



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 1, 2018

The United States welcomes OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) Lamberto Zannier back to the Permanent Council. Mr. High Commissioner, thank you for your detailed and thoughtful report and for providing it to participating States well in advance of today's Permanent Council meeting. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the upcoming 25th anniversary of the creation of your office.

Mr. High Commissioner, the United States urges you to maintain a focus on the plight of the Crimean Tatars in Russia-occupied Crimea and on the concerns raised in the 2015 joint report by your office and ODIHR. Russian occupation authorities banned the Crimean Tatar Mejlis as an "extremist" organization. We condemn the occupation authorities' October 29 announcement of plans to "nationalize" the Mejlis building, which they seized in 2014, by apparently handing it over to a Crimean Muslim group that is loyal to occupation authorities. We also condemn the failure to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for over a dozen documented, unsolved disappearances of Crimean Tatars who are feared dead. In this context, Mr. High Commissioner, I welcome your commitment to meeting directly with members of the Crimean Tatar community on your recent trip and hearing first-hand their stories. Authorities continued to target members of other communities with harassment and prosecution in Crimea, including ethnic Ukrainians who try to maintain their Ukrainian identity.

We also note your constructive engagement with Ukraine's government and parliament, and we encourage you to support Ukraine's efforts to ensure its institutional structures fulfill its commitments to protecting the human rights of persons belonging to members of minority groups.

Mr. High Commissioner, we congratulate the recipients of the Max van der Stoel Award, the brave students of Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for their opposition to ethnic segregation in their schools. Institutionalizing the separation of communities will not heal the divides caused by war; these young people's recognition of that fact and willingness to stand up for what they know to be right – even in the face of community opposition – is an inspiration to us all.

The bloody conflicts in the Western Balkans in the 1990s are behind us, but countries in the region continue to face challenges. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, not all individuals enjoy equal political rights. Discrimination is pervasive: discrimination against those who are not ethnic Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats; discrimination against those who belong to those three ethnic groups but are minorities within the Federation or in Republika Srpska, and against those who are members of a minority group within their region; discrimination against those who proclaim their mixed heritage; and discrimination against those who feel their ethnicity should be irrelevant or simply a personal matter. Mr. High Commissioner, I also note your reporting on your recent visit to the United States and look forward to future exchanges on some of the issues that you raised in your report.

We agree the HCNM's thematic guidelines play a useful role in helping states find common ground and provide a useful toolbox to develop and implement policies. We appreciate the work on the Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age. We share your view that while on-line media sometimes can be used to provoke animosity, it also allows disparate groups to interact and in some instances can reduce intolerance. As you stated, positive interactions can strengthen societal cohesion and stability, and thus reduce conflict. Within this context, I share your view that it is both possible and desirable for you to both safeguard the principle of quiet diplomacy, and broaden the visibility of your work to ensure that your tools are indeed utilized and the principles enshrined in them respected.

We also welcome you raising the complex and sensitive issue of so-called "kin-States," that is, states with national minorities abroad. States may express legitimate concern for the human rights of persons belonging to national minority groups in other countries, including those with whom we have affinities, but should do so without ethnic double standards, inflammatory rhetoric, or destabilizing intent.

In conclusion, Mr. High Commissioner, the United States values the work of your office and you can continue to count on our support. We will defend your independence, your mandate, and your budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.