



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

www.osce-hcnm.org

ADDRESS

by

Knut Vollebaek

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the

Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Oslo, Norway – 7 July 2010

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect with you on an issue which is of great significance to my work and is a cross-cutting issue for my country-related activities in the OSCE region.

Integration is a buzzword which has become part of today's political jargon. However, it has different meaning to different people, and this often creates misunderstandings, misconceptions and sometimes, unfortunately, unwise policies. Let me at the outset warn you: I am not going to provide you with a magical definition of this concept. More modestly, I am here to explain what integration means for me and how it relates to the very heart of my mandate as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

As was mentioned by Ambassador Moran, in 2004 the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, requested my predecessor Ambassador Rolf Ekéus to “initiate a comparative study on the integration policies of established democracies and analyse the effect on the position of new minorities”. This request on your side prompted an in-depth reflection within my Office about the overall aims, goals and policies of integration. The resultant report was presented to this Assembly in 2006. It compared the integration policies of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. When I took up the position of HCNM, I decided to continue the work started by my predecessor. Thus, my reflections on integration since then have moved beyond the mentioned report.

What I am discussing with you today is more generally my **philosophy** with regard to integration, the **link** between integration and conflict prevention, the question of “**who**” and “**how**” of integration, and my **prospective work** in this field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No matter how we define integration, all our societies are ethnically, culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse. This diversity is constantly growing due to the increasing mobility of people in today’s interconnected world. Inter-ethnic relations are therefore all the more important, and their appropriate management is key to peaceful societies that can resolve problems effectively. It is essential to establish a careful balance between policies of integration and inclusion, and those of recognition and accommodation.

Since the establishment of the institution of HCNM, successive High Commissioners have promoted “**integration with respect for diversity**”. Promoting integration and inclusion for all members of the society while recognizing their differences, helps create the condition in which different majority and minority communities can live peacefully together. The aim of an integration policy is to create a society in which all, including members of all ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious groups, have a sense of sharing or building a common identity. In such a common home, all should have equal opportunities to contribute to the richness of society and to benefit from it, because the rights of all are respected and the responsibilities of all are accepted. In such a society, the benefits of diversity can be enjoyed by all and possible tensions arising from diversity, which could lead to instability or conflict, will be attenuated.

A well functioning society requires effective integration of all groups. Integration is a two-way process that depends on action by both majority and minority communities. It, thus, necessitates functioning States, which devote sufficient resources to the protection and promotion of minority rights and a commitment of minorities to participate and engage in public life.

If integration with respect for diversity is not achieved, when either integration or diversity are not respected nor appropriately balanced, **conflicts** are more likely to erupt. In almost 17 years of HCNM experience, the link between lack of integration and risk of conflict has been clearly present. My predecessors spoke of integration in connection with conflict long before it became a popular concept. The HCNM approach to integration was developed under specific circumstances, and mainly in the context of democratic transition, state-building and post-conflict consolidation. But in my view, several aspects of this approach are applicable to all societies and to all forms of diversity.

In fact, respect and promotion of identity rights are a precondition for building peaceful inter-ethnic relations within States: when this is missing, tensions between ethnic groups are harder to manage and sometimes even erupt into open warfare. We have witnessed several sad examples of this in the OSCE region, especially in the 1990s, but also, in more recent times, as we have witnessed in the last few weeks in Kyrgyzstan.

Still, it is the accumulated experience of my office that the provision of minority rights in the legal system, while essential, might not be enough to prevent conflicts. Sometimes minority rights remain on paper and are not effectively implemented, thus, creating frustration and resentment on the part of minorities who feel ignored or, at best, tolerated in their own

society. The full enjoyment of minority rights is vital in order to ensure that minorities have a stake and are given an effective voice in their States of residence. This requires that minorities are given and take the opportunity to learn the State language, to participate in public life, cooperate with the authorities and ultimately be an essential part of the society. Integration with respect for diversity means that the right to remain different, to speak one's mother tongue and to preserve one's cultural identity should be considered an enrichment of the society, and not lead to the institutionalization of exclusion and discrimination, particularly with regard to accessing education and jobs and having equal opportunities.

