



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Statement

by
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegations,

It is as always a pleasure to be present at the Permanent Council. I am grateful for the opportunity to report on developments within my field of responsibility and inform Delegations about some of the HCNM activities carried out since I last appeared before the Permanent Council on 9 February this year. As I focused on the recently finalized Recommendation on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies on that occasion, I will today concentrate on highlighting some of the aspects of my country-specific engagement, including visits I made during the latter part of last year as well as this year.

In November 2005, I visited **Georgia**, including the former Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

In spite of the complex situation Georgia faces, I noticed a strong commitment on the part of the Georgian Government to protect the right of national minorities and to promote their integration into Georgian Society. The ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) by Georgia on the eve of my visit to Tbilisi, and the establishment of the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration with a focus on national minorities, are good examples in this regard.

In Tbilisi, all my interlocutors expressed satisfaction with Georgia's co-operation with the HCNM and supported my conflict prevention and civil integration activities in the country, in particular in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. The objective of the programme is to contribute to the integration of the region and its population into mainstream Georgian society. I was subsequently requested to embark upon similar efforts in the region of Kvemo-Kartli, which is mainly populated by the Azeri-speaking community.

Acting on this request, I have started the replication of some of my Samtskhe-Javakheti projects in the Kvemo-Kartli region. These projects address the key minority-related issues of concern in the region such as land privatization, media development, training in the Georgian language for various minority groups as well as elaboration of curricula for teaching Georgian as a second language and Azerbaijani as a mother-tongue for the region's minority schools.

During my meetings in Sukhumi in Abkhazia with the de facto Prime Minister, Aleksandr Ankvab, and with the de facto Foreign Minister, Sergey Shamba, I emphasised, as I did during my previous visit, that international norms and standards require that any authority controlling territory and people, even if not recognized by the international community, must respect the human rights, including minority rights, of everyone, including those of children who wish to study in their mother-tongue. I appealed to the Abkhazian leadership to show flexibility regarding teaching in the mother-tongue, specifically teaching students in the Georgian language in the Gali district, and to ensure that this matter it resolved in full accordance with international norms. I also requested the de facto Abkhazian authorities to refrain from taking any decision – such as forced recruitment into the Abkhaz Army – that may increase tensions between Tbilisi and Sukhumi.

During the period under review, I also completed the first phase of the project "Teachers for Understanding", which aims at enhancing the skills of teachers of the Georgian and the Abkhaz languages and at building confidence between the two communities, including teachers. The language-teaching methodology training carried out during the first phase of the project included approximately 100 teachers serving in 33 schools in Abkhazia. I am currently engaged in dialogue with the de facto authorities in Abkhazia about the second phase of the project. Needless to say, I keep the authorities in Tbilisi posted and in agreement with my activities

Since I last reported to the Permanent Council on country-specific issues, I have continued my engagement in **Central Asia**.

As a part of my on-going dialogue with the authorities in Ashgabad, in early March of this year, I travelled to **Turkmenistan**. During my trip, I also visited the Lebap region in the north of the country. As on previous visits, my meetings with the country's leadership focused on the issues of ensuring the rights of national minorities in the multifaceted process of nation building which is unfolding in the country. In this context, I discussed at some length the situation in the field of education, as well as the programme of resettlement for some members of minority communities located in the northern border areas. After agreement with President Niyazov, I intend to visit one of the new settlements during my next trip to the country, to get a first-hand account of the situation.

I am also encouraged by the positive response that I have received from the Turkmen authorities, as well as those of **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan**, to my invitation to attend an informal exchange of views in The Hague on 14 July 2006 on the issues of social integration and national minorities in Central Asia. This event will constitute a preparatory step in the organization of a regional ministerial conference on "Education as a means of Integration" in Central Asia in the autumn. Considering the broad concern about the standards of education in the region, my aim is to contribute to developing and sustaining the process of educational modernization in the countries of Central Asia and fostering co-operation across the region. In this context, I am looking forward to receiving an answer in the coming days from the Ministry of Education of **Uzbekistan**, whose participation in the meeting would be an important contribution to the successful outcome of this process.

A month ago, I visited **Kyrgyzstan** in connection with the round table entitled "Modernizing Police and Promoting Integration: Challenges for Multi-Ethnic Societies" that I organized jointly with the Interior Ministry of the Kyrgyz Republic. The event was an integral part of the assistance I am providing to the initiatives of the Minister of the Interior to develop policing appropriate to Kyrgyzstan's ethnically diverse society. I intend to continue actively supporting these efforts and I am convinced that they will contribute to strengthening stability and security in Kyrgyzstan.

