



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

**INTEGRATION AND MULTI-ETHNIC DIALOGUE:
COMMON LESSONS, DIFFERENT CONTEXTS**

address by
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Mr. President, Parliamentarians, Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me back to address the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on a topic that is of great importance to me and should be at the top of any politician's priority list in the OSCE participating States. I am very honoured to share the podium with Ms. Kathleen Ferrier, the PA's Special Representative on Migration, who is actively involved in her own country's integration and a strong supporter of the HCNM.

February seems to have been the month in which we buried multiculturalism. Not a day seems to pass without news coming in on how policy choices we made have proven to be wrong, how we failed to reconcile equality with recognition, justice with security, integration with diversity. Exaggerated or not, news about the death of multiculturalism is everywhere.

I cannot, however, help having a sense of déjà vu. This debate is not new. I have been following it for many years. It often intensifies during election campaigns and then in essence becomes a disagreement about terminology and definitions. It tends to be strong on critique but weak on solutions and alternatives. Nevertheless, it is an important debate. It shows that we are trying to grapple with the kind of challenges that have no easy answers, and that the answers we may find and promote in good faith can sometimes have unintended, negative consequences.

When it comes to integration, OSCE parliamentarians have a special role to play. You represent a wide range of constituencies. You are their voice and their means to participate and to have a say in the decision-making processes. You are in a position to develop innovative approaches in managing diversity in a way that can deliver the many benefits, but which also contain the risk of potential human costs and conflict.

My institution was set up to deal with ethnocultural tensions within States and to ensure that they do not flare up into violence and jeopardize international peace and stability. The High Commissioner was the OSCE's answer to a growing scepticism about the possibility for different ethnic groups to live in peace and dignity and build a stable, common State. The ethnic diversity that the HCNM was set up to address, was not the result of recent migration but of major historical events such as the redrawing of borders, the collapse of empires and the dissolution of multinational States, often accompanied by conflict and interethnic strife.

Nevertheless, since its inception in 1992, the HCNM has been addressing the relationship between majorities and minorities as part of the political process in the broadest sense.

So what do I have to offer to the current debate on integration?

I believe that despite the differences in context and historic circumstances, there are lessons to be shared. The HCNM has always promoted integration based on respect for diversity and the protection of human rights, including minority rights. The HCNM always attempts to achieve a balance between the security considerations of States and the interests of minority communities to preserve and promote their identity and culture; between the need to uphold territorial integrity and the need to accommodate ethnocultural diversity through democratic means.

Herein lies the first lesson: protection of minority rights is a prerequisite for ensuring the stability and security of our societies. I have learned that sometimes the most violent of conflicts have been triggered by an inability to speak one's mother tongue or have one's culture recognized and respected. This results in a destructive cycle in which minority communities contest the legitimacy of the State in which they reside and, by doing so, weaken and further undermine the State's capacity to respond and accommodate minority needs and interests. It is an important lesson that should inform any contemporary discussion on rights and security.

Yet, the protection of rights and the accommodation of differences, however important, may not be sufficient. We need to actively promote the integration of our increasingly diverse societies. We need to build overarching, inclusive, civic identities that supplement rather than replace our particular ethnocultural affiliations. All our societies are made up of and contain different cultures. *This is not a problem to be solved but an opportunity to be enjoyed.*

Multiculturalism has arguably failed because it strengthened cultural differences and undermined the notion of a common, civic identity. I have two observations to make in this regard. Civic or political identity is an important element of successful integration because it can unite individuals regardless of their ethnicity and provide a common foundation of civic rights and responsibilities on which to base their relationship with the State. It can create a common interest in working towards a stable and prosperous future. It cannot, however, be built on the basis of the denial of an individual's ethnicity, culture or religion. Integration is not about the *suppression* of identities but rather about the *multiplication* of identities.

Experience shows that integrating diversity requires the recognition both of individual and of group identities, coupled with the awareness that they are pluralist, shifting and often contested.

Another lesson that I have learned is that identities are accentuated only if there is a reason for them to be accentuated, not because of the degree of cultural distinctiveness. The reason is usually discrimination, exclusion, violence. This is when our multiple identities become reduced to singular categories: a Swede, a Norwegian or a Muslim. This is when any dialogue breaks down and the risk of communal violence goes up. We can actually belong to a variety of groups and enjoy a variety of identities simultaneously. As the Indian social scientist Amartya Sen notes, “the force of a bellicose identity can be challenged by the power of *competing* identities.”

In my experience as High Commissioner, the policies that are likely to deliver the best results are the ones that understand and appreciate the demands of integration and sentiments of national solidarity but at the same time do not lose sight of the value of positive politics of recognition.

Such an approach tries to avoid the extremes of assimilation and separation. It sees no contradiction in maintaining a distinctive identity – be it cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic or a combination of these – and being an integral part of society at large. Furthermore, the approach assumes the complementarity of civic and ethnic elements of identity and of belonging to both a particular ethnic community and a wider community of all citizens. This sometimes requires States to take special measures to reach out to persons belonging to minority communities. This is ultimately in the interest of all citizens, minorities and majorities alike. If individuals feel that their minority background is not a source of discrimination or exclusion, that their rights are respected and that their voices are heard through democratic processes, they will be less likely to resort to unacceptable means for representing their interests and defending their identities. It is only when minorities feel they “belong” to the State in the same way as majorities do – that the State is also “theirs” – that civic identity will transcend the ethnic one.

This is why I prefer not to speak about integration of minorities *into* societies but rather about integration *of* societies. This means identifying the beneficiaries of integration policies as

being multi-ethnic States and societies as a whole rather than specific groups. Traditional national minorities I work with often challenge the hierarchical relationship that tends to develop between majority and minority communities where the responsibility to change and adapt is placed solely on the shoulders of the minorities. I believe integration works best when it is a process based on partnership rather than on a preconceived outcome: it requires all members of society, from the majority and the minority communities, to adapt when necessary, to establish effective channels of communication and to learn how to engage in mutually beneficial social relations.

The experience of many post-Communist States is a testament to this: progress cannot be achieved without significant changes. The normalization of interethnic relations and a reduction in conflict did not occur without a considerable transformation both of majority and of minority communities. Parties once embroiled in violent conflict now sit together in parliaments and government coalitions. The situation is far from perfect, but the change is noteworthy. It occurred on the one hand by the opening of the majority community to the inclusion of minority cultures and on the other, by the reciprocal opening of minority communities to a State and to the participation in public and political life. This has been a mutually transformative process, expanding horizons and values of all involved. The process is not over. How you as parliamentarians address the challenges will determine whether this process will be beneficial to all members of our societies. The enjoyment of opportunities within the State inspires social integration, confidence and, indeed, loyalty towards the State. This is, ultimately, the foundation for human as well as national and international security.

Thank you.