



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

address by

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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to deliver my final statement in my capacity as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. I will summarize the activities that I conducted since my last statement in December 2023, despite the serious issues that continue to directly affect my work and the functioning of this organization. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for and deep gratitude to the participating States and their authorities for their unyielding support and engagement, constructive dialogue and good co-operation with my institution. I deeply value and appreciate your strong support for my mandate, which made the activities presented to you in my statement today possible.

I am deeply grateful for the strong working relationship that I have enjoyed with the OSCE leadership, including Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Director Matteo Mecacci, Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) Teresa Ribeiro, and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General Roberto Montella, as well as with the OSCE Secretariat and field operations.

In addition, I want to thank the Chairpersonship of Malta, in particular the Chairperson-in-Office, His Excellency Dr. Ian Borg, and the Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Natasha Meli Daudey, for their strong leadership, commitment and dedication to facilitating comprehensive, open and constructive dialogue with all participating States. Your leadership has been pivotal in maintaining the stability and credibility of our organization.

The challenges we face today illustrate how vital it is to come together to preserve and strengthen the spirit of co-operation and dialogue within and between States and multilateral organizations. Respect for the fundamental norms and principles that our predecessors agreed upon 50 years ago is today critical to ensure the future of our organization. Sustainable peace and security in the OSCE area rests on our ability and willingness to work together while recognizing and respecting our differences. Continuous dialogue based on our shared principles and commitments is essential to restore trust, reinforce co-operation and return to consensus-based decisions.

These ideals have inspired my work during my whole mandate. I will now summarize my office's work, including my engagements with participating States in alphabetical order, and present to you the activities undertaken by my office since my last PC statement.

My visit to Albania in January 2023 opened a chapter of close co-operation with Tirana, notably with the Committee on National Minorities, a central institution under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office. I had the pleasure to continue this productive dialogue during the meeting with Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Igli Hasani, who visited my office in April this year. My institution's expertise remains at the disposal of the Albanian authorities to advance pending secondary legislation relevant to the "Law on the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania".

Together with our partners in the Council of Europe office (CoE) in Tirana and the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Albania, my office has been providing assistance to the members of the Committee in building their capacities to effectively implement their mandate. Our co-operation started when we provided technical assistance in the process to draft the Committee's Strategy and Action Plan for 2023 to 2026, which facilitates their everyday work.

Continuing in the same spirit, I am pleased to report that my office, in co-operation with the CoE Office in Tirana, organized a visit of members of the Albanian Committee on National Minorities to Tallinn to exchange experience with their Estonian counterparts, primarily the Ministry of Culture and the Integration Foundation in April. The participants shared their experiences in designing inclusive policies that benefit national minorities, and their effective implementation and monitoring. This will directly contribute to the institutional development of both countries and, therefore, to the better protection and integration of national minorities.

I travelled to Andorra in early May to learn about its multilingual education system. During the visit I met with Prime Minister Xavier Espot, Foreign Minister Imma Tor, the Institutional Relations, Education and Universities Minister Ladislau Baró, Speaker of Parliament Carles Ensenyat, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Sandra Codina and several other parliamentarians, as well as other representatives of the authorities. I also took the opportunity to meet with representatives of religious communities in Andorra to discuss the ways in which inter-faith and inter-confessional dialogue can strengthen social cohesion in a religiously diverse society. Andorra's society is also linguistically and culturally diverse, and it co-operates effectively

with both France and Spain to provide three main education systems. Pupils graduate with the ability to communicate in three, four, and even five, languages. This not only builds bridges between communities within Andorra and with its neighbours, but also provides opportunities for tertiary education and employment throughout the entire region and beyond.

The curricula of the various schools include days on which pupils from different schools gather at a single location to learn together. I had the opportunity to observe one of these events and was impressed by the way that language posed no barrier between them, despite the many mother-tongues spoken by the children.

During my visit, I also had the opportunity to meet with local and national authorities in charge of the education systems. I observed that internal and cross-border co-operation on curricula, diploma-recognition and funding prioritizes the quality of education ahead of any political concerns. This creates an ideal learning environment that not only provides future opportunities to young people in Andorra, but, in turn, facilitates the future prosperity of the country.

