



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Statement in Response to the High Commissioner for National Minorities**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 22, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is also for us a pleasure to welcome High Commissioner Ekeus back to the Permanent Council here and we commend Commissioner Ekeus for his continuing good work on behalf of the OSCE and thank him for the very informative and comprehensive briefing here this morning.

Your emphasis today on education, Commissioner Ekeus, is a very appropriate one because there is a very significant connection between issues of national minorities and issues of education. In fact, it is difficult to address one area without involving the other.

The United States fully supports the activities undertaken by the High Commissioner and his staff to develop, preserve, and institutionalize educational opportunities for national minorities. Already we have seen some positive results from these efforts, most notably in the Balkans.

We are encouraged by the High Commissioner's plans to begin a project in the Abkhazia region of Georgia designed to provide support and training for teachers of the Georgian and Abkhaz languages. We feel that this is precisely the kind of project that the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities is uniquely qualified to undertake.

We are also pleased to hear that the Kyrgyz authorities have established a "Working Group on Integration through Education," and have done so on the basis of Commissioner Ekeus' specific recommendations. We look forward to hearing more about the results of this working group and other projects of the High Commissioner's office as they begin to bear fruit.

Unfortunately, there are numerous cases today within the OSCE region where the educational rights of national minorities are not being protected. We recall very pungently here the commitments made by our Ministers in Copenhagen in 1990 regarding national minorities.

One commitment that remains particularly timely, given recent events, is our pledge to "endeavor to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, notwithstanding the need to learn the official language or languages of the State concerned, have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue, as well as, wherever possible and necessary, for its use before public authorities in conformity with applicable national legislation."

The July 15 closure of a Romanian language school in Tiraspol, just one day after the High Commissioner visited the school, and subsequent actions against other Moldovan schools under

Transnistrian control demonstrate that these commitments are not being upheld. We will return to this topic again during the Special Permanent Council meeting this afternoon.

Prohibitions against the use of minority languages are also a problem in Turkmenistan, where the obligatory use of Turkmen as the official language is limiting the Russian and Uzbek minorities' access to educational opportunities.

We call on the Turkmen authorities also to follow through on their commitment to work with Commissioner Ekeus. We urge specifically the Government of Turkmenistan to honor its invitation to Commissioner Ekeus to visit there and are dismayed that Commissioner Ekeus has had to postpone his visit five times now at the request of Turkmen authorities. We understand that the High Commissioner is now scheduled to visit Turkmenistan in September. We expect the government of Turkmenistan to offer its full cooperation to make the High Commissioner's trip a productive one.

Mr. Chairman, please allow me to thank Commissioner Ekeus for his ongoing efforts to protect national minorities everywhere and to work closely with OSCE participating states to uphold our commitments in that regard. His work is an extremely valuable asset of our organization and a unique service to the citizens of our states.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.