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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Thirty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,

on Tuesday, 11 November 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Initial report of the Republic of Moldova (E/1990/5/Add.52; E/C.12/Q/MOL/1; HR/CESCR/NONE/2003/6; HRI/CORE/1/Add.114)

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Slonovschi (Republic of Moldova) took a place at the Committee table.

Mr. SLONOVSKI (Republic of Moldova) said that one of the greatest obstacles to the establishment of the rule of law in the Republic of Moldova and to the country's eventual European integration was the separatist conflict in Transnistria. Finding a lasting solution to that conflict was among the Government's chief priorities. In February 2003, the President had put forward a plan to end the conflict that called for re-establishing the nation's borders on the basis of those of the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic of 1 January 1990. Despite its participation in a joint constitutional commission to draft the new Moldovan Constitution, the separatist regime had shown signs of continuing to pursue its goal of an independent Transnistrian State. In those circumstances, only the close cooperation of all the actors involved - the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the Ukraine - could influence the Transnistrian regime to adopt a more constructive position during the negotiations.

Another key to solving the Transnistrian conflict was the signing of a customs agreement between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and the establishment of a single customs zone at the Moldovan/Ukrainian border. It was hoped that that would help to reduce illicit trafficking and strengthen control over Transnistrian exports. Trilateral consultations were scheduled between the European Union, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to address problems that had arisen in applying the provisions of the agreement. Despite the setbacks it had encountered, the Government was determined to solve the Transnistrian problem peacefully and to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic.

In accordance with the recommendations of the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, the Parliament had, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, formulated a national action plan for human rights for the period 2004-2008. The plan called for improving the standard of living of vulnerable social groups, indexing pensions and establishing methodologies for calculating family household income, as well as

for developing special measures to address the needs of elderly and disabled persons and children.

New legislation had been enacted to recognize and protect the rights of national minority groups in Moldova, including the rights to receive an education in their mother tongue. The Government encouraged national minorities to develop their culture, language and religion through the provision of literature, radio programmes and religious services in minority languages.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and the Family had set up special gender focal points within the various government ministries and departments to provide a rapid response to gender-related issues, and had formulated a national action plan to promote gender equality. The Government had also set up numerous bodies to address women's issues, particularly those relating to employment, social security and women's role in society. In addition, it had established five centres throughout the country to promote equality between the sexes.

In 2003, a new Labour Code, which placed particular emphasis on workers' rights and strengthened employers' obligations, had entered into force. Of the principles set forth in the new Code, the most difficult for the Government to apply was that of ensuring full employment. The introduction of a national employment programme and the adoption of the Employment and Job-Seekers (Social Protection) Act were among the steps taken.

The massive flow of emigrants from Moldova had given rise to human trafficking, which had been addressed by the recently introduced Criminal Code. The Code was consistent with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and sought to protect victims and facilitate their social reintegration. The Code provided more severe punishment for trafficking in children than for trafficking in adults.

The Government had taken measures to address the situation of street children, which had become a major problem. The measures included: the establishment of a social protection department, which provided children's allowances for low-income families; the approval of a national plan for the protection of children and the family; and a child protection bill, aimed at protecting and reintegrating street children.

While the Republic of Moldova was firmly committed to upholding democratic values and human rights, the democratization process had encountered a number of major obstacles, such as a decline in economic activity, increased unemployment and impoverishment of the population. Corruption and criminality were two additional obstacles. Nevertheless, the Government had made strides in improving protection of economic and social rights, and there had been an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001 and 2002. However, the Government could not claim that it guaranteed all citizens the right to a decent life. In order to achieve that objective, it was necessary to combat corruption and strengthen public administration by making public officials aware of the need to respect human rights.

Drug use was on the rise and was linked to the increased production and illicit sale of opium and cannabis. Measures to combat drug abuse and narcotics trafficking included amendments to legislation, the establishment of a commission and the development of a national programme.

HIV/AIDS infection remained one of the most serious problems in the country. Assisted by various international organizations, the Government had developed a prevention strategy, devised a national programme, carried out two projects to prevent the spread of the disease among vulnerable groups and formulated national standards on the treatment of infected persons. It had also received financial assistance in implementing its national programme from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and from the World Bank.

