



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

Address by

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to the

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[Check against delivery]

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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the reporting period, from June to October, I continued my activities based on a two-track approach. This includes focused, tailored, confidential engagements with individual participating States, along with the wider promotion of the recommendations and guidelines that my office has conceptualized in various thematic areas over the past 26 years. My visits to countries in the OSCE region, of which I will present some highlights shortly, have therefore been complemented by public events aimed at sharing policy advice and adapting it to local contexts, and at exchanging experiences and working methods with like-minded organizations. Outreach to the United Nations and other regional organizations has been part of this effort.

As an additional step in our dialogue with other regional organizations and relevant UN agencies, I hosted, together with the Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE, a panel discussion on “Preventive Diplomacy in the Changing Landscape of Modern Conflicts: The Role of Regional Organizations”. The event, which built on the success of a similar panel discussion in 2018, took place at the United Nations in New York, in the margins of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. I also took the opportunity to participate in an informal discussion with civil society hosted by the International Peace Institute a day earlier.

The event at the UN dedicated special attention to the role of youth. Focusing on youth allows us to address the root causes of segregation and exclusion, which often contribute to divisions in society and ultimately conflict, from the onset. In that sense, participants voiced broad recognition that any work on conflict prevention cannot disregard the key role of education and, in particular, of approaches to learning that promote a positive sense of belonging and expose students to a variety of viewpoints. In this context, I was proud to present the very relevant experience of my office in the field of multi-ethnic and multilingual education, as a way to overcome divisions in society.

The event’s participants agreed that much needed multilateral co-operation requires increased investment in partnerships among like-minded organizations. Therefore, creating and capitalizing on opportunities for exchange and collaboration was seen by most as contributing directly to conflict prevention. I am therefore already planning to continue this exchange, with another event to be held in 2020, in co-operation with the upcoming Albanian Chairmanship.

Education policy is an area in which my office is increasingly receiving global recognition, including by the UN. The latter is capitalizing on our experience in this field to develop a set of universal recommendations on minority education and languages. In May, I addressed the UN European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities, convened by UN Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes. More recently, my office participated in the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum, organized as part of this process. We presented our office’s experience with the Central Asia Education Programme, which is aimed at promoting multilingual and multicultural education in Central Asia. I am looking forward to addressing the next session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues at the end of November, this year focusing on language and education.

Co-operation with the UN continues also in other areas, including on the issue of statelessness. In the OSCE region, statelessness is both a human rights concern and a conflict prevention

issue, often involving national minorities. In early October, I spoke at the UN high-level event on Statelessness in Geneva, on the invitation of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. Several OSCE participating States made pledges regarding preventing and reducing statelessness. All States should consider what they could do to support the drive to make the goal of ending statelessness worldwide by 2024 a reality, as outlined in the Global Action Plan. For those participating States that have not yet done so, acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness will bolster efforts. I was encouraged to note the progress made by several OSCE participating States, with special mention for Kyrgyzstan, which the UNHCR has recognized as the first country in the world to eliminate statelessness. I am also pleased to note that Latvia has adopted amendments to the citizenship law granting automatic citizenship to new-born children of non-citizens. This is in line with the recommendations that I put forward to the authorities during my visit to Latvia earlier this year. While this affects a relatively small number of children, and further measures should be taken to facilitate the naturalization of all non-citizens, it is an important step towards the resolution of this long-standing issue.

Where relevant, and within my mandate, I will continue following up with individual recommendations in my discussions with participating States. As an additional concrete effort, some weeks ago, in partnership with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR] and the UNHCR, in an event opened by the Slovak Chairmanship, I co-hosted the third OSCE-UNHCR Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Birth Registration and Childhood Statelessness among OSCE participating States. I encouraged co-operation to continue in the coming year, including the direct transfer of skills and knowledge between States.

In the reporting period, my institution has also made considerable efforts to promote its thematic toolbox at the local level to encourage ownership and use by local stakeholders, in accordance with specific contexts and needs. A number of roundtables and other events focusing on specific sectorial policies, such as education, participation, access to justice and policing, as well as the overall process of integration, were therefore organized across the OSCE region.

