



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

KEYNOTE SPEECH:
INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

address by
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I would like to say first, on behalf of the High Commissioner, how much we welcome this opportunity to discuss the integration of national minorities, a subject which is central to his work.

We particularly welcome the chance to discuss integration in the broad context implied by the theme of the Economic Forum, which includes demography and migration as well as integration. A wide-ranging exchange of views based on the experience of integration of different kinds of minorities could, we believe, bring valuable insights into the process of integration. The fact that some of our panellists have experience of integration not just of established national minorities but also of new minorities formed by migrants and indeed other excluded or disadvantaged communities will, I am sure, enrich our discussion. The circumstances and legal framework may be different but I believe this meeting will show that there is much overlap in the policies and methods of all those engaged in promoting integration and that this is an area where we can all learn from one another. I will say more about this overlap later.

The starting point for the High Commissioner's policy of promoting integration respecting diversity is the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. His mandate requires him to be an instrument of conflict prevention by identifying and by finding ways to reduce tensions arising from minority issues. The mandate rests on the premise, whose truth has been demonstrated again and again in recent years, that problems concerning the relationship between the majority and minorities are one major source of international conflicts as well as instability within States. Social tensions arising from minority issues, and, more specifically, from the exclusion of groups or communities from the benefits of society, exist in many States and can lead to serious incidents of violence. Failure to deal adequately with these tensions can lead to a vicious circle in which isolation and alienation reduce the benefits of belonging to the State, leading to further isolation and deprivation, which can in the end provide a breeding ground for crime and even terrorism. The aim of integration is to create a State which all groups consider their common home, where all individuals are able to interact freely, where all have equal opportunities to participate and to benefit and where the causes of tensions arising from minority issues will have been eliminated.

It is not just the High Commissioner who advocates integration respecting diversity as the best way to prevent tensions arising over minority issues. The Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities expressly refers to a policy of integration and social cohesion as an essential condition for a democratic society and for

sustainable development. It places an obligation on State Parties to encourage a spirit of tolerance and cultural dialogue, and to take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. I would like to underline the point that a policy of integration, means the integration of all persons residing on the territory of the State, whether they are citizens or not. Under international law the duty of States to protect fundamental human rights and freedoms, including minority rights, likewise applies to all persons resident on their territories, whether citizens or not. The risks of alienation or isolation leading to tensions, which a policy of integration seeks to combat, are not confined to citizens. Indeed such tensions may well be exacerbated by the absence of citizenship.

Integration respecting diversity avoids the extremes of assimilation (which, if it is not voluntary, is ruled out by applicable international law), on the one hand, and separation, on the other. Separation can take a number of different forms, some of which, such as South African apartheid, infringe universal human rights; and most of which involve risks to national stability and international security.

But a policy of integration is not just about protecting the rights of minorities and removing the threats to security and stability. It is also about increasing the welfare and prosperity of society as a whole by providing the opportunity for all to make their full contribution through their participation in the life of the State. And, it enhances the lives of all by enabling them to benefit from the richness of a multicultural society. In short, a policy of integration is part of good governance, contributing not only to justice and human rights but also to security and prosperity and cultural diversity for the benefit of society as a whole.

The best way to combat alienation and disaffection among minorities is for the State to demonstrate, on the one hand, its willingness to protect their rights, including their right to preserve their identity and, on the other hand, the benefits available to them from participation in the life of the State on a basis of equality and nondiscrimination.

But minorities too have their responsibilities. The success of a policy of integration depends on the willingness of the minority to play their part. For example they need to be ready to learn the State language, an aspect of integration which the High Commissioner actively supports in many countries. They need to take up the opportunities to participate offered to them. And, like the majority, they should also be ready to learn about other cultures on the basis of a curriculum, which covers all the communities of the State. Members of minorities who develop the sense of belonging to the State and being stakeholders in it are

more likely to accept their responsibilities to the State, such as the payment of taxes and the avoidance of crime.

