

Report by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: UK response, July 2022

Thank you Mr Chair,

Welcome Ambassador Abrakhmanov, to the Permanent Council and thank you for your comprehensive address. You have made clear the broad scope of activities undertaken by your office and the extent to which you have helped participating States to enhance their security through ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights by all people, including those belonging to national minorities.

You are right to highlight the impact of the war in Ukraine on ordinary, innocent people. We have said many times in this Council that Ukraine remains front and centre of UK priorities. We join you in calling for the immediate protection of civilians and humanitarian access in Ukraine, including for national minorities. But we also emphasise that the swiftest and most effective way to ensure this is for the Russian government to immediately cease all hostilities and withdraw its troops from the whole of Ukraine. We echo the urgent call for Russia to respect international law, including with regard to minority rights.

We were strongly encouraged by your assessment that, prior to the current conflict, Ukraine was making progress on inclusivity and diversity. Indeed, this progress is made all the more striking by the fact that, as you also highlighted in your report, the Russian government featured minority issues as part of its false pretexts for its invasion of Ukraine.

We share your concern over the restrictions placed on Ukrainian communities in territories temporarily under Russian control. You rightly highlight Russian imposed changes in schools which undermine the Ukrainian curriculum. We also note with concern that Crimean Tatars have reported a number of threats during your reporting period.

We look forward to your continued engagement on issues arising from the war in Ukraine, including in relation to internally displaced persons and refugees. We encourage all participating States to fully cooperate with you and your staff to enable you to fulfil your mandate without impediment throughout the whole of Ukraine, including areas temporarily under Russian control. We welcome your intention to re-commence your work as part of post-conflict rehabilitation, once conditions allow.

We value highly your office's research into the intersectionality of gender and national minorities, and your acknowledgment that women with a minority background face unique and multiple challenges. We fully support women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of public life, including in peace and security, and we were pleased to hear about the

discussions that you have organised exploring these issues. We encourage more initiatives that promote gender mainstreaming and we look forward to continued reports of your progress in this important area.

I would also like to highlight your considerable achievements in the Western Balkans, in particular your advocacy on national minority rights during visits to Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We note that the high degree of constructive cooperation you encountered enabled you to contribute to the resolution of national minority issues within and between participating states. Social cohesion and ensuring inclusive multi-ethnic societies is essential to peace and security, as well as to the prosperity of the region. We welcome progress made here. However, we share your concerns on divisive rhetoric that can result in hate incidents, and you rightly raised this during your visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ambassador, the UK is a strong supporter of your institution, which plays a vital role in early warning and conflict prevention in the case of tensions related to national minorities. We thank you and your dedicated team for all your work and wish you all the best in your future endeavours.