



ADDRESS OF OSCE PA SECRETARY GENERAL R. MONTELLA

At the High-Level Opening Panel - OSCE HCNM Conference *From Lund to Ljubljana: Promoting Participation of National Minorities as a Pathway to Integration of Diverse Societies*

Lund, 14 November 2019

High Commissioner Zannier,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me thank you, dear Lamberto, the entire Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for organizing the conference and inviting me to be part of this distinguished opening panel. It is an honour to be here in Lund today on the 20th Anniversary of the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*.

Such a package of recommendations has constituted - and continues to constitute - a key tool to help governments and legislative bodies to adopt specific measures to alleviate tensions and better integrate national minorities into the societies and institutions of the respective countries. Together with the rest of the comprehensive acquis of the HCNM, the Lund recommendations prove very well the added value of this institution, which, and I wish to stress this, is unique in the international framework and whose best practices are appreciated beyond the OSCE region. In

fact, this is even more relevant as, as we all know, public international law still lacks a consensual and established corpus of norms defining and effectively protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Moreover, I particularly welcome the conceptual shift that the HCNM has promoted in terms of looking at multi-ethnic societies as a whole and at integration as a dynamic process involving members of the majority as well as of the minorities, relying on the active encouragement of the latter to participate in public life at all levels. The shift, in other words, from Lund to Ljubljana. Indeed, inclusive governance through specific mechanisms as well as the fostering of a shared sense of belonging of every member of society is a fundamental aspect of good and democratic governance and essential to peace, stability and prosperity.

However, while the HCNM's efforts have made a substantial contribution to improving inter-ethnic relations and preventing the escalation of conflicts, ethnic tensions and cases of ineffective integration unfortunately still persist in the OSCE area and need our continued attention. As a matter of fact, monitoring the level of integration and cohesion of diverse societies is one of the key tools in the *early-warning* and *conflict prevention* capabilities of the OSCE. We need to maintain our focus on areas where harmonious inter-ethnic relations are a key precondition to a viable society, such as the Western Balkans, and on the situation affecting minorities in conflict zones, as for example in Eastern Ukraine. At the same time, we also need to pay increased attention to areas where recent events have been exacerbating or bringing back old tensions.

Dear Colleagues,

I feel to be here with two different hats, both relevant to today's conference. One is a personal hat, as I spent the beginning of my career working in OSCE field offices in South East Europe on issues related to the integration of national minorities. This makes it a topic to which I am very personally attached, and I will dwell on my experience in a few minutes. The other hat is of course my institutional role as Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Let me start from here.

In the framework of intra-institutional efforts to protect and empower national minorities, Parliamentarians are a key resource and sometimes their role is underestimated. Members of Parliament, as elected representatives, are the bridge between citizens and institutions, they are sentinels of the needs and feelings of the people on the ground. In the case of representatives of minorities, nobody better than them can ensure that the instances of the minority they represent are well reflected in the central government policies and in the country's legislative activity. This is true in all cases: regardless of any party or political affiliation, Members of Parliament will be the permanent link between the minority and the heart of the central State decision-making bodies. This is why it is key that electoral systems enable the direct representation of minorities.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly acquis also includes specific resolutions on national minorities. One, adopted at our 2011 Annual Session in Belgrade, *inter alia* urged Parliaments of the participating States, *acting synergistically with the lawful representatives of minorities, to rapidly appraise the compatibility of their own legislation on this matter with the principles* of relevant HCNM recommendations. In that case, the milestone 2008 Bolzano Recommendations had just been adopted. Other important texts include the resolutions on National Minorities in Inter-State

relations (Oslo 2010) and on Gender and Minorities in the OSCE region (Monaco 2012). Moreover, PA Declarations have also frequently reiterated the call for OSCE States to respect the rights of minorities and to recognize their particular vulnerability in the context of the rise of extremist groups and populist rhetoric, not least in our most recent 2019 Luxembourg Declaration.

The strong link between Members of Parliament and national minorities has been reiterated by our President, George Tsereteli, during his visit to the HCNM Headquarters in March this year, when he committed the PA to engage with OSCE Parliaments in order to ensure that HCNM recommendations and guidelines are taken into account in national political debates and legislative activity. That visit, in which we also brainstormed on possible joint projects between the HCNM and OSCE Parliamentarians, and yesterday's morning visit of Ambassador Zannier to our International Secretariat in Copenhagen, significantly testified to the excellent cooperation and coordination between our two bodies, both at political and working level. Dear Lamberto, I wish to thank you also for this.

Dear Colleagues,

As mentioned, let me move also to my personal experience on integration of national minorities. In fact, I spent about ten years, between the late 1990s and early 2000s, working on the integration of ethnic Albanians in South Serbia (based in the OSCE Office in Bujanovac), and on the integration of local Serbs in Kosovo (based in the OSCE Office in Vushtrri/Vučitrn). This in the most pressing climate of the ongoing armed conflict of 1999 and in a region where a combination of ethnic hatred and political goals had just led to one of the worst and more cruel wars of the last century, following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

In those circumstances, we played a substantial role in mediating and negotiating with the sides the approval of a number of measures to progressively integrate minorities in public life. For instance, we contributed to the creation of a multi-ethnic security force by promoting the adoption of a law allowing recruitment of minorities in the regular police (something that also contributed to the dissolution of parallel armed militias). We also managed to increase the representation of minorities in the judiciary. These are only two examples that testify to the progress marked in consolidating a viable inter-ethnic society. There are many more positive examples, including the role played in the adoption of an electoral law based on a proportional system which allowed better representation of minorities and the establishment of a multi-ethnic media network. This was all done thanks to the indispensable contribution of the office of the HCNM, which also opened a branch of the Novi Sad University in Bujanovac.

Someone might consider these to be small achievements if we look at the wider political picture. Instead, they show and prove very well what the real work of the OSCE is all about: improving the life and security of our citizens, who, I will never get tired of repeating it, are the only end users of our product. Sometimes, investing for example in education and fostering projects to bring together children from different ethnic communities to allow them to grow together in a mutually respectful environment is by far a greater success than debating the geopolitical chessboard at big conferences.

Dear Colleagues,

In conclusion, rest assured that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will continue to keep the topic of national minorities high on its agenda and stands ready to fully cooperate to strengthen efforts, both within and outside the OSCE framework, aimed

at improving the level of integration and of empowerment of national minorities across the region.

I once again thank you for organizing this important conference and look forward to interesting panels and fruitful debates.

Thank you!