



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**High Commissioner on National Minorities**

address by

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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

**to the 1431st Plenary meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

**[Check against delivery]**

Vienna, 6 July 2023

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to all of you, and to the authorities of the participating States that you represent, for your open and constructive dialogue and excellent co-operation with my institution to support the implementation of my mandate. I am also grateful for the strong and close co-operation I have enjoyed with Secretary General Helga Schmid, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Director Matteo Mecacci, the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) Teresa Ribeiro, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General Roberto Montella, as well as with the OSCE Secretariat and the OSCE field operations. I would also like to recognize the role of the 2023 OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia His Excellency Bujar Osmani: I am grateful to the CiO of North Macedonia for their leadership. In these challenging times, with a continuously shrinking space for multilateralism, concerted efforts must be made to preserve all and any avenues that facilitate dialogue for peace and protect fundamental rights. Our very future depends on international co-operation and we must do all we can to realize this by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and by facilitating the peaceful co-existence of people within and between States.

I recognize that the war against Ukraine has cost lives and livelihoods, has uprooted scores of people and has divided the OSCE community and the international community at large. The situation in Ukraine has continued to impact the work of my institution as well as the activities of all OSCE institutions across the board. Despite these challenges, I carried forward my duties to the extent that it was possible. I appreciated the opportunity for a sobering, honest dialogue on how we as the OSCE can further mobilize our resources to assist Ukraine and to help end the war.

During the first half of the year, I undertook official visits, in chronological order, to Albania, Finland, the Holy See, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. I continued my dialogue with several other participating States and made progress on our programmatic work. I have also had the opportunity to interact with other international actors through my constructive dialogue on various multilateral platforms, where I discussed matters pertaining to my mandate. I want to

express my sincere gratitude for the productive exchanges that allowed me to carry forward my work and I thank everyone for their warm welcome during these engagements.

Strengthening social cohesion to prevent conflicts and building peaceful and resilient societies has remained central in all my public and confidential communications since I assumed my mandate.

I also continued advancing the conflict prevention work of my mandate, and addressing social problems that can lead to conflicts and tensions within society, such as intolerance, hate speech and discrimination.

This year marks the 30th anniversary since the first OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the renowned Dutch statesman Max van der Stoel, assumed his duties. In these three decades since the office was established in The Hague, six successive High Commissioners have focused on guiding the OSCE participating States to increase the integration of society. Social cohesion starts with designing inclusive legislation and policies and building accountable and responsible institutions that maintain effective consultation mechanisms which help national minorities address matters that affect them. Pursuing balanced integration policies is a key to the success of these efforts. Each participating State has implemented this advice differently, based on their own specific domestic contexts, and with varying degrees of success. This legacy presents us with a unique body of work to reflect on and, most importantly, to learn from each other's practices and shortcomings. From this perspective, let me share some of my observations concerning the participating States which I have engaged with since I last addressed the Permanent Council in December 2022, in alphabetical order.

My first visit this year, in January, was to Albania. In Tirana, I had the opportunity to learn about the Ministry of Education's regional initiatives and good co-operation on primary education with Albania's neighbours. I emphasized the link between quality education and the inclusion of national minorities. I was pleased to meet with the staff of INSTAT, the statistics office in Albania, to learn more about their preparations for the upcoming census, such as the pilot census and communications and outreach strategies, including to children in schools. I

appreciate these efforts to ensure awareness and the inclusion of national minorities as well as a recognition of the right to self-identification in this important exercise.

I welcome Albania's ongoing work concerning national minorities, including the legislative and institutional framework updates. The expertise of my institution is at the disposal of the authorities of Albania with regard to the secondary legislation relevant to the "Law on the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania" that remain pending. The promulgation of several key pieces of legislation and the subsequent establishment of the Committee on National Minorities, as a central institution operating under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office, are important milestones that will further contribute to social cohesion and help to strengthen the integration of Albania's diverse society.

I am pleased that my office, in co-operation with the Council of Europe office in Tirana and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania, is providing technical assistance to the Committee on National Minorities in Albania, at their request, by supporting the drafting of the Committee's new Strategy and Associated Action Plan 2023–2026, which will facilitate the implementation of its important mandate.

