**SCGB AGM 2024 held on Monday 19 February 2024 at 18.00**

**at the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia, 28 Belgrave Square, London SW1**

1. **Present:** Avram Balabanovič**,** Dejan Brkić, Aca Divac, Nada Hinić, Angelina Janković, Maya Jordan, Ivan Miletić, Djordje Perendia, Ljiljana Radan Pavlović

Olga Stanojlović, Nikola Swann, and Vesna Erić

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Maya Atkinson-Milanković, Petar Janković, Žika Petrović, Zvezdana Popović and Lazar Vuković
2. **Minutes of Last Meeting:** The minutes were agreed
3. **Matters Arising:** No Matters Arising that are not on the agenda
4. **Project Reports:**
	1. **The 2023 Serbian Month Catalogue:** Maya said that the third catalogue of Serbian Month 'British Serbs' was published, with a new chapter dedicated to Serbian customs (including celebrations of the Slava, Christmas and Easter) and gastronomy as an intangible cultural heritage. She said that chapters from the previous year's catalogue on famous British Serbs, British Friends of Serbia, and Serbian communities (Telford and Cambridge) also featured. Maya went on to say that the catalogue also included articles from young and older generations of British Serbs, and a piece about the relationship of Queen Elizabeth II and Serbia. She said that information about organizations, as well as successful academics, artists and athletes, was also included. Maya said that the catalogue had been well received both in Britain and Serbia and copies of the catalogue were sent to key stakeholders in Serbia and Britain e.g. the All Party Parliamentary Group on Serbia, the British Embassy and British Council, the Office of HRH Crown Prince Alexander. She reported that the catalogue had been had been paid for by a grant from the Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Maya said that the sale of the catalogues and income from advertising, mainly from restaurants, was used to fund Serbian Month, since the timetable for funding from the Office for the Diaspora prevented us from seeking funding for Serbian Month activities. Maya said that production of the catalogue was very time consuming and stressful and it meant that she and Olga, who were joint-editors, had little time to focus on Serbian Month itself.
	2. **Serbian Month**

Maya said that Serbian Month in Great Britain was held for the 15th time from 26th January to 8th March 2023 and once again it was a large festival which promoted Serbian culture, education, language, and art and created bridges between British and Serbian people. She said that the programme was extremely rich and varied programme and included 40 live and virtual events, held in 11 cities (London, Aylesbury, Bedford, Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Corby, Halifax, Leicester, Reading and Shrewsbury). Maya reported that the feedback was positive and many thought that this was the best programme to date.

Maya went on to highlight the some of the main activities of Serbian Month. She said that the Saint Sava celebrations, celebrated in several cities (London, Bedford, Halifax, Reading, Leicester), kicked off Serbian Month and that we continued to promote our churches and this year, we published a video about the Church of St. Prophet Elijah in Corby. She said that another St Sava Ball was organised Njegos Foundation London and was held under the auspices of the Hilandar Monastery in the presence of Archimandrite Methodius, as well as famous artists, trumpeter Nikola Mijajlović, soprano Tamara Radjenović and others.

Maya said that other musical events included a concert by the klezmer-Balkan band She Koyokh at Wigmore Hall in London, the Vremeplov band in Birmingham, as well as classical music concerts performed by accordionist Miloš Milivojević, soprano Silva McQueen, tenor Leonel Pinher, pianists Maya Jordan and Mina Miletić, cellist Nicola Tait Baxter and the popular London Tango Quintet. She reported that our actresses Sandra Siladjev and Ela Dorman-Gajić dazzled the stage with their talent. Painter George Perendia exhibited his works in the Bookery Gallerie and writers Jelena Nolan Roll and Živojin Ivković, a guest from Serbia, led a discussion on writing in the diaspora at events in Bristol and London, during which the book 'Talking About Blocks' was presented.

