



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

**MINORITY PROTECTION IN TODAY'S OSCE:
LESSONS LEARNED**

Opening address by
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the
**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the
OSCE contribution to the protection of national minorities**

[Check against delivery]

Vienna, Austria – 29 October 2015

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Supplementary Human Dimension meeting, devoted to the OSCE's contribution to the protection of national minorities.

More than 20 years ago, the then CSCE gave the High Commissioner on National Minorities a mandate – a unique mandate – to identify and seek early resolution of tensions involving national minorities that could threaten peace and stability within and between OSCE participating States. It is beyond doubt that the context in which the OSCE and the institution operates has since undergone profound changes. Our security framework is increasingly more complicated in a globalized world and we see violence break out in Europe once again, which we hoped could not be possible. Human suffering in the OSCE area and in the vicinity has taken on unbearable proportions.

We are hearing “demonizing” discourse regarding minorities resurfacing during these times of great unpredictability, both in economic and security terms. We are seeing people seek scapegoats so that they do not have to confront the real issues. In particular, hate speech and the repeated attacks on the Roma population in some of our OSCE participating States should keep us on the alert.

Hate speech is increasing in political and other discourses, which raises the threshold of our tolerance of what is acceptable. We could almost speak of a “rampant banalization” of verbal violence. If State authorities and political leaders do not counteract such hatred with determination, the credibility of our democratic institutions will be eroded and the capacity of our societies to resolve conflicts will be weakened.

It is not only the preservation of the system of protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities that is at stake; the very foundations of democracy and rule of law that this system rests upon are also at risk.

My institution has consistently argued that in order to prevent conflicts we must promote respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. *The Hague Recommendations on the Education Rights of National Minorities, The Oslo*

Recommendations on the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities and *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, to name but a few of our publications on this issue, have provided solid interpretation and guidance on how to protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and thereby diffuse tensions and accommodate diversity.

Persons belonging to national minorities also need to be supported to become fully fledged members of society. This is why my institution has consistently promoted “integration with respect for diversity”. Promoting the integration and inclusion of all members of society while respecting their differences is the most viable strategy we have to avoid conflicts and consolidate our multi-ethnic societies. My institution has consistently promoted “integration with respect for diversity”, even when some members of the political class have announced “the end of multiculturalism” or when integration was referred to with negative connotations.

Integration with respect for diversity was reinforced in 2012 when my predecessor launched *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*. These Guidelines are the most all-encompassing work of the institution, providing guidance on how participating States can promote diversity in key policy areas, such as education, citizenship, law enforcement and access to justice. They also assert that integration can only be promoted through democratic governance and respect for fundamental rights, including minority rights. Without such an approach, identity can become a source of exclusion and discrimination. This cannot be in a State’s interest because few things are more dangerous to a State than a group of dissatisfied and alienated citizens held together by the bond of common kinship and with no sense of belonging to the State in which they reside.

When we observe the current challenges to integration in the OSCE area, do we see societies that foster a common sense of belonging, that are shared and inclusive, and that ensure everyone is respected no matter what their religion, ethnicity, language or origin may be? Do we see societies where effective equality is the rule? These factors are discussed in the Ljubljana Guidelines and they merit much attention in view of today’s challenges.

To take a recent example of identifying approaches to address today’s challenges, the UN sustainable development goals seem, to some extent, to reflect the notion that development will not be sustainable unless it reaches all sectors and members of society – in a word, that it

is inclusive. The sustainable development goals call for inclusive education, inclusive growth and the promotion of inclusive societies with inclusive institutions at all levels, in addition to the goal to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all by 2030. To take another recent example, the first EU fundamental rights colloquium recommended empowering actors at all levels to build a culture of respect and tolerance through education and promoting diversity.

To all of those thinking about how to implement strategies in this field – have a look at the Ljubljana Guidelines.

In the Ljubljana Guidelines, we have framed structural principles for an integrated society, principles that are necessary for integration as well as elements of an integration-policy framework and some key policy areas. Let me highlight two areas of relevance today, which are critical to the sense of belonging necessary for an inclusive society. The notion of a sense of belonging implies that we are not talking about integration of minorities *into* society but the integration *of* diverse societies as a whole.

First, the principle of equal access to services and employment: if a young person belonging to a national minority feels that he or she does not have equal opportunities to find work – no matter how well he or she masters the State language – the sense of belonging to the country of residence will hardly be achieved.

Second, if hate speech is allowed to flourish, if politicians are not taking up their responsibility to engage in a dialogue that is respectful of diversity and take a clear stance against incitement to hatred, then we will not encourage a sense of belonging for all members of society. How do you expect minority youth to feel included if politicians support hate speech or fail to distance themselves from that?

These are issues we shall dwell upon during our deliberations in the second working session tomorrow, focusing on the Ljubljana Guidelines and the integration of diverse societies.

Going one step further to the human rights approach to addressing minority issues, the 2008 *Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* reaffirmed the principle that the respect for and protection of minority rights is the responsibility of the

State in which persons belonging to national minorities reside. By publishing the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, my institution has not shied away from addressing States' interests in minority protection head-on by filling a normative gap in this less codified area of minorities in inter-State relations.

The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations also deal with the implications of ethno-cultural diversity for international security: ethno-cultural and State boundaries seldom coincide, most OSCE States are multi-ethnic. Many of them take an interest in their "kin" abroad and provide support to them. There is nothing wrong with this, but there may be ambiguities and suspicions regarding the intentions behind this support, which, as we know, historical legacies cannot but exacerbate.

The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations help clarify what a legitimate interest in terms of providing support to ethnic "kin" may entail. They set out some red lines regarding how far a State may pursue its interest with respect to citizens of another country to avoid disputes and possibly escalating tensions over national minority issues.

The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations are, I believe, more relevant now than ever before, as we have witnessed breaches of its principles within the OSCE area. Indeed, adhering to the principles enshrined in Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations is crucial in order to avoid instrumentalization of minority issues in inter-State relations. It is also to be noted that victims of instrumentalization include those persons belonging to national minorities whose concerns are not raised anymore in the international fora due to a fear that those concerns could be instrumentalized.

Having said this, I hope that during the working session devoted to national minorities in inter-State relations and the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations we can also explore positive examples of constructive inter-State co-operation on minority issues.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

Often I hear that the OSCE needs to be more relevant in the face of the growing security challenges faced by participating States. As for what this means for the HCNM – being able

to detect and prevent conflicts more efficiently as tensions simmer? I couldn't agree more. At the same time, we can only be as efficient and relevant as the participating States allow us to be. For this, we need direct and genuine dialogue; that is, "talking to" each other rather than "talking about" each other. This is why I believe that a positive engagement using HCNM tools is of great importance. I therefore look forward to our discussions as well as to hearing how my institution can further help such a dialogue. Thank you for your interest and willingness to debate these issues.