



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 718
26 June 2008**

EU statement in response to the address by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek

The EU warmly welcomes Ambassador Vollebaek to the Permanent Council and has listened with great interest to his statement and to the presentation of the Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations.

The High Commissioner's predecessors have established sets of recommendations on specific issues as a valuable tool to promote the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as well as trust and cooperation within and between participating states. Among these are the Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities and the Lund recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities. We take note with interest of the intention of the High Commissioner to launch the Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations at Bolzano-Bozen later this year. We understand that these recommendations do not exclude any kind of support for national minorities which is based on mutual agreement or mutually accepted practice between the states concerned.

It is with great appreciation that the EU notes the very intensive schedule of the High Commissioner's travels in the first half of this year. In all the countries he has visited, he has conducted a wide range of talks with actors involved, and we note the number of concrete recommendations on many of the issues he has dealt with on his travels.

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The EU appreciates the dialogue of the High Commissioner regarding a number of different minority issues with its own member states.

The EU remains committed to playing a leading role in ensuring the stability of Kosovo. Therefore, the European Union will continue to co-operate with the UN, KFOR, OSCE and other international actors. In this respect the EU shares the High Commissioner's assessment of the importance of the implementation of the laws which are crucial for the process of reconciliation and the functioning of Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society.

In the light of the EU's Central Asia Strategy and its strong regional component, the EU particularly appreciates the efforts of the High Commissioner to support dialogue and cooperation between the states of Central Asia on minority issues. In particular, we would like to express our support for the national minority education initiative sponsored by all states of Central Asia in November 2006.

As to Georgia, the EU supports HCNM's activities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli, which are in line with the EU-Georgia ENP Action Plan. We welcome the adoption of the Law on Meskhetian Repatriation, and the HCNM's subsequent offer to assist the Georgian Government regarding its implementation. We encourage Georgia to make full use of this offer. With regard to Abkhazia, the EU shares HCNM's concerns about the human rights situation in the Gali district, including with regard to education and citizenship. We reiterate our call for the opening of a branch of the joint UN/OSCE human rights office in the Gali district.

Co-operation with the High Commissioner on the part of the Ukrainian authorities and minority representatives in Ukraine can assist the processes of strengthening

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democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in that country.

It is with particular interest that we have noted the High Commissioner's remarks on Roma and Sinti issues. The EU is conscious of its responsibility in this field, especially towards the Sinti and Roma populations in its own countries. In this regard, the EU is pleased with the emphasis that the Finnish Chair is placing on the issue of social inclusion of Roma and Sinti and looks forward to the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna on the 10th and 11th of July on Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration.

Finally, the EU welcomes the dialogue the High Commissioner has established with Russia on issues related to national minorities. In this regard, the EU wishes the High Commissioner successful participation in the Fifth World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, starting in Khanty-Mansiysk tomorrow.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, as well as the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Iceland align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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