



**PERMANENT DELEGATION  
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR  
NATIONAL MINORITIES ASTRID THORS**

As delivered by Counsellor Hilde Austad  
to the Permanent Council,  
Vienna, 16 July 2015

Mr Chairman,

Let me begin by expressing our full support for High Commissioner Astrid Thors and her team. Her mandate is regrettably ever more relevant and difficult to exercise.

Her report confirms sound priorities we fully endorse. We take note of the consistent advice offered to participating States that we can all learn from, and the call to adhere to the principle of “integration with respect for diversity”.

Mr Chairman,

We thank the High Commissioner for her special focus on Ukraine. Likewise, we commend Ukraine for their close cooperation with the HCNM, and for inviting her to the country 10 times since she began her mandate. We hope that this cooperation will continue and develop further.

Consecutive High Commissioners have offered consistent advice to Ukraine on how to maintain a balanced and inclusive approach to minority issues. This is especially difficult – but also especially important – in the country’s current situation. Minorities must be included, not marginalized, as this is precisely what destabilizing forces would want. We strongly support Ukraine’s reform efforts, and hope that the High Commissioner’s advice will be heeded. To highlight one issue, strengthening the institutional framework for minority policy should be a priority.

Mr Chairman,

Ukraine’s close cooperation with the High Commissioner stands in stark contrast to the situation in Crimea, where Russian occupation authorities continue to refuse the High Commissioner access. We note with grave concern that the High Commissioner to our

knowledge for the first time in the institution's history evokes point 28 of its mandate, and reports that a participating State does not allow entry into territory under its control.

We are also gravely concerned by reports of systematic repression of minorities in Crimea since Russia's illegal annexation. We call on the Russian Federation to grant international observers, including the HCNM, immediate and unfettered access to the peninsula.

Mr Chairman,

The High Commissioner's visit to Georgia highlighted the increasing plight of people in and around the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The High Commissioner's findings fit into a disturbing pattern of observations on the developments in the breakaway regions.

Mr Chairman,

We support the HCNM's continued engagement in the Balkans. Recent incidents demonstrate the relevance of the High Commissioner's work in the region.

Mr Chairman,

Finally, we reconfirm our support for the way the High Commissioner executes her mandate. The High Commissioner has found a good balance between the sometimes contradictory requirements for quiet diplomacy, transparency and visibility. This underlines the importance of respecting the autonomy of her institution. We must ensure a good correlation between the importance of her work – for us and for the stability in the OSCE area – and the resources we allocate to her institution.

Thank you, Mr Chairman