



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

Integrating diverse societies: a State responsibility

Address by
by
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at the
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[Check Against Delivery]

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Mr. Provost

Dear students and staff of the University,

Dear participants,

Mahatma Gandhi once said: “the future depends on what you do today.” This statement is as valid now as it was 70 years ago. What you do today will shape your country of tomorrow. One of the main issues that you have to address in this country is the inter-ethnic situation. The stability and prosperity of your country depends on how this is managed.

Your country, like all other countries in the OSCE and beyond, is ethnically diverse. Ethnic diversity is a matter of fact, not definition. I come to you with a strong belief – informed by the work of my predecessors and shaped by my own experience as High Commissioner – that only through integrating our diverse societies can long-term peace and stability be secured. For 20 years, my predecessors and I have been working on inter-ethnic issues in the 57 OSCE participating States. Based on this experience, my Institution has issued thematic Recommendations and Guidelines. Recently, I published a new set of Guidelines – *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* – to define and explain what my Institution has been promoting for over 20 years: “integration with respect for diversity”. Integration of diverse societies is a challenge facing all governments, including yours. Let me also underline that integration is a process, not an outcome. As circumstances change, policies will have to be adapted.

Our societies are dynamic, not static. In the long run, I believe that societies that do not have integration policies or only have dysfunctional policies will inevitably disintegrate, making lasting peace and stability impossible to achieve. Designing and, not least implementing,

adequate integration policies is a great challenge and no universal blueprint exists. The policies and the implementation have to be tailored to local circumstances to be truly effective. This may be complicated and it requires political courage. But despite the difficulties, I see no sustainable alternative.

Integration can only be successful when all sectors of society are engaged in the process. However, the responsibility to design policies that promote and support integration rests squarely with the government. Sovereignty implies “not only rights, but also obligations.” The State is obliged to ensure that its citizens enjoy human rights, including minority rights. The State is obliged to promote the integration of society and to work effectively to support this process. State sovereignty implies that States protect diversity in a manner that facilitates the inclusion of all communities.

You are at a crossroads. On one side, you have a path towards integration, peace and stability, and on the other side, you have the road to division and separation. A stark choice for you and for your Government. But reality cannot be wished away. The choice between integration or further separation along ethnic lines is more acute than ever. This is an issue of both national security and of human development in this country. But it will also be important for your State’s future as a reliable and stable partner in the international community. Thus, your Government should make a decision both *for* its people and *with* its people.

Dear students,

In 2001, the Ohrid Framework Agreement [OFA] brought an end to the civil conflict in your country. The OFA provided a framework for accommodating ethnic diversity by enshrining

substantial minority rights in the fields of education and language use and by introducing power-sharing arrangements and decentralization reforms. In that way, the OFA succeeded in bringing an end to the conflict and introduced a framework for managing ethnic diversity. In the 12 years that have passed, the legal and institutional set up has been adjusted to reflect the provisions of the OFA. The OFA has also been praised for its flexibility compared to other post-conflict power-sharing agreements.

However, our hopes that inter-ethnic coalitions would emerge and work for the benefit of all communities, including the oft-neglected smaller communities, have not been realized. Politics is increasingly dominated by ethnic issues. This is feeding a perception that this a zero-sum game, in which one man's gain is another man's loss. Divisions are penetrating further, affecting all fields of life, both public and private. People are increasingly living within the artificial boundaries of their ethnic group. As a result, mistrust between the ethnic communities is growing. The only reason this country experiences few inter-ethnic incidents is because people do not meet across ethnic lines. It is not because of any greater inter-ethnic understanding. I have repeatedly called on the authorities to address the root causes of these divisions and work on measures that would promote social cohesion.

So, what could be done to achieve progress?

First, with the passing of time, new challenges emerge bringing the need for new responses. While the OFA has proved to be a solid foundational document and should remain as such, additional responses are required to tackle the deep divisions in society. An urgent requirement is to re-establish political co-operation and compromise across the ethno-political spectrum. The Government has launched a review of OFA implementation

since 2001. This is a welcome step. But to help find solutions to the country's long-term challenges, this review must go further than a technical exercise. Real benefit could be derived from combining this review with a thorough assessment of how the balance between respect for a person's identity and overall social cohesion has been maintained.

Second, as Max Van der Stoel once said: "capital invested in conflict prevention is capital well spent." There is a point in any conflict cycle where effective intervention can significantly reduce the risk of conflict. This is why I engaged your authorities on reforming the education system to bridge the ethnic divide in schools. Almost three years ago, the Government adopted an Integrated Education Strategy. However, this initiative has not received the political support required to deliver sustainable results. Instead, it has been politicized. Today, the vast majority of students attend mono-ethnic schools that do not promote interaction across community lines. The findings of a recent study conducted by USAID show that the ethnic division is even greater in secondary than in primary education. This means that ethnic-Macedonians and ethnic-Albanians are growing apart. Little seems to be being done to address this source of continued and increasing division. If political priority were given to creating a sense of common heritage and destiny among different ethnic groups through the integration of the education system, that would indeed be capital well spent.

Finally, as I already said, the Government has the responsibility to facilitate the integration process. But you, the citizens, have the responsibility to shape the society you live in. It is not in your interest to grow up separated from other ethnic groups. Institutions of learning are of particular importance in laying the foundations for tomorrow's society. This very university was founded and cherished by Max van der Stoel to bridge ethnic divides and become a truly

multi-ethnic and multilingual institution. I understand that the leadership still aims at upholding this ideal.

As citizens, you hold the key to your country's future. You have the power to shape it. I hope you will put this power to good use, because future stability and prosperity cannot be taken for granted.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to our discussions.