



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

Address by
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[Check against delivery]

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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today. Since my last address to the Permanent Council in November last year, my travels have taken me to many different parts of the OSCE region, from the Baltic region, East and South-East Europe to Central Asia. At the same time, I have invested considerable resources in advancing my Institution's thematic work, both in terms of developing and launching a new set of Guidelines - *The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age* – and promoting the implementation of the Institution's whole thematic toolbox at the local level to ensure its ownership by local stakeholders and its usage in accordance with specific contexts and needs. Programmatic work continues to be an integral part of my Institution's long-term engagement with the participating States and is often a direct outcome of the agreements and commitments that follow my country visits.

In November 2018, my Institution celebrated the 25th anniversary of the appointment of the first High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). The event to mark this occasion was held at the Peace Palace in The Hague in conjunction with the 2018 Max van der Stoep Award ceremony: an award which is assigned every two years to a person, group or institution for extraordinary and outstanding achievements in improving the position of national minorities. I am grateful that several of your delegations graced us with their presence on this important day – as a testament of the support given by your States to successive High Commissioners during this last quarter of a century of joint work. The 25th anniversary was more than a celebration: it also provided an opportunity to take stock of the work of the High Commissioner in an international landscape that is continuously evolving. A photo exhibition portraying some of the milestones during the last 25 years, together with a booklet published especially for the occasion with contributions from successive High Commissioners, clearly revealed an unwavering adherence to the original mandate. At the same time, an evolution in the High Commissioner's working methods to better reflect the changing nature of minority-related issues over time was also visible. Minority-related issues feature prominently in internal debates within participating States, often also affecting bilateral relations. Investing in promoting principles, as articulated in my Institution's Guidelines and Recommendations, that can then be adapted to local contexts has, over time,

emerged as a constructive way forward. Therefore, I intend to focus on the expansion and further promotion of our thematic work also in the time to come.

Let me revisit the Max van der Stoel Award ceremony, which I mentioned earlier. To my great pleasure, in 2018 the Max van der Stoel Award jury decided to present the prize to an informal group of students – girls and boys – from the town of Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina for their inspiring and courageous opposition to ethnic segregation in school. Throughout 2016, they vigorously campaigned against a decision by the education authorities to separate students based on ethno-centric curricula in line with the “two schools under one roof” model prevalent in the country. Practices such as this persistently reinforce ethnic divisions and are rooted in the structural legacies of the armed conflict of 1992 to 1995 as well as the subsequent constitutional framework laid out in the Dayton Peace Agreement. While in the immediate post-war period specific measures were indeed a necessary compromise to avoid a relapse into conflict, 22 years later this is no longer warranted. The students of Jajce understood that and took action to reverse a situation that only serves to cement divisions in society. Instead of sitting idly on the sidelines, they advocated for – and managed to achieve – an approach that takes into account the differences and sensitivities surrounding the school curricula, while firmly rejecting classroom segregation. I strongly believe that integrated and multilingual education is a fundamental recipe for building inclusive societies that are resilient to crisis and conflict. This youth-driven, grass-roots-level initiative – which used the well-fitting motto “segregation is a bad investment” – perfectly reflects these values. Should you be interested in learning more about this courageous group of young people, a short film about them and their initiative can be viewed on our website.

Such stories are refreshing. Because of the nature of our work, we are all too often confronted with the negative fall-out of inter-ethnic tensions. But this biennial award is an occasion to explore and highlight positive stories as well, which can serve as an inspiration to others. Of course, there are no ready-made blueprints for success. Solutions must fit the context. However, learning from, and reflecting on, what has worked elsewhere and abstracting that into principles – which my Institution then distils into Recommendations or Guidelines – has proved to be very useful. The reporting period has seen a flurry of activity in this field. As I mentioned in my introduction, my Institution developed - and in February, in co-operation with the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, launched - the ninth addition to the current set of OSCE HCNM thematic Guidelines and Recommendations produced over the last 25 years: *The Tallinn*

Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age. The decision to hold the event in Estonia was a direct follow-up to my exchange with the President of Estonia during my first visit to the country in my current capacity nearly a year ago.

