



**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**Response to the Report by OSCE High  
Commissioner on National Minorities  
Astrid Thors**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 19, 2015

High Commissioner Thors, we warmly welcome you back to the Permanent Council and thank you for your comprehensive report on your activities during the past four months. During this short period, you have been active with the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the Supplemental Human Dimension Meeting on national minorities, and a trip to Ukraine, as you investigate, report on, and advocate for persons belonging to national minorities. We thank you for your constructive reminder this morning that we must remain aware of the importance of language, education, and political participation in ensuring that each participating State protects and empowers its national minorities.

Since your last report to the Permanent Council, we have seen serious abuses against members of minorities in Russia-occupied Crimea and in the separatist-controlled parts of eastern Ukraine. Communities whose members have been targeted for discrimination in Russia-occupied Crimea include ethnic Ukrainians, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Orthodox Christians outside the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, and in particular members of the Crimean Tatar community. Russian occupation authorities have intimidated Crimean Tatars by conducting raids on their homes, schools, and mosques, by closing down most Tatar media and information sources, and by closing the headquarters of the Tatar representative council. Russian occupation authorities restrict Ukrainian-language education, refuse health care and social services to people who do not accept Russian citizenship, and have failed to take appropriate steps to identify those responsible for the disappearance and killing of Crimean Tatars in the early months of the Russian occupation of Crimea.

High Commissioner Thors, we appreciate your efforts to draw attention to the situation in Crimea, including the Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Ukraine's autonomous region of Crimea, which the HCNM authored jointly with ODIHR, having been invited by Ukraine. The report's solid methodology, detailed analysis, and concise recommendations stand out as a best practice. The United States echoes your call to the Russian occupation authorities to accommodate your own and other independent international actors' efforts to access the peninsula to monitor the situation there. We further call on the Russian Federation to end all human rights abuses against the people living in Crimea and to carry out the recommendations outlined in your report. We also call on Russia to end its occupation of the Crimean peninsula without further delay.

Madam High Commissioner, I think I must pause here to apologize for the distinguished Russian Ambassador's inaccurate comments. I hope that you will continue to work with impartiality and objectivity. The fact that Russia does not like to face the facts of its

occupation should not dissuade you from addressing them. Your factual reporting is a helpful contribution to genuine dialogue in this forum. Russia's comments today say more about Russia's insecurity than about the quality of your work.

While Russia denied you access to the part of Ukraine it occupies, we were encouraged by your visit earlier this month to Mariupol and Sartana in southeastern Ukraine. During this visit, you urged Ukrainian authorities, in consultation with representatives of minority communities, to establish a designated executive body that would function as a central governmental interlocutor for minorities in Ukraine. We agree that Ukraine, like many other countries, needs stronger institutional architecture to implement its commitments regarding persons belonging to national minorities, and to promote more effectively the inclusion in society of all parts of its diverse population.

High Commissioner Thors, we appreciate and support your continued engagement in Central Asia. Your support for educational reforms, a regional dialogue on national minority education, and the Central Asia Education Program is helping promote and protect the right of persons belonging to national minorities to access education in their mother tongues. We believe these efforts will continue to pay dividends into the future.

Likewise, your work in Moldova and Georgia to enhance dialogue and facilitate freedom of movement is commendable. We acknowledge your engagement with the Georgian authorities on the draft State Language Law to ensure that the law complies with international standards and OSCE commitments. Also, we join you in congratulating Georgia on the adoption of its National Strategy on Civic Equality and Integration for 2015-2020. Combined with Georgia's political will, the HCNM's expert advice was a big part of these successes.

We join the EU in encouraging you to explore a follow-up to the ODIHR/HCNM 2008 report on Georgia's occupied regions.

High Commissioner Thors, we steadfastly support the HCNM's mandate, autonomy, and budget as you continue to engage parties with the goal of enhancing peace and security through respect for the human rights of the members of national minorities. The United States appreciates your efforts and thanks you for your discreet, yet active, work in so many OSCE participating States.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.