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High Commissioner on National Minorities

address by
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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to brief the Permanent Council once again and to update you on my work since my last address in June. I would like to acknowledge the continued engagement and support that my institution has received from the participating States. I value the constructive exchanges with you and your national authorities. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Chairpersonship and Ambassador Raphael Nägeli, the OSCE Secretariat and the Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the field presences for their continued support and co-operation, particularly in connection with my recent visits.

Over the past months, I have continued to identify and address tensions involving national minorities at an early stage, with a view to preventing conflict and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. My work takes place against the backdrop of three interconnected trends, that I have also signalled in my previous statements to the Permanent Council: polarization in diverse societies, securitization of national minority issues, and instrumentalization of national minority issues, including across borders.

This is why it is important to promote equal participation and opportunities for all, while fostering public discourse that encourages inclusion and a shared sense of belonging. I also wish to highlight the need to ensure that minority issues are addressed through appropriate policy and legislative frameworks grounded in human rights. Legitimate security concerns must, of course, be addressed, but responses are only effective when they are specific and proportionate, and do not collectively frame minority identities or rights as security threats. Recognizing diversity as a source of strength is essential to building cohesive societies. At the same time, it is important to guard against the instrumentalization of minority issues, which is underpinned by the dual responsibility of States to protect and promote the rights of persons belonging to national minorities within their own borders, while also acting responsibly in relation to minorities under the jurisdiction of other States.

I pursue my conflict prevention mandate through three main activities: sharing legal and policy advice, building the capacity of institutions dealing with national minority issues, and promoting dialogue – both within and between participating States. I help States find practical

solutions that promote inclusion, increase social cohesion, and strengthen regional security. My work is focused on areas where these activities can make a tangible difference, while also looking at best practices that can be a source of inspiration elsewhere.

One example is multilingual education. Education is not only about acquiring knowledge and skills. For those who belong to national minorities, it can also enable them to maintain their linguistic and cultural identity, while ensuring their full and effective participation in wider society. My office has been supporting multilingual education as a way to promote the integration of diverse societies for decades. We have built capacity where it can be most effective, including through ongoing initiatives to bring practitioners and policymakers together to exchange experiences on multilingual education across the OSCE area. In turn, this has encouraged regional co-operation, which is particularly relevant when the same languages are spoken on both sides of a border. In this regard, I wish to highlight the ministerial roundtable that I convened in Ashgabat for the five Central Asian countries and Mongolia, which has already led to concrete practical steps for strengthening regional co-operation on multilingual education among these six participating States. I will return to this later in this statement.

Over the past decade, my institution has increasingly focused on the role that contested histories play in the contexts where I work. The way people understand and remember the past can profoundly affect relations between communities, particularly when differing historical narratives coincide with ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious or other differences. These issues can also resurface in response to current developments, including court judgments, commemorations or political debates, bringing unresolved historical grievances back into public discourse and potentially affecting inter-community relations in the present. But history can also provide a space for dialogue and mutual understanding. I will elaborate later in this statement on the steps I am taking to put our *Siena Recommendations on Contested Histories and National Minorities,* launched in June of this year, into practice across the OSCE area.

Another way that I create impact is through promoting meaningful consultation with national minorities. Policies are more effective and sustainable when those affected have a genuine opportunity to contribute to their design and implementation. Consultation – with meaningful participation of both the authorities and minority representatives – is therefore an important means of building trust, strengthening participation and supporting social cohesion. My office

helps build the capacity of national, regional and local authorities to conduct such consultations effectively in various participating States.

Finally, I would like to underline how impactful dialogue can be, not only in addressing issues at hand, but also in terms of the positive ripple effects on wider co-operation and security. I have seen first-hand how constructive bilateral dialogue can help address concerns and lead to practical solutions between participating States regarding communities with whom they share ethnic, cultural or linguistic ties and that reside in other States. I therefore strongly encourage States to make use of bilateral channels, which are effective fora to discuss specific contexts and signal political commitment. In situations where bilateral channels prove challenging, multilateral organizations can provide frameworks and standards, or alternative avenues for dialogue and engagement. I stand ready to continue to support these efforts and, where appropriate, to facilitate dialogue between parties.

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

Since my last statement on 4 June 2026, I have visited, in chronological order: Moldova, Georgia, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Kosovo[*], Estonia and North Macedonia. During this period, I have also continued my engagement with these and several other participating States through written correspondence and online meetings, and advanced both the thematic and programmatic work of my institution. I have maintained dialogue with various international actors through my participation in multilateral platforms, addressing issues relevant to my mandate. I wish to convey my appreciation for the open and productive exchanges that have made this work possible.

