

***His Excellence László Sólyom, the President of the Republic of Hungary
Message to the participants of the 2nd European Conference on Higher Education
of National Minorities***

The preservation of the national identities and the maintaining of cultural diversity, regardless of state borders, is the road to the future in the European Union. Moreover, each state has the moral obligation, and the Republic of Hungary has also a constitutional obligation also, to assist its minorities who live in other countries. The aim is to help the parts of the Hungarian nation to resist even natural trends of assimilation, which threatens even though that given minority benefits of all rights from the state of their citizenship. Therefore, minorities should also benefit from enhanced rights. Nevertheless, each state should grant such rights to national minorities living on their territory. According to the Hungarian Constitution, national and ethnic minorities living in Hungary are state-forming factors. On the other hand, the Republic of Hungary bears responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders.

In 2 months, Romania will be part, along with Hungary, of an important international community. The European Union is not merely an economic community; first and foremost it is a community of values and rights.

This community, to which nations join voluntarily, provides us with the opportunity to resolve contradictions that have caused so many failures along history. We may now rely on shared civil freedoms, and continue to foster Hungarian national language, culture and historical identity that will keep us together. Shared freedom is now much wider than it was, when it had lead to the creation of nation-states. Today, it means rule of law and European norms, including higher education of national minorities and various forms of autonomy that a cultural nation may benefit from.

Let us remember that the European Union has been established to ensure that peoples of Europe live together in peace and friendship, and protect the rights of each and everyone. We need to reiterate and emphasize that every seventh

citizen of the European Union lives in minority in its state, and out of this large community over 100,000 people pursue their studies in various higher education institutions dedicated to the national minorities in certain countries of the European Union. Moreover, the grounds for higher education of national minorities are the rights of each person in the European Union to advance their own history and to have access to education in their own language.

The European Conference on Higher Education of National Minorities organized with the participation of member states with long years of national and European experience plays a special role in turning printed letters of law into applied daily practice. I wish a successful dialog to all the participants of the conference.

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László SÓLYOM