



**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,

My last address to the Permanent Council was on the 12th of May this year. Since then, my activities have covered a broad spectrum and I would like to inform the PC of these today.

Two weeks ago, I undertook a visit to **Kyrgyzstan** for meetings with the President, the Prime Minister and other officials following the formation of the new Government after the Presidential elections held in July. During my visit I also travelled to the southern region of Osh for discussions with local officials and representatives of national minorities.

Inter-ethnic relations in the country have not been immune to the economic, social and political pressures unleashed by the recent developments in Kyrgyzstan. Many within the national minority communities of Kyrgyzstan are still anxious about their future, including their personal safety, and are choosing to leave the country. Although the presidential election and the formation of the new Cabinet have promoted some sense of stability among national minorities, these positive trends need to be reinforced by increased focus on inter-ethnic issues and a consistent policy of national integration and social cohesion in the country.

The effective participation of the national minority communities in the forthcoming process of the Constitutional amendments is particularly vital as any genuinely democratic constitution-making must be inclusive and representative. I recommended the authorities in Bishkek to ensure a good level of representation for national minorities in the Constitutional Convention and opportunities for those outside the process to have a say. I expressed my readiness to assist Kyrgyzstan in this important endeavour.

My political engagement will be underpinned by practical initiatives in a variety of areas designed to encourage a deeper process of integration in Kyrgyzstan. I will continue supporting the reforms promoting integration through education and activities aimed at the introduction of multi-ethnic policing practices in the police service of Kyrgyzstan.

In October, I also travelled to **Kazakhstan** for discussions with officials and representatives of national minorities. During the visit I had a chance to familiarize myself with the implementation process of the Language Development Programme. I am encouraged by the Kazakhstan Government's assurances that it intends to adopt a balanced and gradual approach to the strengthening of the role of the State language with a special emphasis on education and a more intensive promotion of the official language and languages of national minorities. I am convinced that education and the learning of languages have a key role to play in any strategy aimed at furthering social cohesion in a multi-ethnic country.

Over the past two years I have supported a project promoting multilingual education in the South Kazakhstan region. The project is intended to raise the State and/or official language skills of final-year student in the Uzbek-language schools in order to enhance their performance in the State entrance examinations for admission to institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan. After two years of project implementation in two Uzbek-language schools, the rate of successful university applications and the results achieved in the State entrance examinations have improved considerably.

It is my strong belief that such an approach holds promise for the future of Kazakhstan, and I look forward to working closely with the authorities on the extension of this initiative to other schools and in providing expertise and support to the Ministry of Education and Science as well as to the State Languages Committee set up earlier this year.

In May, I visited **Turkmenistan** for meetings with the President and other officials. I also travelled to the region of Dashoguz for discussions with local officials during my visit. Over the last couple of years, my dialogue with the Turkmen authorities has focused on finding the right balance between legitimate educational and linguistic concerns of the majority and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. I am committed to continuing and broadening my engagement in Turkmenistan and hope to visit the country again in the near future.

In June, I visited **Ukraine**, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. A priority of my visit was the discussion of minority related legislation, including language legislation, to see how I can contribute to the Ukrainian Government's efforts to develop its legislation in line

with European standards. I am glad that work is proceeding on the key draft laws on language and on minorities. My dialogue remains active and I look forward to increased cooperation with Ukraine in this area.

Inter-ethnic relations in Crimea and issues related to the return and integration of the Crimean Tatars continue to be of concern to me. During my visit there, my discussions focused on the controversial land issue as well as the draft law on the restitution of rights of formerly deported people. I share the view of the Ukrainian Government that these problems need to be resolved within a wider economic context including the settlement of the Crimean Tatars and the economic development of the Crimean region and I support the Government's position that additional international financial assistance would substantially facilitate this process.

As a result of my visit, I am currently preparing a project aimed at the promotion of mutual understanding between the communities on the Crimean peninsula.

Last week, I visited **Estonia** where I met senior government officials, including the Foreign Minister and the Chairman and Members of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee. I also visited Ida-Virumaa county, a region populated mainly by the Russian minority, where I met representatives of local authorities and national minorities of the region.

