



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**High Commissioner on National Minorities**

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**NATIONAL MINORITY ISSUES AND EUROPEAN SECURITY**

address by

**Knut Vollebaek**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

**Corfu Process Meeting -**

**Theme: “Conflict Prevention as one of the main tasks of the OSCE”**

[Check Against Delivery]

Vienna, Austria – 23 February 2010

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me back to continue our discussions on European security. I think this morning's seminar was a very opportune and useful kick-off for our conflict prevention discussion.

As we also heard this morning, the war in Georgia in 2008 clearly demonstrated there is something amiss with our system of conflict prevention. The alarm bells were ringing, but the international community failed to heed them. We can surely do better than this. The Corfu Process provides an excellent platform to debate and ultimately determine in what direction we want to steer the OSCE. It seems that there is broad agreement on this. Let us then use this opportunity.

It is encouraging that in the 2009 Athens Ministerial Declaration participating States “[...] recognize that these security challenges [...] should be tackled with a renewed commitment to achieve results through multilateral dialogue and co-operation.” I hope this is more than just nice words. I am convinced that we must recommit to multilateralism and refrain from unilateralism. This applies not least to national minority issues. We must deliver on this renewed pledge in order to genuinely talk to each other and discuss issues of concern in good faith.

As was reiterated by several speakers this morning, conflict prevention is the trademark of OSCE. We have a good record in conflict prevention in general and in the prevention of ethnic conflict in particular. The participating States broke new ground when they established the institution of the HCNM and the Field Missions. They are the OSCE's conflict prevention tools.

Conflicts may be prevented. They are not inevitable. Conflict is not as abrupt as an earthquake, a tornado or a volcanic eruption; most of the time, the warning signs are out there.

Dan Smith reminded us of the banality of the old saying that “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure”. Banal yes, but still true. And unfortunately so difficult in practice. As a resident of the Netherlands at the moment, I observe in admiration how the Dutch have set up an extremely effective defence system against rising water levels. They know that this may not be imminent, but, based on historic and meteorological data, they know that they have to be prepared for the eventuality. As a matter of course they methodologically collect the money to finance these defences. Fund raising, maintenance and upgrades take place not in the middle of the flooding, but in anticipation of it.

In the same vein, the OSCE must maintain its existing defences against conflicts, but also build new ones. To a large degree I will say that we have data. We need to analyse them. And we need to act upon them.

Maintaining existing institutions requires sufficient resources and talented and motivated people. We must avoid debilitating red tape. We must produce quality output, in a timely manner.

It is imperative that OSCE reporting is taken seriously. This was, you will recall, also highlighted by Freizer this morning. How does one otherwise spot a conflict in the making? Reports from the OSCE Institutions and Field Missions plead for a robust and thorough debate amongst the participating States. The OSCE's consensus principle may be seen as a weakness with regard to timely action, however, we could turn it into strength, if we all openly address potential conflicts with a common aim, namely prevention. Another way of saying this as stated by Dan Smith: We need shared values and shared consciousness.

Let us report on progress and improvements. They are important. However, our reports have to be realistic. They have to get to grips with the burning issues when they arise. They have to stir the OSCE into action when needed.

I admit that conflict prevention is sometimes difficult to get a handle on. You will never know how much of the work was really essential.

As we also were reminded this morning, conflict prevention cannot be measured or estimated in monetary terms. It is easy to implement project activities, where the results and successes can be ticked off one by one. It is more difficult to engage in cumbersome conflict prevention activities. We need a long term perspective. They may not always be clearly defined, and the outcome is more often than not uncertain. Conflict prevention means getting down to the nitty-gritty and requires time, skill and commitment from those trying to deal with it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now offer some details on the proposal that I made several months ago. I was pleased with the many positive reactions to my proposal for a political endorsement of the HCNM's Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations. At the same time several of you have approached me following my last Corfu statement and asked for further clarification.

I have mentioned several times already that we cannot increase security in Europe without looking at minority issues. Majority-minority conflict leaves deep scars in the societies

affected. They do not always heal well. In addition, this type of conflict often draws in neighbouring States. What starts as a snowball can often become an avalanche.

