



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities
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Report to the Review Conference

by
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you today at the opening plenary session of the first Review Conference to prepare for the OSCE Summit in Astana in December. I would like to thank the Chairmanship and Ambassador Lenarcic and his colleagues for organizing this session of the Conference.

In my report to you today, I believe it would be appropriate to concentrate on an issue which I see as a test case for the OSCE and to which I have devoted much of my time over the last six months, namely the situation in Kyrgyzstan. However, before I get down to details, I would like to briefly reiterate why the institution of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was established and the crux of its mandate. The Astana Summit comes at the end of a year with substantial challenges for the OSCE. As the Secretary General mentioned in his intervention, this is an appropriate moment to examine how our conflict prevention “tool box” to deal with potential threats to security links up with the necessary action on the ground to prevent tensions developing and deteriorating into open conflict.

The institution of the High Commissioner on National Minorities was established in 1992 as an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage. My mandate is to address tensions involving national minority issues which, in my judgement, have the potential to develop into conflict. The decision to set up this institution was a recognition of the nature of many conflicts of recent times – that they are a consequence of interethnic tension, tensions that can originate from, perceived or real, exclusion and alienation from society at large or threats to identity and culture, language, religion and traditions. Such tensions can also

impact on security in regional and international contexts, not least through their effect on neighbouring States.

The 1992 decision was not just a reaction to the ongoing conflicts at the time, but rather one taken with a view to preventing future conflicts. I believe my institution has proved its worth over the eighteen years of its existence. On the basis of my experience as High Commissioner, I strongly believe that the work of the HCNM is as relevant today as it was when it was first established. Tensions between minority and majority communities, unfortunately, continue to exist in the OSCE region, even breaking out into open conflict on occasion, as we saw in Georgia in 2008 and, more recently, in Kyrgyzstan.

Having regard to the possible consequences of such tensions for inter-State relations, I would like to ask you to give consideration to the political endorsement of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, proposed by a number of participating States, at the Summit meeting. I also believe that the final declaration at the Summit in Astana should contain a strong re-affirmation by the Heads of participating States of their support for the institution of the HCNM and its role as a significant instrument of conflict prevention in our region.

Mr Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The serious state of affairs that developed in Kyrgyzstan is the culmination of several years of increasing alienation of the minority communities from state institutions. My concern about the situation in the country was conveyed to the Permanent Council on several occasions, culminating in the early warning issued on 12 June

More than three months later, I remain deeply concerned. I visited Kyrgyzstan two weeks ago and had extensive meetings in Osh and Jalal-Abad and in Bishkek. What I learned at these meetings has added further to my concern. What I saw in southern Kyrgyzstan is an alienation of the minority community from the major institutions of the State – local government, the police and the judiciary. I saw people living in fear of further violence with little or no contact with the majority community. I saw houses where only the foundations remain, burned-out shells of shops and cafes, and deserted streets that should have been full of people celebrating the end of Ramadan.

Although the immediate situation appears to have stabilized, we should not be lulled into a false sense of security. Indeed as a regional security organization, what is needed is concrete and timely action when faced with simmering tension of this kind. There is some hope that the Parliamentary elections on 10 October will help bring some clarity and stability. Negative signals, however, persist. Relations between ethnic groups remain tense; fear about renewed violence is widespread. Much work still needs to be done to address both the immediate and long-term challenges Kyrgyzstan faces as a multi-ethnic society.

Let me commend President Roza Otunbayeva for her positive intentions. It is my understanding that the President yesterday signed the Terms of Reference for an independent international investigation into the June events and that a letter has been sent to the UN SG for support. If my information is correct, I see this as a positive step. The investigation's work will be challenging in the current circumstances, but all the more necessary in view of the reported serious shortcomings in observing human rights standards. It is disturbing to hear that human rights defenders of different ethnicities have been threatened for inquiring into the causes and impact of the June violence. It is worrying that in court cases related to these

events fair trial standards are not being observed. It is yet another obstacle to the efforts aimed at building lasting peace. This, I repeat, calls for the setting up of a genuine international investigation within the shortest time-frame possible.

The lack of adequate security in the country is of acute concern. A significant number of the minority Uzbek community have already left the country. Local police need support in order to provide effective protection to all citizens from physical threats, harassment or attacks, including sexual violence. The OSCE Police Advisory Group (PAG), approved by the OSCE on 22 July, was meant to be rapidly deployed, and my office has assisted in delivering training to its members. It is highly regrettable that the Police Advisory Group has still not arrived on the scene, and I call on the provisional authorities to ensure that the necessary conditions are in place for the Group to start carrying out its mission in the immediate future.

Mr Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

History has proved that unresolved conflicts are likely to generate further rounds of hostility if their root causes are not addressed. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is a reminder that long-term stability cannot be achieved if minority communities are left on the margins of society. The risk of destabilization is particularly high in countries that lack stable and strong institutions. In such a climate, nationalist discourse is likely to flourish, with the risk of alienating minority communities from the State and ensuing destabilization.

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Before I round off, it would be remiss of me if I did not refer to the current state of affairs affecting the largest ethnic minority in the OSCE region. Recent events have demonstrated that the situation of the Roma continues to be of great concern. European Union expansion and, in particular, the opening of borders within the EU has resulted in a significant increase in outbreaks of anti-Roma hostility and rhetoric. Last year, on the occasion of International Roma Day, I issued a study together with Council of Europe Commissioner Thomas Hammerberg on “Recent Migration of Roma in Europe”. We have decided to re-launch this study, as we consider that it responds to the need in Europe for practical guidance and clarity on the persisting difficulties being experienced by States in integrating the Roma, which have now acquired a broader dimension, involving, as we have seen this summer, an inter-State component.

At a meeting on Roma in November 2009 jointly organized by the Council of Europe, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU and the OSCE, I identified three areas which require attention and I will repeat these today. They are:

1. the proper implementation of existing commitments on the part of the participating States;
2. grass-root initiatives and properly monitored projects that meet the real needs of Roma and help them extricate themselves from the lamentable situations in which they find themselves; and
3. strategies to combat stereotyping by the majority and to develop a sense of responsibility and ownership on the Roma side

Unfortunately, a massive gap still exists between, on the one hand, European efforts to challenge racial discrimination and, on the other hand, policies concerning the Roma population in all areas of public life. This presents a real challenge for the years to come.

However, I trust the OSCE participating States are prepared to face up to this challenge, and are willing to accommodate the real needs of Roma and Sinti in their domestic policies to ensure their proper integration within broader society.

Thank you for your attention.