The Government was taking steps to give effect to the economic, social and cultural rights contained in the Covenant. The main obstacles it faced were the economic situation and its inability to guarantee the respect of human rights in all parts of the nation. The Government would welcome international cooperation and aid in achieving its objectives.

I. General framework within which the Covenant is implemented

II. Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant

Articles 1-5 of the Covenant

Mr. ATANGANA said that the State party should supply information on its case law on economic, social and cultural rights as contained in the Covenant, as requested in the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/MOL/1). It was not clear why the State party's Parliament considered the State party to be exempt from the application of the European Convention on Human Rights as it related to acts committed in the territory of the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Republic.

Mr. CEAUSU, referring to article 2 on the obligation of States to use the maximum of available resources to achieve the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, said that, in most cases, those resources were natural resources. Natural resources would prove an asset for the population only if they were equitably distributed and managed. Moldova's main natural resource was agricultural land, with agriculture accounting for approximately 30 per cent of GDP.

The social programmes referred to in the report were financed primarily by the State budget, including funds from voluntary contributions. In that connection, he would welcome more information on the tax system in Moldova, and whether it brought in enough revenue to adequately finance such programmes. For example, bearing in mind the poverty levels in Moldova, did the Government place additional taxes on luxury items imported into the country? He also wondered whether income tax was progressive, so that those who earned more paid more. Did the Government have the means to ensure the proper collection of taxes?

The report referred to corruption in administration at all levels. He wished to know whether corruption was being combated

vigorously, not just through legislation, but also with the cooperation of the police and justice system, to ensure that laws were implemented and respected. The success of social and economic programmes depended on such an approach, but was the Government prepared to take firm measures in that regard?

Ms. BRAS GOMES said that the definition of an ethnic minority given in article 1 of the Ethnic Minorities (Rights of Individuals and Legal Status of Organizations) Act contained implicit discrimination, as it was couched in terms of characteristics of ethnic groups that set them apart from the Moldovan majority. She would be interested to hear the delegation's opinion on the matter.

The country's replies and the Declaration of Independence contained references to both ethnic and national minorities, however, in the opening statement only national minorities had been mentioned. She would appreciate clarification of the two concepts. She would also be

interested to hear how effective the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities had been in eradicating discrimination against minorities, particularly the Roma population.

Mr. MALINVERNI said that, although the Roma population was distributed throughout the country, there was a high concentration in a number of villages in the north which were particularly disadvantaged through, for example, the absence of drinking water and telephone lines. In the process of privatization of land that had begun in the early 1990s, the Roma minority had had proportionately less access to land, with the result that many Roma could no longer live from agriculture and had been forced to leave the country. He would welcome clarification of the reasons. He would also welcome details of the 2001 law which contained provisions in favour of the Roma minority, and the impact it had had.

The report stated that instruction in Moldovan schools was given only in the two official languages: Russian and Moldovan. However, the delegation had mentioned that in certain schools classes were also taught in Bulgarian and Ukrainian. He would appreciate clarification of whether that meant that all instruction was imparted in those languages or that Ukrainian and Bulgarian minority students received language instruction in their mother tongue.

Ms. IYER said that she welcomed the Government's adoption of a number of acts which promoted the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of different ethnic groups. Another positive step was that minorities were represented in Parliament and local councils. However, the burden of improving the status of minorities must be shared between the Government and the minorities themselves. Although the preservation of the traditions and culture of ethnic minorities was important, it was also essential to help integrate minorities into the mainstream. The objective of all social and economic development was to improve the quality of life of all people, including members of minorities. She would be interested to hear what measures had been taken to promote economic development and improve the situation of minorities.

Mr. RIEDEL said that it was praiseworthy that the Covenant had direct applicability in Moldova. However, no examples had been given of how the international law rule in the Constitution worked in practice. He would be interested to hear whether any cases referring to provisions of the Covenant had come before the Constitutional Court or the lower courts.

The National Human Rights Institute was apparently supplemented by three ombudsmen. Which of those was entrusted with the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, and had any cases or petitions been brought before him or her concerning those rights? Had the Institute included the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in its plan of work for the next three to four years?

