

HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
22 September to 3 October 2014
Warsaw, Poland

Rapporteur's report
Monday, 29 September 2014

Working session 10 (specifically selected topic):
Rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including address by the
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

Rapporteur: Mr. Davit Knyazyan, Delegation of the Republic of Armenia to the OSCE

No. of statements:

Delegations: 13

Civil Society: 26

OSCE Inst./Int'l Org: 0

Rights of Reply: 8

The working session 10 was devoted to reviewing implementation of OSCE commitments in the field of rights of persons belonging to national minorities, the current state of affairs in that regard and main challenges, with particular focus on the education rights and effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities.

Ms. Astrid Thors, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities focused her introduction on such challenges as increasing of aggressive nationalism and ensuring full respect for the commitments under the Helsinki Final Act. She recalled the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, reiterating that while minority rights are a matter of legitimate concern to the international community they should be addressed within the framework and in compliance with the principles of international law. The necessity for better use of multilateral international mechanisms, including the HCNM institution was underlined. Ms. Thors referred to the Hague Recommendations and Ljubljana Guidelines in the context of education of persons belonging to national minorities and integration policies, stressing that education should be the platform for communication across and between ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. The HCNM stressed the need for education of national minorities in their mother tongue, at the meantime pointing out that it should be complemented by gradual introduction of state language, thus ensuring that education system promotes integration of diverse societies. Ms. Thors highlighted the importance of full and effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public affairs, underlining enhancement of good governance in that regard. Finally, she drew the

attention to promoting participation of minorities in electoral processes, referring to recent launch of respective Handbook jointly by ODIHR and HCNM.

39 participants made statements in the Session, out of which 26 intervened as Non-Governmental Organizations. 8 delegates made use of their right to reply.

A number of participants welcomed and supported the HCNM, in particular its activities relating to the recent crisis in the OSCE area in the context of monitoring rights of national minorities. The importance of the HCNM activities for conflict prevention was stressed. One delegation called to the HCNM to avoid double standards and drew attention to problems in different parts of the OSCE area. Another delegation recalled positive cooperation with the HCNM and the OSCE field operation in promoting rights of national minorities.

The discourse also concentrated on the problem of finding balance between the objectives of preserving ethnic identity of minorities and promoting integration of multi-ethnic societies. Several OSCE participating States shared their best practices to that end, such as linguistic pluralism, promotion of official use of languages of national minorities at the national and regional levels, opening of cultural centres, involving national minorities in the process of elaboration of school textbooks, financial assistance to schools providing education in minority languages as well as legislative protection of national minority education. One Delegation expressed concern that integration policies may lead to forced assimilation and loss of identity and underlined the need to distinguish between forced assimilation and integration. It called to take into account the recommendations and resolutions of the Council of Europe. Several participants supported implementation of the Bolzano/Bozen and Hague Recommendations and Ljubljana Guidelines.

A number of participants expressed concern on negative trend in parts of the OSCE area in the field of protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities, in particular referring to such problems as discriminatory practices in the field of education in minority languages, rise of aggressive nationalism, extremism, xenophobia, exclusion of national minorities from public life through invoking citizenship policies. Other participants refuted the raised criticism and highlighted the steps taken to uphold and protect the linguistic and other rights of the persons belonging to national minorities, including legislative reforms.

In the right of reply section the allegations regarding violation of rights, including linguistic rights and discriminatory practices targeting national minorities were refuted. Delegates underlined their commitment to protect persons belonging to national minorities and recalled their respective legislations as well as referred to improvements in their educational systems for better protection of minority languages.

Recommendations to the OSCE participating States:

- Ensure full and comprehensive implementation of commitments to respect and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities;
- Include multilingual teaching as part of the obligatory curriculum;
- Promote education in minority languages at all levels;
- Make use of Bolzano/Bozen and Hague Recommendations and Ljubljana Guidelines, and the potential of the HCNM institution;
- To support the HCNM mandate, including by ensuring unimpeded access to the whole of the OSCE area to monitor implementation of commitments in the field of protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Recommendations to the OSCE and its institutions

- The HCNM should deal with negative trends throughout the OSCE area in regard to rise of extremism, challenges in the field of education and legal status of national minorities.
- The HCNM should continue exercising her mandate in Ukraine.
- The HCNM activities should be based on “quiet diplomacy”.