



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

Opening remarks
by

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to the
**European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of
Minorities**

[Check against delivery]

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues,

I would like to thank the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes, and the other organizers for their initiative on this European Regional Forum. Today, as never before, we crave discussions and recommendations that provide expert insights on language and education rights that should shape effective domestic policies and laws.

Unfortunately, nowadays in many countries conflicts based on ethnic tensions or nationalism are emerging and spreading. Our commitment to preventing conflict has never been more important than it is today. This reminds us that peace, stability and democracy can never be taken for granted but require constant vigilance. On our journey towards sustainable peace based on respect for human rights, including minority rights, we know that one of the crucial instruments for preventing conflict is education. In this vein, as I address minority issues, the themes of education and language are central in my activities.

Although the role of education in conflict prevention is increasingly acknowledged, this has still insufficiently materialized in practice. Still, many governments believe that the only tool for integration is the promotion of the State language in education and reforms are often shaped and implemented without effective consultations with minority communities. This has created tensions and frictions within our societies. With this in mind, I have provided advice to a number of governments with the aim of ensuring that the implementation of reforms in this area is in line with a balanced approach, as integration is a two-way process, and respect for minority rights, including in education, should be part and parcel of any successful integration policy.

At the office of the HCNM, we strongly believe that education is a key tool to prevent conflict, but, if misguided, it can divide societies and provoke clashes and crises. This is a central consideration in a number of our thematic Recommendations and Guidelines. The *Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*, *The Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities* and *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* place the question of minority education on the conflict prevention agenda. Also, *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* place the special role of education within integration policies in the context of cross-community dialogue and interaction.

Over the years, the attention of successive High Commissioners has focused in particular on the language in which education is delivered. My office continues to consider how best to bridge linguistic divides and, to this end, encourages the adoption and implementation of policies on teaching in, and learning the languages of, national minorities.

We have been promoting approaches that favour multilingual education. Countries and regions that embrace multilingualism tend to have better learning achievements, perhaps reflecting a more accepting attitude to other languages. At the same time, I am aware that solutions to the complex issues of national minority education are context-specific: HCNM Recommendations do not provide a universal solution to resolve all dilemmas. They provide for a framework of dialogue that both the OSCE participating States and national minorities can refer to when negotiating what is acceptable for both the majority and the minorities.

During my country visits, I encourage the authorities to support national minorities' access to quality teaching of the State language as well as education in minority languages. My institution provides long-standing support for policies aimed at overcoming segregation in education and wider society, while supporting governmental efforts to promote cohesion and integration through improving learning of the State and/or official language. I also provide advice on how to balance the preservation of culture and identity of minorities with the need for minorities to be fluent in the official/State language, or languages, in order for them to be fully engaged in public life and realize their full potential in society wherever they live.

In this regard, I would like to present some concrete examples of my institution's long-standing support for national educational projects. The OSCE HCNM Central Asia Education Programme started in 2012 to support multilingual and multicultural education in Central Asia and Mongolia, aimed at building expertise through teacher training, pilot MLE [multilingual education] programmes and the exchange of experience. Annual Regional Schools address significant aspects of MLE planning and management, teaching methodology and the development of teaching materials. Research workshops, training courses, webinars and roundtables, as well as consultations with international and national experts on different aspects of MLE, exchange study visits aimed at observing the experience of those schools piloting MLE programmes – all of this contributes to building expert capacities among teachers.

Just over a year ago, I hosted the first-ever International School on Multilingual and Multicultural Education in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. This five-day international school brought together more than 100 education officials and practitioners from seven time zones and ten countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Since 2005, the office of the HCNM has also supported the development of a multilingual education policy in Georgia, to introduce the bilingual teaching of subjects and to enable minority youth to learn both their mother tongue and the State language at school. My institution has also supported the training of teachers in language- and subject-integrated teaching methodologies, the training of teachers of Georgian as a second language and the preparation of supporting teaching materials. Over 200 minority-language schools and school teachers were involved in different capacity-building activities.

Also in Moldova, progress towards the deeper integration of the different ethnic communities can be achieved through education, starting from early education. Beginning in 2000, my office initiated and supported a multi-year programme to improve the teaching of the State

language to children from minority communities through the publication of specialized textbooks and the training of some 1,500 teachers on the use of modern techniques for teaching non-native speakers the State language. In 2015–2017, my office supported the development of the “Dual Learning Programme”, the first bilingual (Gagauz-Romanian) programme for kindergartens in Gagauzia. Today, we are supporting the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of Moldova in developing a balanced multilingual education policy.

In the Balkan region, the office of the HCNM, the EU and local stakeholders have promoted the creation of “the Bujanovac department”, a branch of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad. This is the first truly multilingual and multi-ethnic higher-education institute in southern Serbia, where Albanian and Serbian students study together in a shared space. The idea that inspired its founders was that ethnic Albanians should be able to follow tertiary education in their mother tongue without having to depart to universities elsewhere. At the same time, being able to speak the State language fluently would greatly widen their career choices in Serbia. This Department is an example of how multilingual education can be used in practice to solve the dilemma of either mother-tongue or State-language education.

With the support of the Government of Serbia in 2017, we also created and published the first ever children’s illustrated Bilingual Serbian-Albanian dictionary. It is also available in a digital format, together with the relevant grammar information and audio pronunciation. The digital version can be downloaded as an app for smartphones. A similar dictionary has been developed for schools in North Macedonia and discussions are underway for expanding this initiative to Kosovo. We are also in the process of digitalizing a Cypriot Greek-Cypriot Turkish phrasebook that my office developed as a way to reach a wider audience in the digital age and promote channels of communication between the different communities in Cyprus.

In concluding, I believe that this Forum’s discussions will help us all to better understand how diversity can be promoted, managed and valued in education systems. I also hope that our conclusions will be translated into practical recommendations and later – into effective government policies. This Forum is very much in the spirit of the HCNM. It proves that investments in education, if well directed, will remain an effective conflict prevention tool.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your discussions.