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Original scientific article

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF MINORITIES' INTEGRATION IN MONTENEGRO: APPLYING EUROPEAN VALUES IN THE CONTEXT OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT:

The process of accession to the European Union involves establishing an institutional and legal framework that aligns with its norms and values. Montenegro aspires to become a new EU member, but developing a sustainable multicultural policy requires profound changes in value systems. Respect for unity and diversity is crucial for societal prosperity and reflects EU values whose motto is "United in diversity". As a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, Montenegro faces challenges in integrating minority communities, and linguistic aspects play a key role in preserving cultural identity and enabling equal participation of all citizens

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in social life. This paper analyzes the extent to which European values are applied in Montenegro through support for linguistic diversity and integration of minority communities, focusing on the legal framework and representation of minority languages in the education system and media.

KEY WORDS:

Minority communities; Minority languages; European values; Montenegro;

SAŽETAK:

Proces pristupanja Evropskoj uniji uključuje uspostavljanje institucionalnog i pravnog okvira koji je u skladu sa njenim normama i vrijednostima. Crna Gora teži da postane nova članica EU, ali razvijanje održive politike multikulturalnosti zahtijeva duboke promjene u sistemima vrijednosti. Poštovanje jedinstvenosti i raznolikosti je ključno za prosperitet društva i odražava vrijednosti EU čiji je moto „Ujedinjeni u različitosti“. Kao multietnička i multikulturalna zemlja, Crna Gora se suočava s izazovima integracije manjinskih zajednica, a lingvistički aspekti igraju ključnu ulogu u očuvanju kulturnog identiteta i mogućnosti ravnopravnog učešća svih građana u društvenom životu. Ovaj rad analizira u kojoj mjeri se evropske vrijednosti primjenjuju u Crnoj Gori kroz podršku jezičkoj raznolikosti i integraciji manjinskih zajednica, usmjeravajući pažnju na pravni okvir i zastupljenost manjinskih jezika u obrazovnom sistemu i medijima.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

Manjinske zajednice; Manjinski jezici; Evropske vrijednosti; Crna Gora;

INTRODUCTION

Montenegro's path toward European Union membership requires comprehensive reforms that align with EU standards, particularly in fostering inclusivity and respect for diversity. As a country characterized by its multi-ethnic and multicultural population, Montenegro must address the complex task of integrating minority communities, with language being a pivotal element for preserving cultural identity and ensuring equal participation in public life. The existing legal framework, including the Constitution that recognizes Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian as languages in official use, along with the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, offers substantial guarantees for language protection. Additionally, the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages underscores the nation's commitment to safeguarding linguistic diversity, with particular emphasis on the Albanian and Romani languages.

This paper will delve into Montenegro's legislative measures supporting minority language rights and assess their practical application. It will examine challenges within the education system, where certain languages, such as Romani, remain underrepresented. Furthermore, the role of media in promoting minority languages and cultures will be analyzed, highlighting the gaps in content quality and accessibility. By reviewing these key areas, the discussion aims to highlight the progress made and the ongoing needs for more robust policies that align with European values, strengthening both social cohesion and Montenegro's path toward EU integration.

DEFINING MINORITY COMMUNITIES

When it comes to the concept of *minorities*, although the term implies the group's minority status, it lacks precision. Broadly speaking, this term refers to "collectives that are fewer in number and differ from the majority population by specific characteristics such as language, national or ethnic identity, origin, religion, and others." Minorities distinguished by a single characteristic, like language, can be accurately termed "linguistic minorities". However, when a minority possesses a combination of these traits (language, origin, customs, etc.), what is commonly referred to as *ethnic particularity* raises the question of which term would be most appropriate. In practice, terms such as "national minorities," "ethnic minorities", and "ethnic minority communities" are commonly used.ⁱ

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR MINORITY RIGHTS

The United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) is recognized as a pivotal international document in this area, establishing rights for the protection of minority communities and it mandates states to safeguard and foster conditions that enhance minority identities within their territories. Additionally, the most comprehensive list of minority rights is found in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Council of Europe (1995). Equally significant is the strategy for A credible enlargement perspective and enhanced EU cooperation with the Western Balkans, adopted by the European Commission in 2018, reaffirming the

European future of the Western Balkans region, including Montenegro. One of the leading initiatives concerns strengthening the rule of law, fundamental rights, and good governance, emphasizing improved law enforcement, more decisive measures to protect minorities and combat discrimination, and enhancing social inclusion.

MONTENEGRO'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MINORITY LANGUAGE PROTECTION

Montenegrin laws recognize the importance of minority languages and guarantee their protection. The Constitution of Montenegro, as well as the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, ensure the right to use minority languages in both public and private spheres.

The Constitution of Montenegro establishes the legal foundation for safeguarding human rights and freedoms, mandating Montenegro to uphold international standards in this regard. The Constitution defines Montenegrin as the official language (Article 13), while also recognizing Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian as languages in official use.

The Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, particularly Articles 10 and 11, specify the rights of speakers of languages in official use and the manner of language usage. Article 10 defines that members of minority peoples and other minority national communities have the right to freely and independently determine their national identity, including the right to freely choose and use their personal and family names and the names of their children, with the option to register these names in birth records or

personal documents in their native language and script. Article 11 specifies that minority peoples and other minority national communities and their members have the right to use their language and alphabet. Official use of minority languages involves using minority languages in issuing public documents and maintaining official records, using minority languages on ballots and other electoral materials, in the work of representative bodies, as well as using minority languages in administrative and court proceedings and conducting administrative and court proceedings.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES IN MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is a signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the Council of Europe, which safeguards the rights of minority languages in crucial domains like education, judiciary, media, and public administration. By adhering to European standards, Montenegro reinforces the legal framework, facilitating its path towards European integration.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) entered into force in the Republic of Montenegro on June 6, 2006. According to the Charter's definition, regional or minority languages are those traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population. These languages are different from the official language(s) of that State and do not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants. By ratifying the Charter, Montenegro provides

special protection to the Albanian and Romani languages (however, conditions for Romani language protection in administrative areas have not yet been met, primarily due to the lack of employed personnel in administrative bodies who can provide services in that language), as well as general protection to the Bosnian and Croatian languages.

The general obligations that Montenegro assumed by signing the charter are:

- ensuring that new territorial divisions and the creation of new municipalities do not threaten the status of minority languages in the newly formed municipalities,
- facilitating and promoting the use of minority languages in public life, which includes administrative bodies at both the local and state levels,
- considering the needs and wishes expressed by minority language speakers.

Specific obligations related to the Albanian and Romani languages, which are largely contained in the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, are:

- enabling minority language speakers to communicate orally and in writing with local administrative bodies, as well as with state bodies that have offices or authorities at the local level, in their language, and to receive responses in that language,
- allowing local and state authorities to draft and issue documents in minority languages,

- ensuring that, when issuing documents and keeping records, individuals' names and surnames are written in their original form, as they are written in the minority language and script,
- local self-government bodies should ensure that the names of cities, parts of cities, villages, rivers, as well as street names and institutions, are written in both the official language and minority languages.

POSITION OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system is crucial in preserving and promoting minority languages. The General Law on Education emphasizes minority rights, access to education in minority languages, and hiring teachers proficient in these languages. In schools where instruction is provided in the languages of minority ethnic groups, pedagogical records are kept and printed in both Montenegrin and the respective minority languages. Official documents are also issued in both Montenegrin and minority languages.

Unlike the Albanian language, which is successfully taught at all levels from preschool to higher education, Bosnian and Croatian require greater promotion of cultural identity, and the Romani language is absent from the education system due to a lack of teaching staff and educational materials. Furthermore, Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro are not adequately represented in Parliament, which is causing a significant challenge to their integration into society. The Constitution of Montenegro does not recognize them as a national minorityⁱⁱ, and the Law on the Election of Councilors and

Members of Parliament does not include affirmative actions for these communities. Statistics show that most Roma and Egyptians do not engage with political events and do not understand key political processes. To improve their political participation, continuous education and social empowerment opportunities at the local level are needed. Additionally, it is crucial to strengthen the capacity of organizations advocating for their rights, such as the Center for Roma Initiatives, the Roma Council of Montenegro, the Democratic Party of Roma, the United Movement of Roma and Egyptians, and the Roma Youth Organization "Walk with Us - Phiren Amenca".

ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING MINORITY LANGUAGES

The media plays a significant role in promoting minority languages. Although the state financially supports projects that promote minority cultures, there is a recognized need for additional strengthening of this support, especially in less developed local communities. Regarding information dissemination in minority languages, Television of Montenegro broadcasts programs in Albanian and Romani. However, the lack of high-quality and comprehensive content in minority languages, as well as programs that promote the culture of all minority communities (including Bosniaks, Muslims, and Croats), indicates that media representation of minorities is more formal than substantive in preserving their cultural autonomy.

A public opinion survey conducted through questionnaires with a sample of 1,163 respondents, focusing on members of minority groups in Montenegro, from February 1 to April 15, 2022, as part of the Civic Alliance projectⁱⁱⁱ shows that only 12.4 % of respondents feel fully informed about the language, culture, and customs of minorities, while 30.6 % feel adequately informed. A majority of respondents (59 %) believe that the Government of Montenegro does not sufficiently address minority rights. There is also a widespread perception that public broadcasters do not air enough programs in minority languages and lack sufficient content about the cultures and customs of minority communities in Montenegro. The quality of existing programs has been rated as low, and there is a belief that financial support for these programs is inadequate, with the largest contributions to minority language programming coming from the Fund for the protection and realization of minority rights and the EU. Significant deficiencies are highlighted in the operations of local and national public broadcasters in promoting the languages, cultures, and customs of minorities. Political influence on editorial policies and the economic instability of broadcasters are seen as undermining professionalism and objectivity. A specific concern is the lack of informative programming in the Romani language, while existing programs in Albanian and Romani are criticized for their quality. To address these issues, there is a call for more innovative approaches to promote culture and traditions, an increase in the number of broadcasts, and the training of a skilled workforce for these programs.

CONCLUSION

Although Montenegro has made efforts in recent years to develop minority community rights, there remains a need to improve their overall status. Key issues persist, particularly in bridging the gap between the prescribed – normatively proclaimed concept of protection, and the actual – realized level of protection of rights for members of minority nations and their communities. Challenges related to access to education, employment, and the necessity to adopt new laws and align existing ones with international standards for human and minority rights protection are crucial. Specific challenges faced by Roma in political participation processes and obstacles within the political system itself also require attention.^{iv} Preserving linguistic diversity and integrating minority communities by embracing European values are pivotal for Montenegro's democratic progress. Continuous support and promotion of minority languages not only enrich the country's cultural mosaic but also contribute to its path towards European integration.

NOTES - NAPOMENE

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2. The Preamble of the Constitution of Montenegro (paragraph 3) recognizes Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians, Muslims, and Croats as peoples and national minorities in Montenegro, while Roma and Egyptians are categorized as "others".
3. Research results on the use of minority languages in the programming content of public broadcasters at the national and local levels. Civic Alliance, June 2022.
4. The Position of Minorities in Political Life in Montenegro. Center for Monitoring and Research, 2024, p. 33

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