With reference to the national plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights, he wished to know what concrete measures had been taken with regard to its economic, social and cultural rights components. What targets had been set for the next five years, for example, in terms of training judges, administrators and teachers?

Mr. SADI said that he would welcome more details of the political, security and social obstacles to the national plan of action. Had those obstacles been overcome and what was the outlook for the future?

He wondered whether Moldova had an overall policy for the integration of minorities into mainstream society. For example, how were Roma and other minorities assimilated? He would also be interested to hear about the mechanisms used by the ombudsmen to deal with economic, social and cultural rights.

Mr. GRISSA said that it was unfortunate that, with the exception of paragraph 9 on the Bulgarian and Gagauzian minorities, the report contained no differentiated data expressing the ethnic minority population, particularly the Roma, as a percentage of the total population. Nor was there any mention of a Romanian minority. Did such a minority exist, or was the country as a whole considered to be made up of Romanians?

He would be interested to learn how women were treated in Moldova. For example, did each ethnic group have a particular treatment of women? It would be useful to have a breakdown of data in terms of minorities, gender and urban/rural population.

Mr. MARCHÁN ROMERO, referring to paragraph 25 of the report which stated that the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights depended on available resources, said that the Committee's general comment No. 3 had analysed in depth the legal nature of States' obligations under the Covenant. The comment indicated that, although the Covenant provided for the progressive implementation of the obligations, a number of them were to be applied with immediate effect. The Committee had pointed out that once a State had ratified the Covenant, it must report on the results of the implementation of its provisions. He wondered whether the Moldovan Government had consciously assumed the obligation of taking immediate measures to give legal effect to the Covenant.

Ms. BARAHONA RIERA said that it was not clear whether natural resources were public or private property. She would welcome clarification of the status of water and subsoil. She would be interested to learn more about the environmental protection measures and legislation in place, particularly given the high number of degraded ecosystems and forests, and the fact that 70 per cent of land

was non-arable chemozems. What percentage of GDP went towards environmental protection and regeneration, and which institutions were involved?

Given that corruption was notoriously difficult to eradicate, she would be interested to hear how that was being achieved in Moldova, or what systems were in place to combat it in the long term.

In accordance with article 3, Moldova had made significant legislative advances in the area of non-discrimination, notably with the 2003 national plan for gender equality. However, it remained that no clear definition of discrimination was contained in either the Constitution or legislation. She would also be interested to know what budget was available for the implementation of the plan.

Mr. TEXIER said that, although the Constitution provided for the independence of the judiciary, there seemed to have been a number of problems in relation to the remuneration of judges, which could have promoted corruption. He would be interested to know if that problem had been resolved.

Mr. KOLOSOV wondered what the consular section of the Moldovan Embassy in Moscow was doing for Moldovans who had gone to Russia in search of work. How did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitor its work?

Articles 13-15 of the Covenant

Mr. SLONOVSKI (Republic of Moldova) drew the attention of the Committee to the information provided in the written replies regarding the Ethnic Minorities Act. The country's legal framework ensured that minorities were not discriminated against.

Although corruption had not been completely eradicated, the Government had taken steps to improve the situation. For example, a special centre had been established to combat corruption among State officials. The Government had recently ratified the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and had adopted a law on corruption in 2003. The problem was being tackled in cooperation with the neighbouring countries.

Under the Constitution and other legislation, international human rights instruments took precedence over domestic legislation. For example, provisions related to individual rights and freedoms were applied in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant and other international instruments to which the country was a party. If there was a conflict between domestic legislation and an international instrument, the latter took precedence and the law in question was amended.

There was no jurisprudence on the application of the Covenant because its provisions were incorporated in national legislation and judges made their decisions on the basis of domestic laws. He could not provide examples of direct application of the provisions of the Covenant as to date there had been no cases of conflict between the Covenant and domestic legislation.

III. Issues relating to specific rights recognized in the Covenant

Articles 6-9 of the Covenant

Mr. TEXIER commended the delegation for the information on the new Labour Code and the programme to combat unemployment. According to the delegation, unemployment was currently at 6.8 per cent. He wished to know what statistical method the Government had been using to calculate unemployment figures and whether they had been broken down by gender, age and other criteria. What was the trend in unemployment?

