

POSITION OF MINORITIES IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF MONTENEGRO

POLICY BRIEF





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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Centre for Monitoring and Research (CeMI) implemented the project entitled 'Contribution to the inclusion of minorities in the political life of Montenegro' with the financial support of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

The goal of this project was to respond to the current challenges in the political life of Montenegro, especially regarding the insufficient participation of minority peoples and other minority national communities in the decision-making system in Montenegro. Our goal was to contribute to the improvement of their political inclusion by strengthening the capacities of relevant organizations and raising awareness of their rights among the membership and the general public.

To that end, the project consisted of a set of activities aimed at providing support to organizations dealing with the protection of minority rights, as well as educating members of minority nations and other minority national communities about political participation and decision-making processes. Through information and advocacy campaigns, we tried to create a more favorable environment for a greater degree of inclusion of minority groups in the political life of our country.

The policy brief before you is one of the products of this project, and it was created as a result of our effort to provide deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities of political participation of minorities and other national communities in Montenegro. Through the analysis of relevant data and the application of expert research methods, this study will enable us to better understand the context and identify the key factors that influence their political inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The participation of minorities in the political life of Montenegro is a complex issue that relates to various aspects of political engagement, representation in institutions and challenges that minority groups face. Designing a sustainable policy of multiculturalism in a divided society, such as Montenegrin, requires changes in the value system as well. Respect for uniqueness and diversity are fundamental conditions for a stable and progressive society. This principle also represents part of the achievements of the European Union, as a community that represents the most modern example of the coexistence of diversity. The key foreign political priority of Montenegro is the accession to the EU, and the motto of the European Union is 'united in diversity'. Through the implementation of this principle, a high degree of protection of the rights of minorities and preservation of their identity is enabled.

The policy of multiculturalism faces numerous challenges all over the world, including in Montenegro. Key challenges relate to ethnic tensions and conflicts that may arise from long-standing political, socio-economic or cultural divisions; identity issues; integration and inclusion: access to education, employment, health services and other resources, as well as promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; extremism and radicalization: these phenomena can be caused by a feeling of marginalization, injustice or non-acceptance; politicization of ethnic and cultural identities - policies based on ethnic or national divisions can make it difficult to build inter-ethnic trust and cooperation; the impact of global trends and phenomena such as migration, globalization and xenophobia can also influence the politics of multiculturalism in the local context. In political culture, there are noticeable tendencies of closure within ethnic, linguistic and religious communities, which leads to defining the boundaries and goals of political influence based on ethnic characteristics and collusion. These challenges require careful analysis, political community maturity and appropriate political and social strategies to ensure the coexistence of different ethnic groups and build an inclusive multicultural community.

The EU strategy for the Western Balkans¹ confirms the 'European future' of the region as a geostrategic goal for a stable and united Europe, based on common values. Emphasizing the commitment to the principle of the rule of law in the process of adopting European standards and values points to the need for the countries of the Western Balkans to reform their systems in order to ensure security, respect for fundamental rights, the fight against corruption and terrorism, and the recognition and realization of fundamental rights and the elimination of discrimination, especially towards the vulnerable groups, such as members of national minorities, especially the Roma. The process of accession to the European Union includes the gradual establishment of an institutional and legal framework that is in line with EU norms and values. This demanding process implies essential social reforms in the candidate states, along with the development of democracy through the rule of law. This implies the construction of a political system based on the division of power as the basis of social and political stability, with an independent judiciary, an

¹ <http://europars/strategija-za-zapadni-balkan-eu-zapocinje-nove-vodece>

effective fight against corruption, full implementation of the law, protection of human rights and a determined fight against discrimination.