Maya said that the Serbian Council organised several events. A lecture by Nik Ilić, former military attaché at the British Embassy in Belgrade was held on ZOOM and a large audience heard about the role of the British in Yugoslavia in WW2. She went on to say that another very well attended event was the promotion of Nick Allan’s book 'When Dreams Collide: A Journey Through Yugoslavia with Rebecca West'. Maya said that the Serbian Council in cooperation with Jasenovac and Holocaust Memorial Foundation presented a screening of the documentary film "The Story of the Cherry Tree" produced by Astra production from Pirot about the fate of the Jewish citizens of Pirot in WW2 which was enriched by the talk on the history of Jewish population in former Yugoslavia given by historian Dr Bojan Aleksov (Associate Professor at the UCL SSEES).

Maya said that Serbian Month and the Serbian Month Catalogue received a lot of coverage in Serbia, thanks to the efforts of Natasha Kocsis but that we had little success in Britain, and this was made worse now that Britić had ceased publishing. This was in the main part due to lack of time but also because we did not have the skills within the team to make the best use of social media. It was **agreed** that we should explore the possibility of paying someone to undertake PR in the UK and perhaps combine this with assistance in producing the catalogue and assistance with administrative tasks for the organisation so that Officers could focus on strategic issues.

* 1. **The Serbian Language**

Olga said that the Serbian Council leads the Round Table’s work in the Serbian language which began in 2011 with the establishment of the Round Table Working Group on the Serbian Language which aims topromote the teaching and learning of the Serbian language in Britain, to standardise the way it is taught, and to obtain a recognised qualification in Serbian at GCSE and A Level.

She went on to say that the focus has been on older learners from 12 to 17 years for whom there was no provision following the withdrawal of Serbian-Croatian O and A Level in England in the early 1990s.

Olga reported that the Working Group has taken forward these priorities from 2019 by entering into a partnership with the Azbukum Centre for Serbian Language and Culture in Serbia to deliver their Serbian language courses at beginner, GCSE and A Level. She said they did this because the Azbukum courses offer qualifications which are accredited by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and are recognised across Europe and beyond and which can be used for registration at universities in Serbia, or used to show knowledge of Serbian when applying for British universities or employment. Olga said that the approach is that of learning Serbian as a non-native or second language for students of Serbian heritage living in the diaspora, which is the methodology the Working Group feels is most appropriate for our students. She said that courses are delivered online and so can attract students from across the UK and Ireland.

Olga said that last year 14 students completed the courses successfully and they will receive their certificates from Lazar Dzamić author, journalist, academic and leading European marketing and brand strategist at an Award Ceremony on 24 February which will be combined with a talk and concert to celebrate Nikola Tesla. This year we have 15 students on the courses.

Olga went on to say that there are significant challenges in delivering courses for this age group are which include: the ability to recruit sufficient students at each level to make the course financially viable; the level of fees that are charged in comparison to other courses; and the ability of students to commit to the requirements of the course because of school and other commitments

Olga drew attention to the fact that the landscape of Serbian language teaching and learning has changed since the Round Table Working Group started work in 2011 and the Working Group needs to review its strategy. She said that the changes included:

* the possibility of developing a closer relationship with the St Sava Church School for Britain and Ireland which offers Serbian lessons for children aged from 5 to 12 and which from 2021 the school coordinates the teaching of Serbian language and religion across Great Britain and Ireland. This is possible because the school builds on programmes developed by the Azbukum Centre
* the re-establishment of the Dopunska Škola in 2019 It now teaches 255 students from 5 to 14 in Corby, Bedford, Leicester and London (Hammersmith and Dulwich), Newcastle, Oxford, Birmingham, Redhill and Surrey and with 5 online groups.
* the new policy of ‘honorary ‘teachers’ introduced by the Serbian Ministry of Education which allows the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers from within the Serbian diaspora to teach in Dopunska Škola network. The important issue which is requires clarification if there is flexibility about the way in which the language element of courses can be taught.
	1. **The Round Table**

Olga said that one of the main priorities of the Serbian Council is supporting and strengthening the Round Table of Serbian organisations, which it was a driving force in establishing several years ago. She said that the aim the Round Table is to encourage cooperation and collaboration between Serbian community groups and organisations across the UK and Ireland (UK&I) and to provide a forum to discuss issues of interest and importance to the Serbian community. Olga said that the Serbian Council believes that this type of collaboration strengthens the impact of the Serbian community within wider British society and with Serbia.