If different ethnic groups end up building parallel societies, they are unlikely to cooperate. In the absence of cooperation across ethnic lines, segregated groups may challenge the legitimacy and the sovereignty of the States where they reside. States that fail in their duty to create integrated societies lack stability and pose a potential security risk. This is even more pertinent when the lack of integration of minority communities in their State of residence, translates into a perceived higher degree of belonging to a so-called kin-State across the border. This raises fears of irredentism and external interference, negatively affecting both inter-ethnic relations within States and between States. The lack of integration, thus, is a threat for both the domestic, regional and international security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another essential element of the work on integration, one that gives rise to most controversies, is the question: **who** should be targeted by integration policies. The dominant discourse is that of integrating minorities, usually meaning migrants, into mainstream society.

This is apparent in how integration is defined and understood, especially in the EU countries and at EU level. My angle, given my mandate, is different. From the experience of my Office, conflicts start precisely when it is presupposed that there is a singular, monolithic dominant society and culture, with characteristics defined by the majority. This view implies that minorities do not contribute to making the society as it is, that they are rather alien to it, potentially representing a threat to its survival. In such a view, minorities, of whatever kind, are expected to accept the burden to change and adapt, whereas the majority, irrespective of the presence of remarkable diversities within itself, at best provides the tools for the minority to change.

My focus is rather on the integration *of* societies, not *into* societies. Given my mandate as an institution of an intergovernmental organization, my work addresses in first place States and societies, and is aimed at preventing conflicts between and within States. In today's world all States are multinational and multiethnic and face the challenge of building cohesive and integrated societies. Thus, my work on integration is intended to help States devise policies of integration with respect for diversity, and in this way preventing potential interethnic tensions. This means looking at instruments for the society as a whole, rather than singling out groups.

In my perspective, it is essential to separate integration from the issue of migration and the creation of so called "new minorities". Integration of societies is relevant far beyond the phenomenon of migration. It is a question of how a society wants to function.

Under international law, human rights standards apply to all. These fundamental individual rights include protection from racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, the provision of

equality before the law and the enjoyment of all the other individual rights guaranteed under the most relevant international documents. For many members of minorities, whether long established as national minorities or more recent immigrant communities, these are the most important and immediate issues. They form the basis of a wide range of national and international programs for the elimination of discrimination and racism. The primary concern of most individuals belonging to minority communities is protection against racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, or even attacks. It is difficult to make much progress towards more general integration if physical safety cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, equal treatment by government and in the employment and housing markets are fundamental.

At the same time, integration policies need to be targeted according to the minorities and circumstances, such as the numbers involved, the length of settlement, geographic concentration and their social and economic needs. Given the increasingly wide range of minorities, it is unlikely that a single set of policies will be appropriate for them all, and instruments for integration respecting diversity cannot be applied to each minority in the same way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no universal recipe as to **how** to achieve integrated societies respecting diversities. From my experience, however, some essential elements can be identified, bearing in mind that each case is different and the instruments need to be adapted to the circumstances.

In the context of the much wider range of minority communities currently present in many States, it would be disproportionate and dysfunctional to seek to apply the same measures for recognition, participation, education and cultural support for all minorities regardless of their size, location or dispersal, length of settlement and legal status. States may thus legitimately adopt measures to promote the integration of members of some minority communities while at the same time applying different measures to recognize the status and separate identity of other minorities. But these measures must be reasonable and proportionate.

First, integration respecting diversity is a precondition for minorities to preserve their identity. Second, it implies the obligation of the States to acknowledge that minority identities enrich the society as a whole and that minority issues are not issues for minorities only. Third, it assumes the responsibility of persons belonging to minorities to co-operate with the State in pursuing effective integration, especially by obeying the law and contributing to the overarching goal of security.

A basic principle of particular relevance to be taken into account is the right of an individual to choose whether to be treated as a minority or not. It is the duty of the majority to allow this choice.