Montenegro is a collection of different communities, whose members often do not know much about each other, and mutual prejudices can cause ethnic distance. Ethnic distance refers to the measure of distance or difference between different ethnic groups in society. The research of ethnic distance is very necessary, in order to see what the relations of each other are, especially in the light of current political divisions. CEDEM's studies on ethnic distance in Montenegro investigate the attitudes and perceptions of citizens towards members of different ethnic groups in society, as well as the factors that influence these attitudes. Key findings include information on the level of ethnic distance between different groups, the factors that influence that distance (such as political attitudes, socioeconomic status, education, etc.), and possible implications for society and politics. Furthermore, the study investigates citizens' perceptions of multi-ethnic relations in society, feelings of belonging and identity, and attitudes towards political issues related to ethnic divisions. Key findings from these and other studies provide important insights into the dynamics of ethnic relations in Montenegro and can serve as a basis for the development of policies aimed at reducing ethnic divisions and promoting inter-ethnic understanding. The 'Ethnic distance'² research from December 2023 shows that every fifth member of any community expresses ethnic distance. The results of the research indicate that discrimination mostly refers to work and employment, education, as well as public services. Participation in the government is the most important factor among all ethnic communities when it comes to the perception of discrimination and non-respect of minority rights. Research³ showed that the ethnic distance decreased among Serbs, while it increased among Bosniaks. 'The key reason for the decrease is that the number of Serbs who express ethnic distance, which was previously high, significantly decreased due to the fact that there was a change of government and significant participation of members of that nation in the government', explained CEDEM's chief methodologist, Professor Milos Basic, adding that the same reason led Bosniaks to distance themselves more. He said that young people show a lower level of ethnic distance compared to the elderly.

The state's interest lies in achieving social stability, and in multi-ethnic societies this can be achieved through better social integration of minorities through multilingualism, a sense of social security and intercultural exchange. Montenegro, as a multi-ethnic country, must be inclusive. A condition for the well-being of society is that members of minorities are in every government. National affiliation plays an important role in the identity of individuals and groups and is a key factor in social stratification. Therefore, the inclusion of different national, racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, as well as their members, is an indispensable element of pluralism in society and the state.

² Milos Basic, Ethnic Distance in Montenegro, CEDEM, 2023, <https://www.cedem.me/istrazivanje/nivo-etnicke-distance-smanjeno-u-posljednjih-pet-godina/>

³ Milos Basic, Nationalism and Ethnic Distance in Montenegro, CEDEM, 2023, <https://www.cedem.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Izvestaj-Etnicka-distanca-i-nacionalizam-PRAVI-DOKUMENT-1.pdf>



NATIONAL CONTEXT

The multi-ethnic character of Montenegro implies the importance of including all communities in political life. Montenegro, as a multi-ethnic country, exists in conditions of numerous challenges when it comes to the rights of minorities. After the restoration of independence, the Constitution of Montenegro from 2007 played a crucial role in the guarantees of minority rights by following the structure of these rights given in key international and regional documents and the basis for the further development of the protection of minority rights. The preamble of the Constitution of Montenegro determines the state based on the values of freedom, peace, tolerance, respect for human rights and freedom, multiculturalism, democracy and the rule of law, as well as commitment to equal cooperation with other nations and states and European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Preamble of the Constitution determines the determination of free and equal citizens, as members of 'nations and national minorities' living in Montenegro: Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians, Muslims, Croats and others, to express their commitment to a democratic and civil Montenegro. From the point of view of the key principles of the Constitution, on which the exercise of all human rights, including minority rights, are based, the provisions by which Montenegro guarantees and protects rights and freedoms are relevant, and rights and freedoms are inviolable. According to Article 9 of the Constitution of Montenegro, confirmed and published international treaties and generally accepted rules of international law are an integral part of the internal legal order, have primacy over domestic legislation and are directly applied when they regulate relations differently from internal legislation. Among the legal instruments of the UN, these are: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Also, Montenegro is bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but not as a contractual obligation, but as an international customary law obligation. From the legal instruments of the Council of Europe, they are: the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages.

The contribution of society is extremely important in improving the respect of minority rights because the implementation of minority rights is not only a legal issue. The normative framework for the protection of minority rights represents an additional guarantee of more effective protection and respect for minority rights. Here we will identify the key laws and regulations related to the rights and position of minority groups in the political system of Montenegro.

2.1. The Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms

The System Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms⁴ further elaborates the constitutional principles and in Article 2 establishes the criteria for defining minority nations and other minority national communities, as well as enabling the effective participation of minorities in public life. They are defined as 'any group of citizens of Montenegro, numerically smaller than the rest of the prevailing population, which has common ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics, different from the rest of the population, is historically linked to Montenegro and motivated by the desire to express and preserve the national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity'. The equality of minorities in relation to other citizens is proclaimed in Article 4 of the Law and is ensured through protection against discrimination in all spheres of social life of minorities. Paragraph 2 of this article establishes the illegality and punishability of any violation of the rights of minorities, thereby additionally ensuring equality.