I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in early March to support the Regional Conference on Matters Pertaining to National Minorities. This event was initiated by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, taking inspiration from annual roundtables that my institution has been hosting in The Hague in recent years. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss matters of common interest – including improving socio-economic conditions for Roma communities – with the Minister of Human Rights and Refugees Sevlid Hurić. I was pleased to lend my support to country's diversity management efforts by sharing my institution's practices and principles contained in the thematic Recommendations and Guidelines, as well as lending support to ensure participation by representatives of national minorities from across the region. I am grateful to the OSCE field operations in South-Eastern Europe, which similarly facilitated attendance of participants from their areas of responsibility.

The objective of the Regional Conference was to facilitate a co-operative approach to national minority issues by State authorities and representatives of communities throughout the region. I encouraged the delegates to move on from the divisions of the past and towards a future of regional strength through diversity as an integral part of Europe. I am confident that such dialogue and exchanges can contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity.

I look forward to a continuation of the regional co-operation that was initiated at the Regional Conference and have raised the matter in my discussions with interlocutors in the region in my search for a host for the next conference.

During my visit to Sarajevo, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees presented a draft of its new Programme for the Promotion of Minority Rights. My institution provided input to the document prior to its presentation and I participated in discussions for its further improvement. I encouraged the Ministry to continue its efforts to integrate the country's diverse society and emphasized the importance of the consultation process as both a trust-building exercise and to establish ownership and continued engagement towards successful implementation of the programme.

Finally, I had the opportunity to explore grassroots efforts in Mostar, implemented by the civil society organizations (CSOs) Local Democracy in Action Mostar and Nansen Dialogue Centre Mostar. The former is a CSO that facilitates citizen participation at the local level through awareness-raising and consultations. The latter works towards building common activities among students and teaching staff in the "two schools under one roof" approach within the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. I continue to observe that local engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a vibrant bridge between communities in this diverse country.

My office continues to support the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Their initiative to evaluate the progress of the multilingual education programmes in national minority schools, which my office supported, resulted in several significant findings. I commend the Ministry, school principals and teachers for their dedication to making multilingual education a shared task through a participatory process in its design and implementation. My office also supported a conference in June to follow up on the evaluation that provided space for teachers and policymakers to make the multilingual education process a common goal.

In March 2024, I visited Latvia for the first time, with meetings in Riga and minority-populated Daugavpils. I am grateful for the excellent support provided by Latvia during this visit. While in the country, I met with key interlocutors, including Minister of Foreign Affairs Krišjānis Kariņš, Minister of Culture Agnese Logina, Minister of Education and Science Anda Čakša, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Zanda Kalniņa-Lukašēvica, State Secretary at the Ministry of

the Interior Dimitrijs Trofimovs and the Mayor of Daugavpils Andrejs Elksniņš. In discussions with officials, I shared my observations from meetings with national minority representatives, civil society, the media, principals, and students and teachers from several local schools in Riga and Daugavpils.

The visit provided an opportunity to follow up on earlier discussions on new policies relevant to national minorities, such as those adopted or under consideration in the fields of education, language, citizenship, participation and media, among other topics. I acknowledged the role played by the current regional security context in shaping this new policy framework. I highlighted to the authorities the significance of creating an environment that respects the rights and requirements of all groups in society. This can be accomplished through open dialogues with minority communities and the implementation of fair, practical and comprehensive policies with realistic timelines. This is crucial for promoting social cohesion

Regarding the transition of the education system to the Latvian language only, I noted efforts to promote the State language as a means to facilitate the participation of national minorities in public life. However, based on Latvia's extensive experience in multilingual education, I encouraged the authorities to provide national minorities with opportunities to continue learning and practicing their mother tongues, with adequate investment to preserve a high quality of education at all levels. I advised my counterparts to balance efforts to promote the State language with the right of persons belonging to national minorities to use their minority language in private and public communication. I took note of plans to potentially discontinue State-funded media in the Russian language. I emphasized the importance of maintaining a share of locally produced media content in the Russian language.

Regarding ongoing reforms in the immigration and citizenship sphere, I acknowledged some positive steps taken recently. At the same time, I urged the authorities to address cases through individual, reasonable and proportional approaches.

