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

address by

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* Corr.1 due to change of distribution status only, text remains unchanged

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

It is my pleasure to address you today and to share an overview of my activities since my last statement to the Permanent Council in June. Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to all of you and the authorities of the participating States that you represent for the open and constructive dialogue, and strong co-operation extended to my institution. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Chairpersonship and Ambassador Vesa Häkkinen, the OSCE Secretariat and the Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), as well as the field presences, for their support and productive collaboration, in particular during my recent visits.

We gather at a time of mounting complexity for our shared security. Within a fragile security environment and with an increased need for multilateral engagement, addressing national minority issues that can cause conflict is a matter of strategic interest for all of us. In this context, my conflict prevention mandate, which underpins our joint efforts to address tensions involving national minority issues at the earliest stage and foster dialogue before disputes escalate, is as important as ever.

In my work, I continue to observe the securitization and instrumentalization of minority issues for political purposes as well as nationalist rhetoric. This exploits and widens divisions between diverse groups in society, and undermines trust between and among different communities and between citizens and institutions. It is important to recall *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations*, published by my institution in 2008, which highlight the dual responsibility that States have to protect and promote the rights of minorities within their own borders and to act as responsible members of the international community when it comes to minorities under the jurisdiction of other States.

As you know, the participating States established the position of the High Commissioner on National Minorities to strengthen our collective conflict prevention framework. I continue in the footsteps of my predecessors, identifying and addressing tensions involving national minority issues that could escalate into conflict at the earliest possible stage. Since I assumed my mandate, I have done this by identifying practical, workable ways to strengthen social

cohesion and integrate diverse societies. This includes promoting the development of legislation and policies, supported by accountable institutions and effective consultation mechanisms, that ensure that minorities are consulted and involved in matters that affect them. Through my office, and based on quiet diplomacy, expert analysis and sustained engagement, I provide participating States with impartial advice and support. I aim to depoliticize and address potential tensions as early as possible to secure the best outcome for peace and security in the OSCE area.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Since my last statement on 5 June 2025, I have travelled, in chronological order, to Serbia, Kosovo^{*} and Kazakhstan. I also continued my engagement with several other participating States and advanced both the thematic and the programmatic work of my institution. I maintained constructive dialogue with a range of international actors through participation in various multilateral platforms, where I addressed issues relevant to my mandate. My work contributes to legislative reviews and the amendment of policies, as well as to fostering co-operation among communities and participating States. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the productive and open exchanges that have supported my efforts.

On 25 August, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia in Belgrade. I had the opportunity to follow-up on our conversation in February and to exchange views on developments in Kosovo, specifically with regard to the situation of the Kosovo Serb community.

From 26 to 29 August, I visited Kosovo to assess inter-community dynamics from the conflict prevention perspective and identify specific areas for long-term engagement. I met with a wide range of interlocutors, including acting government officials, political parties, civil society organizations, representatives of non-majority communities and international actors. In addition to meetings in Prishtinë/Priština, I also visited the municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Gračanica/Gracanice, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Parteš/Partesh.

^{*} 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.

I wish to thank the authorities in Prishtinë/Priština, local government officials, and political and non-governmental representatives of non-majority communities for the constructive discussions I had. I was able to gain first-hand insights into matters of relevance to my mandate. The visit was also helpful for me to establish direct contact with the authorities and with other relevant interlocutors, and to provide a sound basis for my engagement in the future.

Many of my conversations revolved around the authorities' relations with the Kosovo Serb community, and specifically matters related to participation, inclusion and application of the rule of law. Despite the challenging context, there was openness to discuss how the authorities at all levels can improve consultations with non-majority communities when developing and implementing policies that affect them. This relates directly to my conflict prevention mandate, as the perceived lack of inclusion in such processes contributes to mistrust and tensions in society.

While Kosovo has a strong legal framework to guarantee language rights, I heard from interlocutors that its implementation could be improved with a view to strengthening inter-community relations. Government officials asked for international support in furthering compliance with language regulations. During the visit, I also met with the Rector of the University of Prishtinë/Priština to discuss the status of the Balkanistics Programme. This important initiative, initiated and supported by my predecessors, has helped develop language skills among its participants and increased cross-community understanding.

