



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1102 Vienna, 2 June 2016

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#### **EU statement in response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms. Astrid Thors**

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The European Union warmly welcomes High Commissioner Astrid Thors back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report. We appreciate that during this reporting period the High Commissioner paid visits to a number of participating States, though we encourage her to broaden the geographical range of her country visits.

We once again express our full support for the office, mandate and autonomy of the High Commissioner and we reiterate the importance we attach to the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We call on all OSCE participating States to respect the mandate of the HCNM and to co-operate closely and fully with her office on all matters related to national minorities and to make full use of its expertise. We reiterate that the HCNM should have the necessary means to fulfil her mandate.

We welcome her visit to Kyrgyzstan and commend her for her efforts in her ongoing dialogue with the authorities to find ways to protect and promote the rights of persons belonging to the Uzbek minority in the country and increase their participation and representation. Better enforcement of the electoral quota, full access to justice and multilingual teaching are important areas.

In southern Serbia we see the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad with students of mixed ethnic background as a symbol of interaction and integration between all communities and as a concrete result of the work over the years of the Office of the High Commissioner and the support of the European Union. In this context, we reiterate the importance attached by the European

Union to effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to national minorities and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout Serbia.

Concerning her visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina we regret the increase in nationalist rhetoric as observed during the visit. We agree that this hampers reconciliation and has a negative effect on national minorities. We also regret that there has been no change in the 'two schools under one roof' approach.

We welcome the active engagement of the High Commissioner in Georgia and her dialogue with the authorities concerning potential tensions among communities. We would also like to see the effective implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration for 2015-2020 and its Action Plan as well as The State Language Law in order to achieve an adequate balance between promoting the State language and protecting the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We remain concerned about the recent shift into Russian as the language of instruction in 11 formerly Georgian-language schools in Gali district and we hope that the High Commissioner will look further into the matter.

We are pleased to be updated by the High Commissioner about some positive developments in the Republic of Moldova, including the adoption of a new program to improve teaching of the State language in schools teaching in minority languages, and the process of the joint working group of members of parliament and the People's Assembly of Gagauzia. The situation of the Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region remains a concern for the European Union. This subject should be followed closely with a view to ensuring an effective and sustainable return to their normal functioning.

We welcome the HCNM's engagement in regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine. In this context, we note the strong involvement of the Office with issues that concern persons belonging to national minorities in the ongoing process of political and legislative reforms. We support the commitment of the Government of Ukraine in this regard. We encourage the High Commissioner to continue her dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities to improve the institutional framework for implementing rights of

persons belonging to national minorities, including language issues and promoting their integration. We commend the involvement of the HCNM with the ongoing reforms, including the decentralization reform, in the country.

We reiterate that we find it highly disturbing that the authorities in de facto control of the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula have so far not accommodated requests from the High Commissioner to facilitate a visit to Crimea. The HCNM and other international human rights actors should be granted full, free and unrestricted access to the whole territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and Sevastopol. We also share the High Commissioner's concern over the decision on 26 April to declare the Crimean Tatar Mejlis as an "extremist organisation" and the human rights situation there, including reports of abductions, arrests and homes being searched by armed officers. We would welcome any further information the High Commissioner can share on her future activities in this area.

We reiterate our call upon the Russian Federation to cooperate with the High Commissioner on minority issues in Russia.

We very much welcome the fact that this time the High Commissioner visited three Member States of the European Union to discuss inter-State relations and internal situations regarding rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The findings and recommendations of the High Commissioner will be carefully studied.

We note with concern the High Commissioner's observation that there has been an increase in hate speech targeting persons belonging to national minorities in several of the countries she has visited. We share the opinion that hate speech must be addressed wherever it occurs and look forward to supporting the work of the HCNM and ODIHR to tackle this.

Education has always been a priority for the Office of the High Commissioner over the last twenty years. Education is central in preventing conflicts and building lasting peace. We commend the work done in this area and we thank the High Commissioner for

organizing the conference to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 'The Hague Recommendations on the Education Rights of National Minorities' in April this year.

We look forward to other thematic work foreseen for the near future, such as access of persons belonging to national minorities to justice and updating of the 2003 Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media.

Finally, we thank Ms. Thors and her staff for their excellent work and once again express our full support for the High Commissioner and her team.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.