In Kyrgyzstan, my staff have had promising discussions with the Ministry of Education and Science, which recognizes the importance of multilingual education. By learning from successful local initiatives where schools have pioneered the introduction of multilingual education, the Ministry has taken steps to expand these efforts. Such positive developments ensure that students can access education in their mother tongue while acquiring proficiency in

the national language. This not only enhances cognitive skills and academic performance but also promotes cultural preservation and social cohesion, preparing students to excel in a more interconnected world. In Kyrgyzstan, I have also taken note of ambitious ongoing and planned reforms in the areas of elections, territorial administration and integration strategies, which all may have significant impact on minority communities, particularly in regard to their representation in public life. I encourage Kyrgyzstan's authorities to be mindful of the importance to effectively consult with all relevant minority communities on these matters and I note that my office stands ready to provide further support in this regard.

In February, I visited Malta for consultations with the OSCE Chairpersonship on key areas of co-operation. I am grateful to His Excellency Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta and OSCE Chair-in-Office, as well as to the taskforce for a productive exchange on matters of common interest.

While in Malta, I met with Permanent Secretary in the Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation Ministry Matthew Vella, Commissioner Renee Laiviera at the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), Chief Executive Joanna Spiteri and Chairperson Frank Farrugia of the Broadcasting Authority. I took the opportunity to meet with various interlocutors to learn about Malta's experience with diversity governance, particularly multilingualism in education and the media. I welcomed Malta's continued efforts in delivering high-quality bilingual education for all, as well as Malta's steps towards the inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities, data collection, anti-discrimination, and the intersection between climate policy and ethnicity.

In Moldova, in February, my office worked with a local partner to organize a Public Administration School for national minority youth. The aim of this initiative is to encourage their involvement in public life through training and internships in State institutions. This programme has been very successful and gives hope for the future.

One of our main priorities is promoting multilingual education to ensure equal access and educational opportunities for all students, regardless of ethnic background. We are focusing on areas such as policymaking, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, our office is supporting the Education Department in Gagauzia to create effective monitoring and assessment tools for implementing bilingual teaching at the preschool level.

I am pleased to welcome the Ministry of Education's support for improving Romanian-language teaching in Gagauzia, which is in high demand. However, there is still a shortage of Romanian-speaking or bilingual teachers in Gagauzia and Taraclia.

Following the Bashkan elections in May 2023, our office has been facilitating communication between various stakeholders in Gagauzia and Chisinau. It is good to see the country's leadership reaching out to different sectors of Gagauz society, but a more strategic and participatory engagement is necessary. We are ready to provide expertise and facilitate dialogue to ensure the effective functioning of the autonomy.

We also support Moldovan parliamentarians by providing empirical research and facilitating dialogue to develop legislation and policies that promote enhanced linguistic competencies and diversity. The data collection for the Linguobarometer study, which examines the links between linguistic experiences and language policy preferences across Moldova's ethnolinguistic groups, has just been completed.

On 31 May to 3 April, I had the honour to be the first High Commissioner on National Minorities to visit Mongolia. During the visit I met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Battsetseg Batmunkh, Minister of Education and Science Enkh-Amgalan Luvsantseren and Deputy Minister of Culture Battur Purevsuren; the heads of the National University of Mongolia and the University of Internal Affairs of Mongolia, Badarch Dendev and Batbaatar Purevdorj respectively; and Member of the State Great Hural (Parliament) and Head of the Delegation of Mongolia to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Tsogtbaatar Damdin. I witnessed first-hand the commitment of the authorities in Ulaanbaatar to promote diversity and empower national minority communities. In particular, in the field of minority education, I appreciated the genuine interest and efforts of education policymakers and practitioners in implementing multilingual and multicultural education. With the Minister of Education and Science, I signed a Memorandum of Co-operation to enhance our joint efforts in multicultural and inclusive education. I was also able to gain an insight into the substantial efforts of the Government to preserve the diverse cultural heritage of the country, especially amid challenges related to climate change. I was also pleased to learn about the particular attention the Mongolian authorities pay to the active engagement of minority women and youth in public and socio-economic life. We also had the opportunity to explore these issues in further depth during

our roundtable on my *Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life* (Socio-Economic Recommendations).

My team and I were pleased to welcome a delegation from North Macedonia for a day-long workshop in The Hague in late January, with the participation of Djabir Doko, the then Deputy Minister of Political System and Inter-Community Relations; Robert Alagjovzovski, the National Coordinator for Interculturalism; and Eran Kurtish, the Director of the Agency for Community Rights Realization. In addition to discussing the implementation of our respective mandates in more detail, the main aim of the workshop was to learn about the upcoming priorities and explore potential avenues of co-operation. My institution looks forward to continuing its important collaboration with the authorities of North Macedonia, which dates back to the first High Commissioner, Max van der Stoep.

I continued my dialogue with the authorities of the Russian Federation on both the situation in Ukraine's territories under the effective control of the Russian Federation, and issues which the Russian Federation raised with me regarding the situation in specific participating States. In this regard, I exchanged correspondence with Patriarch Kirill and Ms. Tatiana Moskalkova, the Commissioner for Human Rights. While considering the matters raised with me, I also reiterated a number of issues that I have relayed to the authorities of the Russian Federation in the past two years on the situation in those territories, where I continue to be concerned about the impact of certain policies in areas such as education and languages. I also expressed my condolences to the Russian Federation on the appalling terrorist attack in March this year at Crocus City Hall. In my correspondence I reiterated that terrorism knows no border, nationality or religion. At the same time, I was concerned by reports that indicate a surge in xenophobic incidents and hate speech directed at persons belonging to ethnic groups associated with Central Asia. I am also following with interest the debates on migration policies among the officials and legislators. I encourage the authorities of the Russian Federation to ensure that the response to this terror attack and other security incidents do not exacerbate xenophobic sentiments and or lead to discriminatory treatment of minority groups.

Last month, I visited Belgrade to continue my longstanding engagement with the authorities of Serbia on issues related to national minorities. During the visit I met Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ivica Dačić, Foreign Minister Marko Đurić, Education Minister Slavica Đukić Dejanović and Commissioner for the Protection of Equality Brankica Janković. The visit

was a good opportunity to discuss the latest developments related to the integration of Serbia's diverse society, review ongoing joint initiatives, and thank interlocutors for their constructive co-operation throughout the last three years. As always, my visit was greatly enhanced by the excellent co-operation my institution enjoys with the OSCE Mission to Serbia under the leadership of Ambassador Jan Braathu, whose tremendous work in support of Serbia's institutions continues to attract the praise of interlocutors. Prior to my visit to Serbia, I hosted Serbia's Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue Tomislav Žigmanov in my office in The Hague, where we discussed national minority issues.

In May, my office hosted the annual meeting of the Stakeholders' Committee of the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad at the technical level. The meeting once again demonstrated the firm commitment of all stakeholders to provide quality education to ethnic Albanians in Serbian as a non-mother tongue.

Over the years, my office has worked closely with all stakeholders to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the Department, and together with representatives of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, I have had the opportunity to co-chair the annual meetings of the stakeholders, facilitating the collective efforts towards this important objective. The Bujanovac Department continues to serve as an inter-ethnic, bilingual learning facility that supports career opportunities for all communities. It is an educational institution and an aspiring hub for interaction among communities. It promotes social and economic development in the region, showcasing how co-operation can contribute towards strengthening social cohesion.

During my trip to Switzerland, I exchanged notes with my interlocutors in Switzerland on the current security situation in the OSCE and had an opportunity to discuss diversity governance in the country. I met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis and members of his team in the federal government, including Federal Councillor; Ambassador Muriel Peneveyre and The Director of the Federal Office of Culture Carine Bachmann, responsible for Education and Multilingualism. I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about Switzerland's model of multilingualism, cultivated in society and enshrined in law, in the German, French, Italian and Romansh languages. I commend Switzerland's efforts to foster a sense of community and belonging, as this falls squarely within the advice that I provide to all 57 OSCE participating States, as set forth in *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*.

On 11 December 2023, in Ashgabat, I addressed the high-level forum “Dialogue as a Guarantee of Peace” and spoke about the importance of diversity management for stability of our societies. To this end, I would like to note the active engagement, keen interest and good cooperation of the government of Turkmenistan with my Institution in the areas of promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and strengthening integration efforts. This and other important events held in Central Asia and beyond, that I had the privilege to be a part of during my term in the office, demonstrated the strong commitment of authorities to constructively and openly engage with my mandate and the OSCE in general.

