

The Strasbourg Manifesto

on the protection of national minorities and languages within the framework of the European Union

- Summary -

17th April 2014, Strasbourg

We, members of the European Parliament and of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages of the European Parliament stress that fundamental freedoms, human rights and equal opportunities shall be provided for all citizens of the European Union including persons belonging to minorities.

We note that national minorities make up 8% of the European Union's population while regional or minority languages are spoken by nearly 50 million people, 10% of the EU population. Immigrant minorities make up 6.5% of the EU population, more than 30 million people. We regret that the protection of minorities does not deserve greater attention in the institutions of the European Union.

We, minority-friendly members of the European Union note that equal treatment is a basic right, not a privilege of all citizens. Addressing the issue of minorities, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic relations are crucially important for the future of the European Union for its stability, security, prosperity and for good neighbourhood relations.

We, members of the European Parliament believe that the majority and the minority share a mutual, but asymmetric responsibility for integration, the preservation and development of the identity, culture and language of the minority communities and peaceful interethnic relations.

We believe that it is of utmost importance to differentiate the needs and ways for protection of groups having traditionally lived in a Member State from new, immigrant minorities who arrived to the host country by legal immigration.

We, members of the European Parliament call the institutions of the European Union to urgently resolve the so-called Copenhagen dilemma. The establishment of an effective mechanism to monitor and ensure fundamental and acquired rights of minorities both in candidate countries and in states already admitted to the European Union is therefore of utmost importance.

We, members of the European Parliament stand for a comprehensive and legally binding European Union protection system for national minorities, regional linguistic groups and constitutional regions accompanied by a functioning monitoring mechanism.

We, members of the European Parliament call, similarly to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies for the establishment of a European Framework of National Strategies on the Protection of Traditional National Minorities.

We, members of the European Parliament request the President of the European Parliament to forward this manifesto to the Commission, to the Council, to the governments and national

parliaments of the Member States and to governments and national parliaments the candidate and potential candidate countries.

The Strasbourg Manifesto on the protection of national minorities and languages within the framework of the European Union

- A. whereas more than 300 different national minorities and linguistic communities live in the European continent, 8% of the EU-28 citizens belong to a national minority; whereas nearly 50 million people, 10% of the EU population, speak a regional or minority language;
- B. whereas the motto of the EU is “united in diversity”; whereas the EU Treaty is determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe;
- C. whereas the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities; whereas these values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail;
- D. whereas any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited;
- E. whereas the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Copenhagen on 21 and 22 June 1993 state that respect for and protection of minorities is a requirement for applying for membership of the European Union;
- F. whereas the national minority communities represent a special contribution to European culture
- G. whereas addressing the issue of national minorities, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic relations is crucially important for the future of the European Union, for its stability, security, prosperity and for good neighbourhood relations; whereas the majority and the minority share a mutual, but asymmetric political and moral responsibility for integration, the preservation and development of the identity, culture and language of the minority communities;
- H. whereas the handling of minority issues is of crucial importance in respect of the internal and external legitimacy of the European Union, as well as its credibility and image as a human rights champion and as a global actor in handling inter-ethnic conflicts throughout the world;
- I. whereas every individual shall have the inalienable right to choose freely whether one belongs to a national minority and no disadvantage shall result from this choice or from the exercise of the rights connected to this choice; no state may

question the free choice of identity or multiple identities of persons belonging to national minorities;

- J. whereas preserving and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity within and between Member States is a fundamental value and at the same time a major task of the European Union;
 - K. whereas there is a difference between the protection of minorities and anti-discrimination policies; noting that equal treatment is a basic right, not a privilege, of all citizens;
 - L. whereas the EU is since March 2007 equipped with an institution responsible for the protection of fundamental rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities - the Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna;
1. Reiterates the positions it has upheld over time on multilingualism, cultural diversity, the protection of national minorities such as:

