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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

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High Level Session: Minorities and Minority Languages in a Changing Europe
Statement by Mr Leon Gjokaj, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro

18 June 2018

Honourable Chairperson - Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Madam Pejčinović-Burić,

Your Excellencies,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and privileged to address you at this meeting on behalf of the Government of Montenegro, during the presidency of the Republic of Croatia, our neighbouring and friendly country.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is an important jubilee, not just because of the years of the existence of these two documents, but also because their valuable content encouraged states to work even more on the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities.

Montenegro supports the fundamental values of the Council of Europe - human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As a civic, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multicultural state, we pay special attention to the integration of national minorities into society, while preserving their particularities.

The decision to restore Montenegrin independence is based on the commitment of its citizens: "to live in a country whose fundamental values are freedom, peace, tolerance, solidarity, respect for human rights and freedoms, multiculturalism, democracy and the rule of law."

On this occasion, I would like to emphasize in particular that the greatest achievement of Montenegro's independence is its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional harmony.

We have taken this decision as free and equal citizens, with all the wealth of our diversities, thus creating a safe home for all citizens of Montenegro.

After the renewal of its independence in 2006, our country has accepted all obligations arising from Council of Europe's conventions and agreements.

Montenegro has made visible progress in developing and building a stable legislative framework and institutional system for the exercise, protection and promotion of human and minority rights and freedoms.

Taking into account all international standards, we have also adopted a legislative framework for the protection of minority rights. In addition to the fundamental human rights and freedoms, the Constitution and laws of Montenegro provide minorities with a set of additional rights, so as to protect their overall national identities.

Montenegro acknowledges the work of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, since the recommendations of these bodies are doubtlessly one of the mechanisms for improving the situation in this field.

It is precisely through acknowledging the recommendations of these bodies that we adopted the Law Amending the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, which reformed the work of the Fund for Minorities, increased the capacities of the Centre for Preservation and Development of Minority Cultures, and doubled the funds allocated to minority national councils.

The minority language is in official use in all local self-government units in which members of a certain minority make up the majority or at least 5% of the population, while last year the Government of Montenegro also adopted the Proposal for the Law on the Selection, Use and Public Display of National Symbols.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Respecting and improving human rights is a continuous process, to which we will continue to be committed in the future.

The fact that last year we became a member of NATO makes a case for the successful policy we are pursuing and the standards we are implementing. We are committed to the full adoption of the European value system in order to achieve the European quality of life for all citizens of Montenegro.

Finally,

Relationships between people are built up for a long time and when they get broken they are hard to rebuild. In Montenegro, we managed to preserve the most important thing, immaterial, spiritual - multicultural, multi-confessional and multi-ethnic harmony and tolerance. We succeeded in doing so, because we were and we remain conscious of the importance of the society of diversity which we have been developing for centuries in Montenegro. We are aware that this is our best concept for the future.

Thank you for your attention.