



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report of Astrid Thors, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 12, 2013

The United States warmly welcomes High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors for her first presentation to the Permanent Council. Madame High Commissioner, we thank you for your comprehensive report and wish you every success in leading this highly respected and effective institution in the OSCE as it enters its third decade.

Your message regarding the need for cooperation among the participating States and with all OSCE structures is one that resonates. Just as participating States should be held accountable on the commitments they have made in the OSCE, they must make sure that you have the tools, resources, and support that you need to fulfill your mandate.

We support your plan to incorporate key issues of women, peace, and security into your work, and concur that the effective participation of women, including minority women, in conflict prevention must be ensured.

In your report, you have noted the visits you have already made to participating States during your brief tenure as the High Commissioner. You have, indeed, "hit the ground running," with an impressive number of visits to participating States. Your visit to Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia came as the political context in that region continues to evolve. We share your concern that the situation in southern Serbia remains largely unchanged since your predecessor last addressed the Permanent Council. We welcome the work you have done in Serbia related to education for minority-language communities. In Kosovo, we welcome your initiative to expand programs to ensure elected officials have the opportunity to learn Kosovo's official languages, and like you, welcome the initiative of Kosovo's Language Commissioner to take ownership of that project once your office withdraws. Although Kosovo is unfortunately not yet here at the OSCE table, we call upon the Government of Kosovo to continue to cooperate closely with your office and to stand ready to take ownership of projects and programs you pass forward to them. Unfortunately, we share your view that there is a growing separation between the two main communities in Macedonia, and we are alarmed by the rising number of inter-ethnic incidents, especially among young people. We welcome your ongoing efforts to assess gaps in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and to look for measures that can promote the integration of society there.

We welcome the good news after your visit to Moldova in November. We are pleased to hear about cooperation you received from the Government of Moldova, as well as the Government's commitment to increase financial and political support to your project to teach the State language to civil servants from minority communities. We echo your call on the Transnistrian de facto authorities to refrain from taking measures that create obstacles for Moldovan-administered schools in Transnistria teaching in the Latin script.

We welcome some of the positive measures taken by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, including the adoption of the Action Plan for Implementation of the Concept on National Unity and Inter-ethnic Relations, and plans to establish public reception desks in the most conflict-prone areas of the country. But we concur with your assessment that these positive steps may be undermined by problematic decisions in the fields of education and language. We agree with your assessment that the Government's decision to abolish national tests for graduates in the Uzbek language runs counter to the tenets of the Concept on National Unity, and should be reversed.

We welcome your continued efforts to address inter-ethnic tensions on the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine, and echo your call to the Ukrainian Government to ensure all inter-ethnic incidents are swiftly condemned and investigated by the appropriate authorities.

We look forward to the reports and insights from your planned visits to Georgia and Kazakhstan, and call upon those governments to extend their full cooperation and assistance on your visits. The work your office does to monitor the situation along the Administrative Boundary Lines in Georgia, as well as the challenges facing ethnic Georgians in the surrounding regions, can serve as a useful confidence-building measure.

Madame High Commissioner, as your predecessors have, you will face many challenges in your new role. Perhaps the least visible but most significant evidence of the HCNM's success is found in conflicts that did not erupt because they were avoided, thanks to the HCNM's efforts. As you strive to prevent future conflicts and to see communities live in harmony with one another, you need our help. You need our cooperation for your visits, and you need access to regions and to peoples. We participating States must not only hope for your success, but facilitate it. We thank you again, Madame High Commissioner, for your efforts and for your comprehensive report.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.