



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

**STATEMENT**

by  
**Astrid Thors**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the  
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**[Check against delivery]**

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegations,

Let me begin by saying how pleased I am to inform the Permanent Council for the first time about my activities. As you know, I became the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on 20 August this year. I am honoured to follow in the footsteps of such distinguished former High Commissioners as Minister of State Max van der Stoel and Ambassadors Rolf Ekéus and Knut Vollebaek. Sadly, I did not have the privilege to meet the late Max van der Stoel. However, his legacy remains strong and his methods remain relevant. We still promote dialogue, confidence and co-operation.

I am fortunate to have 20 years of HCNM experience to look back on. There are many important lessons to be learned from the past. One is that the HCNM cannot work in isolation. Twenty years ago, Max van der Stoel already recognized the need for “co-operative security in action”; that is, working in close co-operation with others. I believe that co-operation is even more important today. Actors in the field of conflict prevention and conflict management have proliferated in the past 20 years. It is good that conflict prevention gets the attention it needs, but this makes co-ordination and co-operation with relevant partners even more important.

My Institution has a unique mandate to provide early warning and, as appropriate, early action in regard to tensions involving national minority issues. It also has the flexibility to find tailor-made solutions to the causes of inter-ethnic tension and conflict. Yet, it is important to remember that my Institution can only be effective and relevant with the direct engagement and co-operation of the participating States. Therefore, we work closely with participating States to find solutions to inter-ethnic issues. We also assist in developing appropriate frameworks to protect and promote the rights of national minorities so we can address potential tensions at the earliest stage.

Introducing multilingual education and protecting the linguistic rights of minorities are two important ways of diffusing potential tensions. We also need to work together to promote the integration of our societies, and one way to do this is by enhancing the participation of minorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My Institution's geographical priorities will depend on political developments, and it is not possible to predict the future with a high degree of certainty. Naturally, some work is a continuation of long-term engagements initiated by my predecessors. However, we must also be alert to emerging issues that may require our attention. I sincerely hope that the participating States consider my Institution as a resource to support their efforts to promote peaceful, stable and prosperous societies. My involvement is intended in the spirit of mutual co-operation and assistance.

Over the years, my Institution has developed a significant body of expertise, not only on countries but also on thematic issues relevant to the mandate. As you know, my predecessor launched *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* exactly a year ago. The Guidelines distil the accumulated experience of my Institution during 20 years of promoting the integration of diverse societies. Since integration is so important to conflict prevention, I intend to continue promoting these Guidelines. The Guidelines provide general principles and the elements of an integration policy framework, and offer advice on various key policy areas that can be adapted to local contexts.

The first sets of HCNM thematic Recommendations were published in the 1990s. Since then, the Institution has gained a lot of practice in facilitating their implementation in politically and socio-economically diverse contexts. At the same time, other organizations dealing with minority questions are developing their approaches. For instance, the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has published detailed commentaries in several areas, including, for example, on the linguistic rights of minorities. Since it is important to have state-of-the-art knowledge in the core policy areas, I am planning to assess, for example, how multilingual education can work in different contexts to achieve a balance between respecting minorities' right to learn their mother tongue while providing opportunities for minorities to learn the official or State language. I have observed varying practices during my country visits and I believe we need to find more conceptual clarity while ensuring we can adapt multilingual education to the local context.

Meanwhile, we see that as technology advances, it introduces new challenges that affect minorities. This is especially so in the media. We need to follow developments carefully to

ensure that minorities' rights, access and representation are not undermined and that they benefit from new opportunities.

Without promising too much, I would like to highlight one more area where I see the need for my Institution to engage more actively: the work relating to women, peace and security. The effective participation of women, including minority women, in conflict prevention must be ensured. I look forward to co-operating with the OSCE Gender Section, and women's groups and networks on how we can make headway in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since I took up this position on 20 August, I have visited several participating States. I am grateful for the excellent co-operation I received from these governments.

In October, I paid my first visit to Belgrade, Pristina and Skopje. The regional context continues to evolve. The 19 April agreement between Belgrade and Pristina and its implementation, and Serbia's accession talks with the European Union are positive developments.

While the situation in southern Serbia remains largely unchanged since my predecessor delivered his last statement to you on 11 July, I note with concern the disengagement of the ethnic-Albanian leadership from the dialogue with the central Government. I sincerely hope that the dialogue on the seven points of concern will continue.

From a regional perspective, tensions involving one or both communities in southern Serbia and in Kosovo<sup>1</sup> continue to influence each other. The confrontations over the regulation of controversial monuments have not resurfaced, but this is a possibility we must keep an eye on.

The role that education can play in promoting the integration of Serbia's diverse society is an area I focused specifically on in southern Serbia. I chaired the first meeting of the Stakeholders' Committee of the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

of the University of Novi Sad. This institution illustrates how we can support integration of society through promoting language acquisition.

