



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT BY NORWAY IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES KNUT VOLLEBÆK**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 11 July 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I join others in warmly welcoming High Commissioner Vollebæk to the Permanent Council and I thank him for his comprehensive presentation.

Mr. Chairman,

The report of the High Commissioner fully demonstrates his untiring efforts to promote good treatment of national minorities as well as good interstate relations on these issues, wherever they are.

The two perhaps most important achievements during the term of High Commissioner Vollebæk, the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations and the Ljubljana Guidelines, will remain core instruments for the participating States when dealing with inter-State as well as intra-State minority-related issues.

We believe that both sets of guidelines deserve political endorsement, and we encourage the Chairmanship to consider this as an issue for the upcoming Ministerial meeting in Kiev.

Mr. Chairman,

The High Commissioner has a firmly established tradition for using quiet diplomacy as the preferred work tool. This implies that we in the Permanent Council do not have insight into his work at any given time. But this is how it must be. The mandate of the High Commissioner illustrates in so many ways why the independence of his office must be protected and respected.

Mr. Chairman,

We note that minority issues in Moldova, Macedonia, Serbia and parts of Central Asia continue to require frequent visits by the High Commissioner, as he underlined in his report.

We share the High Commissioner's concern about the situation in Georgia. We should all take careful note of his warning that there are developments that may aggravate an already tense situation on the ground and lead to new incidents. We agree with him that we need more international presence in that country. I take this opportunity to repeat that we should reestablish the field mission to Georgia, with a robust mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

Certain challenges may be specific for one participating State or one region only, other challenges can be found in practically all participating States. One of them is the rise of nationalism and political extremism. We fully share the worries expressed by the High Commissioner in his report that ideas that have always been present in the undercurrent today are again gaining ground and are allowed onto the political stage.

The current economic crises may be part of the explanation why this is happening. Whatever the reason, all participating States must fight extremist and intolerant ideologies at home. But we must also work together in the OSCE to foster tolerance and ensure that minority groups may live in dignity and freely exercise their human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me now to change my perspective and say: Dear Knut,

You have spent more time in the field than in your office in The Hague. And indeed, you have always been full of energy and activity. I met you for the first time in 1988, in the Foreign Ministry in Oslo. You were Head of the UN Division, if I am not mistaken; I was the youngest in the Eastern Europe Division. We had our offices in the same corridor. I remember that no matter how early I came to my office in the morning, you were always there, with your big, and I should say, characteristic smile.

Since then you have had prominent positions in our service: State secretary, Foreign Minister, Ambassador to Washington, to name a few. In 1999, during your term as Foreign Minister, you also chaired the OSCE.

I speak on behalf of everyone in Norway's Foreign Service when I say that we admire you for the job you have done both in our own service and – during the last six years – in the OSCE.

I have some personal memories from your time as Foreign Minister. I remember being your note taker during a meeting you had with your colleague of the Holy See, at his place. I was so fascinated by both the place and your discussions that I completely forgot to take notes. And since I remembered little, my first draft report was rather short. I therefore felt compelled to add a few points I thought that might have been made. And finally, in order to make the report readable, I added, as many civil servants do, points that you in my opinion should have made.

And during that visit to Rome we once passed – on foot – a shop with silk ties on sale. I wanted to buy one, but had difficulties in making up my mind which one to pick. Then you interfered, you looked briefly at the ties on display, picked one, hung it around my neck and said: This one suits you. I was proud to tell colleagues back in Oslo that I am wearing a tie chosen for me by the minister himself!

You will not return to our Foreign Service, but you will not retire. The Norwegian government has appointed you Chairman of a Commission tasked to map the situation for one of our national minorities, the Romani, often also referred to as the travelers, and to propose measures to safeguard their interests and their future.

Even if minority issues in Norway have fallen outside your HCNM mandate, I am sure that you will agree with me that Norway's five national minorities and our Sami indigenous people have suffered from quite aggressive assimilation measures. And perhaps the most vulnerable of them have been the Romani.

Knut, I could think of no better and more qualified chairman of that Commission.

Knut, I know that your wife Ellen is with us here today. Also she deserves our thanks. And I really hope that she after the 19th of August will see more of you than during the last six years.

Knut, I thank you for your excellent work during the last six years and I wish you all success as Chairman of the Government Romani People Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.