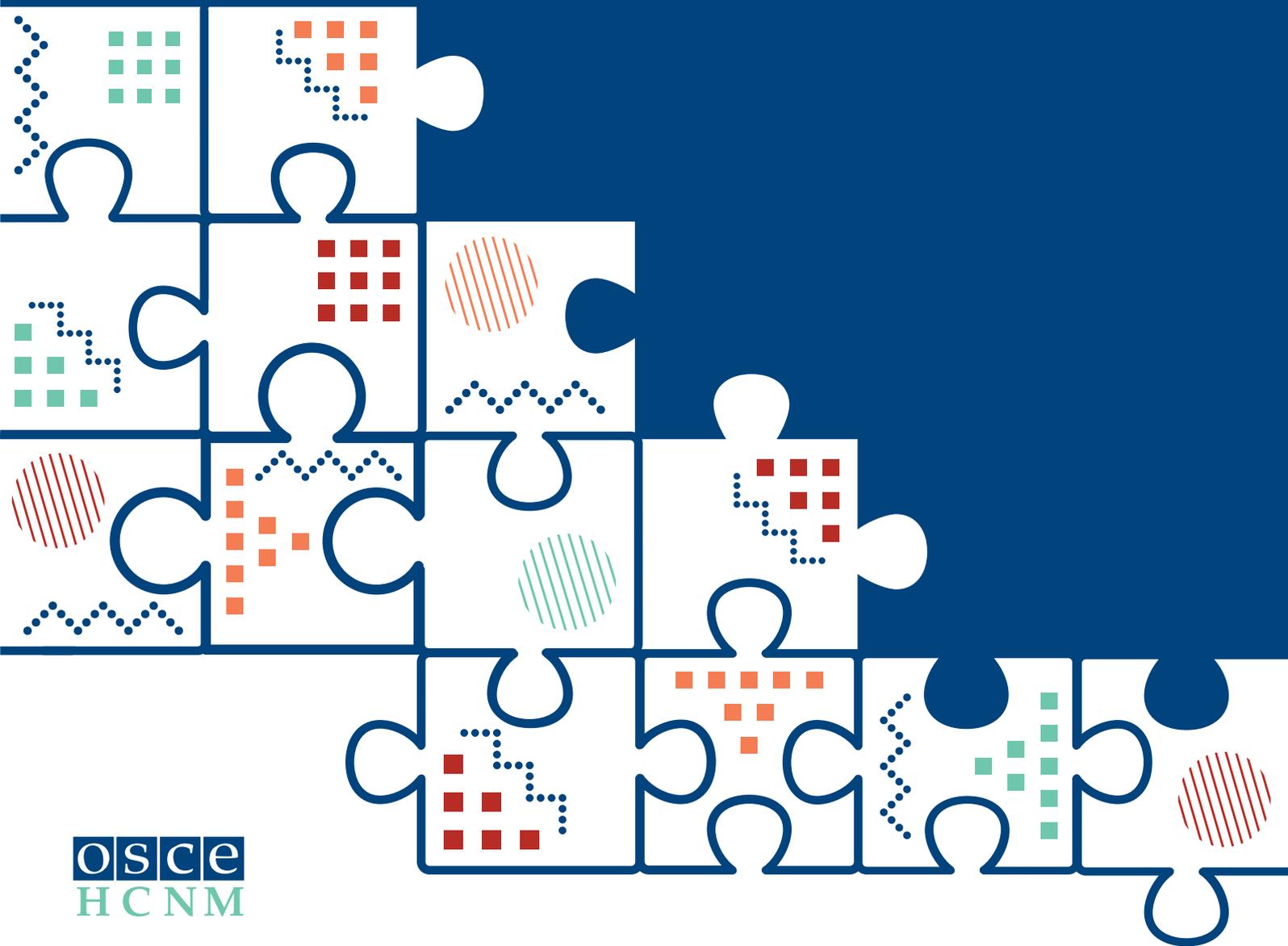


Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

High Commissioner on National Minorities



Who we are

A society can be divided by ethnicity, religion, language, or a combination of these. If social cohesion is weakened, divisions can lead to tensions and even conflict. In recognition of this challenge, the High Commissioner on National Minorities was established in 1992 as an instrument to address ethnic tensions and to prevent conflict between or within states over national minority issues.

The High Commissioner is mandated to “assess at the earliest possible stage the role of the parties directly concerned, the nature of the tensions and recent developments therein and, where possible, the potential consequences for peace and stability” within the OSCE area.

The High Commissioner therefore provides early warning and, as appropriate, early action in regard to tensions involving national minority issues that have the potential to develop into a crisis or conflict.

The mandate is essentially two-fold: to contain and de-escalate tensions, and to alert the OSCE participating States and executive structures when a situation threatens to develop beyond a level which the High Commissioner is able to contain with the diplomatic means at the institution’s disposal.

The High Commissioner’s holistic approach to conflict prevention includes efforts to assist the integration of diverse multi-ethnic societies, making them more cohesive, resilient and stable. In the High Commissioner’s view, building inclusive societies is essential for sustainable peace.