From 22 to 27 June, I visited Moldova, where I held meetings in Chișinău, Comrat and Bălți. Building on my previous visit in March 2025, as well as continued engagement through online meetings, correspondence and staff visits, I had constructive discussions with a broad range of interlocutors on issues relating to the institutional and policy framework for integration, mother tongue-based multilingual education, language policies, and consultation of national

[*] 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.

minorities. My conversations also focused on the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, which has been an area of focus for successive High Commissioners over time. I discussed with the authorities the importance of strengthening dialogue between the central authorities and the autonomy, with a view to ensuring a well-functioning autonomous arrangement based on clearly defined competences.

During my visit, I discussed ways to continue supporting mother tongue-based multilingual education, as this remains an important element of my engagement in Moldova, in particular through building capacity among education practitioners and offering tailored expert support for the Ministry of Education and Research. The visit provided an opportunity to engage with interlocutors in Gagauzia and in Bălți, including education professionals at minority-language schools. I observed that the authorities have continued to develop multilingual education programmes at both the policy and implementation levels, supporting the acquisition of the official language alongside the preservation of minority languages. I will continue working closely with the authorities of Moldova in these and other areas.

From 31 August to 4 September, I visited Georgia. I held meetings in Tbilisi, Marneuli and Batumi with a broad range of interlocutors, including Government officials, minority representatives, community leaders, representatives of civil society organizations and education professionals to exchange views on issues related to social cohesion and inter-community relationships. The discussions focused on legislative and institutional developments, and frameworks related to national minorities; access to quality education and implementation of multilingual education; participation of minorities in public and political life; the importance of inclusive and meaningful consultation mechanisms; and the valuable role of non-governmental organizations in advancing national minority issues. I will continue my engagement with Georgia’s authorities on these matters in support of inclusive policies that foster social cohesion. I also joined a European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia patrol to the Administrative Boundary Line.

On 9 and 10 September, I visited Bratislava, where I met with several Government officials to exchange views on the protection and inclusion of national minorities in Slovakia and the wider region.

I then travelled to Budapest, where I met with officials of Hungary's Government on 11 September and discussed the situation of national minorities in Hungary and ethnic Hungarian communities in neighbouring States.

From 20 to 22 September, I visited Ukraine, including the Chernivtsi region, as a follow-up to my previous visit earlier this year. I met with regional and local authorities, representatives of educational institutions, civil society, religious leaders and persons belonging to national minorities. In Chernivtsi, I continued my dialogue with interlocutors on ongoing reforms and new legislation, including in the fields of education, language and religious affairs. I discussed the importance of implementing reforms in a way that pursues their broader objectives while safeguarding opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities. I also participated in a practical discussion with local authorities on consultation with national minority communities on these and other issues, as a core element of inclusive governance.

I also note the dialogue between Ukraine and some of its neighbouring States on issues concerning national minorities, which demonstrates the importance of sustained engagement, including on issues where positions may be different. Continuing to work towards mutually acceptable solutions can help prevent differences from becoming sources of tension and contribute to good-neighbourly relations.

Despite the ongoing war against Ukraine, I note the continued co-operation of the authorities with my institution and their openness to our engagement. My institution will continue to work with Ukraine to promote dialogue and consultation, support policymaking, and build institutional capacities for the effective implementation of policies concerning national minorities.

I visited Kosovo from 9 to 10 October. Building on my visits in August 2025 and March 2026 and regular correspondence, I continued my engagement with the central and local authorities, as well as non-majority communities, with a focus on ensuring that communities are effectively consulted on key issues affecting them. In regard to topics such as the rule of law and property rights, I continue to emphasize the importance of due process, transparency and ensuring procedural guarantees in all cases, with a view to strengthening trust between communities and

administrative bodies. My visit also focused on issues related to the implementation of Kosovo's language rights framework and dialogue between local and central authorities.

From 10 to 12 November, I visited Estonia, where I participated, like last year, in the Integration Foundation's annual conference. This year, the conference was titled "Fragmented World, One Cherished Home" and took place on 11 November in Tallinn. I also held meetings with several Government officials, national minority representatives and civil society. I welcomed the authorities' openness to discuss the ongoing education reform, including investment in the quality of teaching and second-language methodology. I also exchanged views with my interlocutors on the broader policy landscape related to social cohesion in different areas, including education, language, participation, and legislation affecting religious communities.

