



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 7, 2023

High Commissioner Abdrakhmanov, dear Kairat, welcome back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for the comprehensive report on your activities in the latter half of 2023. The United States appreciates the work of your office and fully supports your mandate. Assessing and addressing tensions involving national minorities is key to preventing conflict in the OSCE region, and your work is at the heart of these efforts.

Ukraine remains at the top of our agenda as well. As you stated, the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine are part of Ukraine, not part of the Russian Federation, and the Kremlin cannot exercise jurisdiction over the people living there through the so-called elections it has attempted to organize in these regions. Despite Russia's efforts to erase Ukrainian culture and identity and to exploit its multiethnic society for its own purposes, Ukrainians of all ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds have courageously defended their country's sovereignty. Russia's war of aggression has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, including those belonging to the country's minority ethnic groups.

Since the attempted illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian authorities have disproportionately targeted Crimean Tatars for repression, imprisonment, and abuse. Over 200 Crimean Tatars have been jailed or otherwise persecuted, most on bogus terrorism charges with sentences of up to 20 years in prison. According to the NGO Crimean Solidarity, at least 20 Crimean Tatar women have received fines and other administrative punishments for showing support to, or asking about, the fate of their loved ones.

Ukraine's Roma refugees also face unique challenges stemming from long standing systemic disparities. NGOs and activists report that Roma refugees who fled Ukraine disproportionately experience discrimination in accessing refugee benefits and services, including in housing, assistance, and employment. Sadly, this doesn't come as a surprise – Roma throughout the OSCE region have long faced persistent societal prejudice and systemic discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. High Commissioner, the United States would appreciate your continued attention to Russia's brutal war against not only the people of Ukraine, but also against Ukraine's history and cultural identity. We remain concerned about the forced imposition of Russian curricula and Russian language in schools, and the adoption of Russian passports in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Heightened ethnonationalism and increasingly divisive political rhetoric risk further destabilizing other parts of the OSCE as well. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska authorities and some Bosnian Serb politicians have inflamed tensions, deepened divisions, and sought to weaken the central government institutions. President Dodik's ongoing

attempts to undermine the Dayton Accords and calls for Republika Srpska's secession are the most serious threat to peace and security in the Western Balkans since the 1990s. In Tajikistan, we continue to be concerned about government pressure on the predominantly ethnic Pamiri from the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, including efforts to shut down civil society organizations.

High Commissioner, thank you for your ongoing engagements with the government of the United States. Your most recent trip to Washington in August provided useful opportunities for our colleagues at the Department of State and other agencies to discuss best practices and lessons learned directly with you, and we hope to continue these fruitful and productive relationships.

We commend your ongoing work to promote multilingual education, including in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova. We welcome efforts to integrate gender equality perspectives into the discussion on national minorities and look forward to the policy advice you develop in that regard. We also appreciate your office's work with UNHCR to address the challenges that statelessness poses.

High Commissioner, on the thirtieth anniversary of the institution, your work is as critical and relevant as ever. Time and again, we have seen the devastating impacts that unchecked hatred, discrimination, and persecution of minority groups have wrought: violence and instability that threatens the security of an entire country or region. Thank you for your ongoing commitments to addressing both the short-term triggers of interethnic tensions and long-term structural concerns. We welcome the extension of your term and look forward to continuing to work with you.

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