In Georgia, my office continues supporting the roll-out of Georgia's State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration (2021–2030) in several areas via programmes aligned with local partners as well as sharing policy advice and good practices. In particular, my office supports the Ministry of Education, teachers, education experts and national minority communities in promoting multilingual education. Georgian civil society organizations, including national minority groups, Government and the parliament, are key partners of my office in supporting the participation of national minorities in political life. Other projects supported by my office aim to improve national minorities' access to media and information and to counter misinformation and hate speech.

Throughout 2023, I am dedicating several activities to mark the 30th anniversary since the first High Commissioner assumed his duties and opened the office in The Hague. On 11 May, I partnered with the European Centre for Minority Issues in Flensburg, Germany, to host an Expert Seminar on three decades of work by six High Commissioners. I received a valuable

assessment of the effectiveness of my institution and suggestions on how it can adapt to the contemporary security landscape in the OSCE area.

While in Germany, I had the opportunity to learn about good practices on social cohesion in the border area between Denmark and Germany. In Flensburg, I met with representatives of the German minority in Denmark and the Danish minority in Germany, the Frisian and Roma and Sinti minorities in Germany, and authorities from both sides of the border. The Schleswig border region has a long history of accommodating national minority interests, including through representation mechanisms, schools and cross-border co-operation, to address the needs of all communities. It is an excellent example of the ways that national minorities can be bridge-builders and create value for everyone from the cultural richness of diversity.

I have previously reported before you on the importance of inter-faith dialogue and the significant role it can play in enhancing communication and co-operation across communities and in finding practical solutions to achieve long-term stability. It is with this in mind that I visited the Holy See in April, where I had the extraordinary opportunity to greet His Holiness Pope Francis and take part in a General Audience. I also had an opportunity to exchange with the Multilateral Sector of the Section for Relations with States and International Organizations of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See on the need for continued efforts to promote dialogue between religious denominations as well as between faiths and States. The principle of the centrality of human dignity in the Holy See's foreign policy resonates well with my mandate of helping to shape and manage just and diverse societies across the OSCE region. Empowering all people, especially those belonging to national minorities, is essential to building stronger, more resilient, sustainable, inclusive, peaceful and democratic societies. Indeed, we must remain united in our determination to find concrete actions for true and lasting peace, where human rights and the rule of law are respected, and the interests of future generations are taken into account.

In February, I visited Finland, including Helsinki and the Inari municipality. During my visit, I met with representatives of Finland's Government, the Swedish Assembly of Finland, the Sámi Parliament, as well as a range of other interlocutors, including several national minority representatives. I appreciated the opportunity to enhance my knowledge about the positive efforts aimed at facilitating social cohesion, primarily through mechanisms aimed at managing

linguistic and cultural diversity. I welcomed the country's initiatives to support national minorities through inclusive education, including by ensuring dedicated funding. I was also encouraged after gaining further insights into the Government's efforts to address challenges related to climate change and sustainable development. Finland has gained unique expertise in overcoming the negative implications of climate change and environmental degradation while pursuing sustainable development and promoting the socio-economic participation of national minorities, including the Sámi. I was pleased to learn first-hand about the commitment of the Government of Finland to promote inclusiveness in its diverse society that actively encourages national minorities, including indigenous people, to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them directly, such as amendments to the Act on the Sámi Parliament.

During my visit, I had an opportunity to discuss the support that my institution could provide, including by facilitating dialogue within and between the communities, the authorities and other relevant stakeholders in line with my mandate. I valued the openness of my interlocutors in discussing issues related to diversity and social cohesion in Finland. I look forward to continuing this productive exchange with the newly formed Government on matters relevant to my mandate, also in light of Finland's upcoming Chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2025.

On 2-6 May, my office organized a regional school to promote multilingual education in Almaty, Kazakhstan. It brought together education practitioners from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Georgia and Moldova. The regional event facilitated the exchange of experiences between OSCE participating States on the promotion of multilingual and multicultural quality education programmes as well as strategies for ensuring that the State language can be learned while preserving cultural identity by using the mother tongue.

