



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1007 Vienna, 10 July 2014

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms. Astrid Thors**

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The European Union warmly welcomes High Commissioner Astrid Thors back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report on her recent activities.

The European Union considers the office and the mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) to be of the utmost importance for the whole concept of comprehensive security of the OSCE. This autonomous Institution is and should remain a core conflict prevention instrument for the whole OSCE area in providing early warning and seeking early action with regard to tensions involving national minorities.

We reiterate the importance the EU attaches to the respect of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We call on all OSCE participating States to respect the mandate of the HCNM and to co-operate closely with her office on all matters related to national minorities and to make full use of its expertise. Quiet diplomacy, which characterises the work of the High Commissioner, is less visible to the public but brings results of lasting importance. We reiterate that the HCNM should have the necessary means to fulfil her mandate.

We commend the work done by the HCNM in the areas of education, including in multilingual and integrated education, effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life and policing in multi-ethnic societies.

We wish to underline the importance of the central principles of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State relations

referred to by the High Commissioner in her report, in particular that the respect for and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities is primarily the responsibility of the State where the minority resides. Any concerns in respect to minorities should be addressed with full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations.

We appreciate the HCNM's strong engagement in regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine. These developments have proven once again the importance and value of the HCNM. We commend her particularly for her activities regarding language issues. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities need to be fully ensured in line with the relevant international standards, including those of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE. We welcome the commitment of the government of Ukraine in this regard.

We share her concern about the precarious position of both the Crimean Tatar and the Ukrainian-speaking communities on the Crimean peninsula after its illegal annexation by the Russian Federation. We have taken particular note of the fact that the High Commissioner during her visit found no evidence of violations to the rights of Russian speakers. We note with deep concern the reports received by the HCNM about the detentions and disappearances, about pressures to renounce Ukrainian citizenship, and about violation of the rights to freedom of religion and education rights. We call for an end to these actions that have the potential to escalate tensions in Crimea.

We welcome the High Commissioner's good cooperation with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in developing an integration strategy aiming at strengthening social cohesion while simultaneously protecting and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities enshrined in national legislation. We continue to support the efforts of the HCNM to improve the situation of the Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova with a view to ensuring their normal and sustainable functioning.

As for her visit to Georgia, we appreciate her efforts to explore how the Institution can best assist the authorities in the ongoing multilingual-education reform process and the attention she paid in her reporting on negative developments in the breakaway regions.

We support the activities in the field of higher education in southern Serbia, in particular those in the Bujanovac department of Economics. We welcome that with the assistance of the HCNM the needs of the Romanian speaking communities in eastern Serbia are considered to be addressed. In this context, we reiterate the importance attached to effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to minorities and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout Serbia.

In her reporting on Bosnia and Herzegovina she voices concern about the intensified use of ethnocentric rhetoric in the country. The European Union shares these concerns. To fulfil justified expectations of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina their leaders need to look beyond ethnic divisions.

We support the work done in Skopje on integrated education and call on the government to continue to work expeditiously and closely with the High Commissioner in this field.

We take note of her reporting on positive developments in Kazakhstan concerning education in a number of minority languages, including an action plan on introducing multilingual education in schools with minority languages of instruction.

Finally, we thank Ms. Thors and her staff for their excellent work and once again express our full support for the High Commissioner and her team.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.