

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE
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NATIONAL MINORITIES, BRIDGE BUILDING AND INTEGRATION**

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Working session I: Legal mechanisms for bridge building across States

Mr. Moderator,
Distinguished experts,

Discussion of current issues regarding national minorities is particularly important at the present time, when the situation in this area is becoming worse, threatening stability and security in the region. The migration crisis overwhelming many European countries has clearly revealed the problems with inter-ethnic relations. At the same time new tasks have arisen regarding the provision of facilities for migrants and the subsequent guarantee of all human rights, including the rights of minorities.

Last year at this time and in this building we discussed the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations and Ljubljana Guidelines in detail and spoke of co-operation between the so-called “kin-State” of origin of minorities and the neighbouring countries where these minorities live. And once again we ask ourselves the question: can national minorities be the linking element in inter-State relations? In theory, minorities could indeed act as a unifying basis for all spheres of society, be they political, economic, social or cultural.

But what happens in practice? We find that minorities who try to maintain their language, culture and links with their historical homeland are treated like disloyal citizens of the countries where they live. They are accused of creating a “fifth column” and are pressured and persecuted for striving to retain their identity. Moreover, the actions of the neighbouring State are regarded as some kind of pretext for attaining political ends. In such cases, can there really be any talk of respect for and observance of the rights of minorities?

How has this state of affairs come about? For example, there is apparently a huge mass of documents constituting the legal basis for safeguarding the rights of minorities, in the form both of legally binding documents and recommendations. But international agreements provide only the basic principles for the protection of minorities. They are interpreted in different ways in different countries depending on the specific situation. And we see that some countries, for example, have not signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the only legally binding document in this area. France has no such

concept in its political discourse, but the different communities have equal status. Other countries, Estonia and Latvia, for example, have stipulations that exclude hundreds of thousands of so-called “non-citizens”, i.e. members of minorities, from the scope of the document. In this way the possibilities for non-citizens to use and be taught in their native language or to participate in political life are limited.

What needs to be done to rectify the situation? First of all, monitoring mechanisms and the procedures of international agreements have to be reinforced. This is possible provided that the recommendations are not ignored, as is the case in practice.

And however banal it might sound, there is a need for the political will, a commitment to meet obligations and the renunciation of double standards in assessing the position of minorities in different countries.

Do the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations have a future? Yes, if they are considered in combination with other recommendations elaborated by the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities: The Hague, Oslo, Lund, and so on. But if the policy in a particular State is at variance with the provisions and norms in one area of the special rights of minorities, such as their language or education rights, it is not really possible to claim that recommendations as complex as the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations are being applied. Only a consistent democratic approach to minorities within a country will create the conditions for a corresponding foreign policy and for strengthening inter-State relations.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that confrontation between States will have an extremely negative impact above all on the position of minorities. The problems should be solved exclusively by peaceful means through inclusive dialogue by all interested parties. The complete participation of minorities in the life of society with the full set of rights is vital to the development of any country and an important factor in international bilateral co-operation.

Thank you for your attention.