



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Working Session 17 Address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; Rights of persons belonging to national minorities; Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism**

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer,  
U.S. Permanent Representative to the OSCE  
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In certain participating States, members of minority groups may be vulnerable to human rights abuses and are often the target of discrimination. Equally regrettable, minority groups may be the pawns of neighboring countries who claim to speak for them.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities has the mandate to engage parties in the most appropriate manner with the goal of enhancing peace and security through the realization of human rights as they pertain to the members of national minorities. The United States fully supports the High Commissioner and thanks Astrid Thors for her discreet, yet active, work in so many OSCE states.

Communities that have been targeted for discrimination in **Russian-occupied Crimea** include ethnic Ukrainians, Jews, Catholics and Orthodox Christians outside the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, and especially members of the Crimean Tatar community. Russian occupation authorities have sought to intimidate Crimean Tatars by conducting dozens of raids on their homes, schools, and mosques and by seizing control of and closing the headquarters of the Tatar representative council, or Mejlis. They have levied unprecedented fines of almost \$100,000 on the Crimea Foundation, a major Tatar NGO, and have closed down most Tatar media and information sources.

Some Crimean Tatar leaders, including Mustafa Dzhemiliev, Refat Chubarov, and Sinaver Kadyrov, continue to be banned from returning to Crimea. Those leaders and activists who remain on the peninsula face a campaign of baseless arrests, interrogations, prosecutions, and imprisonment. Their family members and livelihoods are threatened. Crimean Tatar leader Ahtem Ciygoz has been jailed since January, awaiting trial on questionable charges. The occupation authorities have also failed to identify those responsible for the disappearances and killings of Crimean Tatars in the early months of the purported annexation of Crimea. We appreciate the recent joint report on human rights abuses in Crimea issued by ODIHR and High Commissioner Thors despite their inability to access the peninsula. We call on Russia and the occupation authorities to give them immediate and unrestricted access to the territory of Crimea.

In **Georgia**, ethnic Georgians continue to be denied property rights and freedom of movement in the occupied regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In **Moldova**, educational opportunities through Latin-script schools remain limited for children living in the Transnistrian region.

Efforts to enhance dialogue and facilitate freedom of movement in Moldova and Georgia warrant ongoing support.

Elsewhere, challenges to democratic governance affect the rights of persons belonging to minorities. While some progress has been made in **Kyrgyzstan** in recent years, more should be done to address inter-ethnic tensions, including improving access for ethnic Uzbeks to language education and media in their native tongue. We encourage **Turkmenistan** to promote access to education for members of national minorities in their mother tongues and to allow them to exercise their cultural and linguistic diversity.

We see many positive developments in the Balkans since the ethnic cleansing of the 1990s. We continue to encounter, however, lingering effects from that period of conflict. Nationalism often undermines individual human rights in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. We are particularly concerned by calls for a “third entity” in the Federation and by secessionist rhetoric in Republika Srpska. Unfortunately, the 2009 Sejdic-Finci ruling of the European Court for Human Rights, which ruled all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, may hold office and be represented in all state-level institutions, remains unimplemented. Furthermore, the country has yet to tackle the inefficient and ethnically divisive “two schools under one roof” model.

Our discussions in regard to minority rights need to cover **Kosovo**, although it is unfortunate that its representatives are denied a seat at the OSCE table to hear and respond on this issue. Progress made since the April 2013 agreement between Kosovo and **Serbia** has the potential to receive a boost from the new agreement – achieved in August – on the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities. The key will be good faith implementation by both sides. Members of minority communities in Kosovo still face varying levels of institutional and societal discrimination in areas such as employment, property, social services, language use, freedom of movement, and the right to return voluntarily to one’s home.

Inter-ethnic tensions continue to be a concern in **Macedonia**. Political leaders on both sides of the ethnic divide must demonstrate renewed commitment to the Ohrid Framework Agreement and act according to its letter and spirit. They must also give greater priority to integration in the education system, enabling a younger generation to find new opportunities to advance. Above all, the current political crisis in Macedonia should not be a reason for anyone to use inter-ethnic tensions for political or other gain.

Finally, **Greece** has sought to legally affirm certain ethnic minority groups, but limitations remain. The Greek government is working to establish national worship sites for the officially recognized Muslim minority population, as well as those newly arrived, yet societal tensions remain, resulting in discrimination and social exclusion.

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, but it is also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the worst single transgression of the Final Act – the genocide at Srebrenica. Let our accomplishments over four decades inspire us to make continued progress, but let continued examples of hate, aggression and discrimination equally move us to ongoing action before it is, again, too late.