



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES ASTRID THORS

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 19 November 2015

Mr Chairman,

Minority issues play a part in many conflicts in the OSCE area and beyond. The High Commissioner on National Minorities is therefore a crucial part of the early warning and conflict prevention instruments of our organisation.

Successive High Commissioners have contributed positively to reducing inter-ethnic tension and defusing potential conflicts through quiet diplomacy and expert recommendations.

The High Commissioner has been able to play this central role because of the institution's autonomy. The ability to act without undue interference has been a central success factor. We call on all participating States to help uphold this autonomy in two ways: Firstly by providing the High Commissioner with the necessary resources, and secondly by ensuring the High Commissioner's unrestricted access to all parts of the OSCE area.

Limiting access contravenes the High Commissioner's mandate. In this connection, we urge all participating States to grant the High Commissioner full access to the territories they control. We encourage Ms Thors to keep the Permanent Council informed of access restrictions, as provided for in her mandate.

Mr Chairman,

We are concerned by the situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This concern is aggravated by the lack of access for international observers, including the HCNM. We fully support the points made by Luxemburg on behalf of the EU on Georgian-language schools in Gali and on a possible follow-up of the 2008 joint report by the HCNM and ODIHR.

Mr Chairman,

The High Commissioner maintains in a commendable way the difficult balance between quiet diplomacy and speaking up over issues she cannot be quiet about. The joint HCNM-ODIHR report on the human rights situation in Crimea illustrates my point.

Mr Chairman,

We remain gravely concerned by the situation for 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. We commend the High Commissioner for her strong focus on Crimea.

We welcome the close cooperation between the High Commissioner and Ukraine. If my count is right, the High Commissioner has visited the country 11 times since she took up her mandate. The engagement is resource intensive, but justified. We note the observation from the most recent visit that "Ukraine remains a tolerant society with rich ethnic, linguistic and regional diversity", but that this is under pressure, especially in eastern parts of the country. Ukraine's difficult situation, with external forces attempting to exploit any lack of cohesion, only means that minority issues must be handled with extra care. We therefore hope priority will be given to implementing the High Commissioner's consistent advice, and that the fruitful cooperation will continue and result in positive change.

Mr Chairman,

We thank the High Commissioner for the focus on thematic issues in her report. The way states handle minorities' rights determines whether minorities are marginalized or included. We urge all participating States to protect and promote the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. There is a direct link between stability of societies and minority rights.

Finally, let me reiterate our full support for the High Commissioner and the way she executes her mandate.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.