



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

STATEMENT

by
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ambassadors, Members of Delegations,

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Vienna to present the Permanent Council with a report on my activities in fulfilment of my mandate since my last report in November 2008.

Before I proceed with the customary overview of my country activities during this period, I would like to raise with you an issue that is a common thread running through much of my field work, namely, **education**. I believe that we, as a security organization, should not let this issue slip off our agenda in spite of the fact that, at first glance, it may seem to be a soft, non-security issue.

As I see it, education is one of the main instruments in promoting integration and as such can heal wounds, prevent conflicts and contribute to sustainable societies in the long term. Many participating States face great challenges with respect to their education system in general and integrating minorities in particular. How can they make sure that minorities receive the mother-tongue education which is rightfully theirs and at the same time learn the State language so that they can pursue university education if they so wish and become active participants in the societies where they live? How can they ensure that schools become a meeting place which can cut across ethnic, social and religious boundaries in such a way that they promote understanding among all citizens and support the cohesion of society?

Since my last appearance before you, I have visited many schools. It is certainly encouraging to meet young student leaders of different ethnic backgrounds. Many of them – often against the advice of their parents and friends – have decided to work together to promote inter-ethnic understanding among the younger generation in previously war-torn societies. These are the glimmers of hope that I most cherish and strive to support.

They are the exception rather than the rule, however.

Regrettably, negative trends in education in some areas of the OSCE region are a cause of serious concern. If we fail to tackle these issues today, tomorrow we may wake up in fractured, barely integrated societies. As a security organization, we need to be aware of this potential time bomb and to do our utmost to defuse it.

What do I mean by negative trends?

I am primarily concerned about increasing segregation along ethnic lines in education. This development is particularly regrettable in those societies where an integrated education system previously existed.

Segregated education leads to negative linguistic ramifications. It often translates into weak or non-existent knowledge of the State or official language among minorities.

In some country contexts, minority pupils' lack of competency in the State or official language adversely affects their chances of securing admission to university. In some cases I have found that the entire school curriculum is in many instances taught in a minority language, and is often coupled with inadequate teaching of the State language. In the end, minority-language school-leavers find it hard to compete with their majority counterparts at tertiary level. This problem has emerged most prominently in countries where school-leaving and university entrance examinations have been combined into a single exam offered only in

the State or official language. Needless to say, minority marginalization and lack of university prospects often frustrates or even radicalizes minority communities and hampers chances for successful careers in the public service and military or in academia.

There is another aspect to this: while proficiency in minority languages among the majority is recognized in international standards as a positive contribution to inter-ethnic peace, ethnic separation in education obstructs such learning.

Apart from linguistic problems, segregated education often creates an impression in the majority's mind that minorities are a foreign, alien body in their state entity. In schools formed along ethnic lines, children rarely immerse themselves in each other's culture, traditions and ways of looking at the outside world.

The end product of these segregated systems are young citizens of the same country who know little about each other, do not speak each other's language and look with suspicion at their neighbours with different ethnic backgrounds. I am concerned that over time a tiny spark in such disintegrated societies can trigger inter-ethnic animosity.

As High Commissioner on National Minorities, I am not calling today for the abolishment of minority-language schools. On the contrary, throughout my travels across the OSCE area, I have witnessed the strong desire of minority communities to retain their identity. Ethnic Russians in Estonia and Ukraine, ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and Georgians in the Gali District seek to preserve and develop their culture and heritage through mother-tongue teaching.

Our own, OSCE principles declare that "the participating States will endeavour to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, notwithstanding the need to learn the official language or languages of the State concerned, have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue."¹

How do we operationalize this commitment and marry State language competence and integration, on the one hand, with mother-tongue teaching, on the other?

Multilingual education – or the teaching of subjects in various languages – can help us bind segregated societies together. I am happy that this form of education is taking root in many of the countries I visit. Through this sort of education children learn languages from each other, socialize and become friends.

However, in places where a choice has been made in favour of multilingualism, it needs to be introduced with care and in genuine consultation with minority communities. Otherwise, these communities may feel that multilingualism is assimilation through the back door.

In cases where government and minorities opt in favour of keeping separate minority-language schools, we need to find innovative ways of teaching the State or official language to these communities. In addition, we have to see to it that minority schoolchildren interact and meet with their majority counterparts through joint play, sporting activities, study projects and exchange programmes. This would help fight stereotypes and forge friendships.

¹ The CSCE Copenhagen Document, Paragraph 34.

