



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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[Check against delivery]

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Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be here today and to present to you my first statement. Tomorrow is exactly six months since the Ministerial Council appointed me to this position. Despite restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I have been able to engage effectively with participating States, and international and non-governmental partners. Since my appointment, I have had over 150 bilateral meetings, mostly online but a number in person as well. These meetings have been with Ministers for Foreign Affairs, government officials, parliamentarians, Permanent Representatives in Vienna, bilateral Ambassadors in the Netherlands and representatives of persons belonging to national minorities. I have engaged with officials representing over 25 OSCE participating States. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Permanent Representatives in Vienna for facilitating many of these meetings. I look forward to resuming in-person country visits as soon as conditions allow.

I am engaged in regular consultations within the OSCE, including with Secretary General Helga Schmid, ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro and Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Roberto Montella. We are convinced of the need for good co-operation between ourselves and our offices to address our common challenges in line with our respective mandates. I am also in regular contact with the Heads of the OSCE field missions and presences to ensure the complementarity of OSCE engagement. I would like to highlight the excellent co-operation my office has with them and the invaluable assistance they provide. I am also particularly grateful for the excellent co-operation with the Swedish Chairpersonship. I would like to congratulate Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde for conducting an intense travel schedule, strengthening trust and co-operation within and between participating States and supporting the work of my institution.

During the past six months, I have also found the opportunity to hold consultations with multilateral partners, including the UN, the Council of Europe and other European institutions, such as the European External Action Service and the European Commission. I will describe my collaboration with these international partners in more detail later in my report.

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the High Commissioner on National Minorities is mandated to provide early warning and early action to prevent ethnic tensions from developing into conflict. The successive High Commissioners have assisted the OSCE participating States in their efforts to develop and implement policies that facilitate the integration of diverse societies. At a time when diversity in our societies is increasing, promoting policies that facilitate integration is one of the most effective tools we have for preventing tensions within or between States. How States choose to handle diversity can determine how strong and resilient their societies are to internal and external challenges.

I am pleased to report that in many of my meetings, I encountered a high degree of constructive co-operation and trust in our efforts to resolve national minority issues within and between participating States. I believe this constructive approach benefits from a depoliticization of national minority matters, both domestically and in bilateral relations. I have observed many examples of good practices in this respect, and I intend to examine these examples and support the exchange of experience between interested participating States. I am also convinced that no participating State is immune to the challenges of managing inter-ethnic diversity, and all participating States can learn from each other's experience.

Since most of my meetings were held online, I would like to share my engagement with a number of participating States in alphabetical order. I will then also present the thematic work of my institution.

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Albania's leadership of the OSCE during a challenging 2020, adapting operating modalities to the new realities, while also ensuring that important decisions were made.

Following parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government in Albania, I stand ready to continue providing assistance on national minority issues, as they pertain to my mandate.

I have been in contact with the authorities of Belarus and Poland with regard to the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus. It is important that any disagreements do not negatively affect inter-ethnic relations.

In my preliminary online consultations with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we identified education as an area where my office may be able to offer expertise. It will require context-specific approaches to address segregation in “two schools under one roof” and provide pupils with suitable choices for quality education. I look forward to visiting the country soon to learn more about the intricacies of the context and to engage with interlocutors on ways that my institution can be of assistance in promoting social cohesion in the country.

In April, I had some preliminary contact with Estonia’s authorities and a broad range of minority representatives. These meetings confirmed my office’s positive assessment of Estonia’s efforts to support the integration of its diverse society. Because Estonia has gained so much valuable experience along this path, I am planning to intensify our activities to share our Estonian partners’ experience with institutions working on inter-ethnic issues across the OSCE area. While I appreciate Estonia’s progress in several policy areas and increased government efforts in recent years to listen to minority communities, my conversations with representatives of national minorities highlighted specific concerns with the ongoing education reform, which I have asked the authorities to look into. In particular, the government’s plans and priorities for education aimed at enhancing knowledge of the State language in minority language schools and an ongoing reform of gymnasium-level education resulting in the merging of schools constitute a source of concern, especially among ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking community. While I praise the government for investing in strengthening State-language proficiency among minority communities, which will support their participation in higher education and employment, it is also important that opportunities for education in and of minority languages are preserved, especially in areas compactly inhabited by national minorities. Given the degree of ambiguity with regard to future changes, which may create fear and speculation, I advised the authorities to communicate transparently with minority communities and include them in relevant decision-making processes.