Based on Article 7 of the same Law, the Government of Montenegro adopts the Minority Policy Strategy, in order to ensure the conditions for the unhindered enjoyment and nurturing of the national or ethnic peculiarities of minorities and their members. This instrument defines measures for the implementation of the Law itself, as well as for improving the living conditions of minorities. The strategy represents a set of special measures in a five-year period, as well as the definition of carriers, deadlines and financial costs in order to improve the position of minorities and their better integration in society. International legal standards are implemented through this strategy, in a way that protects identity and enables minority equality.

On the basis of Article 8a of this law, the Government established a public institution, the Centre for the Preservation and Development of Minority Culture, for the purpose of promoting and protecting minority rights, encouraging the preservation, development and expression of the culture of minority nations and other minority national communities in Montenegro, and encouraging the spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and mutual respect and understanding. The work of this institution is supervised by the state administration body responsible for human and minority rights. In accordance with this law, minorities can establish institutions, societies, associations and non-governmental organizations in all areas of social life in order to preserve and develop their national or ethnic identity.

The set of identity issues includes the right to enter one's own name and surname in one's own language and script in official documents, that is, the use of one's own language and script as a right of special importance for minorities. Using the mother tongue enables members of minorities to actively participate in social life. Thus, in Article 11 paragraph 2 of this law, it is prescribed that in local self-government units where members of minorities make up the majority or at least 5% of the population, according to the results of the last two consecutive censuses, the language of that minority is also in official use. This includes the use of the language in administrative and court proceedings, when issuing public documents, on ballots and the like, writing the names of local self-government units, settlements, squares, streets, institutions and others in the language and script of minorities. In the field of information, in accordance with Article 12 of this Law, minorities

⁴ Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 31/06 and 38/07 and Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 2/11 and 31/17

are provided with freedom of information at the level of standards contained in international documents on human rights and freedoms. In addition, Article 13 of this law gives minorities the right to schooling in their own language and to the representation of that language in general and vocational education, at all levels of upbringing and education, depending on the number of students and the financial capabilities of Montenegro.

Article 20 of this Law prescribes the right to use national symbols. This issue is regulated by a special law. Article 21 of this law provides minorities with the right to mark significant dates, events and personalities from their tradition and history, as part of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Montenegro. Article 22, as well as Art. 31 and 32 of this law prescribe the possibility of association of minorities, in accordance with the law and internationally recognized principles, as well as the establishment of contacts and cooperation with citizens and associations outside Montenegro with whom they share a common national and ethnic origin, cultural-historical heritage or religious beliefs.

Several institutions deal with the protection of rights and the improvement of the position of minorities in Montenegro, such as the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms, the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman), councils of minority nations and other minority national communities, The Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights, the Centre for the Preservation and Development of Minority Culture (CEKUM) and others.

2.1.1. Councils of minorities or other minority national communities

Article 79 of the Constitution guarantees rights and freedoms to members of minority nations and other minority national communities that they can use individually and in community with others, including the establishment of the Council for the Protection and Promotion of Special Rights. The right to establish minority councils is also prescribed by Article 33 of the Law. A minority nation or other minority national community and their members may, in order to preserve their national identity and improve their rights and freedoms, establish a council of that minority nation or other minority national community. Six councils were established in Montenegro: the Albanian National Council, the Bosniak Council, the Croatian Council, the Muslim People's Council, the Roma Council and the Serbian National Council.

Article 36 foresees the establishment of the Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights, which is established by the Parliament of Montenegro in order to support activities important for the preservation and development of the identity of minorities in the area of national, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. The act establishing the Fund determines the Fund's bodies, their mandate, competences and the manner of their work and decision-making, the composition and number of members of the management body, as well as other issues of importance for the Fund's work. In the management body of the Fund, each council of a minority nation or other minority national community has its own representative. In the amendments to the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms from 2017, new articles 36a to 36s were added, which regulate issues related to the organization of the Fund, rights and obligations, financing, as well as authorizations related to the activities of the Fund.

With the adoption of the Law on the Selection, Use and Public Display of National Symbols⁵, minorities were granted the right to use national symbols. According to this Law, symbols used by members of minority nations and other minority national communities for their representation and expression of their national identity are considered national symbols. The national symbols are the coat of arms, the flag and the anthem. The standard of the coat of arms and the flag, as well as the sheet music of the national anthem, are determined by the decision of the council of the minority nation or other minority national community, in the manner determined by the statute of the council. Consent to such a decision is given by the Government of Montenegro, and the original of the coat of arms, the original of the flag and the sheet music of the anthem are kept by the President of the Parliament of Montenegro. The coat of arms, flag and anthem are used in the form and content determined in accordance with this law. The law stipulates that national symbols cannot offend the feelings of others with their content.

