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October 28, 2010

Hearing on Tehran's Ethno-Cultural Discrimination Demonstrates Need for International Action

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-  2010-10-26 EU Briefing Paper, Nasser Boladai (pdf, 0.1 MB)
-  2010-10-26 EU Briefing Paper, Sedigheh Adalati (pdf, 0.1 MB)



27 October 2010, Brussels – At the latest meeting of the European Parliament’s delegation for the relations with Iran, an overdue discussion of Iran’s marginalised, non-Persian nationalities raised awareness about persistent ethno-cultural discrimination within the state.

Political representatives of three different ethnic minority groups, Mr Nasser Boladai (Balochistan People’s Party), Ms Sedigheh Adalati (Federal Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan) and Mr Miro Aliyar (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan), provided powerful reports on the human rights abuse and governmental neglect faced by their respective provinces.

They further gave an introduction to the Congress of Nationalities for Federal Iran (CNFI), an organisation composed of sixteen political parties, which differ in their ethnic origins but are united by the mutual aim for a democratic, federal and secular Iran.

Opening the discussion, delegation chair Ms Barbara Lochbihler MEP announced the Iranian Embassy’s written protest to the meeting’s subject based on allegations of separatism. Ms Lochbihler denied any such intentions and subsequently gave floor to the Iranian guests.

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Mr Nasser Boladai, representative of West Balochistan, talked of the discriminative nature of Iran's constitution. Stating that 'Iran is a racist country,' he strongly criticised articles 12 and 115 of the Iranian constitution, which denote Shia Islam as state religion and prevent citizens with different beliefs from holding the country's presidential office. In line with the 2010 report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, he further condemned article 19 as permissive of racial discrimination.

Azerbaijani representative Ms Sedigheh Adalati made a comprehensive contribution outlining particular areas of discrimination within Iran. She drew attention to the obligatory and exclusive use of Farsi in all Iranian schools, leading to social marginalisation of children with different linguistic backgrounds and their subsequent educational and vocational disadvantage. She reminded those present that 'to reject a child's language is to reject the child himself' and further deplored the inferior status of women, in particular those of non-Persian descent, who are treated as 'fourth-class citizens'.

Finally, Mr Miro Aliyar from Iranian Kurdistan provided a succinct overview of the CNFI as tool for multi-ethnic collaboration within Iran. Drawing attention to the high populational proportion of non-Persian ethnicities, he advocated devolution of power within the state whilst respecting its territorial borders. Announcing the CNFI's vision of a democratic, federal Iran, he stated that CNFI members 'do not dispute territorial integrity' of Iran but sought a means to the respect and equality of religion, gender and ethnicity, and called for stronger EU support in its achieving this end.

Subsequent questions and statements by the delegation members demonstrated active interest in the issues raised. Ms Lochbihler's inquiry about the existence of land confiscation was affirmed by both Mr Boladai and Mr Aliyar, who stated the frequent and enforced redistribution of private property of non-Persian people. Responding to the question on joined oppositional forces within Iran by Mr Michael Gahler MEP, the speakers expressed their regret about persistent Persian nationalism of the Green Movement, but affirmed their general wish for cooperation.

After this insightful and long necessary introduction to Iran's societal peripheries, the positive momentum for change has to be maintained. The international community, recently most concerned about Iran's nuclear programme and individual cases of human rights violations including that of Ms Ashtiani, will have to extend their focus and understand Iran as multi-ethnic state in need of comprehensive legal equality provisions.

The possibility of a federal system adapted to Iran's unique societal composition, which was proposed by the three distinguished speakers, could hold a solution to social justice within the state.

Note:

For more information regarding the work of CNFI and UNPO on the issue of federal solutions, please refer to the 2009 Conference: Human Rights and the Question of Democratisation and Federalism in Iran, available [here](#).

For the video record of the Iran delegation meeting from 26 October 2010, please click [here](#).

For the electronic documents containing the speeches of Mr Nasser Boladai and Ms Sedigheh Adalati, please access the attached pdf files.

Related Publications

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