As you can see from this brief introduction, a closer examination of these issues and an exchange of good practice between OSCE participating States merit our attention. I would therefore encourage you to consider convening an OSCE-wide meeting next year on how education can facilitate social integration in our societies. Such a dialogue would enable all of us to benefit and learn from each other's achievements and even each other's mistakes.

Another topic that deserves continued scrutiny is the **participation** of minorities in public life or, to put it simply, their ability to take part in governing the state. This is an issue in all countries I travel to. To the credit of many OSCE participating States, arrangements have been made and mechanisms put in place to promote minority participation.

“Perceptions matter, resources matter, instruments matter.” This is maybe the best way of summarizing recent discussions at the Ten-Year Review of the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*. In fact, quite a number of you participated in this event, which I organized jointly with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Lund in mid-May. Leading academics and policymakers in the field gathered to take stock of the Recommendations and their implementation over the past ten years. They also reviewed how to further strengthen the impact of these most important Recommendations, and certainly did not express any doubt as to the relevance of this document today. More than ever before, participation, inclusion, and social cohesion are indicators of valid democratic pluralism in all our societies.

Perceptions matter: participation means more than visible inclusion. It means being consulted, being invited to discuss – and influence – relevant policies that directly impact the minority community, being recruited into state services, being given full information and access to vote. This is what makes minorities feel that they can and should participate in the public life of their country.

Resources matter: our debate clearly underlined how important participation in economic, social and cultural life is for minorities to effectively participate in their societies. Persons belonging to national minorities need to have equal access to resources, and be given opportunities to decide on budgetary questions as they relate to their regions.

Instruments matter: minorities need pieces of national legislation and administrative acts that are designed to facilitate their effective participation in public life, be it politically or in the economic, social or cultural sphere. Participating States need to consider instruments that focus on more local self-government for minorities, particularly where they reside in compact settlements, and thereby encourage them to take part fully in their society, locally and centrally.

A brief report on the Lund seminar will be available on our website shortly, and a publication of the presentations made at this event is expected in the autumn. I wish to strengthen the application of the Lund Recommendations and extend the fields of their effective operation. I believe an OSCE inter-governmental meeting examining the topic of participation would make a valuable contribution in this regard, by reviewing the successes and outlining the outstanding challenges in this important area.

I look forward to working with the current and upcoming Chairmanships on developing both ideas, namely, meetings on multilingual education and minority participation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to my specific country engagements since my last address in November 2008.

I will start with **Georgia** because I believe the situation there requires particular vigilance on our part.

I visited Georgia on 20–24 January 2009. While I travelled without any obstacles to Abkhazia, including the Gali District, which lies along the administrative boundary line and is mainly populated by Georgians, I was once again prevented from entering South Ossetia. The *de facto* authorities used the pretext this time that my mandate does not extend to South Ossetia until a formal Memorandum of Understanding is signed between the OSCE and Tskhinvali, and therefore I am not entitled to travel to the region.

In Tbilisi, I discussed my co-operation with the Georgian Government. In particular, my conflict prevention and civil integration activities in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli, populated predominantly by Armenians and Azeris, but also the Meskhetian Repatriation Process and ways in which I can provide assistance to the Government in order to make repatriation possible.

In **Sukhumi** I conveyed my concerns to the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities about the situation of Georgians in the Gali District, and their fears of being further alienated from the rest of Georgia. I noticed increasing pressure being put on the Georgian population through the curtailing of their education rights, compulsory "passportization", forced conscription into the Abkhaz military forces and restrictions on their freedom of movement. I urged the *de facto* authorities to put an end to this pressurization and expressed my concern that such coercive practices, which violate international law, may further destabilize the already fragile inter-ethnic situation in the region and force many Georgians to leave.

Since the authorities in Sukhumi failed to answer my queries in substance, I had to reiterate them in a public statement on 14 April 2009.

While in Sukhumi, I also discussed ways to assist the *de facto* Abkhazian authorities in strengthening the Abkhaz identity and language in the region, as some of my interlocutors expressed concern about the future of Abkhaz culture and identity.

Another situation that I am watching closely is in **Ukraine**'s region of Crimea. I discussed the inter-ethnic and political situation there during my recent visit in April 2009. Reports about the tendency towards increasing radicalization and xenophobia on the peninsula concern me greatly. It was therefore with particular pleasure that I visited a school in Simferopil, which successfully offers a voluntary course promoting tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding between the various ethnic communities on the peninsula. In my opinion, the locally developed course entitled "Culture of Good Neighbourhood", which I have been supporting for two years now, serves the long-term aim of conflict prevention in Crimea in an exemplary way.