The need for a European approach

2. Stresses that fundamental freedoms, human rights, and equal opportunities shall be provided for all citizens of the European Union, however, protecting national minorities, regional and minority languages in an enlarged EU is a major issue and that it will not be achieved simply by fighting against xenophobia and discrimination, but by adopting specific legal, linguistic, cultural, social, etc. regimes and treatments;
3. Points out that various EU principles and policies, such as the rule of law, participatory democracy, welfare, decent life, social cohesion, the fight against any kind of discrimination and non-discrimination, policies pursuing the reduction of regional and social differences, cross-border co-operation, decentralisation, subsidiarity, respect for cultural and language diversity constitute indispensable conditions for the protection of both individuals belonging to minority communities and the society as a whole and contribute to the evolution of a more minority friendly Union, regards these norms as a necessary aspect of the European Union's commitment to enhance its legitimacy;
4. Notes that under the Recommendation 1201 (1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on an additional protocol on the rights of national minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Recommendation 1735 (2006) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the concept of Nation -in favour of which several states expressed a unilateral undertaking during the admission procedure to the Council of Europe or referred to it expressis verbis in bilateral treaties contracted in the subsequent years - the expression "national minority" refers to a group of persons in a state who reside on the territory of that state regardless of their citizenship; maintain longstanding, firm and lasting ties with that land and the state founded; display distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics; are sufficiently representative, although smaller in number than the rest of the population of that state; are motivated by a concern to preserve together that which constitutes their common identity, including their culture, language, traditions and/or religion;
5. Considers it necessary to differentiate the needs and ways for linguistic preservation

for regional linguistic groups having historically lived in a Member State from the immigrant minorities, who arrived in their host countries by regular immigration; Stresses that there is a major difference in the obligation of the state towards the national minority persons and communities and the immigrant, new minorities; points out that in the case of immigrant minorities the state should help primarily in the integration into the society, also by helping to learn the language of the host country, including regional languages where they are socially prominent;

6. Points out that positive measures implemented for the purpose of protecting minority persons and groups, fostering their appropriate development and ensuring that they are granted equal rights and treatment with respect to the rest of the population in the administrative, political, economic, social and cultural fields and in other spheres shall not be considered as discrimination;
7. Considers that national minority communities have specific needs different from other minority groups, that public policies should be more focused and that the Union itself must address these needs in a more appropriate way;
8. Considers that no single solution exists for improving the situation of national minorities in all the Member States, but that some common and minimum objectives for public authorities in the EU should be developed, taking account the relevant international legal standards and existing good practices; calls on the Commission to establish a policy standard for the protection of national minorities;
9. Stresses that the European Union has to be an area where respect for ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity prevails, and where people are neither excluded nor marginalised in any way; points out that the EU needs to adopt a systematic approach to the preservation and protection of minority languages and cultures and that it should learn from best practices from all around Europe;
10. Underlines the Union's pivotal role in strengthening inter-cultural dialogue throughout Europe, with the aim of supporting solidarity as well as social and political cohesion; suggests efforts to promote confidence building between, and the co-existence of, communities traditionally living next to each other by teaching and learning about one another's identity, regional identities, one another's languages and one another's history, heritage and culture, with a view to better understanding and greater respect for diversity;
11. Underlines that the protection of individuals belonging to national minorities and communities should be guaranteed in a coherent, parallel and coordinated way on the national (governmental, regional, local), and European (EU, Council of Europe, OSCE) level – a fact that implies the need to establish formalised channels of communications between the different bodies and procedures;
12. Firmly believes that individual rights shall be guaranteed for the members of national minority communities in order to create appropriate condition for their development comparable with those of the majority; notes that since national minorities as such do not have legal personality they cannot be legal subjects and therefore they cannot be parties to contracts or covenants. However, they must be the object of collective protection and their members must enjoy the capacity to act, either as individual legal subjects or within the framework of various entities with legal personality, in defence

of the respective national minorities' identity and cultural rights. The recognition and protection must be legally organized both at the level of each nation-state concerned and at transnational (international) level.

