



**European Union**

**12th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

**” Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities”**

28-29 November 2019

EU INTERVENTION

Madame Chairperson,

We are pleased to engage in this debate on *Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities*.

The European Union is founded on ‘unity in diversity’. Besides 24 official languages of the Union, there are over 60 regional, indigenous or minority languages, spoken by some 40 million people. It is this diversity that makes the EU what it is: not a ‘melting pot’, but a common home celebrating diversity, where our many mother tongues are bridges to greater solidarity and mutual understanding.

Our Charter of Fundamental Rights states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. It prohibits discrimination based on many grounds, including language. The respect for the individual and for linguistic diversity, openness towards other cultures, tolerance and acceptance of otherness are core values of the EU.

Educators and researchers from around the world confirm that education provides for better outcomes when based on respect for the identity of each and every child. We would also argue that respect for the cultural identity and language of the child is essential for achieving SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. At the same time, it is important to ensure quality learning of and teaching in the official language, as knowledge of that language is a crucial factor of social cohesion and integration.

In today's interconnected world there is an increasing need to be able to speak several languages. For persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities it is equally important to speak the official language or languages of the State in order to better integrate, and one or more internationally used foreign

languages. Unfortunately the pressure to speak several languages accentuates the tendency to abandon the use of minority languages. Therefore a stronger emphasis at national levels in promoting bilingualism or multilingualism in addition to mother tongue proficiency is vital.

Within the EU our Member States have been aided by a Strategy for multilingualism issued in 2008. In our external relations we support projects to promote mother tongue based multilingual education. Some of these projects are included in the € 500 million the EU invests annually in education programmes in more than 60 countries around the world.

We look forward to continuing our cooperation and conversation with all our partners, governments, UN agencies, and civil society, to further strengthen and explore ways to promote bi- and multilingual education, important for the eradication of discrimination based on language and for an inclusive and equitable education.

Thank you.