

Delegation of Switzerland

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND AT THE
960th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 July 2013

**In response to the report by Mr. Knut Vollebaek,
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Mr. Chairperson,

Since we may not have a chance to do so again, we should like to thank the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Knut Vollebaek, for his instructive and frank report.

We remain convinced that respect for the rights of national minorities and their integration into their respective societies are essential for maintaining stability and security in Europe and beyond. They are also essential for improving the living conditions of individual human beings.

We particularly welcome the ongoing efforts of the High Commissioner in the Western Balkans and the Southern Caucasus, two priority areas for our OSCE Chairmanship. We might also mention that we have said that we want to support, particularly in the Western Balkans, the participation of minorities in all levels of government and their inclusion in the decision-making processes.

In this regard, we note with satisfaction that Serbia was receptive to the recommendations made by the High Commissioner. We particularly welcome the positive developments in the south of Serbia and the intensification of dialogue with the local Albanian leaders. The management of tensions by the High Commissioner and the OSCE Mission to Serbia also demonstrate the added value of co-operation among the OSCE executive structures as well as co-operation between them and the host State.

During our successive chairmanships, Switzerland and Serbia intend, among other things, to support the reconciliation processes and the facilitation of dialogue and mediation on the ground. This will involve setting an example and applying these objectives at the national level as well. In this context, we will keep a close eye on the developments in the south and east of Serbia.

In 2014 we plan in this way to support, also financially, the projects of the Office of the High Commissioner aimed at supporting the integration of national minorities, especially in public administration and the education system.

We shall also explore how the OSCE and the High Commissioner, in particular, may contribute to the transitional justice process through their work to integrate national minorities. In this case, this will involve addressing, for example, the underlying causes of the inter-ethnic divisions in Kyrgyzstan.

We shall also support the efforts of the High Commissioner to promote the recent Ljubljana Guidelines. In this regard, we would be ready to promote them locally, for example in Skopje in support of the OSCE Mission. In this same vein, we would, for example, be ready to support the application of the Integrated Education Strategy of the authorities in Skopje.

We are also grateful to the High Commissioner for his comments on Georgia. These have made it possible to draw the Permanent Council's attention to the situation on the administrative boundary line and to the situation of the ethnic Georgians in the districts of Gali and Akhalgori.

Lastly, determined as we are to strengthen the OSCE's capacities in the conflict cycle, we shall promote co-operation between the High Commissioner and the OSCE missions. Furthermore, inspired by the successes achieved by the institution in Central Asia, we shall encourage regional initiatives.

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to take the occasion of Mr. Vollebaek's last address to the Permanent Council to express our heartfelt thanks for his tireless work over the past six years. His perseverance and continued commitment to conflict prevention have contributed in an exemplary manner to the reduction of inter-ethnic tensions in the OSCE area.

Under his leadership, the institution has demonstrated that it can adapt its working methods to meet the challenges inherent in the promotion of coherent multi-ethnic societies. The Bolzano Recommendations and the Ljubljana Guidelines require nothing more than consistent implementation and promotion by all of us.

Mr. Vollebaek leaves behind an undoubtedly strengthened institution. We look forward already to being able to count on the commitment of his equally dedicated successor and on the proven competence of the personnel of his office.

Lastly, we should like to wish Mr. Vollebaek all the best in his future professional activities and good health.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.