Education as a way to enhance mutual understanding and social cohesion, and the effective participation of national minorities in public life, were the central themes of two roundtables held in North Macedonia and in southern Serbia. These were organized, respectively, with the support of the South East European University [SEEU] and of the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of Novi Sad University. In eastern Serbia, building on the my office's recommendations and guidelines on education and the media, my office held a series of workshops aimed at providing youth from diverse communities with critical thinking skills and imparting principles that foster mutual understanding. Central Asia has also seen a flurry of activity in this context. A seminar on multilingual education was organized in Tajikistan. In Kazakhstan, at an event organized with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Strategic Police Matters Unit of the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department, I presented *The Graz Recommendations on Access to Justice and National Minorities*, and *The Recommendations on Policing in Multi-ethnic Societies*. The Graz Recommendations were also the focus of an event organized in Kyrgyzstan. In Uzbekistan, my office conducted a roundtable on *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*.

With a view to make the work of my office more visible, within the limits set by the confidentiality principle enshrined in my mandate, in the reporting period I have endeavoured to reach out to a number of partners, media outlets and official structures in participating States. As the most recent example, I visited my home country, Italy, last week, where I exchanged information on general developments in the OSCE region, explored avenues for co-operation and capitalized on a high level of media interest in my work to promote the principles of our recommendations and guidelines to a wider audience.

Beside my work on these thematic issues, the last months have taken me to Tajikistan, the United States, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia and Ukraine. I will give you some highlights of the discussions I had in these countries in chronological order.

In **Tajikistan**, which I visited in June, I held meetings in Dushanbe and in the Sughd province in the Fergana Valley, where a sizable Uzbek ethnic minority lives. In Dushanbe, I met Tajikistan's Foreign Minister and Education Minister, as well as a number of other officials, civil society and minority interlocutors representing all the main communities present in the country.

I was pleased to assess the positive impact of the marked improvement in bilateral relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on regional security and on interethnic relations. The opening of border crossing points and the easing of hitherto stringent restrictions on trade and cross-border traffic was stressed as a very significant development, especially for the ethnic Uzbek community in North Tajikistan. On the other hand, the stalemate with Kyrgyzstan over the border delimitation process continues to present a threat to security along border areas, which has a direct negative impact on minority communities residing there. If the stalemate continues, I would like to encourage both governments to seek international facilitation to expedite the delineation process, taking into account recognized best practices.

Education and language featured prominently in my discussions with all interlocutors. In Khujand in the Fergana Valley, where I visited an Uzbek language school and the recently reopened department of Uzbek philology at the University of Khujand, I took note of the reported decrease in the number of minority language schools and classes in the past years. I called on the authorities to invest in the protection and development of mother tongues, including languages spoken by communities in the Gorny Badakhshan region. I also encouraged them to promote the State language through incentives rather than punitive measures. In line with the advice I provide in most contexts in which I operate, I promoted multilingual education, where a balance is achieved between protecting minority languages and ensuring State language proficiency, as a vehicle to full participation in society.

A seminar on multilingual education organized by my office culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Tajikistan's Minister of Education, which underpins the Ministry's participation in the HCNM Central Asia Education Programme. This programme, which has been running since 2012, supports the development of multilingual education in national minority schools in the region. While the key lies in implementation, I consider this a positive step towards building social integration and cohesion.

In Tajikistan, I also observed how the ethnic and linguistic composition of society is reflected in public spaces and called on the Tajik authorities to implement more inclusive "renaming" policies, which reflect the culture and history of all communities residing in the country.

In July, prior to my UN-related business in New York City, I visited **Washington D.C.**, where I was welcomed by a number of Government representatives and the United States Helsinki Commission. My discussions in the U.S. remained focused on the impact of increased political polarization in American society and on measures taken by the authorities to promote social cohesion and to reduce the distance between communities.

Over the course of the trip, I discussed government policies aimed at enhancing community capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts or tensions, measuring and addressing inclusion and diversity, as well as specific programmes and activities to support these policies. Furthermore, and as anticipated last year, I also took the opportunity while I was in the country to engage with civil society actors, discussing matters related to the management of diversity and the integration of society. I expressed interest in building upon existing good practices in the broader scope of my mandate in the OSCE area, as well as in strengthening partnerships with interlocutors in the future.

During my visit to New York City, I also had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of inclusive public spaces. Specifically, I met with a member of the New York City Mayoral Committee on City Art, Monuments and Markers who had been tasked to develop recommendations on how to resolve contestations over a number of divisive symbols and monuments in the city. In this context, I visited a once controversial statue, which was, as a result of this process, contextualized in a way that reflects and respects a variety of existing historical narratives.

In July, I paid a visit to the **Russian Federation**. There, I continued my exchange with the central authorities on the integration of Russia's society, and visited the Republic of Tatarstan. In Tatarstan, I found a vibrant and diverse society, where the authorities invest significant resources in preserving and promoting minority cultures. I took note that Tatar enjoys the status of a State language in the Republic and is used alongside Russian in dealings with public administration as well as in toponyms.

