



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

address by
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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

I welcome the opportunity to address you today and to present a summary of my work since my previous statement to the Permanent Council in October last year. I would like to start by conveying my appreciation to all of you, as well as your authorities, for the constructive dialogue, strong support for my mandate and effective co-operation towards my institution. I also thank the Chairpersonship and Ambassador Raphael Nægeli; the OSCE Secretariat and the Secretary General; as well as the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Representative on Freedom of the Media for their co-operation. I furthermore wish to highlight the importance I attach to the support of and co-operation with the field operations, particularly during my recent visits.

My work remains focused on delivering my mandate by providing constructive engagement to help reduce tensions involving national minority issues that could have wider societal and political consequences, and have the potential to escalate in the OSCE area. Addressing such tensions early and comprehensively remains a matter of strategic importance for us all.

While each country has its own context, I continue to observe instrumentalization of minority issues, often accompanied by nationalist or exclusionary rhetoric. This phenomenon occurs both within States and across borders, affecting inter-State relations and influencing public perceptions of certain communities. These dynamics may deepen societal divisions, erode trust among communities, and hinder the development of inclusive and resilient societies, thereby threatening peace and stability across the OSCE area. This is why I urge States to refrain from instrumentalizing minority issues and to engage in good faith through channels of dialogue, particularly bilateral mechanisms, in the pursuit of good neighbourly relations. As I have stressed before, established frameworks, such as *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* published by my institution in 2008, underscore co-operative and constructive approaches to addressing minority-related concerns and can offer guidance in that respect.

At the domestic level, the instrumentalization of minority issues often goes hand in hand with a lack of trust between minority groups and the majority or State authorities, undermining the

meaningful engagement necessary to promote social cohesion and prevent conflict. In contrast, inclusive, cohesive societies in which national minorities can participate fully and equally tend to be more resilient. While governments bear the primary responsibility for maintaining effective dialogue, such engagement is a two-way process, requiring openness, willingness and good faith on all sides. Too often, I observe situations in which politicization of the issues, profound mistrust or entrenched positions make it difficult for either party to take the first steps towards meaningful engagement. While there may be legitimate reasons for caution, it is precisely these kinds of consultations that are essential to building trust and strengthening it over time.

History weighs heavily upon many of my engagements. The trauma that different groups in society may have experienced due to war, massive human rights abuses, border changes or other collective suffering can be an active force shaping current perceptions, expectations and sensitivities. The way in which different groups remember the past, and how they feel about certain events and figures, is central to how trust, legitimacy and constructive engagement are built and maintained within diverse societies as well as between States with a shared history. To provide guidance to participating States on how to deal with the sensitive issues related to history and memory and their impact on national minorities, we will publish our latest set of recommendations later this month, and I will say more on this at the end of my statement.

As you are aware, the participating States established the position of the High Commissioner on National Minorities to strengthen our collective conflict prevention framework. They understood that because minority issues can be politically sensitive and have the potential to be instrumentalized, they are directly linked to peace and security. In fulfilling my mandate, I base my activities on factual assessments and focus on practical approaches. I also strongly encourage participating States to ensure that their decisions and public statements are grounded in facts, evidence and experience, rather than bent to political pressure, and I can provide support to that end.

Through quiet diplomacy and sustained engagement, I support social cohesion and stability in diverse societies. I offer advice on specific policies and legislation in various participating States on many issues, ranging from political representation to contested historical narratives. After each visit, I send concrete recommendations to the relevant authorities regarding some of the most pressing issues I have observed. I often share expert input at various stages of the

process to draft policies or legislation related to national minority issues. I also advise more broadly on policies or legislation that should be introduced or avoided. This has a direct impact on the effect these policies and laws will have on the ground.

My institution furthermore promotes the meaningful consultation and involvement of minorities in decisions affecting them through capacity building and by supporting the development of effective monitoring frameworks and consultative mechanisms. At times, my office helps clarify issues which are the subject of discussion between participating States, and promote bilateral dialogue on such issues. My institution also contributes to the development of normative frameworks on national minorities in various participating States, including through our ongoing thematic work.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Since my last statement on 30 October 2025, I have travelled, in chronological order, to Estonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Kosovo^{*}, Mongolia and Lithuania. During this period, I have also continued my engagement with several other participating States, including through written correspondence and online meetings, and advanced both the thematic and programmatic work of my institution. I have maintained dialogue with various international actors through my participation in multilateral platforms, addressing issues relevant to my mandate. These efforts have contributed meaningfully to conflict prevention and to the strengthening of co-operation among communities and participating States. I wish to convey my appreciation for the open and productive exchanges that have made this work possible.

