



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

Address by  
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to the  
**1188th Plenary Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

**[Check against delivery]**

Vienna, Austria – 7 June 2018

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate the opportunity to address the Permanent Council today, the second such opportunity during the first year of my mandate as High Commissioner.

The nature of conflict has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Today, we increasingly face acute crises and hybrid conflict characterized by internal strife at the heart of our societies. The friction and tensions we witness between different communities and even States are often aggravated by politics of identity. It is against this background that efforts to prevent crises and wars - a priority for our organization and for multilateral diplomacy in general - have become particularly challenging. I am tasked by you to directly engage to prevent conflict. This is a difficult and delicate duty given the complex geopolitical environment which exists in the OSCE area. Often the stakes are high as success during the early stages of an evolving conflict can prevent a point of no return from being reached over time. For this reason, the role of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities remains as relevant as the day it was created, and perhaps even more so today. One of the most effective tools to prevent the type of modern conflicts we are currently experiencing is the implementation of policies aimed at promoting the sustainable integration of our diverse and multiethnic societies. It is in this area that my institution has a strong track record and a wealth of experience with assisting participating States who choose to follow this path; a path that acknowledges the long-term benefits of diversity and harnesses them for the advancement of society.

Conversely, in the first year of my mandate, I have seen how State and non-State actors alike attempt to use language and education issues to fan the flames of conflict. There have been disputes over the use of language, and there have been reactions, sometimes rather harsh ones, involving legislation and the restriction of existing practices, in response to this.

Those caught up in such a spiral can benefit from the existence of a neutral platform for dialogue, in order to find their way out of the deadlock. Striking a balance between the legitimate interest in a strong State language and the required respect for minority languages

is a delicate business. It requires discussion and agreement based upon a set of principles, which my institution is ready to assist with.

In my previous address to you, I highlighted the mandate which you have given me, to independently determine the relevance of my intervention. I rely upon the co-operation of all participating States, but this has not always happened in the way I would have expected it. In some instances, I have witnessed some limitations to my engagement, based in some cases on unilaterally formed or restrictive definitions of national minorities. To quote former High Commissioner Ambassador Max van der Stoel: “I will not seek to impose, nor can I enforce any definition of national minorities, but the existence of minorities is a matter of fact, not of definition”. To me, self-identification of minority communities remains an important criterion to determine my engagement to implement the Mandate you have assigned to me. And I remain committed to continue advising countries through quiet diplomacy and by gaining their trust and confidence, which have been key to ensuring the effectiveness of my Office.

In the current polarized environment the thematic guidelines developed by successive High Commissioners can play a very useful role. These guidelines are based on best practices observed by consecutive High Commissioners over the last quarter of a century. They take into account lessons learned from national experiences and programmatic support to participating States. Moreover, they are enriched by the traditionally strong co-operation that the HCNM has fostered with partner institutions and with renowned experts drawn from across the OSCE. The existing Recommendations and Guidelines cover the most relevant and sensitive policy areas related to protecting minorities. At the same time, they offer participating States a useful toolbox to help them develop and implement policies that ensure the successful integration of our diverse societies. My focus will be on ensuring that the current guidelines continue to be relevant and up-to-date and, most importantly, that they are better known and actively used by governments as guiding principles for a positive impact on minorities and the increasingly diverse societies in which we all live. The results will speak for themselves: stability, successful integration, and an understanding and appreciation of the benefits that diversity brings.

This year we celebrate the anniversaries of a number of guidelines. This enabled us to step back, take stock and reassess their relevance today.

Twenty years ago my institution launched the *Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities*. This collection of 21 key Recommendations has been used by many stakeholders as a standard reference tool to address important areas such as the rights of national minorities to freely use their language when conducting business, in their private life and in their relations with the administrative authorities and public services.

Last week at the University of Oslo, with the generous support of the Government of Norway, I used the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oslo Recommendations to generate policy-driven discussions between representatives of participating States and internationally renowned experts from academia and international organizations, including the OSCE, the UN and the Council of Europe. My personal view, which was further reinforced by these productive discussions, is that a carefully formulated and balanced language policy is also by default a conflict prevention policy. It is a core component of a cohesive, stable society, which respects the rights of all, and in turn reduces the potential for tensions. These points are further elaborated upon in the recently published book on Language Policy and Conflict Prevention, which was launched during the event. I'd therefore like to thank those participating States who sent representatives to the Oslo conference and played an active part in it.

