



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

## **Informal Briefing**

by  
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to the  
**Permanent OSCE Missions and Delegations of participating States**

**[Check against delivery]**

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today in my capacity as Director and Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the High Commissioner, even though that pleasure is overshadowed by the worrying fact that I shouldn't be the one addressing you in the first place.

You are all aware that the HCNM office has been without a High Commissioner since August last year. This historically unprecedented interlude has deprived our very personalized institution, which is deliberately built around the judgment of an eminent international personality, of a significant part of its ability to implement its mandate. The "HCNM without a High Commissioner" has not become blinded, because our teams of advisers continue to closely follow issues and regions of potential concern. The office also continues to support OSCE participating States with expertise on national minority issues, as my briefing today will show. But its voice certainly has become more muted in these circumstances. In my view this deprives the OSCE of an important antenna; an important early warning mechanism, that is much needed in a time when challenges around the management of diversity are increasing.

I therefore sincerely hope that the participating States can soon reach an agreement on appointing a new High Commissioner, and I would call on you for your continued support in this regard.

In the meantime, the office has continued to operate in accordance with the Legal Opinion provided by the Secretariat's Legal Services, which stipulates the extent of my authority as Officer-in-Charge while the post of High Commissioner remains vacant. As such, the office continues to monitor developments related to national minorities across the OSCE area and brings issues to the attention of the Chairmanship where it is deemed relevant in light of the mandate. We have also continued our thematic work and continued to assist several OSCE participating States with the development and implementation of policies that would promote longer-term social cohesion and stability.

Allow me to give you a short overview of the different thematic and country-specific activities undertaken by the office in the last six months, since the update circulated by the German Chairmanship in November 2016.

Where invited to do so by the participating State in question, HCNM has continued to provide technical assistance in legislative reform initiatives, primarily by providing legal opinions directly to the relevant State, on particular issues which have an impact upon national minorities, or relations with national minorities.

The HCNM Institution has continued its close collaboration with other OSCE institutions and structures, in particular ODIHR,

including its elections department, as well as OSCE field presences, where constructive sharing of experience and information seeks to make the most efficient and effective use of OSCE resources. HCNM staff continues to participate actively in meetings and initiatives of the wider OSCE family, including the networks of early warning focal points, the regional Heads of Mission meetings and the newly created OSCE internal network of EU focal points.

The institution has continued to develop its thematic work, which is used as a toolkit by many participating States. I would like to mention in particular our current work in developing “Recommendations on Access to Justice for National Minorities”, for which we receive ongoing support from the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship. Additionally, we have been laying the foundations for marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities”, including the launch of a new publication on their continued relevance. The “Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media” of 2003 have been overtaken by rapid advances in technology, and we will soon issue an updated version taking full account of these developments. The “Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations” are also approaching their tenth anniversary, and we are already in discussions with the incoming Italian OSCE Chairmanship to continue to promote their use amongst participating States.

As you are aware, previous OSCE High Commissioners on National Minorities have been involved with issues of statelessness within the OSCE region. Working in partnership with ODIHR and UNHCR, we have contributed to a new handbook on international standards and good practices on combatting statelessness. This was launched in Vienna, in March, under the auspices of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship.

“Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism” has been identified by the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship as a key priority area. HCNM is exploring where it can add value to these efforts, considering its own particular mandate, and its specific experience regarding inter-ethnic relations. This has so far included participation in yesterday’s conference on this issue, and establishing working relationships with key players, including the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, Professor Dr. Peter Neumann.

I will now present you with a chronological overview of the practical support we have provided to participating States in the intervening period since my last update.

The institution continued to support **Serbia** with promoting multilingual higher education. On 30 November 2016 I chaired a technical-level meeting of the “Stakeholders Committee” of the multi-

lingual University Department which the HCNM has been supporting in southern Serbia.

The meeting focussed on course accreditation, student demographics, and employment prospects for graduates. We appreciate the continued engagement of the Serbian Government, as well as the recent visit of the Deputy Foreign Minister of Austria, Dr. Michael Linhart, who visited the Department yesterday, meeting with both current and prospective students, in a demonstration of support from the OSCE.