I also used my visit to further discuss the issue of draft legislation regulating the status and rights of formerly deported people. I understand that the Ukrainian parliament has requested the Government to improve its currently registered official draft law on this topic. I will

continue my involvement and assistance in this matter, which is of vital importance for the Crimean region.

My visit to Ukraine in April 2009 was also undertaken in the context of the study of the educational situation of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and ethnic Ukrainians in Russia. My initiative is aimed at assisting the two countries in their dialogue on the educational situation of their kin-minorities. Apart from Crimea, I travelled to the cities of Kyiv and Donetsk. The two legal education experts who had accompanied me during my visit to Russia were also in attendance during most of my meetings in Ukraine. Subsequent to my official visit, the experts and my staff members visited Lviv to conduct the Ukrainian part of the education study, focusing now on the educational situation of Russians in Ukraine. At the same time, the visit provided me with an opportunity to deepen my dialogue with Ukraine on certain language education issues on which I have furnished recommendations on previous occasions.

Recurring issues in my meetings with officials, experts, representatives of Russian communities and Russian-language teachers included the possibility to receive education in Russian language, the ministerial programme to improve Ukrainian-language education in minority-language schools and the language requirements for external secondary school graduation examinations. As was the case with the first part of my education study in Russia, I would like to commend the authorities for the professionalism, constructive approach and transparency they demonstrated during my visit. I am looking forward to assisting and developing the dialogue with Ukraine and Russia on the subject of the study.

My visit to the **Russian Federation** in March 2009 focused on a range of matters pertaining to national minorities in Russia as well as the situation of ethnic Russians abroad. In my talks in Moscow, I discussed, among other topics, legislative initiatives in the Russian Federation, particularly legislation with regard to “compatriots”. A number of my interlocutors expressed concern about the rise of xenophobic attacks in recent years and the implications for inter-ethnic relations. The Russian authorities agreed that we would address this issue together, particularly through the work with law enforcement agencies in the second half of 2009. I welcome the open exchange of views in Moscow and look forward to expanding my dialogue with the Russian Federation.

My parallel work in Ukraine and Russia is closely linked to and is inspired by the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations. This year I began holding regional round tables on the implementation of these Recommendations. The first of these was held in Ljubljana in March and was dedicated to South-Eastern Europe and its neighbours. The second round table took place in Tallinn last week and focused on the Baltic Sea region plus Belarus. I believe both round tables were successful, not least thanks to the host States and to the dedication of the participants. They made it clear how important and sensitive the questions related to national minorities are in the context of inter-State relations and how essential it is to address them with due respect for the interests of States and minority communities alike. It is a subject that warrants further attention and awareness needs to be raised among participating States in order to address potential causes of tension at the earliest possible stage. The next round table will be held in Berlin in the autumn with the States of Central Asia. I look forward to their active participation in discussing how the Bolzano Recommendations can be of relevance to them. I also intend to continue in 2010 with round tables focusing on regions such as Central Europe and the Caucasus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the past few months I have also visited three Central Asian States.

My visit to **Uzbekistan** on 1–4 April 2009 and meetings with the authorities and minority representatives focused on the implications of the education reform for minority communities and on ways of improving State language teaching in minority schools. The Government and I have agreed to continue our exchange of views and co-operation on these issues.

I am particularly grateful to the Government of Uzbekistan for hosting the Review Conference of the **Inter-State Dialogue on Social Integration and National Minority Education in Central Asia** held in Samarkand on 3 April. I noted with pleasure that during this Conference good practices and outstanding challenges in the areas of textbook development, teacher training, language learning and distance learning were all examined. It clearly demonstrated the value of regional co-operation in questions concerning minority education. The Conference participants came up with a number of recommendations which I am currently following up. One of the proposals was to establish a regional project resource centre that would assist the implementation of recommendations that were made within the framework of the Inter-State Dialogue. I would be glad if such an institute materializes, and I stand ready to support this initiative if there is a willingness on the part of the Central Asian States to take it forward.

In May I visited **Kazakhstan** and discussed a wide spectrum of issues related to inter-ethnic relations with policymakers there. I also had the opportunity to open a seminar in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice, which deliberated a whole range of issues that need to be taken into account when drafting new legislation. These issues included the renaming of settlements, use of languages in places of minority concentration, the need for an overhaul of the minority representation system in the parliament and other outstanding challenges. I also took the opportunity to commend the authorities of Kazakhstan on their integration ideas in the fields of education and broadcasting.

