



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON
NATIONAL MINORITIES,
AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBÆK,

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
29 October, 2009

Madam Chairperson,

I am pleased to join previous speakers in welcoming the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk, back to the Permanent Council, and thanking him for a comprehensive and interesting report.

I would first like to offer a couple of general remarks, to highlight once more the importance we attach to the office of the HCNM. The existence of sizable national minorities is the rule rather than the exception in our countries. Whatever their history and background, national minorities enrich our societies in various ways. But at times, conflicts may also arise around the treatment of national minorities, and that is why the institution of High Commissioner on National Minorities is so important, with its mandate for protection of human rights and early warning of possible emerging conflicts, as well as conflict prevention and conflict resolution. We would in this context in particular like to commend the High Commissioner for the efforts laid down in establishing a set of Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations. The Bolzano-Bozen recommendations are of great value in ensuring the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and, perhaps even more important, in promoting trust and cooperation between States. We were gratified to note the level of support expressed in the Corfu process, and reiterated by Ukraine a moment ago, to the High Commissioner's suggestion to see how the status of this set of recommendations could be elevated to a more politically binding document, endorsed and adopted by the participating States. We look forward to following up this discussion in the appropriate context.

Madam Chairperson,

We fully support the High Commissioner's continued focus on education as one of the main instruments in promoting integration. We believe it is important to ensure that minorities both receive mother tongue education and learn the State language, as emphasised in the Oslo Recommendations regarding the linguistic rights of national Minorities.

As for the many other topical issues covered in the HCNM's report, I am pleased to rally my delegation to the comments and views expressed by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

Turning now to the ongoing discussions on the 2010 Unified Budget Proposal, we fully agree with the High Commissioner on the need to convert a couple of seconded posts to contracted positions, thus contributing to ensure continuity and improve institutional memory. We also agree on the need for an additional contracted senior political advisor post.

Finally, Madam Chairperson,

We would like to wish Ambassador Vollebæk, as well as his competent and dedicated staff, every success in their important work.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.