

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018

Working Session 8: Tolerance and non-discrimination I

Intervention by Jednakost

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### National Minorities

National Minorities Councils (NMCs) were introduced in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia as a model for exercising the cultural autonomy of national minorities. However in many important ways NMCs have failed to fulfil its initial role. Rather they have promoted the self-isolation of minority communities and hindered interaction between minority communities and the broader Serbian society.

From early on neither the role nor function of NMCs were clearly defined. This resulted in two main problems:

a. NMCs became highly politicized. They have been misused by both majority and minority political parties.

b. NMCs repeatedly overstep their public powers beyond the four areas prescribed by the Law (education, culture, official use of minority language and script, and media in minority languages) and continue to monopolize overall minority policy, including the allocation of public resources.

Legislative changes made in June 2018 regulated the most acute problems and led to a harmonized legal framework pertaining to national minorities. However these changes failed to tackle the fundamental challenge of NMCs – which is that in their present role they contribute to the creation of parallel societies and thus the segregation of minorities.

Therefore, a broad public debate should be initiated by the Serbian government. This debate should include civil society and examine alternative models for cultural autonomy of minorities in Serbia as the general approach taken by the state to minority issues.

Furthermore the role and public powers of NMCs should be reconsidered and made to serve the best interests of both minority communities and society as a whole. We must apply inter- and cross-cultural approaches when developing and implementing minority policies.

Finally although the political nature of NMCs may not be fully prevented the over-politization of these bodies must be held in check and eventually eradicated with overstepping of public powers strongly sanctioned.