

Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria

Working Session 13

Rights of persons belonging to national minorities

Written statement in the exercise of the right to reply to the Association for Cultural Interaction

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The Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria wishes to draw attention to the fact that the ethnic and cultural diversity in the Bulgarian society is regarded as a wealth and an important resource for the development of the Bulgarian nation.

The Republic of Bulgaria adheres to the principle that every person can freely and voluntarily identify his/her ethnic belonging, mother tongue and religion, or, if he/she so chooses not to identify at all. The protection of the rights and freedoms of the Bulgarian citizens is guaranteed by the Bulgarian Constitution, the national legislation and Bulgaria's international commitments in the field of human rights.

Within this context persons belonging to different ethnic communities are enabled to study their mother tongue. This basic right is guaranteed by the Constitution (Article 36), the Law on National Education (Article 8) and the subsequent regulations. Mother tongue education is provided in municipal schools, and is financed through the municipal budgets. Free of charge text books are provided to pupils. Mother tongue can also be taught in the private schools.

The Ordinance № 6 of 28.05.2001 on the distribution of school time to achieve the general educational minimum for each grade, stage and level of education provides that the mother tongue and religion modules as part of the compulsory elective subjects programme have to be approved by the Minister of Education and Science. Languages taught as a mother tongue through the Bulgarian educational system are Armenian, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Romanian, and Turkish. According to the latest available information from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science for the academic year 2011/2012 a total of 11,055 students have studied these mother tongues:

- 36 students have learnt Arabic as a mother tongue in one school in Sofia;
- 216 students have learnt Armenian as a mother tongue in schools in Sofia Plovdiv and Bourgas;
- 117 students have learnt Hebrew as a mother tongue in one school in Sofia;
- 14 students have learnt Greek as a mother tongue in one school in Sliven;
- 13 students have learnt Rumanian as a mother tongue in one school in Ignatievo municipality, Region Varna;
- 10,659 students have learnt Turkish as a mother tongue in over 60 schools in 14 administrative regions.

The analysis of the above stated data proves that the Bulgarian citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin, enjoy equal access to studies in their mother tongue.