

United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 5: National Minorities

Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism

As prepared for delivery by Dr. Michael Haltzel
Head of the U.S. Delegation
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Thank you, Madam Moderator.

In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act addressed the specific concerns of national minorities and the rights of persons belonging to these minorities. Over the years, the situation for minority populations has generally improved, as democratic norms have taken hold in more and more OSCE participating States. Unfortunately, however, the situation for some minorities has deteriorated, sometimes significantly, especially in places where nationalism and social intolerance have risen to the surface after lying dormant for decades.

I wish to express my government's continued strong support for High Commissioner for National Minorities Vollebaek, his team, and their quiet, persistent, and even-handed focus on education, participation by minorities in public life, and relations between states and minorities in neighboring states with whom they share ethnic affinities. The High Commissioner's work in Georgia is especially crucial at this time, and we regret that Ambassador Vollebaek has been prevented from fully addressing the coercive measures being taken against ethnic Georgians in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions.

Ukraine still faces many challenges with respect to the reintegration of the formerly deported Crimean Tatar population, 300,000 of whom have returned to their ancestral homeland. My delegation welcomes the High Commissioner's efforts to encourage the Ukrainian parliament to adopt legislation regarding the Crimean Tatars and other formerly deported minorities that would meaningfully address issues such as disputes over land, property issues, and cultural rights.

The United States remains very concerned about the difficulties faced by Russian-speaking minorities in Central Asia, especially in Turkmenistan. Our earlier hopes that gradual changes might benefit national minorities in that country, unfortunately, have not yet become reality. We hope that the High Commissioner can positively affect the situation there.

We are also concerned about the situation of minorities in Central and Southern Europe. While the United States commends Greece on its successful year as OSCE 2009 Chairman-in-Office, we also encourage Greece to build on its OSCE commitments, including the ability of individuals to identify their nationality without disadvantage. The United States welcomes Turkey's easing of restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language. We urge Turkey to make progress on developing further initiatives with respect to the country's Kurds and other minorities.

The United States shares the High Commissioner's concern about increasing segregation along ethnic lines in education, such as in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, individuals who belong to none of the three constituent peoples, or who are the product of mixed marriages, face the subtle social and legal repercussions that come with being classified as "Other." In Croatia, property laws and lingering nationalist sentiments continue to make life difficult for many citizens of Serb ethnicity. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Kosovo remain a concern, especially given the history of harassment, intimidation, and violent attacks on Serbs, Roma, and others over the years.

Although Kosovo unfortunately is not yet a participating State, the United States does not believe that this fact absolves Priština from its responsibility to respect OSCE norms. It is essential that Kosovo authorities continue their recent, promising efforts to address both real and perceived threats to the security of minorities, to eliminate ethnic discrimination in areas like employment and health care, and to do more to facilitate the return of those who fled a decade ago.

Many people caught up in the Balkan wars of the 1990's are still missing. We are aware of allegations of trafficking in the organs of individuals, most of them Serbs, transported from Kosovo to Albania in June 1999. We urge all relevant authorities to look at these allegations, without prejudice, to determine if further legal action is warranted and to work to identify all missing persons.

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It is also very important for the leaders and members of the various minority communities in Kosovo to participate in Kosovo's political process and institutions. We encourage Belgrade to shift its attention away from status issues to those areas where it can genuinely help Serb communities throughout Kosovo to develop a more promising future.

Since our session today also includes the issues of aggressive nationalism and ethnic cleansing, it is important to note the work being done at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and by the War Crimes Courts set up in the countries of the Western Balkans.

Last year, we were able to note the positive development of the arrest of Radovan Karadžić and his transfer to The Hague. It is an extreme disappointment that we cannot report the same today for indictees Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić, both of whom remain at large. It is my government's hope that they will soon be located, apprehended, and transferred. We encourage the Serbian authorities to work energetically toward that end.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.