

UNITY GIVES POWER

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This event is not only a occasion to remember the recommendation of the CE, but at the same time we will remember M. Tifon who died some days ago in Paris. The Arman people has lost with him a very important member. May his spirit, engagement and hope for his people be with us in these days here in Ohrid.

I'll thank you for the invitation and It's a great pleasures to be among you, let me start with 3 reasons:

1 I was in Ohrid in occasion of the opening ceremony of the center by the OSCE, with the aim to start the reconciliation of the population belonging to different ethnic communities in the Balkan area. Some steps have been taken, but we are still far away from the expected results.

2. A second reason. It is now 16 years since CONVIVENZA organized a big conference in Switzerland with representatives of the Arman people living in the Balkan. We achieved the ambitious goal to create a common organization of the Arman people. Our example was the Retoromansh people in Switzerland, of whom I'm a member. The Retoromansh people is really the brother of the Arman people with a language based on Latin, a people living in the mountains and over centuries separated by religion, and not least with about 40 000 speakers one of the small peoples without a state of their own. Another example is the Sami population living in 4 states in the northern Europa, a small people too. They built a common organization over Norway, Sweden and Finland and that was the precondition to get visibility, acceptance and strong possibilities to have influence. Let's come together, together we are strong, was for the Retoromansh and for the Sami people the slogan and should be the slogan for a new start for the Armans, too.

3. The third reason to be proud, is the proof of what I mentioned with *together we are strong*. Last year I was in Beograd to the festivity when the Arman PEN Club became a member of the PEN Club international. It's indeed the result of years of engagement and I'll express recognition especially to Lila Cona for her engagement. You get Arman people visibility.

Now some words to the recommendation of the CE. The situation today cannot be not compared with the years 25 years ago. I'll think you agree with me, when I say it was at a time full of hope to achieve the goals of recognition and acceptance of communities like the Arman people. I remember the euphoric meetings with political challenges, but also with initiatives and engagement of the people. Today we must admit that the interest for diversity, for minority rights, for rights of small peoples doesn't has the priority in the European political agenda. We are witnesses to a war in Europe, to potential conflicts in this region, too, but it's even worse that we are living in a period of growing nationalism, where the diversity of peoples is seen as danger for the national unity.

But we have to learn that international institutions like the Council of Europe the OSCE and others don't have the power we expected. They are all still instruments of the member states. Their possibilities to get real influence against the will and power of the member states are weak. And dear friends I must confess Your Umbrella organization, the big result of Disentis was not able to fulfill the hope we sat in her activities.

Let me close with three advices, which I learned in my lifelong interest and engagement especially for the small peoples. All three are covered by the slogan Together are we strong and how to become visible?

1. The first is unity. Cesar' saying divide et impara is the strategy of the imperialists, as well as of the nationalists. To find unity under one umbrella is a difficult work for the small peoples also, they rather prefer the isolation more than to give a hand and work together. It is the chance an condition for achieving results, and also for being visible and credible in their own states and in Europe.
2. The second is to develop a common strategy on the practice on the cultural, social, political and social media. To inspire the young people is essential. Common small projects which are possible in one of the states could have more chances to be copied in another. A common strategy is the best weapon to fight for in the nationalistic states.
3. 3. Do your own things, don't put your hope on others, the state, the international institutions, you have the power to improve and guarantee the survival of the Arman people! I'm sure that this consciousness will be strengthened by this conference