I also discussed with several interlocutors how a framework could be useful to help guide discussions about contested historical memory and public symbols in Kosovo. Building on my institution's ongoing work on contested histories and national minorities, on which I will elaborate later in my statement, I plan to engage on this thematic area with a wide variety of interlocutors in Kosovo at both the political and programmatic levels.

I visited Kazakhstan from 14 to 20 September, where I was invited to address the VIII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. I emphasized the potential of interfaith dialogue to act as a bridge between communities and countries and took the opportunity to discuss the contribution of minority youth and women to conflict prevention.

During my visit, I held constructive and open meetings with a range of stakeholders from the Government, various ethnic communities, experts and civil society in Astana and Almaty. I discussed Kazakhstan's comprehensive policy and institutional framework to support integration and social cohesion in detail. I took note of the key role that the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan plays as a platform for ethnic representation, inter-ethnic dialogue and community mediation. I welcome the commitment expressed by Kazakhstan's authorities to promote the integration and cohesion of society, including by supporting trust and mutual understanding among various ethnic communities. I look forward to continuing our constructive dialogue, including on practical issues with relevance to these diverse communities.

From a regional perspective, I continue promoting and supporting multilingual education in Central Asia, building on our longstanding engagement in this field. In Almaty, I visited a multilingual school, where I witnessed first-hand how multilingual education can serve as an effective tool for promoting inter-ethnic accord while at the same time fostering a common civic identity. Over the past years, my office has supported several countries in the region in their efforts to develop national frameworks for multilingual education for minority children, which also contributes to regional co-operation through the exchange of best practices.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

I also continued to support conflict prevention in areas relevant to my mandate through ongoing consultations, correspondence, and programmatic work.

I have remained in regular communication with the Ukrainian authorities and the representatives of national minorities in Ukraine, including on specific challenges related to the ongoing war against Ukraine. Given the importance of putting a strong and inclusive legal and policy framework on national minority issues in place as part of ongoing reforms, I have provided the expertise of my office to the authorities, also building on the recommendations that I shared with the Ukrainian authorities after my visit in April. My office furthermore continued providing assistance to strengthen the capacities of Ukrainian institutions working on minority issues, including their ability to support the effective implementation of relevant

legislation, to monitor the application of minority rights and to engage in meaningful and inclusive dialogue with minority communities.

In Moldova, I follow legislative and policy developments relevant to national minorities and issues that could affect social cohesion, including in follow-up of my visit in March. My office maintains close engagement with State institutions, national minorities and international partners on these issues. My staff also participated in ODIHR's election observation mission, with a focus on assessing the participation of persons belonging to national minorities. Furthermore, I worked with Moldova's institutions to strengthen their capacities in the area of multilingual education, which resulted in the adoption of a national action plan in September. My office is also promoting the collection, use and analysis of data on identity-related matters in Moldova. This will also feed into our wider efforts to provide participating States with succinct guidelines and good practices in regard to managing data in a conflict-sensitive manner.

I have also maintained engagement with and in various other countries. In addition to my own travel, my staff regularly visit participating States to assess issues related to my mandate and explore opportunities for co-operation. I will continue to monitor and engage on developments and tensions involving national minority issues across the OSCE area, in line with my conflict prevention mandate.

During the past months, I also attended a number of events with other international organizations as part of my general approach to ensure meaningful co-operation with the wider international community, especially in areas that support my activities. In June, I participated in the GLOBSEC Forum in Prague and in July I was at the Dubrovnik Forum, organized by the Government of Croatia. These conferences give me an opportunity to engage in debates on issues related to my mandate, as well as to interact with a broad range of partners and interlocutors across the entire OSCE area.