On a related note, you may recall from my previous report to the Permanent Council last November my reference to the launch of the first ever illustrated Serbian-Albanian/Albanian-Serbian and Macedonian-Albanian/Albanian-Macedonian dictionaries for primary schoolchildren. These dictionaries are concrete examples of my institution's long-standing support for policies that aim to overcome segregation in education and in wider society. In addition to distributing the hard copies of the dictionaries in primary schools in Bujanovac, Preševo, Skopje and Gostivar, we continuously followed the usage of the digital versions of the dictionaries. And, I am pleased to report to you that this innovative approach to language learning has borne fruit: there have been over 50,000 visits to the dedicated websites and the mobile phone apps were downloaded in excess of 3,000 times.

My office continues to develop the means to bridge linguistic divides and, to this end, encourage the adoption and implementation of policies on teaching in, and learning the languages of, national minorities. I note with some concern, however, that the languages of the minority communities are still referred to as 'foreign' languages in some participating

States, which is not conducive to fostering cohesion within a diverse society. I strongly believe that the terminology used to qualify the languages of the minority communities in policy documents and in public communication does have a determining impact on how members of a society are perceived or will be perceived. I would, therefore, encourage policymakers to mainstream the terminology used to ensure that the wording itself does not deepen divisions or distrust between different segments of society. Best practices show that referring to languages of tuition different from the State language as the ‘mother tongue’ or simply ‘other languages’, has a positive impact on the wider community.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the *Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations*. These Recommendations were initially intended to provide clarity on how States can pursue their interests with regard to national minorities abroad without jeopardizing peace and good relations with neighbouring countries. They are more relevant than ever before. Accordingly, my institution plans to mark this anniversary with a two-day conference on 15 and 16 July in my hometown of Udine. The event is being organized in close co-operation with the Italian OSCE Chairmanship, which I would like to thank for their commitment and support. Invitations are extended to all participating States. I strongly encourage your active participation and engagement in this event in order to discuss potential problems in the presence of renowned experts and promote bilateral and multilateral co-operation on national minority issues.

To foster a wider promotion and understanding of the *Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations* my office has prepared a short animated movie on them, an ‘explanation’, capturing their essence and outlining their relevance. The movie is now playing in the background and will be posted on our website.

In addition, as I mentioned to you in my previous Statement to the Permanent Council, my office is currently developing a new set of thematic Guidelines on ‘National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age’, complementing and updating the *Guidelines on National Minorities and the Broadcast Media* of 2003. The document is at an advanced stage and I hope to be able to present it to you soon.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, a large part of my work involves travelling extensively throughout the OSCE region to meet with representatives of national minorities, Government officials and many other stakeholders.

Since my last report, I had the opportunity to chair my first meeting of the Bujanovac Department Stakeholder Committee in **Serbia** in December 2017. The multi-ethnic and bilingual Bujanovac Department is part of the HCNM's focus on education and targets language acquisition, integration and economic under-development in south Serbia. The Committee is chaired by me, with participation from central and local level government in Serbia as well as Heads of the OSCE field operation and the EU delegation there. The meeting was held in a harmonious atmosphere, addressing the promotion for the Department, the usage of languages in the lectures provided, and employment opportunities for the Department's graduates. Given HCNM's involvement in this initiative for the past six years, I used the occasion of this meeting to raise the issue of potentially decreasing the involvement of the international community and increasing local ownership of the Department. There was agreement on the need for increased local ownership. However, the discussion on which form this should take was not conclusive. Since then, my staff members have continued to work closely with interlocutors in Serbia on this issue as well.