In eastern Serbia, I have been monitoring the steps taken by the Government to address the Romanian-speaking community's concerns about access to education, broadcast media and church services. I have told both Governments that the Romania-Republic of Serbia Joint Inter-governmental Commission is the best mechanism to address outstanding bilateral issues.

I am pleased to report that some progress has been made on two of the concerns. A course entitled the "Romanian language with elements of national culture" was piloted and the Government is currently analysing the results. I encourage the Government to make similar efforts for other national minorities in Serbia. In addition, locally produced content in the Romanian language is now being broadcast in the media in some areas of eastern Serbia.

However, the situation of access to church services in the Romanian language remains difficult. I will continue to encourage the two Churches to establish a constructive dialogue. Independently of this dialogue and its outcome, however, the State should provide the appropriate legal framework based on its national and international obligations.

The preparations for the local elections dominated the discussions with my interlocutors in Pristina. Although, the situation has stabilized since the 19 April 2013 agreement, intra-community incidents continue to affect the Kosovo-Serb community, mainly in the north of Kosovo. The effects of the Association or Community of Kosovo-Serb municipalities on the effective participation of communities is of particular interest to my Institution.

In Kosovo, my concern that the legal framework guaranteeing multilingualism is not being fully implemented in practice was confirmed. Several donor initiatives have illustrated individuals' need and interest to learn the official languages of Kosovo but action and resources from the Kosovo institutions have not followed. My office has supported training courses in the official language for officials in ten municipalities. When I visited one of these courses, I was impressed by the support of the Mayor and the engagement of the participants. Together with the European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo, my Institution will be

looking to expand the project to four more municipalities in 2014. I was also encouraged by the Language Commissioner's willingness to take on ownership of this project as my office gradually withdraws.

In Skopje, I focused on the inter-ethnic relations in the country. More than a decade after the Ohrid Framework Agreement [OFA] was signed, it is critical for stability in the country and the region that we address the growing separation between the two main communities. The authorities are currently reviewing the OFA implementation to identify remaining gaps. This should also be an opportunity to discuss measures that can promote the integration of society.

My Institution is ready to work closely with the authorities to address the root causes of divisions along ethnic lines in the country. For example, the Government's Strategy on Integrated Education is a balanced policy aimed at promoting inter-ethnic interaction and dialogue in society. Introduced three years ago, the Strategy provides for interventions in the education system whereby information and interaction between each ethnic and linguistic community is provided, linguistic barriers are overcome and mutual respect is paired with knowledge of each other. In a society where inter-ethnic incidents among the youth continue to occur, measures like this become all the more important.

The Ministry of Education and Science has produced a first assessment of measures related to ethnic communities in education. The authorities need to commit adequate budgetary resources to implement the full spectrum of integration measures envisioned in the Strategy to avoid further division of society.

At the regional level, I have been closely following reports from eastern Slavonia in Croatia where signs on public buildings written in the Latin and Cyrillic scripts have been removed. This has led to tensions within the country as well as bilaterally with Serbia. I hope that the tensions between the two countries can be defused through a constructive dialogue. I welcome the Croatian authorities' condemnation of these incidents and their resolution to protect the right of national minorities to use their languages and scripts in accordance with international commitments and the country's legal framework.

In November, I visited Moldova, where my Institution also enjoys good co-operative relations with the Government. I welcome the authorities' commitment to develop a

comprehensive integration strategy to remove obstacles to the full participation of persons belonging to national minorities and affirm existing commitments on the protection and promotion of minority identity, language and culture. I am glad to note that the Government has increased its financial and political support for one of my projects to teach the State language to civil servants from minority communities. This project will continue for the next three years.

I also visited the regions of Gagauzia and Transdnistria. The situation of the Moldovan-administered schools in Transdnistria teaching in the Latin-script remains precarious. The schools are facing new obstacles, including higher rental costs for school premises, taxation of teachers' salaries by the *de facto* authorities and issues related to the transportation of educational supplies. Because actions that negatively affect the situation of the schools impede negotiations on this topic of long-standing concern to the OSCE, I strongly urged the Transdnistrian *de facto* authorities to refrain from taking such measures. I will continue to follow this issue closely, together with the OSCE Mission to Moldova. Finally, I stressed the importance of a direct dialogue between Chisinau and Comrat regarding the functioning of the Gagauz autonomy.

Central Asia is one of my main priorities. The countries in this region face many inter-ethnic challenges stemming not only from the legacy of the past but also from current efforts towards State-building. Identity, language policy, economic and social development, competition for resources, border delimitation and demarcation and overall regional security considerations, also in relation to the situation in Afghanistan, have a direct bearing on inter-ethnic relations.

At the end of November, I paid my first visit to Kyrgyzstan. Following the tragic events of 2010, my predecessor was intensely engaged in this country and it is clear that this remains an area of concern. The inter-ethnic peace in the country remains fragile. The law-enforcement bodies struggle to quickly and fairly investigate recurring incidents of inter-ethnic tensions. This breeds mistrust towards the authorities, especially law-enforcement bodies, among all communities in the country. In addition, we see efforts towards reconciling the communities in the south impeded by a perception of bias in trials related to the June 2010 events.