During the visit, I saw evidence of an improvement in inter-ethnic relations. I was pleased to note the extent to which non-citizens also have taken part in the local elections held on 16 October. The voting behaviour of non-citizens and Russian-speaking citizens appeared to be determined primarily by the economic programmes of the competing parties rather than their policies on ethnic and minority issues.

I was pleased to notice a significant improvement in the socio-economic situation in the Narva region. I also noted a more positive attitude than was previously the case of students, parents and teachers in Russian schools towards the start of the education reform. I welcome the debate in society with regard to the preparations for the start of the reform and its implementation. I stressed the need for more teacher training, including courses in the Estonian language and in teaching methodologies. This will help to ensure that the quality of

education does not suffer as a result of the increase in the proportion of Estonian language instruction in Russian-medium schools and that the teaching staff of schools continue to reflect the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Estonian society.

The legislative and administrative steps taken by the Estonian Government in order to facilitate the naturalization process have my full support. However, I indicated that further positive measures are needed to speed up naturalization and to make the process more accessible for elderly citizenship applicants.

Mr. Chairman,

Since my last appearance before the Permanent Council two more countries – **Latvia** and **Georgia** – have ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). The Latvian Parliament ratified the FCNM on 26 May and the Georgian Parliament on 13 October.

I welcome the ratification of the FCNM by both countries.

My visit to **Latvia** at the beginning of June, took place just a few days after the ratification of the FCNM. Inevitably, the ratification was the main topic of my discussions with the Latvian authorities, in particular the wording of the Declaration of Parliament which accompanied the ratification. I also discussed education reform and the naturalization process.

During my meetings with my Latvian interlocutors, I stressed the importance of ensuring that the implementation of the Framework Convention is inclusive, in accordance with the objective and purpose of the Convention, and that there should be no discrimination between different groups of citizens.

I urged the Latvian Government to accelerate the naturalization process, bearing in mind that the number of non-citizens remains high.

I noted the pragmatic approach taken by the Latvian authorities with regard to the implementation of the reform of the Russian secondary schools to the effect that at least 60 %

of the lecture time should be carried out in the Latvian language. I stressed that the Government should take into consideration the specific situation of each school to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised.

In **Georgia**, I continue the implementation of my “Conflict Prevention and Integration Programme for Samtskhe-Javakheti”, a programme which the HCNM has been engaged in since April 2003 and which is aimed at the integration of the Armenian minority into Georgian political, social and cultural life. Within the framework of this Programme, I am endeavouring to support the integration of this region into mainstream Georgian society by means such as increasing the level of knowledge of the Georgian language among civil servants in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region; improving the effectiveness of the teaching of the Georgian language to minority students in Samtskhe-Javakheti; improving the information flows from minority regions to the centre and vice versa and increasing the access to national television news.

The Language Training Project for Civil Servants, teaching various groups of civil servants Georgian, has currently instructed more than 500 civil servants, and I expect this number to grow by several hundreds by the end of the Programme. I have also established “language houses” in the towns of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, where local inhabitants can read press coverage and watch movies in Georgian as well as and take advantage of a free translation service.

I have continued my involvement in Abkhazia, where over the past years I have worked with the de facto authorities in Sukhumi in order to ensure the right of Georgian students in the Gali district of Abkhazia to education in their mother tongue. In August 2004 I started the implementation of the project “Teachers for Understanding”, which aims at enhancing the skills of teachers of the Georgian and the Abkhaz languages in the districts of Gali, Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira. The project should also help to build confidence between the two communities, in particular between teachers.

On September 29, I visited **Bucharest** at the invitation of the Romanian Foreign Minister. The main purpose of the trip was to discuss the Draft Law on the Statute of National Minorities prepared by the Romanian authorities. The Draft Law is an important document

which will have long-term political repercussions not only for majority-minority relations within Romania but also for Romania's relations with neighbouring States. I have made an assessment of the Draft and suggested a number of amendments aimed at reducing some of its technical and political shortfalls. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the Draft Law demonstrates a strong commitment by the Romanian State to support national minorities and reinforces Romania's standing as a democratic state.

