



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

New Challenges for Inter-ethnic Conflict Prevention.

Current Issues from the Human Dimension.

Address

by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

Rolf EKEUS

to the 2003 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, Poland

6 October 2003

Mr Chairman,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this meeting and to contribute to the discussions on implementation of human dimension commitments. As you know, although my mandate is derived from the politico-military dimension of the OSCE, I draw upon and use as my tools the standards and reasoning of the human dimension in the course of dialogue aimed to prevent violent conflict in situations involving national minorities. More specifically, I look at inter-ethnic relations between majorities and minorities with a view to identifying – and seeking resolution of – tensions that might endanger peace, stability or friendly relations within or between OSCE States. Since matters within the human dimension are often at the root of such tensions, I necessarily deal with these. So, the human dimension is very much at the centre of my work.

Under the mandate given to the High Commissioner I am engaged in some twenty Participating States. I am reporting to the Chairman-in-Office and give regularly concentrated information to the OSCE Permanent Council about my activities. Today I would like to focus instead on some thematic issues that I have been dealing with over the past year and look ahead to some changing circumstances and emerging challenges, bearing in mind that this year the institution of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities surpassed its tenth anniversary.

The subject of **minorities and the media** is of considerable interest to me. In particular, access to the media in one's own language is important both for purpose of information

and for maintenance of cultural identity. The mainstream media – and particularly the audio-visual media – are influential in shaping the wider society's perception of minority groups and *vice versa*. Potentially, media have an important role to play in promoting tolerance and understanding between different groups in society. However, the sometimes negative depiction of minority groups in the media is a matter of grave concern. More broadly speaking, issues have arisen in a number of situations where I am involved in terms of opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to establish their own media and/or to access television and radio programming provided in their own language(s) and addressing their specific interests and needs.

Ultimately, it is governments who are responsible for ensuring that a pluralistic media reflecting the diversity of interests and range of voices within society is able to flourish. In order to assist in this regard, I have invited a number of internationally recognised independent experts to elaborate guidelines for policy-makers on the use of minority languages in the broadcast media. These guidelines draw on relevant international standards as well as examples of good practice partly derived from a study which I commissioned last year and which entails survey of the existing State practice across the OSCE region. Both the Guidelines and the Survey of State practice will be presented for discussion at a conference to take place on 24-25 October which I am organising in cooperation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Copies of the Survey are available here today.

Citizenship – and related issues of loyalty, identity, belonging and inclusion – is a subject of increasing importance in our societies, characterised as they are by increased diversity and mobility with multiple interests and over-lapping identities. We have seen recent developments in a number of related areas, including a rise in calls for dual citizenship or of forms of national association for non-citizens. Questions relating to the rights of non-citizens are attracting growing attention in international fora and this is a subject that has been taken up by the UN – resulting in a substantial report by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Non-citizens. This is a matter of interest to me insofar as it intersects with national minority issues in the various situations in which I am involved. Of course, from the perspective of human rights, we should not forget that part of the impetus for the whole corpus of human rights has been not to distinguish in terms of the equal enjoyment of human rights – since distinctions are problematic both from the perspective of possible discrimination and of developing integrated societies based on equality and mutual respect. I intend to work on the subject of citizenship in the coming year in order to further clarify the concept and to obtain a broad understanding that the rights of minorities largely extend to both citizens and non-citizens.

Another important subject of concern is that of the socio-economic aspects of inter-ethnic relations. The opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities in the economic life of the country (both public and private) are frequently inadequate and unequal. Relative economic marginalisation is a factor which often underlies or contributes to inter-ethnic tensions in situations involving minorities. Competition for resources and goods in the economic field – especially jobs – is a normal feature of democracies based

on the free market. Problems arise when persons belonging to national minorities find themselves excluded or unable to compete on a level playing field – whether as a result of direct discrimination or of a more complex interaction of historical, social and cultural factors. Whatever the cause, economic inequalities between majorities and minorities should not be allowed to persist and it is my intention to further explore this inter-linkage between economic disadvantage – particularly as a result of unemployment – and inter-ethnic tensions. Furthermore, it goes without saying that harmonious inter-ethnic relations in a country contribute to make economic endeavours and investment more attractive to both local and foreign entrepreneurs. There is growing awareness that minorities might be an enriching factor rather than a potential threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Speaking of economic disadvantage, we cannot ignore the special **situation of Roma** across the OSCE. I believe that all of us would agree that the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE continues to be a matter requiring our full and urgent attention and commitment. I fully support the work carried out by the ODIHR and its Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. It is true that a number of countries have developed national strategies to redress this situation and it is good that we are working together to develop a comprehensive Action Plan. We have an historic opportunity to take stock, to draw on our modest successes and learn from our mistakes in recent years to create a coherent, focused and achievable Plan for the next 10 years – and here the word Action is key. This annual meeting is one important forum, may be the most important, in which such assessment can take place. Obviously, it is Roma themselves who are best placed to

identify their own interests and needs and it is important that we continue to foster Roma participation in the elaboration of the Plan.

As High Commissioner, I am also considering ways how I can take a more active role in addressing the issues of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. In 1993 the Rome Ministerial Council decided that the OSCE should do more to combat these threats. The Rome Declaration on Aggressive Nationalism, Racism, Chauvinism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism explicitly invited the High Commissioner, in light of his mandate, to pay particular attention to these forces. I am deeply convinced that, while searching for the proper ways to fulfil this task, my approach should be complementary to existing bodies and instruments. It is encouraging that movements embodying policies of extreme nationalism who in the past have caused violent conflicts, are giving way to a new generation of politicians who support integration and reconciliation. This does not exclude that forces of extreme nationalism, racism and xenophobia still are not uprooted in a number of Participating States. Referring to the Statement this morning by the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly Ms. Barbara Haering on the question of New Minorities, this is a legally and politically complex issue. I plan to address this publicly in the near future.

In conclusion, my mandate has proved its usefulness and potential. We have developed in Europe numerous remedies, domestically and internationally, against violations of the principles and rules of human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance. In order, however, to reduce the number of violations and improve the prospects for all of us,

preventive action needs further development and support, both politically and materially. I am, therefore, pleased that this year's Human Dimension meeting will dedicate a full day to discuss issues affecting national minorities and the broader societies of which they are also part. The Director in my Office will chair the day which has been organised in two thematic parts – the morning session to address socio-cultural or identity issues, and the afternoon's session to address participation in public life. We have arranged for two distinguished scholars, Professor Tibor Varady from the Central European University and Professor Hurst Hannum of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, to introduce these complex subjects and stimulate the debates.

Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that through a thoughtful and dedicated implementation of human dimension commitments, OSCE participating States will better be equipped to manage their inter-ethnic relations and thereby reduce the prospects for violent conflict. The High Commissioner on National Minorities will continue to play its part through the second decade of its existence.

Thank you !