



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON
NATIONAL MINORITIES, MS ASTRID THORS**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 2 June 2016

Mr Chairman,

We commend High Commissioner Thors for her dedication and hard work. She and her team are making an impressive contribution to conflict prevention across the OSCE area, despite extremely limited resources.

We regret that not all participating States see the full value of the HCNM. The institution deserves our full support and cooperation, including unrestricted access to our countries. We encourage all participating States to welcome visits from the HCNM. I can assure her that she is always welcome to Norway.

Mr Chairman,

We appreciate the close cooperation between the High Commissioner and Ukraine. We encourage Ukrainian authorities to promptly implement her consistent advice, including on improving the institutional framework for minority issues.

We remain deeply concerned by the situation for minorities in occupied Crimea, especially Crimean Tatars. The High Commissioner's office has worked in Crimea for many years and knows the area well. We agree with the High Commissioner that "continued repression ... could in the long run lead to radicalization and to situations where resorting to violence is not excluded." We call on Russian de facto authorities to grant the High Commissioner and other international actors full and unrestricted access to the peninsula.

Mr Chairman,

Earlier this morning we heard Georgia's Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze speak about disturbing developments in his country's breakaway regions. Ever-

closer integration into the Russian Federation is putting the ethnic Georgian population in the breakaway regions at risk. We were especially concerned by the recent killing at Kurcha, and the increasing repression of the ethnic Georgian population in both breakaway regions.

We therefore appreciate the High Commissioner's close attention to Georgia, including her recent country visit. We also support her message to Georgian authorities to continue promoting the integration of society.

Mr Chairman,

We highly value the HCNM's thematic work. The focus on hate speech is timely. We agree that "preventing hate speech is conflict prevention". We congratulate the High Commissioner on the successful marking of the 20th anniversary of The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities. We follow the work related to thematic recommendations and guidelines with great interest, and we are looking forward to updated guidelines on media-related issues.

Mr Chairman,

Migration is one of the bigger challenges of our time. We have an obligation to provide protection for those fleeing from war and persecution. Many OSCE participating States also welcome economic migrants. We should however not ignore that migration may give rise to inter-ethnic tension and unrest. The way we receive and accommodate refugees is crucial. If we do things right, the newcomers will enrich our societies.

Mr Chairman,

The HCNM's task is difficult. The focus on quiet diplomacy means much of the work goes unnoticed. Still, we all have our opinions on what the High Commissioner's priorities should be. Moreover, the opinions of participating States are deeply divided. This difference of opinion shows how crucial it is to protect the autonomy of the HCNM. If we want an institution capable of fulfilling its mandate in such a diverse setting, we must let it do so without interference.

This policy of non-interference should extend to the renewal of the High Commissioner's mandate. We have heard no credible arguments for why her term should not be renewed, except as retaliation for using what was in fact correct legal terminology, as employed by the UN and other international organisations. We reiterate our strong support for renewing the mandate of High Commissioner Thors for a second term, and call on others to do the same.

Thank you, Mr Chairman