In Latvia and Estonia, I continue following the steps towards implementing recent education reforms as they affect instruction in minority languages. While reiterating my support for measures to strengthen knowledge of the State language among national minorities, I advise the authorities of both countries to consider measures that ensure that minorities continue receiving at least a portion of their education in their mother tongue, along with an investment in adequate resources and continuous outreach to, and the meaningful involvement of, local communities.

Specifically on Latvia, I have conveyed my advice with regard to the country's immigration reform. In particular, I addressed the situation of individuals who were previously residing in the country as stateless and who subsequently acquired Russian citizenship.

My office continues its fruitful co-operation with the Department on National Minorities under the Government of Lithuania. I particularly appreciate the Department's dedication to the exchange of good practices among the OSCE participating States. This is done by convening platforms to tackle the most pressing issues that many of the participating States are facing. On 9-11 May, my office supported the Department's initiative to bring together representatives of the relevant governmental institutions from Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine and Lithuania to explore the best strategies to support Ukrainian refugees and constructively engage with local national minority and majority communities to mitigate the risks of alienation and tensions.

I want to use this opportunity to thank the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia for the opportunity to speak at the Conference on Addressing Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region in February and congratulate the Chairpersonship for the substantial and productive discussions at this important event on 6-7 February. I found the presentations and the debate on the topic of addressing anti-Semitism in the age of artificial intelligence particularly illuminating. The conference also placed a timely focus on technological advances, particularly as they relate to preventing the amplification of messages of intolerance, hatred and "otherization".

I am also grateful for the excellent co-operation with North Macedonia on their process of reflecting on the implementation of the "One Society for All" Strategy so far, with a focus on lessons for the future. I have shared with the relevant authorities some observations on the lessons learnt in the previous cycle that may assist with the new Strategy cycle. While the ownership of the process and drafting of a new cycle of the Strategy lies entirely with the authorities of North Macedonia, my office stands ready to provide continued expertise and support towards this crucial policy document.

My office continues to engage with various stakeholders in Moldova along several dimensions pertinent to the successful integration of its diverse society. Moldova remains a society where

people's appreciation of multilingualism and multiculturalism has held firm, despite external shocks, including those resulting from the war against Ukraine. Moldova was one of the first countries to open its doors to the tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

My office piloted a Public Administration School initiative to enable minority youth, including young minority women, to participate in public life and to foster civic engagement. I am pleased to report that some participants are now completing internships at various governmental and civil society institutions. I have also initiated co-operation with the State University of Moldova to develop a curriculum on national minority governance to raise awareness about the management of diversity among young majority and minority representatives.

As I previously informed you, my institution has provided practical and policy support to mother tongue-based multilingual education in Moldova. This is the most effective way to ensure that everyone, including minorities, acquires proficiency in the State language while ensuring the use and maintenance of minority languages. I observe an increased demand to receive quality Romanian-language education among national minorities.

With assistance from my office, the authorities, teachers and parents in Gagauzia have embraced this idea, developed curricula, and secured sustainable local funding. The Ministry of Education and Research applied a coherent approach to multilingual education by developing a concept for multilingual education at the national level. Finally, my office facilitates dialogue on language policy. It provides an empirical basis for the parliamentarians of Moldova to design legislation and policies that favour enhanced linguistic competencies and promote distinct linguistic identities. I therefore appreciate the authorities' recent decision to provide teaching of the Romanian language to the adult population free of charge. I was also pleased to see constructive and positive engagement with the National Bureau of Statistics, which embarks on the challenging task of conducting the country's Population and Housing Census in 2024.

Since assuming my role as High Commissioner in 2020, the crucial administrative exercise of conducting censuses has featured in a number of my engagements with participating States, with a particular emphasis, from my perspective, on the collection of identity-related data,



including data related to ethnicity, languages or religion. This data serves as a foundation for the development of evidence-based, and therefore effective, diversity governance policies. In such circumstances, the collection of personal data must not be instrumentalized as a source of division in a diverse society, either domestically or in bilateral relations.

Montenegro is among the participating States that plan to carry out a census in the near future. Within the framework of the excellent co-operation of my institution with the authorities of Montenegro, I have offered the expertise of my office concerning the upcoming census as it pertains to my mandate. It is an example of how my institution provides expertise on identity-related data collection and use, which is available to all participating States in the design and implementation of relevant policies.