Although the new Labour Code had provisions related to the prohibition of forced labour, the report and other sources of information indicated that various forms of forced labour persisted, in particular among detainees, and persons undergoing treatment for alcoholism. According to reports from non-governmental organizations, annually 1,000 alcoholics

undergoing rehabilitation were subjected to forced labour. Although the adoption of the Labour Code was commendable, it was important to look at the real situation. He wished to have further information in that regard.

He enquired whether child labour was a problem and what measures were being taken to eradicate it.

The country's minimum wage did not seem to be in line with the requirements of article 7 of the Covenant, as it did not ensure a decent living for employees and their families. He was interested not in figures as such, but in the purchasing power associated with those figures. He asked whether a person on minimum wage could live decently, feed, dress, pay rent and enjoy a certain number of leisure activities. Information on measures being taken to improve the situation would be welcome. He asked whether the minimum wage was revised annually to reflect the cost of living.

The problem of disparity between the salaries of men and women seemed to be particularly acute. He would welcome comments from the delegation in that regard.

It would be useful to know whether a plurality of trade unions really existed in the country. Trade unions seemed to be subjected to extensive restrictions. For example, public officials were reportedly prohibited from forming trade unions. Although the prohibition was understandable in relation to the police, prison guards and judges, there was no reason why it should be applicable to other public officials. Conditions for creating trade unions in the private sector were also unfavourable. He would also be interested to know what limitations there were on strikes.

Mr. CEASU asked for clarification as to the number of people living in the country. The figures contained in the report varied. For example, he wished to know whether the figures listed in table 12 referred only to the people living between the two major rivers and did not take into account those living in Transnistria.

He asked for information on the privatization of large businesses and wished to know what happened to businesses which went

bankrupt. What was the Government doing to modernize or sell unprofitable enterprises? It would also be interesting to know what effect emigration of qualified labour had on the domestic labour market.

Referring to paragraph 178 of the report, he wished to know what the scope of the financial support given to enterprises for job creation was and how many companies had benefited from the programme. He asked what the results of the programme were and whether the Government believed that the money had been spent wisely.

According to table 14 in the report, in 1992 the minimum salary, at 18 MDL had amounted to 50 per cent of the minimum amount needed to live, but only 2 per cent in 2000. The percentage was so small that he wondered what the point of having a minimum wage was and asked whether there were many people on the minimum wage.

It would be useful to know how labour inspections were carried out and whether an independent public body was responsible for them. He asked how many people were involved in labour inspections and what powers were vested in them. For example, could they close down an enterprise in cases of serious breaches of labour standards?

He wished to know what percentage of employees were members of trade unions.

Mr. ATANGANA asked the delegation to provide a complete list of those allowed to form trade unions.

Ms. BRAS GOMES said that, according to the World Bank, youth unemployment in the country was growing and over 54 per cent of emigrants were under 30 years of age. The drain of young workers was a huge loss not only for the economy but also for the social security system, since it had a major impact on the inter-generation balance of the country's pay-as-you-go pension system. She asked what proactive employment policies designed to counteract migration of young persons in search of work were envisaged in the national employment plan for 2003-2005. It would be useful to know whether there were any specific measures targeting the under-30 age group.

Women were still greatly disadvantaged in the labour market. She asked whether specific measures were in place to improve the situation of women in the employment market and guarantee not only their right to work but also the right to just and favourable working conditions.

Mr. SADI wished to know why the Government was putting so much hope in the new Labour Code and how it differed from past laws which had failed to tackle the problem of unemployment.

Mr. MARTINOV said that, judging from the information provided by the delegation, disability benefits were paid only to persons who had been insured. He asked what happened to persons who had not been insured, and what percentage of the disabled they represented. He asked how large the State social insurance budget was and whether it was currently in deficit or surplus.

Mr. GRISSA asked for clarification with regard to the definition of the working population. Did the figures provided refer to the population of working age or total population and did they take into account those who had emigrated? According to table 12 in the report, the active population made up only 46 per cent of the total population, yet there were only around 57,000 unemployed people in the country, a figure that seemed rather low. If that was indeed the case, he wondered what had caused so many people to emigrate. He asked whether that was owing to the fact that salaries were low in comparison to those abroad or the fact that the people could not find work at all.

