

Original: ENGLISH



## United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Gary Robbins  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 22, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States very warmly welcomes High Commissioner on National Minorities Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council, and we thank him for his report.

Mr. High Commissioner, your ability to identify and address new issues and trends that might otherwise escape international attention deserves particular praise. Your emphasis on minorities in inter-state relations highlights situations of genuine concern and risks that arise when public leaders or political parties promote kin-state activism in order to score political points at home. Your focus on minority issues in the OSCE region has helped us better understand the effects of migration on what we too often assume to be static, traditional populations.

We welcome the release earlier this month of the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies. The guidelines show why policies related to integrating diverse groups in our societies are so important, and what we can do to make those policies as effective as possible. We look forward to further discussions of the recommendations contained in the guidelines and how we might incorporate them into OSCE work.

One issue raised during the recent conference in Ljubljana was discrimination against and lack of integration of Roma in the OSCE region. The Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has followed this issue over the years and published in 2000 its seminal "Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area." Unfortunately, the escalation of violence against Roma and the increasing marginalization of some Romani communities may have heightened the possibility of interethnic conflict. We welcome your engagement on this issue, in consultation with ODIHR, and urge you to intensify your engagement in this area.

We also support your engagement 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 share your concern about tensions that could arise related to Hungary's citizenship policies, and regret that the changes to Hungary's legal framework were made without consulting affected neighboring states as envisioned in the Bolzano recommendations. However, we are encouraged that Hungary is now working with Slovakia on citizenship issues, and urge both sides to demonstrate flexibility.

We take note of your report on your visit to Ukraine, including the issues you raised concerning the new language law and the proposed law on deported persons. We will look to Ukraine, as the incoming Chairman-in-Office, to lead by example and fully implement all its OSCE commitments.

We also take note of your concerns about continuing ethnic tension in Macedonia. We encourage all parties in Macedonia to find common ground based on the spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

We are disappointed to hear that you were not able to visit South Ossetia during your recent trip to Georgia. In the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, ethnic Georgians continue to face bleak conditions, including the denial of property and other rights. Violent incidents have taken place and tensions are high in these regions, making a strong OSCE presence a continued necessity. We repeat our call for the return of a strong OSCE presence in Georgia.

Turning to Kyrgyzstan, since the June 2010 violence in Osh, the United States has been -- and remains -- concerned about the situation of ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan. While we are encouraged that no further disturbances have erupted, the fact remains that rule of law is problematic for 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. The Government of Kyrgyzstan and local leaders must also do more to promote the participation of persons belonging to minorities in all state structures.

Mr. High Commissioner, you and your office do extremely important and difficult work, and you do it particularly well. The United States is grateful that you continue to exemplify the high standards set by your predecessors, and that you point the way forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.