I visited Tajikistan in May and discussed the country's inter-ethnic policy with the President and high-level representatives of the Government and Parliament in Dushanbe and local authorities in Khudjand, Gafurov and Isfara, as well as with minority representatives from schools with Uzbek and Russian languages of instruction. In my dialogue with the authorities, I encouraged them to continue promoting multilingual and multicultural education, including through ongoing participation in the HCNM Central Asia Education Programme. I also emphasized the role that the effective participation of national minorities in social, economic and public life plays in accommodating the rich ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of Tajikistan's multicultural society, thereby further promoting tolerance.

I am pleased to note that recently there have been signs of progress in the de-escalation of tensions at the Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan border. In particular, I noticed and welcome meaningful contacts and promising interaction between the authorities of both sides of the border. If required, OSCE officials, including myself in my capacity as the High Commissioner on National Minorities, could play a positive role by offering an additional mediation instrument.

In June, I visited Turkmenistan, where I met with high-level representatives from the Government, the Mejlis, the authorities of the Dashoguz region, and the international community. I appreciated the authorities' openness in discussing a broad spectrum of matters related to my mandate. Together with the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, I co-hosted a round table

on the OSCE participating States' best practices concerning the effective participation of national minorities in consultative mechanisms. I encourage further increasing opportunities for the political participation and socio-economic inclusion of national minorities, with a focus on youth and women. During my meetings with the central and regional authorities, I discussed Turkmenistan's experience in managing diversity, including through recent advances with tackling statelessness at policy level.

## **Ukraine**

I continue to follow the impact of the ongoing war against Ukraine on national minorities and minority communities, as well as its possible impact on minority issues in the wider OSCE area. My dialogue with representatives of minorities and with the authorities of both Ukraine and the Russian Federation has been regular and ongoing, which helped me shape my assessment of the impact of the war on the lives and identities of ordinary citizens, including minorities, and relatedly, my engagement with the parties.

My institution's assistance with regard to Ukraine's processes and policies on minority issues has continued during the reporting period. I appreciated the constructive interactions, both through meetings and through diplomatic correspondence, which I and my advisers had with the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada's Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chair of the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations, the Education Ombudsperson, the Head of the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, as well as representatives of national minorities, including the Crimean Tatars, the Greeks, and the Roma, among others.

My office has focused on individuals and communities living in Ukraine's territories that are currently under the Russian Federation's effective control. I am concerned by the information shared by my interlocutors on the extent to which specific measures and practices appear to affect the identity of individuals and communities in these territories, particularly in the education sphere. Based on the publicly available data from almost 700 educational institutions operated by the Russian authorities, that my office has analysed, education in and of Ukrainian and minority languages has been discontinued. From my mandate's conflict prevention

perspective, and in line with *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, I stress that actions and steps designed to assimilate individuals against their will can only lead to irreparable harm being done to Ukraine's social fabric and will seriously jeopardize any hope for a just and sustainable peace in the future.

My attention to education has continued in other contexts as well. As the deadline for the implementation of the education reform in schools serving speakers of EU languages is approaching, I took note of concerns by some minority representatives and certain participating States related to the changes that the reform is expected to introduce. In my office's dialogue with Ukraine's authorities, as well as the authorities of neighbouring countries, I have stressed the importance of intensifying channels of bilateral, technical-level dialogue with the participation of national minorities in Ukraine. This would help to achieve practicable, balanced solutions, based on compromise, which can be acceptable to all.

Additionally, as I have previously reported, my office has supported the development of the Law "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" during the course of the past few years, and it was adopted on 13 December 2022. Given some of the outstanding concerns of minority communities, the implementation phase of the Law is, in my view, particularly crucial. The efforts of Ukraine's State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience are of critical importance to support the rolling out of the Law through the development of the "Unity in Diversity" programme, based on a concept that Ukraine adopted in May. I have offered the expertise of my office to support this process. In the same vein, my institution is also exploring avenues of collaboration with other bodies mandated to deal with minority rights and issues, including the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner and its consultative body. Likewise, international co-operation with key players, including the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe, in support of Ukraine, has continued at a sustained pace.

