

Macedonian Association “Sonce”

Thank you Madame Chair. Building trust and social cohesion is essential for peaceful coexistence, especially for societies where minority groups have long been marginalized. Albania is a country with rich cultural diversity, and the Macedonian minority has been an integral part of this diversity for centuries. However, structural challenges remain. Limited access to education in Macedonian language, lack of adequate representation, insufficient media visibility, and insufficient state investment in the region where Macedonians live, continue to hinder equality. In areas, such as [inaudible], inadequate infrastructure, limited public services, and lack of economic opportunities deepen the feeling of exclusion and weak trust in institutions. One of the most serious barriers to cohesion is external pressure, particularly from Bulgaria. Using the political advantages of European Union membership, Bulgaria has repeatedly insisted that the Macedonian identity in Albania does not exist, attempting to impose assimilation policy. By conditioning Albania's EU integration on the denial or redefinition of Macedonian identity, such actions create inter-group mistrust, threaten social cohesion, and undermined the rights of recognized autochthonous Macedonian minority. This politicization of identity violates international human rights principles and risks normalizing discrimination. To build peaceful coexistence, states must guarantee protection without political interference. Community-based strategies, such as intercultural dialogue, multilingual education, investment in minority regions, and equal access to cultural expression are essential. Strengthening minority media, ensuring full schooling in minority languages, and promoting cooperation among minorities can cultivate trust and break down stigma. Albania has the opportunity to continue being a positive example in the region by defending minority rights [cut off by Chair].