

**Greeting by the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters
Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities,
Parliamentary State Secretary Christoph Bergner,
at the annual ECMI Advisory Council Conference in Berlin,
7 May 2012**

Ladies and gentlemen,
Prof. Larsen, Dr. Malloy,

- As a contribution to language diversity I will start by using the local minority language German.
- Es ist für mich eine Freude, hier als Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Aussiedlerfragen und nationale Minderheiten zu sprechen. Ich heiÙe Sie alle in der schleswig-holsteinischen Landesvertretung in Berlin willkommen und freue mich, dass ich an der diesjähri-gen Konferenz des wissenschaftlichen Beirats des Europäischen Zentrums für Minderheitenforschung teilnehmen kann. Ich danke ECMI für die Organisation der Veranstaltung und dem Land Schleswig-Holstein für das Zur-Verfügung-Stellen der Räumlichkeiten.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- In choosing this Representation of Schleswig-Holstein, ECMI has found a very suitable place for this conference. Sixteen years ago, the governments of Denmark, Germany and the state of Schleswig-Holstein founded the European Centre for Minority Issues. During all that time these stakeholders have supported it.
- It is important to emphasize that the support will continue. The research, information and advice ECMI offers can help in different cases with issues and problems of majorities and minorities which arise from their often opposing interests.

- Almost every day, we are made aware that ethnic tensions and long-standing conflicts between nationalities continue to plague many countries in Europe. Conflicts, which reappeared after the collapse of the old states and old power structures - communist structures - in eastern and south-eastern Europe, or older conflicts between religious groups and nationalities that were only kept in check by those regimes have flared up again. New or seemingly new problems have also appeared, as the groups who feel their special ethnic and linguistic identity are now free to organise themselves and are able as organised groups to require their legitimate rights as minorities.
- For this reason, today you are dealing with the implementation status of European standards for minority protection at various political levels. Europe has agreements on protection for minorities, but minorities do not receive adequate protection in all regions of Europe. In some cases, minority protection has reached an impasse. At this conference, you plan to discuss solutions for several specific problems and so possibly help break the deadlock on certain conflicts.
- The theme of this year's conference is "The Minority Governance Impasse: Overcoming the Macro-Micro Divide". In some countries, particularly those regions whose status is in dispute due to their history and/or to separatist movements, there is no dialogue on minority rights at the highest, or macro, level of government. Here I am thinking of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, northern Cyprus and northern Kosovo. But even in some democratic states, protection of minorities is inadequate or non-existent. The aim is to achieve effective and comprehensive protection for minorities everywhere.
- This raises the question whether de facto states – states not or only partly recognised - should be allowed to enter into minority regimes. On the one hand, this could give minority rights greater weight in the regions I have just mentioned, so that minorities in these regions would gain protection. On the other hand, the participation of de facto states in international treaties could be considered as recognition for these states and used to reinforce their claims to

sovereignty. The accession of de facto states to minority regimes brings risks as well as opportunities.

- You are also planning to address the gap between government obligations to respect minority rights and actual compliance with these obligations at local level. State obligations to respect minority rights do not automatically ensure effective protection of minorities. All levels of administration must be informed of these obligations, and the leading institutions must enforce compliance. Ignorance at local level should not prevent effective protection of minorities. From my point of view, this can be the task of ECMI: Providing information and advice at local level can improve minority protection at local level and overcome the macro-micro divide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- After an introduction from an academic perspective, I am looking forward to a productive discussion from the perspectives of theory and practice – as many of you are involved in both. It is especially helpful that many of you have the experience of working in the regions I have mentioned.
- I am grateful to all who are committed to protecting minorities. Your commitment helps ensure peace and the development of democracy. I wish you a very successful conference and renewed inspiration for your future efforts.