The mandate allows the High Commissioner considerable autonomy. The decision as to where and when to become engaged is left to the High Commissioner’s discretion and does not require the approval of the state concerned or OSCE decision-making bodies. This is crucial to the flexibility of the High Commissioner’s involvement.

As a conflict prevention instrument within the OSCE’s politico-military dimension, the High Commissioner does not function as an ombudsperson for minorities or an investigator of individual human rights violations.



The HCNM has been helping to boost the capacity of minorities to broadcast news in their native language, one of many projects aimed at increasing the participation of national minorities in the life of wider society.



The Central Asia Education Programme promotes mother tongue-based multilingual education. It helps achieve a balance between ensuring fluency in the State language while also preserving and accommodating minority languages and identities.

What we do

The High Commissioner is empowered to conduct on-site missions and to engage in preventive diplomacy. This involves extensive travelling and regular contact with minority and government representatives. The High Commissioner also promotes dialogue, confidence and co-operation.

The High Commissioner interprets conflict prevention both in an operational and a structural way, combining a short-term approach of quiet diplomacy with a long-term perspective in order to achieve sustainable solutions and address the root causes of conflict.

Quiet diplomacy

The mandate emphasizes that the High Commissioner must work in confidence. This confidentiality, or quiet diplomacy, serves several purposes.

Firstly, it is designed to alleviate any suspicion or stigmatization

that governments may feel by having the High Commissioner involved in what are often highly sensitive issues.

Secondly, keeping issues away from press and public scrutiny reduces the potential for these issues to be sensationalized or misrepresented and makes it easier to broker agreements. Despite this, the High Commissioner endeavours to be as transparent as possible, and publications, speeches and news are publically available.

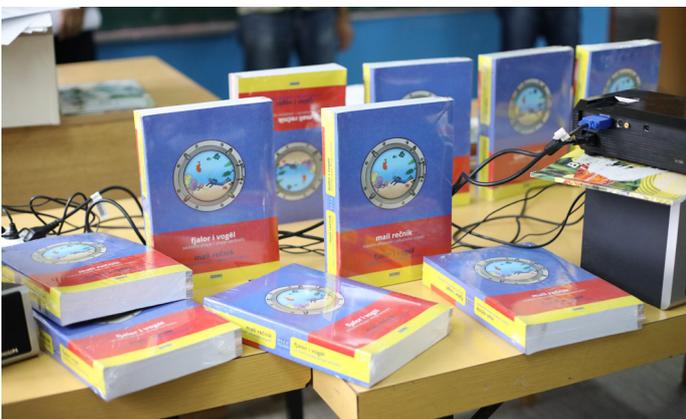
While working independently and confidentially, the High Commissioner is nevertheless accountable to the OSCE participating States. The High Commissioner regularly briefs the Permanent Council, both formally and informally, keeps the Chairperson-in-Office informed and works closely with other OSCE and international institutions. This gives the High Commissioner the political support necessary to fulfil the mandate.

Long-term perspective

The High Commissioner provides confidential advice to governments in the form of letters and at discussions during visits. This engagement is usually followed up with further assistance, including with developing legal and policy frameworks.

Nine thematic Recommendations and Guidelines have also been issued over the years, highlighting best practices and lessons learnt related to the integration of diverse societies, national minorities in inter-State relations, access to justice, linguistic and education rights, and other issues.

To help the States implement the recommendations, the office of the High Commissioner, which is based in The Hague, conducts targeted, small-scale projects such as, for instance, projects that focus on multilingual education and minorities' political participation.



The first ever children's illustrated Serbian-Albanian/Albanian-Serbian dictionary for primary schools, one of a range of HCNM-supported dictionaries that will help overcome language barriers and segregation in education, and bridge linguistic divides in society.



Every two years, the HCNM presents the Max van der Stoel Award of 50,000 euros to an individual, group or institution for outstanding work in improving the position of national minorities in the OSCE area.

The High Commissioner



Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov of Kazakhstan took up the mandate of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on 4 December 2020. Prior to that, he was Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Sweden and Denmark.

Abdrakhmanov was Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan from 2016 to 2018. From 2013 to 2016, he was Kazakhstan's

Permanent Representative to the UN. He then represented his country as the Foreign Minister on the UN Security Council between 2017 and 2018. He served as Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative to the OSCE from 2007 to 2013 and Chaired the OSCE Permanent Council in 2010. He was instrumental in organizing the OSCE Astana Summit in December 2010, the first OSCE Summit in 11 years.

Thematic Recommendations and Guidelines



The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (1996)



Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media (2003)



The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies (2012)



The Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (1998)



Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies (2006)



The Graz Recommendations on Access to Justice and National Minorities (2017)



The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life (1999)



The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations (2008)



The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age (2019)

Visit www.osce.org/hcnm/thematic-recommendations-and-guidelines to download PDFs or order print copies of the above Recommendations and Guidelines.

All publications by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities can be accessed at www.osce.org/hcnm/publications



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The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

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