From 10 to 14 November 2025, I visited Estonia. The visit was undertaken at the invitation of the Integration Foundation, a longstanding and valued partner of my office, to the International Conference on Integration in Tallinn on 12 November. Throughout the visit, I held meetings with a broad range of interlocutors, including Government officials, educators, representatives of the media, minority communities and civil society organizations, reflecting the importance of inclusive dialogue across sectors. I travelled to the Ida-Viru region, which gave me an

^{*} 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.

opportunity to engage with minority communities, including at the Roundtable of National Cultural Associations of Ida-Viru County. In Narva, at the Estonian State Gymnasium and at the Narva College, I gained firsthand insight into the implementation of Estonia's education reform in a region where the Russian language is widely spoken. Discussions during the visit covered a range of issues relevant to my mandate, including monitoring integration, access to minority-language media, historical memory and the importance of inclusive consultative mechanisms related to the participation of national minorities in public life.

I visited Montenegro from 20 to 21 November 2025 to attend the Second Regional Conference on Co-operation with National Minorities in South-eastern Europe in Podgorica. I am grateful to Montenegro's Minister of Human and Minority Rights, who hosted the event with the co-operation of my office and support from the OSCE Mission to Montenegro. The conference brought together high-level representatives from across South-eastern Europe, including four Ministers and government authorities working on policies related to national minorities, representatives of national minority communities, and technical experts. The discussions focused on how to better leverage the diverse and multi-community nature of societies in the region to foster economic growth and create employment for the benefit of both minority communities and societies as a whole, and how to stimulate further regional co-operation to that end. During the visit, I also had discussions with Government officials and representatives of minority communities in Montenegro.

I visited Serbia from 9 to 12 December 2025. During my exchanges with Government officials and national minority representatives, we discussed the participation of national minorities in public administration, including in law enforcement; dialogue between the central authorities and national minority representatives; ongoing planning and legislative initiatives related to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities; education in mother tongues and the State language; and the perceptions of minority communities regarding administrative processes, including those related to the registration of addresses. I benefited from hearing directly from several National Councils of National Minorities regarding their priorities, relations with central institutions and the challenges they face.

I visited the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo, where I had exchanges with the mayors and other political leaders representing the ethnic Albanian community. I appreciated the openness of central institutions, local officials and national minority representatives to discuss

the specific dynamics affecting southern Serbia. I look forward to continuing my open dialogue with the authorities. On 11 December, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia Marcel Peško, I co-chaired the 16th meeting of the Stakeholders' Committee of the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad, a multilingual and multi-ethnic higher education institute which my institution has supported since its foundation. The meeting provided an opportunity to review enrolment and financial sustainability, also in light of changes in the higher education sector in Serbia. Since the meeting, my office has been engaging with all stakeholders to provide support and good offices to ensure the continued functioning of the Department, which remains a high priority for me and, as confirmed during my visit, for the Government of Serbia.

I visited Romania from 16 to 18 February. In Bucharest, I met with a range of Government officials, parliamentary representatives of national minorities and independent institutions, including the National Council on Combating Discrimination, to exchange views on Romania's legal and institutional framework for the protection and inclusion of national minorities. In Cluj-Napoca, I met with representatives of national minorities and local authorities, as well as with academics at Babeş-Bolyai University. I took note of efforts to promote cohesion and address challenges, including through implementation of the "National Strategy for preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech" and its Action Plan for 2024 to 2027.

At the invitation of the Chairperson-in-office, I accompanied the Chairman on his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 20 February. Together with the Chairman, I met with State authorities, including at the Presidency, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and with officials from the Central Election Commission. In addition, I had separate meetings with the Minister of Human Rights and Refugees and members of the Council of National Minorities. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss issues including election reform, self-identification, education, and the important role that political leaders can play in avoiding and mitigating divisive rhetoric. I offered my support on these matters, as well as in developing an action plan for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

From 25 February to 5 March, I visited Ukraine, where I travelled to Kyiv and to the Chernivtsi region. I met with a wide range of interlocutors, including representatives of national and local authorities, independent experts, civil society organizations and persons belonging to national

minorities. Despite the ongoing war against Ukraine, I noted the authorities' continued efforts to engage with my office and to develop and refine legislative and policy frameworks related to national minority issues. In my exchanges in Kyiv, I discussed recent legislative and policy developments, paying particular attention to the impact on persons belonging to national minorities and indigenous people, including ensuring that their views and interests are taken into account. Other issues discussed included minority rights monitoring, dialogue with national minorities and capacity building. In the Chernivtsi region, I had the opportunity to observe the implementation of national laws and policies in practice, in particular in the field of education and in other areas related to cultural and community life.

