



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

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## **ADDRESS**

by

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to the

**Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect with you on an issue which is of great significance to my work and is a cross-cutting issue for my country-related activities in the OSCE region.

Integration is a buzzword which has become part of today's political jargon. However, it has different meanings for different people, and this often creates misunderstandings, misconceptions and sometimes, unfortunately, unwise policies. Let me at the outset warn you: I am not going to provide you with a magical definition of this concept. More modestly, I am here to explain what integration means for me and how it relates to the very heart of my mandate as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

As was mentioned by Ambassador Moran, in 2004 the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly requested my predecessor Ambassador Rolf Ekéus to "initiate a comparative study on the integration policies of established democracies and analyse the effect on the position of new minorities". This request on your side prompted an in-depth reflection within the HCNM office on the overall aims, goals and policies of integration. The resultant report was presented to this Assembly in 2006. It compared the integration policies of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. When I took up the position of HCNM, I decided to continue the work started by my predecessor. Thus, my reflections on integration since then have moved beyond the mentioned report.

What I will be discussing with you today are the more general aspects of my **philosophy** with regard to integration, the **link** between integration and conflict prevention, the question of “**who**” and “**how**” of integration, and my **prospective work** in this field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No matter how we define integration, all our societies are ethnically, culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse. This diversity is constantly growing due to the increasing mobility of people in today’s interconnected world. Interethnic relations are therefore all the more important, and their appropriate management is key to peaceful societies that can resolve problems effectively. It is essential to establish a careful balance between policies of integration and inclusion, and those of recognition and accommodation.

Since the establishment of the institution of HCNM, successive High Commissioners have promoted “**integration with respect for diversity**”. Promoting integration and inclusion for all members of society while recognizing their differences, helps create the conditions in which different majority and minority communities can live peacefully together. The aim of an integration policy is to create a society in which all, including members of all ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious groups, have a sense of sharing and building a common identity. In such a “common home”, all should ideally have equal opportunities to contribute to and to benefit from the richness of society because the rights of all are respected and the responsibilities of all are accepted. In such a society, the benefits of diversity can be enjoyed by all and possible tensions arising from diversity, which could lead to instability or conflict, will be attenuated.

A well-functioning society requires the effective integration of all groups. Integration is a two-way process that depends on action by both majority and minority communities. It requires States to devote sufficient resources to the protection and promotion of minority rights and the commitment from minorities to participate and engage in public life.

If integration with respect for diversity is not achieved, either because integration or diversity is not respected or appropriately balanced, **conflicts** are more likely to erupt. After almost 17 years of experience, it has become clear to the HCNM that there is a link between the lack of integration and the risk of conflict. My predecessors spoke of integration in connection with conflict long before it became a popular concept. The HCNM approach to integration was developed under specific circumstances, and mainly in the context of democratic transition, state-building and post-conflict consolidation. In my view, however, several aspects of this approach are applicable to all societies and to all forms of diversity.

In fact, respect and promotion of the right of identity is a precondition for building peaceful, interethnic relations within States: when this is missing, tensions between ethnic groups are harder to manage and sometimes even erupt into open warfare. We have witnessed several sad examples of this in the OSCE region, especially in the 1990s, but also more recently in Kyrgyzstan.

Nevertheless, accumulated experience has shown that the provision of minority rights in the legal system, while essential, is not enough to prevent conflicts. Sometimes minority rights remain on paper and are not effectively implemented. This leads to frustration and resentment on the part of minorities who feel ignored or, at best, tolerated in their own society. The full enjoyment of minority rights is vital in order to ensure that minorities have a stake and are

given an effective voice in their States of residence. This requires that minorities are given – and take – the opportunity to learn the State language, to participate in public life, to co-operate with the authorities and ultimately to be an essential part of society. Integration with respect for diversity means that the right to remain different, to speak one’s mother tongue and to preserve one’s cultural identity should be considered an enrichment of society, and not lead to institutionalized exclusion and discrimination, particularly with regard to accessing education and jobs and enjoying of equal opportunities.

