



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

**STATEMENT**

by  
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the  
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Mr. Chairman,

Since last informing the Permanent Council of my activities 28 October last year much of my focus has been on the situation in Central Asia and the Balkans.

I have visited **Kyrgyzstan** twice since my last visit to the Permanent Council, in March immediately following the first round of parliamentary elections, and in April in co-ordination with the visit of the Chairman-in-Office. During my most recent visit I also travelled to the southern region of Jalal-Abad for discussions with local officials, representatives of national minorities and local NGOs.

The political turmoil that has gripped the country over the last months has had a far reaching political, social and economic impact on the country. While inter-ethnic questions have not been at the centre of the political events, the relations between the various ethnic communities of Kyrgyzstan are closely interwoven with the set of unfolding processes in various parts of the country. I am concerned that these relations could be destabilised by the recent events and that this instability could have a broader political significance. Many within the national minority communities are worried about what the changes will mean for their future in Kyrgyzstan. A deterioration of security in the face of a perceived rise in lawlessness and criminality is a primary concern. Representation is also an important issue. From within the minority community I have, however, encountered sentiments that the political changes in the country represent an opportunity to advance their concerns, which some feel have been neglected previously.

Finding the balance between the different ethnic communities in the country is, I believe, one of the key challenges for Kyrgyzstan ahead of the presidential elections and beyond. I have encouraged the authorities in Bishkek to give increased attention to the issue of national integration, including steps to ensure a significant level of representation for national minorities and to enhance security. It will be important that the forthcoming presidential elections do not serve to further divide society. In this regard the full participation in the electoral process of all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic identity, should be guaranteed.

In support of my political engagement, I will continue to advance my long standing commitment to developing educational policy and practice as a means of integration in the

country. I also believe that there is now an increased urgency in respect to the issue of multiethnic policing for Kyrgyzstan. I further believe that the proposed process of constitutional reform will be an opportunity to establish firmly the legal foundations necessary for long term integration and stability in the country, including guaranteeing the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. I stand ready to assist Kyrgyzstan in this important initiative.

In December I visited **Turkmenistan** for meetings with the President and other officials. This visit marked a further step in my discussions with the authorities in Ashgabad about the nature of the nation-building programme being conducted in the country. A particular focus of my current attention is the issue of education and how education policies can be developed to address simultaneously the desire of the majority to promote its culture and enhance knowledge and use of the State language while also ensuring the rights of national minorities to protect and develop their cultures and languages. My dialogue is active in this area and I welcome Turkmenistan's readiness to participate in an international conference that I am organising later this year to promote national integration and regional cooperation on education in Central Asia. I intend to return to Turkmenistan later this month to continue my discussions.

In February 2005 I undertook a visit to **Kazakhstan** where I am monitoring an innovative pilot project, created by the HCNM, to provide teaching in the State and the Russian languages for final year Uzbek-speaking children in order to assist them to take the national examination for entry into higher education. This project has demonstrated considerable success in its first year of operation with almost all of the children involved being able to enter higher education in Kazakhstan. I look forward to providing additional support in the area of teacher training for the minority schools of southern Kazakhstan. In this regard, I am encouraged by Kazakhstan's strong commitment to strengthening its educational system as a whole and look forward to assisting in this process, notably in the area of the training of bilingual/multilingual teachers, in order to further national integration in the country.

I have visited **Tajikistan** twice since my last appearance at the Permanent Council. In November I travelled to Dushanbe for discussions with officials, representatives of national minorities and NGOs. During this visit I learned more about the current issues facing the country and affecting inter-ethnic relations. A particular challenge identified during my

meetings was the urgent need to enhance and modernise educational provision in the country. Education was viewed by all parties as a priority and as a way to help to bring the country together following past civil strife.

As a result, of this visit I undertook to organise jointly with the Ministry of Education a conference entitled 'Education as a Means of Integration in Tajikistan' in Dushanbe. In March I returned to Tajikistan with some of my staff for the conference. The conference explored how new approaches to curriculum design, teacher training and language teaching can strengthen the role of education in fostering more harmonious relations between different ethnic communities. The issue of how co-operation amongst neighbouring states in the area of minority education could help to promote national integration and enhance regional stability was also considered. I look forward to developing together with the Ministry of Education a number of practical projects to follow up on the ideas discussed in the conference.

On 2 - 4 May I visited **Kosovo** for the first time in my capacity as the High Commissioner in order to get acquainted with the situation. In my discussion with the UNMIK, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and representatives of Serb community, I discussed recent developments regarding inter-ethnic relations, with a special focus on education, the decentralisation process, the economy and the employment of persons belonging to minorities. I remain in close contact with the Chairman-in-Office regarding my further engagement in this region.

