

Thank you, Madam President,

The Council of Europe welcomes the anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. For us it was a useful model for the drafting of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities developed in the 90s. The principles of this Declaration remain always a source of inspiration;

The protection of minorities is one of the pillars of the Council of Europe because democracy requires effective systems to protect the rights of minorities.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the Council of Europe in 1994 is the most comprehensive human rights treaty designed to protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. States parties to the Framework Convention assume a legal obligation to promote the full and effective equality of persons belonging to minorities in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life and to respect their rights, including linguistic rights, that will allow them to express, preserve and develop their culture and identity.

The Council of Europe regularly monitors how the Framework Convention is being implemented in each of the thirty-nine States Parties. As a result of the detailed assessments in country monitoring, we built up a profound and comprehensive body of findings on thematic issues of particular concern in all countries. The Advisory Committee's thematic commentaries provide practical and long-term guidance to decision-makers and other stakeholders, including minority representatives. They include concrete recommendations on how to improve certain aspects.

Respecting minority rights is important in reducing the risks of inter-ethnic conflict. On the whole, my delegation is pleased to see that its recommendations are being implemented by states parties and the level of protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities has clearly risen overall. Laws containing detailed guarantees for the use and learning of minority languages, for instance, administrative frameworks for their implementation have improved. Consultative mechanisms have been created to ensure that the views and concerns of minority representatives are given due account before relevant policy decisions are taken, such as in the area of culture, education, regional development, or the promotion of effective participation in public life. These improvements have clearly led to the prevention of minority rights violations as such, as well as, in a number of instances, have prevented a difficult situation from deteriorating and possibly becoming a threat to the stability in the country.

Consequently, we can consider that the international and European minority rights standards have met most of the expectations placed in them. However, our main challenge as international institutions in the time ahead is now to secure these achievements in our field and to ensure that the standards which are set are maintained.

