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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 June 2009

**Regarding the report by Mr. Knut Vollebaek,  
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Madam Chairperson,

We welcome Mr. Knut Vollebaek, the distinguished High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), to this meeting of the Permanent Council and thank him for his as usual very informative report on the work to implement his office's mandate.

Russia believes that ensuring the rights of national minorities must remain one of the priorities of the OSCE's work. We note the active position taken by the High Commissioner in helping to strengthen the standards involved in the protection of the rights of national minorities within the Organization's area of responsibility. We welcome the continuing practice of examining the situation of national minorities "on the ground". We believe that his visits to different countries are an important and productive aspect of the High Commissioner's work.

One of the strengths of the institution of the HCNM has always consisted in the principle of "quiet diplomacy", which we hope will continue to be applied in a balanced manner, especially with respect to the most sensitive problems.

We are pleased with the useful exchange of views held during Mr. Vollebaek's visit to Moscow this March. We support the current inquiry into the situation regarding education in the Russian language in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian language in Russia. We are keen to strengthen constructive co-operation with the HCNM's office on a wide range of issues.

It is important that the High Commissioner not overlook the rise in alarming xenophobic attitudes and manifestations of neo-Nazism in many European countries. It is our firm belief that these trends hold the risk of dangerous consequences for the stability of inter-ethnic relations throughout the OSCE area.

Madam Chairperson,

Most timely in our view is the High Commissioner's focus on problems concerning the education of national minorities, primarily from the point of view of language, and their full participation in the public and political life of the various countries where they are living. We are ready to discuss proposals regarding the organization of OSCE-sponsored events on this subject, the time for such an initiative having clearly arrived.

We cannot agree entirely with some of Mr. Vollebaek's conclusions drawn on the basis of his visits to a number of participating States. The derussification policy being pursued in several countries is a cause for concern. The same is true of the restrictions on the use of the Russian language in education and the media, the reduction in the number of educational establishments offering instruction in the students' mother tongue, and the creation of disparities in the opportunities available to young people as regards access to higher education. Moreover, the reform of education systems is proceeding in a way that fails to take into account the size of the Russian-speaking minority and the fact that this minority tends to be concentrated in certain geographical areas.

Nor do we regard as satisfactory a situation in which a large part of the population finds their rights limited for political reasons. To ignore the unprecedented problem of mass statelessness and the failure to observe basic political rights of national minorities is inadmissible. In that context, the focus must be placed primarily on matters concerned with ensuring the rights of minorities to participate in elections and receive education in their native tongue.

We urge the High Commissioner not to lessen his vigilance regarding the situation of the Russian-speaking population in a number of countries in the post-Soviet space.

We support him in the particular concern he is showing regarding the effects of the global financial and economic crisis on the situation of national minorities, which, as in the case of the Russian-speaking population, are experiencing difficulties in exercising their socio-economic rights and are becoming even more vulnerable at a time of these massive upheavals.

Unfortunately, we failed to hear today any objective assessment of the state of affairs in Kosovo regarding the protection of the rights of the non-Albanian ethnic communities, except for the Gorani communities. The interests of the other ethnic groups in this part of Serbia, in particular those of the group that is most vulnerable in terms of the observance of their human rights, namely the Kosovo Serbs, must not be overlooked.

We have been impressed by the fact that the High Commissioner is dealing with the unresolved situation regarding the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia. It is our view that the inter-ethnic situation in that country requires the closest possible attention in view of the continuing discrimination suffered by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Ossetian populations and the repression of the Dukhobor communities.

We trust that the High Commissioner will respect in full the opinion of the authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and will take account of their concerns.

A most important task continues to be the monitoring of the observance of the rights of national minorities and the drafting of recommendations on the prevention of discrimination. Russia has played an active part in events organized by the High Commissioner in the context of the tenth anniversary of the Lund Recommendations and in promoting the regional application of the new Bolzano Recommendations. We await with interest further discussions on the subject of national minorities in international relations.

We wish Mr. Vollebaek and his staff continued success in their work.

Thank you for your attention.