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

STATEMENT

by
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to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
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Mr Chairman,

Allow me first of all to thank the Parliamentary Assembly for inviting me to speak on the occasion of the Fifth Annual Winter Meeting. It gives me great honour to be addressing the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security today. As the High Commissioner on National Minorities was established as a conflict prevention instrument part of the political-military security dimension of the OSCE, it is appropriate that I should address the 1st Committee. I have, however, in the past years on several occasions addressed the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions. I would consider this practice equally appropriate, as many of the tools I use in my activities form part of the human dimension. I see it as a privilege to be given the opportunity to address two committees and thus exchange views with a broad spectrum of parliamentarians in the Assembly, and look forward to hearing your views in the debate here today.

Appearing before the Committee on Political Affairs and Security, I wish to take the opportunity to outline some of the main elements of my mandate and elaborate on some of the activities of the HCNM and reasons that I see the HCNM continues to have a key role to play in the efforts to prevent conflict in the OSCE region. I would also like to devote some time to present an initiative that I have recently taken in response to the call from the Assembly regarding the question of the situation of so called "new minorities".

Let us for a moment return to the beginning of the 1990s. Europe was in a stage of profound transformation. The hopes and expectations were high. The "era of confrontation and division of Europe" had ended and a "new era of democracy, peace and unity" begun, as stated by the OSCE participating States in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

Shortly thereafter, Europe yet again saw a part of it being ripped apart by violent conflict and bloodshed, as war broke out in the Balkans. At the same time, conflict followed in the path of the break-up of the Soviet Union, as newly independent states emerged and their borders had sometimes been drawn with little regard for traditional national regions generated violent clashes. It stood clear that the post-Cold War world would not be spared conflict, and that the conflicts that were raging were driven and exacerbated by inter-ethnic tensions and tensions between majority and minority populations.

Out of this situation of great hope soiled by despair for the human suffering caused by the conflicts, came a determination to make every effort to see to it that future conflicts would be prevented. The Dutch Foreign Minister at the time, Mr Hans van den Broek, in a speech to the OSCE Ministerial Council 1992 said that: "We must fear that ethnic tensions, most within and between nations, will prove the most dangerous threat to stability and the common security on our continent in the years to come." The Minister thus emphasized that the OSCE participating States must enhance their capability to deal with these issues.

After complex negotiations the OSCE half a year later took the groundbreaking decision to establish the post of High Commissioner on National Minorities. I say groundbreaking, because no time before – or after, for that matter – had an international organ been given the right, and the duty, to intervene in the internal affairs of states to address what are often sensitive issues, namely relations between majority and minorities, with the ultimate objective of preventing future conflicts.

The mandate of the HCNM is thus to address tensions involving national minority issues at the earliest possible stage in order to prevent conflict within the OSCE area affecting peace, stability or relations between participating States. As a precondition for awarding a right of such intrusive character to the HCNM, governments demanded that it be required that the High Commissioner would "work in confidence" and independently of all parties.

Allow me to state an obvious fact, namely that conflict prevention is cost effective – investing a small amount in conflict prevention can avert a much larger cost of human suffering and expensive crises management and peacekeeping operations. I would like to share with the Parliamentary Assembly the approach of the HCNM and some of the practical work that the HCNM carries out with the aim of conflict prevention.

The HCNM engagement spans across the OSCE region, encompassing inter alia Central Asia, Southern Caucasus, the Baltic States and Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe. My core activity as High Commissioner consists of engagement in individual participating States, providing Governments with recommendations on legislation and how to develop institutional, political and practical framework relevant to promoting harmonious inter-ethnic

relations. My country-specific engagement includes dialogue and cooperation with Governments, national minority representatives and associations and civil society, in order to ease tensions and diminish conflict potential.

The fundamental concept on which the HCNM bases its policy is that of "integration with respect for diversity". It is not a matter of either/or, but rather finding the right balance, acknowledging the right of minorities to their own language, culture and identity and at the same time achieving an integrated society where every person in the state, be it persons belonging to the majority or the minorities, has the opportunity to take part in and influence the political, social and economic life of mainstream society. I see this as the approach to avoid tensions and conflict.