Minority interlocutors' main concerns were related to the education reform regulating the use of languages in school. In my engagement with all interlocutors, I took note of references to the importance of promoting the Russian language to strengthen social cohesion and facilitate integration. I also enquired about the amendments to the education law adopted in 2018, which entail a non-compulsory study of minority languages that are considered official in ethnic republics. I understand the rationale behind this legislative change as a way to harmonize federal and republican legislations. I acknowledge the value of the provision of a non-compulsory study of the Tatar language, which, if indeed based on parental and students' choices, is in line with the thematic recommendations and guidelines of my institution.

At the same time, I was concerned about the somewhat robust approach to ensuring schools' compliance with federal laws and regulations on the use of language. In this regard, I believe it is important that the primary responsibility for the matter of languages in education remains with the education authorities. It is equally important to ensure that the implementation of the amendments is achieved through positive means and incentives, a gradual approach and a consultative process. This would help to avoid miscommunication, speculation and perceptions that the promotion of the Russian language may have a detrimental effect on the Tatar language, or that it may decrease opportunities for bilingualism in the Republic in light of its official status.

While in Moscow, I discussed the situation of Russian minorities in the OSCE area with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the State Duma leadership, with a particular focus on matters related to naturalization and extra-territorial conferral of citizenship. I also discussed issues related to the situation of the Crimean Tatars. Both of these sets of issues remain high on my agenda. Finally, I took the opportunity to exchange experiences with relevant government agencies on the integration of diverse societies.

In September, I visited **Kazakhstan**. In Nur-Sultan, I met President Tokayev, the Chairpersons of the Senate and Mazhilis, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and several other Ministers and senior officials relevant to my mandate.

In general, I noted the efforts made by the authorities to accommodate the rich diversity of Kazakhstan, including through commitments at the highest level to preserve interethnic harmony and to foster cultural expressions and multilingualism. At the same time, I underlined the importance of accompanying such measures with efforts to further advance the effective participation of all groups in public life.

As part of my visit, I exchanged experiences with the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, its Deputy Group and representatives of Ethno-Cultural Associations at the Friendship House in Nur-Sultan, where I raised awareness about my institution's thematic recommendations and guidelines and explored avenues of co-operation to operationalize them. I also discussed further steps in my office's co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science and my institution's partner – the National Centre for Professional Development "ORLEU". That included extending and broadening the Memoranda of Understanding to promote mother tongue-based multilingual education in schools with minority languages of instruction, as well as in preschools, within my office's Central Asia Education Programme.

I also visited Petropavlovsk in the North Kazakhstan region, where ethnic Russians make up the majority of the population. I met regional and city authorities, and representatives of ethnic groups. I visited two schools to see how linguistic diversity is accommodated in education. I also observed how the region's history is reflected in public spaces. In this context, I observed a number of powerful symbols of interethnic unity, such as the Abay-Pushkin monument to two of the most prominent Kazakh and Russian poets. In Nur-Sultan, I conveyed that any change of toponyms should be part of a broad consultative process and reflect a variety of views and narratives. In this regard, I received assurances at the highest level that the historical significance of toponyms, as well as their potential to unite or divide diverse societies, is well understood.

In Almaty, I met local authorities, national minority and civil society representatives, and visited a school with Uyghur language of instruction, which, with our support, successfully implemented mother tongue-based multilingual education. I intend to make the successful experience of such pilot schools more visible as a source of inspiration for other similar contexts.

In September, at the invitation of the Government of **North Macedonia** during my visit to the country in April, I addressed the high-level international conference *Towards the Concept of One Society and Inter-culturalism* organized by the Prime Minister's Office in co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Skopje. The conference was meant to present a draft new National Strategy that aims at cementing social cohesion as a means to promote peace and stability. As such, I was pleased to note that the principles it promotes fall squarely within the overarching

document guiding the work of my office, *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*. I believe that, if successfully implemented, this strategy represents a unique opportunity to enhance the integration of society, with respect to the diversity of all the communities comprising it.

In my meetings with State and government officials, as well as with local government representatives, I reiterated that while the Ohrid Framework Agreement [OFA] did bring progress in many areas, challenges persist in fostering the overall integration of society, leaving it divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. This is why I intend to closely follow the finalization and implementation of the Strategy, as a tool that has the potential to bridge outstanding divides. In particular, I highlighted the importance of fostering linguistic diversity by striking a balance between nurturing one's mother tongue, while promoting mastery of official languages. Such an approach goes hand in hand with the promotion of shared, common languages, allowing for effective communication between different groups in society. I therefore called for a pragmatic implementation of the new legislation regulating the use of languages.