The round table was organized with and addressed by the OSCE Senior Police Adviser, Mr. Kevin Carty, and provided the participants with critical knowledge on multi-ethnic policing issues, including the aims of this form of policing in terms of enhancing stability, improving police-community relations and thereby enhancing police intelligence operations and strengthening the conflict prevention capacity of the police service.

The round table is expected to result in the development of concrete activities aimed at enhancing police-minority co-operation in Kyrgyzstan.

Also during this visit, I met with a number of Kyrgyz senior officials and representatives of national minorities to discuss the majority-minority relations in the country. Furthermore, I travelled to Osh and the town of Uzgen to learn about recent developments in South Kyrgyzstan.

In my statement to the Permanent Council of 3 November 2005, I indicated that the March events and the ensuing developments have caused some anxieties among the national minorities. With a view to assisting the Kyrgyz authorities, I made some recommendations on how to improve the majority-minority relationship in Kyrgyzstan. I noted, during my recent visit, a rising awareness on the part of the Kyrgyz leadership of the need to address inter-ethnic problems. The developments, however, necessitates continued attention.

One such development is the unfolding conflicting views on the role of languages in the country. On the one hand, the National Commission on the State Language instructed that only Kyrgyz should be used in the work of the of public administration structures as of January 2007. On the other hand, some representatives of the Uzbek minority called for the Uzbek language to be given official language status. In my view, there is a need for both caution and dialogue in this situation. I expressed my readiness to assist the Kyrgyz authorities in developing a comprehensive and long-term policy which would lead to a gradual strengthening of the role of the State language, envisaging, *inter alia*, widespread language learning, based on modern methods, through public education and in the public service, especially at local level in some regions. Simultaneously, attention has to be paid to the position of the national minority languages so that the rights of individuals to use and develop their mother-tongue are not compromised.

I will continue to monitor the situation, particularly in the south of the country. As I informed the authorities during my visit to Bishkek, I stand ready to advise in the process of the new draft Constitution and assist the authorities in ensuring that it meets relevant international standards, and serves as an instrument of confidence-building among various ethnic communities.

Turning to **South-Eastern Europe**:

In late January, I visited **Serbia**, where I met with members of the Serbian Government, including Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, and national minority representatives. My dialogue with the Serbian Government remains open and constructive, and progress has been made in the field of protecting minority rights. In my meetings, I raised several issues related to the integration of national minorities in areas of the administration, judiciary, police and education. In South Serbia, ensuring adequate representation of national minorities in the

judiciary serves to assist the government in meeting its obligation to provide bilingual court proceedings in areas where national minorities meet a specified threshold.

As I have highlighted to the Permanent Council on earlier occasions and stressed in my dialogue with the Serbian Government, I believe that it is important for the authorities to respond in a timely manner to what is perceived as ethnically motivated incidents in Vojvodina, in order to ensure that a lack of proper reaction from law enforcement bodies does not generate an excuse for radicalisation. The police play an especially important part in such a response. In this context, I drew the attention of the Minister of the Interior to the Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies, and stated my readiness to embark on a practical discussion with the central and local authorities about the recommendations and their implementation.

The following month, I visited **Kosovo**, in order to follow up my previous visit by assessing possible ways to support both local and international efforts to promote conciliation and improve relations between the communities living in the region. Since then, I have continued to provide assistance to the on-going international efforts in support of minority rights and to ensure a framework that protects the rights of all communities living in Kosovo, especially by contributing with advice to President Ahtisaari, UN SG Special Envoy, and his team. I am actively pursuing a process aimed at reconciliation among the communities.

Later in April, I visited **Croatia** in order to discuss several issues that I have followed closely in recent years, namely, the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, proportional representation in the state administration and the judiciary; and the tendency in a number of schools in Eastern Slavonia, particularly in the Vukovar area, to segregate students along ethnic lines.

In all of these spheres, there has been some progress since my last visit to the country. Croatia's Constitutional Law on National Minorities continues to serve as an example to the region. There is a readiness on the part of the authorities to address the lack of implementation of certain aspects of that law, such as problems related to proportional representation. Indeed, several concrete steps have already been taken. I emphasized in my dialogue with the Croatian Government that further steps should be considered in order to build on this progress.