At the beginning of June I made my first visit to **Tajikistan** in my capacity as High Commissioner. I had the opportunity to discuss a range of issues not only with the Tajik authorities but also representatives of the different minorities. The talks focused mainly on how to address language issues in education. In December last year, at the invitation of the Tajik Ministry of Education, I sent an expert to Tajikistan to make an initial assessment of minority schools and I had the opportunity to follow up on the findings with the Tajik leadership. The Tajik side is currently working on adapting the Law on Language and has invited me to comment on the changes during the drafting process. I am looking forward to receiving the text of the proposed amendments.

I shall continue to co-operate with all the Central Asian participating States, particularly in the sphere of minority education.

Turning to the Balkan region, I have continued to focus my attention on the situation in South-Eastern Europe and travelled extensively there in the winter and early spring. In January, I visited Skopje, Tetovo, Struga and Kicevo in **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**. This was my second visit to the country in the space of 12 months. The primary focus for my visit was to address the problems faced in the area of primary and secondary education, particularly concentrating on segregation along ethnic lines, and to offer further

assistance to ameliorate these problems. In addition, I am also looking at ways of providing assistance to the country's smaller communities in order to help facilitate a wider debate on the various models of enhancing effective participation of the country's smaller communities.

In February, I visited Belgrade, Sandzak and the municipalities of Bujanovac and Presevo in **Serbia**. This gave me an excellent opportunity to assess first hand the situation on the ground and meet directly not only with the national authorities, but also with local leaders and minority representatives. As I have reported to you previously in similar circumstances, I strongly urged the authorities to take a proactive stance on issues affecting national minorities. At the same time, I encouraged minority representatives to engage the institutions of Serbia and to work through the institutions in a non-confrontational way. Also during my visit, I provided some specific legal analyses to the Serbian authorities as part of my efforts to assist the Government in ensuring that its legal framework is the product of a fully consultative process and of the highest legal standard. I believe that Serbia is making good strides in this area.

In February, I also visited **Kosovo**, where the main purpose of my visit was to address the ongoing problems of access to education in the language and curriculum of choice by the Gorani community in the Dragash/Dragaš municipality. In this context, I undertook an extensive field visit to the Dragaš region. As a result of disputes between various actors in Kosovo, Gorani children have, in some instances, been denied full access to education. While I believe that good will exists on all sides to resolve the issue, the failure to do so is, no doubt, due to the lack of trust between some ethnic communities in Kosovo. In order to address this ongoing lack of confidence, I have followed my predecessor's example and continued to seek a means to discuss and move forward the transitional justice agenda in Kosovo. As I have reported on several previous occasions, this is a slow process and one fraught with many challenges. Nonetheless, next month, a paper on transitional justice that my office commissioned from a local NGO will be publicly launched. I will be attending this event, and I hope this paper will serve as an impetus to generate a public debate on the need to deal with the past and build trust between Kosovo's ethnic communities.

Furthermore, in February I visited both **Slovakia** and **Hungary**. My visit to the two States was prompted by the deteriorating bilateral relations between the two countries triggered by concerns over the situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Consequently, the major part of my time was dedicated to Slovakia, where I visited both Bratislava and the city of Komarno, on the border with Hungary. I then made a brief visit to Budapest. I am glad to note that recently the tensions between Slovakia and Hungary have subsided and bilateral co-operation continues at many different levels and through various institutions. I believe that the two States will succeed in addressing contested issues by taking full advantage of the bilateral and multilateral mechanisms that are at their disposal. It is essential that the two EU member States set a positive example of how questions of national minorities can be dealt with through friendly inter-State relations in accordance with the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations. I continue to follow developments there and remain in close contact with the authorities in both Bratislava and Budapest.

In March, I travelled to **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where I met with authorities and other various actors in Sarajevo, Mostar and Stolac. This was the very first visit by any High Commissioner on National Minorities to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main purpose of my trip was to voice my concern about the continuing trend of segregated education along ethnic lines in the country. This is in line with the focus of my work in a number of countries as

highlighted above. In addition, I used the visit to reiterate my belief that the country must play a stronger role in recognizing its diversity, including the unique character and significance of its 17 national minorities. To this end, I attended the launch of a National Minority Workbook, which my office helped fund and develop in conjunction with the OSCE Mission. It is hoped that it will be used widely in Bosnia and Herzegovina's schools.

