

LAUDATION

in praise of

the Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities

on the occasion of delivering the JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM Award

We would like to give a warm welcome to the representatives of the Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities as the 2019 winner in the category of national minorities of the Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award. This award is to acknowledge the restless work done by the organization for the enforcement of the rights of the national minorities living in Hungary on a high level, for as many as ten years. The activities performed by the Association have greatly contributed to the best possible enforcement of the rights and interests that are guaranteed to the institutions and members of these national minorities by the Fundamental Law of Hungary, the cardinal law on the rights of national minorities living in Hungary, as well as the related acts.

The award shows our appreciation of the presidents of the national minority self-governments, with special regard to the earlier head of the organization Mr. Mihály Hepp and its current president Mrs. Erzsébet Holler Racskó, who actively shaped the public life of the national minorities living in Hungary and contributed to the encouragement of the dialog between the national minorities in Hungary and the other groups of society in the past decade.

This acknowledgement at the same time means encouragement to resume this activity in the future: the Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities actively shapes and plays a key role in the cooperation of the national minorities in Hungary and at the same time, it is a useful coordination forum in the process of enforcing the rights of national minorities. Its work promotes and reinforces the endeavor that the young generation of the national minority communities take on an increasingly active role in fulfilling the common tasks.

In our days, the majority of European states agree that the cultural identity of the members of national minorities is a part of their human dignity, this is why it requires absolute protection. It is also recognized that, although it is highly important, it is not sufficient to ensure equal treatment for the majority society and the national minority communities but it is also necessary to give special authorities to these communities. Individual nationality rights may help preserve or express the identity of the person in question, as well as the specific national minority features of their environment but the situation of the entire community is also influenced by collective rights. The key to preserving, representing and passing on cultural identity is the establishment of a well-functioning advocacy and educational-cultural institutional system.

The system of national minority self-governments, which was established in Hungary in 1993 and which has by now become able to represent settlement, regional and national level interests alike, is a unique tool and opportunity to create the frameworks of a nationality cultural autonomy, which has such a reliable foundation both in positive law and dogmatics that guarantees that the existence and operation of national minority self-governments will remain a part of the Hungarian state and social structure.

However, it has been proven by history that for using the wide-ranging authorities ensured by the Fundamental Law of Hungary and the Act on the Rights of Nationalities, it is constantly necessary to define and enforce common self-government goals that point beyond the special needs of the individual communities regarding all such matters that affect the legal status, roles and opportunities of the self-governments.

The heads of the national minority self-governments wisely recognized that the right of assembly offers to them further possibilities to enforce their interests, as the right of the national minority communities to collectively participate in public life may also be realized through establishing and operating civil society

organizations: this special opportunity for self-organization is guaranteed both as an individual and a collective right by the Act on the Rights of Nationalities.

Considering the above and using the opportunity provided by the law, in 2009, the Association of National Minority Self-Governments was founded by the national minority self-governments of the country as their voluntary social organization, for a collective goal of protecting and enforcing their interests. The president of the organization was Mihály Hepp from the Croatian national minority, from the outset until 2014. In 2014, the organization was transformed, this is when it assumed the name Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities, and it was at that time that Mrs. Erzsébet Holler Racskó, the president of the National Self-Government of Slovaks in Hungary became its new president.

The Association is an independent, self-sustaining organization, which is independent from all the political parties, a member of which can be any and all national minority self-governments which wish to cooperate with the other members of the association by respecting voluntary activities, the equality of the members before the law, consensus-building, the sharing of burdens, a future-oriented approach, professionalism, activities performed in an association, as well as the principle of local governance.

In the spirit of solidarity and professionalism, the organization, striving to work together with other self-government advocacy groups, undertakes to represent and enforce the interests of the self-governments in legislation and in other decision-making processes and wishes to participate in aligning interests on a national level. With regard to this, the organization encourages its members to cooperate and endeavor to develop common standpoints besides preserving their independence. The Association mediates the viewpoints of the self-governments that joined as members, towards the advocacy, political, or government organs, as well as the national minority groups and the majority society.

It is an important element of the social awareness-raising activity related to the rights of national minorities and the diversity of these national minority communities that the Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities took over the publication of the journal *Barátság*, as well as the editing of the webpage nemzetisegek.hu from Filantróp Társaság Barátság Egyesület (Philanthropic Friendship Society) in 1 January 2018. This journal is the only periodical in Hungary, issued six times a year, that informs the public of the key cultural events and traditional festivities of the national minority communities, furthermore, one that publishes selections from works of literary and fine arts, from the current performances of universal artwork and science. Furthermore, it undertakes an important role in shaping national minority policies, as it allows politicians, public officials and experts on national minorities to express their opinions on state measures concerning the national minorities, especially those related to the issuance of regulations concerning national minorities, thus providing practical support to the legislators.

The Association of National Self-Governments of the Nationalities has by now become a key factor in the public life of the national minorities living in Hungary: it is a permanent consultation partner of the government organs involved in nationality policy and it performs its tasks in a close professional partnership with the Parliamentary Committee of National Minorities of Hungary, the MPs of national minorities and nationality advocates. The high-level working relationship developed between the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, and especially the deputy commissioner for the rights of national minorities living in Hungary, as well as the Association in the past few years has greatly contributed to the monitoring of the enforcement of the rights of national minorities living in Hungary and the widening opportunities for the Ombudsman to act against the violation of such rights.

The *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award is to acknowledge the committed work of ten years for the wide-ranging enforcement of the rights of the national minorities living in Hungary and it is also aimed at encouraging that the value-based activities for protecting and enforcing interests be continued in the future as well, in the interests of all the national minorities living in Hungary.

We congratulate the Association and its members on their receiving the award and we wish them all success for the work performed in the interests of the national minority communities.

Budapest, 9 December 2019