

Eurolang – European Language Equality Network on Item V

Thank you Madam Chair, distinguished delegates.

I'm here from the Cornish national minority and I'm representing the European Language Equality Network – Eurolang from Brussels.

The last three years we've been working as a secretariat for the European Parliament inter group for Traditional Minorities and Languages, and currently ELEN represents 37 languages in 21 states. That's 50 million people, 10% of the EU.

If we're talking about challenges, I think there has been a lot of progress in Europe since 2004, but since 2004 it has been something of a high tide with many language communities gained domestic language legislation to protect their language and many states ratified the European Charter for Languages and the Framework Convention which have become benchmarks in minority protection and respect for linguistic diversity. The prohibition of discrimination against national and linguistic minorities has become primary EU law with the passing of the Lisbon Treaty and the attached Charter of Fundamental rights. However, we face a lack of implementation of the Framework Convention and the European Charter by states, plus many EU states ignoring minority protection standards set in the Copenhagen Criteria which were meant to uphold when joining the EU.

In Europe there are problems arising everywhere with language legislation being undermined in Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Catalonia and Galicia. Regional languages in France remain to be endangered, though we are encouraged to hear that France will be ratifying the European Charter in the next few years. And we continue to be concerned with the situation of Hungarian national minorities in various European states and the lack of any protection or recognition for any national-linguistic minority in Greece.

One of the chief problems of the Declaration obviously is its non-binding nature. As NGO's we are looking for things that are binding treaties that can be enforced. It's difficult to make the Declaration stick and for example when a government or a local authority when they know that there will be no legal consequences for them in they don't implement language protection mechanisms. So we would like to see good examples of best practices in jurisprudence that show how the Declaration has been referred to and then implemented in practical terms perhaps shared online.

And lastly, Ladies and Gentleman for positive measures and proposals – I won't be here this afternoon – but as Secretariat of the Parliament intergroup we have recommended that Rita Izsák comes to speak in the European Parliament on the UN's work and furthermore, in line with the recommendations for promoting the Declaration we would like to propose to MEP's that there should be a European level forum on minorities in the European Parliament.

Thank you Madam Chair and delegates for your kind attention.