I continue to follow developments in Kosovo<sup>1</sup> closely. To that end, I regularly consult with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. My advisers visited Pristina not long ago to assess the situation and engage with relevant interlocutors. In addition to highlighting the importance of participation

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

and dialogue between communities, strengthening long-term structural conflict prevention is also among my priorities. To that end, my institution, in close co-operation with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, continues to support the Balkanistics Study Programme at the University of Pristina as an important step towards the integration of Kosovo's diverse society. Launched in 2021 with the support of my office, the OSCE Mission and several international actors, the Balkanistics Study Programme facilitates language inclusion by offering university-level education in the official languages. While the Programme is functioning, some structural obstacles stand in the way of its long-term sustainability, such as the recognition of diplomas for prospective students and teaching staff – matters that I will pay close attention to going forward.

I look forward to visiting Pristina and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo later this year to discuss the Balkanistics Study Programme and other ways to strengthen social cohesion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Co-ordination and co-operation with international and regional organizations on issues related to my mandate have been of particular importance from day one. To mark the 30th anniversary of my institution this year, I have continued to reach out to all relevant international institutions to explore synergies between, and increase awareness about, my mandate. In particular, I have continued to collaborate closely with the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

The United Nations has been an important partner, especially with respect to conflict prevention. Therefore, maintaining regular dialogue with UN representatives remains high on my agenda. On 30 May, I hosted an event in the margins of the UN General Assembly on Preventive Diplomacy in the Changing Landscape of Modern Conflicts, focusing on the Role of the UN and Regional Organizations. The event was co-organized with the Permanent Mission of North Macedonia to the UN, representing the 2023 OSCE Chair, and the Permanent Mission of Poland to the UN, in the capacity of the 2022 OSCE Chair. The event gathered wide-ranging multilateral actors, including the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi. We brought together various regional organizations under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, including the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, the Organization

of American States, the UN Secretariat and numerous UN Member States. Participants reflected on their different experiences and approaches to preventive diplomacy with a particular focus on the implementation of integration practices concerning national minorities, including youth and women. Through our discussions, we sought practical avenues of working together, while exchanging our best practices to strengthen social cohesion within our diverse societies. In the margins of the event, I also met with the representatives of several regional organizations and high-level UN officials. Our discussions focused on reinforcing multilateralism through preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention to build sustainable, peaceful and resilient societies.

Just recently, at the end of June, I travelled to Geneva to sign a landmark Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). This step will further enhance our strategic partnership and co-operation with UNHCR in areas of mutual interest and increase synergies between our activities, including addressing and preventing statelessness as it pertains to national minorities. My efforts in this regard aim to benefit societies as a whole throughout the OSCE region, in line with my conflict prevention mandate. While in Geneva, I also met with Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Ian Fry, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change to discuss matters of common interest.

Achieving the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly with regard to the nexus between social and economic inclusion and justice as a conflict prevention tool, has been extensively discussed in all of my meetings with the UN and other international actors. Economic prosperity and environmental integrity are vital to sustainable development, lasting peace and security. This is why, as international actors of change, we must recognize the complementarity of our efforts and seek synergies between our work to create a meaningful change and lasting impact.

During my visits to New York and Geneva, I continued my engagements with representatives of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) to discuss areas of complementarity between our respective institutions and increase our collaboration to help build more tolerant and peaceful societies. In February this year, I welcomed the OIC team to my office in The Hague

for a working-level meeting. Our discussions focused on diversity management with respect to Muslim minorities and communities across the OSCE region.

On 7 June in Strasbourg, I met with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić to launch a webpage entitled “Collection of Council of Europe and OSCE National Minority Standards”. This new online resource collects in one place all of the key documents and texts related to national minority standards from both our institutions. The joint webpage is an example of our long-standing co-operation with the Council of Europe, and it also marks important milestones for each of us. This year is the 30th anniversary since my office opened its doors in The Hague, and for the Council of Europe, 2023 is the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). The meetings with Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe and Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, also provided an opportunity to discuss the enhanced co-operation between my office and Council of Europe institutions, in particular the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Venice Commission, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Advisory Committee on the FCNM and the ECRML Committee of Experts.

