



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to High Commissioner for National Minorities, Rolf Ekeus

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 28, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes High Commissioner Ekeus back to the Permanent Council today. We thank him for providing us with such a comprehensive update on his efforts to promote peace and stability through the integration of minorities across the OSCE sphere. In particular, Commissioner Ekeus, we endorse your continued emphasis on education as a key building block upon which to achieve tolerance and peaceful social integration. The importance of these activities to the broader goals of conflict prevention and long-term stability, cannot be overestimated.

We support the special attention that the High Commissioner and his staff have devoted over the past year to education in Central Asia, and applaud his recent visit to Uzbekistan to assist the Ministry of Public Education in finding ways to promote social integration through educational reform and we look forward to learning of the High Commissioner's plans to deepen his engagement in this region.

We once again call upon the Government of Turkmenistan to honor its invitation to Commissioner Ekeus to visit, and we urge it to extend him full cooperation in furthering his mandate. Such cooperation is a key reflection of the level of commitment to OSCE principles, and can only benefit the Turkmen people.

The United States welcomes Commissioner Ekeus' favorable report on Latvia's social integration and educational reform, and we commend the Latvian government for its flexible approach to the reform process. Integrating minorities into the mainstream of national life while ensuring the protection of their basic right to preserve their cultural heritage, is crucial to a stable and productive society and we welcome the Latvian Government's commitment in this regard, and support the government's ongoing efforts to promote naturalization, to implement education reform in a flexible manner, and to reach out to its minority population. We also encourage the governments of Latvia and Russia to engage in a constructive dialogue to address bilateral concerns.

The United States views with concern the still-unresolved situation with Latin-script schools in Moldova's Transnistrian region, and welcomes the High Commissioner's engagement on the attempts by the Transnistrian separatists to carry out - in Ambassador Ekeus' eloquent words - "linguistic cleansing." We have raised this issue many times in the Permanent Council and reiterate that, while some progress has occurred in the schools crisis, the situation is not resolved and needs to be soon.

We welcome the positive outcome of Commissioner Ekeus' visit over the past few days to Georgia, and commend the Georgian government for supporting his efforts there. We are particularly pleased to hear that the 'Teachers for Understanding' project is underway in Abkhazia, a program that we anticipate will help reduce ethnic tensions and promote inter-communal understanding in that region.

The United States values the High Commissioner's role in helping to improve inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia, and supports efforts aimed at building bridges between all of Macedonia's ethnic communities. We are encouraged by the increased enrollment in South East European University and the improvement in access to higher education for under-represented minorities. With respect to Tetovo University, the United States expects that the university will continue to improve the educational standards of its recognized faculties with an eye toward meeting European norms, and will work to dispel lingering doubts about links between criminal elements and the University's security apparatus.

Mr. Chairman, permit me to once again thank Commissioner Ekeus and his staff for their hard work in carrying out the commitment of the OSCE to protect national minorities, promote tolerance and encourage social integration. As the lead office in identifying and helping to reduce ethnic tensions before they escalate to crises, their work is a valuable and indeed a vital component of this organization as well as of international security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.