In my exchanges with different interlocutors, we also touched upon broader reflections related to the social cohesion and recovery of the country after the war. My office is consolidating analysis to support efforts towards peace and stability, and on questions of identity, language, minority protection and reintegration. Since such issues will form an important part of Ukraine's reconstruction, my office is also assessing how it can most effectively contribute to social cohesion in post-war Ukraine from the perspective of my mandate.

My office will continue to work closely with the Ukrainian authorities by sharing comparative analysis of and advice on relevant legislation and policies, as well as through our activities to strengthen institutional capacities for the effective implementation of relevant legislation and policies.

From 23 to 27 March, I visited Kosovo. Building on my first visit in August 2025 and subsequent correspondence, I continued my engagement with the authorities and non-majority communities on the topics of consultations with communities, language compliance and cultural remembrance. My visit took place in the days following the announcement by the authorities in Pristina and the European Union about the specific modalities related to the implementation of two laws with significant implications for non-majority communities. While effective implementation will be important, I was glad to hear that the authorities had taken steps to address sensitivities and administrative realities faced by the Kosovo Serb community and other residents, as I had been encouraging them to do since last summer. While community representatives have a role to play, the primary responsibility for maintaining effective dialogue rests with the relevant institutions and officials.

Since compliance with Kosovo's legal framework on the use of languages is an important element of my engagement in Kosovo, I discussed the need to appoint a Language Commissioner as soon as possible. I also continued my discussions on cultural remembrance in public spaces and history education with various interlocutors, which remain relevant to address potential long-term tensions. The visit provided an opportunity to engage with new local officials following the October 2025 municipal elections and to discuss matters related to inter-community relations in specific regions. I met with mayors, with representatives of education and health institutions, and with community representatives in six municipalities and heard how local leaders undertake consultations with a wide spectrum of community representatives on issues that affect them. I will continue to liaise with central officials on how these concrete local examples could serve as inspiration elsewhere. I look forward to continuing my open dialogue with the authorities in Pristina, as well as with mayors and with community representatives.

From 3 to 8 May, I visited Mongolia. In Ulaanbaatar, I held consultations with the authorities on several issues related to my mandate, including multilingual education and the effective participation of minorities in social and economic life. I also travelled to the ethnically and linguistically diverse province of Bayan-Ulgii, where I visited a multilingual school which provides instruction in the Mongolian and Kazakh languages and met with representatives of the regional government, civil society and education authorities. During my visit to Mongolia, I was able to gain insight into national legal and policy frameworks designed to support integration and to make first-hand observations of practical aspects of the implementation of multilingual education. At the National University of Mongolia, I also delivered a lecture on the OSCE and the mandate and engagements of the HCNM. I look forward to continuing my dialogue and practical co-operation with stakeholders in Mongolia.

From 17 to 22 May, I visited Lithuania. The Lithuanian authorities invited me to deliver a keynote address at the annual Forum on Integration and Inclusion in Vilnius, organized by the Department of National Minorities under the Government of Lithuania, a longstanding partner of my office. During the visit, I met with Government officials, and representatives of the Parliament, local authorities, minority communities, educators, media representatives and civil society organizations. My exchanges focused on the intersection of social cohesion, integration, and broader resilience considerations. I travelled to Trakai, where I met with representatives of Lithuania's traditional minority communities. I also visited two schools in

Vilnius catering to Ukrainian pupils and providing education in Polish and Russian, respectively. These visits offered valuable insight into the practical implementation of inclusive and multilingual education policies in Lithuania and the important role education plays in promoting integration while preserving minority identities. I also delivered a lecture at Mykolas Romeris University on the OSCE and the mandate and engagements of the HCNM.

During the past six months, I have remained in regular communication with the authorities and representatives of national minorities in Moldova. I follow legislative and policy developments relevant to national minorities and issues that could affect social cohesion, and my office continues to work with Moldova's institutions to strengthen their capacities in the area of multilingual education, and data collection and analysis. On 29 April, I spoke online at an international conference on the preservation, development and promotion of the Gagauz language in Moldova. I welcomed this event as an opportunity to exchange views on inclusive policies on language education. I look forward to visiting Moldova and continuing my exchanges with the authorities in the near future.