Named after Estonia's capital, which is a pioneer in the use and promotion of digital technologies, *The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age* emanated from the observation that the fundamental transformations in the media landscape during the past decade have multiplied opportunities to access an abundance of diverse content, as well as tools for individualized and interactive participation in public debate. The ability of media to divulge information and to reach and connect people has been exponentially amplified. So too has its potential to defuse or, alternatively, ignite conflict. This is particularly relevant for diverse societies. In diverse societies, where minorities and majorities live side by side, the media can offer all groups in society enhanced opportunities to shape their own identities and explore different viewpoints. As media increasingly transcends borders, minorities can easily form transnational networks, which in turn can play a key role in supporting the preservation of cultures and traditions. Regrettably, however, the media also carries risks for peace and stability. Transnational networks involving minorities spread across various States have the potential to interfere in, and possibly damage, bilateral relations. The new media carries the risk of political manipulation, and minorities can be instrumentalized. A rise in inflammatory language in the global political discourse has led to the spread of xenophobic and racist language.

These Guidelines appeal to the responsibility and the interest of States to ensure that the media and the opportunities it offers are used in a way that minimizes these risks and rather catalyses the integration of diverse societies. The proposed recipe, crystallized in 37 concrete recommendations, is, among others, a mix of multilingualism reflecting the linguistic diversity in society; the participation of various groups, including minorities, in media content production and delivery; and restraint by States in their interference in other countries' affairs. As in other recent Guidelines and Recommendations issued by my Institution, specific attention has been devoted to mainstreaming gender. As such, issues such as the equal participation and representation of women, including those with a minority background, in the media, or protection measures to prevent and counter gender-based violence taking place on these platforms, feature prominently throughout the Tallinn Guidelines.

I appreciated the interest and support of the OSCE participating States, which was apparent in the high attendance and active participation of a number of representatives at the launch event, both in person and via the online platform created to reflect the digital spirit of the Guidelines. I also welcome, and will follow-up on, the interest expressed by some participating States to host country-level events to raise awareness about, and to encourage the practical application of, these Guidelines.

Another key priority of my Institution is to foster the accessibility and user-friendliness of our Recommendations and Guidelines, which are often translated into many languages, and to promote them locally, through roundtables and other events which target local officials. It is only when the principles enshrined in them are operationalized and integrated in policies and practices that we can achieve real impact. In the reporting period, for example, my office held several roundtables in Ukraine covering a number of HCNM's thematic Recommendations on education, participation in public life, inter-State relations and broader social integration. In Moldova, my office, in partnership with the Moldovan Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, organized an expert workshop for education specialists to disseminate good practices in multilingual education from within the OSCE region. In Georgia, we recently contributed to a training module on hate crime, organized by ODIHR and targeting the police and officials of the Ministry of the Interior, by presenting *The Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies* and *The Recommendations on Access to Justice*.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is only when engaging with participating States that the norms and commitments enshrined in my Institution's thematic work are translated into practice. To that end, country visits are a key tool. The last few months have taken me to several areas of the OSCE region, where I met with representatives of minorities, government officials and a variety of other interlocutors. In many contexts, I continue witnessing a strong degree of polarization around issues such as education, use of language and citizenship. On the latter, I wish to recall the language of *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations in Inter-State Relations*. Recommendation 11 states that: "States may take preferred linguistic competencies and cultural, historical or familial ties into account in their decision to grant citizenship to individuals abroad. States

should, however, ensure that such a conferral of citizenship respects the principles of friendly, including neighbourly, relations and territorial sovereignty, and should refrain from conferring citizenship *en masse*, even if dual citizenship is allowed by the State of residence.” I regret that these principles are not always taken into account.

Allow me to give you a brief overview of my visits in chronological order.

In November last year, I visited **Turkmenistan**, travelling to Ashgabat and the province of Dashoguz, which hosts a sizeable ethnic Uzbek population. I noted a degree of openness among the authorities to discuss issues related to the inter-ethnic situation in the country and their readiness to co-operate with my Institution. In the capital, I co-organized, together with the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, a roundtable on *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*. This event was meant to familiarize representatives of the main governmental institutions relevant to my mandate with international and OSCE standards on minority protection and best practices on integration policies and inform their work on implementing the Human Rights Action Plan and other policies related to inter-ethnic relations.

