

Ms President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

I am addressing you on behalf of the Council of Armans (Macedonarmans) which represents one of the oldest peoples still living in the Balkans, in Albania, Greece, FYROM, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia.

This people speaks its own language, the Arman language (Macedonarman), and has always been bilingual, alongside the Greeks at the time of Alexander the Great, the Romans during the era of the Roman and Bizantine Empires, the Turks during the Ottoman Empire, alongside all peoples who became nations starting in the 19th century. Our bilingualism has allowed us to preserve our values, and at the same time we have demonstrated respect and love when living close to others. This means that we have always been a European people, perhaps the very first, as every people should be, in a truly united Europe. Today, as Europe becomes increasingly aware of its diversity and how important this is for its prosperity, we are at risk of disappearing because the peoples we live close to are afraid to acknowledge our identity and our culture. They are afraid to appear smaller in front of other peoples whose greatness is not questioned.

We therefore have no rights and our existence is not recognised in Romania, Greece, Albania, nor in the other states where we live. Nevertheless we believe there is no great and no small people. We should all have the same status: a **European people**, speaking at least two languages.

First of all, be reassured that we embody universal values which we would like to transmit to our descendants, at least in two languages as we did in the past, simply because we believe that the word „European” goes hand in hand with the word „bilingualism”. That is why we want to stay bilingual, as every European should be. That is why I would like to say to all our neighbours: „Do not worry, acknowledge us and help us preserve our language and our culture, for they are undeniably a source of prosperity and happiness for all peoples, ours as much as yours. We are the best link for all peoples in the Balkans, where peace and love should bring us all together.”

We welcome the recommendation you are preparing regarding the right of all peoples to receive education in their mothertongue, as well as the Council of Europe Recommendation 1333/1997 reaffirming our recognition as a people and calling upon the states where we live to help us preserve our language and our identity. We hope both recommendations will help Armans (Macedonarmans) to continue to live, as they have always have, whilst preseving their language and culture.

Thank you for your attention.

Nicolas CARACOTA