

**Right of Reply by Deputy Head of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience Mr. Ihor Lossovskiy
to the statement of the Delegation of Hungary**

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Based on the latest recommendations of the European Commission to accelerate the process of European integration, Ukraine is completing reforming its legislation in the field of national minorities amidst ongoing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which is the largest war since the Second World War on the territory of Europe.

The reform is carried out in accordance with the defined European standards and the relevant international obligations undertaken by Ukraine.

On June 23, 2022, the European Council adopted a decision on the status of a candidate for membership in the European Union for Ukraine and announced recommendations, the implementation of which will precede the start of the negotiation process.

One of which is the improvement of the legislative framework for the protection of the rights of national minorities.

The Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on December 13, 2022 became an important step for the formation of the legislation in the field of protection of the national minorities.

For the implementation of the Law, it was necessary to develop 6 of normative supplementary legal acts, bylaws. The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience was designated as responsible for their preparation. To fulfill the assigned tasks scientists, politicians, public activists and international experts in the field of minority rights protection from the European Commission and the Council of Europe have been involved.

From January to September of this year, 42 consultation meetings were held with representatives of public associations of national minorities both online and directly in the regions of Ukraine where national minorities compactly live.

At this time, most of the regulatory and supplementary legal acts have already been prepared and approved by the Government of Ukraine.

In April, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Concept of the State Targeted National Cultural Program "Unity in Diversity". With the participation of interested state authorities and experts invited by the Council of Europe, in September draft State target national and cultural program "Unity in diversity" for the period until 2034, have been developed and submitted to the Government and was approved on September 26, 2023 by the relevant order of the Government.

The draft resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated July 23, 2023 "On Amendments to the Procedure for Conducting a Competition to Determine Programs and Activities Developed by Civil Society Institutes, for the Implementation of which Financial Support is Provided" has been prepared. Public associations of national minorities now have the opportunity to receive financial support on a competitive basis for the implementation of programs and events at the expense of the State Budget of Ukraine, regional and/or local budgets.

Pursuant to Part 1 of Article 19 of the Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine", with the aim of balanced consideration of the interests of

persons belonging to national minorities and promoting the activities of public associations of national minorities, a draft order of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience "On approval of Procedure for the establishment and functioning of the Center for National Minorities" was adopted, which has undergone public discussion and interdepartmental coordination in the Ukrainian Government.

Pursuant to Part 2 of Article 15 of the Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine", in order to hold consultations with the participation of representatives of public associations of national minorities of Ukraine on issues related to the legally defined rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities of Ukraine a draft order of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience "Issues of Activity of the Council of Public Associations of National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" was adopted, which has undergone preliminary public discussion and is at the stage of interdepartmental coordination.

In fulfilment of the preliminary recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding the Law of Ukraine on National Minorities (Communities), the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 21.09.2023, adopted in its entirety the draft Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" regarding some issues of the implementation of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities of Ukraine" (registered by the Verkhovna Rada on 13.08.2023, registration No. 9610). This Law was developed taking into account the recommendations outlined in the Conclusion to the Law "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" dated 06.12.2023 of the Venice Commission. This draft Law was developed by DESS together with the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Human Rights.

In accordance with the transitional provisions of the adopted Law, the development of methodology is foreseen, regarding the peculiarities of the use of languages of national minorities, in particular, but not exclusively, when providing any topographical information, communication with authorities, including when providing emergency assistance in localities, in which persons belonging to national minorities traditionally live, or in which such persons make up a significant part of the population, at the request of such persons and if such a request corresponds to real needs. According to Article 10 of the Law, the methodology is to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and is to be based on the main provisions of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Taking into account the sensitivity of the language issue, the relevant Ukrainian central authorities started extensive consultations with the public and local authorities regarding the development of the methodology.

In its Conclusion adopted at its Plenary Meeting on 06 October 2023, the Venice Commission welcomed the numerous improvements adopted by the Verkhovna Rada in the new Law on Amendments to the Law on National Minorities (Communities) (No. 9610). The Venice Commission highly appreciated the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to implement the Commission's recommendations in order to bring the provisions of the Law of Ukraine on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine into full compliance with international standards. In its Conclusion, the Venice Commission in particular, pointed to 12 individual improvements adopted by the new Law.

It should be emphasized that the mentioned process of reforming the legislation takes place openly, transparently and inclusively, with the involvement of a wide range of international experts, public organizations of national minorities of Ukraine, including the Hungarian national minority, with whom a number of online and offline public discussions were held, in particular in cities of the Zakarpattia oblast of Ukraine, where the majority of Ukrainian Hungarians live compactly.