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**COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF  
NATIONAL MINORITIES  
(DH-MIN)**

**OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE DH-MIN IN 1998-1999**

*Document prepared by the Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of  
National Minorities and the DH-MIN*

## Introduction

The present document summarises the main activities undertaken by the DH-MIN under its 1997 terms of reference. In doing so, this paper highlights how the DH-MIN carried out work within its mandate, notably the issues it addressed (section I) and the working methods it used (section II).

### DH-MIN 1997 terms of reference:

- The Committee of Experts on Issues relating to the Protection of National Minorities was established by a decision of the Committee of Ministers of December 1997 at the 613<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies with the following main elements in its **terms of reference**:
  - "To act as a forum for the exchange of information, views and experience on policies and good practices for the protection of national minorities at the domestic level and in the context of international instruments;
  - To identify and assess ways and means of further enhancing European co-operation on issues relating to the protection of national minorities and where appropriate, to make proposals to this effect for consideration by the CDDH."

DH-MIN held three plenary meetings between 1998 and 1999: 1<sup>st</sup> meeting: 17-20 March 1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting: 20-23 October 1998, 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting: 16-19 April 1999<sup>1</sup>. In addition, a meeting of the Bureau was convened on 20 October 1999 before the work of the Committee was suspended<sup>2</sup>.

- In November 1998, the Ministers' Deputies gave the following **ad-hoc terms of reference** to the DH-MIN:
  - "to undertake a study on "dispersed ethnic minorities" as well as prospects for co-ordination between the Council of Europe on the one hand and the European Institute for Dispersed Minorities and other bodies pursuing similar objectives on the other hand;
  - to submit its findings to the Committee of Ministers through the CDDH."

A working group on Dispersed Ethnic Minorities (DH-MIN GT-DEM) was established and it met from 8-10 September 1999. It brought together representatives of 9 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Lithuania, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Ukraine).

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<sup>1</sup> The third meeting of the DH-MIN took place in conjunction with the sixth meeting of governmental offices for national minorities under the joint programme between the European Commission and the Council of Europe « National Minorities in Europe ».

<sup>2</sup> This decision was taken in order to reallocate funds towards the implementation of priority activities concerning national minorities in the framework of the Stability Pact for South East Europe.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SECTION I:</b> <b>ISSUES EXAMINED BETWEEN 1998 AND 1999 AND RESULTS</b></p>
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- During the two years of its activities, the DH-MIN examined in detail the following themes:

- **Participation of minorities in decision-making processes**

The examination of this issue led to the elaboration of a questionnaire prepared by the Secretariat. Replies to this questionnaire were then compiled in a document (reference: DH-MIN (99) 1) on the basis of which a synthesis was prepared (DH-MIN (99)2). These documents prepared the ground for a study on the subject which was commissioned from the Max-Planck Institute, Heidelberg, Germany.

The study was finalised in 1999. It aimed to “develop a typology of different forms of participation of minorities in decision-making processes and identify parameters relevant to the choice of a specific form for a given situation”. The study addressed the following subjects:

1. Parliamentary representation of minorities and exercise of parliamentary control;
2. Representation of minority interests in governmental agencies;
3. Informal channels of participation, such as round tables or councils;
4. Different forms of autonomy;
5. Approaches taken in federal systems.

The study was submitted to the CDDH for its examination. It is now a public document (DH-MIN(2000)1).

- **Dispersed ethnic minorities**

A questionnaire was prepared by the Secretariat and sent to member States requesting information about groups that could be considered as dispersed and about the existence of institutes dealing with this issue in member States. The questionnaire also requested the views on the possible creation of a network of institutions dealing with dispersed ethnic minorities.

On the basis of the replies (submitted by 15 countries only and compiled in a document DH-MIN-GT-DEM (99)2), the DH-MIN concluded that there was no need to propose a definition of the term “dispersed minorities” and that the creation of a network of institutes should be left to the initiative of the Parties.

The final activity report of the DH-MIN on dispersed minorities was forwarded by the CDDH to the Committee of Ministers for its attention in 1999 and was then made public.

- As part of its mandate, the DH-MIN prepared **draft opinions of the CDDH on the following recommendations:**

- Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1345 (1997) on the protection of national minorities,
- Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1291 (1996) on Yiddish culture,
- CLRAE Recommendation 43 (1998) on territorial autonomy and national minorities.

- During its meetings, the DH-MIN also held **exchanges of views *inter alia*** on the following subjects: the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the question as to which groups are covered by the FCNM.

## SECTION II: WORKING METHODS

The working methods of the Committee were mentioned in the 1997 terms of reference in the following way:

- “carry out or commission relevant policy research;
- involve in its work representatives of national minorities and non-governmental organisations.”

As mentioned above, questionnaires were used to launch studies and the Committee used outside expertise to further examine some aspects of the theme it had chosen to examine.

In addition, the DH-MIN held consultations with NGOs having expertise in the field of the protection of national minorities (FUEN, MRG, EBLUL, *Association internationale pour la défense des langues et des cultures menacées*).