



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 8:

Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I (continued),

Including:

Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities, and
Preventing Aggressive Nationalism, Racism and Chauvinism

As prepared for delivery by Harry Kamian,
Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE
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Let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to High Commissioner on National Minorities Zannier and his office and note we look forward to his visit to the United States next month. The HCNM has a well-earned reputation for independence, objectivity, and practical approaches to problem-solving.

The OSCE region continues to witness serious violations of OSCE commitments regarding the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The bloody conflicts in the Western Balkans in the 1990s are behind us, but countries in the region continue to face a number of challenges. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, not all individuals enjoy equal political rights. There is pervasive discrimination against those who are not ethnic Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats; against those who belong to those three ethnicities; against those who are a minority within their region; against those who proclaim their mixed heritage; and against those who feel their ethnicity should be irrelevant or simply a personal matter. The ability to self-identify should include the ability to keep that identification private.

Within the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska, under the leadership of Milorad Dodik, official policies and rhetoric have sanctioned intimidation of and discrimination against non-Serb returnees, including in employment.

Within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have the absurdity of "two schools under one roof," one for Bosniaks and the other for Croats. Institutionalizing the separation of communities is the wrong way to heal the divides caused by war. Some argue this system protects communities, but it doesn't. It segregates them and reinforces ignorance of the other. The plan announced by the government of the Republika Srpska to adopt Serbia's curriculum fails to consider the needs and sensitivities of non-Serb students and appears designed to further sway Serb citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to associate themselves more with Serbia than Bosnia.

Serbs in **Croatia** continue to face intimidation and historic revisionism from certain elements in society, elements that some officials and segments of society fail to sufficiently condemn and correct.

Minority communities in **Kosovo** still face varying levels of discrimination, both institutional and societal, in employment, access to legal and social services, and regarding their freedom of movement.

Survivors of conflict are traumatized anew when they hear denials of past wrongs, including the denial of the July 1995 Srebrenica genocide, or when they see support, sometimes high-level, in **Serbia** and **Croatia** for those convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. We join all those, including in Serbia, who condemned the tweet by the Deputy Speaker of Serbian Parliament, Vjerica Radeta, mocking the recent death of Hatidza Mehmetovic, a leader of the Mothers of Srebrenica. Mrs. Mehmetovic lost her husband, two sons, and a brother in the genocide. And we condemn expressions of adoration by some leading Croatian politicians for music with hate-filled lyrics.

The United States condemns the **Russian Federation's** aggression in **Ukraine** and **Georgia**. Its occupation of parts of their territory are egregious examples of aggressive nationalism. Russia seized Crimea by force, and as it seeks to "russify" the peninsula, occupation authorities continue to discriminate against and target for reprisal the two largest non-Russian minorities – Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians. Russian occupation authorities have banned most Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar-language media, replacing the content with Russian programming, and commit gross and widespread harassment of organizations representing minority communities. Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars can no longer gather to celebrate their national holidays and mark historic dates, school instruction in their languages has decreased dramatically, and their leaders have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, interrogation, politically motivated prosecution, and imprisonment.

Russia fomented the conflict in eastern Ukraine on the false pretext of protecting Russian speakers. As the direct result of Russian aggression, the population has undergone terrible suffering: nearly two million people have been displaced and more than 10,000 killed. In Russia-controlled territory, civilians considered to have pro-Ukrainian sympathies have been imprisoned, tortured, and subjected to extrajudicial killings.

In Russia-occupied regions of Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia, ethnic Georgians and others face restrictions on their fundamental freedoms, including freedom of movement. De facto authorities and Russian forces detain those attempting to cross the Administrative Boundary Lines. In February, one such Georgian citizen, Archil Tatumashvili, died following his arrest and detention in South Ossetia. We continue to call for a full, transparent investigation of this incident.

Although Russia has been a constructive participant in negotiations about the separatist Transnistrian region of **Moldova**, it has not lived up to its commitment to remove its forces from Moldova, consistent with its 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit commitments.

Kyrgyzstan uses security concerns to justify overly broad "extremism" restrictions on the ethnic Uzbek population. This is part of a wider policy of discrimination hindering ethnic Uzbeks' access to education and to media in their native tongue.

Persons belonging to national minorities are not only vulnerable to the violations of their rights at home but also to malign manipulation from abroad. The Russian Federation is a particular concern in this, and we see it as a problem among some Western Balkans and

Central European countries as well, including a few that belong to the **European Union**. As the High Commissioner has reminded us, majorities in one country can have affinities for kin who are minorities in other countries. But reasonable care must be taken to ensure that all Helsinki Final Act principles are respected. We can and should express our legitimate concern for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in other countries, including those with whom we have affinities, but without ethnic double standards, inflammatory rhetoric, or destabilizing intent.

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