It is also important to ensure that laws and regulations are formulated in such a way as to ensure that members of minority communities are not disadvantaged by unnecessarily formal or complex procedures that are more difficult for them to comply with than for members of the national majority. It will also be helpful to ensure, that staff in public offices in relevant areas include members of minority communities who will be able to assist in overcoming any linguistic or cultural barriers. At the same time, a policy of integration, is more likely to be

successful if members of linguistic or cultural minorities are encouraged to learn how to access relevant services on their own, rather than continuing to rely on others to act for them. Local and regional authorities should be given a good deal of discretion in developing the most appropriate ways of facilitating and encouraging members of minorities to learn the official language. Laws aiming at imposing a language and even threatening sanctions for non compliance, instead of offering opportunities to learn the language as a means of social promotion, should be discouraged.

A crucial instrument for effective integration of societies is education. Education is by far the most effective conflict-prevention mechanism, in the mid to long-term, because it happens at an early stage, ultimately shaping future generations for responsible citizenship. It is through education that we can expect children to learn how to be respectful, tolerant and fair citizens, who will guarantee that traditions of pluralism and democracy are maintained and further developed. A balanced education system needs to combine education in and through the minority language with education in the State language. For minorities, the study of their culture and mother tongue, as well as, where appropriate, education in their mother tongue, is a precondition for the full enjoyment of many other rights and goals. This includes the right to participation, association and finding employment. At the same time, the education of majorities about the culture of minorities will help raise awareness of the complexity of society, and thus establish mutual respect and understanding.

Governments have a key role in developing policies for integration and in promoting social cohesion and avoiding the risks and costs of permitting high levels of separation that may result if they take no action. They can establish a legislative framework that encourages and facilitates appropriate levels of integration, for example by removing any constitutional or

legislative barriers to the selection of members of minority communities for employment in the public sector, as members of public bodies or as candidates for election.

Equal and non-discriminatory participation in public life and in economic activities is essential for minorities' sense of belonging. This may involve measures to ensure that minorities are adequately represented in elected bodies, in administration and law enforcement bodies, including police, as this helps promote mutual understanding and cooperation. It is crucial to overcome barriers to access social services and the labour market, for example by providing training in the majority language, as well as measures to encourage employers to diversify their workforce and to avoid indirect discrimination. Regular monitoring of participation by members of minorities in every sector of employment is an essential tool in order to achieve effective equality. Thus, governments should put in place mechanisms for dialogue and consultation with minorities at every level.

The media too can make a decisive contribution to the general aim of integrating diverse societies, not only by simply transmitting information but also by passing on knowledge and positive attitudes. In this way, the media can play a positive role in promoting respect and understanding, especially by making minorities visible to the majorities. Constant attention should be paid to the issue of both media in minority languages and the way the mass media in general addresses minority issues. Access to media, particularly broadcast media, in minority languages may facilitate participation in the wider society and the maintenance of minority languages, cultures and traditions. Governments should be ready to facilitate broadcasting in minority languages and to encourage the public media to foster mutual understanding, to address the concerns of persons belonging to all communities and to combat negative stereotyping.

Finally, it is crucial that governments and public authorities assess and review the progress of their integration policies on a regular basis in consultation with members of minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just outlined some of the conclusions that I have drawn based on my conflict prevention work involving national minorities in the OSCE region. Effective integration of diverse and pluralistic societies is the key to prevent minority related conflicts.

For this reason my Office is currently working on systemizing this experience and this philosophy into some guidelines for all societies in the OSCE area. The recommendations won't be a magical formula to establish integrated societies with respect to all diversities, they will simply provide options that States might want to consider in their effort to prevent conflict among different groups emerging.

The initiative taken by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in 2004 to look at integration policies of established democracies was most relevant. The issue of integration continues to be high on the agenda for most Governments. It is my hope that the Parliamentary Assembly will stay engaged with the matter, and I look forward to working closely with you as we now move forward with the guidelines.

Thank you for your attention.