2.2. Education, culture and information

In addition to the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, the legal framework that regulates the rights of minorities and other minority national communities consists of laws and other acts that regulate the exercise of rights in certain areas, such as education, information, culture, use of language and letters, etc. One of the important laws is the Law on the Selection, Use and Public Display of National Symbols⁶. This Law regulates the right to free choice, use and public display of national symbols of members of minority nations and other minority national communities. The Law on Local Self-Government⁷ stipulates that in the performance of their duties, local self-government bodies are obliged to ensure equal protection of the rights and legal interests of local residents and legal entities based on the law, and that the municipality provides conditions for the protection and promotion of minority rights. It is also prescribed that the municipality is obliged to provide conditions for the protection and promotion of minority rights and gender equality (Article 11), that local officials or employees in the performance of their duties may not discriminate on the basis of belonging to a minority national community or a minority people (Article 95). In order to ensure and improve the right of proportional representation of minorities and other minority national communities, the obligation of the human resources management unit to monitor the implementation of measures to achieve equal representation is prescribed (Article 146). The law also stipulates that the program of public hearings, in municipalities where the majority or a significant part of the population is made up of members of minority nations, is also held in their language (Article 168).

The General Law on Education and Upbringing⁸ particularly emphasizes the rights of minorities and refers to the availability of education, culture and information in the languages of minority groups, as well as the impact of education on political participation. Article 11 of the law stipulates that classes are conducted in the languages in official use, respecting the rights of minorities, while specifying the languages in which the classes are conducted (Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian languages). Article 29 of the law prescribes that, for the purpose of deciding on professional issues and for professional assistance in the decision-making process and the preparation of regulations in the field of education, a National Council is established, while Article 31a prescribes

⁵ Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 003/20 from 23.01.2020.

⁶ Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 003/20 from 23.01.2020.

⁷ Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 2/18.

⁸ Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 64/02, 31/05 and 49/07 and Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 45/10, 45/11, 39/13 and 44/13 and 47/17.

that one third of the members of the National Council are elected from among representatives of minority nations and other minority national communities. When hiring teachers, the Law stipulates that teachers in institutions or a special department of an institution with classes in the language of members of minority nations and other minority national communities must, in addition to the conditions prescribed by law, have an active knowledge of the language and script of that minority and the Montenegrin language.

The Law on Culture⁹, when determining the principles on which it rests in Montenegro, prescribes that, among other things, they are contained in the freedom of creativity and respect for the right to culture; commitment of the state and local self-government to encourage and help the development of cultural and artistic creativity and the protection and preservation of cultural heritage; equal preservation of all cultural identities and respect for cultural diversity; and finally - building and improving the culture system, in accordance with international standards, especially EU standards. In this sense, the Law particularly emphasizes the public interest, which is reflected in the preservation of original and traditional cultural and ethno-cultural peculiarities in Montenegro. Realization of public interest in culture is provided by Montenegro and local self-government, and the method and measures of realization of public interest are determined by the National Cultural Development Program.

The Fund for Encouraging Pluralism and Diversity of the Media, through the Law on Media¹⁰, encourages the provision of public services in order to realize the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law for 'non-commercial media content of public interest, in the languages of minorities and other minority national communities.' The funds from the Fund are used to encourage media pluralism, and especially for the production and publication of content that, among other things, is important for the protection of the rights and dignity of minorities and other minority national communities against discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices. This Law prohibits the publication of information in the media that expresses ideas, claims and opinions that cause, spread, incite or justify discrimination, hatred or violence against a person or group of persons because of their personal characteristics, religious and other beliefs, xenophobia, racial hatred, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed in the form of nationalism, discrimination and hostility against minority people and other minority national communities.

The Law on Electronic Media¹¹ in Article 74 stipulates that public broadcasters are obliged to provide public services for the production and broadcasting of radio and/or television programs with informative, cultural, artistic, educational, scientific, children's, entertainment, sports and other program contents in the languages of minority nations. and other minority national communities in the areas where they live, without discrimination.

Pursuant to Article 38 of the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms¹², the Government of Montenegro is obliged to submit a Report on the development and protection of the rights of minorities and other minority national communities to the Parliament of Montenegro at least once a year.

⁹ 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', No. 49/08, 16/11, 40/11, 38/12.