I continue to follow the issue of the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in **Croatia** closely, in particular the provisions regarding education and equitable representation of minorities in administration and the judiciary, as well as different aspects of refugee return. In the area of education, I remain concerned about the tendency of ethnic separation of students in a number of schools in Eastern Slavonia, particularly in the Vukovar area.

The focus of my work in **Serbia and Montenegro** has concentrated on the implementation of the State Union Law on National Minorities and the issue of education as a tool of long-term conflict prevention in South Serbia. In addition, I have continued to closely follow the situations in both Vojvodina and South Serbia since my visit there in the spring. During my last visit to the PC, I noted that the situation in Vojvodina had been stable and the number of inter-ethnic incidents reported in 2004 had decreased. I had also urged the authorities to respond to such incidents in a timely manner to ensure that a lack of proper reaction from law enforcement bodies did not lead to an opportunity for radicalisation. Recently, several potentially ethnically-related incidents have caused some concern on the part of authorities in both Hungary and Serbia and the issue has recently been raised in the European Parliament. I continue my commitment to follow up my earlier recommendations, and will monitor developments closely.

Since my visit to **Kosovo** in May, I have been exploring possible ways to support both local and international efforts to promote a peaceful, viable and stable future for Kosovo. With status talks now likely to begin, I am actively investigating to what extent I can support efforts in Kosovo to improve the inter-ethnic relations.

On 15 July, the Parliament of the **F.Y. Republic of Macedonia** adopted a law on the use of flags of communities in Macedonia. This important piece of legislation, for which I submitted a number of recommendations in the early stages of its drafting to the relevant authorities, contributes to the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

I also continue to follow developments in other areas of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, particularly the requirement of equitable representation of all communities in public services. In close consultation with the OSCE Mission and other representatives of the international community in Skopje, I have continued to work on the preparation of a Road Map which may serve as a strategy guideline for further efforts by the Macedonian authorities in this regard.

Each time I am here I take the opportunity to briefly mention the South-East European (SEEU) University, established under the auspices of the HCNM, which I continue to support. It is, by all accounts, a successful, genuinely multilingual and multicultural institution and a model university for Macedonia and the region. I have continued to provide the Ministry of Education with expert advice on the new State University in Tetovo in order to ensure that this university maintains a consistent and transparent approach toward its accreditation process and becomes a quality institution of higher education.

In addition to my engagement in individual countries the HCNM has continued further development of thematic issues. I have intensified my already close cooperation with the Council of Europe, in line with the joint conclusions agreed by the OSCE and the Council of Europe this spring. My office has contributed to the timely and interesting debate launched by the Slovenian Chairmanship on the issue of integration. I have also had a dialogue with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on the issue of so-called “new minorities”, without prejudice to my mandate. And, I have set up an expert group to produce recommendations on **policing in multi-ethnic societies**. In a number of States, I have encountered the absence of institutional mechanisms to support interaction and cooperation between the police and persons belonging to national minorities. In combination with the lack of appropriate training for operations in a multi-ethnic society, an often monoethnic composition of the police service and evidence of discriminatory practices, the police have generated negative reactions among minorities in a number of countries and have even become a conflict catalyst. In contrast, I have seen in other States how efforts to make the police service more

representative of the community it serves and enhance communication between the police and national minority communities have not only strengthened inter-ethnic relations but also increased the operational effectiveness of the police.

Reflecting this important role of the police, the HCNM (in close co-operation with the Strategic Police Matters Unit in the OSCE Secretariat) together with the international organizations directly responsible, engaged in an analysis of the relevant international standards and practices in the area of policing with a view to elaborating practical recommendations/guidelines on policing in multi-ethnic societies. To this end, I have brought together a group of internationally recognized independent experts comprising representatives of relevant international organizations and consultants and non-governmental actors with particular expertise in this field. Two initial meeting of experts were convened in June and October 2005 with a further expert meeting to discuss a set of draft Recommendations/Guidelines on Policing in Multi-ethnic Societies planned for December 2005. Early next year, I hope to be able to endorse and make public the recommendations to be adopted by these experts for a wide implementation in the OSCE area.