Indigenous peoples – particularly the Sami – featured as an important matter in my consultations with several participating States, especially in relation to the nexus between the consequences of climate change and conflict prevention. I look forward to exploring these matters as they pertain to my mandate. To that end, I appreciate the invitation of the authorities of Finland to host my visit next year.

In my dialogue with Georgia, I was able to build on my institution's long-term engagement with the country and in the region. Despite the pandemic, my office was able to resume some of its project activities. We organized a teachers' information exchange to support multilingual education and improve the quality of education in schools and preschools with minority languages of instruction. We also held online and in-person workshops for minority youth to promote more inclusive political participation processes, especially from a gender perspective. My office also provided an online expert seminar for the State Language Department, with the aim of sharing best practices and inspiring balanced and inclusive strategic policy design.

As part of an inclusive consultation process, my office provided feedback to the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality on the new draft State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration from 2021 onwards. We outlined that a comprehensive and effective integration policy implies addressing anti-discrimination and full and effective equality; effective participation; language; education; security and law enforcement; access to justice; and media. To support Georgia's implementation of its new integration strategy, my office has designed a new aligned support programme, which has been submitted to participating States for funding. The programme would aim to continue supporting multilingual education, political participation, and access to media for national minorities, and to counter hate speech and disinformation; with crosscutting focuses on gender, youth and confidence-building measures.

In response to a request from the authorities of Kazakhstan, I provided recommendations on ongoing and future integration policies: in particular, consultative mechanisms, multilingual education, language policy (including onomastics and toponymy), participation, policing, and access to justice. In my correspondence with the authorities, I encouraged them to further strengthen the mediation capacities of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan so it can play a more comprehensive role in preventing localized incidents that may involve representatives

of different ethnic groups. I also shared a video address with the Assembly's 29th annual session.

I held several meetings and corresponded with the authorities of Kyrgyzstan on the development of their national inter-ethnic policy. I welcome President Sadyr Japarov's adoption of the Concept for the Development of Civic Identity for 2021–2026, "Kyrgyz Zharany", in November 2020, and I have committed my office's assistance to the relevant authorities in Kyrgyzstan to develop the Action Plan for the Concept. I also commend the President's recent decision to reinstall a specialized executive structure dealing with inter-ethnic policymaking – the State Agency for Local Self-Governance and Interethnic Relations.

I followed with concern the recent escalation along the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This may have potential implications for inter-ethnic relations in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. I will continue closely monitoring the situation from the perspective of my mandate. Moreover, I stand ready, in co-ordination with other OSCE structures and international organizations, to assess the needs for assistance and explore how my institution can use its specific experience to contribute to trust building and provide programmatic support, inspired by our thematic Recommendations and Guidelines, in such areas as language, education, policing of multi-ethnic societies and access to the media.

Meanwhile, we have continued to promote education initiatives in the region. Our Central Asia Education Programme has supported mother tongue-based multilingual and multicultural education since 2006. The third phase will end in June 2021. This programme has contributed to an increase in the enrolment of minority youth, including girls, in higher education, which will improve their opportunities for employment and socio-economic inclusion. It has also been observed that the incidence of early marriage has decreased among girls attending the schools participating in the programme since 2006. Based on the experience we have gained in mother tongue-based multilingual and multicultural education in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, we have expanded the programme to Tajikistan, Mongolia and Turkmenistan, providing further opportunities for regional co-operation and collaboration. In 2020–2021, the HCNM renewed its Memorandum of Co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan and with the National Centre for Professional Development "ORLEU" of Kazakhstan. For the

first time in the history of my institution, we signed a Memorandum of Co-operation on Multilingual and Multicultural Development with the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan and a Memorandum of Co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia. I look forward to renewing the Memorandum of Co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan. This reinforces my belief that participating States in Central Asia are particularly dedicated to their OSCE commitments to develop more sustainable and equitable quality education for all, including for ethnic communities.

Although some programme activities had to be adjusted due to Covid-19 restrictions, we were still able to develop and launch an online training course together with the in-service teacher training institutions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which supported minority school teachers providing distance learning. We shared resources, such as online classes in minority languages, through social media and online communication platforms. Our website and newsletter for multilingual education in Central Asia were widely used to access digital information and methodological resources.

We have found that broader support is required to improve the socio-economic and public participation and inclusion of national minorities within the societies of Central Asia. Therefore, the fourth phase of the programme will also look at opportunities and challenges in this area. We welcome further financial support from participating States in achieving this endeavour.