I remain engaged in the Baltic region. Also in March, I travelled to **Estonia** on my first official visit. In addition to meeting with senior government officials in Tallinn, I also visited the Ida-Virumaa County, a region populated mainly by the Russian minority. There, I met with the local authorities and representatives of national minorities. On the question of integration into Estonian society of national minorities, including non-citizens, I was assured that this issue is very high on the Government's agenda. The Estonian Integration Strategy covering the period from 2008-2013 speaks to this commitment. Nonetheless, I made concrete recommendations with a view to accelerating the naturalization process further. These included: granting automatic citizenship to all children born in Estonia after 1991, as well as to the new-born children of non-citizen's families, and adopting a more inclusive discourse in society about non-citizens and the naturalization process.

Estonia, I believe, has achieved progress in the implementation of its education reform process, especially in the transition to bi-lingual teaching. While I commended the efforts of the Government to implement this reform, I also recommended that it regularly monitors progress, particularly the quality of education, and addresses all shortcomings identified by professionals in the field, as well as by pupils and parents. Finally, I stressed to the authorities, as I have done in many other OSCE participating States, that during this difficult economic period it is important to address socio-economic issues in a manner that will avoid social marginalization of persons belonging to national minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talking about how the current **economic and financial crisis may impact on minorities**, you may recall that I referred to this during my last visit to the Permanent Council in November 2008. Since then I have noted that considerable attention has been devoted to its impact on migrants, in particular in the context of both the loss of remittances and the effect that returning migrants might have on stability in their home countries. I welcome the fact that this issue is being followed closely by my colleague, Goran Svilanovic, Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities. Yet, with regard to persons belonging to national minorities, there are few figures available. We know that national minorities often live in remote regions where there are fewer public services or employment opportunities – exactly the regions that have been particularly hard hit by the current crisis. We also know that as a result of their economic marginalization, it is in fact often persons belonging to national minorities who become migrants and therefore it is also their communities that are now being affected by the loss of a source of income.

Furthermore, we all know from general development research [*by the World Bank in October 2008 and the World Development Report 2006 for example*] that most minorities have higher rates of poverty than other so-called “poor” groups, that inequality is a growing concern in developing and developed countries and that high levels of inequality, which precludes certain segments of society from participating to their fullest, can undermine growth and political stability overall. While the effects of this crisis on national minorities and in general the extent to which national minorities participate in the economic life of their societies

remain scantily researched, there is reason for concern that horizontal inequalities may actually be widening as a result of the crisis. In order to assess this properly, we need better information. Better and disaggregated data collection concerning the economic and employment conditions of national minorities within their societies may help reveal the causes of their poverty and, thus, help decrease inequalities – something which is often at the heart of inter-ethnic tensions and, indeed, conflict.

While governments may feel under pressure to focus their recovery efforts on the more readily identifiable concerns of the majority population, I would like to reiterate my call of November last year for the authorities in all OSCE participating States to continue to be vigilant in safeguarding the values upon which the peace and stability of our societies depend. This includes respect for human rights, equality and protection without discrimination of those who are most vulnerable.

Another situation that continues to be a matter of concern to me is that of **Roma and Sinti** in our area. Recent incidents in several OSCE participating States demonstrate that discrimination against Roma persists in such key areas as education, housing, employment and access to public services as well as to justice. In addition, in times of economic crisis communities such as Roma tend to become easy scapegoats for extremist movements and populist politicians. The escalation in hate motivated incidents and racist rhetoric, the recent evictions, and the continuous discriminatory treatment and exclusion of Roma in a number of participating States is a source of deep concern for me. In this context, in a joint statement with the ODIHR, the Council of Europe and the EU, on 8 April, International Roma Day, I have underscored the need to eradicate all forms of discrimination and violence against Roma and to step up the efforts for the inclusion of Roma in our societies. Moreover, on the same day I released a study on recent migration of Roma in Europe that I commissioned jointly with the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights. I am sending a copy of this report to all participating States. Conscious of the great number of problems faced by the Roma communities across the OSCE region and in close co-operation with the ODIHR, I systematically raise the issue during my bilateral visits wherever I consider this to be necessary. This was the case during my recent bilateral visits to Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The HCNM is a unique institution in international relations dealing with threats to inter-ethnic peace. While I am an instrument of the first OSCE dimension, I rely on our third dimension commitments to fulfil my conflict prevention tasks. In my confidential engagements, I also deal with national minority issues that cause friction in inter-State relations. While most of my engagements are not headline news, they must be continued and, in some cases, intensified.

In less than two weeks' time, many of you will accompany your Foreign Ministers to Corfu in Greece for discussions on European security. It is opportune to recall in this context that a number of the problems facing us today in the OSCE area are in fact the result of mismanagement of inter-ethnic relations. I therefore believe it is particularly important that the Foreign Ministers will continue to commit political support and resources to the prevention of ethnic conflict in the OSCE.

I thank you for your attention.