On a more positive note, the Government has made commendable steps to improve inter-ethnic relations by adopting an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Concept on National Unity and Inter-ethnic Relations. I have also learned that the recently established Agency for Inter-ethnic Relations and Local Governance has set up public reception desks in the most conflict-prone areas of the country, which could help address inter-ethnic issues at the grass-root level. The authorities now need to fully implement these measures to improve the situation on the ground and win the trust of all communities.

However, these positive steps could be undermined by recent decisions in the fields of education and language. The Government's decision to abolish national tests for school graduates in the Uzbek language is just one example of such counterproductive measures. This runs counter to the tenets of the Concept on National Unity and earlier announcements on gradually improving multilingual education while safeguarding mother-tongue education. This hasty decision, made without consultations with stakeholders, could deprive hundreds of graduates of equal access to higher education and ultimately impede their inclusion in the social and political life of the country. I urge the authorities to either repeal this decision or introduce a transition period while they design viable alternatives to enable Uzbek minority students to prepare for exams in the State or official languages.

I also discussed the draft National Programme on State Language and Language Policy with the Kyrgyzstani authorities. This is a welcome step towards a more balanced language policy in the country. I encouraged the authorities to use this opportunity to safeguard the linguistic and education rights of national minorities.

I intend to visit Kazakhstan early next year to continue my predecessor's constructive engagement with the authorities. While there, I will discuss issues such as the current efforts to promote knowledge and use of the State language while respecting minority language rights and the representation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life.

In December, I visited Ukraine. In the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council, I discussed various issues related to national minorities with the Ukrainian authorities and other stakeholders, including representatives of national minorities. We covered topics such as the modernization of the legal framework regarding integration of society and protecting and promoting the rights of minorities. I remain committed to assisting the Ukrainian



Government in promoting the integration of society in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in particular concerning the effective participation of those formerly deported people who have returned in large numbers but have been insufficiently included in socio-economic and public life. I am concerned about issues related to the return of formerly deported people and tensions between the various ethnic groups on the peninsula. I urge the Ukrainian Government to ensure that all inter-ethnic incidents are swiftly condemned and investigated by the appropriate authorities, as the Crimean authorities indicated they would do. I am specifically referring to recent incidents of vandalism of religious sites in Crimea.

Early next year, I intend to visit Georgia. My office has been actively engaged in this country for many years, especially in the Armenian and Azerbaijani populated regions of Samtskhe Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, and I plan to continue this engagement.

I will also continue supporting the Georgian Government's efforts to introduce multilingual education, revise the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and its Action Plan, implement the anti-discrimination law, and repatriate and reintegrate the formerly deported Meskhetians. At the same time, I will continue monitoring the situation at the Administrative Boundary Line and the challenges facing the remaining ethnic-Georgian populations in the Akhgori and Gali Districts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my first months as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, I have also had the opportunity to attend several important meetings and conferences.

In early November, I spoke at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting here in Vienna, which was devoted to the question of Roma and Sinti and the OSCE Action Plan. I discussed effective avenues of co-operation with the ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and other international actors to tap into synergies and provide added value in our shared activities. I also stressed the need to ensure that Roma and Sinti are genuinely consulted on issues that affect them and that they are fully participating. The OSCE Action Plan and the new Ministerial Decision on Roma ["Decision on Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, with a Particular Focus on Roma and Sinti Women, Youth and Children"],

MC.DD/6/13/Rev.3/Corr.1] needs to bring real progress and benefits for this vulnerable and marginalized minority in Europe. I am committed to fulfil my tasks in the implementation of the Action Plan and will be consulting with the new Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues on concrete co-operation in the near future. One of the messages of the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting that I would like to highlight is the need to focus greater energies on empowering Roma youth and Roma women and that we need to recognize and respect the diversity within these communities.

At the end of November, I attended two events on minority rights. On the 25th, I joined the Council of Europe to celebrate the 15th anniversary event of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, a key document for my Institution. And in the same week, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights launched its comprehensive publication on *Promoting and Protecting Minority Rights: A Guide for Advocates*.

While I was in Strasbourg, I was particularly inspired by the words of Asbjorn Eide, one of the most eminent people in the field of minority rights movement for many decades. I wish to share his observations with you here today. In his assessment, while many challenges remain in Europe in the field of minority protection, most notably the vulnerable and marginal situation of Roma, the standards and mechanisms developed over the past two decades on minority rights have contributed to the improvement of the situation of minorities in Europe and to overall security and stability. This observation gives us cause for optimism.

Finally, at a conference in Berne earlier this week on the minority languages in Switzerland, Conseiller d'Etat Philippe Perrenoud of Berne stated that it is not only the obligation of the minority community to make efforts but that of the majority as well. This is very much in line with the Ljubljana Guidelines and it is in this spirit that we should continue our work together for the benefit of our societies and the stability of the OSCE region.

Thank you.