

**POLICY DISCUSSION MEETING ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF
NATIONAL MINORITIES**

**Minority Rights Group International
18-20 April 2002, Budapest, Hungary**

The Issue: The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) is the first multilateral legally binding instrument devoted to minority rights. The Convention entered into force in February 1998 and has been ratified by 34 States as of February 2002. It covers a range of principles and programme type provisions which are to be implemented by State Parties. The Council of Europe has established a system of monitoring based on reports from the Contracting Parties. An Advisory Committee (AC) of independent experts examines these state reports and is required to prepare an opinion on each State report. Contacts with the civil society has become a regular feature of the AC's work. NGOs and other community organisations have meaningfully contributed to the monitoring process through raising awareness of the Convention, engaging in dialogue with their governments, and providing the AC with critical assessment of the situations in their countries to supplement information from States. The Convention came into force five years ago and a couple of sets of Opinions, Comments and Decisions were published. It is now a crucial time to assess whether the FCNM has been useful in improving the protection of minorities at the national and local levels and to consider the best ways forward to strengthen its implementation.

The Workshop: The workshop will bring together 25-30 minority-based and other human rights NGOs as well as members of the Secretariat of the Framework Convention and of the Advisory Committee and other relevant experts from across the Council of Europe area. Participants are invited from Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the FR of Yugoslavia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and UK- Northern Ireland. All participants will have experience in working with and along the Framework Convention and a strong commitment to good practice in their work.

The key *purpose* of this meeting is to identify the ways in which the FCNM has and could contribute to the improvement of the situation of minorities at local and national levels. Besides the focus on the constructive ways forward, we would also like to discuss those circumstances/contexts under which the FCNM has been or could be less useful. Lessons will be learnt from the past to identify the best ways forward. The *goals* are to (1) share experiences of NGOs, INGOs and participants on *processes* that have been established along the FCNM; *mechanisms* that have been created; *concrete results* that have been produced; *impacts* on minorities, NGOs, Governments at local and national or inter-state levels; in-country, regional and international networks that have been created; and follow-up advocacy, (2) to disseminate existing local and national information from and among participants; (3) to establish a broader international linkage between and among NGOs and experts.

The methodology will be participatory. The workshop will be structured around facilitated discussion sessions based on a policy paper that will be forwarded to participants well before the meeting. Participants will be asked to write up their experiences along the FCNM briefly. The case studies should not be longer than one page and could be constructed around the

following major points: (1) Objectives; (2) Methodology; (3) Concrete outputs and long-term developments; (4) Lessons learned – both positive and negative; (5) Follow-up activities.

The **language** of the workshop will be **English**.

Workshop follow-up: A workshop report will be produced on the basis of discussions to summarise the key-issues that have emerged so far along the FCNM and to map out future directions and possible activities. The workshop report will be disseminated across the Council of Europe area and it will be used by MRG in its international advocacy at the UN, CoE, OSCE. It is hoped that the workshop report will support participants' advocacy efforts and will be used in their organisations' work.

In order to make sure that some of the ideas from the workshop can be taken forward, MRG has secured a small amount of money (USD 1500 per project) for five follow-up activities. This money will be allocated by MRG following the workshop on the basis of application forms.

Costs: MRG will cover the costs of participant travel, accommodation and subsistence only for all invited participants.

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