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STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES
Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 16 November 2017

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chair,

I join others in welcoming the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Lamberto Zannier, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his first report in his new capacity.

The report emphasises the thematic work of the High Commissioner and highlights the importance of systematizing and making available the advice given to participating States throughout the tenures of all previous High Commissioners. We welcome this work and the resulting recommendations and guidelines both new and updated. We look forward to hearing how the High Commissioner will develop diverse ways to keep the institution's recommendations and guidelines firmly on the desks of policymakers. To that extent, we also look forward to the collaboration on next year's event in Oslo marking the 20th Anniversary of the Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities, and the event's ensuing work on language rights and conflict prevention.

It is vital to keep the advice of the High Commissioner updated, accessible, and, where relevant, public. However, recognizing that the work of the High Commissioner to a substantial extent is marked by quiet diplomacy and confidential correspondence, we appreciate that much of the work must remain unheralded. That does not diminish its value.

Norway remains committed to gender equality. Women belonging to national minorities suffer double discrimination in many contexts. It is therefore crucial to strengthen our efforts to prevent and counter such discrimination. In this regard, Norway recalls the OSCE's Gender Action Plan calling on the High Commissioner to address specific issues relating to the participation in public and private life of women belonging to national minorities and to ensure that the policies and programmes of his office take steps to counter double discrimination. As head of an institution, the High Commissioner bears both an internal and external responsibility for the implementation

of the action plan and for gender equality in the OSCE and its region. Norway will follow the High Commissioner's work on this issue closely and expects the High Commissioner to report on implementation and progress.

Participating States may differ in the views of what the priorities of the High Commissioner should be. Norway's first priority is clear: the mandate and independence of High Commissioner must be respected and protected. To ensure the efficacy of the High Commissioner in a region as diverse as ours, we must allow him to act, travel and communicate according to his mandate without interference.

Participating States must offer support and cooperation, and bear the responsibility of allowing and facilitating the High Commissioner to travel and communicate freely on our territories including in occupied and disputed territory.

All three elements of cooperation, as mentioned in the High Commissioner's report, are crucial. I have touched on two of them, unhindered access and confidentiality, but the third is equally important: genuine dialogue requires genuine interaction. We, the participating States, must engage constructively with the High Commissioner on issues within our jurisdiction when they are raised. Only in the engagement between the High Commissioner and participating States can we realise the full value of the High Commissioner as an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage.

Thank you.