Building on my earlier engagement in **Ukraine** regarding the Education Law, I continued my dialogue with the Government, national minorities and other parties concerned with finding solutions that would accommodate the interests of various groups. I visited Kyiv in December 2017 and the Zakarpattia region in February 2018 to obtain a first-hand assessment of the implications of the education reforms and other legislative initiatives. During my visits, I continued reiterating the need to depoliticize the language issues, and find a balanced approach in promoting the State language for the integration of society, while safeguarding minorities' rights to preserve their languages. I visited several schools with minority languages of instruction in Zakarpattia, including a school which pilots bilingual education. In my assessment, multilingual education is one of the most effective ways to find the above balance. As we speak, I am in an ongoing dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine regarding the modalities of implementing the Education law, as well as

the upcoming legislation related to education policy. In this context, I encourage the Ukrainian authorities to fully implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, including regarding the transition period, and in finding a more balanced approach in addressing the issue of the differential treatment of EU languages and other languages.

Meanwhile, in light of the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine to declare the law "On the Principles of State language policy" of 2012 as unconstitutional, I encouraged the Government of Ukraine and the Verkhovna Rada to ensure that legislation related to the use of languages is inclusive and acceptable to all groups within Ukrainian society, and offered my expertise and advice to that end. I have also provided expertise to the National Agency for Civil Service of Ukraine with regard to possible modalities of implementing the new language requirements for civil servants.

Following my exchange with national minority interlocutors during these two visits, and in the context of ongoing discussions about the concept of National Minority Broadcasting, I exchanged views with the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine, emphasizing the importance of measures to ensure that adequate space is provided to broadcasting in minority languages to prevent the emergence of parallel informational spaces for minorities and majorities. I welcome the commitment of the Public Broadcasting Company to accommodate my recommendations.

In the coming months, I will continue working with the Government of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada, national minority groups and international actors such as the Council of Europe on promoting diversity in different policy areas to prevent minority issues from further politicization, both domestically and in Ukraine's bilateral relations with its neighbours. In doing so, my institution will continue the good co-operation with different OSCE bodies, including with the Special Monitoring Mission and the Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.

I have continued to follow the situation on the Crimean peninsula, including by meeting with representatives of the Crimean Tatar community, such as the Mejlis. I have taken note of their concerns about the precarious situation in which their community finds itself and intend to continue discussing this matter with the relevant authorities.

With reference to **Moldova**, which I visited last October, I noted as a positive step the adoption of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations 2017-2027, which I will continue to support, alongside our ongoing bilingual education project in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, with the understanding that the central government will take on responsibility for funding the latter. At the same time, I also took note of the very recent ruling of the Constitutional Court to repeal the language law of 1989. This has already provoked reactions from some segments of society and I will therefore continue monitoring the developments on the ground with regard to possible implications for inter-ethnic relations.

On 26 February, I visited **Bratislava** and met with government representatives. During a series of productive meetings, I discussed future co-operation and obtained an update on national minority issues in Slovakia, assessing that their demands on the use of language, education and the funding of cultural activities are currently being positively and adequately addressed. I received, however, information that members of the Roma community are subjected to discrimination and hate speech, including in some cases by State officials and law enforcement authorities.

On 27 February, I travelled from Bratislava to **Budapest** to meet with Government and civil society representatives. I found the overall situation of national minorities to be positive, in terms of adequate representation in the public sector and a sufficient allocation of resources to promote their own unique identities. Roma communities, however, continue to face challenges which impact their access to education and equal treatment before the law. I also remain concerned about increasingly intolerant and xenophobic rhetoric directed towards migrants, refugees and disadvantaged groups in Hungary, including by Government officials. As noted in *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, States should promote the integration and cohesion of diverse, multi-ethnic societies. Intolerant speech ripples through all communities and can provoke further alienation. In particular, targeting civil society organizations on the basis of xenophobic sentiment fuels intolerance and hinders the integration of all groups within society, including national minorities.

My office has also engaged substantially with **Albania** during the reporting period, through the provision of legal advice. Albania's recently enacted law "for the Protection of National Minorities in Albania" required the issuance of several regulations or Ministerial decisions



within six months, which would regulate important areas covered by the primary legislation. This draft secondary legislation touches upon areas of significance to national minorities, about which my institution has experience in terms of providing advice on issues such as national minority consultative mechanisms, education in the mother tongue of national minorities, the registration of new national minorities, and public broadcasting in the languages of national minorities. These are the areas that are broadly covered by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on National Minorities, and upon which the new law was largely modelled. The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs invited me to provide a legal opinion about this package of draft secondary legislation, and in April I conveyed that opinion to the Ministry. In order to ensure the optimal use of resources and a co-ordinated OSCE position, my institution worked in close co-operation with the OSCE Presence in Albania. I therefore wish to commend the Albanian OSCE office for the significant input it provided to this process.

