

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

WORKING SESSION 10

Fundamental Freedoms II, including freedom of movement, treatment of citizens of other States, migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants

As delivered by

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Mr. Moderator,

We would like to thank the distinguished introducer for his informative presentation.

Having in mind that the issue of emigration from Middle East was touched upon by Mr. Aras-Fernandez, at the outset we will highlight the steps undertaken by the Government of Armenia in reaction to the refugee crisis from the aspect of freedom of movement.

Armenia has received about 17000 refugees from Syria and Iraq. To ensure their safe emigration from war-torn Syria and Iraq, Armenian authorities have facilitated border-crossing procedures and procedures of granting asylum and citizenship. Second, taking into account that many of those people are deprived of the possibility to reach out to our state institutions, we have not closed the diplomatic and consular missions in Syria including in besieged Aleppo..

We would like to stress the importance of upholding the OSCE commitments in the sphere of freedom of movement for the purpose of facilitating human contacts and freer cross-border movement in the OSCE area. It is an important track to reach our objective of common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

Armenia with its liberal visa regime and electronic visa system holds first ranks among the OSCE participating States. Citizens of 32 European countries, including all the EU states do not need entry visas to travel to Armenia. Armenia enjoys reciprocal visa free travel regime with almost all CIS member-states.

Enjoyment of the right of the freedom of movement presupposes the existence of the open and secure borders between participating states. Unfortunately, the land borders of Armenia have been closed by Turkey and the right of freedom of movement of population of Armenia has been severely curtailed for more than two decades.

The blockade of Armenia by Turkey is aimed at undermining the social and economic development of Armenia. There are no any legal grounds for Turkey to inflict such step, which constitute a flagrant breach of the international law which we are bound to respect not only by its virtue but also through commitments undertaken in the Helsinki Final Act. Moreover, the Helsinki Final Act clearly states the inadmissibility of political, economic and other coercion exercised against other participating state.

The blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey (since 1993) has a negative influence on the living standards of the population of the Republic of Armenia, especially its vulnerable groups and on their social and economic rights, including the right to development, which is an apparent violation of the norms of the Charter of the United Nations, the international law, including the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States.

This illegal and unilateral blockade, which on countless occasions has been qualified by many as unacceptable do not belong to OSCE toolbox.

Another anomaly was outlined in the Baseline Study on Cross-Border Mobility in the OSCE Region, elaborated by ODIHR. The Baseline Study states that Azerbaijan does not allow Armenian citizens to enter its territory. Moreover, even persons who are suspected to be of Armenian origin, regardless of their nationality are denied entrance to Azerbaijan. This is not only violation of commitments in the freedom of movement, but it also has clear implications in the sphere of tolerance and non-discrimination and racism.

Finally we would like to make the following recommendations

- Facilitate free and secure movement of persons among participating States through ensuring open and secure borders.
- Remove the illegal restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of all individuals residing in the conflict affected areas and ensure humanitarian access of international organizations, including OSCE to those areas.
- Promote regional and cross-border cooperation at all levels of governance, including civil society through ensuring freedom of movement for representatives of governmental bodies, NGOs and international actors, including OSCE.

Thank You.

Reply to Turkey

Mr. Moderator,

We are aware of the exceptional art of the Turkish diplomacy to deny undeniable. We are not so creative and tend to identify reality as it is. If distinguished delegation of Turkey is not comfortable with the term “blockade”, it is welcome to offer another definition to describe total closure of land borders. Regrettably, manipulations with terms will not change the realities on the ground.

Thank You.