Over the past months, I have participated in various events, some of them organized by other international organizations. This forms part of my general approach to advance meaningful co-operation with the wider international community, especially in areas that support my activities. In November last year, I participated in the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva. I engaged in debates on issues directly related to my mandate and interacted with partners and interlocutors, both from within the OSCE area, as well as those bringing expertise and experiences on minority issues from outside our region.

In February, I participated in the Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism, organized by the Swiss Chairpersonship. In my work promoting cohesion in diverse societies, I am directly engaged in addressing the broader social and political conditions in which anti-Semitism thrives and my office reinforces the principle that including and protecting Jewish communities is a core democratic responsibility and a key indicator of societal resilience. As such, I appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the discussions on this important topic.

In February, I addressed the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at its Winter Session. I reaffirmed that dialogue with parliamentarians is essential to underpin my support to participating States in their efforts to promote cohesive and resilient societies and prevent conflict, given the key

role that parliamentarians play in, among others, legislation, budgetary choices, oversight and public discourse.

In March, I participated in the 42nd OSCE–Council of Europe Coordination Group Meeting in Strasbourg to take stock of our collaboration on the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and to explore future co-operation, leveraging the complementarity of the respective mandates of our institutions. I also valued the opportunity to participate in a side-event on “Protection of National Minorities: Council of Europe and OSCE Perspectives”.

For several years, my office has been engaging on the subject of contestations over history that have the potential to intensify or cause tensions within and between States. National minority issues are often part of these dynamics, making this an issue of direct relevance to my mandate. Successive High Commissioners have noted that there is no specific international legal framework governing the ways in which States can and should regulate decisions over historical narratives or symbols, and that there is little guidance on conflict prevention approaches that relate to contestations over historical memory.

When issues around contested histories cause discord, decision-makers may need to take difficult steps to reduce tensions. When this involves national minority issues, my office can offer support and advice. Therefore, my office has developed a set of Recommendations on Contested Histories and National Minorities that I intend to launch in Siena on 19 June. These Recommendations are based on the observations of successive High Commissioners and input from experts in the field, and are built on international law.

The Siena Recommendations on Contested Histories focus on three key policy areas: the legal and policy sphere, public spaces, and education. Our intention is for the Recommendations to be a source of practical advice for the participating States to consult when they are taking decisions on matters related to contested historical narratives, especially when they intersect with other national minority issues. My overarching advice is that States should seek opportunities to promote mutual respect and understanding both among different communities in their society, as well as with neighbouring States. I sincerely hope that participating States will make good use of these Recommendations, acknowledge the risks inherent in issues

related to historical narratives and memory, including in bilateral relations, and handle related decision and rhetoric in a responsible way, for the sake of peace and security.

This year, my office is overseeing the selection and presentation of the 12th Max van der Stoep Award on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Every two years, this award is presented to recognize extraordinary and outstanding achievements in improving the position of national minorities in the OSCE area. I look forward to announcing the winner soon and inviting you to the Award Ceremony, which will take place in The Hague in November.

Addressing the specific challenges faced by women and girls from minority groups, and empowering them to contribute fully to society, is essential for peace and stability. Through ongoing work in various participating States and other engagements, my office continues to highlight the different roles that national minority women play in conflict prevention.

My office has continued exploring the thematic area of conflict-sensitive collection, analysis and use of data on ethnicity, language and religion. The objective of this work is to bring to the surface the consequences of methodological choices that may affect social cohesion, such as how groups are classified. Furthermore, earlier this year, the Council of Europe invited my office to participate in a working group overseeing a study on the collection of data regarding national minorities, building on my office's ongoing work in this field.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Many of the activities I have outlined today would not have been possible without the generous financial support of several participating States, to whom I extend my sincere gratitude. This support has made it possible for us to plan our activities based on predictable funding while maintaining the flexibility needed to respond to evolving circumstances on the ground. I would also like to thank those participating States that have seconded nationals to my office, providing valuable expertise and strengthening our capacity. I am grateful to the Chairpersonship for expertly guiding us towards the approval of the budget. The careful planning processes undertaken within my office have further strengthened our strategic framework and operational efficiency, while respecting the need to remain flexible and respond to evolving needs. I look forward to continuing engagement with delegations on the path towards further reforms.

As I mentioned above, I remain guided by the principles of impartiality and quiet diplomacy, with a focus on practical solutions that have concrete impact in both the short and long term. I encourage all participating States to make full use of my institution as a unique tool to promote peace, stability and security in our region. I remain ready to engage with and support all participating States on matters within the scope of my mandate.

Thank you for your attention.