No information was provided on the unemployment levels for women and men, and the data on unemployment among young people were unsatisfactory.

Ms. BRAS GOMES, referring to implementation of article 9 of the Covenant, noted that under new legislation it was intended to increase the period of payment of unemployment benefit from 9 to 12 months. What happened after the end of that period for persons who were still unemployed but did not qualify for an old-age pension or disability benefit? Could the delegation confirm that such persons were no longer covered by the social security system or even by the social assistance system?

Noting that the system of pension security was under pressure E/1990/5/Add.52, (para. 281), she asked what efforts had been made to decrease the costs of administration, pension distribution and banking services.

She wondered whether the delegation could shed further light on what was meant in the statement in paragraph 388 of the report that the aim of social reform was to guarantee an adequate social service system that did not prejudice economic activity. She did not see how social services could have an adverse impact on economic activity.

Regarding the consolidation of the private pension system and the introduction of a voluntary or compulsory private supplementary pension within the new pension system, she asked who would be required to have a private pension. Who would administer the private scheme? Would part of the contributions to the public system be channelled to private schemes? She wondered how the public system, which was already in difficult financial straits, could cope with additional financial constraints.

Mr. SLONOVSKI (Republic of Moldova), replying first to questions on emigration, said that wages in Moldova were in fact rather low, and part of the population of working age had gone abroad so as to be able to provide for their families. Around 1 million people had left the country in search of work, but it was impossible to verify the figure because no surveys were carried out, and most such persons departed illegally and were living in other countries illegally. The departure of young people in search of work was a tragedy for Moldova - most Moldovans abroad were between 18 and 40 years old. The Government was working on a number of plans to encourage them to return. The problem could be solved only if the country's economic situation improved, because only economic growth would result in job creation. One positive aspect was that Moldovans working abroad sent back much of their earnings to their families. A percentage of those earnings eventually ended up in the State budget and thus could be used for a variety of government programmes, including for job creation.

The Government was also working on a programme to rehabilitate industry in cooperation with international partners. New companies had been launched in joint ventures which were a source of well-paid jobs and created employment opportunities for Moldovans living abroad who wished to return. A number of European Union programmes on behalf of illegal immigrants from Moldova were coming to an end; that acted as a further incentive for such persons to return home.

With respect to unemployment, he said that the Government's goal was to create as many jobs as possible. A number of job-creation programmes had been set up, including with the assistance of international organizations. A programme had been launched to assist victims of human trafficking in finding employment. Regarding unemployment among young people, a plan passed in Parliament in October provided for special programmes for that target group. It was planned to open information centres and to start a campaign to encourage business leaders to give priority to hiring qualified young people. So many people of working age had left the country over the past 10 years that the net unemployment rate had fallen.

The reference to forced labour for alcoholics surprised him; it was the first time he had heard such a thing. By law, prisoners were not forced to work. During the Soviet era, alcoholics had sometimes been required to undergo treatment, but that was no longer the case, and such persons certainly were not forced to work.

Regarding the minimum wage, he said that the figure of 18 MDL to which reference was made in table 14 served solely as a yardstick when imposing fines. The actual figure for the minimum wage was 150 MDL; the average wage in the public sector was 800 MDL, or about US\$ 60.

As to gender discrimination in the labour market, he assured the Committee that there was no such discrimination in hiring, and women received the same wages as men for the same work. There were increasing numbers of women in the civil service and in the Government. For example, the Parliament of Moldova was chaired by a woman. Around 44 per cent of civil servants were women. Every measure was taken to ensure gender equality in hiring and pay.

With regard to the new Labour Code, which was drafted on the basis of a number of international conventions, in particular those of the International Labour Organization (ILO), he did not think that its mere entry into force would automatically lead to a reduction in the unemployment rate. Of much greater importance were more general factors, such as the overall economic situation. If the economy improved in the next few years, that would eventually result in a situation in which the rights of Moldovan citizens could be better protected, whether they worked in the public or the private sector.

