



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Session 11

#### Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities

As prepared for delivery by U.S. Head of Delegation J. Brian Atwood  
**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
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Our statement this morning focused on the individual rights of persons belonging to national minorities as a primary concern in the Human Dimension from the start of Helsinki process. This afternoon, the United States will address additional concerns regarding the treatment of persons belonging to national minorities among the participating States.

Although **Kosovo** is still wrongfully denied a seat at the OSCE, the United States continues to view our Human Dimension discussions as applicable to that country, especially with regard to the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities. There has been progress since the April 2013 agreement between Kosovo and **Serbia**, which offers new opportunities for the Kosovo-Serb community to participate in Kosovo's institutions. We call on all ethnic groups in Kosovo to take advantage of this new opportunity to heal old wounds and move forward as part of a multi-ethnic Kosovo that respects the rights of all its citizens.

Members of ethnic minorities in Kosovo, which include Serb, Romani, Ashkali, Balkan Egyptian, Turkish, Bosniak, Gorani, Croat, and Montenegrin communities, still face varying levels of institutional and societal discrimination in areas such as employment, education, social services, language use, and restrictions on their freedom of movement and the ability of internally displaced persons to return to their homes. While the police make efforts to prosecute vandalism, Serbian Orthodox cemeteries and churches continue to come under attack. Reports of violence and other crimes directed against minority individuals and their property persist and require increased measures of protection. At the same time, we commend efforts to facilitate implementation of legislation conferring equal status on the country's official languages, with help from the High Commission on National Minorities.

Inter-ethnic tensions also continue to be a concern in **Macedonia**. In July, there were protests with ethnic dimensions over the "Monster" case verdict. The incidents reflect a worrisome trend of increasingly strained relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Political leaders on both sides must demonstrate renewed commitment to bridging this divide and act accordingly. They must also give greater priority to integration in the education system, enabling a younger generation to re-establish inter-ethnic ties and find new opportunities to advance.

In **Bulgaria**, where parliamentary elections will take place October 5th, campaigning in languages other than Bulgarian remains prohibited by law. This effectively denies members of minority groups the right to use their native tongue.

In **Greece**, although the government recognizes an individual's right to self-identification, many individuals who define themselves as members of a minority group find it difficult to express their identity freely and maintain their culture. Even the officially recognized "Muslim minority" in Thrace continues to face discrimination and social exclusion.

**Turkey** is similarly restrictive in its overall approach to minorities, officially recognizing only three non-Muslim minorities and limiting linguistic, religious and cultural rights of those belonging to other ethnic or religious minorities. While there has been welcome progress for Kurdish speakers in education, the law, and public services, other groups face varying levels of pressure to assimilate.

The April elections in **Hungary** heightened concerns about establishing a polity based on ethnic or blood identity. Those who received citizenship based on ethnicity as a result of the 2010 amendments to the Act on Hungarian Citizenship – primarily people living in Hungary's neighboring states – were allowed to vote on a preferential basis relative to other Hungarian citizens living outside of Hungary. Those registering as minority voters had to choose between voting as a “Hungarian” on the national lists or voting on a separate list as a national minority, where their votes would have little political weight. Minority voters also had to be publicly identified, effectively violating the secrecy of the ballot. In fact, only a tiny fraction of Hungary’s ethnic minorities participated in the election because of this voting system, and thousands of Roma removed themselves from the municipal lists of “minority voters” prior to election day.

Finally, I wish to note that the conditions of the Uzbek community in southern **Kyrgyzstan** remain a concern to the United States. Ethnic Uzbeks continue to face police abuse, threats of arrest and imprisonment, and unfair trial proceedings. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Spravedlivnost, which won this year’s Max van der Stoel Award for advocating on behalf of those unjustly jailed and for fostering interethnic reconciliation in the country. We call on the government authorities in Kyrgyzstan to do their part to promote reconciliation, including by promoting the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in all state structures.