13. Notes that exchange of best practices between regional and minority language communities in Europe should be promoted permanently; notes that better use of already existing institutional structures would facilitate networking and coordination between organisations working in the field of linguistic diversity and language learning
14. Stresses that the situation of stateless persons permanently resident in Member States needs to be addressed; concerned that some Member States impose unwarranted demands on stateless persons or demands which may not be strictly necessary in order to obtain citizenship; calls on those Member States concerned to systematically bring about just solutions, based on the recommendations of international organisations;

Minority rights and enlargement

15. Points out that the latest and future enlargements have led and will lead to an even greater number of Member States characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity; believes, therefore, that the EU has a particular responsibility to safeguard the rights of minorities;
16. Calls for more consistency of the European Union in the field of minority protection; strongly believes that all Member States as well as candidate countries shall be bound by the same principles and criteria in order to avoid the application of double standards; Calls therefore, as a part of resolving the so-called Copenhagen dilemma, for the establishment of an effective mechanism to monitor and ensure fundamental and acquired rights of minorities both in candidate countries and in countries already admitted to the European Union;

Tasks of the European Institutions and Member States of the European Union in order set up comprehensive standards for minority rights

17. Urges the State Parties to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers based on the reports of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention and the Committee of Experts of the Languages Charter.
18. Stresses the need for a comprehensive European Union protection system for national minorities, regional linguistic groups and constitutional regions accompanied by a functioning monitoring mechanism; stresses that the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 and the accompanying monitoring mechanism may constitute an example for this;
19. Calls, similarly to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies for the establishment of a European Framework of National Strategies on the Protection of National Minorities;

20. Promotes the establishment of a European Forum of national and linguistic minorities as an affiliated consultative, advisory body of both the European Union and the Council of Europe;
21. Encourages European institutions to develop binding legislation on the rights of minorities. Urges the Commission to play a more active role in implementing the provisions of the treaties on this subject. Encourages the Commission to engage in finding democratic solutions in order to resolve conflicts between national minorities and States when the bilateral and internal solution is not possible.

- Annex -

Collection of European parliamentary reports, resolutions and other EU documents which lay down the main principles of the protection of national minorities and languages within the framework of the European Union

- Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on the European Union and Articles 10 and 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which obliges the Union to “respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”,
- Various legal instruments adopted by the Council of Europe in the field of minority protection, and in particular the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as to the various instruments developed by the UN and the OSCE,
- Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions entitled ‘Non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all – a framework strategy’(COM(2005)0224)) and the respective Parliament resolution of 14 June 2006 on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all - a framework strategy,
- EU framework for national Roma integration strategies established by the decision of the Council of 19 May 2011 and based on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, the respective European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2011 on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion, and the conclusions on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 of the Council of the European Union's 3089th Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting,
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment

between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (the Racial Equality Directive), Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (the Equal Treatment in Employment Directive), Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law (the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia);

- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 4 September 2003 on regional and lesser-used languages and their conditions considering the EU's enlargement and cultural diversity
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 26 May 2005 on promotion and protection of fundamental rights: the role of national and European institutions, including the Fundamental Rights Agency;
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 8 June 2005 on the protection of minorities and antidiscrimination policies in an enlarged Europe,
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 14 June 2006 on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all - a framework strategy,
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 15 November 2006 on a new framework strategy for multilingualism,
- Legislative resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 30 November 2006 on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,
- Agreement of 28 November 2007 between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on improving cooperation between the two institutions and increase complementary initiatives and synergies and to the agreement between the European Community and the Council of Europe on cooperation between the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe,
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 5 February 2009 on Problems and Prospects Concerning European Citizenship
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 24 February 2009 on Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 1 December 2010 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2009) – effective implementation after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 6 March 2012 on modernising Europe's higher education systems
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 22 November 2012 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2010-2011),
- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 14 March 2013 on strengthening

the fight against racism, xenophobia and hate crime,

- Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 11 September 2013 on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union
- Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality of the Lisbon Treaty,