I visited Brussels in March and had productive exchanges with the EU, including with the European External Action Service, Toivo Klaar, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, Miroslav Lajčák, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, Eamon Gilmore, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, and with Anna Jarosz-Friis, Director of the Secretariat of the Donor Coordination Platform for Ukraine. This proved to be a useful opportunity to discuss matters pertinent to my mandate with various EU interlocutors. My office also continues to engage in regular annual consultations with the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations on matters of common interest. More recently, on 27 June, I had the opportunity to address the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament on preventive diplomacy; a topic very close to my mandate.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to elaborate on my institution's thematic engagement.

Recognizing the detrimental effect of hate speech against persons belonging to national minorities, in December 2022 my office co-hosted an OSCE-wide event in Vienna on countering hate speech. Together with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, we provided an opportunity to discuss the state of affairs on hate speech proliferation and the mechanisms and initiatives to counter hate speech. At the event, a diverse group of representatives from government institutions, academia, and civil society shared their experiences, good practices, and the challenges they faced when designing comprehensive hate speech responses.

On 23-24 February, I had the honour of addressing the 22nd Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I will continue the co-operation with parliamentarians from across the OSCE area as they play a crucial role in designing inclusive policies that strengthen social cohesion.

On 28 March, together with OSCE Secretary General, Helga Maria Schmid, I hosted an event to present the research findings on the intersectionality of gender and national minorities, which resulted from a study led by my office for the past two years. This study was conducted in co-operation with the OSCE Gender Issues Programme as part of the OSCE project "WIN for Women and Men: Strengthening Comprehensive Security through Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality (WIN)". I am grateful to those participating States that made it possible through their contributions.

Mainstreaming gender has been one of my main priorities since taking up office. I realized that efforts to empower minority women in all areas of life would be ineffective without a deeper understanding of the root causes of inequality and the multiple forms of discrimination that minority women face. At the same time, insufficient comprehensive data and information on intersectionality matters in academia and international organizations' work has been a persistent obstacle to achieving progress in this field. This situation motivated us to launch

further research on this topic, which we are proud to have completed this year. While we have not managed to untangle all the complicated dynamics at the heart of exclusion and discrimination, this research has contributed to bringing essential issues related to national minorities and gender to the attention of the participating States.

The event also discussed best practices that can support the full and equal involvement of national minority women in public life, improve their access to economic and social rights, and increase their participation in processes for peace and security. The study showed that achieving equality for minority women requires a multi-layered approach to tackle an issue such as this, which is complex and often difficult to analyse. Existing approaches solely designed to address gender or minority issues, and even minority women issues, will inevitably be ineffective in addressing the root causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination. Indeed, we should consider other factors, such as socio-economic inequalities, structural discrimination, rural-urban divides and traditional gender roles. While the research proposed some recommendations to participating States, more work needs to be done to link them closer to my conflict prevention mandate. Therefore, thanks to the warm encouragement and feedback from the participating States during the event, we are now exploring the possibility of producing specific policy advice in this thematic area to complement the existing body of HCNM thematic guidelines and recommendations.

Co-operation within and between the participating States, as well as with larger multilateral structures, is vital to achieving sustainable equality. I am proud that with this research and the subsequent event, the OSCE showed its commitment to addressing the dynamics of the exclusion of, and discrimination against, national minority women, while providing some knowledge to support responses. In parallel, I continue to engage with other international actors and partners working on similar issues, such as the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with whom I recently had productive exchanges. I look forward to continuing our co-operation on this specific aspect.

Beyond this research project, and the activities it catalysed, my work on gender continues on other tracks, for example, by mainstreaming gender in all our thematic recommendations and by devoting specific attention to the meaningful participation of women in all our events. A



recently updated Gender Action Plan for our office outlines our priorities for the coming two years.