I recently started a series of introductory meetings with the Latvian authorities. I am also planning to organize meetings with minority representatives in the near future. I had the opportunity to discuss issues related to the status of non-citizens and the naturalization process with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. While I commend Latvia for streamlining procedures and easing certain naturalization requirements, and thereby reducing the number of non-citizens in recent years, I also expressed openness to share recommendation on how to further expedite the process. I discussed the implementation of the current education reform and recent decisions pertaining to higher and preschool education with the Minister of Education and Science, and recommended that there remains space for pupils of a minority background to continue learning in their mother tongue. It is also important to continue the ongoing consultations with the representatives of national minorities while implementing education reforms.

I have continued the long-term engagement of my predecessors in Moldova on several dimensions of inter-ethnic relations and integration of diverse society. I took note of the debate related to language legislation in Moldova. I reached out to the authorities to underline the need for an inclusive dialogue in the area of language policy and I reiterated my support in facilitating such a dialogue. I also offered expert assistance and targeted programming to promote innovative models showing how the State and minority languages can co-function in a harmonious and mutually enriching manner. Our ongoing work supporting an inclusive consultative process for the development of a new Action Plan for the Strategy on the Consolidation of Inter-ethnic Relations in Moldova is of particular importance in this regard.

I am also pleased to note that my institution's long-term co-operation with the authorities in Moldova is bearing fruit. Multilingual education will be offered in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia; Taraclia, which has a significant ethnic-Bulgarian community, is ready to pilot bilingual groups at kindergartens; and the President has launched a new national programme to assist adults learning the State language. These initiatives have important meaning beyond their apparent educational value. They help overcome linguistic segregation and promote social cohesion. In this respect, I am pleased to inform you that my office, in co-operation with our Moldovan partners, has recently completed the Ethnobarometer, an analytical product that measures various aspects of identity politics and inter-ethnic relations in Moldova. We hope that the Ethnobarometer will be an important source of data for policymakers in the field of inter-ethnic relations.

In my online consultations with representatives of the authorities of Montenegro, I discussed how it is crucial to maintain the effective functioning of policies and institutions in areas related to national minorities to ensure the continuity of positive inter-ethnic relations in the country. I look forward to visiting Montenegro in the near future to assess inter-ethnic relations first-hand and to discuss ways that my institution can support the integration of society.

I look forward to paying an introductory visit to North Macedonia in the coming period to meet with my institution's traditional interlocutors, including members of the government and parliament and representatives of civil society and national minority communities, to discuss how I can support the implementation of the "One Society for All" Strategy. Indeed, this Strategy is a good example of a State recognizing the value of providing opportunities for all

communities. I intend to continue working with the authorities of North Macedonia and provide support in line with my mandate.

Socio-economic inequalities and distances between communities are factors that shape inter-ethnic relations. It is important to work towards reducing inequalities between different groups, including minority women. My office is currently studying the socio-economic participation of women belonging to national minorities in North Macedonia. The results may contribute towards informing the implementation of the “One Society for All” Strategy, particularly on matters related to the intersection between gender, national minorities and socio-economic participation.

In North Macedonia, my office has been developing language tools. The Macedonian–Albanian Dictionary has led to the development of a Macedonian–Albanian phrasebook, “FRAZA”. I was glad to find out that the digitalized dictionary and the phrasebook have been particularly useful for pupils following their education online due to Covid-19. I am equally pleased that my office has embarked on enriching the phrasebook to include two additional languages – Serbian and Turkish. In this way, the possibilities for interaction will increase beyond the two largest communities in the country. Digitalized, interactive and gender mainstreamed, FRAZA is more than an instrument of communication. It acknowledges that language is the cornerstone of one’s identity and sense of belonging, and it is modelled on the principles of inter-culturalism. It not only enables interaction, but also exposes its users to cultural aspects of different communities around them, fostering understanding across cultures.

I appreciated the invitation of the authorities of Serbia to visit the country. I look forward to my engagements with a range of interlocutors in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Bujanovac. Serbia remains a valuable partner for my institution and I will continue building on the successful past co-operation of previous High Commissioners, including input to the national minority-related legislation and mechanisms.