I welcome the fact that the National Human Rights Plan includes policies related to the integration of diverse societies and the situation of national minorities. I called on the authorities to step up efforts to implement the relevant measures of the National Human Rights Action Plan on the protection and promotion of the right of persons belonging to national minorities to be educated in their mother tongue and to their participation in public life. These measures could include introducing mother-tongue classes in schools in those areas that are densely populated by minorities. For instance, in Dashoguz I visited schools which offer classes in foreign languages, but not in Uzbek – the mother tongue for many pupils. Access to mother-tongue education is not only a fundamental right, but also, as the experience of my Institution shows, it provides the basis for a more proficient acquisition of the State language at school. I also prompted the authorities to allow the opening and registering of minority associations and cultural centres to enable persons belonging to national minorities to preserve and develop their culture and traditions. I also encouraged a more active participation by Turkmenistan’s representatives in our Central Asia Education Programme – a long-standing effort aimed at building expertise through teacher training, pilot multilingual education programmes, and the exchange of experiences in Central Asia and Mongolia.

In **Estonia**, in addition to launching the Tallinn Guidelines, I engaged with the Government, minority representatives, civil society, and education professionals, both in the capital as well as in Narva. This regional visit complemented my first assessment of Estonia's minority-related situation, following my first visit to the country in my current capacity in June 2018. In general, I continued to see positive trends in the integration of Estonian society that are evidenced in areas such as the media, citizenship, language and education.

In Narva specifically, minority interlocutors noted increased attention from the Government vis-à-vis the region, which carries a significant symbolic value. The recent relocation of the office of Estonia's Integration Foundation and the opening of the Estonian Language House in Narva are appreciated locally. My interlocutors, including ethnic Russians, highlighted the importance and primacy of the local Narva identity, which transcends ethnic belonging and informs pluralistic and inclusive self-identification. This is particularly evident among the younger generation, which bodes well for the future.

At the same time, socio-economic inequalities and social distance between different ethnicities still requires additional efforts on the part of the Government. I encouraged both the former and the incoming Government to pay closer attention to the existing apprehensions among the Russian-speaking community about the future of Russian-language education, and pointed to the need for better outreach, closer consultations, and the inclusion of a broader array of stakeholders in the decision-making process. In particular, I took note of repeated references to a "united Estonian-language school" in many party programmes in the pre-election context. I noted that the degree of ambiguity with regard to what this may entail fuels fears about the future of minority-language education. I encouraged the authorities to take into consideration regional specificities with regard to the ethnic composition of society and create opportunities for minority representatives to participate in the decision-making process of future policies in this field.

During my first visit to **Latvia** in my current capacity, which took place in March, I engaged with a broad range of interlocutors both in Riga as well as in Daugavpils; an area with a sizeable concentration of minorities in the south-east of the country.

On the matter of citizenship, I took note of a decrease in the number of non-citizens from 29 per cent in 1995 to 10.7 per cent in 2019. In this context, I was encouraged by the President's initiative to grant automatic citizenship to the newly-born children of non-citizens and

welcome the recent adoption of the relevant draft law the Saeima in the first reading. While I recognize that this measure alone will not solve the issue of non-citizenship, I view it as a positive step towards the resolution of this long-standing matter, and as having a symbolic value for minorities. I encouraged the authorities take additional steps to further facilitate and incentivize naturalization, especially for the younger generations, which would be beneficial in the long term.

With regard to the education reforms launched in 2018 and their implications for national minorities, I recognize the intended objectives behind the reorganization and optimization of the school system. At the same time, I reiterated my position that the reform constitutes a departure from a previously well-functioning model of bilingual education, which was based on the advice of my institution. Going forward, it is crucial to proceed with the implementation of the reform in a way that is inclusive and which takes into consideration the concerns of national minorities who will be affected by it. In this regard, I encouraged effective communication and dialogue with minority communities to reduce the risk of misunderstandings and rumours. I also urged the authorities to avoid giving any impression that the reform is unduly penalizing or disproportionately impacting national minorities.

As to the language policy, I highlighted the importance of a pragmatic approach by pursuing a balance between promoting the State language and safeguarding minorities' languages through positive means and incentives, rather than punitive measures, as the latter may undermine any efforts to increase the use of the State language as a tool for integration. In Latvia, I also looked into other matters related to the integration of society, such as inclusive public spaces and symbols.

Intercommunity relations, participation in public life, education and language feature high on my agenda, also in South-Eastern Europe. In April, I visited various locations in the region to assess developments in all of these dimensions, engage with relevant stakeholders, and renew and refine my institution's support.