Regarding trade unions, everyone in Moldova had the constitutional right to join any trade union. There were two trade union federations in the public sector.

As for privatization, the process was continuing at the same pace as in the past. Unfortunately, some privatizations in the mid-1990s had been illegal. Although a number of decisions were being reviewed, past privatizations would not be annulled because that would violate the right to own property. At issue, rather, was the mechanism by which privatization was carried out. As to access by the Roma minority to land, by law all Moldovan citizens had the right to obtain privatized land, and there were no restrictions whatsoever on ethnic grounds. Very few Roma had acquired such land because very few Roma worked as farmers.

With regard to industrial action, he said that the Labour Code set out the right to strike in great detail and specified when a strike could be called, what forms it could take and conditions under which it was illegal. As to whether there were groups who were not permitted to join a trade union, there were no restrictions on trade union membership. Very few members of trade unions received salaries for their union work.

On a question regarding child labour, he said that the minimum employment age was 16. Children between the ages of 16 and 18 who worked were protected by law. Forced child labour in any form was prohibited, and violators were subject to prosecution.

With regard to how Moldova's embassy in Moscow protected the rights of Moldovan citizens in Russia, he pointed out that that embassy had one of the heaviest workloads of all Moldovan embassies the world over. Many Moldovans living in Russia, and especially in Moscow, availed themselves of its services when they had problems.

Mr. TEXIER said that, as the delegation seemed to be surprised by his question concerning forced labour for alcoholics, he would cite his source: the report of the Helsinki Committee on Moldova. The report acknowledged that the legislation had been improved, but the practice persisted.

The delegation had stated that the minimum wage was approximately 150 MDL and that the average wage in the public sector was the equivalent of US\$ 60. But the point was what could be bought with such wages and whether they guaranteed a decent standard of living. On the question of child labour, he wished to know whether child labour actually existed and, if so, whether concrete measures had been taken to combat the practice.

Mr. MARCHÁN ROMERO asked whether, despite its limited economic resources, the State party recognized its obligation to implement at least a minimum of the rights set out in the Covenant and to work towards implementation of the others. He also sought Moldova's position on the Optional Protocol.

Mr. SLONOVSKI (Republic of Moldova), replying to Mr. Texier, agreed that a salary of 150 MDL did not go very far. Salaries in the private sector were much higher. In the public sector, they varied between US\$ 60 and US\$ 200. With regard to the question of whether forced labour involving children occurred, he could rule it out in the public sector, but did not know about the private sector. He cited the case of the Roma, whose children worked in the streets begging.

The Government was working to ensure the progressive implementation of the Covenant, but that for economic reasons, it could not do so right away. The Government was currently considering whether it could ratify the Optional Protocol.

Ms. BRAS GOMES said that she had not received any answer to her questions on article 9. Given that Moldova was about to undertake major changes in its social security system, any information on implementation of article 9 of the Covenant would be most useful.

Mr. CEAUSU asked the delegation to provide figures on the percentage of the country's industry that had been privatized. Which industries had gone bankrupt, and which had been sold? Such information would help the Committee assess the social impact of those developments.

The CHAIRPERSON reminded the delegation that some articles of the Covenant were immediately applicable, for example those dealing with the consistency of domestic legislation with the Covenant and the principle of non-discrimination.

Articles 13-15 of the Covenant

Mr. KERDOUN said that he would welcome an explanation of the situation regarding the pre-school education system in Moldova, as, according to paragraphs 534 and 535 of the report, it was in a state of perpetual decline with many kindergartens being closed. He wondered what measures were being taken in light of the fact that many children did not have access to mandatory free primary and secondary education. What plan did the Government have for improving the entire education system? What was the position of minorities in education, particularly Roma, who often did not attend school on a regular basis? He would be interested to learn more about the tertiary sector - for example, was university education free? Were there any restrictions on university access for minorities? Did university entrance involve competitions, as was the case for higher schools? He would also be interested to hear whether corruption was commonplace in universities, particularly during exam periods, and what measures were being taken to combat it.

Mr. SLONOVSKI (Republic of Moldova) said that every citizen regardless of ethnic origin, had the right to enter tertiary education. He was not aware of any discrimination.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.