If different ethnic groups resort to building parallel societies, they are unlikely to co-operate. In the absence of co-operation across ethnic lines, segregated groups may challenge the legitimacy and the sovereignty of the States where they reside. States that fail in their duty to create integrated societies lack stability and pose a potential security risk. This is even more pertinent when the lack of integration of minority communities in their State of residence, translates into a perceived stronger sense of belonging to a so-called kin-State across the border. This raises fears of irredentism and external interference, negatively affecting both interethnic relations within States and between States. The lack of integration is therefore a threat to domestic, regional and international security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another essential element of the work on integration, one that gives rise to most controversies, is the question: **who** should be targeted by integration policies. The prevailing discourse on the subject advocates integrating minorities, usually meaning migrants, into mainstream society. This is apparent in how integration is usually defined and understood, especially in the EU countries and at EU level. My angle, given my mandate, is different. In

the experience of my office, conflicts start precisely when it is presupposed that there is a singular, monolithic, dominant society and culture, with characteristics defined by the majority. This view implies that minorities do not contribute to the making of any given society and that they are rather alien to it, potentially representing a threat to its survival. Such a view requires that minorities, of whatever kind, accept the burden to change and adapt, whereas the majority, irrespective of its own remarkable diversities, at best provides the tools for the minority to change.

My focus, however, is on the integration *of* societies, not *into* societies. Given my mandate as an institution of an intergovernmental organization, my work in the first instance addresses States and societies, and is aimed at preventing conflicts between and within States. In today's world all States are multinational and multiethnic and face the challenge of building cohesive and integrated societies. My work on integration is therefore intended to help States devise policies of integration with respect for diversity, and in this way prevent potential interethnic tensions. This means looking at instruments for society as a whole, rather than singling out groups.

From my perspective, it is essential to separate integration from the issue of migration and the creation of so-called "new minorities". The relevance of integration for societies goes far beyond the phenomenon of migration. It is a question of how a society wants to function.

Under international law, human rights standards apply to all. These fundamental individual rights include protection from racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, the provision of equality before the law and the enjoyment of all the other individual rights guaranteed under the most relevant international documents. For many members of minorities, whether long

established as national minorities or more recent immigrant communities, these are the most important and immediate issues. They form the basis of a wide range of national and international programmes for the elimination of discrimination and racism. The primary concern of most individuals belonging to minority communities is protection against racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, or even attacks. It is difficult to make much progress towards more general integration if physical safety cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, equal treatment by government and in the employment and housing markets is fundamental.

At the same time, integration policies need to be targeted according to the particular minority and the particular circumstances. For example the numbers involved, the length of settlement, geographic concentration and their social and economic needs. Given the increasingly wide range of minorities, it is unlikely that a single set of policies will be appropriate for them all, and instruments for integration respecting diversity cannot be applied to each minority in the same way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no universal recipe on **how** to achieve integrated societies respecting diversities. From my experience, however, some essential elements can be identified, bearing in mind that each case is different and the instruments need to be adapted to the circumstances.

In the context of the much wider range of minority communities currently present in many States, it would be disproportionate and dysfunctional to seek to apply the same measures for recognition, participation, education and cultural support for all minorities regardless of their size, location or dispersal, length of settlement and legal status. States may therefore

legitimately adopt measures to promote the integration of members of some minority communities, while at the same time applying different measures to recognize the status and separate identity of other minorities. These measures must, however, be reasonable and proportionate.

First, integration respecting diversity is a precondition to minorities preserving their identity. Second, it implies the obligation of States to acknowledge that minority identities enrich society as a whole and that minority issues are not issues for minorities only. Third, it assumes the responsibility of persons belonging to minorities to co-operate with the State in pursuing effective integration, especially by obeying the law and contributing to the overarching goal of security.

A basic principle of particular relevance to be taken into account is the right of an individual to choose whether to be treated as a minority or not. It is the duty of the majority to respect this choice.

