

**The project »Protect yOUR Diversity« was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"**

**Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.1 "*Town-Twinning*"**

**Participation:** The project enabled the direct meeting of at least 212 citizens, 62 of them from Slovenia, and 150 from partners' and associated organizations from five more different countries: Croatia 45, Serbia 32, Bosnia and Herzegovina 54, Austria 13 and Germany 6.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Škofja Loka, Slovenia, from 26/05/2022 to 29/05/2022.

### **Short description of the project "Protect yOUr Diversity":**

In cooperation with the municipality of Škofja Loka and with partners from five different countries, the Croatian Cultural Association Komušina from Škofja Loka has implemented project activities supported by the European Commission under the Programme Europe for Citizens, Measure 2.1 Town – Twinning.

We have organized the International Conference to primarily promote linguistic and cultural diversity in the EU and combat language-related grounds of ethnic minority discrimination. Our project addresses linguistic prejudice connected to ethnic origin, explores the richness of language diversity in the EU and promotes ethnic minority languages as a part of common European cultural heritage.

The International Conference "Protect yOUr Diversity" was also implemented to promote a more significant role of citizens to connect with decision-makers at local, national and EU levels. The conference was held in cooperation with various municipalities, non-governmental organizations, immigrant communities, minority members, experts and representatives of local and national authorities who discussed minority issues in Slovenia and at the EU level. The conference program included exchanging experiences and good practices on integrating minorities into social, cultural and political life in different European countries.

In workshops and lectures, the participants discussed how to take further steps to ensure the sensitization, appreciation and recognition of minority languages in their everyday life. The main topic of debate was on how to ensure multilingualism as a developing minority EU perspective, community engagement in achieving language equality and how to tackle linguistic prejudice and language discrimination in media.

By actively involving different minority groups and experts, we have established our 'PRotect yOUR Diversity' minority network, made the promotive video, and just launched a long-term video media campaign to reach the relevant stakeholders. The project campaign will target local, national and European decision-makers and influence them to combat linguistic discrimination, especially in the media and social networks. That will contribute to protecting the minority languages in local communities and promote the multilingual abilities of minorities in achieving greater equality and integration.

The participants also discussed the future role of minorities in the EU and their European perspective, the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life, and looking for proposals on how minority organizations, in cooperation with local communities, can help to reduce discrimination and prejudice on a general level. The conference brought together representatives of municipalities and minority communities from 6 different countries, European, national and local authorities, experts, artists and representatives of minority associations in Slovenia. They all tried to contribute to promoting debates and finding solutions for the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life.

### **Programme of the Conference:**

#### **The programme of the Day 1:**

Programme of the Day 1 started with the arrival of representatives of partners' organizations. Delegates brought various culinary delights from their countries, which we exhibited and organized an 'international welcome fair'. At the introductory event, we have started with twinning activities and introducing to each other. This was followed by dinner and socializing programme.

#### **The programme of the Day 2:**

The second day's program started with the opening greeting from the organisers - Damir Hauptman addressed the participants on behalf of the Croatian cultural association Komušina, and Mr Tine Radinja, the mayor of the Municipality Škofja Loka, on behalf of Municipality Škofja Loka.

The first part of the workshops of the conference began with the presentation of partners' organisations in the project, their local communities and countries. At the working meeting, partners' delegates compared experiences and practices in the general status of minorities in social, cultural and political life in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Austria and Germany.

In addition to partners' organisations, at the plenary session, representatives of various cross-sectoral organisations - Ministry of Culture of RS, Office for Cultural Diversity and Human Rights, Republic of Slovenia's Advocate to Principle of Equality, People's University of Škofja Loka, City of Zagreb, Youth Center Institute O, Municipality of Škofja Loka's Department for Social Affairs, Škofja Loka's Tourist Office, RTV Slovenia's TV 1 Editor for Minority programme and others, presented themselves.

At the workshop of the Europe café, the chief editor of RTV Slovenia's Radio 1 for minorities opened the debate with her personal experience and the overall analysis of the minority status in Slovenia. The conference's special guest, one of Europe's leading experts on minority rights, Council of Europe's member of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (since 2010), and the Cambridge University visiting professor and Alumnae, prof. Dr Petra Roter attended the workshop. As an independent expert, she has co-operated with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and ECMI – European Centre for Minority Issues. She is also the Chair of the University Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences International Relations cathedra.

She gave a motivational opening lecture and started the Q & A with participants. With this introduction, we opened a round table where we touched on the main topic of debate - how to ensure multilingualism as a developing minority EU perspective, community engagement in achieving language equality and tackling linguistic prejudice and language discrimination in media.

After the workshops, participants of the conference learned about the cultural and natural sights of the local environment under the guided program. The participants visited Škofja Loka's medieval city centre and Castle with Museum complex and learned about the city's historical and cultural history and potential. They also saw some infrastructural spots of the town rebuilt with the help of EU funds (Škofja Loka's panoramic road).

In parallel with this program, the other participants of the conference, representatives of partners and cultural organisations from abroad, could socialise with the local cuisine in the outdoors activities and Association's Club Venue in Škofja Loka.

The second day of the conference ended with a cultural program with the renowned Slovenian Stand–Up Comedian programme of immigrant descent, and also included the concert of traditional Bosnian music (Sevdah). At the dinner the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other informally, socialise and exchange their views, ideas and contacts.

### **The programme of the Day 3:**

The program of the third day began with displaying a special video message to the participants from the Slovene Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Mr Luka Mesec. The representative of Center for Mobility and European Education and Training Programs (CMEPIUS), NA for Erasmus+ programme and contact point for Europe for Citizens programme, prepared a presentation of the EfC programme. We were also presented other funding opportunities and programmes by the European Union (Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Social Fund, European Solidarity Corps and other smaller programs) that offer various forms of participation to minority organizations.

During the break, the participants could refresh themselves with original local delicacies. At the Europe café workshop, we were able to exchange views, experiences and good practices, and above all, we focused on the future and various possibilities of upgrading cooperation. We were able to implement the storytelling method, so we focused on others' experiences to premise our conclusions. Mr Andrej Hoivik, a member of the Slovenian national parliament,

also attended the debate. He fully expressed his best wishes and backed up our intentions to implement our goals regarding the minority issues, especially tackling the linguistic prejudice and language discrimination in media. Afterwards, the conference delegates had their shooting sessions to create material for our promotional video and their expressions during our conference. Before the main cultural event, the participants appeared at the Create your diversity and Minority art exhibition, where they could try the art crafts under the tutorial.

The main cultural event started with the opening words of the president of the Croatian Cultural Association Komušina, Mr Pejo Mijatović. The mayor of Škofja Loka, Mr Tine Radinja, also welcomed participants. The different traditionally artists and folklore groups of participants from Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Slovenia displayed their knowledge and skills.

A special welcome was made to the local folklore group of mentally handicapped who attended the programme, as solidarity towards other people with fewer opportunities who live in the neighbourhood. The programme continued with the live artist programme and dinner for the participants.

#### **The programme of the Day 4:**

The conference has ended with signing the Joint twinning statement on the importance of combating language prejudice, developing intercultural dialogue, protecting cultural heritage and engaging local communities in promoting and fostering social inclusion.