In **Croatia** I continue to follow the issue of the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, in particular the provisions regarding education and proportional representation of minorities in administration and the judiciary, as well as different aspects of refugee return, including the issue of terminated occupancy and tenancy rights. Those were the main topics on the agenda of my visit to Croatia on 21 - 22 February. With the representatives of the Government I started a dialogue regarding the possible assistance my office could provide regarding the implementation of some remaining elements of the Law. After my visit I submitted a number of recommendations which I hope to discuss with the Croatian authorities in the near future.

In February, I also visited **Serbia and Montenegro**, including Vojvodina and South Serbia. The security situation in those regions as well as the impact of Kosovo on the situation in the western Balkans were the main topics on my agenda. I also discussed the implementation of the State Union Law on National Minorities which was drafted with the assistance of my office. My focus in South Serbia will remain on education as a tool of long term conflict prevention. The situation in Vojvodina is stable and the number of inter-ethnic incidents reported in 2004 has significantly decreased following the local elections. I urged the authorities to respond to such incidents in timely manner to ensure that a lack of proper reaction from law enforcement cannot create a space for radicalisation.

An important aspect of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in **F.Y. Republic of Macedonia**, which is still being implemented, is the requirement of equitable representation of all communities in public services. In close consultation with the OSCE Mission and other representatives of the international community in Skopje, I have continued to work on the preparation of a Road Map which might serve as a strategy guideline for the Macedonian authorities further efforts in this regard.

I also continue to follow the potentially contentious issue of the draft law on the use of flags of communities. I have already submitted my recommendations on an earlier draft and I stand ready to assist the authorities once this issue is re-addressed later this year. In close co-operation with the OSCE Mission, I continue my engagement regarding the implementation of a number of recommendations on inter-ethnic relations at primary and secondary level schools which I submitted in May last year.

On a number of occasions I have had an opportunity to address you regarding the South-East European (SEEU) University, which I continue to support. Its success, as a genuinely multilingual and multi-cultural institution has been confirmed by the recent Evaluation Report by the European University Association, which *inter alia* underlines that "the SEEU is clearly a model university for Macedonia and the region". At the same time since the problems surrounding the founding of the new state University in Tetovo still persist, I have decided to continue to assist the Ministry of Education with expert advice.

Last Monday, I visited **Hungary** where I met senior government officials, including the Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I have been closely

cooperating with the Hungarian authorities over the past years and I am continuing my engagement with Budapest. The purpose of my visit was to familiarize myself with the recent initiatives of the Hungarian government to support their kin-minorities in the neighbouring countries and to form an opinion (a judgement) on whether these initiatives are in line with international norms and practices.

On 8 February I visited **Turkey** for a one-day working visit to Ankara. The main objective of this visit was to follow up my first visit of January 2003. My contacts in Ankara enabled me to receive first hand information on the progress achieved on issues of concern to me in the implementation of the reform process since my earlier visit.

During my recent visit to **Georgia** end April, I was pleased to hear that the Georgian Government has placed Samtskhe-Javakheti, a region with a large Armenian speaking population, high on its agenda. President Saakashvili informed me that now, with the perspective that Akhalkalaki Military Base will be withdrawn from the region, more than ever before, the Government is paying attention to Samtskhe-Javakheti. I was pleased to learn that the Government is planning a number of initiatives to further integrate this region into Georgia, including plans to start reconstruction of key road-links in the coming months, which will enhance the physical and economic links between Samtskhe-Javakheti and the rest of the country. I welcomed these plans and pledged my continuing assistance in reducing tensions in the region through my "Conflict Prevention and Integration Programme for Samtskhe-Javakheti". My office has been implementing this programme in the region since April 2003.

I particularly welcomed the decision of the Georgian Government to establish a National School of Administration, named after the late Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, with a focus on national minorities. The school should help the Georgian authorities to involve the national minorities in the decision-making process and increase the participation of national minorities in governmental structures. I am considering ways of how to assist the Georgian Government in this important endeavour.

President Saakashvili indicated his warm support for my engagement in Abkhazia where over the past years I have worked with the de facto authorities in Sukhumi in order to ensure the right to education in the mother tongue of ethnic Georgian students in the Gali district, and

where since August 2004 I have been implementing the project 'Teachers for Understanding'. This project is aimed at enhancing the skills of teachers of the Georgian and the Abkhaz languages in the districts of Gali, Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira, and at building confidence between communities in Abkhazia.

Finally, concerning **Ukraine** I continue to monitor developments related to national minorities as well as the situation in Crimea, particularly in view of the political changes resulting from the 2004 Presidential elections. I intend to visit Ukraine in June in order to resume my engagement and discuss with the new Ukrainian Government these and other issues.