As I indicated earlier, finding and promoting positive examples of effective policies to manage diverse societies is high on my agenda. In this regard, in my engagements so far, numerous interlocutors have referred to Vojvodina in Serbia as a model of how to accommodate the interests of national minorities and an example of positive bilateral co-operation on national minority issues. I look forward to visiting the region and having the opportunity to observe

first-hand how positive arrangements and practices in the province contribute to maintaining inter-ethnic peace.

In Serbia, I also intend to travel to the south, where several matters require my attention, including the collection and use of identity and ethnic data and matters related to language and education. I am glad that the Albanian-Serbian dictionary developed by my institution is helping improve interaction among youth from different communities. I look forward to continuing my institution's engagement with the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of the University of Novi Sad, which my office has been supporting for ten years. The availability of quality, bilingual higher education in southern Serbia is an encouraging example of what can be achieved when the central government, academic institutions, minority representatives, local authorities and the international community work together towards strengthening social cohesion.

Since I took up my mandate, I have been able to build upon the fruitful relations that my predecessors established with this country. I have conducted an extensive round of meetings with Ukraine's authorities, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, of Culture and Information Policy and of Education and Science, as well as with representatives of civil society and national minority communities. Policies in the fields of language, education and decentralization, among others, featured highly in all these conversations, given their potential impact on both domestic and bilateral relations. From my discussions with representatives of national minorities, I observed that they clearly link their future to that of Ukraine. I encouraged Ukraine's authorities to ensure that any new policies, including their implementation modalities, continue to foster this sense of belonging.

I have closely followed implementation of the education reform in Ukraine. I recommended to the authorities that they ensure flexibility and an incentive-based approach in implementing the new language requirements for schools with instruction in non-EU languages. I was also pleased to hear that Ukraine and Hungary are engaged in bilateral dialogue to address issues pertaining to education and language.

In December 2020, my office, together with Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science, organized a conference marking the end of the Ministry's pilot project on multilingual education. Going forward, I hope that Ukraine will capitalize on the wealth of expertise it has

gained in multilingual education and expand it to benefit other multilingual regions in the country.

I am pleased to report that a national minority law is under development. My office has provided technical expertise to ensure that this new law will strengthen the legislative framework governing minority rights in Ukraine, including linguistic rights, in a way that reflects and respects the country's diversity. As work to develop this law progresses, it will be important to consult meaningfully on the draft law with as representative a range of minority communities as possible. Over the past few months, my office has also provided a series of webinars on minority rights and inter-ethnic relations to help build the capacity of the newly established State Service on Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience. We have also continued to expand the reach of our Diversity Management Training Tool in Ukraine, which aims to improve civil servants' and public officials' capacities in mainstreaming and managing diversity in their daily work.

I held online meetings with representatives of the national authorities in Uzbekistan, including with the heads of the National Centre for Human Rights and the Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendly Relations with Foreign Countries under the Cabinet of Ministers. We discussed the possibilities for consolidating ongoing collaboration between the Government of Uzbekistan and my institution, including sharing best practices and lessons learned in different inter-ethnic policy areas, such as the development of consultative mechanisms with national minorities; promoting balanced language policies; and strengthening the effective participation of national minorities in public, socio-economic, and cultural life.

Madame Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addition to ongoing engagement with the participating States, my office stands ready to contribute its expertise to co-ordinated efforts to rebuild cohesion in societies affected by protracted conflict. Once political settlements are near, my office can offer expertise on drafting policies related to national minorities and inter-ethnic relations, and advise on how to support the integration of diverse society; for example, in the use of languages in education and public administration, on media issues, and promoting effective participation.

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the following part of my report, I would like to highlight the thematic work of my institution.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I have observed many examples of good practices in areas related to my mandate. Fostering the exchange of experience and best practices in the field of inter-ethnic relations among the participating States is a key component of our work. In addition to providing an opportunity for mutual learning, it contributes to strengthening our advice to participating States on how to address the challenges they face in managing diversity in their society. Indeed, the best practices that the successive High Commissioners have encountered across the OSCE space in the last three decades form the foundations of the thematic HCNM Recommendations and Guidelines. In this vein, on the request of a participating State, my office organized an online roundtable on 14 May bringing together leaders of various State institutions working on inter-ethnic issues in the OSCE area. State agencies mandated to work on inter-ethnic issues play a fundamental role in ensuring that government policies reflect minority concerns. They are also a vehicle to foster the participation of national minorities in public life. Strengthening their ability to carry out their mandates effectively is therefore crucial in creating cohesive, well-integrated societies that are resilient to conflict. This informal event brought together around 15 representatives from Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine, who shared some of their achievements, lessons learned and challenges in implementing their mandates. Given the high level of interest by the participants in following up this initial conversation with more focused and frequent discussions, I am considering ways to repeat this meeting at regular intervals in the future, as well as inviting more institutions to be involved. It may also be possible to bolster this resource through additional peer-to-peer exchange activities, which my office could consider facilitating, such as study visits, in-person conferences and bilateral exchange opportunities. The goal would be to help create an informal network of institutions working on minority issues, where members can find concrete answers to the questions they face in their daily work.

