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MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN THE KOSOVO HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM: IS THE RESERVED QUOTA SYSTEM BEING ABUSED?

On 13 October, the Assembly Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Return discussed the reserved quota system in public universities in Kosovo for students belonging to minority communities. The quota system, designed to offer an opportunity to students from minority communities to apply for and register their studies in Kosovo's public universities, has been reported to have been misused by students not belonging to minority communities. The Assembly Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Return called on the

For the 2015-2016 academic year, the number of reserved slots for minority community students was reported to have been 382 reserved slots. This number was quickly filled up, but only 30 slots were taken up by students from minority communities.

Minister of Education, Arsim Bajrami, and on the rector of the University of Pristina, Ramadan Zejnullahu, to issue a third call for registration for students from minority communities, alleging that only 30 of the 382 slots foreseen for minority students were filled up by students from minority communities themselves. The Minister initially agreed to direct public universities to issue a third call, and promised to meet the rectors to discuss the

issue, but two scheduled meetings with rector Zejnullahu have been cancelled at the last minute, without explanation or any new information being offered to the public.¹

Higher-level education is open to all citizens of Kosovo as well as foreign students, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, financial status, etc., and aligned with the general spirit of diversity and equal opportunities for all.² In addition, the Statute of the University of Pristina—Kosovo's largest public university—stipulates that access to education and student benefits at the University is independent of one's ethnicity, language, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, gender, marital status, etc.³ Access to higher-level education for minority communities is offered through a quota system whereby a set number of slots are reserved for members of minority

¹ <http://www.rtklive.com/rtk2/?id=2&r=3314>; <http://www.kosovapress.com/sq/arsim/minoritetet-kerkojne-te-drejtat-e-tyre-per-arsim-51532/> and <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/minoritetet-kerkojne-te-drejtat-e-tyre-per-arsim-2-70875.html>.

² Law No.04/L-037 on Higher Education in Kosovo (29 Augustus 2011).

³ 'The Statute of the University of Pristina', Article 7.

communities in each given academic year.⁴ Students belonging to minority communities are also free to apply through the regular process open to all Kosovo citizens.

Access to higher-level education is open to all citizens of Kosovo, regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, language, sexual orientation, etc.

It should be noted that this quota system affects students from minority communities within the public higher-education system run by the Republic of Kosovo, chiefly Turks, Bosniaks, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians. The parallel Serbian-language higher education system is composed of the University of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North and attended mainly by students belonging to the Serbian, Gorani, and Serbian-speaking Roma

communities. While the Serbian-run parallel system is an important topic on its own, it is entirely separate from the Kosovo-run system and therefore, not covered in this report.

Issues with the quota system for members of minority communities have been raised repeatedly. In October of 2014, the then-deputy Minister of Education, Usman Baldzhi, was quoted to have said, “Several Albanian youth have used quotas reserved for minority communities to register in the University”, and “that they have done so by asking political parties to issue fraudulent statements of ethnicity.”⁵ In its previous mandate from 2012–2014, the Consultative Council for Communities (CCC) also raised this concern and issued a recommendation to the Ministry of Education, Technology, and Science. Through the recommendation, the CCC asked the latter to establish a mechanism to verify the ethnicity of those students claiming to be from minority communities by asking them to bring a certificate issued from Municipal Offices for Communities and Return.⁶ The 6+ political caucus in the Assembly, representing parties from minority communities, met with Minister of Education, Arsim Bajrami, in September where they presented the issues and problems faced by students from minority communities and asked him to open a third round of registration for students from minority communities to which Minister Bajrami agreed; he also noted that he would meet with rectors from universities to personally ask them to do so.⁷

The Law on Higher Education speaks of a diverse and inclusive system that is academically free and open to all citizens of Kosovo. In reality, the situation is not reflective of the spirit of the law.

ECMI Kosovo has previously written and advocated extensively on the issue of education for minority communities and on the importance of affirmative and inclusive actions targeting minority community students.⁸ The reserved quota system for minority communities is an important step towards their integration into the higher-

⁴ The number changes from year-to-year and is dependent on the total number of students in a given academic year. For 2015, the number of reserved slots for minority community students was reported to have been 382.

<http://www.kosovapress.com/sq/arsim/minoritetet-kerkojne-te-drejtat-e-tyre-per-arsim-51532/>

⁵ <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/regjistrohene-up-duke-deklaruar-kombesi-te-rrejtshme-50775/?archive=1>

⁶ ECMI Kosovo, ‘The New Mandate of the Consultative Council for Communities: Challenges and Opportunities’ (3 October 2014), p. 6.

⁷ <http://www.info-ks.net/bosnjaci/aktualno/58559/bajrami-ministar-obecao-treci-upisni-rok-na-up>

⁸ ECMI Kosovo, ‘Protecting and Promoting Education for Minority Communities’ (2 March 2010); ECMI Kosovo, ‘Improving Minorities Communities’ Access to Higher Education in Serbian Language and Public Employment’.

level education system offered by Kosovo. Therefore, the problems faced by minority community students should be given due attention and care. In particular, we would recommend that the Ministry of Education and the rectors of Kosovo's public universities take appropriate measures to avoid misuse of the quota system by non-minority students, by instituting a verification mechanism designed to ensure that students registered under the quota system genuinely belong to minority communities.

Minority students currently provide a signed letter attesting to their ethnicity usually provided by political parties, but this process has been vulnerable to abuse. There have been allegations, also raised during the meeting of the Assembly Committee on Rights and Interests of Communities and Return, that certain individuals within political parties provide these letters fraudulently to non-minority students in exchange for money. As suggested by the CCC, the

The verification mechanism would serve to authenticate and attest to the ethnicity of the students, while not causing any heavy burden on the student or the Ministry

issuance of certificates by Municipal Offices for Communities and Return, which would consecutively be verified on authenticity by the Ministry of Education and public universities before the student is admitted under the quota system, would leave less space for abuse.

A verification mechanism of that nature would not cause undue burden on the student and it would be a simple

matter for the Ministry to verify the authenticity of those certificates through Municipal Education Directorates and Municipal Offices for Communities and Return. This mechanism would also ensure that public universities and Kosovo's public education system fulfill the promise of the Law on Higher Education of a diverse and inclusive system that is academically free and open to all citizens of Kosovo.

*Through the **Kosovo Communities Issues Monitor**, ECMI Kosovo monitors, analyses, and provides recommendations on developments and concerns related to the position of minority communities in Kosovo, within the framework of international and domestic minority rights legislation. The analyses presented in the Monitor rely on close monitoring of media and interviews with relative stakeholders. While ECMI Kosovo strives at all times to provide accurate and nuanced information and to present the views and perceptions of all sides, the objective of the Monitor is not to provide journalist or factual coverage, but to offer an additional analytical element to the debate, reflecting ECMI Kosovo's longstanding experience with communities issues in Kosovo and the domestic and international legal framework in place.*

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About ECMI Kosovo

ECMI Kosovo is the principal non-governmental organisation engaged with minority issues in Kosovo, with the overarching aim to develop inclusive, representative, community-sensitive institutions that support a stable multi-ethnic Kosovo. ECMI Kosovo contributes to the developing, strengthening and implementation of relevant legislation, supports the institutionalisation of communities-related governmental bodies, and enhances the capacity of civil society actors and the government to engage with one another in a constructive and sustainable way.