¹⁰ 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', No. 82/20

¹¹ 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', No. 46/10, 53/11, 6/13, 55/16 and 92/17

¹² 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', No. 31/06, 51/06 and 38/07, 21/11 and 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', No. 31/17



REPORTS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Based on Article 25 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Montenegro is obliged to submit periodic reports to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, including information relevant to the implementation of the Framework Convention. Such reports are intended to indicate changes, additions and novelties in the legal and institutional framework for the protection of minorities and other minority national communities in Montenegro, undertaken and planned measures for the improvement and development of the rights of minorities and other minority national communities, and progress in implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities mentioned in the previous Opinions on Montenegro.

Official sources of the European Union, such as the Annual Progress Report, provide an overview of the problems and challenges that national minorities face in political participation in Montenegro. Such EU reports analyze various aspects of political life in the country, including issues related to minority communities. A chapter dealing with human rights, justice and internal affairs may include information on political representation, minority rights, challenges facing minorities, and recommendations for improving the situation.

Also, the reports of civil society organizations dealing with human rights are very relevant and useful, as they often provide additional insights into the political position of minority groups in the country.

3.1. Annual Progress Report of 2023¹³

When it comes to the promotion and implementation of human rights, institutional capacity still needs to be further strengthened, including the allocation of appropriate financial resources. The internal structure of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights should be improved and deal with all areas related to fundamental rights, including the provision of necessary human resources. Changes in the leadership and structure of the Ministry introduced in July 2022 have threatened its capacity to promote fundamental rights, enforce the legal framework, draft new laws and implement and monitor existing strategies and policies. Key personnel responsible for the rights of persons with disabilities and the fight against discrimination were removed. Montenegro has yet to adopt a comprehensive monitoring and data collection system to assess the level of implementation of human rights laws, policies and strategies.

¹³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e09b27af-427a-440b-a47a-ed5254aec169_en?file_name=SWD_2023_694%20Montenegro%20report.pdf

Regarding the rights of members of minorities, in December 2022, Montenegro submitted the sixth report on the implementation of the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages and the fourth report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Committee of Experts of the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages published in September 2023 the seventh monitoring report on Montenegro, **stating that there are still shortcomings in the adequate use and protection of the Romani language in accordance with European standards and legislation.**

There is still no equal treatment of minorities in the Parliament. Data on the implementation of the strategy for minorities for the period from 2019-2023. years are not available. In July 2022, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights established a new Directorate for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Minority People and Other Minority Communities. In November 2022, the Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights allocated more than one million euros to 195 organizations and individuals for the advancement of minority rights. In August 2023, the Special Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal investigation into the financial management of the Fund. In March 2022, the Ombudsman gave an opinion to the Ministry on possible amendments to the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms in order to ensure direct appointment in minority councils based on the freely expressed will of minority people and other minority national communities.

Roma and Egyptians are still the most vulnerable, and anti-gypsyism remains a problem. **There was no progress regarding the reduction of the census for the political representation of Roma in the Parliament, because the Law on the Election of Councilors and MPs was not amended.** The Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms, in cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Ombudsman, organized the first session of the Roma Parliament on April 6, 2023. The Roma Council boycotted the session. On October 19, 2022, the government organized the third ministerial meeting of the Roma in Podgorica. The ministers of all the countries of the Western Balkans responsible for the inclusion of Roma agreed to act on the commitments taken from Poznan in 2019 and the first two ministerial meetings organized in Tirana (2020) and Sarajevo (2021). They also agreed to strengthen ongoing work on Roma integration in housing, employment, the green and digital agenda and Roma-inclusive budgeting, and to adopt strong monitoring and reporting systems to measure progress in implementing the new Roma strategies and the Poznań Declaration goals. with the help of national statistical offices.

The budget allocated to projects supporting Roma inclusion is increasing, but adequate planning, monitoring and financial control are lacking. In the 2022/2023 school year. 202 Roma children (92 boys and 110 girls) attended preschool, 1,833 (950 boys and 883 girls) attended primary school, and 214 attended secondary school (122 boys and 92 girls). There are currently 14 Roma students. The number of Roma educational mediators working in different municipalities is increasing, of which 30 are supported by the Ministry of Education. The legal framework still does not support the enrollment of Roma students in higher education.