Since my last address to this Council, I have sustained my engagement with and on Ukraine in the context of the tense political and security environment as a result of the ongoing war against this country.

Since my last report, I have intensified collaborations with international partners to assist Ukraine’s authorities in strengthening the institutional and legislative framework for minority rights and issues. My understanding is that this collaborative effort is not only crucial for Ukraine’s future recovery and reconciliation but also for supporting Ukraine’s journey towards the European Union. My office will continue assisting Ukraine with both legislative and policy advice and capacity building in the areas that are relevant to my mandate.

After following the development and adoption of the Law “on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine” in December 2022, I noted the adoption in late 2023 of amendments to this and other minority-related legislation, which seeks to reflect the recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding the protection of national minorities. I regard these changes, particularly in the parts related to language and education, as helpful in addressing some of the long-standing concerns expressed by minority communities in the country and as well as issues raised by Ukraine’s neighbouring States. My office has been in constant contact with key partners engaged in policy and legislative work, such as the Office of the Verkhovna Rada’s Commissioner for Human Rights and its Minority Council and the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience with its various consultative fora, to define and plan future collaborations. The visit of the latter’s leadership to my office in The Hague is testament to such close co-operation. Future joint projects mainly aim at boosting these institutions’ capacity to monitor minority rights and assist the implementation of the existing minority rights framework in Ukraine in a way that duly considers the needs and

interests of minority communities. My online participation in an event on the relevance of minority rights to European integration, organized by the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience in Uzhhorod gave me a direct insight into the situation of national minorities in Ukraine. In the same vein, to help the authorities assess needs and boost the efficiency of existing structures, I have also encouraged my staff to participate as observers in existing platforms of dialogue, such as regular sessions of the National Minority Council under the office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights and the Forum of National Minorities of Ukraine held on 7 June 2024.

I am pleased to note that, also based on my warm encouragement and concrete recommendations to the parties in the past years, bilateral channels of dialogue between Ukraine and some of its neighbours have been revitalized, with the aim of finding compromises on specific minority issues. I strongly urge the parties to continue in this manner, while refraining from negative rhetoric. Such actions can have a detrimental effect on both social cohesion and regional relations. I am convinced that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on international law, will enable the necessary conditions for dialogue, mutual understanding and respect for the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic nature of societies.

As prospects for peace negotiations start to emerge, I would like to offer my services, particularly with regard to diversity management policies, which can contribute to ensuring the sustainability of any peace formula in the future.

In Uzbekistan in June, my office, together with the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan and the National Centre for Human Rights, co-organized two roundtables on my Socio-Economic Recommendations in Tashkent and Samarkand. In this regard, I was glad to note various governmental projects aimed at the social and economic development of the country's regions, including in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. On that note, I would like to express my hope that regional development programmes will continue to acknowledge the specific needs and interests of the various ethnic communities constituting the diverse populations of the nation's regions.

As part of my mandate, I continue to follow the situation in Kosovo* very closely. The Director of my office, Ambassador Marek Szczygiel, visited Kosovo in March 2024 on my behalf to liaise with interlocutors and assess the situation. The visit was carried out in close co-ordination with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and its Head of Mission, Ambassador Michael Davenport, to build upon the impressive work that he and his team carry out regarding, *inter alia*, the situation of non-majority communities.

Recent events in Kosovo have shown that the situation will remain fragile until all parties renew their commitment to dialogue towards effective diversity management. The inclusive participation of Kosovo Serbs and other non-majority communities in public and socio-economic life, including meaningful consultations with non-majority communities on issues affecting them, are essential to prevent further tensions and to de-escalate the situation.

My institution, along with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and other international partners, has been supporting the Balkanistics programme at the University of Pristina for several years. The programme is facing obstacles to its re-accreditation, which I hope will be resolved soon. Ensuring the continued functioning of the Balkanistics Programme would bring communities closer together and have a direct impact on the availability of much-needed bilingual professionals. In this context, it would be important for all parties to the Berlin Process to renew their commitment to implementing the mobility agreements, including the one on recognition of higher education diplomas.

Co-operation with international organizations and multilateral structures at large has been one of my priorities since I assumed this mandate. In this reporting period, I continued reaching out to multilateral organizations at large to reinforce my work and increase its reach and impact. To this end, on 23 to 25 June, I undertook an inaugural visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to meet with the leadership of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The purpose of the visit was to discuss issues of mutual interest, explore areas that are complementary to our work and strengthen co-operation between our respective institutions on sharing knowledge and best practices. In my conversation I stressed the importance of strengthening interfaith dialogue, especially by contributing to existing platforms for dialogue among religious and political

* 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.

leaders that aim to promote respect and non-discrimination, and combat Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance, including against Christians and other faiths. We also discussed conflict prevention, peaceful resolution of conflicts, mediation and promoting youth and women's empowerment.

The United Nations remains an important partner in the implementation of my conflict prevention mandate. With this in mind, together with the 2024 OSCE Chairpersonship of Malta and the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Nicolas Levrat, I co-organized an Expert Roundtable discussion on Building Peace: Minority Youth in Conflict Prevention Efforts and Inclusive Socio-economic Policies in Geneva in May. The UN Office in Geneva provided the perfect backdrop to discuss measures and policy approaches set out in the Socio-Economic Recommendations and place them in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and other UN frameworks that empower youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention settings. Minority youths in particular can play a key role in building strong, inclusive societies and, in so doing, minimize the risk of conflict.

Throughout my time as High Commissioner, I have valued the excellent co-operation with the European Union on matters relating to my mandate. I visited Brussels once again in March and had productive exchanges with the European External Action Service, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan Regional issues Miroslav Lajčák, and with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Olof Skoog. As in recent years, my institution has also contributed to the European Commission's 2024 Enlargement Report by sharing observations, comparing notes and providing our input on areas relevant to our work.

The Council of Europe (CoE) continued to be an important partner for my institution. In addition to the aforementioned programmatic co-operation, we have benefitted from an ongoing exchange at various levels. The Director of my institution participated in the OSCE-CoE Coordination Group meeting in April in Strasbourg, and my team continues to co-ordinate closely with relevant bodies, including the Secretariat and the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

In February, I participated in the 23rd Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and addressed the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security. This was a valuable opportunity to engage with parliamentarians on their important role in designing inclusive legislation and to discuss matters related to OSCE principles and values.

Dear colleagues,

Let me now share some observations made in recent times that are of a more general and horizontal nature.

In many countries and regions, a focus area of my engagement remains the issue of linguistic diversity, in line with my publications, *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* and *The Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities*. My office has observed the emergence of numerous legislative and policy initiatives across multiple countries in the OSCE region that are placing an almost exclusive focus on promoting one official language, which is sometimes called a State or an official language. I want to use this opportunity to underscore one of my institution's most long-standing recommendations, and that is the need to maintain an appropriate balance between a participating State's wish to ensure State-language knowledge among its population on the one hand and the right of national minorities to learn and use their mother tongue on the other hand. I and my predecessors as High Commissioner emphasize the need to seek and maintain this balance while also acknowledging and supporting the fact that promoting State languages can be a legitimate aim and that widespread knowledge of a shared language can play an essential function in the integration of diverse societies.

Numerous examples from the OSCE area confirm that multilingual education is an excellent solution to the challenge posed by trying to balance multiple languages in linguistically diverse societies. The experience of successive High Commissioners confirms that countries that guarantee an appropriate role for minority languages in primary and secondary education are likely to make significant progress in integrating their diverse societies. Multilingual education can also be a positive factor in strengthening regional co-operation and understanding between neighbouring States, fostering cross-border communication and cultural exchange, which can support regional integration and further enhance social cohesion and resilience to conflicts.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would now like to reflect on my institution's thematic engagements.

Last week, on 3 and 4 July, my office hosted the fourth edition of the annual Inter-Agency Roundtable in The Hague, which gathered representatives of institutions responsible for national minority issues or inter-ethnic relations. This year, we focused on promoting the effective participation of national minorities in public life through consultative mechanisms, including specific institutions (bodies) and procedures. The discussion revealed that consultative mechanisms could help overcome barriers and ensure broad participation, especially when the design of these mechanisms has been participatory and meant to generate real impact. As highlighted by *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, consultative bodies should be able to raise issues with decision-makers, prepare recommendations, formulate legislative and other proposals, monitor developments and provide views on proposed governmental decisions that may directly or indirectly affect minorities. Governmental authorities should consult these bodies regularly on minority-related legislation and administrative measures to address minority concerns and build trust. My institution is uniquely positioned to continue fostering the exchange of experience and promote partnership building through formats like this, with the ultimate goal to develop policies aimed at building resilience in multi-ethnic societies.

Reflecting on our thematic priorities, my office's work on gender issues this year builds on our earlier efforts as we further advance our expertise and guidance on integrating gender perspectives into policies related to national minorities and security. To these ends, and in line with the Maltese Chairpersonship's promotion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, I strengthened our collaboration on gender issues with several other OSCE structures. For example, last month my office participated in the third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting with the Chairpersonship and ODIHR to address Tolerance and Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality. Furthermore, to mark International Women's Day in March, my office teamed up with the RFoM, ODIHR, the OSCE PA and the Chairpersonship to host an expert conference on the gender aspects of surveillance and human rights within the broader context of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. This event raised awareness of the challenges that surveillance technology poses to overcoming gender-based discrimination and

violence, and highlighted the necessity for an OSCE-wide, harmonized approach to this transboundary and crosscutting issue. It is my pleasure to announce the development of a report based on this event, including targeted recommendations, which has been jointly drafted by the three OSCE institutions and will soon be distributed to all participating States.

During the term of my mandate, I have strengthened my institution's partnership and co-operation with the UNHCR to continue working towards ending statelessness in the OSCE area. Persons belonging to national minorities, including the Roma, have a higher risk of statelessness due to difficulties in confirming their nationality and obtaining identity documents. I consider this to be an important factor in conflict prevention and have kept it high on my agenda, including through my quiet diplomacy efforts as well as by co-organizing conferences to exchange good practices and a joint UNHCR-OSCE study visit to Georgia on Statelessness for Central Asian States. Building on my institution's joint pledge with ODIHR last year to continue our important joint collaboration on this topic, I have the pleasure to inform you that my office has joined the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, a collaborative multistakeholder platform led by UNHCR. These important steps will ensure that the momentum built towards preventing and addressing statelessness within the OSCE will continue beyond my term, in line with my mandate.

Throughout the years of my mandate, environmental considerations have increasingly featured in my discussions with OSCE participating States, as well as multilateral organizations. There seems to be a common understanding that environmental issues, such as climate change, environmental degradation and access to resources, pose additional risks to peace and security. This concern is reflected in the Socio-Economic Recommendations, which we published last year, and recognizes that persons belonging to national minorities must be protected from any disproportionate and unjustified environmental impact and risks. Building on the thematic advice provided by successive High Commissioners over the years, my office continues to explore the nexus between national minorities, conflict prevention and the environment. In this respect, identifying areas relevant to my mandate, with the objective of being able to advise OSCE participating States on these issues, remains high on the agenda of my institution.

My office also continues to promote conflict-sensitive data collection, analysis and use among participating States, with a view to ensuring that all data exercises are designed to avoid creating tensions and instead foster the integration of our diverse societies.

Additionally, I have continued observing the impact of competing historical narratives on diverse societies, as well as several governments' attempts to deal with contested historical legacies through legislative action and policies. In line with *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, I call on participating States to approach historical memory in a responsible way. My office will continue to build on the work and exchanges with academics and experts in this field, as well as with participating States dealing with these issues, to elaborate concrete advice that can help governments to deal with history and its tangible representation in a way that unites, rather than divides.

In all the above efforts and throughout my thematic work, my office continues to mainstream gender-related perspectives and pays due attention to the situation of minority women in different thematic areas. Efforts are also made to include specific attention to youth issues from the perspective of my mandate.

Concluding this chapter, as you know, every other year my office has the privilege of overseeing the selection and awarding of the Max van der Stoel Award on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The award honours the legacy of the first High Commissioner, Max van der Stoel, by recognizing extraordinary and outstanding achievements in improving the position of national minorities in the OSCE area. I look forward to soon announcing the winner and inviting you all to a high-level ceremony that will be held in The Hague on 6 November 2024 to present the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award and prize of 50,000 euros to the winner.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Many of the important activities and projects that I have presented to you today would not be possible without the financial contributions of the following participating States, which I would like to thank in alphabetical order. We are grateful to Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Switzerland for their support. I also want to thank Germany, Kazakhstan, Norway and the United States for seconding their nationals to my office. Considering the ongoing budget crisis in the OSCE, the financial and human capital commitment of the above-mentioned participating States facilitated the successful and timely implementation of many initiatives in my office during the term of my mandate. The work of

all OSCE institutions and mechanisms impacts real people on the ground; our projects and programmes make a real difference and translate to a tangible impact.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the Chairpersonship of Malta for their exceptional organization of various significant events and unwavering support for the initiatives of my office in the first half of this year. The strong and steady leadership of Malta has been instrumental in ensuring the continuity and predictability of the work of our esteemed organization. I also want to commend Ambassador Natasha Meli Daudey, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Malta to the OSCE, for her expert guidance of this Council during the first half of this year.

As I near the conclusion of the mandate entrusted to me, I find myself wondering about my legacy as the first High Commissioner coming from, as we say in the OSCE, “East of Vienna”. I assumed this mandate during a time of growing tensions in the OSCE area, and I conclude it after witnessing two and a half years of death and tragedy which have caused suffering to so many innocent civilians, including national minorities. This dramatically changing political landscape has affected our disposition and openness for dialogue and co-operation with each other. Polarization in our societies has impacted our ability and willingness to co-operate, communicate and engage. Protection of urgent national security interests takes priority over a collective approach to security and multilateral mechanisms. In this equation, innocent people and marginalized groups remain the most vulnerable and most affected. Recognizing this and being aware of the attempts to instrumentalize national minority issues, I have focused on maintaining impartiality and objectivity, and on “doing no harm” and quiet diplomacy principles. I recall that our organization is rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals, as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act and in the Astana Commemorative Declaration. I hope we can return to the principles and commitments that once brought us together.

Yesterday, it was exactly 32 years ago that the States participating in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe gathered in Helsinki to discuss how to respond to fundamental changes in the political landscape in Europe. Among many decisions aimed at formulating a common response to shared challenges, they decided to establish the role of High Commissioner on National Minorities as an instrument of conflict prevention. This year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the first High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van

der Stoel, and next year, we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. This is a pivotal moment for us to reflect on the irrefutable value of this organization and its autonomous institutions.

Delivering my mandate in the current context has often felt like an impossible challenge. However, as long as we maintain our commitments enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, a peaceful future remains within our grasp. To ensure the effectiveness of our organization, we require unity and resolve now more than ever before. It is imperative that we hold in high esteem the unique tools we have been given to uphold peace and security in the OSCE region.

In all of my efforts, I have placed a strong emphasis on engaging multiple stakeholders and building meaningful networks. This approach has brought together experts, academics, civil society, international organizations and government representatives to raise awareness, share best practices, and work together to tackle challenges. Achieving comprehensive security and prevent conflicts requires us to unite all sectors of society, including minority groups, recognizing their respective roles and responsibilities. I firmly believe that we need to connect different communities and improve co-operation among stakeholders to increase the resilience of our diverse societies.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all of you for your unwavering trust in me during my tenure in this mandate. I also want to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the team in the office, who work tirelessly behind the scenes. Over the past three decades, exceptional individuals have dedicated their careers to the cause of national minorities, now serving in various international entities worldwide. In The Hague, some have devoted their entire professional lives to supporting the work of my office and aiding all previous High Commissioners in fulfilling this mandate. Therefore, I express my profound gratitude to everyone, past and present, for their commitment to excellence, which has been pivotal to the successful delivery of this mandate. I would also like to take a moment here to wish the incoming seventh OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities every success in executing the mandate entrusted by 57 participating States.

Lastly, I must express my deep gratitude to my country, Kazakhstan, its leadership and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for nominating me to this esteemed position. It has granted me the

opportunity to share and apply my country's expertise and experience in fostering peace, facilitating dialogue and advancing diplomacy within the OSCE and beyond.

Thank you for your attention!