



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on violations of rights of national minorities in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1217th meeting of the Permanent Council,
14 February 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

The Ukrainian delegation takes the floor to exercise the right, reserved at the 1213th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council of 24 January 2019, to raise the issue of violations of the rights of national minorities in the Russian Federation.

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Ukraine has consistently and regularly voiced its deep concerns over the situation of the Ukrainian national minority in the Russian Federation. With the minority of over 2 mln strong, according to official statistics, the second biggest in Russia, there is not a single school with the full curriculum of instruction in the Ukrainian language. In 2017 a single Library of Ukrainian Literature in Russia, which had functioned in Moscow, was liquidated. The director of the library was criminally persecuted on trumped-up charges. The situation has been aggravated by rapidly growing manifestations of chauvinism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, including ambitions of territorial expansionism, discrimination in the Russian Federation which transform the Ukrainian national identification into a direct threat to personal safety.

The violations of international standards and obligations affecting national minorities and indigenous peoples in Russia have been repeatedly highlighted by numerous international reports and observations. This, unfortunately, has not led to improvement of the situation by the Russian authorities.

It is in this worrisome context that we bring to the attention the Opinion by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, prepared within the 4th monitoring cycle in Russia. The Opinion was published on 15 January and contains an independent evaluation of implementation of the Framework Convention by Russia's Government. The findings of this authoritative opinion are based on information submitted by Russia's state authorities, on other written sources and on information obtained by the Advisory

Committee from governmental and non-governmental contacts during the visits to a few regions in Russia.

Mr.Chairperson,

Let me offer a quotation from the text of the mentioned opinion of the Advisory Committee: “Since the annexation of Crimea and conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russian government-controlled media are fuelling a patriotic mobilisation of society against Ukraine. The Advisory Committee is concerned that this discourse risks side-lining not only persons belonging to the Ukrainian national minority but also anyone not aligning with the majority, including persons belonging to other national minority groups”.

Among numerous examples, there is the case of Rafis Kashapov, the Director of the Tatar Cultural Centre in Naberezhnye Chelny in Tatarstan, who in May 2015 was sentenced to three years in prison and a two-year ban on the use of social networks. He was charged with “public calls for disintegration of Russia’s territorial integrity” and “incitement of hatred towards the Russian authorities as a social group” for four articles he shared online in 2014 condemning Russia’s actions in Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Highlighting the systematic hardships affecting the Ukrainian national community in Russia, it is appropriate to also draw attention to other specific findings. In particular, “cultural organisations of the Ukrainian national minority told the Advisory Committee that they met obstructions when trying to operate... They reported difficulties in registering organisations and receiving authorisation for the organisation of Ukrainian cultural events. The Advisory Committee is deeply concerned about reported repression of leaders of existing organisations in several regions. Intimidatory practices have been reported to the Advisory Committee based on a wide interpretation of the anti-extremism legislation (see Article 6). Publishing information about the great famine in Ukraine during the Stalin era (“holodomor”), for instance, would reportedly be considered extremist activity.”

Mr.Chairperson,

We believe to be noteworthy for the OSCE and its comprehensive approach to security the links established by the Advisory Committee between the deteriorating situation for national minorities and their rights and the general restrictions in Russia on freedoms of expression, assembly and association as well as freedom of the media. In particular, it is considered that the legislation on “foreign agents” and on extremism is broadly used to intimidate or silence persons belonging to minorities or defending minority rights. According to the conclusions of the Advisory Committee, “persons belonging to minorities who are affected by problematic inter-state relations, such as with Ukraine, are particularly vulnerable in this context.” The findings compelled a strong urge to Russia’s authorities “to abstain from unduly infringing on the freedom of expression and freedom of conscience of persons belonging to and defending the rights of national minorities”.

The Delegation of Ukraine believes that a holistic approach needs to be taken by the OSCE Institutions when acting to help address the persistent violations of the rights of national minorities in the Russian Federation, in particular of the Ukrainian national minority. We strongly encourage the OSCE HCNM, ODIHR and RFoM to combine their efforts within existing mandates because of inter-relation of different aspects of restrictions of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Russian Federation that lead to further worsening of the situation for national minorities in that country. It is imperative to enhance co-operation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe to deliver immediate action on existing recommendations.

We encourage the HCNM to proceed to visiting different regions in the Russian Federation for direct contacts with minorities on the ground and delivering assistance in addressing identified needs and concerns.

We urge the Russian authorities to take immediate measures to reverse the rapid degradation of the situation of national minorities in Russia by moving to implement respective OSCE commitments relating to persons belonging to national minorities, as well as relating to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, and of the media. We call upon the Russian authorities to co-operate fully with the autonomous OSCE Institutions and render full assistance to implementation of their respective mandates.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.