

UN Minority Forum "Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities"

Session 3: Focusing on the rights of minorities and effective prevention of conflicts

Dear Madam Chair,

Two decades after the bloody break-up of the former Yugoslavia, which marked genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the Western Balkans region continues to be a post-conflict zone in which the probability of conflicts erupting again has been recently increasing more than ever. The inability to build a sustainable peace is indicated by the recent rise of inter-ethnic tensions, the constant rhetoric of hate speech against different identities, public denial of recognized war crimes and the return of the discourse on expansionist and hegemonic projects of the 90's. Meanwhile, this same region has expressed its aspirations to be part of a European family built on the principles of peace, freedom, human rights, democracy and equality. Unfortunately, the WB's so far path to integrate into the European Union is failing to build a sustainable peace in the region, nor a justice system that closes the chapter of the past by dealing with accountability, punishment and reparation for war crimes committed. Thus, this integration process faces constant challenges in building a society that substantially adopts universal and European values, that respects diversity and equality between peoples, minority rights, and that creates a friendly neighborhood in the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.

In order to prevent the escalation of this situation into conflict, I recommend:

- European Union should be more diligent when it comes to the fulfillment of one of the key Copenhagen Criteria in its enlargement policy with respective WB countries, which is the protection of human and minority rights. It should strengthen the monitoring mechanisms on implementation of the legislative framework on minorities and increase its impact in changing the course of exclusive and discriminatory governmental practices towards the protection of minority rights.
- All the representations of international and regional intergovernmental organizations, present in the Western Balkans, such as the European Union, the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, which are active in the field of protection of human and minority rights and in the field of security, should strengthen their efforts in creating more collaborative partnerships, synergies and liaisons on the monitoring of minority rights, identification of violations for early warning and conflict prevention. They should also play a more proactive role in awareness raising for minority rights among WB societies.
- WB states should strengthen efforts in public, namely cultural diplomacy, using soft power in order to strengthen intercultural dialogue between their societies. In this context, mobility programs and schemes among the youth of WB societies need to be boosted.
- WB states should adopt and integrate the inclusive and diversity approach in various dimensions. They need to build inclusive institutions, where minorities are properly represented and have a voice and a proactive role in issues that affect them. They should also build inclusive education systems, where national curricula involves the teaching of minority identities.

Thank you for your attention!

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