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STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 7 June 2018

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,

I join others in welcoming the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his second report as High Commissioner. We appreciate that the report was made available well in time for this meeting.

Language is a central theme of the present report. It touches on the situation in several participating States and relevant work of the High Commissioner. Language, and the right to learn, know, speak and write one's own language is a topic that can fan, but also douse, the flames of conflict.

Last week, as mentioned by the High Commissioner, Norway had the pleasure of hosting the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities. High Commissioner Zannier was present, together with a wide range of politicians, practitioners and prominent academics.

At the opening of the conference, Norwegian State Secretary Audun Halvorsen pointed out the value of commemorating achievements like the Oslo Recommendations. He emphasised that the relevance of the conference stems not from marking an anniversary, but from highlighting the continued relevance of the underlying issue – namely linguistic rights.

The Oslo Recommendations provide guidance to OSCE participating states on how best to ensure the linguistic rights of national minorities within their borders. Our takeaway from the conference is that the Oslo Recommendations are as relevant as ever. Safeguarding the right of national minorities to use their own languages in both the private and the public spheres is not only an investment in diversity, but also a bulwark against potential conflict.

In November last year, remaining deeply committed to gender equality, Norway voiced its expectation that the High Commissioner would report on the implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan and on progress toward gender equality in general. Not a

single sentence of the High Commissioner's report has been devoted to this topic. We would be grateful if the High Commissioner would report on implementation of, and progress on, relevant OSCE gender equality commitments, including the 2004 Action Plan. We expect him to cover gender equality in future reports to the Permanent Council.

Thank you