

UKRAINE'S LANGUAGE LAW IS NOT COMPLIANT WITH EU CANDIDATURE

If EU candidate Ukraine reverts its language law, it would be able to demonstrate its commitment to European values and peace.

Ukraine became an EU candidate member in June 2022. However, the European Commission requested Ukraine, that it does not only have to combat corruption but it also needs to fulfill the demands of the Venice committee regarding the language law. On top of this Ukraine should also comply with the standards set down in the Strasbourg treaty for the protection of national minorities. This treaty safeguards the free use of autonomous minority languages.

The importance of linguistic rights should not be underestimated in the Ukrainian context. After the ethnic breakup of Yugoslavia, language rights had been identified as a prerequisite for the European Integration of former Soviet satellite states.

Slovakia and Romania – both countries with significant linguistics minorities – never would have been member of the European Union today, if they would have disregarded the basic human rights of their own population during the EU candidacy period in the same way as Ukraine does now.

The Copenhagen Criteria explicitly mention those basic standards that any EU candidate must fulfill. The first criteria clearly states that an EU candidate member needs to have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

The Ukrainian language law which has been adopted by the Ukrainian parliament, right after the ratification of the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine in 2017 is fundamentally incompatible with these criteria.

Szelmenc

This language law, which forbids the public use of languages other than Ukrainian, also threatens the inhabitants of the village Szelmenc in

Transcarpathia. The tragic history of this village is a representative illustration for the history of Ukraine. The village was part of Austria-Hungary till 1919 and then became part of Czechoslovakia, it became part of Hungary in 1938. In 1945 a border had been placed through the village, which resulted in one part being Czechoslovakia and the Other part being Soviet-Union. In the nineties the villagers woke up in Slovakia and Ukraine. Despite the changing borders, the languages which has been spoken, by the inhabitants has not changed.

Collateral Damage

Romanian speaking Ukrainians are in a situation, which is identical to that of ethnic Hungarians according to a shocking testimony of ethnic Romanians from Ukraine about the dismantling of their language rights and education, during a conference at the council of Europe at the end of 2021. Although the primary purpose of the Ukrainian language law is directed against Russian speakers, it also makes vulnerable historical minorities simply collateral damage of the Conflict with Russia.

The present regulations regarding the public use of the Russian language can be called absurd. It is not only forbidden to use the Russian language in commerce, but also forbidden to print newspapers in the Russian language. An evangelization broadcaster recently reported that it had to move to Hungary, since it is forbidden to evangelize in the Russian language on Ukrainian radio.

By immediately restoring language rights EU candidate member Ukraine can directly make a credible contribution to peace and simultaneously show its commitment to European Values. The only thing needed is political will.

Drs. G.Landman

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