This is why I believe we must build further defences together against interethnic conflict in the OSCE area. This particularly applies to the inter-State dimension because it has a direct and immediate impact on European security.

This is why I suggested last year that the participating States endorse the HCNM's Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations and commit themselves to follow them. In my opinion, European security would definitely benefit if States take it upon themselves to respect a certain 'code of conduct' with regard to national minorities. The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations are such a set of guidelines.

Over the last few months and years we have seen an increase in so-called kin-State activism. This has led to tensions, or at least to perceptions that are not conducive to the development of good inter-State relations. Many of the causes of conflict in the OSCE area can be traced back to the failure to find agreement between majorities and minorities. The protection of co-ethnics in a neighbouring State often gets in the way. If we are genuine in our desire to make Europe more secure in the future, we must address national minority issues.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked why I suggested endorsing only the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, and not the previous five sets of Recommendations elaborated over the years under the aegis of the High Commissioner. If the States want to endorse all of them, I would sincerely welcome such a move. I certainly believe that all HCNM recommendations are of significant relevance to all participating States.

However, the latest set is particularly relevant to the debate on European security. These Recommendations do not focus primarily on the interethnic situation **in** a State but rather on relations **between** States. I therefore think that the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations lend themselves to being used as a "code of conduct" by participating States in their interaction with each other on questions that concern national minorities.

This interaction should be based on a number of principles, which are deeply rooted in international relations and which I highlighted in my address to you last October, namely:

- The State of minority residence has to respect and promote minority rights;

- States are not allowed to exercise jurisdiction over the population, or part of the population, of another State within the territory of that State without its consent;
- The conferral of citizenship should only take place in strict adherence with the principles of good neighbourly relations and territorial sovereignty;
- States are allowed to extend benefits to persons residing abroad, but they should refrain from taking unilateral steps and fuelling separatism.

Whenever appropriate, I encourage States to reach bilateral or regional agreements. I suggest they establish inter-governmental bodies that initiate and support regular consultations and co-operation in the spirit of good neighbourly relations. What is deemed appropriate and positive by two or more States that share respective minorities across their borders does not constitute a challenge. It is when there are different – often detrimental – perceptions of what the actions of a certain State means to another State, that the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations could offer some useful guidance. The basic message is that all actions taken should be transparent and based on consultations.

It is evident from the declarations and decisions made in Athens that the Corfu Process is meant to restore confidence and trust among the 56 OSCE partners. It strives to strengthen the OSCE's capacity in conflict prevention and in tackling security challenges. Tension between States over national minority issues is a tangible danger to the security of our region. I therefore believe it is useful to have guidelines in this area that help us deal with difficult issues. Admittedly, not all recommendations are equally relevant to all parts of the OSCE area. However, the regional round tables that I have been conducting over the last few months (the latest took place last week here in Vienna), and which I plan to continue, help to highlight the most relevant parts of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations for a given region. However, when I ask for your endorsement it is for the Recommendations, with their explanatory notes, in their entirety. We talk about endorsing a set of norms.

If States endorse norms of behaviour on national minority issues in inter-State relations, this would no doubt contribute to alleviating a sense of insecurity often felt by some States in the OSCE family. Reinforcement of and continued commitment to multilateral instruments dealing with the international dimension of minority issues, such as the HCNM, would certainly help to enhance European security.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wholeheartedly support the statement in the Corfu decision in Athens that “[t]he OSCE, due to its broad membership and its multidimensional approach to common, comprehensive, cooperative and indivisible security, provides the appropriate forum for this [political] dialogue.”

Only a comprehensive approach to European security, encompassing all of its dimensions, can strengthen it. We all agree that respect for human rights, including minority rights, and security are linked. So why not build on this consensus? Why not reinforce our defences against inter-state conflict over national minority issues in the OSCE region? Why not send a strong signal that conflict prevention remains a priority area for our Organization? The Corfu process offers a window of opportunity. The OSCE can and should demonstrate its continued leadership and vision when it comes to prevention of ethnic conflict and inter-state tension over national minority issues. I count on your support in this effort and stand ready to offer my Institution’s experience and expertise.

Thank you for your attention.