



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 10

Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities

Delivered by U.S. Head of Delegation J. Brian Atwood
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The rights of persons belonging to national minorities have been a primary concern in the Human Dimension from the start of the Helsinki process. The United States strongly supports the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Astrid Thors. Thank you, Madame Commissioner, for your dedication, perseverance and effectiveness.

Where adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law is weak or absent, respect for the human rights of members of minority groups is in many cases sadly lacking.

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

We continue to witness the detrimental effects of nationalist violence and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans of the 1990s. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, we see the dismissal of serious wartime atrocities, including the denial of the acts of genocide at Srebrenica, in the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska as part of an intentionally antagonistic nationalism that intimidates those Bosniaks, Croats, and others who have returned, or are considering returning, to their pre-war areas of residence where they are now a minority.

The prioritization of “collective rights” over the rights of individuals contributes to Bosnia’s inability to implement the 2009 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Sejdic-Finci case. Bosnia should allow all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, to hold office and be represented in all state-level institutions. The concept of “two schools under one roof” perpetuates artificial divisions within Bosniak/Croat communities. Legal mechanisms created to protect the vital interests of a group are abused by nationalist demagogues to block the functioning of the state for the benefit of all.

All participating States must re-emphasize the importance of respecting the individual rights of all rather than placate, perpetuate, or promote the politics of ethnic exclusivity. We hope that Bosnia’s politicians will do so in the context of the upcoming elections. Bosnia’s neighbors, **Serbia and Croatia**, should do the same.

Hungary’s expansive nationality law, when combined with inflammatory rhetoric, can create cross-border and inter-ethnic tensions. The Hungarian government’s calls for “autonomy” for ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine add fuel to an already difficult situation. The United States encourages Hungary to ensure that its articulation of any concerns for Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries is both appropriate and constructive.

Even as we urge States to recognize and protect the rights of national minorities, we must also firmly reject the cynical misappropriation of the issue by States. We have seen how States set out on a dangerous and destabilizing path when they attempt to fuel their political agendas with a toxic mixture of nationalist sentiment at home and real or feigned concern for minorities in neighboring states.

Russia's actions in **Ukraine** present stark examples of both the denial of minority rights and the misappropriation of minority rights. Russia has violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine on the pretext of protecting the ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The United States does not and will not recognize Russia's unilateral attempt to "annex" Crimea.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of persons belonging to the Crimean Tatar community are under siege. Tatar leaders and activists continue to be subject to raids on their homes and places of worship and threats of prosecution for "extremism." The two most prominent community leaders, Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov, are banned from returning to Crimea, their homeland, for five years. Human rights in Crimea continue to seriously deteriorate for those who actively identify themselves as Ukrainian or are members of other ethnic or religious minorities. Anti-Roma sentiment in eastern Ukraine and Crimea has expressed itself in violent attacks on homes and threats to Romani men, women and children. We must reject both the denial of minority rights and their misappropriation.

Several years ago, the office of the High Commissioner developed the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations to guide policy responses to national minority concerns in inter-state relations. We urge all participating States to use these recommendations as a resource.

In the next session, my delegation will address additional concerns regarding the implementation of laws to protect the exercise of rights by persons belonging to national minorities in a number of participating States.