



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council N°1078 Vienna, 19 November 2015**

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE 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. We regret that the High Commissioner due to political circumstances was not able to visit more participating States.

We express our full support for the office and the mandate of the High Commissioner and we reiterate the importance we attach to the protection 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 it brings results of lasting importance. We reiterate that the HCNM should have the necessary means to fulfil her mandate.

We share with the High Commissioner the principle of “integration with respect for diversity”. We also see the need for developing effective policies for integration of persons belonging to national minorities as an essential aspect of a tolerant and stable society. We agree that preventing divisions along ethnic lines enhances the stability of societies. Any concerns in respect to persons belonging to national minorities should be addressed with full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations.

We recognise the important work done by the HCNM protecting the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We agree with the High Commissioner that when linguistic diversity is handled in an appropriate way in a State’s legislation and

policy, particularly when it comes to the balance between the promotion of State language and the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities can foster cohesion. We welcome the assistance on language issues and the engagement of the Office with the authorities in Georgia. At the same time, the European Union notes with concern the changes to the language of instruction from Georgian to Russian in 11 formerly Georgian-language schools in the Gali district of the breakaway region of Abkhazia, and we hope that the High Commissioner will look into the matter. In this context, we would also be interested to hear about the possibility to follow-up on the 2008 joint report by the HCNM and ODIHR on the human rights situation in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Education has always been a priority for the Office of the High Commissioner over the last twenty years. Education is central in preventing conflicts and in building lasting peace. We commend the work done in this area, in particular the assistance for multilingual education in Central Asia. We support the High Commissioner's activities in Serbia in the fields of education and minority languages. We reiterate the importance attached to effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to national minorities and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout the country. We look forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "The Hague Recommendations on the Education Rights of National Minorities" in April next year.

We support the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner concerning effective participation such as facilitating a dialogue between political parties and national minorities in Georgia and the Western Balkans. Effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life contributes to stable, just and secure societies.

We commend the High Commissioner for co-organising the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in October. It was an excellent opportunity to once again discuss the "Ljubljana Guidelines" and the "Bolzano/Bozen recommendations" which are more relevant than ever. We look forward to other thematic work foreseen for the near future, such as access of persons belonging to national minorities to justice and updating of "the 2003 guidelines on the use of minority languages in the Broadcast Media". We also welcome the intention of the incoming Chairman-in-Office to take up

the issue of persons belonging to national minorities as a priority and to further strengthen cooperation with the High Commissioner in this regard.

We welcome the HCNM's engagement in regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine, and we positively note the assessment of the High Commissioner that Ukraine remains a tolerant society with rich ethnic, linguistic and regional diversity. We also note the HCNM's recommendations to the Government of Ukraine. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities need to be fully ensured in line with the relevant international standards, including those of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We support the commitment of the Government of Ukraine in this regard. We encourage the High Commissioner to continue her dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities to improve the institutional framework for implementing rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including language issues and promoting their integration. We commend the involvement of the HCNM with the ongoing reforms, including the decentralization reform, in the country.

We welcome the joint ODIHR and HCNM Human Rights Assessment Mission report on Crimea and we call for its recommendations to be implemented. We share the High Commissioner's deep concern about the deteriorating human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula. We have repeatedly expressed our concern about the precarious position of both the Crimean Tatar and the Ukrainian-speaking communities after the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation.

We find it highly disturbing that the authorities in de facto control of the Crimean Peninsula have so far not accommodated requests from the High Commissioner to facilitate a visit to Crimea. We reiterate that the HCNM and other international human rights actors should be granted full, free and unrestricted access to the whole territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and Sevastopol.

We call upon the Russian Federation to cooperate with the High Commissioner on minority issues in Russia. For example, regarding recent actions by Russian authorities against the Head of the Moscow Library of Ukrainian Literature, Ms. Natalya Sharina and Mr. Valery Semenenko, co-chair of the Ukrainians of Moscow

NGO, a partner of the library. This development continues to raise concern about the situation for the Ukrainian minority in Russia.

Finally, Mr Chair, 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\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

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