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Kosovo's future status

Hearing on ethnic minorities in the Kosovo Status talks

The need to include all ethnic minorities in talks on the future status of Kosovo was the key message to emerge from a joint hearing in the European Parliament on 6 March. The hearing, which was organised by Green MEPs **Els de Groen** and **Gisela Kallenbach**, brought together representatives from the different sides of the current negotiations, including Dusan Batakovic, Advisor to Serbian President Boris Tadic, and Veton Surroi, a member of the Kosovar Albanian negotiating team.

Speaking after the hearing, **Els de Groen**, member of the Parliament's civil liberties committee, stressed:

"Roma across Europe have been systematically excluded from decision-making processes throughout history, even with regard to decisions that have a fundamental impact on their lives. In the Balkans, this practice occurred at important political junctures, such as during the Dayton peace agreement. It is vital that these mistakes are not repeated and that the Roma, who have a large Diaspora, are included in the ongoing negotiations on the future status of Kosovo."

"Truly building democracy and stability in Kosovo can only be achieved with the participation of all minority groups in the process. Roma should be acknowledged as full citizens and accorded rights and obligations equal to those of other citizens of Kosovo. They should be entitled to use their own language, education and political rights."

Gisela Kallenbach, member of the Parliament's delegation to Serbia and Montenegro, added:

"The negotiations should not only acknowledge the right of minorities to return to their former homes, they must also consider sustainable means of return and the provision of housing and other essential services, like education. The international community should give both financial and technical support to this end."

Report on the exclusion of minorities in the talks on Kosovo's status.

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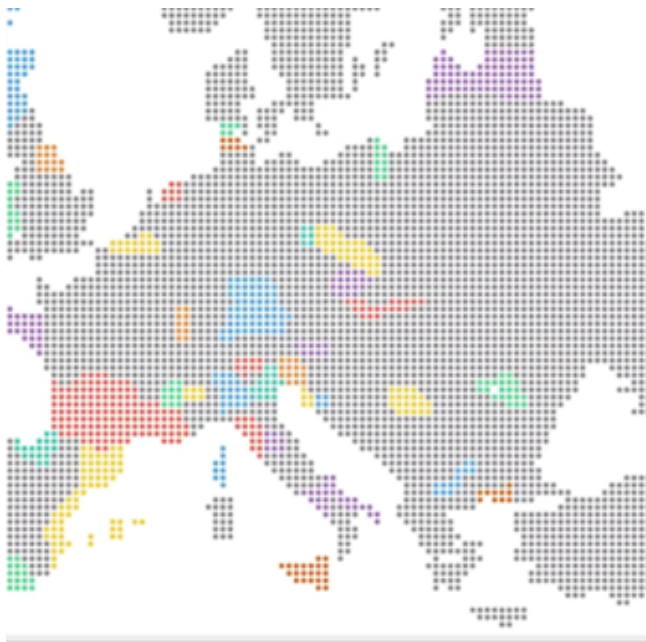
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