



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

**Promoting the Integration of National Minorities**

Address

by John de FONBLANQUE

Director of the Office of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the 2004 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, Poland

5 October 2004

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, it gives me great pleasure to address you today on behalf of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. I will focus my remarks on promoting integration, particularly through education, because this is an increasingly important area of the HC's work. I will try to illustrate my account with some examples.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the human dimension implementation meeting is to review the commitments in the Human Rights field undertaken by participating States of the OSCE. Strictly speaking, reviewing human rights commitments is not part of the work of High Commissioner. He belongs not to the Human Dimension of the OSCE's work but the security dimension. His mandate is to be "an instrument of conflict prevention in the longest possible term". His job is to identify and address tensions and risks of tensions between groups and communities which could lead to violence. Human rights play a crucial part in his work because failure to respect human rights, particularly minority rights, is a prime cause of such tensions. But he is not a human rights monitor as such.

Thus the High Commissioner normally works on a confidential basis. Moreover, his task of identifying and addressing tensions which could lead to risks of conflict is not dependent on the use of the words "National Minorities" to describe the groups whose situations could give rise to such tensions. It is the facts that matter, not the words. If the words "National Minorities" have unhelpful connotations for some, for example if they are thought to imply some kind of second class citizenship, different wording can be used. But this would not alter the right, indeed duty, of the High Commissioner to assess and if necessary take action on tensions or risks of tensions involving groups or communities identified by some combination of ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious characteristics.

One of the key means of addressing such tensions and the risks they pose is to promote the integration of the minority within a multi-ethnic State. Integration involves a balance of rights and responsibilities on both sides. On one hand the State respects the right of the minorities to maintain their identity, for example by facilitating education and broadcasting in the language of the minority and by encouraging their participation in public life. On the other hand members of the minority give their allegiance to the State, pursue their objectives by means of their participation in the public life of the State and refrain from challenging the territorial integrity of the State. Each case is different and no rigid rules can be applied. A different balance would be appropriate in each case. But some form of integration, avoiding the extremes of forced assimilation on the one hand and separatism on the other, is likely to be the best way to promote harmonious social development and reduce the risk of conflict.

In order to promote integration and reduce risks of tensions the High Commissioner has, over the years, encouraged experts to produce guidelines on key areas such as education, language and political participation, which he can draw on in formulating his recommendations to the parties concerned in a particular case. At last years Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the High Commissioner announced that he would shortly be producing a fourth series of guidelines on the use of minority languages in the broadcast media. These guidelines were produced on the basis of an extensive review of existing practice which was also published. Copies of the guidelines are available outside the room and I commend them to your attention. The access of minority groups to broadcasting is an important factor both for the maintenance of their cultural identity and for their integration and effective participation in the public life of the State.

But if the High Commissioner is to achieve his objective of containing and de-escalating tensions, recommendations, however well-based may not be enough. He may need to reinforce his recommendations by providing assistance in carrying them out. He may for example be able to provide states with advice about programmes of national integration by making available to them the services of experts who have been associated with successful integration programmes in other states. Similarly he can provide states with expertise on particular aspects of integration particularly education, which forms an increasing part of his work.

Education is crucial for the promotion of integration because it is the process through which the attitudes of the next generation to other groups and communities are formed. Education is a powerful tool for good or ill. It may broaden the minds of students and develop in them an appreciation and understanding of the view points of other groups and communities. Or it may reinforce prejudices and the building of stereotypes.

One way in which education can promote integration is through contact between students from different communities and the desegregation of schools. This is one reason why the High Commissioner believes that development of multilingual education can be a good solution in appropriate circumstances. Contact can also be promoted through joint extra-curricular activities.

Another crucial means by which education can promote understanding is through the development of curricula for subjects like history and literature, which reflect the achievements of all the different groups which make up the State. An example of the High Commissioner's support for work on the curriculum has been the help he has provided to the

Serbian Ministry of Education, together with history teachers from the Albanian minority and international experts to establish a commission to develop a text book for history teaching in Albanian primary schools in Serbia. The aim is to produce a text book which accurately reflects the history of the region including the part played by the Albanian minority. The Commission met in July 2004 and is making good progress.

Another aspect of educational policy which is crucial for integration is the balance between the minority language and the state and other languages in the school curriculum. Teaching in the minority language is important both for the preservation of minority identity and, as underlined by the Hague recommendations, for the educational development of children in the early years of schooling. On the other hand the acquisition by students from the minority community of real proficiency in the State Language is crucial for their subsequent participation in the economic and political life of the State. An example of the High Commissioner's support for the development of ethnic minorities skills in the use of the State language involves the Armenian speaking minority in Georgia, a community which is somewhat isolated from the main stream of Georgian life and faces a number of economic and other challenges. One project under the High Commissioner's programme involves intensive language courses for first year university students to facilitate their integration into the Georgian higher education system. Another involves training teachers of the Georgian language in Armenian minority schools in modern methods of language teaching. A third project seeks to upgrade the language skills of civil servants in the region whose prospects of promotion are held back by their lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. A fourth project assists with the translation of Georgian TV programmes into the Armenian language, thus helping to bring the minority into the main stream of Georgian life.

Multilingual education, in which pupils use more than one language as the medium of education and study different subjects through the medium of different languages has proved a very successful way of developing high levels of proficiency in a second language in countries like Spain and Canada. This is a further reason, in addition to the beneficial effect of desegregation which I have already referred to, for believing that it could be developed into a powerful tool for promoting integration.

Another key to the effective promotion of integration through education is the participation of minority representatives, whether parents or teachers or others, in making decisions on educational policy issues. A good example is the High Commissioner's support for the working group on integration through education in Kyrgyzstan. This group was established by the President with a composition which fully reflected the diversity of Kyrgyzstan society as well as including senior government representatives and NGO's. Its report which has been endorsed by the Kyrgyzstan government will, in the High Commissioner's view, do much to promote integration in Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Chairman I have given a brief outline, with some examples, of the High Commissioner's work on promoting integration through education. I have highlighted desegregation, multicultural curricula and minority participation in educational decision making as key issues, as well as the balance between mother tongue and state language teaching and the advantages of multilingual education. I have described a number of programmes and projects designed to help states to carry out his recommendations.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that these projects are not an optional extra but are a crucial means for the High Commissioner to carry out his core functions. Projects such as

those I have described form an integral part of his work and are of growing importance to it. There is undoubtedly more that could be done if the resources were available. Contributions by donors and extra-budgetary funds have provided crucial support for this work but core activities mandated by the OSCE as a whole should not be too dependent on donors. The availability of adequate financial and human resources is essential if the full potential of the mandate is to be realised.