



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

ADDRESS

by

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to the

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Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear friends

Thank you for the invitation to address this important meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. As a long time parliamentarian both at the national and European level, it gives me particular pleasure to be here among former colleagues from Parliaments across the OSCE Region. It is my first time addressing the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as a recently appointed OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and I look forward to exchanging views with you on how we can continue to work together on advancing security and prosperity in the OSCE region within our respective mandates.

Diverse societies are a reality in all parts of the OSCE Region. In recent decades, we have witnessed rapid globalization, movements of people, the redrawing of national borders and ethnic strife and conflicts. These phenomena have changed and continue to change and challenge our societies. It is true to say that we all now live in increasingly multi-ethnic and multilingual societies.

My predecessors as High Commissioners on National Minorities have all in one way or another contributed to a vision on how to promote stability and cohesion in diverse societies. This has been above all done through intensive work behind the scenes with concerned participating States, as quiet diplomacy is one of the tools of the High Commissioner

It is the responsibility of sovereign States to provide security for citizens, to protect human rights and to ensure good and effective governance. In contemporary diverse societies it is also the responsibility of the State to promote integration of the society. In today's world you could argue that integration is an essential part of good governance.

Unfortunately, there are also negative forces in our societies who act against and undermine smooth integration. Some do it on purpose, others not. A particularly negative role is played by those who are practising hate speech. Often integration processes are significantly

hampered when hate speech is spread to condone or even promote the exclusion of entire groups from societies.

In this context, I urge you to be aware of your responsibility as politicians and opinion leaders. Democratic leadership also entails a responsible leadership that does not passively tolerate hate speech but instead leads through example and firmly rejects such language.

The experience acquired by successive High Commissioners over the past twenty years has been distilled into several thematic recommendations issued by the HCNM. The Ljubljana Guidelines, the latest of such recommendations, address integration as a comprehensive approach that both ensures respect for minority rights while also working towards an inclusive and cohesive society.

The topic of integration is very familiar to me, as I was the Minister responsible for integration in the previous Finnish Government. Although the contexts vary, the issues arising are surprisingly similar whether we talk about traditional minorities or more recently arrived groups.

The Ljubljana Guidelines recommend that States adopt policies that respect diversity but at the same time strive to avoid and combat assimilation and excessive separation between groups. The focus should be on the integration *of* the society rather than *into* it.

The prevalent and often implicit assumption is that there is a mainstream society to which others must adapt. In my view, this idea is both misguided and unfair to national minorities, who are constitutive elements of the society. They play a role in the history of the society in which they live. The majority's failure to recognize this fact is precisely what leads to resentment and alienation in many cases. The onus should not be placed solely on national minorities to adapt and adjust to the majority. Instead, integration policies benefit the multi-ethnic State as a whole and should be addressed to all groups that comprise it. But we must not hide the facts; integration is a two-way process, and it will change society, but in a way that enriches it.

Integration does not stand in contrast to minority rights. Minority rights should be part and parcel of any successful integration policy. Yet respect for minority rights is only one aspect

of a stable and democratic multi-ethnic State. Persons belonging to national minorities should be full-fledged members of society. It requires that the State ensures that the rights of all are respected and creates the conditions for all members of the society to take on their share of the responsibilities and the benefits.

Governments need to ensure that all groups in a society are consulted in the process. This consultation has to be effective, transparent and continuous. Failing to facilitate effective participation of all parts of society will render any resulting policies less effective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no single recipe for a successful integration policy, and every situation is unique. Integration policies need to be specific enough to be effective in the given circumstances and flexible enough to accommodate changing realities. One could perhaps use the image: we know what kind of pot and water is needed for the integration, but each situation has its own spices to be a delicious dish.

Integration policies should assign clear responsibilities and competencies to all authorities concerned. Equally important is the inclusion of all levels of administration: from the central authorities to the municipal offices who deliver many of the public services. This institutional set-up also has to take into account the necessity of co-ordinating policy action between the different levels and layers of authority.

Allow me to make two things crystal clear. In my experience, I learned that broad consultations as well as clear leadership from the top level of government are preconditions for a successful integration policy. Without top-level support, integration policies will just attract dust on the shelves.

Dear friends,

For governments to be able to adequately design and implement policies and assess their effectiveness, objective, accurate and disaggregated data on the precise situation of different groups in society are essential. Unfortunately, this is still often not the case.

I am aware of many situations where such important information is missing in the OSCE region. For example, there are situations where no population census has taken place for long periods of time. In some cases, there are doubts that citizens participating in censuses are not able, without pressure, to make their own choices, as to which ethnicity or language they feel closest to. We have many different traditions in the OSCE participating States and it is my intention to study this issue and to find out where we have good practices, in order to be able to share that information with you and other decision makers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can not address you today without raising the dire situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE region. In early November we will be gathering in Vienna for a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting devoted to examine what we have achieved during the last 10 years of implementing the OSCE Action Plan on improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti. The Action Plan also tasked my Office to work within its mandate on issues relating to the improvement of the situation of Roma and Sinti.

As I see it, the exclusion of Roma from mainstream society can cause serious social and political strife. There is plenty of evidence of this already in several of the OSCE participating States. Unfortunately, if not addressed effectively in the short and medium term the potential for further escalation over time exists. That is also why the High Commissioners have in the past drawn attention to various aspects contributing to the overall exclusion of Roma from mainstream society, including the lack of registration and civic documentation, the lack of availability and access to quality education for Roma children and the lack of participation and representation in public life.

The recently circulated draft report by ODIHR on the Implementation of the Action Plan points to lack of tangible results and real outcomes for the benefit of Roma despite increased funding. The report also illustrates continued negative trends across the OSCE Region for the situation of Roma. One of the most worrying negative trends is the disturbing number of hate crimes against Roma, the use of extremist anti-Roma rhetoric and continuing reports of police ill-treatment. Roma are of course not the only group that has been targeted by such ill-treatment and crimes in the OSCE region.

The report provides material for some critical self-reflection for us all.

At the times of economic hardships we also need to think more strategically of cooperation and partnerships to be more effective. For example, there is excellent new research relating to conflict, fragility and social inclusion by the World Bank that we can draw on. I find it extremely important that we continue to develop synergies and cooperation with the international financial institutions. While we have our mandates and knowledge, we often do not have the necessary means at our disposal.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Conflict prevention is what the High Commissioner stands for. My mandate is to provide early warning and, as appropriate, early action at the earliest possible stage. For this to be achievable, it is essential that I maintain good dialogue and co-operation with all participating States. Conflict prevention is not only about addressing emerging tensions at the earliest stage possible, it also means identifying and tackling the root causes of these tensions. This includes, but is not limited to, the failure to respect rights.

Although I am optimistic that together with resolute action we can continue to make progress, I would like to echo here the words of my predecessor Knut Vollebaek. In his final address before this Assembly, he expressed his concern that there is a risk of backsliding in the work we do. He noted then that it had become more difficult to maintain a constructive relationship with participating States. I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to work together with the OSCE institutions to reverse this trend. In times of new tensions, we need to keep our tools sharp for using.

Thank you for your attention.