



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement
in response to H.E. Kairat Abdrakhmanov,
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1318th meeting of the Permanent Council
3 June 2021

Madame Chairperson,

The delegation of Ukraine welcomes H.E. Kairat Abdrakhmanov back to the Permanent Council in his new capacity as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and thanks him for the presented report.

We appreciate the close cooperation with the High Commissioner and his engagement in assisting Ukraine. Indeed, since Ambassador Abdrakhmanov took the office last December, there have been an extensive number of online contacts and meetings between the HCNM and his Ukrainian interlocutors, including the representatives of national minorities and indigenous peoples residing in Ukraine. Substantive meetings were also held with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, in particular with the Minister Dmytro Kuleba this past March.

We are also looking forward to the visit of the HCNM to Kyiv later this year.

Dear High Commissioner,

Ukraine welcomes the valuable advice and expertise of your Office provided to the Ukraine's authorities as well as positive evaluation of some practical steps implemented by the Government of Ukraine to meet the HCNM recommendations, including when drafting the new comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the rights of persons belonging to the national minorities residing in Ukraine. We are pleased that you noted considerable progress in this work. The experts of the HCNM were invited and are welcomed to the parliamentary working group engaged in drafting of a new law on national minorities. The next meeting of this WG is scheduled for tomorrow, 4 June.

The Government of Ukraine stays committed to promoting the rights of all national minorities in line with OSCE commitments and international standards. Establishment of an effective system of promotion and protection of rights of all national minorities, as well as support and development of tolerant inter-ethnic relations are among key priorities of the democratic reform process undertaken by the Ukrainian Government. Ukraine's efforts are also aimed, in particular through the decentralization reform, at establishing an efficient mechanism for participation of representatives of national minorities in decision-making by both state and local government. We are happy that these efforts started to produce meaningful results to the whole Ukrainian society, including national minorities and indigenous people residing in Ukraine.

At the same time, significant challenges faced by Ukraine and its people of all ethnic backgrounds continue to stem from the hybrid aggression from abroad. The Ukrainian Security Service recently has documented in Zakarpattia region some attempts aimed at destabilisation of the situation on the inter-ethnic grounds. The traces of perpetrators lead us to Russia. Three persons were detained for displaying posts with hate speech and threats towards the Hungarian minority in Berehovo in early May this year. There are direct evidences that the activities of the suspected had been financed and guided from Russia.

What is most important in these developments, that this failed provocation was orchestrated on the eve of a bilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Hungary in Bratislava on 12 May, where a number of important agreements were reached. Moreover, on the same day a meeting of the bilateral Ukrainian-Hungarian interdepartmental working group on education was hosted in Budapest.

We highly appreciate the constructive approaches demonstrated by our colleagues during these last meetings when discussing the issues of respect of the educational needs of the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine while observing the national legislation of Ukraine as well as relevant international standards in this regard.

Distinguished colleagues,

Ukraine believes that the HCNM has a particular role to play in addressing grave violations of national minorities' rights resulting from the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol. These violations were extensively registered in the 2015 HCNM/ODIHR HRAM Report on Crimea. To our regret, since that report the situation in temporarily occupied Crimea has degraded even more. Most recent reports received from the human rights defenders and other reliable sources, particularly reports by the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and UNESCO concluded that human rights situation in Crimea, including the rights of minorities, keeps worsening.

Russia's occupying authorities in Crimea continue to exert pressure on ethnic and religious communities that refuse to recognize the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and seek to preserve their native language, religious and cultural identity.

Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians face particular challenges, grave human rights violations and discrimination. For more than five years, the Mejlis and Kurultai of Crimean Tatar people remain outlawed in occupied Crimea. All this happens in violation of the Order on provisional measures, issued by the International Court of Justice on 19 April 2017. Let us recall that the Russian Federation was ordered to "refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis".

The Russian Federation was also ordered to "ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language" in the Crimean peninsula, however there is further deterioration of the situation. Within seven years of the Russia's illegal occupation, the number of children educated in Ukrainian language has dropped by 54 times, to 0.2%. As we have already informed PC, there is only one school with the Ukrainian language of instruction. At the same time, even this school - according to the reports on the ground - remained as formality, as the education process is fully in Russian. Ukrainian as a language of instruction has been fully removed from the preschool and university-level education.

The same situation is true for the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where school graduates are forced to pass a Unified State Exam of the Russian Federation.

This alarming and further deteriorating situation requires adequate reaction and continuous active engagement of the OSCE High Commissioner in seeking observance

of rights of Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups in the occupied Crimea and occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We encourage the HCNM to use all assets at his disposal and closely monitor the situation with observance of rights of the national minorities and indigenous peoples in the temporarily occupied Crimea.

It is also of paramount importance in cooperation with the OSCE autonomous institutions and the SMM to ensure unimpeded access of the established international human rights monitoring mechanisms to Crimea, pursuant to relevant UN General Assembly resolutions on the human rights situation in Ukraine's Crimea.

Dear High Commissioner,

The delegation of Ukraine has carefully studied your report and notes with regret that the HCNM report lacks the information on the conditions of the national minorities in the Russian Federation.

We assess this lack of information as unwillingness of the Russian delegation to cooperate with the OSCE autonomous institutions. In our view this situation is neither acceptable, nor in Russia's own best interest.

The isolation and marginalization of the national minorities and indigenous peoples residing on the territory of the Russian Federation and absence of their communication with the international community should not disable the reaction to serious violations of their rights in that country.

In this regard, we repeatedly condemn the deliberate repressive anti-Ukrainian practices and discrimination by the Russian authorities against the Ukrainian community and its activists in Russia. Among such repressive acts are dissolving by the Russian courts of the Federal National Cultural Autonomy of Ukrainians in Russia (in 2010); dissolving of the Organization of Ukrainians in Russia (in 2012); closure of the Library of the Ukrainian Literature in Moscow (in 2018); the ban under the security pretext of the Ukrainian World Congress (in 2019) and the "Siryj Klyn" regional structure of Ukrainians in Omsk Region (in 2020).

These actions pose a serious threat to preserving and developing the national identity, cultural and linguistic needs of Ukrainians, who are the third largest ethnic group in Russia. Moscow's policy of forced russification is well known to Ukrainians, but this policy also directly affects the rights of other ethnic groups in Russia, such as Erzya, Mokshans, Udmurts, Mari, Chuvashs, Bashkirs, peoples of the North Caucasus and the Russian Far North, and even Tatars.

In this regard, we wish to bring to the attention of the Permanent Council the report of Syres' Boliayen', the Inyazor (Chief Elder) of Erzya people. On 19 April, he addressed the 20th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and shed the light on the real policy of the Russian Government towards the national republics and indigenous peoples in Russia.

According to him, the russification policy led to the situation that "Over the last 30 years, Erzya have been degraded from a nation of few million people into a small ethnic group on the brink of complete extinction – without wars, plagues and forced deportations".

We believe that all these worrying developments require reaction and close engagement of the HCNM, thus we encourage and look forward to specific practical steps in this respect.

Madame Chairperson,

I would conclude by thanking High Commissioner Kairat Abdrakhmanov for today's presentation of his report and reiterating Ukraine's readiness for further cooperation, including in view of the HCNM's intention to visit Ukraine later this year.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.