



Parliamentary Assembly Assemblée parlementaire

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“Situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed Peoples”

Recommendation 1775 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers

adopted at the 1005th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (26 September 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has given careful consideration to Recommendation 1775 (2006) on the “Situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples”¹. It has brought the recommendation to the attention of the governments of the member states and forwarded it to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), for the attention in particular of its Committee of Experts on Issues relating to the Protection of National Minorities (DH-MIN) and to the Steering Committee for Education (CDED) for information and possible comments. The comments are appended to the present reply.

2. The Committee of Ministers notes that a number of the issues raised in the recommendation are being addressed in connection with the monitoring of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which entered into force in the Russian Federation on 1 December 1998. This instrument obliges the State Parties to promote the necessary conditions for maintaining and developing the culture of persons belonging to national minorities and the safeguarding of essential elements of their identity, among which are their religion, their language, their traditions and their historical heritage. The Committee of Ministers recalls that during the first monitoring cycle, the Committee of Ministers adopted, on 10 July 2003, Resolution ResCMN(2003)9 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Russian Federation. The second resolution was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 May 2007 (CM/ResCMN(2007)7) on the basis of the second opinion on the Russian Federation, adopted by the Advisory Committee at its 26th meeting on 11 May 2006. The Committee of Ministers believes that the monitoring machinery for the Framework Convention, which protects, *inter alia*, the freedoms of language, thought, expression, conscience and religion, access to the media and the right to education, should enable the groups concerned to receive the necessary support for the protection of their rights. It supports the Assembly's call to the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

3. The Committee of Ministers would also like to draw the Parliamentary Assembly's attention to the training seminars organised by the Council of Europe in the Russian Federation on minority issues, involving both non-governmental and governmental actors. It recalls that the authorities of the Russian Federation have taken part in a range of related international events, including a seminar organised by the Council of Europe and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in Vienna in October 2006 on the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minorities Languages. Moreover, the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers organised an international seminar on the “International legal guarantees for the protection of national minorities and the problems in their implementation, with a special focus on minority education” in Strasbourg on 18 October 2006. The programme of the seminar, in which members of the DH-MIN participated, included in-depth presentations and discussions on the situation of Finno-Ugric peoples in the Russian Federation.

¹ The Committee of Ministers took note of the position of the delegation of the Russian Federation that the term “Samoyed” has pejorative and humiliating connotations and is not commonly used in doctrine or in everyday life in Russia.

4. With regard to the specific recommendation to establish a European Centre for Finno-Ugric languages based on the model of the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL), the Committee of Ministers refers to the observations made by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and by the Steering Committee for Education (CDED) (see Appendix).

5. Finally, the Committee of Ministers invites the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples to play an active part in the campaign to promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism among citizens, in particular on European Day of Languages, which is celebrated every year on 26 September.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Comments by the DH-MIN adopted by the CDDH as regards Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1775 (2006) on the “Situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples”²

1. The CDDH recalls that, in accordance with its terms of reference, its Committee of Experts on Issues relating to the Protection of National Minorities (DH-MIN) is to “act as a forum for the exchange of information, views and experience on policies and good practice for the protection of national minorities at domestic level and in the context of relevant international legal instruments, including those of the Council of Europe, *without pursuing activities relating to monitoring the situation in individual member states*” (emphasis added).

2. Against this background, the DH-MIN has limited itself to the following comments on the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1775 (2006) on the “Situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples”³.

3. The DH-MIN welcomes the attention paid by the Parliamentary Assembly to minority issues, including to the situation of the peoples mentioned in the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1775 (2006), which covers a wide range of linguistic groups living in diverse situations. Without wishing to comment on the actual situation of the said populations in the Russian Federation, the DH-MIN recalls that a number of the issues raised in the recommendation are being addressed in connection with the monitoring of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which entered into force in the Russian Federation on 1 December 1998. During the first monitoring cycle, the Committee of Ministers adopted, on 10 July 2003, Resolution ResCMN(2003)9 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Russian Federation and the second resolution is currently being prepared, on the basis of the second opinion on the Russian Federation, adopted by the Advisory Committee at its 26th meeting on 11 May 2006.

4. The DH-MIN further notes that the Council of Europe has organised training seminars in the Russian Federation on minority issues, involving both non-governmental and governmental actors and that the authorities of the Russian Federation have taken part in a range of related international events, including a seminar organised by the Council of Europe and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minorities Languages in Vienna in October 2006. Moreover, the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers organised an international seminar on the “International legal guarantees for the protection of national minorities and the problems in their implementation, with a special focus on minority education” in Strasbourg on 18 October 2006. The programme of the seminar, in which members of the DH-MIN participated, included in-depth presentations and discussions on the situation of Finno-Ugric peoples in the Russian Federation.

5. With regard to the specific recommendation to establish a European Centre for Finno-Ugric languages based on the model of the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL), the DH-MIN considers that the Council of Europe should indeed support valuable independent initiatives devoted to the promotion of minority cultures, but it does not necessarily follow that the Committee of Ministers, an intergovernmental body, would be best placed to “establish” such initiatives. Moreover, the optimum scope of such initiatives, including the question as to whether they should be devoted to specific languages or have a more general mandate, is an important issue to be addressed when such proposals are developed.

² At the 64th meeting of the CDDH (10-13 April 2007), the expert from the Russian Federation indicated that his authorities would submit observations to the Ministers’ Deputies in this regard.

³ The DH-MIN took note of the position of the delegation of the Russian Federation that the term “Samoyed” has pejorative and humiliating connotations and is not commonly used in doctrine or in everyday life in Russia.

Appendix 2 to the reply

Opinion of the Steering Committee for Education on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1775 (2006) on the “Situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed Peoples”

The Steering Committee for Education (CDED),

Welcomes the initiative by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, to help protect the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed minorities;

Supports the call to the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and points out that the said authorities have signed and ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;

Believes that the monitoring machinery for the Framework Convention, which protects, *inter alia*, the freedoms of language, thought, expression, religious conscience, media access and education, should enable the groups concerned to receive the necessary support for the protection of their rights;

Expresses reservations about the advisability of setting up a European centre to protect a group of specific languages;

Urges the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples to play an active part in the campaign to promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism among citizens, in particular on the European Day of Languages, which is celebrated every year on 26 September.