In **Pristina**, I found that the stalemate in the dialogue with Belgrade, the imposition of tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a confrontational attitude towards the international community all tend to increase political uncertainty, to the detriment of relations among communities. This was confirmed in my meetings with various

institutional representatives, including those from non-majority communities. Against this backdrop, I stressed the importance of resuming talks with Belgrade as well as safeguarding rights and promoting the participation and representation of non-majority communities, with particular reference to areas such as public employment, language, education and access to justice. I also recalled the need to ensure the meaningful participation and representation of women from non-majority communities in the public sector, as well as to overcome any additional obstacles that may be gender-conditioned.

During my visit, I met with key players engaged in the formulation of education and language policies. I continue to receive information that the knowledge of official languages requires further investment and focus. I encouraged policymakers in the field of education to develop opportunities not only for learning the Serbian language, but also for the Kosovo Serb communities to learn the Albanian language, as part of the education system. In response to continued complaints about the quality of available translation services, I made a well-received suggestion of opening an institute of Slavic studies that would, with immediate effect, serve to improve the existing translation capacities. I intend to follow up on this initiative, in close co-operation with the OSCE field operation there.

Language acquisition remains a priority area for my Institution's programmatic work. Over the past few years, my office has been actively engaged in promoting the learning of the official language(s) by municipal officials and has developed dedicated teaching materials jointly with the European Center for Minority Issues Kosovo (ECMI Kosovo) and the Office of the Language Commissioner for this purpose. In an effort to ensure a smooth transition to local ownership, as well as the sustainability of the programme within local institutions, I have now handed over the materials to the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, which will take over the management of the programme in close co-operation with the Office of the Language Commissioner.

In **Serbia**, I chaired the 11th meeting of the Stakeholders' Committee of the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad. The multi-ethnic and bilingual Bujanovac Department constitutes a prominent example of how domestic and international actors can join forces to successfully address specific local needs – in this case, quality education opportunities in the minority's mother tongue and in the State language. As such, the Bujanovac Department is an essential part of my engagement in

education in the region. I am pleased to report that this meeting was co-chaired by Serbia's Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development, for the first time in his current capacity. While more remains to be done to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Department, the discussion reflected the commitment of all Stakeholders in preserving its role to foster interaction and integration between communities, while guaranteeing that its students are equipped with quality education in a wide range of subjects. To that end, the Stakeholders agreed to consider further expanding the programmes offered, as also requested by the students during my exchange with them.

In **North Macedonia**, I witnessed the first steps in the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, which solved a long-standing dispute. I noted how this agreement can contribute to regional stability, while providing an example for other governments entangled in bilateral disputes. The agreement also seems to have created positive momentum in the country, including in the area of inter-ethnic relations, and has boosted reforms.

In my meetings with Government officials in Skopje, I conveyed the need to fight against segregation in schools and to step up efforts towards integrated education and multiculturalism to form the basis for a more cohesive society. I also mentioned the need to look at history through multiple perspectives, particularly in diverse societies where there might be competing narratives about past events.

With reference to the new legislation on the use of languages, I underlined the need to balance efforts to foster linguistic diversity, including by nurturing one's mother tongue, with the promotion of shared, common languages, allowing for effective communication between different groups in society. I called for a pragmatic implementation of the Law on the Use of Languages so that the wider public perceives linguistic pluralism in education and the public services as an issue that does not affect existing rights, but rather enriches all. As part of my Institution's focus on language acquisition and with a view to pre-empt a divide caused by insufficient linguistic capabilities, I have embarked on creating a Macedonian-Albanian phrasebook together with Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje. In the same vein as previous initiatives carried out by my Institution, this phrasebook would address a well-known gap in the availability of language learning materials, thus contributing towards enhancing interaction among members of the two largest communities in the country.

Last week, I visited **Ukraine** for the fourth time since I took up my current mandate.

In the current context of ongoing political changes and reforms in a number of areas, including language policy, education broadcasting, decentralization and the reform in the civil service, I stressed with all my interlocutors the need to proceed in a way that takes into account the country's rich diversity. I encouraged inclusive consultations with all relevant groups at every step to build acceptance and to ensure sustainability and ownership of decision-making processes.

More specifically, with regards to the recent promulgation of the law "On ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as a State language", as in any OSCE participating State, I support efforts to promote the knowledge of the State language as a key tool to facilitate integration and social cohesion. I also took note of concerns expressed by minority representatives that the law and its implementation may undermine their language rights. In this regard, I urged the relevant authorities to apply a gradual approach in the implementation process, taking into account the perceptions and interests of national minorities and using incentives rather than punitive measures. It is equally vital for social cohesion that these efforts are carried out in a balanced manner. In that sense, I acknowledged the authorities' commitment to complement the law with special legislation that should provide adequate guarantees for the protection and use of minority languages and possibly pave the way for a differentiated and decentralized language policy implementation. I will continue to closely follow further developments and stand ready to assist the Government and the Verkhovna Rada with the next steps.

