



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON
NATIONAL MINORITIES,
AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBÆK,**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
18 June, 2009

Madam Chairperson,

I am pleased to join previous speakers in welcoming the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk back to the Permanent Council, and thanking him for a comprehensive and inspiring report. Time constraints allow me to pick up just a few of his many highly interesting observations, so I shall limit myself to commenting on three issues.

Firstly, we would like to commend the High Commissioner for the emphasis placed on the crucial and topical matter of education in relation to national minorities. We agree with him that education is indeed relevant to security. It should not be considered a theme on the periphery of this organisation's agenda, but as an important potential tool for conflict prevention. As an essential instrument for promoting mutual understanding, genuine integration and thereby sustainable societies, education may - properly designed - contribute to preventing conflicts involving ethnic minorities. Schools are very important social meeting places, and constitute arenas that *can* foster mutual understanding and respect. A segregated school system, however, leaves fewer opportunities for developing a common civic platform, on which any sustainable society has to be based. This does not mean that minority-language schools should be abolished. Norway fully shares the High Commissioner's view that there should be adequate opportunities for "persons belonging to a minority to instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue", as stated in the CSCE Copenhagen Document. We agree that building a school system based on multilingualism, carefully introduced, in close consultation with the minority communities, emerges as the most viable way to go.

Norway shares the view that if we fail to come to grips with the most unfortunate tendency towards increased segregation of education, we may see more socially fragmented and unstable societies that may harbour new threats to security. Given the importance of this matter, we think the proposals put forward by the High Commissioner to have an exchange of best practices between participating states, and to convene an OSCE-wide meeting on the role of education in bringing forth social integration, without stimulating a policy of assimilation, deserve our positive attention.

Secondly, Madam Chairperson,

Like the High Commissioner, Norway is also concerned about reports showing a tendency towards increasing radicalization and xenophobia on the Crimea peninsula. We commend the High Commissioner for actively following the situation and for his continuous support for locally developed tools like the “Culture of Good Neighbourhood”-educational course, which aims at promoting tolerance and intern-ethnic understanding between the various communities on the Crimea. We generally support all the efforts of the HCNM to prevent potential increased tensions among the peoples on this peninsula.

Thirdly, Madam Chairperson,

Norway has on every given occasion expressed our support for the tireless efforts of the Finnish and Greek chairmanships to secure a continued, meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia. We have – together with the overwhelming majority of participating states – repeatedly urged the Russian Federation to show flexibility in order to reach consensus on a status neutral solution, but in vain. By the end of the month, the OSCE presence in Georgia comes to an end, and given the fact that no agreement was found in the UN with regard to an extension of the UNOMIG mandate on its operation in Abkhazia, Georgia, the international presence in the country is being dramatically reduced. This gives cause for great concern. In this situation, the roles of the High Commissioner and the ODIHR become even more important, as was also pointed out by the previous speaker from Canada.. Their mandates are still valid, and we would like to express our full support for their work in Georgia. The need for follow-up of the very thorough and preoccupying joint report presented by ODIHR and the HCNM has not become less urgent over the past months.

Finally, Madam Chairperson,

We would like to wish Ambassador Vollebæk, as well as his competent and dedicated staff members, every success in their important work.

Thank you.