Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 996 (1993)[1]

Population movements between the states of the former USSR

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The break-up of the Soviet Union has seen an unravelling of its complex agglomeration of ethnic groups, nations and republics. Free of the Russian dominated, highly centralised structure which denied various national identities, nationalism in some of the newly independent states is leading to discrimination and antagonism towards minorities.

2. As a result of ethnic conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, in Ossetia, Ingushetia and elsewhere in the Russian Federation, as well as in several of the states of Central Asia, more than one million ethnic Russians and non-Russians have been displaced. Recent and continuing violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and Tajikistan has resulted in tens of thousands of families requiring immediate aid and further substantial help to survive the winter. Moreover, during the massive deportations carried out by Stalin between 1941 and 1944, certain ethnic groups of the ex-Soviet Union were violently uprooted from their land. Among them were Poles, Germans, Meskhetians, and Crimean Tatars, whose right to return to their country of origin must be recognised by Russia, Georgia and Ukraine respectively.

3. Twenty-five million Russian-speaking people living outside the Russian Federation are becoming increasingly concerned by changes in their political and economic positions, involving losing their privileges, and for their rights in response to indigenous nationalist and Islamic fundamentalist pressure and prejudice. It is estimated that some two to three million might migrate to Russia in the near future.

4. To this must be added a further million officers and their families of the Russian Army who remain outside the Russian Federation.

5. It should also be noted that, in addition to the migrants, refugees and displaced persons already in the country with valid documents, a growing number from Somalia, other African and Middle Eastern countries are arriving at Russian airports with false documents as a result of inadequate immigration controls.

6. In response to earlier inflows, a number of Russian non-governmental organisations were established to provide reception points and programmes of assistance for Russian-speaking repatriates, migrants, refugees and displaced persons, and to purchase land for self-help settlements. Many of these are finding that they are unable to complete their projects through a shortage of funds.

7. More recently the Russian Government has established the Federal Migration Service to register such repatriates, migrants, refugees and displaced persons at local offices, to provide initial reception, protection and assistance, and to establish new communities for permanent resettlement in central Russia for those who do not wish to return home. The absence of federal legislation on migration, refugees and displaced persons is causing complications for these programmes.

8. The Russian Government has recently signed international agreements to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to advise, provide expertise and support for such government assistance to migrants, refugees, displaced persons and repatriates, and co-ordinate better the work of the non-governmental organisations.

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1. Assembly debate on 4 February 1993 (28th Sitting) (see Doc. 6739, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, Rapporteur : Mr Atkinson ; and Doc. 6753, opinion of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries, Rapporteur : Mr Böhm). Text adopted by the Assembly on 4 February 1993 (28th Sitting).

9. There is a degree of confusion and duplication emerging between these international organisations through a lack of co-ordination and a conflict of mandates. There are also insufficient resources and a lack of planning at a higher level to enable them to undertake programmes necessary to satisfy the needs of repatriates, migrants, refugees and displaced persons in the areas of arrival and to put into place programmes of assistance to avoid displacement in the areas of conflict.

10. In view of President Yeltsin's clear commitment to democracy and reform, the formidable economic and political challenges his government is facing and the distinct danger of a return to communism should he fail, it is essential that Council of Europe member states fully appreciate the growing social burden and destabilisation which the presence of so many migrants, refugees, displaced persons and repatriates now poses for Russia and other former Soviet republics and that they are prepared to offer effective assistance - bilaterally, in concert and through international agencies.

11. The Assembly calls on the Russian Government :

11.1. to introduce a legal basis for migration, refugees, displaced persons and repatriates as soon as possible ;

11.2. to ratify the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness ;

11.3. to tighten its immigration controls and those of Aeroflot and other airlines against illegal immigrants ;

11.4. to encourage non-governmental organisations and charitable organisations in the establishment of self-help communities for the permanently displaced with the necessary infrastructure, services and financial support ;

11.5. to introduce into law the right to own private property without leasehold from the state.

12. The Assembly calls on the states - formerly republics - of the former Soviet Union, to consider as a matter of urgency :

12.1. the growing number of ethnic conflicts between and within them and to fully utilise the mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflict prevention of the CSCE ;

12.2. the situation of the migrants, refugees or displaced peoples arising from these conflicts with a view to utilising the resources of the UNHCR, IOM and ICRC, in accordance with their respective mandates and fields of responsibility, through the migration services of the Russian Federation or those of other states in the immediate provision of assistance and temporary settlement ;

12.3. measures to restore confidence so as to encourage as many refugees, displaced persons and repatriates as possible to return to their homes with appropriate assistance and compensation including the harmonisation of legislation on the rights of citizens and the protection of minorities, and to enter into bilateral agreements which will regularise the position of ‘‘stateless persons", such measures and agreements to be in conformity with the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol of 1967 and the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness ;

12.4. the immediate end of the economic blockade of Armenia ;

12.5. the recognition of the right of populations deported during the Stalin era to return to their countries of origin.