

Statement of H.E. Dr. Ferenc Dancs
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Madam Chair,
Mr Special Rapporteur,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Forum on Minority Issues is a significant and outstanding platform for exchanging views, ideas and best practices with the aim of furthering the protection of the rights of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

For historical reasons, one of the key objectives of Hungary's foreign policy is the international protection of minority rights. The Hungarian Government therefore highly appreciates efforts of the UN Minority Forum and especially the activity of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues to keep the questions of minorities, in particular their language, education and human rights on the agenda.

The Hungarian government remains committed to the promotion of the education in and the teaching of minority languages, and the current developments in several regions, including our own neighbourhood show that attention is also required from the international stakeholders in this matter. We therefore welcome the expertise and advice offered in the UN and other relevant regional framework related to this matter.

We firmly believe that the language rights of national minorities are integral part of human rights. In our view, when discussing the use of minority languages the focus should not only be on the opportunities provided by the majority, eventually multilingual society for ethnic minority speakers, but we have to explore the possibilities how to maintain and guarantee their rights to the use of mother tongue in education and in other sphere of public life. These rights are enshrined in international instruments of the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE). States have no other task but to comply with them.

According to the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1992: "States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue *or to have instruction in their mother tongue.*" Recommendations of the Inaugural Session of the Forum on Minority Issues confirmed the above, by adding that "Specific forms of such opportunities should be chosen in consultation with persons belonging to minorities and taking account of their freely expressed wishes." The first international agreement concerning education in minority languages was adopted within the framework of the Council of Europe in 1992, "the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages". With its ratification, States Parties undertake to ensure fully or partially the education in minority languages on different levels of their educational system, according to their choice and in conformity with the Charter.

In this context, we recall that **Ukraine's** language policy is high on the agenda of the international organisations. I have to refer to the alarming developments concerning Ukraine's policies on the education of minority languages, and I have to express the Hungarian Government's still existing serious concerns on the Ukrainian Education Act, especially Article 7 of the Act and the Law of Ukraine on the Principles of State Language Policy. The implementation of these normative acts in their current forms narrow down already existent minority rights related to education in minority languages. As you are certainly aware, the Council of Europe requested the Venice Commission to prepare its analysis on the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language. We look forward to the forthcoming adoption of the opinion and we are confident that the recommendations of the Venice Commission will be duly taken into account by the Ukrainian authorities when updating their legislation on national minorities.

Enhancing the role of a state language and its education, under no circumstances can justify limitations on existing linguistic rights of national minorities. Preservation of identity and culture should be seen as a prerequisite of long-term peace, stability and prosperity of the society as a whole.

We can state that the right of national minorities to receive education in their mother tongue is and should be a self-evident fundamental right recognized in international human rights instruments. We therefore commend the Special Rapporteur on minority issues for addressing the issues of the education of minority languages as a key priority within his mandate and we fully support his endeavours in this field.

Thank you.