



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 3: National Minorities

As delivered by Julie Raschka
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

Nearly all OSCE participating States have at least one national minority group within their territories. Respect for the human rights of persons belonging to minorities and the promotion of an integrated, multi-cultural society is therefore not only desirable in itself but helps ensure stability and security both within and among States. Nevertheless, implementation of the commitments our Ministers adopted in Copenhagen twenty years ago is still far from ideal. Members of ethnic, religious and other minorities still face discrimination and even acts of violence in many parts of the OSCE region.

The minority rights provisions of the Copenhagen Document covered a broad scope of issues, ranging from the rights of minorities to contacts with persons belonging to their minority inside as well as across frontiers, to the right to establish and maintain organizations in their country and to participate in international NGOs. But paragraph 40 was especially far-reaching as it was the first time a CSCE document embraced specific references to anti-Semitism and the human rights problems of the Roma. Taking individual human rights as its point of departure, the Copenhagen Document commits States to "protect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities on their territory... in conformity with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination." States also commit themselves, where necessary, to take special measures to ensure this equality. In cases where special measures are necessary and appropriate, the goal of such measures should be to further the aim of achieving the equal and meaningful enjoyment of human rights of all persons in fact as well as in law.

The emphasis of the High Commissioner on National Minorities on education is a very appropriate one because there is a significant connection between the full enjoyment of their human rights by persons belonging to national minorities and education. In fact, it is difficult to address one area without involving the other. Unfortunately, there are numerous cases today within the OSCE region where the rights of persons belonging to national minorities with respect to education are not being protected.

Many of the problems involving national minorities involve a lack of respect for human rights generally in a country and a failure to implement "good governance". Adequate protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities, combined with governing institutions that are responsive to and act effectively in the interests of the entire population go a long way to eliminating root causes of tension and conflict.

Bitter experience has taught us that we should not underestimate the potential for instability and insecurity – or even violent conflict – emanating from a failure to address problems related to national minorities. The effective protection of national minorities and of the rights

and freedoms of persons belonging to those minorities throughout the OSCE area is essential to ensuring long-term stability, democratic security and peace.

Good governance in the form of representative democracy is also extremely important, and must include the participation of individuals from the different ethnic, racial, or religious groups that form the fabric of the society in the governance of their country. In the United States, the strength of our democracy is rooted in majority rule, with strong protection for the voting rights of individuals, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or membership in a language minority group. The U.S. Government has invested a great deal in outreach to minorities, and has made an effort to include them in the consultation and decision-making process wherever possible. We view this as critical to increasing understanding and integration of persons belonging to minorities in society and ultimately, to preventing societal conflict. We have also taken steps, along with many other participating States, to respond to the worrying waves of hate crimes that have targeted ethnic and religious minorities, as well as other vulnerable or marginalized individuals. We must all remain vigilant to combat such intolerance and hate-motivated violence when it emerges.

Mr. Moderator, we welcome the intensive efforts by OSCE institutions, particularly those of the HCNM, and of OSCE missions to improve the lives and prospects of national minorities. Ultimately, however, it is up to participating States to find the political will to move from words on paper to improving realities for persons belonging to national minorities on the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator