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REPORT

FOR THE GENERAL COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

"The OSCE: Addressing New Security Challenges"

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Report to the Third General Committee

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For decades progressively growing consumption has been the order of the day on the development agenda, in particular for social groups that wield the greatest social authority, i.e. the upper and the middle class, hence these groups' problems have come to the social forefront during the crisis. In many ways they overshadow the crisis' dramatic impact on those who are unable to determine their own problems or clearly articulate them against other, better-off and better-educated groups.

The main problem of the crisis and, in effect, its dramatic nature deals with the fact that its impact varies in gravity from country to country as well as social and professional groups inside each country. Yet, essential issues like ecology and social welfare, healthcare, lack of vital social and material goods in a number of countries and even social groups in industrially developed states are addressed far inferior to need. Such development has come to jeopardize both nature and humanity at large.

Not only has the economic crisis exacerbated the age-old problems of vulnerable social groups, but it has also highlighted new present-day challenges. During recession the main problem facing all the countries is growing unemployment, lower real income of households and subsequent problems aggravated by the following challenges:

1. Unemployment, in particular:

- 1.1. among women, which, though legally prohibited, is caused by a possibly stronger discrimination while recruiting and dismissing employees, invariable lower salaries for women as they have to combine family responsibilities with bearing and rearing children;
- 1.2. among youth, which has to do with fewer jobs available and lower demand for labour, especially with insignificant career record;

2. Trafficking of humans, in particular women and children as an alternative to any legal business, which is now failing;

3. Child poverty and neglect, child pornography, paedophilia and stronger involvement of children into crime; in this connection the need for engagement by mass-media is particularly actual today to reveal these negative aspects, and to ensure their wide demonstration and attraction of appropriate power structures and the public for resolving the existing problems;

4. Child exploitation, and the spread of the worst forms of child labour as the cheapest one. Efforts undertaken by the International Labour Organization to decrease the number of working children, which has fallen by 27.8% over the past few years, may come to naught;

5. The crisis puts family values to the test. The highest pressure is on families whose income directly depends on current salaries, without any outside financial sources like property or private business. The mounting financial predicament often renders families incapable of paying off their loans and providing their kids with decent education.

These problems directly cause a cornucopia of new problems, i.e. lower birth rate, growing abortion rate, more abandoned children, which, in its turn, only compounds the complicated demographic background.

Interstate transfer of specific social activities need to be put in practice. On the one hand, such activities in Russia in this field are clearly inadequate. On the other hand, an ideological approach is increasingly gaining ground, with many aspects of genuine assistance to its facilities faltering and even collapsing (i.e. few nursery schools along with too many students in secondary schools, poor healthcare, little access to sports and exercise therapy for most children and teenagers etc.).

At the same time the so-called “old EU members” have gone a long way building support for these social groups through both the state and various communities. This positive experience is absolutely invaluable for both countries whose citizens accumulated the experience but also for many other European states, since they all have a lot in common in most cultural dimensions and, consequently, lifestyles.

Today, Russia is one of the main recipients of such experience due to its trailblazing in political, economic and social development. But while present-day Russian legislative reform is in many ways based on European achievements, there is no actual transfer of hands-on social work experience or social assistance from the EU to Russia.

The global community has already passed through the first stage of the financial and economic crisis, which is an integral part of the economic cycle.

Yet experts forecast that the raging crisis might last longer and spread universally.

This will place even greater responsibility for their nationals’ future on all the OSCE participating States and will require greater efforts to protect social rights of vulnerable groups in particular.

It is necessary to quickly conclude international bilateral agreements on co-operation in child adoption issues with a view to enhancing control over their subject matter as regards child-rearing practices.

A new international instrument is needed to define the main rules of providing for children after a divorce of parents who are nationals of different countries. In this connection it is also necessary to speed up as much as possible work on national legislation, directed toward the improvement of social protection of citizens, and first of all the most vulnerable groups of the population.

Today, with a growing number of armed conflicts, unrestrained production and use of state-of-the-art weapons of mass destruction and indiscriminate action, and new threats posed by transnational terrorism, it is especially important to protect basic human rights in the extreme environment of hostilities. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that most such conflicts are internal hostilities killing civilians. In this connection, and in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, questions of protection of victims of any confrontations, first of all women and children, are particularly urgent.

Triggered by sprouting ethnic separatism, religious extremism, collapsing political systems, poverty and social disparity, internal armed conflicts are often characterized by atrocities and direct neglect of humanitarian law as demonstrated by the belligerent parties. As a rule, civilian deaths and injuries are a direct outcome of grave violations of international humanitarian law.