



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1164
Vienna, 16 November 2017**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE High
Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Lamberto
Zannier**

The European Union warmly welcomes the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Mr. Lamberto Zannier, to the Permanent Council – for the first time in his new capacity, and thanks him for his presentation. We commend Mr. Henrik Villadsen, Director, and the HCNM team for continuing the excellent work of the Office, ensuring consistency in all aspects of the mandate in a historically unprecedented interlude without a High Commissioner.

The European Union strongly believes that protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, is crucial for maintaining regional peace and stability. The EU remains committed to and calls for ensuring the rights already exercised by persons belonging to national minorities, as enshrined in UN, Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols and OSCE commitments, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities are an important aspect of our co-operation with all our partner countries, including our closest neighbours, and are consistently raised in our political and human rights dialogues. Within the EU, Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination on any ground including against persons belonging to national minorities. This protection is bolstered by EU directives tackling discrimination. We reiterate that persons belonging to national minorities should be able to exercise fully and effectively their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination and in full equality before the law.

We consider the mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities to be of the utmost importance for the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. 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 underline that co-operation of all participating States is necessary to enable the High Commissioner to fulfil his mandate. It is therefore essential that all participating States meet their OSCE commitments to fully co-operate with the High Commissioner. This also includes paying a visit to any participating State and communicating in person with parties directly concerned to obtain firsthand information, according to his mandate.

We welcome the HCNM's active engagement in many parts of the OSCE region in his first months in office. We reiterate our support to the High Commissioner's engagement in the Western Balkans promoting long-term stability and good neighbourly relations and the ongoing activities in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in particular concerning language and education issues.

We welcome the HCNM's engagement in regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine. We have repeatedly expressed our concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea and in Sevastopol, in particular about the precarious position of both Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian-speaking communities after the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. We encourage the new Commissioner to pay utmost attention to this issue. Full compliance with international human rights standards and other obligations under international law must be ensured without delay. 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 the city of Sevastopol.

The European Union welcomes the attention paid by the HCNM to developments related to the newly adopted Law on Education by Ukraine and to the concerns raised about the potential adverse impact on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in education and the use of their

languages. In this context, the EU takes note of the submission of the new legislation on educational reform in Ukraine to the Venice Commission and looks forward to its advisory opinion.

We also appreciate your continuous engagement with the Republic of Moldova on the integration of society, in particular protecting the state and minority languages and cultures, or concerning the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. The situation of Latin-script school in the Transnistrien region remains a concern for the European Union. This subject should be followed closely with a view to ensuring an effective and sustainable return to their normal functioning. We also appreciate your engagement with the Georgian authorities in the implementation of a multilingual and integrated education system.

Concerning your visit to Belgrade, we reiterate the importance of an effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to national minorities and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout Serbia.

Further, we welcome the High Commissioner's focus on thematic work. Thematic recommendations and guidelines are an added value of the involvement of the HCNM in all areas of the OSCE. We encourage pS to make full use of this rich body of advice. We commend the HCNM on the successful launch of the "Graz Recommendations on Access to Justice and National Minorities" earlier this week, and look forward to future thematic work.

We once again express our full support for the office, mandate and autonomy of the High Commissioner and we reiterate the importance we attach to the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

We look forward to fruitful co-operation with the High Commissioner and wish him all the best in his endeavours.

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 as well as the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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