I would like to turn now to the key building blocks of a policy of integration, which are reflected in the structure of this seminar: participation in the political and public life of the State, participation in the economic and social life of the State, and education.

The participation of persons belonging to minorities in the political and public life of the State is essential for the development of a sense of engagement in the State, of being stakeholders in it and of having responsibilities to it. If they perceive that they have an effective voice and that their problems and concerns are dealt with by the State in an equitable manner, they will have no reason to look elsewhere for the solution to their problems. Equitable representation of minorities is important not just in the legislative organs of the State but also in the judiciary and in the executive and in public administration. Equitable representation in the police and judiciary is particularly important in order to avoid perceptions of bias against the minority in the courts and the law enforcement authorities, which have a crucial role to play in handling tensions on minority issues. Political participation should not only be ensured at central level but also at local level, where many of the decisions directly relating to minority interests are taken.

Participation in the economic and social life of the State is also essential for the development of a sense of engagement in the life of the State. States need to ensure that persons from minorities benefit and perceive that they benefit from government economic and social policies on an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis. This means, first of all, that they should benefit from a fair share of employment opportunities, both those provided directly by the State in the public sector and those provided by the private sector with support from the State. Second they should receive a fair share of benefits from other government policies such as education, health and housing. A policy of nondiscrimination may not be enough. Where there is a gap to be closed, special measures may be not only justified but required to enable deprived groups to catch up with the general level. Integration of persons belonging to minorities will often require such measures in order to break out of the cycle of deprivation and alienation.

Education is the first step in equipping children to participate in the life of the State and is therefore crucial to integration of minority and majority communities. Without a good quality education, including the development of fluency in using the State language, members of minority groups will be unable to participate effectively in the political and economic life

of the State. They may even fail to qualify for higher education. Many of the High Commissioner's successful projects are aimed at strengthening skills in the use of the State language. Education in the mother tongue, particularly in the early years, is also important both for the educational development of children from minorities and for the maintenance of their culture. The curriculum should also enable children from minorities to continue to develop their knowledge of their own language, culture, history and religion as well as learning about other cultures. A multi-ethnic State needs a multi-ethnic curriculum, which will ensure that the majority as well as the minorities learn about each other's history and cultures. The organization of education is also important. Ethnically segregated education can all too easily lead to hostile attitudes developing towards other ethnic groups. One very practical way of dealing with this problem is through the development of bilingual or multilingual education, which has proved highly successful in countries like Canada and could have advantages in some parts of the OSCE.

Another important building block of integration and participation is information, for example about the current affairs of the State, which should be available from the media in a form which is accessible to the minority, for example through TV and radio broadcasting in the language of the minority.

I said at the beginning that we welcomed discussion of integration in a context which includes new minorities as well as established minorities. The High Commissioner has found in practice that his mandate requires him to focus mainly on established, rather than new, minorities and it is in that context that he has developed over a period of eleven years the policy of integration respecting diversity, which I have described. But the policies and methods he has developed have much in common with those used for integration and other areas.

To illustrate the overlap with integration of other excluded groups, I would like to refer to a document with which I happen to be familiar, namely the British Government's recently published *Strategy for Promoting Race Equality and Community Cohesion*. I have no doubt that equally relevant comparisons could be found in many participating States. The Strategy aims to "ensure that a person's ethnicity is not a barrier to their success and to foster the social cohesion necessary to enable people from minority and majority communities to work together for social and economic progress"; it notes that "where tensions have developed between different ethnic groups, such as in some Northern English towns in the summer of 2001, deprivation and lack of opportunity have been significant contributive

factors”; and it sets out a programme of specific measures in the fields of education, the labour market, health, housing and the criminal justice system for promoting equal life chances among the ethnic minority and other deprived groups; and for creating a more cohesive society, including increasing opportunities to participate in civic life. There are many parallels here with the High Commissioner's approach. As he recently told the Parliamentary Assembly, the overlap, both in the legal framework and in the policies and methods for promoting integration deserve further study. I look forward to hearing from others dealing with integration of new minorities or indeed other excluded groups.