I have just concluded a visit to **Estonia** where I attended the Lennart Meri Conference and held a series of meetings with representatives of the Government, civil society and national minorities in Tallinn. I took note of the significant progress made in the integration of the Estonian society during the last two decades, especially among the younger generations.

Positive results have been achieved, particularly in the field of education, where the knowledge of the State language among national minorities has improved, while the preservation of minority identities is ensured through the continued provision of education in minority languages.

I also observed positive initiatives to create a common media space for all citizens of Estonia, including through the creation of a TV channel in the Russian language by the Estonian Public Broadcaster.

I welcomed facilitated access to Estonian citizenship, in particular for children and elderly persons, took note of the very significant reduction in the overall number of non-citizens and encouraged the authorities to continue with their efforts in this area.

At the same time, divisions along ethnic lines persist. While efforts of the Estonian government to reach out to minority communities residing compactly in the northeast of the country are commendable, additional steps are required to address these divisions and bring majority and minority communities closer together in all areas of public life. All of these efforts will need to be continued in a systematic manner for the sustainable integration and resilience of the Estonian society.

I have taken note of recent changes to the education policy in **Latvia** and the messages I received from a number of representatives of civil society and national minorities, who referred to a strong response by the law enforcement authorities to their expression of concern about the contents and pace of the education reform. I have engaged in a dialogue with the Latvian authorities about the new education law, but have not been able to visit the country yet. Generally, in recent years, my institution has promoted Latvia's approach to education policy among other OSCE participating States, presenting the country's experience and models of multilingual education as an effective tool for the successful integration of diverse societies. This is now changing, and we intend to continue monitoring the impact of these changes on the society. In my communications with the Latvian authorities, including at the highest level, I have always emphasized the importance of ensuring that the role of schools in preserving minority identities is not undermined, and that the implementation of the education policy is indeed done in an inclusive and gradual manner, based on thorough consultations with all groups concerned, including minorities, educators and parents.

In April I visited both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In **Kyrgyzstan** I continue assisting the authorities with the development and implementation of policies in the field of inter-ethnic relations and integration. I welcome the initiative to adopt the new State Concept on National Unity which will encompass a range of long-term measures promoting the integration of society. I encouraged the Government to ensure that a new policy framework would not only build upon the apparent achievements of the previous Government, but would also include concrete measures aimed at promoting the effective representation and participation of national minorities in public life. It was during my visit to the south of the country in particular that I noted the under-representation of minorities in the law enforcement sector. This remains a key challenge which, if addressed, would increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of the police among all communities.

In Kyrgyzstan, I also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education and Science that further advances our already substantial co-operation. I am pleased that multilingual and integrated education models have taken root in Kyrgyzstan. Such models are currently being applied in 78 schools, five universities and 13 kindergartens. I am also confident that our continuous co-operation in this field will contribute to a further expansion of multilingual and intercultural education, particularly with regard to schools that provide education in national minority mother tongues.

I then travelled to **Uzbekistan** through a busy border crossing-point in the Fergana Valley where I witnessed first-hand the positive impact of the marked improvement in bilateral relations - including the opening of additional border crossing-points - on cross-border and inter-ethnic relations. The current positive regional dynamic in Central Asia is of particular value from the perspective of my mandate, as in my experience better regional co-operation also leads to an improvement in inter-ethnic relations and reduces conflict potential at the local and regional level. I therefore encourage the Central Asian States to make full use of the *Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* in their interactions on minority issues and have offered my assistance in this regard. In addition, one of the objectives of my visit to Uzbekistan was to establish more solid co-operation in the field of mother tongue-based multilingual and intercultural education. To this effect I co-organized a round table on multilingual education with both the Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education and the Minister of Public Education of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's commitment to provide education in a number of minority languages is a positive practice that should continue. I believe Uzbekistan could benefit from adopting some elements of multilingual education to promote the learning of the mother tongue as well as the State language and access to higher education, which in turn would be conducive to the effective participation of minorities in social, political and economic life. I have therefore offered the authorities of Uzbekistan the possibility to participate more frequently in my regional Central Asia Education Programme and hope for a growing interest in multilingual education at the level of experts, practitioners and policymakers.