From 18 to 20 November, I visited North Macedonia and participated in a ceremony to mark the 25th anniversary of the South East European University in Tetovo. Against the background of armed conflict, the first High Commissioner, Max van der Stoel, played a key role in the creation of a multilingual and multicultural university, providing a shared space where students and scholars from different communities could learn, grow and develop together. The University is still providing high-quality tertiary education in the Albanian, Macedonian and English languages. During my visit, I also met Government officials, members of the Parliamentary Committee for Inter-Community Relations and representatives of the academic community. With the Minister of Inter-Community Relations, I discussed my office's ongoing co-operation with the Ministry. This includes our work, together with the OSCE Mission to Skopje, to support the drafting of a Strategy for the Development of Interculturalism and Social Cohesion, 2027–2032, and its Action Plan.

Over the past months, I have participated in various events, including some organized by other international organizations. This forms part of my general approach to advance meaningful co-operation with the wider international community, especially in areas that support my activities.

On 15 September, I spoke at the OSCE Human Dimension Committee meeting dedicated to national minority issues in Vienna. The session focused on multilingual education, which my office has supported for many years across the OSCE area. The discussion was supported by

three panellists, who shared valuable insights on how multilingual education systems work in practice and what value they can bring in different contexts.

From 17 to 18 September, I participated in the "High-level meeting on Co-operation between Regional Human Rights Mechanisms and the UN for the Effective Protection of Persons Belonging to Minorities" in Geneva, organized by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. This forum provided an opportunity to exchange views on approaches to issues affecting national minorities and to strengthen inter-institutional co-operation in this regard.

On 28 September, I addressed the Fifth Samarkand Forum on Human Rights online. At this event, hosted by the National Centre of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Human Rights, I spoke about the importance of inclusive socio-economic development.

On 5 October, I addressed the opening session of the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference and I returned on 14 October for the day focused on national minorities. On 14 October, I spoke at a working-session co-organized with ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues on progress and challenges related to tolerance and non-discrimination, with a focus on national minorities and Roma and Sinti. That same afternoon, I co-hosted a roundtable discussion to examine how national equality bodies and ombudsperson institutions reach – and are reached by – national minority communities, in particular minority women.

On 22 October, with the support of Turkmenistan, I convened a ministerial roundtable in Ashgabat, bringing together government officials responsible for education from the five Central Asian States and Mongolia. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to explore how regional co-operation in education, particularly multilingual education, could be further strengthened. The meeting builds upon the inter-State dialogue on multilingual education started in 2006 in Tashkent, and which my office has continued to support for 20 years, not least through the three phases of the Central Asia Education Programme carried out with UNICEF. I am grateful that the six Education Ministries were able to come together and discuss language-in-education policies and multilingual education, in particular. We have not had the opportunity to discuss this issue at this high level, and on a regional footing, for some time. I am especially grateful to Turkmenistan for its hospitality in hosting the meeting.

The joint communiqué issued following the meeting recognizes that well-designed multilingual education supports the effective and inclusive education of all students, strengthens acquisition of the State language and maintains and promotes first languages. I also highlight that the Education Ministries are keen to continue this conversation by identifying ways in which domestic and regional efforts can be mutually supportive, including through teacher training, developing and sharing teaching materials, and in terms of regional education-related data and student assessments. The roundtable is intended as a preparatory step for a series of technical and high-level engagements, and further regional co-operation, next year.

I note that the experience built in Central Asia and Mongolia over the past two decades is of interest well beyond the region, and I intend to make it available to participating States elsewhere. The ministerial roundtable also marked the 30th anniversary of *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*.

Since my last address to the Permanent Council, my office has launched *The Siena Recommendations on Contested Histories and National Minorities*. I am pleased to learn that these recommendations have been positively received among the participating States. I will now elaborate on what lies ahead.

The Siena Recommendations are intended as a practical tool for participating States. They address situations in which different understandings of the past intersect with questions of identity and relations between communities. If left unaddressed, they can reinforce mistrust and, in some circumstances, contribute to tensions or even conflict. The objective is, therefore, to make use of the Siena Recommendations – based on the specific circumstances – before tensions take hold. This means creating opportunities for dialogue when disputes arise or are expected to emerge around monuments, commemorations, place names, education or public narratives. It also means ensuring that those affected by such decisions, including national minorities, have a meaningful opportunity to be heard.

There is no single model that will work in every context. Different societies will need different approaches. What is important is that processes are inclusive, transparent and based on respect for different experiences and perspectives. Where appropriate, expert dialogue, historical commissions and other forms of bilateral or intercultural engagement can also help address sensitive issues so that they do not become a source of confrontation. Education remains

particularly important. When young people have the opportunity to learn about the past in ways that encourage critical thinking and an understanding of different perspectives, and when the histories and experiences of minorities are included, the risk that historical narratives are used to divide communities is significantly reduced. I wish to underline here that the Recommendations make clear that not all historical interpretations are equally valid. Events that have been judged by international courts and tribunals to constitute genocide or crimes against humanity must not be presented in any way that could facilitate their denial.

