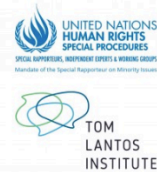


# European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM 6 – 7 MAY 2019



European Regional Forum on Minority Issues

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## Intervention from Ana Brtko

(Independent representative; organisation/affiliation: Association “DeaDia”, Kovačica, Serbia).

Dear Dr Fernand de Varennes and Tom Lantos Institute, thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this forum and share my opinion.

My name is Ana Brtko, and I am a director of an NGO Dea Dia based in Serbia that works towards providing equal access to quality education for all, and protection and promotion of minority human rights.

I have been working in multilingual and multinational environment in the region of Vojvodina in Serbia, which is also very linguistically diverse, as a teacher for over 10 years, so I would like to share my hands-on experience in the field.

During my work in formal and non-formal education, I got introduced to the deficiencies when it comes to practical pedagogies and implementation of policies in terms of minority rights to language and quality education. The quality of education in minority languages is still affected by inadequate teaching materials and lack of textbooks (in minority languages), and lack of teaching staff for individual subjects, most often the inadequate qualifications of the teachers and/or their inadequate knowledge of the

minority language. Slovak ethnical and language minority group alongside other minorities living in the municipality of Kovačica are not fully aware about their human rights. Although they know about the right to learn, communicate, teach and have media in their mother tongue, they are not aware that the disputable quality of and the hindered access to those services is also a violation of their human rights. Despite the possibilities provided by the Charter on the Use of Minority Languages, this provision is rarely applied in practice. The administrative bodies rarely use minority languages, except for the administration of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and although there is a somewhat satisfactory level of presence of minority languages in public radio and television broadcasts in Vojvodina, the privatisation of public broadcasters has considerably reduced the offer and quality of broadcasts available in minority languages at the local level in Serbia. As far as the situation in schools is concerned, there is a worryingly high thresholds of the minority language knowledge students need to fulfill in order for a minority class to be formed (minimum of 15 students) which has led to the considerable reduction of classes where the instruction is in mother tongue. Also, the pre-school education in the Roma language was recently terminated. Furthermore, working as a teacher in primary and secondary schools since 2011, where the teaching is done in minority languages, I have witnessed a lot of corruption and misuse of the right to teach and study in your mother tongue- most often the inadequate qualifications of the teachers and/or their inadequate knowledge of the minority language.

All of this greatly erodes the quality of education and a native language knowledge and contributes to its consequent extinction.

Moreover, the excessive brain drain from our municipality and the region of Vojvodina to Slovakia and Hungary in the last years, leaves only few speakers to begin with.

These migrations are partly due to the aforementioned inadequacies of minorities' education, discriminatory attitudes in the country towards minorities and the systematic denial of opportunities for upward mobility.

Minorities in Vojvodina face greater difficulties when they try to join the social, political and economic life, which consequently produces, legitimizes and reiterates unequal status and distribution of power and resources.

Furthermore, these power dynamics and politics of representation, together with the legacy of ethno-nationally based conflicts, have been contributing to the rise of the youth radicalisation in the region. All of these factors have been contributing to the erosion of trust among different national and ethnic groups, making young people from minority groups in Serbia face a strong identity crises, feel ostracised and even ashamed of their background.

The minority issue was oftentimes the basis of the conflicts and wars in the Balkans region, which proves that the adequate dealing with the issues of minorities is the key social and political question in the Western Balkans.

So, I would like to provide some practical recommendations on measures to effectively tackle these issues by presenting the Dea Dia projects in the field of education.

Within Dea Dia we have been working on:

1. the education and empowerment of minorities, especially linguistic and national minorities in the municipality of Kovačica, Vojvodina,
2. teacher trainings,
3. tackling youth radicalisation in the multinational/lingual environments,
4. and working with the Erasmus+ projects for young people from the region of Vojvodina.

So, my RECOMMENDATIONS FOR the OSCE and UN agencies would be-

1. ***develop more teacher training (professional development) programmes and include education experts and practitioners from formal and non-formal education in their development.***

Educators, whether teachers, researchers or activists, play an important role in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of the young people with whom they work, so we work on building teachers' competences in recognizing their own discriminating pedagogical and evaluative work, creating a safe environment of mutual trust, breaking down stereotypes, showcasing the value of diversity and broadening the understanding of universal human rights. In Serbia, there is no systematic approach in the curriculum to tackling identity-based discrimination in schools, and it is only the NGOs who develop the programmes. Therefore, the key competencies teachers need to acquire, in order to address exclusion and combat the stigmatisation of minority groups in their respective countries, are: 1. **the recognition** of their own prejudices, biases, privileges and position of power in the society alongside identifying the discriminatory and exclusionary practices of others; 2. **constructive and effective management** of the discriminatory situations when they arise; 3. **methods how to transform** these situations and discriminatory behaviour and attitudes (through the creation of safe spaces and adoption of more inclusive practices).

2. **develop more youth projects (e.g. through Erasmus+ platform)** and include young people in the development and implementation of those initiatives. These projects should promote the intercultural exchange and understanding, and tackle topics such as the rights of minorities (language minorities included), because they have the power to bridge ethnic and national distances, and foster dialogue and cooperation between different majority and minority groups. During these cultural exchanges, young people tend to develop more favourable attitudes towards the different identities alongside receiving the education on important human rights topics. More importantly, these projects contribute to their feeling as a part of the EU, development of their European identity and adoption of the EU values.

3. **develop more peace education initiatives**, especially in the region of the Western Balkans in order to tackle further youth radicalisation.

Since the violent break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in the 1990s, right-wing and religious extremism has been present in Serbia. Although violent

extremism is still not a serious problem in Serbia, recent researches on the attitudes of high-schoolers show that young people in the Western Balkans tend to discriminate in a high degree against national and religious minorities. E.g., young people from South Serbia are ready to use violence to resolve political issues with a total of 54% who would be ready to fight for the Preševo Valley to become part of Kosovo, and 47% would be prepared to go to war over the unification of Kosovo and Albania.

Further issues recognised in the 2015-2025 National Youth Strategy include peer violence, violent behaviour by sports supporters' groups, violence against LGBT and Roma, violence in intimate relationships, lack of respect for human and minority rights, and frequent use and abuse of weapons.

Young people feel unable to resolve disputes peacefully, finding it difficult to embrace diversity due to a culture of violence and intolerance, feeling unable to express oneself, feeling disrespected and unrecognised, feeling disillusioned with the government, perceiving social inequality favouring specific groups, experiencing a lack of opportunity in terms of education and jobs, and experiencing a lack of meaning, identity, belonging, and cultural acknowledgment.

Poor quality of education in Serbia and lack of critical thinking further facilitates the process of culturalization of politics, and is unable to produce effective methods and/or policies to tackle the situation.

The key to prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is identifying the weak spots in Serbia which are societal fragmentation along the national and ethnic lines, lack of possibilities for young people and the role of regional politics.

Therefore, more joint peace-building regional projects on root causes of radicalisation, effective methods to understand and resolve conflicts, and the question of identity for and with young people prone to radicalisation and/or extremism should be developed.

We have been developing peace-building projects with peace organisations and experts from all over Europe (especially Finland and other Scandinavian countries, which have an extensive knowledge and experience in the matter), and these kind of partnerships could also prove advantageous for the similar projects in the Western Balkans.