



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Address to the OSCE Human Dimension
Implementation Review Meeting

by

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Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The storm of terror that broke over the United States last week is forcing us to reflect upon how to prevent terrorism from becoming a major threat towards peace, harmony and prosperity in our world. The victims of terrorism are mostly the innocent and the ordinary people. Terrorism is a manifestation of a denial of and contempt for the worth of the human being. Thus, it goes against the fundamental ideas of what constitutes the OSCE, and the human dimension of our organization. The prime contribution of the OSCE to the task of uprooting terrorism is not to give root to terrorism.

My mandate emphasizes that the focus for the High Commissioner on National Minorities is security and the prevention of conflict. At the same time, the mandate explicitly states that the High Commissioner will not consider national minority issues in situations involving organized acts of terrorism. In my view, that does not mean that the High Commissioner should not be concerned with terrorism and terrorist acts. The task of fighting terrorism cannot be separated from the task of preventing deadly conflicts. Violence is bred wherever injustices are perceived. Shattered societies harbor repression, grievances and depravation. Friction between national and ethnic groups, between majority and minority, leads to security tension and becomes breeding ground for conflict that feeds terrorism.

Although the purpose of my office falls within the overarching security dimension of the OSCE, the means of the High Commissioner are frequently those of the human dimension – the international standards laid down in the basic OSCE documents, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights constitute, among other international instruments, the bases on which I analyze situations and will make my recommendations. That follows from the guiding principle of the OSCE that security is rooted in justice. By applying these legal tools together with the instruments, specifically guiding the minority rights and responsibilities like the OSCE Copenhagen Document and the Framework Convention for the Protections of National Minorities, the High Commissioner is working to prevent the outbreak of conflicts

My office is, however, not directly an instrument of the human dimension. Although the title of the post sometimes creates the impression that the High Commissioner is intended to function as a national minorities' ombudsman or as an investigator of individual human rights violations, this is not the case. He is the High Commissioner *on* and not *for* National Minorities. My role is to look at inter-ethnic relations between majorities and minorities and to identify - and seek resolution of - ethnic tensions that might endanger peace, stability or friendly relations within or between OSCE States.

Recent developments, particularly in the Balkans, suggest that it is sometimes hard to draw the international community's attention to a security problem until there is an outbreak of violence. Experience and common sense suggest that it is in the best interest of individual governments to address minority concerns at an early stage in order to prevent disagreements from turning violent. Governments should not be blackmailed into making concessions, but there should be a genuine effort to address the legitimate concerns of persons belonging to national minorities. If a government needs support in addressing inter-ethnic issues it should draw on the assistance of the international community – and that at an early stage.

My office has considerable expertise and experience in national minority issues and I intend to work with any OSCE State that I believe could profit from this experience. We all have an interest in preventing minority issues from threatening our common security.

Within each society there are competing and differing interests and aspirations. This is a normal function of society and need not lead to conflict – certainly not violent conflict, even in countries where there are sizeable minorities. There seems to be a growing sentiment that a clash of cultures within states - like a clash of civilizations - means that every ethnic fault line is the next potential conflict zone. This need not be the case. Certainly, there exist among various persons and groups differing interests, aspirations, and world-views. But, as long as these are peaceful and pursued in the rule of law, then these can - and should - be treated as sources of our common richness as we learn from one another and seek to create the space for each of us to realize our potential.

In order to diminish the possibility of friction we must work to integrate diversity so that all members of society feel that they are full and equal members. Those whose wishes might not coincide with or be accommodated by majority decision-making should be confident that the process and outcome is fair. Vigorous democratic institutions can greatly assist in facilitating these processes and creating outcomes which may be mutually satisfactory

To be clear, while by definition minorities have inferior numbers, they should not feel that their numerical disadvantage means that the cards are stacked against them. The legal structure of the state should protect their rights. Minorities should have a full opportunity to participate in the electoral process and public life. Participation enables minorities or their members to bring relevant facts to decision-makers, argue their position before decision-makers, propose reform, be co-decision-makers, perhaps be permitted to veto certain legislative or administrative proposals which especially affect them, or even to establish and manage their own institutions in specific areas.

That being said, we can not only look at one side of the equation. One must look at majority interests as well as minority concerns in order to put issues in context. Focusing on one at the expense of the other can exacerbate rather than ameliorate tensions.

One must bear in mind that the protection of national and ethnic identity, while important, should not be an end in itself. We all identify ourselves in different ways and increasingly have multiple and overlapping identities. Our ethnicity is only one characteristic feature. When identity with the nation supercedes all other defining features of our lives, we risk concentrating so much on the things that make us unique that we overlook the ties that bind us in wider communities. This narrow focus breeds extremism, fear, and suspicion. This extremism in turn can heighten fear and hatred in others until there is a malign spiral of distrust that can trigger violence - and even to the level of terrorism. In order to prevent or stem this dangerous spiral, more must be done to increase inter-cultural understanding, combat discrimination, and integrate diversity.

The ability of minorities to be educated in their mother tongue is a vital consideration. So too is curricula to promote tolerance. Public education, therefore, plays a critical role in any strategy to develop inter-ethnic harmony. This begins in the school, but it extends well beyond to include adult education, continuing education and other aspects of public awareness raising and education. I also believe that more attention needs to be paid to the role of the media in terms of shaping popular perceptions of our fellow human beings.

The Agenda before us at this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting contains many subjects which I hope will shape our programs of action in the near future. The strong presence of NGOs at this meeting is an expression of the strength and public support of the Human dimension which is something that I warmly welcome. Just having assumed the post of High Commissioner, I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome close co-operation between NGOs and my office. Permit me to emphasize again, however, that our efforts in the human dimension are closely linked to our future success or failure in maintaining peace and security. For this reason, I wish to stress the importance of consistent and consequential behavior – that we follow up our human dimension declarations with concrete action to achieve real progress in realizing full respect for the human rights of everyone. This means to focus our efforts on the effective implementation of our standards.

Moreover, if we are really serious about these matters – if we are really genuine about our declared values, we must be prepared to commit substantial resources in support of our efforts. Successful conflict prevention is no doubt much less expensive in both human and material terms than war, but is not cost-free. It seems to me that as a matter of total security expenditure we still spend too little on conflict-prevention.

For my part, I will, to the best of my ability, act to respond to the situations falling within my mandate and support the common efforts of the OSCE to address the root causes of conflict in the region. To this extent, success in the human dimension is important for all of us.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

