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Minorities and Minority Languages in a Changing Europe

Conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Framework
Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European
Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France
Palais, room 1

18 – 19 June 2018

High Level Session: Minorities and Minority Languages in a Changing Europe**Statement by Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Mrs. Artemis Dralo**

18 June 2018

**Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia
Pejcinovic Buric,
Excellences,**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address this High-Level Session of this important Conference. At the outset, I would like to thank the Council of Europe and the Croatian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the invitation to be part of this distinguished panel.

As a member state of the Council of Europe, Albania has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities since 1999, and is committed to further strengthening the protection and promotion of national minorities.

We are convinced that the Framework Convention on National Minorities supports states parties in respecting minority rights and managing diversity by creating appropriate conditions to preserve minority identity, minority languages, education in minority languages, as well as to ensure equal access to their specific rights and resources in inclusive societies despite differences.

The protection of minority language rights should be guaranteed in connection with the right to equal protection through law and before the law and through the right to be protected against discrimination based on ethnic origin and other grounds, including language, the right to education, access to the media, and participation in cultural, social, economic life and in public affairs.

In addition, there is an obligation for States Parties to promote full and effective equality for persons belonging to national minorities in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, and meeting the conditions in need for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, identity, religion, language, traditions, and heritages.

Albania believes in human rights and to the necessity to promote and protect human rights, by creating conditions to ensure the implementation of the recommendations arising from international human rights mechanism and treaties.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities, ratified by Albania, constitutes the basis for the protection of minority rights and for the implementation of minority policies in Albania.

While inter-ethnic relations continued to be good, Albania significantly improved the legal and policy framework for the protection of minorities by adopting in October 2017 a specific law on national minorities, based on the good international experiences, through a comprehensive and transparent consultation process with different stakeholders, including minority representatives and assisted by the qualified international expertise.

This law and the secondary legislation on its implementation to be adopted soon by the Albanian Government aim at ensuring the exercising of specific human rights of persons belonging to a national minorities, which are necessary to protect the distinct identity of national minorities as an essential component of an integrated society and which guarantee nondiscrimination and full equality before the law.

The process of preparation of the draft law on minorities was supported by the international expertise of the Council of Europe. I take this opportunity to thank the Council of Europe for the valuable support on this process and especially Professor Rainer Hofmann for his professional expertise on the draft Law, and on the draft secondary legislation on national minorities in Albania. It is an obligation of all the institutions to cooperate with all the minority associations, international organizations and all other actors, in order to move forward and to develop all the process of the bylaws according to the EU standards.

We strongly believe that the rights of national minorities, as an integral part of human rights, must be guaranteed and respected. Access to the rights of national minorities can only be ensured in a society where dialogue, understanding and cultural diversity are seen as sources of values of coexistence. In this regard, our country has a permanent commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of national minorities.

We consider that this comprehensive law on minorities will improve the current domestic legislation, in order to guarantee and ensure more the implementation of their rights in practice. To this extend will help the realization of the compiling of the secondary legislation and their full implementation.

The implementation of the legal framework on national minorities aims to promote full and effective equality for individuals belonging to national minorities in all spheres of life: economic, social, political and cultural. Full and effective equality is ensured through special measures to guarantee equal opportunities and access to the enjoyment of their rights. It is a legal obligation to provide members of national minorities the right to develop their culture and to preserve essential elements of their national identity, namely, religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By concluding, we strongly believe that protection of minority rights can only be ensured in a society where dialogue, understanding, minority languages and cultural diversity are considered as sources of enrichment.

The Council of Europe is the proper institution where these policies could be implemented and together we can take concrete steps to promote human rights, including minority rights, and to contribute for the consolidation of democracy, rule of law and sustainable development.

I am convinced that this Conference will serve to reflect on how effectively respond to the challenges for improving national minorities situation, and minority languages and to ensure diversity through minority rights, as an essential characteristic of our societies.

Thank you!