I will continue to engage with participating States on the practical application of the Siena Recommendations, including through my country engagements, policy and legislative advice, programmatic initiatives, and dialogue with national and local authorities. In this connection, I addressed the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on 29 October in Strasbourg, where I spoke about the important role local authorities have in ensuring inclusive processes when it comes to addressing issues involving contested histories and national minorities. I encourage participating States at the local, regional and national levels to consider the Siena Recommendations as a resource for conflict prevention and early action.

Let me turn to this year's Max van der Stoel Award. The international jury, which I had the privilege to chair, unanimously selected the non-governmental organization "Education for the 21st Century" from Serbia as the recipient of the 2026 award. The award was presented in The Hague earlier this month in recognition of the organization's efforts to promote tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity through education, particularly by creating spaces where young people can engage critically with history, identity and different perspectives. By doing so, Education for the 21st Century has given greater visibility to national minorities and their experiences and helped build connections between communities. These are precisely the kinds of initiatives that can contribute to addressing divisions before they take hold.

The organization's experience shows how education and cultural heritage, when approached inclusively, can become tools for dialogue rather than sources of division. I would like to again congratulate Education for the 21st Century for this well-deserved recognition. I also wish to thank the Government of the Netherlands for its continued support of the award and for helping us honour the legacy of the first High Commissioner, Max van der Stoel.

In October, I co-organized a conference on "Inclusive Policing in Diverse Societies: Representation, Trust and Emerging Security Challenges" in Belgrade, hosted by the Interior Ministry of Serbia. The conference was jointly organized with the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the OSCE Transnational Threats Department's Strategic Police Matters Unit and marked the 20th anniversary of the *Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*. Approximately 60 representatives from the Interior Ministry, National Minority Councils and civil society in Serbia, and several OSCE executive structures, as well as members of police services from Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands took part.

Later in October, my institution, together with ODIHR, UNHCR, the Council of Europe and the European Network on Statelessness, co-organized a two-day expert roundtable on preventing childhood statelessness. The event brought together technical experts from Europe and Central Asia to facilitate dialogue on good practices, practical challenges and gaps, and opportunities for further co-operation. The roundtable was part of our ongoing co-operation with ODIHR under our joint pledge to work together with UNHCR on preventing and addressing statelessness, where relevant to my mandate.

My office has continued to ensure that strategies that advance equal rights and opportunities for men and women are mainstreamed throughout our analytical, operational and thematic work. These efforts contribute to and are informed by our ongoing project to develop policy guidance on minority women and conflict prevention for participating States.

My office has also advanced its work on the conflict-sensitive collection, analysis and use of data, with a view to further operationalizing *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*. Jointly with UN Human Rights Moldova, my office completed a year-long pilot course for 15 statisticians of the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova. The course combined innovative technical skills, including AI-assisted data analysis, with a substantive grounding in human rights and non-discrimination standards, helping participants understand how the same data on ethnicity, language and religion can frame an issue in different ways, pointing either to division or to social cohesion. Recognizing that the conflict-sensitive collection, analysis and use of data concern all State institutions, my office and UN Human Rights Moldova also brought together data focal points from ministries and public agencies in Moldova on 16 November, at a roundtable led by the Office of the People's Advocate.

Such discussions and engagements across the OSCE area inform the guidance my office is developing on good practices in relation to data on ethnicity, language and religion that support the integration of diverse societies. These technical choices matter beyond statistics, as they shape integration policies, such as on multilingual education, across government.

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

I would like to recognize the important contributions made by a number of participating States through voluntary financial support. This support has been instrumental in enabling my office to plan and carry out its work with greater certainty, while retaining the necessary room to adapt our activities as circumstances on the ground develop. I am equally grateful to the participating States that have seconded nationals to my office. The expertise and experience brought by these colleagues have been a valuable addition to our work and have further strengthened the capacity to fulfil the mandate entrusted to me.

Managing diversity, protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and addressing grievances before they escalate will remain essential for our common security for many years to come. In carrying out my mandate, I will continue to be guided by the principles of impartiality and confidentiality. My approach is centred on practical engagement and solutions that can deliver tangible results, both in addressing immediate concerns and in contributing to sustainable progress over time. I encourage all participating States to make use of the particular role and capabilities of my institution as a resource for advancing peace, stability and security across our region. My office remains available to engage with each participating State constructively and to provide support on issues falling within the scope of my mandate.

Thank you for your attention.