Since I took up my mandate, I continue to observe the impact of Covid-19 on national minorities. Indeed, there is growing evidence that the groups who were already the most vulnerable in our societies – including persons belonging to national minorities – have become

even more vulnerable during the pandemic. In this regard, the set of recommendations on “Streamlining diversity: COVID-19 measures that support social cohesion” that my predecessor issued last year continue to be timely. These recommendations are relevant to all participating States, and may offer insights into how States can mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups. For example, in some contexts, access to quality education was already a challenge in minority-populated regions and pupils from minority backgrounds have experienced greater disruption of their education due to the pandemic. It is therefore important to involve minority schools in wider ongoing education reform programmes and to support minority pupils’ access to higher education and employment.

Promoting the effective socio-economic participation of national minorities is one of my priorities for the coming years, especially now, as participating States look for ways to address the new challenges related to the global pandemic. We see that members of vulnerable groups, which frequently includes minorities, may be suffering disproportionately. Starting from the early days of the pandemic, persons belonging to national minorities found themselves especially affected due to their over-representation in the informal economy, in low-paid and low-skilled jobs. In this context, it is crucial that participating States’ efforts to combat discrimination and promote effective and full equality for all do not lose momentum. Bearing this in mind, in December 2020, I initiated an expert research study on the socio-economic participation of national minorities to identify the main challenges we face and potential ways to overcome them. We also researched opportunities to promote the effective social and economic participation of minorities, with a special emphasis on youth and gender. Also, in December last year, my office organized an internal OSCE discussion on the socio-economic participation of women belonging to national minorities. It served as an opportunity to share positive practices and for me to further develop my toolbox at the intersection of gender, national minorities and socio-economic participation to foster social cohesion in diverse societies.

Over time, the successive High Commissioners have devoted more attention to gender equality, including in our programmatic activities and our thematic Recommendations and Guidelines and related events. During my mandate, also to support the Swedish Chair’s priorities, I am determined to continue along this path, with new ideas and activities. To better understand the obstacles that minority women may face to access their rights and realize their full potential, we are embarking on comprehensive research into the intersectionality between gender and

national minorities this year. The study will focus on the thematic areas central to my work; such as, the participation of minority women in political and public life, minority women's access to socio-economic rights, and the contribution of minority women to peace and security. We would appreciate any contribution Delegations may want to consider allocating to this ambitious research project.

In early May, I held consultations with UNHCR on the important topic of statelessness. In the OSCE region, statelessness is both a human rights concern and a conflict prevention issue, often involving national minorities, including, but not limited to, Roma. From the perspective of my mandate, the long-term presence of a significant number of persons belonging to national minorities without citizenship in a State runs counter to the integration of society and poses risks to cohesion and social stability. As set forth in *The Ljubljana Guidelines on the Integration of Diverse Societies*, "citizenship has relevance beyond the individual dimension and has significance for the society as a whole. Citizenship, and in particular access to it, is an essential element of integration."

The importance of citizenship for integration is apparent in social and symbolic dimensions, as it is an essential part of a process built upon participation, a shared sense of belonging, and the legal, political and cultural bonds between individuals of different backgrounds and affiliations. As we are aware, the difficulties in obtaining data on statelessness often impairs efforts aimed at addressing the issue. Therefore, I would like to encourage participating States to consider including questions in their next census that would help gather this information in a systematic manner. In this regard, I would also like to recall the OSCE participating States' international commitments and their pledges made during the 2019 UN high-level Segment on Statelessness in preventing and reducing statelessness. All States should consider what they could do to help end statelessness worldwide by 2024, as outlined in the Global Action Plan. I would like to encourage participating States that have not yet done so to accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness as a means towards strengthening regional efforts. My predecessor, former High Commissioner Zannier, also made pledges at the High Level Segment on Statelessness on behalf of the institution to support participating States in efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness. I intend to continue these efforts, in consultation with UNHCR, where relevant, and within my mandate. I look forward to following-up on this topic in my discussions with participating States, and offer individual recommendations related to statelessness and national

minorities, including Roma, as part of my wider efforts to improve integration and social cohesion in diverse societies.