I also conveyed the need to overcome segregation in schools and to step up efforts towards integrated education and multiculturalism to cement societal cohesion. With that in mind, I have offered the expertise of my office in ongoing legislative processes pertaining to education. I also used the opportunity of my visit to look at how historical narratives are reflected in public spaces and took interest in positive examples of cultural manifestations that help overcome divisions.

In October, I visited **Ukraine** to meet with the new Government and the Verkhovna Rada to ensure that the integration of Ukraine's diverse society is high on the agenda, and to offer the expertise and assistance of my institution.

With regard to Ukraine's language policy, in the context of the adoption of the law "On ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as a State language" earlier this year, I reiterated with the new authorities that Ukraine has every right to strengthen the role of the State language to facilitate integration and to enhance a shared sense of belonging. However, these measures should be balanced with efforts to accommodate the diversity of the country. As the State language law does not ensure sufficient legal clarity or guarantees for the protection of the linguistic rights of minorities, I encouraged the authorities to continue their work towards the adoption of updated legislation on national minorities, including on the protection of minority languages. To this end, as I indicated in my statement to the UN Security Council, which I was invited to address in July with a specific focus on this law, my institution stands ready to provide expertise and advice.

As to the matters related to education, I reiterated that I assess as a positive measure the extension of the implementation period of Article 7 of the Education law until 2023. At the same time, a differentiated treatment between the EU and non-EU languages remains a concern, also in the draft law on Secondary Education. On a positive note, the latter provides that private education institutions can freely choose the language of instruction, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. I encouraged the authorities to keep this provision in the final reading of the law.

I welcome the creation of the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience. This development is in line with the advice I gave to the authorities during my previous visits. Such

an institution is indeed important to co-ordinate a number of matters related to interethnic relations and the integration of Ukraine's society.

Lastly, as in all of my previous visits, I met with the representatives of the Crimean Tatars and took note of their concerns, including in the field of education and cultural heritage. I continue to discuss these and other issues raised during the meeting with all relevant interlocutors, as per my mandate.

Looking ahead, my office is finalizing preparations for the event marking the 20th anniversary of *The Lund Recommendations on the Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, which we will be celebrating on 14 November in Lund, Sweden. I am confident that our invitation to the event has already reached your offices, but let me renew it here as well. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Sweden, where these recommendations were originally drafted and launched back in 1999, and which is now generously supporting the organization of the event.

The core message of the Lund Recommendations is that minority participation in decision-making is an asset which generates substantive gains both for the minorities themselves and for the State. As such, it is approached not only from a rights-based perspective but also through a conflict prevention lens. A meaningful level of representation and participation of minorities in all aspects of a country's public life, such as in elected assemblies, executive structures, the public sector, the courts and the civil service, is vital to foster loyalty to and trust in the institutions of the State. Although my mandate focuses on national minorities, true participation cannot disregard the meaningful inclusion of women, including minority women. I therefore look at the participation "file" through a gender lens, too. These aspects help ensure ownership of decision-making processes by all members of society, which in turn positively affects social cohesion.

While I attach great importance to introducing incentives and measures that facilitate the meaningful participation of all social groups in State structures, I am convinced that the key to participation lies in a wider approach that tackles all spheres of public life and all groups of society – minorities and majority, women and men, boys and girls. Hence the title of the conference – "From Lund to Ljubljana" – taking us from participation to the integration of diverse societies. Only when social groups enjoy genuine interaction and mutual benefits can participation in public structures be truly sustainable. For example, a balanced approach to education and language – to name but just two thematic areas in which my office has been engaged in – is a prerequisite to and starting point for ensuring participation and representation of all members of society.

The event, which will see the participation of high-level speakers, will reflect this wider understanding of the notion of "participation". As such, it will revolve around four different panels, each focusing on a specific theme, including political participation; cross-border and economic participation; the participation of minority women in public life, and the experience of Sweden. Speakers – academics and practitioners from a number of participating States – are expected to assess the state of implementation of these recommendations and challenges thereto, highlight positive practices that can be replicated elsewhere and propose a way forward for my institution's engagement in this field.

As we normally do with all of our key guidelines and recommendations, we have produced a short animated video to provide introduction to the principles in the Lund Recommendations,

which I have the pleasure of presenting here today, for the first time. Thank you for the attention, and thank you for watching.