

European Commission  
Vice-President Věra Jourová

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**THE MINORITY SAFEPAK INITIATIVE**

Dear Vice-President Jourová,

I was delighted to note that the Minority Safepack initiative was supported by more than 1.1 million citizens from all over the EU. It is encouraging to see that so many people joined together in asking for a Europe that ensures the protection of national and linguistic minorities all across the Union. The initiative sends a clear message that there is still work to be done by us policy makers, at all levels, before we can safely say that we have an EU where all minorities and autonomies have a place. In concrete terms, I was especially pleased to see that the initiative sets out clear action points for the Commission to take us closer to such a reality.

For the autonomous Åland Islands, this initiative is of great importance. Several of the actions that the initiative calls for could really make a difference in the lives of people in our country. For example, the proposal to amend the 'Directive on the coordination of certain provisions in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services to ensure the reception of audiovisual content in regions where national minorities reside' may seem like yet another legislatively challenging process, but I am sure you can imagine the frustration people feel when they cannot access TV broadcasts in their native language.

It was therefore with great disappointment I took note of the Commission's response to the initiative and the conclusion that no further legislative acts are even proposed. The lack of action to address the concrete problems described in the initiative is of course disappointing in itself but what's more, it sends a very worrying signal to the citizens of Europe. Are the concerns of minorities all across the EU not worth more of a reply than this?

When Åland after a referendum decided to join the EU in 1995, the Union we joined was one of regions. The respect for autonomies and minorities was a central part of the Union's policy making and subsidiarity was set out to be a guiding principle. Today we see different,

worrying development and the Commission is regrettably often a driving force in this. More and more often, legislative proposals for example demand one national plan to be published per Member State. For an autonomy with full competencies to implement EU legislation in some areas and manage some of the EU funds, this becomes both a huge administrative challenge and it risks interfering with our constitutional order. The fact that for example article 4.2 of the treaty unambiguously sets out that the Union shall respect Member States' fundamental structures, inclusive of regional and local self-government seems to have been forgotten somewhere down the road.

Vice-President Jourová, I have followed your important work on ensuring a Union built on the rule of law and transparency and I really wish you the best in pursuing this important and challenging task. At the same time, I hope that you can keep in mind the specificities of different parts of the Union. Together, we can work for a Europe where minorities and autonomies are fully respected and where there truly is a place for each and every citizen.



Harry Jansson

Minister for EU Affairs and deputy Head of the Åland Government