Although Montenegro provides scholarships of 150 euros per month, there are no additional incentives. **Taken as a whole, the quality of education of Roma children remains an area of great concern.** In 2022, the Ombudsman conducted field research in Roma settlements in 13 municipalities. Preliminary findings show that Roma and Egyptians live in less segregated neighborhoods than 6 or 7 years ago, but 42.2% of Roma still live in Roma-only neighborhoods. The problem of overcrowding of Roma households still exists, with minor improvements in terms of access to water, electricity supply and possession of basic appliances. The country still does not systematically deal with child begging and child marriage, nor does it take sufficient steps to fulfill its promises to address the problem of statelessness, as recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Romani language is not used enough and is not taught in schools.

IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE POSITION OF MINORITIES

The protection of fundamental rights, including the fight against discrimination and the protection of national minorities, are key elements of minority policy and diversity management. The effective participation of national minorities in public life is an important aspect of preserving the stability and legitimacy of a democratic society, and contributes to strengthening the state's capacity to respond to the needs of its citizens. Denial of this right can make inter-ethnic relations tense and potentially threaten the stability of the state. Enabling national minorities to actively participate in public life strengthens the sense of belonging to the wider society and the state, opens institutional channels for the expression of interests and needs, and strengthens the sense of responsibility for political processes. In this way, the possibility of national minorities expressing their demands in a non-institutional or violent way is reduced. Therefore, establishing a clear link between the stability and legitimacy of the state, which is connected with the participation of national minorities in public life, is of key importance for building a sustainable and inclusive society.

The preparation of this study serves the purpose of strengthening various processes in which minority rights should be improved, as a result of better knowledge of regulations in areas that are important for the realization of minority rights. Based on the analysis of the key aspects of the study, we can conclude that despite socio-political (dis)opportunities and their influence on the positioning of human and minority rights on the political agenda, in the previous period, Montenegro made significant efforts to develop the rights of minority people and other minority national communities. However, there is still a need to improve their position. There are still important issues that need to be addressed because there are still challenges in achieving complete inclusion and equal status of minority groups. And this primarily refers to the reduction of the gap between the prescribed - normatively proclaimed concept of protection and the factual, realistic degree of protection of the rights of members of minority nations and their communities. It also includes issues related to access to education, employment, etc. but also the need to adopt new and harmonize existing laws with international legal standards on the protection of human and minority rights.

There are also specific challenges that minority groups face in the process of political participation, primarily the Roma, as well as obstacles in the political system itself. Through appropriate representation in all branches of government and participation in political decision-making, members of minority nations and communities will assume part of the responsibility both for their own and for the progress and development of Montenegro as a whole. Effective political

participation of members of minority nations and communities will strengthen the internal and international legitimacy of Montenegro as a democratic state. The system for the protection of minority rights is still an open framework that can be supplemented in order to achieve essential equality and the best international legal standards in this area.

Recommendations for improving the position of the minority groups in the political life of Montenegro:

These recommendations represent guidelines for the development of policies that can contribute to improving the position of minority groups in the political life of Montenegro. It is important that these recommendations are adapted to the specific needs of individual communities and that they are implemented in cooperation with representatives of minority groups.

1. Promoting and establishment of an effective system of monitoring and evaluation of the realization of the rights of minority people and other minority national communities, in order to monitor the implementation of recommendations and measure progress in relation to their position.
2. Promoting and expanding the policy of affirmative action for national minority communities, especially Roma, in order to amend the Law on the Election of Councilors and MPs in order to ensure equal treatment in electoral legislation, as well as through further development of the reference normative framework.
3. Implementation of reforms that support the rights of minority groups through the EU accession process and through their empowerment to participate in the political life of Montenegro.
4. Development of a communication strategy in order to improve dialogue and cooperation for a better understanding of the rights and needs of minority people and other minority national communities. It is necessary to additionally develop programs and policies that will raise the level of awareness of members of minority people and other minority national communities and the general public about the status, rights and obligations of minorities, in accordance with international standards and positive regulations of Montenegro.
5. Strengthening of institutional capacities and allocation of appropriate budget for implementation and monitoring of strategies and policies in this area.
6. Regular updating of changes in relevant legal documents in legislation or new regulations that may refer to the rights of minority groups.
7. More systematic and efficient implementation of the recommendations of the institution of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms. Greater role of the Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms of the Parliament of Montenegro with the aim of having a more significant impact on the improvement of political participation and employment of minorities.
8. Improving the socio-economic integration of members of minorities through the effective implementation of existing normative solutions and principles of affirmative action in order to promote their employment.

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