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Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Centre for Minority Issues, it is my pleasure and distinct honour to congratulate the Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the occasion of the 50th meeting of the Committee. The cooperation between our Centre, the Committee and the Secretariat goes back almost to the beginning. A permanent seat is set aside for the Council of Europe on our Executive Board, and we are grateful to Marc Scheuer, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Mr. Weingaertner, Michele Akip, Alexey Kozhemyakov and others for their service on our Board. Most recently, Thorsten Afflerbach has been appointed and will serve as representatives of the Council of Europe for the next three years. Moreover, this relationship has intensified through the good offices of members of your Bureau. Professor Stefan Oeter has been a strong promoter of our work for many years and holds a seat on our Advisory Council.

The cooperation has seen two milestones that I would like to highlight today. We have had the honour and fortune to be selected to host the Minority Language Guides on our website and to publish Handbooks on the application of the Language Charter in a number of countries that have not signed and ratified the Charter. We are very grateful that we have been endowed with the confidence of the Committee and the Secretariat.

The reason why our Centre is honoured to be a key stakeholder in your work is that the Language Charter is one of the main pillars upon which our mandate is built. Our mission is to work for the improvement of the situation of Europe's minorities through heightened awareness of minority rights and minority issues among all relevant actors. Realizing the immense scope of societal and global challenges of the 21st Century, our specific purpose is to provide actors with new knowledge and tool-kits that empower and equip them to mitigate differences and exchange views through constructive dialogue about how to build a peaceful and diverse Europe.

Language protection and linguistic rights are major elements of a diverse Europe. We focus on both the object and the subjects. For this reason, the Language Charter and the Framework Convention are both corner stones in our mandate. This was envisioned by our founders, the governments of Denmark, Germany and Schleswig-Holstein when we were founded in 1996 in Flensburg, Germany.

Although our work is most visible in Eastern Europe, our mandate covers the entire European Continent. And while our research department is based in Flensburg, we currently operate in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Kosovo. Until recently we implemented a part of the Council of Europe's Democratization programme in Georgia funded by the Government of Denmark. And we have previously operated in the Baltic states, Kaliningrad, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia. In many of these

projects, the Handbooks and the Language Guides, have been invaluable tools in our work.

The Handbooks (<http://www.ecmi.de/publications/category/ecmi-handbooks/>) were published in 2011 by Ewa Chylinski and Mahulena Hofmannova (eds.), titled *Early compliance of non-States Parties with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: A Handbook with twenty proposed instruments of ratification*. Vol. 1 presents the description of the situation of minority languages in a number of countries. It assesses the compliance of the national legislation with the provisions of the Language Charter and makes proposals for instruments of ratification. With this Handbook, it is hoped that the respective states, the civil society organizations and other stakeholders will use it as a guide to address the ratification possibilities as an achievable goal. Vol. 2 presents the congruence between both the Language Charter and the Framework Convention. This is presented in table formats for easy review of the existing legislation to support the proposals for instruments of ratifications. Since Nov 2011, the Handbooks have been downloaded 223 for volume 1 (with 197 unique visitors) and 181 times for volume 181 (with 166 unique visitors).

The Minority Language Guides (<http://www.ecmi.de/information-services/ecrml-language-guides/>) are a practical tool provided by the Council of Europe to provide an overview of the provisions applying to languages covered by the Charter and to structure and intensify the dialogue between the minority language speakers/their NGOs and the authorities of the states concerned. The Language Guides portal on our website is a project and a standing agreement between the Language Charter Secretariat and our Centre. These guides are produced by the Council of Europe and uploaded by our staff. Currently, the Language Guides exist in 17 languages, including Arabic, Romanian and Valencian. The Language Guides page was accessed last year (January-December 2014) 1614 times (with 947 unique visitors). Most viewed were the German Guide with 320 views and second the Russian Guide with 116 views. In 2013, there were almost twice as many visitors with 2945 visits (1753 unique visitors). Most viewed were again the German Guide with 562 visits and the Russian Guide with 200 visits. The Guides are being used but there is room for improvement. Perhaps we need a joint campaign on the new media. Certainly, we look forward to continuing this cooperation and we are grateful for the opportunity to promote the Language Charter through these tools.

The European Centre for Minority Issues uses the Guides and the Language Charter in its work. In Georgia, we assisted the authorities during the ratification process for the FCNM and now we are working with the authorities to promote signature of the Language Charter. In both cases, the Russian Guide has come in handy. In Ukraine we have just started a large programme on building dialogue institutions as well as capacity in the area of non-discrimination and participation. Here linguistic rights are an issue for the smaller minorities and the Russian Guide is again very helpful. In Moldova, not only linguistic rights but also language protection is in focus, not least in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia where there is a serious concern that the Gagauzian language, a Turkic language, will disappear if the authorities does not receive support to promote and preserve the language. Even though Moldova is not party to the Language Charter, we use the Russian Guide to inform the authorities and stakeholders about the European standards in respect to minority linguistic rights and language protection.

Another area where we have been very active is Kosovo. Our experts assisted the Constitutional Commission in writing Chapter 3 of the Constitution, the chapter on communities. The Kosovo Constitution recognizes two official languages in Kosovo:

Albanian and Serbian. Kosovo has adopted a law on the use of languages in 2007. Following independence, our Centre assisted the President's office in establishing the Consultative Council for Communities as well as establishing the Office for Community Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office. More recently, for the last two years, we have assisted in setting up the Office of the Language Commissioner, and we still assist him and his staff with research on areas that need implementation of bilingualism, such as the police force and access to public authorities in both languages. The Commissioner is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Language Law and also functions as a complaint mechanism. As such, Kosovo is far advanced compared to many other democracies in Europe.

Unfortunately, there is no Council of Europe Language Guide in Serbian, so we have had to develop a guide to the Language Commissioner's work and mandate. One reason why we did that was to inform minorities about European standards including the Language Charter. We encourage the Council of Europe to produce a guide in Serbian; Serbian is an inter-ethnic communication tool in the Balkans.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the cooperation between the European Centre for Minority Issues and the Council of Europe's COMEX and Secretariat is vitally important to the protection and promotion of minority languages. We thank you for the good working relationship so far and look forward to continuing the important work together with you. Thank you for the opportunity to address you at this very important event.