Europe's largest ethnic minority group, Roma and Sinti, remains one of the most excluded communities in the OSCE. Together with the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, I will continue implementing the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area. This year, the official ceremony for the Max van der Stoep Award, granted in 2020 to Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre from Ireland, will take place. Relevant information and details about the award ceremony, which is tentatively scheduled for 19 November in The Hague this year, following its postponement last year, will be communicated to your offices in due course.

As we continue to promote our thematic work, I would like to take this opportunity to announce that in the autumn I am organizing a conference to mark the 15th anniversary of *The Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*. How States may approach policing in diverse societies remains topical across the OSCE region, and recent developments have underlined the relevance of these Recommendations. This conference will provide an informal platform to exchange knowledge and experiences on how to operationalize the main principles in different contexts. As trends in crime and police services evolve, the conference will also aim to identify the emerging challenges and new perspectives that my institution should take into account to complement our current work in this area. One new perspective that we will be paying attention to is mainstreaming gender in policing in diverse societies. This is in line with our long-term efforts to promote cohesion within our societies, and enhance democracy and gender equality. It is also in line with the Chairpersonship's priorities for this year.

As you know, we are marking another anniversary of our thematic Recommendations and Guidelines this year. On Monday 7 June, we are holding an online conference for the 25th anniversary of *The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*. I am looking forward to welcoming you and your representatives to join us. Education continues to be a key area of attention for my institution. The conference will give us the opportunity to reflect on how these Recommendations have been applied in different contexts and to consider how they can be further operationalized to meet current and future challenges, including those posed by the move to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ensuring equal access to quality education for all remains imperative. The

conference will therefore also focus on practices and experiences of digital technologies that facilitate access to multilingual education. I would like to invite you to take an active part in the conference discussions. I am very grateful to our Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde, who will participate in the official opening of the event.

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to underline that my institution's programmatic activities could not have happened at their current scale of today without the generous voluntary support from various participating States. I value these contributions very highly, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the authorities of Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Ukraine and the United States for their generous support.

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of multilateral co-operation in the implementation of my mandate cannot be overestimated. I held meetings with several key partners from the UN, where we discussed common challenges in implementing the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is a global responsibility, especially in the areas related to my mandate and from the perspective of securing peace and stability in the OSCE participating States. In the last few months, I had a meeting with the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, to discuss synergies between our mandates and co-operation between our respective offices. I also had a productive exchange with Ms. Natalia Gherman, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. We discussed challenges but also prospects for our regional collaboration. In May, I exchanged views on areas of mutual interest with Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs – Department of Peace Operations. With the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Dr. Fernand de Varennes, I discussed our common priorities and how we could further develop our substantive and productive collaboration.

In March, during my trip to Strasbourg, I met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, and the Secretary General of PACE, Ms. Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis. I also met with the Secretariat of the Venice Commission and the Secretariats of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Effective co-operation between the HCNM and the Council of Europe, and exchanging of views and expertise in the field of minority rights, in particular, and inter-ethnic relations generally, enable the two organizations to maintain consistency in their regional approaches to minority rights and integration of diverse societies.

The EU and the European Commission remain strategic and operational partners for my institution, including in areas of mutual interest related to the prevention of tensions and conflict related to inter-ethnic relations from the Western Balkans to Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. With regard to the Western Balkans, the EU accession process is extremely relevant to my mandate. EU aspirations and the accession process create positive momentum and conducive conditions for the improvement of national minority-related legislation and policies in candidate countries, facilitating the adoption of effective diversity-governance principles at a structural level. In this regard, my institution remains available to relevant capitals in the Western Balkans to continue providing expertise on how to enhance national minority-related legislation in line with OSCE standards that would help them meet the requirements of EU accession. In February, I appreciated a round of productive in-person talks with my EU counterparts in Brussels, including with Secretary General of the European External Action Service, Mr. Stefano Sannino; European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Mr. Olivér Várhelyi; EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák; and EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Mr. Peter Burian.

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I very much look forward to continuing working closely with you. I would like to thank you for the support you have already provided in my first months in office. As I continue to implement my mandate and seek to increase trust within and between participating States on

issues related to inter-ethnic relations in the spirit of co-operative security, I look forward to relying on your support.

Thank you very much for your attention.