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EU statement in response to the report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Vollebaek

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Knut Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive and detailed report.

In the framework of the Corfu process, the European Union has already given its full support for the valuable work carried out by the High Commissioner as a core conflict prevention instrument for the OSCE area, as it is critical to address at the earliest possible stage minority-related issues with potential security implications.

The European Union looks forward to the continuation of discussions on the Bozen/Bolzano recommendations, resulting in a final review conference in 2010. In this context, the European Union welcomes the round tables organized, such as the recent third round table, held in Berlin, with the help of the German Federal Government, on the Central Asian region.

Postal address
Obere Donaustrasse 49-51
1020 Vienna, Austria

Visitor's address
Obere Donaustrasse 49-51
1020 Vienna, Austria

Telephone
+43 (0) 1 217 53 0

Fax
+43 (0) 1 217 53 380

E-mail: osse-del.wien@foreign.ministry.se
euoffice@osce.org

The European Union shares the HCNM's views of the role of the official language of a state as a means of communication between the majority and minorities and its role for social cohesion. It also shares the view that a balanced approach to linguistic issues is necessary. The European Union subscribes to the view of the High Commissioner that linguistic policy is not a zero-sum game.

Further to the topic of linguistic policy, the European Union took note with interest of the activities of the High Commissioner pertaining to the draft language law the Government of Tajikistan is preparing and strongly encourages the Government of Tajikistan to enter into dialogue with the High Commissioner and his staff.

The European Union warmly welcomes the efforts the High Commissioner has put into counselling relevant actors in many participating States on the education of persons belonging to national minorities, helping integration and reducing tensions. The European Union supports the activities undertaken by the High Commissioner towards the educational situation of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and ethnic Ukrainians in Russia. The European Union welcomes the positive reaction by both Russian and Ukrainian authorities to the High Commissioner's report and recommendations.

The European Union also welcomes the initiative by the HCNM on the legislation concerning the rights of formerly deported peoples, in which representatives of deported communities took part and appreciates the recommendation to the Ukrainian Government concerning the Crimean peninsula, to establish an interagency working group, in which formerly deported communities are also

represented. In this respect, the European Union is pleased to learn that the fourth Max van der Stoep Award was presented to the Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research (IDC) from the Crimea, for facilitating genuine integration and participation of all ethnic communities in the region.

On Kazakhstan, the High Commissioner has reported on his activities towards the issue of effective minority participation and the role of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan - a consultative body - in this respect. The European Union supports discussions on the various forms and roles of such consultative bodies and ways to make them more democratic and accountable, for instance by directly electing the members of such bodies. The European Union also warmly welcomes the statement by the Kazakh authorities that the promotion of the state language will not be done at the expense of other languages spoken in the country.

The HCNM plays a complementary role to that of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the EU has taken note of the interest of the High Commissioner in transitional justice in Kosovo. The European Union commends the High Commissioner for his continued efforts in respect of schooling for the children of the Gorani community.

The European Union supports the High Commissioner's engagement in South-Eastern Europe in general and is pleased with the emphasis he intends to put on the issue of reversing segregation in education. Therefore the European Union took note with great interest of the High Commissioner's reporting on his visit to Skopje on 8 October on which occasion his policy paper on the current state of education was presented. The European Union encourages

the Government in Skopje to adopt this paper and to implement its proposed measures.

Finally, The European Union strongly supports and encourages Ambassador Vollebaek to continue his activities in Georgia, including visits to Abkhazia and South-Ossetia and looks forward to hearing more about this in his next report to the Permanent Council.

The European Union once again thanks Ambassador Vollebaek and his staff for their outstanding work and once again expresses its full support for the High Commissioner and his team.

The candidate countries TURKEY and CROATIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.