With regard to education reforms, I welcome the extension of the implementation period of Article 7 of the Education law until 2023. At the same time, a differentiated treatment of the EU and non-EU languages, including in the draft law on General Secondary Education, remains a concern and should be addressed in line with the opinion of the Venice Commission.

Given Ukraine's rich diversity, I continued reiterating the need to enhance the institutional framework to deal with minority issues. I took note of the intention to follow my recommendation to set up a specific institution under the Cabinet of Ministers and possibly co-ordinated by the Ministry of Culture. Indeed, a centralized body that also includes

minority representatives, to co-ordinate the work related to minority issues, can offer an effective mechanism to manage a complex array of issues related to inter-ethnic relations and the integration of Ukraine's society.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the reporting period, I also maintained and further capitalized on the strong co-operation my Institution enjoys with a range of institutional partners. For example, I visited the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in January 2019 and met with senior officials with the aim of strengthening our ongoing co-operation. I also exchanged views with members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the challenges of managing diversity in the OSCE region and the relevance of international actors in the current context. The closely interlinked thematic and geographic activities of the two organizations make co-operation both essential and practical to ensure that our roles are complementary and to maintain consistency in the regional approaches to minority rights. Similarly, a few weeks ago I also addressed the European Regional Forum on Minority Issues at the European Parliament in Brussels, and I am in close contact with the United Nations to prepare for the second edition of an event which my Institution will be hosting at the United Nations in New York, in co-operation with the 2019 Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE.

The panel discussion that we are organizing, also with the warm encouragement of UN Secretary-General Guterres, is a direct follow-up to last year's panel discussion and aims to explore ways to strengthen the contribution of regional organizations under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter to conflict prevention with a particular focus on sustainable integration of diverse societies. Last year's event saw the active participation of a number of regional organizations, and I am hoping to expand their representation this year. Special emphasis will, this time, be placed on the role and inclusion of youth in peace and security efforts. I warmly encourage the participation of your delegations in New York in this event, which will take place on 19 July in the margins of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Invitations will be shared in due course.

Further on my future plans, I will take the opportunity of this event in New York to proceed with a country visit to the United States, as a follow-up to last year's visit. From there, I will travel to the Russian Federation to continue the fruitful discussion that started last October and to expand my assessment of the situation in the country, through a visit to a region. My plans will also take me to Central Asia, where I will visit Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. I am grateful to you and your capital cities for your continued assistance in facilitating these country visits.

On 14 November this year we will also be celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the *Lund Guidelines on the Participation of Minorities in Public Life* at an event that will address issues of political representation as well as economic participation and cross-border cooperation, and will offer a specific gender angle. With the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security coming up next year, we should do much more to promote the *right* of women, including minority women, to their full and effective participation in public life, while also acknowledging the *gains* that such participation generates, including in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building. This is true both for majority and minority women. In the case of minority women, however, gender intersects with other social categories of identity, such as ethnicity and language, often exposing them to double discrimination. I regularly see this in my work: my interlocutors, both among State officials and within minority groups, are mostly men. In the OSCE – we should admit – we are not doing much better. Yet the absence of women at the table means that we risk missing out on the opportunity to tap into the talents and to hear and reflect the needs and the views of all members of society and that full ownership of political decisions, processes and negotiations will never be fully achieved. That, however, is a fundamental prerequisite to social cohesion, and conflict prevention.

I have more actively factored this growing realization in my daily work. In addition to addressing gender-specific considerations more systematically in my engagements with participating States and regularly mainstreaming gender in my Institution's thematic work, I have also encouraged office-wide discussions and inward-looking exercises to assess gender awareness within the HCNM office, and to track behavioural patterns among colleagues with relevance to the equal participation and representation of women and men in our work environment. This is a small contribution to the ultimate objective of achieving full gender equality also in the OSCE as an organization, including at senior level. Meetings like this one

show that there is still room for improvement in this regard. Only through the meaningful participation of all under-represented groups, including women and youth, can we talk of real and sustainable inclusion. And only through integration and inclusion will diverse societies be truly resilient to conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am available to answer your questions now.