

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 960
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**EU statement in response to the report by the OSCE High
Commissioner on National Minorities, H.E. Ambassador
Knut Vollebaek**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Ambassador Knut Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council. It is indeed a special occasion today, as this is his last appearance in this Council in his present capacity.

We thank him for sharing with us his valuable experience from six years as High Commissioner on National Minorities and for his comprehensive report on recent activities.

The European Union considers the office and the mandate of the HCNM of utmost importance for the whole concept of comprehensive security of the OSCE. It is and should remain a core conflict prevention instrument for the whole OSCE area, providing early warning and seeking early action with regard to tensions involving national minority issues.

Quiet diplomacy, which characterizes the work of the High Commissioner, is sometimes less visible to the public but brings results of lasting importance. We commend Ambassador Vollebaek for the dedicated and impartial manner in which he has carried out his important tasks.

We commend him for the two thematic publications that were issued during his time in office: *the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National minorities in Inter-State Relations* and *the Ljubljana*

Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies. In this regard, we would be interested to know more about how Ambassador Vollebaek sees the future use of these Guidelines.

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

We support the work done in Skopje on integrated education, on national minority issues in Serbia and on the national integration strategy and multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova and improving the situation of Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region.

We welcome the High Commissioner's reporting on his visits to Central Asia and his initiatives in that region. We appreciate his continued engagement in the Meskhetian repatriation process in Georgia.

We agree with the High Commissioner about the remaining fundamental challenge of maintaining well-functioning, multi-ethnic, democratic and stable societies.

We reiterate our strong support for the institution of the High Commissioner and we stress the need for all participating States, without exception, to live up to their commitment to fully co-operate with the High Commissioner and his team in order to enable them to fulfil the mandate.

We hope that the candidature of a new High Commissioner on National Minorities will be approved by our Ministers soon. In this context, we would be interested to hear the key messages that Ambassador Vollebaek would want to convey to his successor.

Finally, we would like to thank Ambassador Vollebaek for all his years of dedicated work and an outstanding job done. We wish him good health and all the best for the future.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO, align themselves with this statement.

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