I built on my institution's long-standing and close co-operation with the Council of Europe. In September, I had a fruitful exchange with the senior leadership of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). I also participated in a joint hearing of two committees of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the subject of national minorities in Ukraine. In October, I was invited by the Council of Europe's Advisory

Committee of the Framework Convention on National Minorities to have a wide-ranging exchange of views on the situation of national minorities across Europe and on thematic trends of relevance to both the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

The United Nations also continues to prove a valued partner in the implementation of my conflict prevention mandate. As I will elaborate further below, I continue to pursue an effective collaboration with UNHCR and ODIHR on addressing and preventing statelessness, and I participated in a session focused on the contributions to conflict prevention of minority women at the Geneva Peace Week. I also maintained close exchanges with other representatives and bodies of the UN on issues relevant to my mandate.

I would like to also take this opportunity to highlight some of my office's activities in the thematic areas of contested histories, gender and security, the inclusion of minority youth perspectives, statelessness, and environment-related challenges.

Situations related to memory, historical narratives and their tangible representation, and the ways in which communities remember and interpret their past, carry not only profound emotional weight but also security implications. I have observed that resolving contestations over memory and history in an inclusive and balanced manner is a key to preserving social cohesion and peaceful relations, both within and between countries. As part of my office's research into this issue, I convened a symposium in Siena, Italy, in early October, together with academic partners, to share our experiences of dealing with contested histories. We discussed the challenges of confrontational historical narratives and ways to deal with issues related to historical memory in a manner that reduces tensions and allows for critical discussion of the past. Specifically, we looked at key principles that can guide policy- and decision-making, ways to deal with contestations over statues, street names, monuments and other symbols that commemorate historical events and people in public spaces, and how the education system can be harnessed to promote an inclusive and critical understanding of the past. I stand ready to offer concrete advice and guidance on dealing with contested histories to participating States in their efforts to build trust, long-term cohesion and resilience in their societies.

The integration of gender perspectives continues to be implemented throughout my office's thematic portfolio. Supporting gender equality in diverse societies is a way to strengthen comprehensive security and thereby contribute to conflict prevention. I aim to provide practical

guidance on policies that are sensitive to the challenges faced by national minority women and aim to support their particular contributions to security.

I also continue to build on the work of my predecessors in taking minority youth perspectives into consideration in all aspects of my work. I firmly believe that empowering youth from minority communities contributes to long-term peace and stability.

Shortly after my last address to the Permanent Council, we reached another milestone in our close co-operation with UNHCR and ODIHR on preventing and addressing statelessness: the launch of our joint publication *Opening Doors for Children: Prevention of Childhood Statelessness, Good Practices in the OSCE Area*. This practical guide gathers examples from across the OSCE area, with contributions from experts and, importantly, from persons with lived experiences of statelessness. The publication also highlights that persons belonging to national minorities are among the populations at higher risk of statelessness in participating States, underscoring the importance of this issue to my mandate. I will continue to advance this work, including through my institution's role in the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

I observe that issues related to the environment, national minority relations, and socio-economic participation can affect peace and stability. My office is working with international partners to look into how environment-related factors can affect relations between majority and minority communities in the wider OSCE region.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Some of the activities that I have outlined today would not have been possible without the financial contributions of a number of participating States, which I would like to thank for their continued support. I am also grateful to those States that have seconded their nationals to my office, contributing valuable expertise and strengthening my office's capacity. I welcome the introduction of the Helsinki +50 Fund this year, through which some of you have already contributed to my office's work. The Fund offers the promise of more predictable funding while preserving the flexibility needed to respond to evolving circumstances. In this context,

and in light of the ongoing budgetary challenges facing the OSCE, I am mindful of the calls for the need for reform, and I look forward to further engaging with delegations on this.

Let me conclude by reiterating that it is essential that national minority issues are neither instrumentalized nor securitized. We should not lose sight of the long-term stability that can only be achieved through inclusivity and co-operation. I have remained committed to the principles of impartiality and quiet diplomacy, with a focus on practical solutions. Our Organization is built on agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent Declarations and Decisions. I invite you to make full use of the unique tools at our disposal to promote peace, stability and security across our region. To this end, I remain ready to engage with and support all participating States on matters within the scope of my mandate.

Thank you for your attention.