



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Response to OSCE High Commissioner
on National Minorities
Ambassador Knut Vollebaek**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 11, 2013

Ambassador Vollebaek, we thank you for coming here today, for your final report to the Permanent Council, and – most of all – for your superb service to this organization for the last six years. You leave us having performed a demanding job exceedingly well, for which the United States and, I am sure, everyone around this table, are very grateful.

The work of your office, as a 1999 Economist article commented “has to be judged largely by what has not happened.” So, we thank you for all that has **not** happened as a result of your effective diplomacy. Mr. High Commissioner, as you remarked at the celebration of the HCNM’s 20th anniversary last March, “while the world watches the conflict of the day, the HCNM is already grappling with the potential conflict of tomorrow.” We saw this clearly in your prescient calls for enhanced OSCE engagement in Kyrgyzstan as tensions were building in 2010. Your judgment and experience have enabled you not only to identify emerging crises, but also to develop broader policy frameworks to assist participating States in addressing today’s most salient challenges, including the imperative of effective integration policies.

We agree with your statement that “minority rights alone are insufficient to ensure lasting peace and stability, because, in the long run, a society divided against itself cannot stand. To promote strong, stable and secure States, we must endeavor to build strong, stable and secure societies.” Thus, we welcomed the 2012 Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies on inclusive policies and practices aimed at promoting the integration and cohesion of diverse, multi-ethnic societies and urge participating States to implement them.

We applaud your work highlighting the lack of integration of Roma in the OSCE region. The question of Roma integration is not only one of human and social rights, rather, it relates directly to your conflict prevention mandate, because, as you noted in January, “the exclusion of Roma from mainstream society, could, over time, cause serious social and political strife.” Unfortunately, mob threats and the threat of violence against Roma persist in several OSCE countries, as we saw just a few days ago in the Czech Republic. We will continue to welcome your office’s engagement on this issue, in consultation with ODIHR, and urge intensified engagement.

We support your dialogue with Serbia and Romania concerning the rights of persons residing in eastern Serbia, and urge both countries to be constructive and flexible in moving forward. We welcome the positive steps taken by Serbia and agree with your June statement that more needs to be done to ensure their sustainability.

We note your concerns about continuing ethnic tension in Macedonia and agree that integrated education is an important element in alleviating these tensions. We encourage all parties in Macedonia to find common ground based on the spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

We appreciate your June 26-28 visit to Moldova and welcome efforts to find solutions to allow for the safe and unobstructed operation of Latin-script, Romanian-language schools in Transnistria.

We likewise thank you for your June 19-20 visit to Georgia in which you discussed the situation for minorities in the field of education as well as the ongoing process to repatriate the Meskhetian population that was deported from Georgia by the Stalinist regime in the 1940s. We note your visit to the villages of Khurvaleti and Ditsi, situated near the South Ossetian administrative boundary line, where you met local residents on both sides of the recently extended fencing. We share your concern regarding this “borderization,” as it is inconsistent with Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, threatens local livelihoods and aggravates an already tense situation. We repeat our call for the return of a strong OSCE presence in Georgia to help the international community address issues of this nature.

Turning to Kyrgyzstan, since the 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, the United States has been – and remains – concerned about the situation of ethnic minorities in southern Kyrgyzstan in particular. While we are encouraged that no further disturbances have erupted, the fact remains that the rule of law remains a concern of all communities and all citizens. Police abuse must stop immediately, and be replaced by visible, effective, impartial, and immediate measures to enforce law and order fairly. Judicial proceedings must be conducted in a transparent and impartial manner, with full respect for human rights by law enforcement officers. We also continue to encourage the Government of Kyrgyzstan to promote the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in all state structures, as well as expanding opportunities for minority-language media.

Mr. High Commissioner, you and your office do important and difficult work, and you have done it remarkably well. We thank you and wish you and your family all the best in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.