On Southeastern Europe, I would finally like to congratulate **Montenegro** on the peaceful conduct of the recent referendum. I have followed, and will continue to follow, developments as they relate to national minorities, and would also like to offer assistance to the authorities in Montenegro in order to ensure that in the course of transition to a sovereign state the needs of all of citizens are addressed.

Mr Chairman,

At the end of March, I visited **Moldova** where I met senior government officials as well as representatives of civil society. The purpose of my visit was to assess efforts made by the Moldovan Government to promote societal integration and cohesion of its diverse, multicultural society. In addition to having meetings in Chisinau, I visited the autonomous region of Gagauzia and met there with representatives of both the local administration and the opposition. I was pleased to note trust and co-operation between central and local authorities. However, more efforts are needed to strengthen the democratic foundations of the Gagauz autonomy and to promote the region's integration with the rest of Moldova. To this end, I am supporting a training project in the State language for Gagauz civil servants, which I hope will contribute to the overall efforts to strengthen the State language in Moldova and at the same time promote integration of the minority communities. Furthermore, as a following-up to my visit, I have provided the authorities with comments on the draft Audiovisual Code currently under discussion in the Moldovan parliament.

In April, I visited **Latvia** for meetings with the President and other senior officials. The nature of my dialogue with the Latvian authorities was open and constructive. President Vaira Vike-Freiberga indicated her support for my engagement in the field of education in Latvia and stressed that the Latvian Government will give serious consideration to any advice I may have.

Issues surrounding the education reform and the naturalisation process featured prominently during my visit. In order to evaluate the impact of the education reform on Russian secondary schools, I had a meeting with school principals and teachers from Riga. They were relatively positive about the effects of the education reform. However, some complaints about the lack of training for teachers and the quality of education were voiced. During my meetings with

Latvian officials, I continued to stress the need to ensure that the quality of education does not suffer as a result of the implementation of the education reform. I welcomed the establishment, in October last year, of the State Agency for Evaluation of General Education Quality and stressed that I would look forward to learning more about its activities and findings.

During my visit, I was encouraged by the decision of the Minister of Education and the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration to improve the dialogue with national minority representatives by reactivating and establishing consultative councils on integration and on education issues respectively. These are initiatives that I have highlighted in my dialogue and that I warmly welcome.

Another topic of discussion during my visit was the naturalisation process. The year 2005 was a mixed one regarding citizenship: on the one hand, naturalisation rates remained high (19,169 persons were naturalised in 2005), but on the other, opposition to naturalisation was openly displayed by nationally oriented politicians from several parties. I encouraged the Latvian authorities to accelerate the naturalisation process in the country, bearing in mind that the number of non-citizens still remains high. I also stressed the need for the government to pay special attention to non-citizens who find it difficult to meet the present naturalisation requirements, especially the written language test, due to their age or education, as well as to provide additional resources and funds with a view to strengthening the capabilities of the Naturalisation Board in handling the growing number of applications in an orderly and timely manner.

In the context of my on-going dialogue with the Russian authorities, I paid a visit to **Moscow** in January 2006. I had an interesting and substantial exchange of views with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and other senior officials of the Russian Federation on a broad spectrum of issues affecting majority-minority relations in the OSCE region. The Russian side took the opportunity to inform me about the inter-ethnic situation in the Russian Federation, including the legislative initiatives to draw up a new nationalities policy concept, and developments in the region of the North Caucasus. I was pleased to learn about the Russian Government's approach to draft the new nationalities policy concept in an inclusive and consultative manner and to closely involve regional administrations in the process.

I was also informed by my Russian interlocutors that the Government of the Russian Federation attaches particular priority to maintaining security and fostering socio-economic development in the region of the North Caucasus. In my view, this task can be significantly assisted by a well thought-out ethnic policy that seeks to promote harmonious relations between various ethnic groups and to facilitate communication and co-operation between the authorities, including the law enforcement agencies, and local communities. In my meetings with Russian policy-makers and civil society I was encouraged by their recognition of the challenges and the authorities' resolve to address these issues with vigour and determination.

Finally Mr Chairman, next week, at the annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels I intend to present the **study I have commissioned on the matter of integration policies in diverse societies**. I informed the Permanent Council on 9 February of my decision to commission such a study at the request of the Parliamentary Assembly, and elaborated on that decision to the Assembly session in Vienna in February. Describing various aspects of integration policies, and highlighting good practices in the process, my hope is that the report will serve as inspiration to a continued discussion and exchange of experience among participating States.

I thank you for your attention.