



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF PORTUGAL
TO THE OSCE

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Statement of the European Union in response to the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Vollebaek and Ambassador Moran to the Permanent Council.

The EU renews its full support for the valuable work carried out by the High Commissioner as an instrument of early warning and conflict prevention.

The EU appreciates the High Commissioner's strong commitment which shows in a very impressive number of country visits and talks in the short time since he took up his office.

We support the High Commissioner's initiatives regarding the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Kazakhstan, and constitutional and electoral reform in Kyrgyzstan.

As regards Georgia, the EU is aware of the importance of a speedy and comprehensive implementation of the new legislation and reforms affecting persons belonging to national minorities. The EU therefore appreciates the commitment of the HCNM in assisting this implementation.

The EU encourages the High Commissioner's efforts in South Eastern Europe. We believe the HCNM has a valuable role to play in dealing with issues related to persons belonging to national minorities in Serbia. In this regard we also

appreciate the High Commissioner's wish to become more involved in both southern Serbia and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Concerning Kosovo, the EU welcomes the HCNM's intention to move forward the reconciliation process as initiated by his predecessor. In this regard, we reiterate our support for his efforts to involve all communities in Kosovo. HCNM and OMIK share a common cause in the protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Therefore we encourage the co-operation between them.

The EU values the High Commissioner's contribution in assisting the Montenegrin authorities in drafting the new Constitution. By adopting this new Constitution Montenegro has strengthened its democracy and the rule of law. We support the High Commissioner in providing the Montenegrin Government with further advice and expertise on the implementation of the Constitution.

We join the High Commissioner in congratulating the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest on winning the Max van der Stoep Award. The situation of the Roma presents a challenge inside as well as outside the European Union and the fact that the incoming Finnish Chairmanship plans to make this issue a priority will provide an opportunity to concentrate even more on the effective implementation of existing commitments.

While agreeing that integration with respect for diversity is relevant with regard to the situation of legal migrants in their host countries, the EU notes that views differ on the involvement of the HCNM in this area.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.