Continuing with the subject of activities this year to mark our 30th anniversary, I am especially looking forward to an event that we are co-hosting with the Chairpersonship tomorrow here in the Hofburg: a conference entitled “HCNM at 30: Lessons Learned and Potential Challenges – building long-term social cohesion in South-Eastern Europe”. My office has worked closely with North Macedonia since the establishment of the mandate. Therefore, it is fitting to use our anniversary, which coincides with the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia this year, to come together and reflect on our past engagement in the region and exchange experiences and lessons learned on building long-term social inclusion. You are cordially invited to join me for this substantial discussion tomorrow.

As recently announced in my letter to all of you, I will organize a high-level anniversary event on 24 October 2023 at the Peace Palace in The Hague to conclude the series of events marking our 30th anniversary. Together with former High Commissioners, representatives from the OSCE structures and participating States, including the Government of the Netherlands, leaders of relevant international organizations, civil society and experts, we will collectively reflect on 30 years of working on conflict prevention through the integration of diverse societies. This event will be organized with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

The socio-economic inclusion of national minorities has remained a priority for my office. I am therefore pleased to announce that we have finalized work on a new set of HCNM *Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life* (working title). I am grateful to the colleagues from my office who have worked together with an excellent team of renowned international experts on this 10th set of recommendations. The 30th anniversary event in The Hague will be an opportune moment to present the main principles set out in these recommendations, including their substantial and valuable focus on the participation of minority women, youth and different age groups in all aspects of social and economic life. I sincerely hope to welcome you in The Hague in October to mark this important anniversary and to discuss national minority participation in social and economic life.

I continue to emphasize the importance of preventing statelessness in the OSCE area when relevant to national minorities, including in my quiet diplomacy engagements with OSCE participating States. As I have emphasized to the Permanent Council before, national minorities remaining in legal limbo without full access to their rights is not only a human rights concern but also a threat to the long-term stability and peaceful development of societies. As such, preventing statelessness is a highly relevant factor for conflict prevention, in line with my institution's pledge at the 2019 UNHCR High-Level Segment on statelessness.

In addition to my quiet diplomacy efforts to eliminate statelessness, I am pleased to inform you that my institution is jointly organizing a Regional Conference on Access to Civil Documentation and Prevention of Statelessness in South-Eastern Europe with ODIHR, UNHCR and the OSCE Mission to Skopje, under the auspices of the OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia. It will take place on 17 October 2023 in Skopje. The Conference will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress, outline remaining challenges, and identify good practices and practical solutions towards ending statelessness in South-Eastern Europe by 2024.

Indeed, events focused on disseminating good practices are essential under my mandate. In this regard, I am pleased to learn that according to new legislation in Kyrgyzstan, all children born in the country will be registered at birth, regardless of whether their parents are undocumented or stateless. This development comes after a study visit by Central Asian delegations, including from Kyrgyzstan, to Georgia to identify good practices to address and prevent childhood statelessness.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The work of my office and the implementation of numerous projects outlined today would not be possible without the generous financial contributions of Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland. Their funding came at a crucial time for the mandate, as zero nominal growth has made all OSCE institutions, including mine, reconsider and recalibrate many aspects of our work. Therefore, your unwavering support and commitment to my mandate, especially in these

challenging times, is well noted and greatly appreciated. Our shared responsibility is to maintain the value and relevance of existing OSCE institutions and mechanisms, which underpin the concept of comprehensive security and a common approach towards conflict prevention. In this regard, I would like to recognize the role of Ambassador Igor Djundev, Chairman of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of North Macedonia to the OSCE, in steering this Council.

Distinguished colleagues,

Since I assumed this mandate, a lot has changed in the OSCE region: politically, socially and even in terms of public perception. Daily, we witness an ongoing dramatic war in the middle of the OSCE area, resulting in enormous human suffering and destruction.

What remains unchanged, though, are the people from different non-majority groups of societies with different identity markers and diverse backgrounds that require constant attention. Unfortunately, despite the increasing diversity in our societies, persons belonging to national minorities remain, all too often, marginalized, excluded and even instrumentalized.

This explains why my mandate remains just as relevant today, 30 years after its inception, and why the work and mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities for the OSCE is vital. Conducting this work in the current geopolitical context has been challenging, yet even more necessary. Therefore, thank you all for the support and trust vested in me and my team, to whom I wish to extend my sincere appreciation.