



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

***The Hague Recommendations* after two decades:  
What has changed for education and conflict prevention?**

address by  
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on the occasion of  
**the 20th anniversary of *The Hague Recommendations*  
*Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities***

**[Check against delivery]**

The Hague, the Netherlands – 21 April 2016

Dear Ministers,

Excellencies,

Dear participants and friends of the HCNM,

I would like to welcome you back to the Koninklijke Schouwburg for today's session devoted to **examining developments affecting minority education** and their impact for conflict prevention over the last two decades.

First, let me note the importance I attach to all of you being present today. At the HCNM, we could have chosen to mark the 20th anniversary of *The Hague Recommendations* through a press release in order to draw attention to this foundational text for HCNM's engagement in the field of education. But this would have been tantamount to a company mailing a card to the homes of its staff members for their 20 years of service: impersonal and non-inspirational. Anniversaries would not be worth celebrating if they were not watershed moments to critically **examine past work** and **discuss future challenges and opportunities**. **Opportunities such as** addressing ethnic diversity in education with all the HCNM partners. Let us hope that, at an event like this, one can reinforce not only dialogue but also **co-operation**.

And as I said yesterday, we would very much appreciate your views on the way forward, should **a handbook on Diversity be developed** – possibly together with partners; and how should we continue to liaise on questions of Diversity in Education. We naturally wish to work in close cooperation with advisory bodies of the Council of Europe, especially taking into account The Council's recent Guidelines to Member States on the protection and promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies

But what would an expert meeting be without the experts?

Today, we are glad that so many knowledgeable experts and practitioners have joined us to share their knowledge and experience and remind us of the long journey towards making sure that education is not a source of conflict but rather a tool to prevent conflict.

Of course, many challenges lie on the road ahead of us as we work towards preserving a sustainable peace based on the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights,

including minority rights. During this long journey, we know that a crucial instrument for preventing conflicts is education. However, investing in education requires patience and a long-term perspective. Yet it is the most sustainable and ultimately rewarding mechanism which can shape and prepare future generations for responsible citizenship. Although the role of education in conflict prevention is increasingly acknowledged, this acknowledgment has still insufficiently materialised in practice.

At the same time we note the importance of the World Humanitarian Summit in May, where political leaders are called upon to make commitments to achieve conflict prevention and resolution; to really do it in a concerted way. I believe all of us working on conflict prevention value highly that the international community at this Forum is called upon to provide stronger leadership in addressing the structural root causes of conflict, on strengthening the tools and partnerships to prevent conflicts from breaking out, escalating or re-emerging. This World Summit is so much in the spirit of the HCNM and of Max van der Stoel – and my hope is that education will not be forgotten in this context.

Looking back upon the last two decades of *The Hague Recommendations*, what achievements are we able to identify? These achievements can be summarised in three key words: preservation, inspiration and dialogue.

*Preservation:* *The Hague Recommendations* have been instrumental in the *preservation* of minority education at times when education reforms could have easily neglected the specific circumstances of national minorities. They placed the question of minority education on the conflict prevention agenda. In those States going through a process of democratic transition in particular, they articulated the rights of both the national minorities and minority languages, and ultimately paved the way for multilingual education. But, honestly speaking, this is still only the beginning. To maintain the momentum achieved so far, it will be necessary to invest in updating existing text books, training new teachers, and developing new ways to produce textbooks for the generations to come. Not doing so will place all the progress we have made so far at risk and will force us to go back to the drawing board. Preservation requires continued efforts.

*Inspiration:* *The Hague Recommendations* as an instrument for human rights is grounded in the security considerations of the 1990s. As such, they have been greatly influenced by the

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). Above and beyond this influence, *The Hague Recommendations* have further elaborated on the obligations of the States, which are enshrined in the work of the FCNM; they have provided the necessary impulse and *inspiration* for issues of national minorities in education to be addressed by States. Why inspiration? First, because the Recommendations have called for a pro-active approach by the States towards minority education rights in order to ensure the progressive, yet full realisation of minority rights in education. Second, because this call for a pro-active attitude has been further coupled with the encouragement of parental involvement and the facilitation of national minorities' participation in policy formulation.

*Dialogue:* we are all aware that solutions to the complex issues of national minority education are context-specific: *The Hague Recommendations* do not provide a universal solution to resolving dilemmas such as ensuring that the development of the rights of national minorities in education is understood as part of the overall development of education for any given country. In this search for adequate solutions, *The Hague Recommendations* provides this framework of dialogue that both the participating States and the national minorities can refer to when negotiating what is acceptable for both the majority and the minorities. Twenty years later, this framework is still being used as a reference tool for such dialogues.

Today, we **shall test these achievements** over time by examining three aspects of the OSCE HCNM conflict prevention work through education.

