



Respect and recognition for the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria: strong condemnation of the announcements for a possible deregistration of a human rights organization

We, the undersigned members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, strongly object to the announcements for possible deregistration of a minority and human rights organization in Bulgaria

The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) calls on the Bulgarian government as well as on local and regional authorities to ensure respect and recognition for the Macedonian minority in the country and to prevent any attempt of violation or unduly restriction of the freedom of association, such as the announced deregistration of a minority human rights organization.

Several days ago, the Bulgarian prosecution requested the Regional court of Blagoevgrad to suspend the registration of an organisation formed by ethnic Macedonians for the purposes of protecting the minority's basic rights and freedoms. The organisation was registered by the Registration Agency, under the Ministry of Justice, earlier this year under the name 'Civic association for protection of fundamental individual human rights'. However, one week ago, the Deputy Prime Minister Karakachanov, from the IMRO political party - which also sought the prohibition of several other organisations including the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, wrote to the Prosecutor General and requested deregistration of the organisation as a threat to national security and the 'unity of the nation'. The request to the Blagoevgrad Regional Court was made by the Regional Prosecutor of Blagoevgrad after he received instructions from the Prosecutor General. The Bulgarian government does not recognize Macedonians as a separate ethnic group and considers any expression of a Macedonian identity as a threat.

The Deputy Prime Minister explicitly referred to the organisation's goals - to protect the rights of the Macedonian minority. Consequently, the case was referred to the Blagoevgrad Regional Prosecution, which ordered a 'check', including questioning of the members about their ethnic background and activities. As a result, a few days ago it brought a request in the Blagoevgrad Regional Court requesting the suspension of the juridical person status of the association. The prosecutor argues that the association is a threat to the 'unity of the nation' because it declares the existence of Macedonians in Bulgaria, which is 'anti-Bulgarian', and because it pursues political objectives.

Alleged violations of fundamental rights and cases of hate speech and intimidations against the Macedonian community in Bulgaria are continuously rising and must be tackled. The CSP reminds the European Commission of its duty to ensure the respect for minority rights in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the EU as it is the guarantor of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU institutions must undertake institutional and political action to stop these fundamental rights violations against the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, and to guarantee the restoration of rights to European citizens belonging to minorities. Action is urgently needed also because of the developments at the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) on the execution of several judgments of the ECtHR related to the refusal to register Macedonian organisations. The last review of this group of cases, which is under the enhanced procedure for many years, was in September 2019. The CoE Committee of Ministers sought the preparation of an interim resolution for non-compliance to be adopted next year. This is a case of a harassment of human rights defenders and it is deeply worrying that the Bulgarian government is failing to act to put a stop to these violations. We demand respect and recognition for the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria and we strongly condemn the announcements for a possible deregistration of a human rights organization.

Signed by the following CSP members:

Macedonian Helsinki Committee

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), Belgium

Public Verdict Foundation, Russia

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuania

Minority Rights Group Europe

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

ZARA, Austria

Helsinki Committee of Armenia

Swedish OSCE Network

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor, Armenia

Promo LEX Association, Moldova

Association UMDPL, Ukraine

Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia

Centre de la Protection Internationale, France

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Serbia

Center for Participation and Development, Georgia

Helsinki Association for Human Rights, Armenia

Public Association Dignity, Kazakhstan

Human Rights Matter, Germany

Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia

Legal Policy Research Center, Kazakhstan

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), Belgium

Public Foundation Golos Svobody, Kyrgyzstan

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Human Rights Centre ZMINA, Ukraine

Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"

Women of the Don, Russia

DRA, Berlin

Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Coalizione Italiana per le Libertà e i Diritti civili (CILD), Italy

IDP Women Association "Consent", Georgia

Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM, Serbia

Foundation of Regional Initiatives - YEU International, Ukraine

Truth Hounds, Ukraine