

Thank you, Chair.

I am honoured to speak here at the Forum for the Advisory Committee, which monitors the implementation of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

This Convention is based on the premise that when States protect the rights of minorities within their borders, then society will be better off, and a source of conflicts will be removed.

The Framework Convention focuses on protecting rights in times of peace. A key mission of the Advisory Committee is to identify warning signs of conflict that may affect minorities, and recommend actions the State can take to help resolve issues rapidly, and prevent conflict.

When conflicts do occur, minorities are among the most vulnerable members of the population. They may be perceived as representatives of their "kin-states" and suspected of disloyalty to their own country. If they have supported the authorities, which protected them in times of peace, they may be seen as traitors by those who oppose the authorities. They may also simply be caught in the crossfire between opposing parties.

There is no doubt that minority rights remain applicable in times of conflict. The key question is how to maintain effective access to those rights – above all, the right to personal security.

It is also vital that minorities continue to have effective access to national and international human rights protection mechanisms. Confusion about which party controls a territory, or disagreement about the legitimacy of the authorities in place, may however slow down decision-making at international level. In the long term, it may even create “black holes” where no body is monitoring minority rights or human rights generally. From a human rights perspective, this is untenable.

Our key message today is therefore: access – to rights, and to human rights protection mechanisms. Essential in times of peace, such access is even more crucial for minorities in times of conflict or violence.

Thank you, Chair.