I continued my institution's longstanding co-operation with the **Council of Europe** relating to minority issues. The closely interlinked thematic and geographic activities of the two organizations make such co-operation both essential and practical. The close relationship we have ensures that our respective roles are complementary and enables us to maintain

consistency in our regional approaches to minority rights. For the OSCE HCNM, the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities remains an essential component of conflict prevention, while the CoE monitors the implementation of minority rights and protection standards, in particular those contained in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML).

Both the HCNM and CoE structures have benefited from a regular exchange of information on specific country issues. In February I visited Strasbourg and I met with senior Council of Europe officials with the aim of maintaining and strengthening our ongoing co-operation, as well as discussing specific country-related matters where relevant. In particular, this included an in-depth exchange of views with the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention. I have also attended and addressed a meeting of the Venice Commission in Venice and exchanged views, especially in the context of the Venice Commission's work on the Education Law in Ukraine.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the recurring issues I have encountered across the OSCE area since taking office is the damaging impact of competing and confrontational historical narratives on inter-ethnic relations in a number of participating States. The way people understand, remember, and value history is an important factor when it comes to the self-image and personal identity of an ethnic community. When approaching the past, people have a tendency to glorify and commemorate their achievements, victories, and sufferings, whilst glossing over the darker chapters about the tragedies and suffering they may have inflicted on others. As a result, different groups often attribute different meanings to the same events. Differences in the way different people see and remember history can divide societies for decades or even centuries after the events have occurred, including along ethnic lines.

The State has an important role to play in at least two ways. First, it is up to the central or local authorities to decide whether to permit or ban commemorations, to erect or remove statues, to name or rename public spaces and to organize how history is taught and learned in schools. These are political choices that often evoke strong reactions from society and can

sometimes fuel tension and trigger conflict. This is especially the case when it concerns history and memories related to emotional issues such as guilt and victimhood. If Governments impose singular historical narratives and prohibit alternative interpretations in ‘memory laws’, then they draw a line in the sand of time that can continue to divide societies for generations to come. On the international level, I have also seen that differences in historical interpretations and commemoration practices can have a negative effect on bilateral relations between States.

Secondly, States have a duty to deal with history and memory in a responsible way in order to prevent or manage conflict within society rather than to fuel it. Governments should create the optimum conditions for a tolerant, inclusive debate on historical memory with respect for human rights. This, however, is easier said than done. As is the case with other identity issues, dealing with historical interpretations is complex and sensitive and requires a careful balance to be struck. For example, on the one hand representatives of an ethnic minority may feel severely threatened if nationalist groups or even public authorities brandish historical symbols that evoke memories of violence committed against them. But on the other hand, as long as people don’t incite violence and use hate speech, their right to freedom of expression should be respected.

With the 2012 *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, the HCNM called on States to avoid the divisive use of symbols, to take due account of historical and contemporary community relations, and to foster mutual recognition and accommodate all groups in society. In 2016, the Association for Historical Dialogue and Reconciliation from Cyprus received the Max van der Stoel Award for its efforts to do exactly this, and there are many other good practices across the OSCE area where societies have found ways to deal with divisive historical issues in constructive ways. I intend to further build on this in my dialogue with the participating States on longer-term measures that can foster a mutual understanding of a shared yet divisive history, and, therefore, can promote social cohesion in multi-ethnic societies.

Finally, now that I have mentioned the Max van der Stoel Award, I would like to thank all those delegations and OSCE executive structures who nominated candidates for the 2018 Award. A total of 17 nominations have been submitted to the jury and deliberations are ongoing. I invite and encourage all of you to attend the award ceremony in The Hague on 9

November this year, where the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands will present the award to the winner. This year, the ceremony will also mark the 25th anniversary of the institution of the HCNM. As such, it gives us a good opportunity to look back at a quarter of a century of conflict prevention efforts, in order to ensure that the vicious ethnic violence that ravaged Europe in the early 1990s will not be repeated. I am looking forward to welcoming you to The Hague in the fall.

Thank you for your attention.