



Background

One of the aims of the Council of Europe, which was a commitment from the Warsaw Summit, is to achieve more inclusive Europe, which cannot be imagined without the integration of national minorities in European societies.

The integration of minorities means creating more inclusive and cohesive societies where individuals and groups have opportunity to participate equally in their communities. Integration describes a condition in which different ethnic groups are able to maintain group uniqueness while participating equally in essential process of production, distribution and government. The best way to achieve de facto integration of persons belonging to national minorities is to provide their effective participation in the decision-making process.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities remains one of the main legal instruments in this area. The provisions of the Framework Convention have contributed towards enhancing the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities and at the same time provided possibilities for their integration into the mainstreams of society. Article 15 of the FCNM stipulates that “states shall create the conditions necessary for effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social, economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.” In 2008 the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention produced the [Advisory Committee Commentary on Participation](#) on the Effective Participation of persons belonging to National Minorities in Cultural, Social and Economic Life and in Public Affairs. In the framework of the Macedonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will organise a Conference on the theme: “Strengthening the cohesion of European societies: effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the decision-making process”. The Conference will also address two sub-themes: “Creating conditions for more effective participation in the political and public life for the future: What needs to be done to strengthen the cohesion of our societies while respecting diversities” and “Synergies and Comparative advantages of the Council of Europe, OSCE/HCNM, EU and UN actions that contribute towards better integration of minorities in the decision-making process”.

The aim of the Conference is to provide opportunity for participants to make an overview of the current situation in the member-states of the Council of Europe and to consider to what extent the implementation of the Framework Convention on National Minorities has contributed to the increased effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the decision-making process. An analysis of the impact of the Thematic Commentary produced by the Advisory Committee in 2008 on the Effective Participation of persons belonging to national Minorities in Cultural, Social and Economic Life and in Public Affairs could be presented at the conference. The Conference will also examine the remaining challenges and look into future actions on improving the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the decision-making process at national and local level in the Council of Europe Member States. The participants could consider whether it is feasible to task the Council of Europe/DH-MIN to elaborate a Manual of best practise on this issue.