In support of my conflict prevention policies I initiate projects in areas such as education, language policies, media broadcasting and policing in multi-ethnic societies. In order to keep myself informed of developments and maintain my dialogue with authorities a national minority representatives I regularly visit the countries where I am engaged. During my visits, I make special efforts to meet and exchange views with Members of the Parliament, who obviously play a pivotal role with regard not only to legislation and the development of the institutional framework but also with regard to fostering a political climate and debate which promotes inter-ethnic accord.

Mr Chairman,

In addition to country-specific engagement, the HCNM carries out work in a number of thematic areas. Over the years, besides specific recommendations to individual Governments, the HCNM has developed thematic recommendations on minority issues, with the purpose to provide guidance and encouragement to states to adopt certain measures to alleviate tensions relating to national minorities. These recommendations include the Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities, the Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities, the Lund Recommendations on Minority Participation in Public Life and the Media Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media. The latest set of recommendations, that I presented to the OSCE Permanent Council two weeks ago, deals with the role of the police in multi-ethnic societies.

I could talk about the police recommendations at length, as I do believe these are timely and important recommendations. I will however limit myself to say that the recommendations are the result of work carried out by a group of experts and senior police officers that I – together with the OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit in the Secretariat – brought together a year ago to take a closer look at an issue that I have found to be of profound importance during my work in the field, namely the role of the police in promoting harmonious inter-ethnic relations and de-escalating tensions. The recommendations establish a detailed roadmap for building trust and confidence between the police service and persons belonging to national minorities. It covers such key topics as recruitment and representation, training and professional support, engagement with ethnic communities, operational practices and the prevention and management of conflict. The recommended measures are also intended to improve the police service's operational effectiveness and its capacity to uphold the rule of law. I consider these recommendations to be valid and applicable for all participating States.

Mr Chairman,

The Parliamentary Assembly has on several occasions asked me to address the issue of the situation of so called "new minorities". In the Edinburgh Declaration 2004, the Assembly specifically called on the HCNM to "initiate a comparative study of the integration policies of established democracies and analyse the effects on the position of new minorities". Due to the fact that this matter is politically sensitive, I have approached it with great caution, quietly consulting and listening since the Assembly called on me. Recent developments and debate has given rise to a shared sense within the OSCE community of the need to reflect upon this issue. In responding to the invitations by the Assembly, I have emphasized that my mandate generally points to giving greater priority in my work to "traditional" national minorities rather than "new" minorities. This does not mean however that my work has no relevance to "new minorities". I do believe that the concept of "integration respecting diversity" has relevance in situations concerning "new minorities".

I am happy to inform you today that I, in response to the requests by the Assembly, have commissioned a comparative study of integration policies. The study will look closer at the relevance of the HCNM concept of "integration with respect for diversity" and explore the

applicability of the methods that the HCNM has developed over the years in situations also involving so-called "new minorities".

The Assembly's requests refer to a study of the integration policies of "new minorities in established democracies." This wording raises a number of problems. There is no internationally agreed legal definition of minorities, let alone "new minorities". Some OSCE states make no provision for minority status in their constitutions. There is a variety of views about whether or when groups of immigrants eventually acquire the status of minorities. But the general intention is clear. The study should focus on policies for integrating diversified societies and its centre of attention should be on societies whose diversity results from more or less recent immigration. The policies which I have developed in my work on the integration of societies with "traditional" national minorities will be drawn on in the study as a point of reference and comparison. And the examples of different integration policies will be drawn from a limited number of states with substantial experience and well documented policies. Hopefully, it should be possible to identify best practices in the process. Experience of such practice could be disseminated and I would do my best to make them widely known and applied.

Our societies today face a challenge of increasing importance to all participating States, namely how to accommodate and learn to live with the growing diversity of our societies. Diversity can be a source of tension as well as of benefit. This is indeed the dilemma which is at the heart of my mandate as HCNM. What we need to learn is how to achieve integration and maximise the benefits of diversity and minimise the tensions which it causes.

I hope to work closely with the Assembly, listen and get guidance from you as Members of Parliament as I pursue this work. I look forward to presenting the study to the Assembly in the summer during the 15th Annual Session. I will at that occasion further develop my own conclusions and reasoning on this topic.

I thank you.
