

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 June 2010

**Regarding the report by the OSCE High Commissioner on
National Minorities**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome once again Mr. Knut Vollebaek, who in view of the various circumstances touching on the mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), has been a frequent guest at meetings of the Permanent Council. This is further confirmation of the importance of this institution in the system of OSCE executive structures. Allow me to express a number of fundamental ideas with respect to the report he has just presented.

We should point out that much attention was paid to Georgia, including, if we accept the logic proposed, the territory of Abkhazia. In this connection, we should like once again to call on the distinguished High Commissioner and his Office to take into account in their practical work with respect to the South Caucasus the new politico-legal realities that have emerged in that region, regardless of whether people like this new situation. The fact is that as a result of the armed adventure of the Georgian leadership in August 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only left the control of Tbilisi for good, but also acquired sovereign independent status, which has been recognized by a number of States, including Russia.

We therefore believe it inappropriate and unacceptable to refer to the Government of the Republic of Abkhazia as the “*de facto* authorities” or to discuss any kind of “ceasefire line” in the Gali district of Abkhazia.

Furthermore, as long as there is no agreement within the OSCE as regards the three State entities – Georgia, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia – and as long as the OSCE has not regulated its relations with Sukhum and Tskhinval, the indisputable fact must be accepted that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not part of the area of responsibility of our Organization and can be regarded solely as contact countries outside its borders (outreach). Accordingly, the HCNM mandate, like the mandate of the other OSCE institutions, does not extend to these two republics, and this means there are no legal grounds to demand that the Abkhaz and South Ossetians implement particular recommendations. Abkhazia and South Ossetia have not undertaken any commitments to the OSCE, including

commitments in the human dimension, and therefore they are not bound by any procedures for their implementation, including the monitoring of the human rights situation.

One final point. If the OSCE truly wants to restore confidence in itself and its executive structures, it needs to refrain from the practice of publishing politically motivated and unbalanced documents, as was the case with the extremely biased report by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the HCNM on the results of a visit by experts from these institutions to Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia in the autumn of 2008.

Let me now say a few words about the section of the High Commissioner's report concerned with the countries of the western Balkan region. We welcome the joint steps by the Office of the High Commissioner and the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje in support of the efforts by the Macedonian authorities to improve the national education system. We believe that reform in this sphere aimed at the integration of all the ethnic groups into the public and political life of the country will serve as a basis for maintaining the balance among the different ethnic groups and preserving the unity of the State. It is these principles that underlie the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which confirms the territorial integrity and unitary character of Macedonia.

It seems appropriate to mention the significant successes by Serbia in the protection of the rights of national communities. We regret that the High Commissioner's report made only modest mention of this despite the positive comments by the OSCE Mission to Serbia in connection with the recently approved law on national minorities and the elections held on 6 June to the national minority councils.

We are disappointed that the High Commissioner failed to mention the problem of the Serb population in Kosovo – there is not a single line about this issue in the report. As you are aware, the situation regarding the rights of the national communities in the territory remains one of the most difficult in the OSCE area. From the briefings by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo we hear almost daily about attacks on Serb refugees and the flagrant violation of their rights. We call on the High Commissioner to reconsider his approach to this problem and to make full use of the resources available to his Office in helping to establish a genuinely multi-ethnic society in the territory, in which there would be equal respect for the rights of all its representatives.

Mr. Chairperson,

We trust that, in addition to the subjects mentioned and the well-known dispute between Slovakia and Hungary, the High Commissioner will also focus on other challenges associated with ensuring the rights of national minorities in the OSCE area. A number of problems that are seriously complicating inter-ethnic relations have not been touched upon in the report. One such problem is the dangerous phenomenon of mass statelessness, along with the difficulties in the realization by national minorities of their socio-economic rights, especially in view of the financial and economic crisis, the rise in xenophobia and neo-Nazi manifestations, and the problems of the so-called “new minorities” – migrant workers in many European countries. We trust that the HCNM will pay proper attention to all these aspects.

We have persistently called on Mr. Vollebaek to pay close attention to the situation of the Russian-speaking population in countries in the post-Soviet area, including the question of ensuring political and linguistic rights. The derussification policy being pursued in a number of OSCE States, primarily in education and the information sphere, is fraught with the risk of increased inter-ethnic tensions.

In conclusion, I should like to say a few words about the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations. We have repeatedly called the High Representative's attention to the unacceptability of translating these recommendations into political commitments for OSCE participating States, notably at the special meeting in Vienna on 12 April and at the recent conference in Copenhagen. As far as we are aware, several other countries also hold this view. This being the case, we would ask the Organization to refrain from promoting initiatives on which there is no consensus.

On the whole, however, we confirm Russia's readiness to work constructively with the Office of the High Commissioner, and we wish Mr. Vollebaek every success in his extremely difficult but important work.

Thank you for your attention.