It is also important to ensure that laws and regulations are formulated in such a way as to ensure that members of minority communities are not disadvantaged by unnecessarily formal or complex procedures that are more difficult for them to comply with than for members of the national majority. It would also be helpful to ensure that employees in municipal offices in relevant areas include members of minority communities, who will be able to assist in overcoming any linguistic or cultural barriers. At the same time, a policy of integration is more likely to be successful if members of linguistic or cultural minorities are encouraged to learn how to access relevant services on their own, rather than continuing to rely on others to act for them. Local and regional authorities should be allowed a good deal of discretion in

developing the most appropriate ways of facilitating and encouraging members of minorities to learn the official language. Laws aimed at imposing a language, and even threatening sanctions for non-compliance instead of offering opportunities to learn the language as a means of social promotion, should be discouraged.

A crucial instrument for effective integration of societies is education. Education is by far the most effective conflict-prevention mechanism, in the mid- to long-term, because it starts early in life, ultimately shaping future generations for responsible citizenship. It is through education that we can expect children to learn how to be respectful, tolerant and fair citizens, who will guarantee that traditions of pluralism and democracy are maintained and further developed. A balanced education system needs to combine tuition in and through the minority language with tuition in the State language. For minorities, the study of their culture and mother tongue as well as, where appropriate, education in their mother tongue, is a precondition for the full enjoyment of many other rights and goals. This includes the right to participation, association and finding employment. At the same time, the education of majorities about the culture of minorities will help raise awareness of the complexity of society and thus establish mutual respect and understanding.

Governments have a key role in developing policies for integration and in promoting social cohesion and avoiding the risks and costs of permitting high levels of separation that may result if they take no action. They can establish a legislative framework that encourages and facilitates appropriate levels of integration, for example by removing any constitutional or legislative barriers to the selection of members of minority communities for employment in the public sector, as members of public bodies or as candidates for election.

Equal and non-discriminatory participation in public life and in economic activities is essential for minorities' sense of belonging. This may involve the introduction of measures to ensure that minorities are adequately represented in elected bodies, in administration and all sections of law enforcement bodies, as this helps promote mutual understanding and co-operation. It is crucial to remove barriers that prevent access to social services and the labour market, for example by providing training in the majority language as well as introducing measures to encourage employers to diversify their workforce and to avoid indirect discrimination. Regular monitoring of participation by members of minorities in every sector of employment is an essential tool in achieving effective equality. Governments should therefore put in place mechanisms for dialogue and consultation with minorities at every level.

The media too can make a decisive contribution to the general aim of integrating diverse societies, not only by simply transmitting information but also by providing balanced coverage and promoting positive attitudes. In this way, the media can play a positive role in promoting respect and understanding, especially by making minorities visible to the majorities. Constant attention should be paid to both the issue of media in minority languages and the way the mass media in general addresses minority issues. Access to media, particularly broadcast media, in minority languages may facilitate participation in the wider society and the preservation and development of minority languages, cultures and traditions. Governments should also be ready to encourage and facilitate broadcasting in minority languages and to encourage the public media to foster mutual understanding, to address the concerns of persons belonging to all communities and to combat negative stereotyping.

Finally, it is crucial that governments and public authorities assess and review the progress of their integration policies on a regular basis in consultation with members of minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just outlined here today some of the conclusions that I have drawn based on my conflict prevention work involving national minorities in the OSCE region. Effective integration of diverse and pluralistic societies is the key to preventing minority related conflicts.

For this reason my office is currently working on systemizing this experience and philosophy into a set of guidelines for all societies in the OSCE area. The recommendations are not intended to be a magic formula for establishing integrated societies with respect for all diversities, they will simply provide options that States might want to consider in their effort to prevent conflict among different groups emerging.

The initiative taken by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in 2004 to look at integration policies of established democracies was most pertinent. The issue of integration continues to be high on the agenda for most governments. It is my hope that the Parliamentary Assembly will continue its engagement in the matter, and I look forward to working closely with you as we now move forward with these new guidelines.

Thank you for your attention.