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BRIDGE Saratov Resolution on human rights, freedoms and national minorities' protection in Russia

Within the framework of the BRIDGE project - "Fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of EU with Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Russia (2008 – 2012)" - the country workshop (henceforth WS) on human rights and freedoms, national minorities' protection, was held on 24-25 May 2011, Saratov, Russia.

The WS was organized and hosted by the Stolypin Volga Region Academy of Public Administration (Saratov, Russia) in collaboration with the Institute for Ethnic and Regional Studies - ISCOMET (Maribor, Slovenia), which serves as project coordinator of BRIDGE.

The workshop was attended by experts from 11 constituent entities of the Russian Federation, including: The city of Moscow, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Stavropol Krai, the Republic of Udmurtia, the Republic of Mordovia, the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, the oblasts of Moscow, Orenburg and Samara. Well known scholars, politicians, representatives of the office of commissioner for Human Rights, leaders of national and cultural communities, heads of the Ministry of the cultural and national policy of the Russian Federation, and experts for religious and ethnic problems took part at the WS. Furthermore, also 10 members of the Network of Ethnic Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflict (EAWARN) were present during the WS.

After intensive discussions and debates about the current situation in the field of human and minority rights in the Russian Federation, the participants emphasized essential progress that has been achieved during last decade in both fields. It is of utmost importance to note that Russian legislation in these areas is developed and continues to be developed in accordance with internationally recognized legal standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (1950), the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki (1975), The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Vienna (1989), The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,

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Copenhagen (1990), and other documents of the United Nations and its special divisions, verdicts of the European Court of Human rights; European Council Act; Recommendations of the OSCE based High Commissioner on National Minorities.

At the same time, the conference participants voiced concern over certain cases in which Russian legislation becomes violated. Those cases include infringement of the national rights religious rights. Omissions and collisions in legal acts in some aspects of ethno confessional policy, deficiency of strict state control and control of the law enforcement activities created possibility of corruption and discredit the state policy of the Russian Federation.

During the two days of the WS the participants adopted the following recommendations for state agencies and institutions of civil society which they have been elaborating accordingly in work groups.

1. Support the efforts of the President of the Russian Federation, the government as well as legislative organs in the further harmonization of the legislation and normative legal acts of the Russian Federation in accordance with international instruments guaranteeing the legitimate rights and freedoms of ethnic and religious minorities.

Sign and ratify all international acts prohibiting discrimination and protecting equality. Some of them such as Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), and the European Convention on Nationality (1997) have not yet been adopted by the Russian Federation. Provide full and effective implementation of these treaties at national level.

2. It is necessary to involve members of the Russian scientific community for carrying out the monitoring process regarding the realization of international conventions and acts of minorities' protection in the Russian Federation on a regular level. The results of this monitoring should be presented to state bodies.

3. Provide for active involvement of the academia as well as and non-governmental organizations for the preparation of reports in the field of human rights and freedoms of ethnic and religious minorities in Russia.

4. To accelerate the adoption of the National ethno cultural policy.

5. Initiate discussions for the adaptation of the Federal law project which would regulate the dimension ethno cultural policies of the Russian Federation among academic society, public organizations and media.

6. For more efficient implementation of the state policy in the area of cultural preservation and development of identity among the nationalities of the Russian Federation we consider it sensible to establish the Ministry for ethno cultural policy. We suggest investigating the possibilities for the formation of the federal authority responsible for the state-confessional relations (autonomous or within the structure of the Ministry for ethno cultural policy).

7. Support the introduction of the position of the Commissioner for Human Rights in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

8. Introduce the preventive measures and increase their effectiveness to overcome the existing violation of the human rights by means of imposing respect to cultural, ethnic, world-view and confessional diversity to the state power representatives in all segments of social life, with special attention to the police, judges and other representatives of law enforcement agencies, military personnel, academic, medical and social security staff.

9. Create and support information programs on eradication of discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance on the federal, regional and local levels and support the activities of the non-governmental organizations in this area. Bring Federal target program "Generation of the tolerant awareness and attitudes and prophylaxis of extremism" up to date.

10. Enliven activities in the area of law education, increase juridical literacy of the population and eradicate legal nihilism in the area of ethnic and cultural relations.

Include the optional subjects in legal aspects of interethnic relations into the curricula of educational institutions.

Organize nation-wide festivals of ethnic cultures for the youth, support the practice of young people's exchanges, hosting scientific conferences, academic and educational forums, schools, workshops which promote eradication of negative ethnic stereotypes.

11. Create the structures of free legal help for the migrants and ethnic minorities' representatives regarding Russian legislation that determines the procedures of migration, registration, obtaining of job permission and relevant documents, activities of ethnic and cultural organization and religious groups.

12. Accelerate the work on the project of the Migration policy of the Russian Federation concept and clearly reflect the guarantees for the human rights of the new migrants arriving to the Russian Federation as well as create the conditions for their cultural self-organization.

13. We suggest continuation of the improvement of Russian legislation that stipulates the freedom of conscience, bringing it to the closest conformity with the international standards and norms in this area. Elaborate the national Concept regarding the state policy in the area of freedom of conscience.

14. We recommend drawing attention of the federal agencies (the Ministry of Justice, Public Prosecutor's office and judicial agencies) to the law enforcement practice in respect to the realization of the constitutional rights for the freedom of conscience, realization of legal right and interests of ethnic and cultural minorities and religious associations.

15. We consider it feasible to create a national Center (with affiliations in the regions) for the complex expertise of the literature and other information materials with religious content and assign it with the expertise functions during investigations in court concerning extremism and terrorism, as well as responsibilities for professional training of experts.

16. Promote the federal legislation enhancement in the area of socio-humanitarian expertise with special attention to the legal status of an expert with the fixation of the obligatory educational qualification and level of professional training as well as concretization of the requirements to the content and order of the expert reviews.

17. We suggest redirecting the litigations on acknowledgment of extremist material from the competence of the regional courts to the courts of higher authorities.

Participants of the workshop requested the BRIDGE Coordinator, Prof. Dr. Silvo Devetak and the Rector of Stolypin Volga Region Academy of Public Administration, Prof. Dr. Sergey Yu. Naumov to distribute the recommendations containing in this Declaration to the competent EU agencies, the governments of the EU member states and the governmental structures of the Russian Federation of federal and regional levels.

This Declaration was adopted in Russian and English languages on 25 May 2011 in Saratov, Russia