She reported that the priorities of the Round Table remain the same as in past years the promotion of the teaching and learning of the Serbian language in Britain and Ireland and production of the Serbian Month Catalogue and delivery of Serbian Month. Other issues that the Round Table has addressed include commemorative events, suggestions for the use of the Creative Embassy by the Serbian diaspora and simplifying the process of the diaspora to vote in Serbian elections.

Olga went on to say that the other policy that that the Round Table has maintained over the years is that of electing two people to represent the Serbian community in Britain to the Office of the Diaspora and other Serbian and UK institutions, a democratic tradition that started with electing representatives to the Diaspora Assembly when it was in operation. She said that this was particularly important this year because a Vidovdan Assembly of the Diaspora had held in July 2023 to which the UK was allocated five representatives and Ireland three. Olga said that a Round Table meeting was held in June 2023 where it was agreed that the Round Table should elect and endorse representatives to the Vidovdan Assembly and that the decision should be communicated to the organisers and copied to the Embassy. She said that at the meeting it was agreed that the UK should be represented by its two elected representatives, Dragana Tomašević, Jasenovac and Holocaust Memorial Foundation and Lazar Vuković, Serbian Council and that it endorse representation by Jadranka Dervišević-Kitarić, British Serbian Chamber of Commerce, Nada Hinić, Serbian Society and Michaela Mitrović, ОССЦИ. Olga reported that Lazar Vuković attended the Vidovdan Assembly and was called to speak at one of the sessions but it proved impossible for other UK representatives, who joined the meeting by Zoom, to contribute, which was very unsatisfactory since they had been informed that they could participate via Zoom.

Olga said that other priorities identified by the Round Table is how to engage young people in community activities and encouraging the involvement of communities from outside of London in the work of the Round Table. She said that unfortunately, little progress had been made in taking these issues forward because of the lack of capacity of members of the Round Table Steering Group who are responsible for managing the Round Table

**6.Treasurer’s Report**: The Treasurer’s report was handed out at the meeting. Ivan said that it was difficult to present an accurate picture of the finances because of the school and because the end of the financial year was in July. Avram Balabanović and Nada Hinić expressed their concern about the Treasurer’s report because it was impossible to ascertain the actual financial position of the Trust from the report. They felt that expenditure should be broken down by sector and show the income, expenditure and commitment. Ivan said that this information existed on a spreadsheet and he agreed to provide the information requested and Nada offered her assistance and advice on producing an appropriate financial report.

Ivan said that the financial foundation of the organisation was membership and that in the past this had raised around £1,000 but had fallen following a decision which was made some time ago to abolish the membership fee and replace it with funding for projects. This had been unsuccessful and the membership fee had been reintroduced but needed to be built up significantly.

**7.**  **Election of Officers and Management Committee Members**: Olga reported that the papers had been circulated include the names and short biographies of those standing for Officer posts and as Members of the Management Committee. The positions are not contested so the individuals were elected to the posts for which they stood. These were

**Officers**

Chair Olga Stanojlović

Secretary Maya Jordan

Treasurer Ivan Miletić

**Members of the Management Committee**

Maya Milanković Atkinson

Dejan Brkić

Aco Divac

Žika Petrović

Zvezdana Popović

Lazar Vuković

**8. Any other business:**

Dejan Brkić raised the issue of trying to get a blue plaque for Borislav Pekić. It was **agreed** that this should be explored and taken forward.