The first session will deal with **reforming the education sector in order to accommodate ethnic diversity**. During this session, we would like to discuss how to situate the engagement of the OSCE HCMM in the field of minority-majority education in the context of overall education reform. Whether the OSCE HCNM deals with legislation on or affecting minority education, arrangements for language education, or integrated education, it cannot only deal with minority-related issues in isolation but needs to anchor such issues within the strategic and long-term reforms that will ultimately affect minority-majority relations and societal developments more generally. For example, the question could also be posed: to what extent has diversity been reflected in the curricula and textbooks for pupils from the majority group?

At the same time, strategic education reforms may also be motivated by goals that do not give a central place to human rights or minority rights in education; they may be motivated by

economic reasons or more utilitarian reasons. How do we reconcile the different pressures placed on education in a way that takes into account issues of sustainability and financial capacity, but does not disregard the human rights dimension and, indeed, the development of the child?

The OSCE HCNM is one of the many actors active in the field of education. In those countries where we support participating States, international agencies, including development aid and financial agencies, also work on education reform, and civil society groups also promote activities related to tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding, among other issues. At the same time, the primary obligation to promote inclusive education lies with the States as they are in the best position to ensure that the education they provide is inclusive, respectful towards diversity, and well-adapted to their own country's unique social and cultural context.

The second session will deal with the issue of **accommodating linguistic diversity in education.**

Over the years, the attention of the High Commissioner has focused in particular on the language in which education is delivered. The institution provided assistance to the participating States on how to balance the preservation and development of the culture of their minorities and identity, with the need for minorities to be fluent in the official language, or languages, in order for them to be fully engaged in public life and realize their full potential in society wherever they live.

Let me note here the particularly important role of teachers in this respect as mentioned yesterday: in some contexts, the attitude of the teachers in the classroom may be influenced by the attitudes of society as a whole, and this can lead to the dominant language being given a higher status. If this overall attitude is not challenged or addressed, speakers of other languages may feel inferior and see their language being marginalized, with negative consequences for the children of minorities and their ability to advance through education.

The overall approach, based on *The Hague Recommendations*, has been to recommend a progressive approach that allows minority children to be taught in their own language during the first years of education with the State language being introduced gradually later. Not

surprisingly, the way in which this principle is put into practice is where challenges and tensions may and do arise.

Over time, my institution has been promoting approaches that favour multilingual education. Countries and regions that embrace multilingualism tend to have better learning achievements, perhaps reflecting a more accepting attitude to other languages. In short: when managing diversity in education, multilingualism matters.

At the same time, my institution warned that when introduced, models of multilingual education should not lead to the right to mother-tongue teaching being neglected. In my view, the goal of multilingual education is actually to enhance mother-tongue education and complement it with language skills in other languages – languages that can be important for enabling the full and effective participation of persons belonging to minority communities in public life, thus also helping society to be more integrated.

The third session will allow us to **explore education content**.

*The Hague Recommendations* may at times be perceived as a text that deals exclusively with minority language education. While it is true that a large part of the text poses principles which ensure that the rights of minority language education are safeguarded in practice, nevertheless, *The Hague Recommendations* also acknowledges the need to address the requirements of the majority as well in order to promote understanding, tolerance and multiculturalism within the State.

In that sense, *The Hague Recommendations* is not just an instrument for national minorities but an acknowledgement that this protection has to go hand-in-hand with some societal conditions involving all persons and not just one segment of society. Ethnic divisions may be cemented if there are no attempts to understand the other side as well or to acknowledge their truths. This is especially so in post-conflict societies where inter-ethnic trust is low and ethnic mobilization is often triggered by the fear of being disempowered.

As you can also see from the programme, we envisage new challenges arising when working with participating States. How can we prevent history, civic education and other culturally sensitive subjects from being taught in a way that further polarizes minority groups and

communities in society, rather than integrating them further? Today we will hear the experience of those non-governmental organizations that are active in opening up a dialogue on history and history teaching in a way that promotes critical thinking and the acceptance of the other's truth. They will also tell us what remains to be done in this sensitive but nonetheless key area for sustainable peace.

Even though I believe that today we may find many cases where the principles of *The Hague Recommendations* are not being implemented to the extent one would wish: nevertheless, I think it is time to reflect. Do we need to deepen and enlarge our discussion to include the dimensions of how diversity can be promoted, managed and valued in education systems? Should we not develop, in consultation with other partner organizations, a comprehensive handbook on how to manage diversity in the education system?

I believe that all three sessions will give us food for thought. The Swedish author, Sven Lindqvist once wrote "It is not knowledge that we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and draw conclusions". I would expand this even further by adding "and to translate these conclusions into policy". With these words, I would like to invite all of you to share your knowledge in the dedicated working sessions along with your reflections on how we, and the OSCE HCNM in particular, can take the issue of conflict prevention through education further. I encourage you to play an active role in this, and I look forward to our discussions today.