

WORKING SESSION 12

Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities:

– Rights of persons belonging to national minorities

Association of Lawyers of Russia

From a legal point of view, our attention is drawn to the phenomenon of mass statelessness in present-day Europe, particularly in Latvia and Estonia. The institution of “non-citizens” in these countries was introduced after the collapse of the USSR. Most “non-citizens” were previously citizens of the USSR residing in the Latvian and Estonian Republics. Moreover, more than half of those persons are ethnic Russians. Such a policy could be defined as discriminatory. “Non-citizens” in Latvia and Estonia are restricted in political, labour, economic and social rights, the right of free movement and a number of family rights.

Currently, both Estonian and Latvian governments have taken certain measures to facilitate the acquisition of citizenship (naturalisation) by children born therein. However, in Latvia, all the children born before June 1, 2018, and whose parents are “non-citizens”, automatically, since the moment of birth obtain the status of non-citizens, despite the fact that they were born on its territory. In order to become a Latvian citizen, such a child must undergo an additional procedure.

Speaking in general about minors, we should not forget about children under 15 years belonging to minorities. Such children are the most vulnerable both in a social and psychological sense, as they can become an object of expressing intolerance on ethnic, racial, language or any other kind of distinction.

In line with the global tendencies in prevention of intolerance and bullying among adolescents, since 2019, psychology lessons on bullying for children of 3-4 grades have been introduced in a number of Russian schools. At present, we can more often than not see acts of cruelty and intolerance in schools in almost all states regardless of the standards of living, religion and other factors. Students and children in such a situation turn out to be completely unprotected, and even

teachers do not always cope with the violent behaviour. There are individual cases where a child unable to withstand the pressure from others takes terrible decisions resulting in victims.

Thus, it is important to respect the following principles:

- combating discrimination against minorities through reforms in education, that is introduction of lessons on negative consequences of bullying and discrimination against adolescents and children belonging to minorities into the curriculum of secondary educational institutions;
- promoting better integration of children of minorities into public life;
- ensuring and providing social, economic, political rights to members of national minorities residing in a state on an equal basis with the citizens thereof;
- preventing discriminatory policies against linguistic minorities, in particular against Russian-speaking minority in certain European countries;
- special protection and guarantee of the right to citizenship of children whose parents belong to national and other minorities.

The Association of Lawyers of Russia conducts active work in the sphere of legal education and provides free legal assistance. 84 regional departments of the Association regularly hold unified free legal assistance days where all categories of population have the opportunity to receive a free consultation, including consultations on citizenship issues. We express our readiness to promote protection of minorities, especially the rights and interests of Russian compatriots abroad.