

Statement

by

H.E. Marija Pejčinović Burić,

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

of the Republic of Croatia and

Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

at the

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

18 – 19 June 2018

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this event under the auspices of the Croatian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Today we mark the adoption of two significant international documents on national minorities - **the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**. These instruments represent a sort of *Magna Carta* of minority issues.

It is important to stress the value of the standards set in these two documents to both the minorities themselves and speakers of regional languages. They are important also for democracy, peace, stability and security, culture, economic and social life, and cooperation on the European, national and local levels. **The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is one of the most important international instruments aimed at the protection of national minorities.** The Council of Europe adopted the Framework Convention on 10 November 1994, and it came into force on 1 February 1998 as the first legally binding multilateral minority protection treaty. **Croatia was among the first to sign the document.** Today, out of 47 Member States of the Council of Europe, the Framework Convention has been ratified by 39 States.

Let us also recall that the adoption of the **European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages** was inspired precisely by the **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**, and the text of the Charter was prepared by members of the working group of the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** on the basis of the recommendations of the said Congress. We should not miss any occasion to take pride in the intense efforts at the local level that are being invested in the protection and promotion of minority rights or languages and in confidence-building that is necessary for further progress of our societies. Twenty-five Member States have ratified the Charter, and another 8 have signed this important international instrument. Here too, **Croatia was one of the first signatories.**

It is up to all of us - national governments, institutions, minorities and their representatives, experts, civil society and others - to **ensure that envisaged measures are indeed implemented everywhere, including at the local level, while continuing to develop multilateral responses** to the challenges that lie ahead. It should be emphasized that with the invitation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, **these two instruments can also be joined by non-member States.** I am particularly pleased to welcome representatives of these countries to this event. The rich legacy of both instruments and the European, that is, the

CoE approach and model has been recognized for example by North, Central and South American countries.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Permettez-moi de vous présenter, en grandes lignes, la pratique et l'expérience de la Croatie dans ce domaine. **Le préambule de la Constitution croate énumère 22 minorités nationales, dont les droits sont enchâssés dans la Loi constitutionnelle sur les droits des minorités nationales.** Avec de nombreuses autres lois, cette Loi garantit aux membres des minorités nationales un large éventail de mesures de protection et de promotion, y compris en matière de participation politique, qui présente un intérêt particulier pour les représentants des minorités nationales. **En Europe, la Croatie compte le plus grand nombre de minorités nationales constitutionnellement reconnues et nous sommes fiers de notre diversité et de notre richesse à cet égard.**

Toutes les dispositions des deux instruments du Conseil de l'Europe ont été incorporées dans la Loi constitutionnelle sur les droits des minorités nationales. **En surveillant la mise en œuvre de la Loi constitutionnelle, on surveille en même temps le respect des droits mentionnés dans les documents pertinents.** Les visites régulières des comités (du

Conseil) chargés des deux instruments et la communication pertinente avec les organismes nationaux et la société civile, les experts et la communauté universitaire jouent également un rôle important. Afin d'améliorer les droits des minorités nationales, **le gouvernement entretient régulièrement le dialogue avec les représentants des associations de minorités nationales et des institutions compétentes.** Ceci vise à renforcer la politique à l'égard des minorités nationales, les relations bilatérales (entretenu) dans l'esprit de bon voisinage et la coopération avec les pays d'origine des minorités. Des séminaires annuels sur la mise en œuvre de la Convention-cadre en témoignent.

Egalement, de nombreuses activités pertinentes sont actuellement menées à cet égard dans d'autres États parties, et les connaissances spécifiques reposent en grande partie sur les mécanismes et activités susmentionnés, à savoir les mécanismes de suivi, les consultations multilatérales et bilatérales et d'autres activités. Ce sont souvent ces mécanismes qui nous - en tant que les gouvernements et les décideurs - avertissent d'éventuelles réponses insuffisantes dans la lutte contre la discrimination et l'inégalité des chances, contre la sous-représentation des minorités dans certains domaines ou contre l'isolationnisme des nationalismes. La **protection des minorités nationales et de leurs droits et libertés fait partie intégrante de la protection internationale des droits de l'homme.** L'engagement dans ce domaine

et les efforts y investis mènent à la stabilité, à la sécurité démocratique et à la paix en Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, although the application and interpretation of both instruments is constantly evolving, the **social changes in Europe in the past 20 years have been considerable, and technological progress raises new questions and challenges.** Some of the answers to these questions already exist, confirmed as positive practice in some countries, and other possible solutions we will discuss today and tomorrow.

Today's fast and far-reaching exchange of information and - first and foremost **digitalization** - **has also enabled the preservation of the rich heritage, endangered languages, oral and written testimonies and easier archiving and access to relevant materials. Part of this is already in the repositories that the Council of Europe has greatly supported.** With this we also ensure the transfer of some of the important heritage created at the end of the 20th century, a difficult century for Europe and the whole world.

Finally, during this two-day event we will **analyse the level of implementation of our two instruments in the States Parties, and should reinforce our commitment to them.** In this vein, **I hope that the outcome of this conference will give us guidelines for further**

improvement of the protection of national minorities, as well as finding a response to challenges we are facing in this pivotal area which must remain in our focus.

Thank you.