



On 9 October 2018, during an official visit to Düsseldorf, State Secretary Ivica Toncev visited the Government of the North Rhein-Westphalia province in Germany where he met with Serap Güler, State Secretary for integration at the Ministry for Children, Family, Refugees and Integration.

In the talks with his German colleague, State Secretary Toncev stressed that Serbian citizens were successfully integrated into German society, to the satisfaction of both parties. He also talked about a few concrete topics regarding the position of the Serbs living in North Rhein-Westphalia which is currently home to 70,000 Serbian citizens, although unofficially this number is well over 100,000.

The State Secretary underlined that there was a need for a more synchronized cooperation on the engagement of Serbian language teachers in supplementary schools in this province. In this connection, they noted that the lector from Cologne should take a more active part in the teacher selection process. The fact that there are 16 Serbian Church municipalities in NRW province bringing together the majority of Serbian expats was also stressed.

The two State Secretaries also discussed the „brain drain“ issue and immigration of Serbian citizens to Germany. It was said that Serbia wanted intense cooperation with Germany but that it could not be benevolent in relation to the huge brain drain of experts from Serbia, who are educated in Serbia and later on move to the Western European countries like Germany, leaving behind gaps on the Serbian labour market. The State Secretary therefore suggested that arrangements needed to be made which would undoubtedly ensure the exchange of experts on the market, but that would also vouch for their return to Serbia where they would continue their work, especially bearing in mind that Serbia recorded a significant economic growth and an expansion in IT and construction sectors. It was for this reason that State Secretary Toncev stressed that Serbia could not afford a huge brain drain of experts educated in their homeland and expressed his hopes that Germany would bear this in mind in its further labour market policymaking.

The interlocutors noted that the Serbian diaspora in Germany was highly integrated from the

point of view of interior affairs and that the crime rate pertaining to the Serbian population in the province was very low, having dropped from 4% to 2% over the last couple of years, according to the data provided by the provincial police.

The discussion between the two officials was a friendly and constructive exchange with a view to having a good quality and even better integration of the Serbian community in the Province. In this context, State Secretary Toncev asked Mrs. Güler to find ways of providing additional and more adequate facilities for Serbian clubs which are around twenty in North Rhein-Westphalia.