

Working session 16: Democratic institutions

## The importance of integration of National Minorities:

When you integrate you become part. Integration does not mean that you lose your identity but become an integral part of the society.

Its different from participation which create a parallel system which leads to isolation 'us and them' and discrimination.

Integration means incorporation as equals into society of individuals of different groups.

National minorities coming from totalitarian regimes bring with them baggage which contradict with the values of democracy. Therefor early teaching of democratic values is required and crucial. As an Iraqi lady said after the fall of Saddam, that we felt like a bird which was in a cage for a long time and the cage door was opened but the bird did not know what to do.

We should not hide behind our cultures. Each culture has some things which contradict with the universal declaration of human right specially the freedom of thought, conscious and religion. Values like freedom, equality and justice. The same way you scrutinize right-wing extremism and nationalists for values which does not fit with democracy and human rights and ask them to eliminate them to be part of the democratic process. Like for example "discrimination, superiority complex and intolerance".

We should do the same with national minorities who may have similar issues contradicting with democratic and human right values. They use 'culture' and 'religion' as a cover for it; things like superiority complex, gender inequality, honor killing, anti conversion laws, religious discrimination, intolerance and considering different opinion and disagreement as an offense and using violence to get their way or settle differences.

Some of the things mentioned above were in the past also considered cultural things in the west and was eliminated through the years as it's values contradicted with democratic human rights values.

We need to teach the importance of free speech, equality and tolerance and make National Minorities know their rights. Otherwise they will be bullied by their own communities to not integrate. They may get intimidated and accused of not being loyal to their community. Even sometimes terrorized in order to remain in their statues quote. We need to protect them, stand with them and help them to integrate and enjoy their new freedom and respect the freedom of others.

*"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others", Nelson Mandela*

Europe has been a safe-heaven for us and we are thankful for the way we were accepted as full citizen experiencing all our rights. The countries we come from receive refuges but the refugees always remain refugees. It is not possible for the refugee and the immigrant to become citizens.

We will not like Europe to become like the countries we come from; countries without, freedom of thought and conscious and religion, countries without freedom of speech, equality and justice.

We need to protect these values because it is the bases of democracy and development and progress.

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