



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1062 Vienna, 16 July 2015

EU statement in response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms. Astrid Thors

The European Union warmly welcomes High Commissioner Astrid Thors back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report on recent activities.

The EU highlights its support for the office and the mandate of the High Commissioner. We reiterate the importance we attach to the respect of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We call on all OSCE participating States to respect the mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and to cooperate closely with her office on all matters related to national minorities and to make full use of its expertise. Quiet diplomacy, which characterises the work of the High Commissioner, is less visible to the public but brings results of lasting importance. We reiterate that the High Commissioner should have the necessary means to fulfil her mandate.

We commend the work done in the areas of education, including in multilingual and integrated education, effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life as well as policing in multi-ethnic societies.

We see the need for developing effective policies for integration of persons belonging to minorities as an essential aspect of a tolerant and stable society, in line with the principle of “integration with respect for diversity”. We agree that preventing divisions along ethnic lines enhances the stability of societies. Any concerns in respect to persons belonging to national minorities should be addressed with full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations.

We welcome the High Commissioner's engagement in regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine, and we took note of the concerns the High Commissioner expressed in her report related to the four aspects that are important to an inclusive policy. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities need to be fully ensured in line with the relevant international standards, including those of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We support the commitment of the Government of Ukraine in this regard. We encourage the High Commissioner to continue her dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities to improve the institutional framework for implementing rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including language issues, and promoting their integration.

We share the High Commissioner's deep concern about the deteriorating human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula as we have learned from numerous reports. We have many times expressed our concern about the precarious position of both the Crimean Tatar and the Ukrainian-speaking communities after the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation.

We find it highly disturbing that the authorities in de facto control of the Crimean Peninsula have so far not accommodated requests from the High Commissioner and Ukraine to facilitate a visit to Crimea. As stated in her report, it is clearly in the mandate of the High Commissioner to seek information about the situation on the ground. We reiterate that the High Commissioner and other international human rights actors should be granted full, free and unrestricted access to the whole territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and Sevastopol.

We note the good cooperation the High Commissioner has with the National Assembly and Government of Kazakhstan on inter-ethnic issues and reforms in the education system.

We welcome her first visit to Turkmenistan and it is encouraging that certain issues related to the inter-ethnic situation can now be discussed in openness. The activities within the framework of the Central Asia Education Programme remain important and we commend her for that.

We support the High Commissioner's continuous engagement with the Republic of Moldova and her work on integration of society and language issues. In that context

we would like to draw attention to the long-standing issue of the Latin script schools in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. This subject should be followed closely with a view to ensuring their normal and sustainable functioning.

We consider as positive the High Commissioner's activities in Georgia such as the cooperation on the new Civic Equality and Integration Strategy and the Multi-Party Dialogue on National Minority Issues.

We support her engagement in the western Balkans promoting long-term stability, in particular in Serbia, but foremost in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with her two visits to that country together with the Chairman-in-Office and his Special Representative for the Balkans.

Finally, we thank Ms. Thors and her staff for their excellent work and once again express full support for the High Commissioner and her team.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania 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.