building and Integration: Final Report* (2016),

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/1/306461.pdf>

October 2021 (Bošnjak 2021) together with my Hungarian colleague Mr. Ferenc Kalmár.

Prominent examples of successfully realised activities through projects include the Hungarian House in Beli Manastir, the School Hall in the Elementary school in Lug, the Hungarian Media Centre in Bilje, the Croatian Cultural Centre in Baja, and the Croatian Theatre in Pécs.

Other projects include the Croatian Education Centre in Pécs in Szombathely, and the Hungarian Educational and Cultural Centre in Osijek. The opening of the Dormitory of the Hungarian Educational and Cultural Centre was attended by the presidents of the two governments, Mr. Andrej Plenković and Mr. Viktor Orbán, which clearly shows the importance of the national minorities in the overall socio-political relations of the two states.

Without a doubt, it is very good and commendable that the representatives of the two minorities are working together on a lot of projects in the fields of education, science, art, and culture in the broadest sense of the word. They also cooperate well in economic and communal cross-border projects.

I think it is necessary that the people involved in the work of the IJC have a positive opinion of what they are doing, and it is good to be recognised by international institutions. Perhaps the most reliable indicator and important measure of efficiency and success is that most members of both minorities are very satisfied with the work and achievements of this IJC.

## **6. Conclusion**

With the solid arguments presented in this article, we can say that the Republic of Croatia and Hungary provide the highest level of national minority rights in Europe. The mechanism of the IJC between the two states certainly helps to facilitate this.

It is noticeable that wherever an IJC is established, minority rights are increasing, and the status of the minorities improves – faster or slower, with obstacles, but surely and continuously. Therefore, and with full responsibility, we can state that the IJC is a very effective mechanism for the improvement of minority rights and, at the same time, for the relations between states. This conclusion is based on the studied legal documents and other available materials in the field of protection of the rights of national minorities, as well as personal experience and participation of the authors of this paper at a large number of Sessions of the IJCs (from 2008 to 2014 as a member and from 2014 until today as deputy co-chair), and active monitoring of what was done according to the minutes of the sessions.

In conclusion, successful implementation of the recommendations of the IJC means raising the level of minority rights and contributing to the overall development of the relations of both states. Therefore, the IJC for the protection of national minorities between the Republic of Croatia and Hungary is an important institutional framework and a good mechanism. It demonstrates that the Hungarian and Croatian national minorities are undoubtedly an excellent bridge connecting these two friendly and neighbouring nations (Croatians and Hungarians) and states (the Republic of Croatia and Hungary).

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## Sažetak

U ovom radu opisana je analizirana bilateralna suradnja Republike Hrvatske u području zaštite prava nacionalnih manjina s državama u kojima živi hrvatska nacionalna manjina, a posebno rad i aktivnosti Međuvladinog zajedničkog odbora (MMO) za zaštitu nacionalnih manjina između Republike Hrvatske i Mađarske. Ovaj MMO osnovan je radi praćenja provedbe *Sporazuma između Republike Hrvatske i Republike Mađarske o zaštiti mađarske manjine u Republici Hrvatskoj i hrvatske manjine u Republici Mađarskoj*, sklopljenog 1995. godine u Osijeku i ratificiranog u obje države. Republika Hrvatska ima još tri MMO-a: s Republikom Srbijom, Republikom Sjevernom Makedonijom i Crnom Gorom. U radu međuvladinih mješovitih odbora sudjeluju članovi koje imenuju vlade dviju država. U MMO-u između Republike Hrvatske i Mađarske sudjeluju predstavnici hrvatske nacionalne manjine u Mađarskoj i mađarske nacionalne manjine u Hrvatskoj te predstavnici tijela državne uprave Republike Hrvatske i Mađarske nadležni za područja od posebnog interesa za nacionalne manjine. Sjednice MMO-a održavaju se naizmjenice u dvjema državama. Do sada je održano šesnaest sjednica ovog MMO-a, prva sjednica održana je 1995. u Zagrebu, a šesnaesta sjednica u Budimpešti 2022. godine. Nakon održanih sjednica potpisuju se zapisnici u kojima se vladama obiju država daju preporuke za poduzimanje konkretnih aktivnosti kojima će se poboljšati položaj i status te povećati razina ostvarenosti prava nacionalnih manjina. Istaknuti primjeri uspješno realiziranih projekata na temelju tih preporuka uključuju Mađarski medijski centar u Bilju u Hrvatskoj i Hrvatsko kazalište u Pečuhu u Mađarskoj. Uspješna

provedba preporuka znači podizanje razine prava manjina i doprinos ukupnom razvoju dviju država – MMO za zaštitu nacionalnih manjina važan je institucionalni okvir i dobar mehanizam koji pokazuje da su dvije nacionalne manjine nesumnjivo izvrstan most koji povezuje dvije prijateljske i susjedne države: Republiku Hrvatsku i Mađarsku.

**Ključne riječi:** zaštita prava nacionalnih manjina, bilateralni sporazumi, hrvatska nacionalna manjina, nacionalne manjine u Hrvatskoj, Hrvati u Mađarskoj, Mađari u Hrvatskoj