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EU statement in response to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, H.E. Ambassador Knut Vollebaek

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Ambassador Knut Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

We reiterate our strong support for the institution of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, which is a core conflict prevention instrument for the OSCE area. We stress the need for implementation of the commitment made by all participating States, without exception, to fully co-operate with the High Commissioner in order to enable him to fulfill his mandate.

We highly appreciate the work done by the High Commissioner, also in EU Member States, and can assure Mr Vollebaek and other participating States that those Member States that feature in the report will study its comments and recommendations carefully.

We look forward to the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the commemorative events that will take place in The Hague on 7 and 8 March next year, which include a high-level panel discussion and an academic conference.

We welcome the recent launch of the High Commissioner's Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies, which we view as a useful

contribution to the discussion on integration policies in participating States.

In connection to the High Commissioner's activities during the reporting period, we wish to state the following:

As regards Georgia, we highly appreciate his work on multilingual education reform and continued engagement in the Meskhetian repatriation process.

We are pleased to note that the High Commissioner could hold talks in the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia and regret that it was not made possible for him to visit the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia.

We share the High Commissioner's concern about the still fragile security environment in northern Kosovo and agree that implementation of rights of persons belonging to minorities throughout Kosovo remains a priority. We once more urge all sides to focus efforts on resolving outstanding issues through the EU facilitated dialogue. We welcome the 19 October and 7 November meetings between Belgrade and Pristina in the framework of this dialogue, under the aegis of the High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton.

We support the High Commissioner's work in Skopje on integrated education. We share the view that for building a successful multi-ethnic State more needs to be done and therefore deepening the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement is a vital priority.

We welcome his visit to Ukraine and we expect a close dialogue and interaction between the High Commissioner and the Ukrainian authorities, including during the Ukrainian OSCE chairmanship in 2013. We commend the High Commissioner for his initiatives taken in Ukraine concerning Crimean Tatars and other formerly deported peoples.

We also welcome the High Commissioner's reporting on his visit to Kyrgyzstan and his initiatives in the Central Asian region on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Finally, we commend the work done on promoting a multilingual education system in the Republic of Moldova.

In concluding, we once again thank Ambassador Vollebaek and his staff for their outstanding work and express full support for the High Commissioner and his team.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries Montenegro* and Iceland+, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.