

HDIM 2012

Working Session 12: Rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including:

- Address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities;
- National minorities;
- Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism.

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The introducer, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk, underlined that language and education rights are important as tools for the integration of society. Complaints about the lack of ability to use one's mother tongue in the public domain are often a source of resentment against a Government or local authorities. Participating States need to adopt a legal framework and secure implementing policies that provide for an adequate balance between protection and promotion of minority languages and providing opportunities for learning the State language. A poor command of the State language leads to difficulties in accessing higher level education and risks increased unemployment and exclusion. Comprehensive policies should promote the strengthening of the State languages while also ensuring the protection of minority languages. That is why the HCNM over the years have promoted multilingualism and facilitated implementation of such programmes. The right to education is a recognized human right. Every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language. Throughout the process of establishing an education policy, national minorities need to be consulted and their inputs, critiques and suggestions taken into consideration. States must seek to develop tools to integrate society. Language rights and education rights may be such tools for integrating societies. The mere protection of rights, including minority rights, is insufficient to fully integrate societies. The process of integration serves as an additional dimension.

28 interventions were made after the introducer, of which 16 by non-governmental organizations. In addition, eight participating States made use of their right of reply in response to prior interventions.

Those delegations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that responded to the introducer's topics, referred to national best practices on multilingualism. The main part of the interventions, however, addressed different cases of alleged discrimination of national minorities. Several interventions criticized the Baltic States for depriving national minorities from their basic rights and for allowing radical nationalism. One delegation stated that the situation in the Baltic States discredits the EU's statements on human rights. Concerns were also raised on behalf of the Muslim minorities in Greece and Greek minorities in Turkey.

Central-Asian delegations presented best practices. NGOs voiced concern about the situation for Uzbek minorities in Kyrgyzstan, for Armenians in Georgia and for minorities in Belarus.

Several participants addressed aggressive nationalism and alleged attempts to glorify Nazism. The OSCE was urged to counter these developments.

Recommendations to the participating States:

- Participating States should increase the funding of the OSCE in light of increased risk of conflicts resulting from the economic crisis;
- Participating States should make the HCNM Bolzano/Bozen recommendations binding;
- Participating States should fully co-operate with the HCNM;
- Participating States must uphold multilingualism and multiculturalism;
- Participating States must strive to strike the right balance between State and minority languages;
- Greece should foster a more inclusive society, respect the rights of the Muslim minorities as enshrined in the Lausanne treaty, establish bilingual Turkish-Greek schools in areas densely populated by the Muslim minorities and adopt the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;
- Kazakhstan should adopt specific anti-discrimination legislation;
- Kosovo police should do more to ensure the safety and security of persons belonging to minority communities;
- Kyrgyzstan should take action to stop police abuse;
- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should implement the integrated education strategy;
- Turkey should respect the property rights of the Greek minority and their ownership should be restored. In the process, the burden of evidence should lie with the State, not the minority.

Recommendations to the OSCE and its institutions:

- International organizations should assist in solving the problem of education in Abkhazia;
- The OSCE should adopt a resolution against Nazism and nationalism, set up a High Commissioner for neo-Nazism and work to counter Nazism;
- The HCNM should pay more attention to the situation in the Baltic States;
- The HCNM should pay more attention to recommendations against discrimination.