



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to the Report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov**

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 3, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

High Commissioner Abdrakhmanov, welcome to the Permanent Council for the first time in your new role and thank you so very much for your thorough first report. We appreciate your expertise and dedication, as well as that of your staff, as we all continue to adjust to the evolving pandemic conditions.

Your report demonstrates the depth of engagement the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities undertakes with a range of international actors. Your work demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of your mandate and how best to fulfill it.

In reviewing your report, we noted the strength of your work to address the ongoing health crisis and its impact on minority populations. Your Office has adjusted to a hybrid format of distributing advice to participating States, making good use of your resources and expertise. We are pleased you have been able to foster a communicative and co-operative environment in your short tenure.

You emphasize the need for *Early Warning and Early Action* to prevent ethnic tensions from devolving into conflict. This vigilance is essential as we navigate tensions exacerbated by the pandemic. Such vigilance proves invaluable in ensuring members of national minority groups receive equal treatment and their human rights are respected.

We are pleased with the scope of work you conduct with multilingual countries, indigenous populations, and multilateral organizations. Fostering inclusivity is more critical now than ever before in crafting lasting policies. Thank you for your comments regarding the importance of ensuring that political divides between countries do not negatively affect ethnic minorities, such as the Polish minority in Belarus. We remain concerned about the treatment of the Polish minority in Belarus under the Lukashenka regime’s violent crackdown and the targeting of individuals perceived as “political rivals,” including ethnic Poles. We appreciate your work in Georgia undertaking multilingual education and promoting equal opportunities from a gender perspective.

We hope that your efforts in Moldova will also include this nuanced approach as your Office assists Moldova in building a more inclusive society. We would very much appreciate hearing more about the work of your dedicated officer in the OSCE Mission to Moldova.

We welcome your studies of the socio-economic participation of women minorities in North Macedonia. We look forward to reviewing your findings in this study as well as your progress in enriching language tools for citizens of North Macedonia. Fostering mutual cultural understanding is a crucial element of your Mission's mandate.

We also welcome your outreach in Central Asia, especially through the multilingual and multicultural education initiatives to improve opportunities for employment, socio-economic inclusion, and reduced incidences of early marriage among girls. We commend your Institution for its first *Memorandum of Co-operation* with Turkmenistan's Ministry of Education. We appreciate your efforts, particularly in light of the recent border clashes between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. It is clear that work remains to be done developing mutual trust, so we welcome your commitment to engage in Central Asia.

Turning to your thematic work, we support your pursuit of policies that reflect minority concerns, particularly the establishment of networks to aid in addressing these concerns. We appreciate your long-term focus in fostering conflict-resilient societies, and urge participating States to heed your advice on *Conflict Prevention*.

The United States follows with close interest your sustained, constructive collaboration with Ukraine. We are particularly concerned about the situation in Russia-occupied Crimea, where Moscow abuses Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and other members of ethnic and religious minority groups on a daily basis through politically-motivated harassment, intimidation, unjust prosecution, and imprisonment. We condemn Moscow's holding of over 100 political prisoners from Crimea, the majority of whom are Crimean Tatars, and call for their immediate release. The United States further condemns Russia's lack of transparency across the board in Ukraine, as evidenced by its refusal to allow independent monitoring groups into occupied Crimea and by forcing the halving of the mandate period of the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk.

I take note of my esteemed colleague's mention of issues in the United States and I assure you that there have been a number of initiatives taken to address these issues which I will happily share with both you and the High Commissioner, if there is interest. I would like to say - to quote Amanda Gorman, a poet of whom I have become quite fond - the United States "is a nation that it isn't broken, but simply unfinished. [...] We are striving to forge our union with purpose. To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man."

High Commissioner, I'm impressed with the number of meetings you've already held with participating States. And I'm curious, where do you see the greatest possibility for your Office to have an impact? We strongly value your role in conflict prevention and resolution. You can count on the support of the United States.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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