The HCNM has continued to support the Government of **Moldova** in its efforts to ensure a clear policy framework for the integration of society. In December, the Government adopted the “Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova 2017-2027”, which was developed with HCNM support, and in the spirit of the “Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies”. In February I participated in a conference in Chisinau marking the Strategy’s adoption, organized by the Bureau of Interethnic Relations. The office of the HCNM is currently providing expertise to the Bureau for the development of the first three-year Action Plan for the Strategy. Ongoing support for the implementation process is a key component of a new HCNM Moldova Programme which will kick-off in July.

The Programme will also seek to support the ongoing dialogue between Chisinau and Comrat on issues related to the functioning of the Gagauz autonomy. In all of our activities in Moldova we cooperate closely with the OSCE Mission to Moldova and greatly appreciate their support.

At the request of the Government of **Albania**, we have continued our engagement in the legislative reform process which led to the creation of a draft framework law on national minorities. This bill aims to further improve Albania's system of protection for national minorities, and the HCNM stands ready to continue working with the Government of Albania, and other international partners, to conclude this process. We have accepted a further invitation from the Government to provide advice during the anticipated development of secondary implementing legislation.

In March, I attended the conference in **Cyprus** entitled "Securing Democracy through Education" organised by the Cyprus Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers and had the opportunity to exchange views on the role of education in bridging divides between communities.

We continue our close collaboration with the Government of **Ukraine** and the Verkhovna Rada, particularly at this crucial point when several legislative initiatives with regard to language policy,

education, media and identity issues are being discussed. Last month in Kyiv, together with the Ministry of Science and Education, we co-hosted a conference on “Multilingual education in the OSCE region: experiences and perspectives for Ukraine”. We are currently developing a conference for next month with the Ministry of Culture, on international minority standards and integration policies. This builds upon an earlier successful roundtable.

Whilst discussing Ukraine, I would like to take this opportunity to express our solidarity with the Special Monitoring Mission working in an increasingly dangerous security environment. We appreciate the excellent level of co-operation with the SMM and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.

The office of the HCNM maintained constructive relations with the **Central Asian republics**, conducting policy dialogue, providing expertise and implementing project activities. Whilst I cannot do justice to all of our engagements in the region in this short briefing, let me name some examples.

At the request of the **Kyrgyz Republic**, we provided advice and assistance to the National Expert Council on Interethnic Relations and Religious Policy to enable it to conduct an assessment of the implementation of the “Concept on national unity and inter-ethnic



relations in the Kyrgyz Republic”. A roundtable was held in Bishkek last month and another is scheduled for next month, to plan the next phase.

The HCNM also runs a multi-year Central Asia Education Programme to help the countries of the region address challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity as part of their ongoing education reform processes. Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are availing themselves of HCNM expertise and project support by developing multilingual education programmes. A milestone event took place earlier this month: the first student Olympiad on multilingualism in Central Asia, specifically focussing on mother tongues in the region, State and official languages, as well as foreign languages, was held in Kazakhstan earlier this month. Organized by the Karaganda State University, in co-operation with the HCNM, the Olympiad attracted 102 students from 25 universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The education authorities in Tajikistan also acknowledged the need to improve the quality of instruction in minority schools, and the HCNM is standing ready to provide further support.

The HCNM continued to provide advice and project support to the Government of **Georgia** for the implementation of its State Strategy on Civic Equality and its five-year Action Plan (2015-2020). The authorities particularly valued HCNM project activities, implemented in co-operation with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty

Democracy, which aim to bring political parties and national minorities closer together. The launch of the second phase is planned for July.

Earlier this month, HCNM launched a project in Tbilisi called “Prepare for Diversity and Develop Tolerance among Youth of Georgia”, which was welcomed by the Georgian authorities. Our activities take place under the flagship “1+4” programme which supports multilingual and multicultural education at pre-school and school levels and promotes tolerance and diversity in various higher education institutions attended by ethnic majority and national minority students.

Allow me to use this opportunity to underline that many of the excellent projects and programmes that I have just described are funded by extra budgetary contributions. Additional support from participating States would be most welcome for us to continue this important work.

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The HCNM was created nearly 25 years ago in the wake of resurgent ethnic conflict in Europe. At that time, the participating States clearly

understood that failure to accommodate diversity undermines stability and peace. Today, the need for an effective HCNM remains as strong as ever.

This concludes my remarks, thank you for your attention.