

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



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Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE
STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY
THE OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES
AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBAEK
687TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
8 NOVEMBER 2007

Canada joins other delegations in welcoming High Commissioner Vollebaek to his first Permanent Council meeting in his new position. We thank him for the detailed report of his activities since he assumed his functions in the summer. We are glad that, for the next few years, the OSCE will be able to count on such a skilled envoy. Ambassador Vollebaek's broad diplomatic experience and his knowledge of the OSCE, and of the region, will be tremendous assets in fulfilling his mandate.

It is often said that the true indication of the maturity of a democracy is found in the way it treats its minorities. As one author put it, "it is a question not only of the rights of the minorities themselves: it is a question of the total health and strength of the nation." We would add that mistreatment of minorities undermines not only the human security of the persons affected, but contains the seeds of new tensions and instability. Thus, the role of the High Commissioner in promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and in conflict prevention, early warning and quiet diplomacy, is of crucial importance in pursuing our Organization's goal of a secure region.

We are pleased to see that the High Commissioner has familiarized himself very rapidly with the challenges of his job. Canada broadly shares the orientations that he has chosen.

We were very interested to hear the accounts of his visits to different parts of the region. More particularly, we are pleased that the High Commissioner has chosen to place an increased emphasis on Central Asia. This is consistent with the desire expressed in the Permanent Council for a greater concentration of the OSCE's activities in this region. Canada supports this approach.

We are pleased that the High Commissioner had the opportunity to visit the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli regions of Georgia, and to acquaint himself with HCNM's ongoing projects in the region.

Canada fully supports the High Commissioner's expressed desire to continue the work of his predecessor toward reconciliation between the different communities in Serbia and

Kosovo. We believe the office of the High Commissioner can bring a meaningful contribution to the slow process of rebuilding relations and trust amongst the various communities.

To conclude, allow me to underline that Canada shares the High Commissioner's view about the need to find the right balance between integration and respect for diversity. This is one of the High Commissioner's greatest challenges. It is a balance that we strive to achieve in Canada and that we continuously pursue within our model of pluralism.

I wish to extend Canada's best wishes to High Commissioner Vollebaek as he embarks on what promises to be a very active programme. He, and his staff can count on Canada's full support.