



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

OPENING REMARKS

by
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

at the
Launching Event for the Report
“Current State of Primary Education of Students
Belonging to Ethnic Communities”

Skopje, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – 9 June 2010

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to this launching event. I am glad to see the concrete results of the joint efforts of the staff of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, the Ministry of Education and Science and my office. I trust this report focusing on the educational situation of five smaller minorities – Turkish, Bosniak, Serbian, Vlach and Roma – will contribute to maintaining and developing your country's multicultural and multi-ethnic character. The Government holds an important key to preserving this ethnic, cultural and religious diversity over time.

I am convinced that the goal of preserving and promoting diversity can be most effectively advanced by educational means. For this, you already have a strong basis set by international and Macedonian legislation. Most importantly, the communities have the right to instruction in their own language in primary and secondary school. Full curricula exist for Serbian and Turkish languages in primary education and other smaller minority groups can study in their language for at least a few lessons per week.

At first sight, the legal picture in your country looks encouraging. However, in many countries where I am engaged, I notice a disparity between the declared norms and standards and the real practices in everyday life. Therefore, one of the major tasks of the Government is to shrink this gap, to enforce the implementation of the provisions, and to make sure that quality is not sacrificed in the name of formal reporting.

The State should treat the promotion of education for minorities – in minority languages – as a positive obligation. Good laws and nice declarations are not enough. There is a need to take a pro-active stance and to inform minorities properly of their rights and of existing opportunities. There is a need to develop curricula for all minorities and for all grades, as envisaged by the law. There is a need to allocate sufficient funds for the training of teachers and the publication of modern textbooks. Without adequate resources, learning can be neither attractive, nor effective.

One should also keep in mind that education of minorities will not be fully beneficial if pupils are not exposed to the languages, cultures and religions of others. Multilingualism should be encouraged by the State. Members of the various minority communities should be able to speak each other's languages as well as possess an adequate knowledge of the State language. They should spend time together both in the classroom and during extra-curricular activities. This is when they can get to know each other better and learn to respect each other's differences. This is when tolerance and respect for diversity come most naturally.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The joint report being presented today covers all the issues I have raised and even more. It pinpoints the existing problems and provides recommendations on how to deal with them. The problems are very similar in all communities and it appears there is a consensus on how they should be addressed. I hope the Government's measures will follow the report's recommendations and the next report will mark a number of improvements.

I also would like to stress that my office stands ready to provide our further expert assistance to the Directorate for Development and Promotion of Education in Languages of the Communities. I look forward to continuing our constructive co-operation and to addressing further challenges together.

Thank you for your attention.