



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

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ADDRESS

by

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to the

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security at the
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Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be back before the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I also warmly welcome the theme of this year's session which focuses on addressing new security challenges. No doubt, new security threats have emerged in the OSCE area. Proliferation of small arms and light weapons, climate change, labour migration, water management, human trafficking – these topics are rightly on the Assembly's agenda.

While we are looking for ways to tackle new security problems, we must not lose sight of the continued relevance of the OSCE in the prevention of ethnic conflict – the issue which, let us be frank, has been and continues to be the root cause of most conflict and tension in the OSCE area.

Our Organization is well placed to provide early warning and conflict prevention through its sensors, namely the field presences. In addition, the institution of the High Commissioner on National Minorities is a unique instrument of the OSCE designed to ease tensions over national minority issues within and between participating States.

In the past 12 months, I have been active in many OSCE participating States. My regular briefings at the OSCE Permanent Council will provide you with details of those engagements and are available at the HCNM website.

In my remarks before you today I would, however, like to dwell on three overarching themes that in my experience have an impact on inter-ethnic relations across the OSCE region. These are respectively, education, participation by minorities in public life and relations between states and their kin-minorities in neighbouring states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regrettably, majority-minority frictions remain unresolved in many of the OSCE participating States. The best strategy to alleviate such tensions is the integration of different ethnic communities within the State. Integration involves a balance of rights and responsibilities on both sides. On the one hand, the State respects the right of the minorities to maintain their identity, for example by facilitating education and broadcasting in the language of the minority and by encouraging their participation in public life. On the other hand, members of

the minority give their allegiance to the State, pursue their objectives through their participation in the public life of the State and refrain from challenging the territorial integrity of the State.

In this context, I believe that education is an excellent tool of integration. It is a common thread running through all my country activities.

It is particularly important in multi-ethnic societies. Education enables national minorities to pass on their culture to future generations. In this way, they preserve, promote and develop their minority characteristics. It is fair to say that the preservation and development of ethnic identity is virtually impossible without instruction in minority languages in secondary schools or, at the very minimum, the teaching of minority languages as a subject on the curriculum. But national minorities also have a responsibility to integrate into the wider national society by acquiring a proper knowledge of the State language. This may mean not just the teaching of different languages, but teaching in different languages.

This, however, is an ideal scenario under which the right balance between rights and responsibilities is found. The real world situation is unfortunately different. To my regret, negative trends in education in some areas of the OSCE region are a cause of serious concern. My particular worry is the trend towards increasing separation along ethnic lines in education.

This may sound like a soft issue for our security organization. Let us, however, not delude ourselves into thinking that segregated education – and I use that term deliberately - has no impact on security. It does, and its repercussions are far-reaching and long-term.

In the first place, segregated education often hampers linguistic proficiency in the State or official language among minorities. As a result, minority students often find it hard to enter a university, the public service or to secure a decently paid job. This leads to their marginalization, alienation and, most alarmingly, radicalization.

Secondly, separation along ethnic lines in education often creates an impression in the majority's mind that minorities are a foreign, alien body in their state entity. In schools formed along ethnic lines, children rarely have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with each other's culture, traditions and ways of looking at the outside world.

In the end, we get citizens of the same country who, at best, see each other as strangers and, more often than not, look with suspicion at their neighbours with different ethnic

backgrounds. The long-term effect of segregation could easily be a disintegrated society in which a conflict over water, land, access to employment or merely a place in the queue, almost invariably takes on an ethnic dimension.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What is the right strategy to combine protection of minority identity and societal integration?

As I mentioned at the last Parliamentary session in Astana, I am a convinced supporter of bilingual and multilingual education. It has been proved in many studies and reports to have a number of important advantages. Firstly, this type of education equips children with a range of enhanced skills, including the development of a rich vocabulary, increased sensitivity to multiple meanings, a better understanding of complex language structures and the ability to understand abstract concepts.

Secondly, bilingual or multilingual education equips individuals with the ability to learn additional languages more easily. This capacity is of ever increasing importance in a globalized world, the expansion of the Internet and other modern communication media. Language becomes a gateway to opportunity, to different cultures and to the wider world.

Bilingual or multilingual education also has other advantages. This type of education helps all ethnic communities to understand and accept that they live in a multilingual and multicultural society. Experience has shown that as a result of immersion in other languages – that is teaching a range of subjects through the medium of a second or even third language – students develop a positive attitude to different languages and cultures. Moreover, they are inclined to remain positive towards other language communities after they leave school. Bilingual or multilingual education is a means of fostering increased social interaction and building friendships irrespective of ethnicity.

Knowledge about and acceptance of bilingual or multilingual education is spreading. I see this as an encouraging sign. The HCNM has made its contribution to this positive trend. For example, through the provision of policy advice and projects, many states have begun introducing bilingual or multilingual education in their schools.

A word of caution is, however, necessary. In places where a choice has been made in favour of multilingualism, it needs to be introduced with care and in genuine consultation with minority communities. Otherwise, these communities may feel that multilingualism is

assimilation under the guise of societal cohesion.

As lawmakers, you have the power to shape education systems in favour of integration and to promote learning of languages in schools. I count on your support in advancing integrated forms of education in your countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few weeks ago, on the tenth anniversary of the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life a conference was held in their hometown of Lund in Sweden in order to assess their implementation and continued validity.

Participation is a key pillar of integration. Be it education, language management, regional legislature or national parliament, the best method of preventing discontent and, at worst, conflict is to draw minorities into the decision-making process.

There is no universal recipe that will apply to all cases. In some countries, a majority electoral system is the best way of ensuring minority participation. In others, a proportionate system is more suitable. Dual voting might be applicable in yet another. Whatever the final outcome, minorities have to have a voice in the decisions that have a direct impact on their lives.

Excluded or marginalized groups often react strongly against policies that are uniformly forced upon the wider society. Good governance entails the responsibility of administering to the whole population and taking into account, in a meaningful way, the specific concerns and interests of minorities.

Arguably, the greatest challenge is to give national minorities a meaningful role in political decision-making or, to put it simply, actually governing the country.

Whatever the form – be it territorial autonomy, non-territorial arrangements, specific provisions in the election law, advisory or consultative bodies, the fundamental feature of all these models is their departure from pure majority rule. They reach out to national minorities in order to take their needs and aspirations into account.

Inclusive government and distribution of power across ethnic lines are keys to overcoming internal divisions and reconciling competing interests.

I know that the Parliamentary Assembly takes a keen interest role in election observation. In this regard, I am happy to report that ODIHR and I have finished the process of updating the Guidelines to Assist National Minority Participation in the Electoral Process. The end product entitled “Handbook on Monitoring and Promoting the Participation of National Minorities in Electoral Process” includes new material on the development of international standards and good practices in this field, and contains insights gained from nearly a decade of observation of the participation of national minorities in elections.

I hope you will find this document useful in legislating as well as in your election observation endeavours since issues of minority participation often come up during electoral campaigns. I would also be grateful if you could share with us good practices promoting minority participation which you learn about from your constituencies or from your election observation missions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important development in my work since my last address to you in Astana is the launch of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-state Relations.

In recent years, we have witnessed increased politization of national minority issues in international relations; sometimes even outright confrontation. This trend is particularly worrying. Such inter-state arguments are at the heart of the HCNM mandate. When we look back at the history of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, many of the devastating wars during this period had a "minority dimension" where mistreatment, actual or constructed, provided the *casus belli*.

Today, we witness the renaissance of this phenomenon. In some quarters, there is an inclination to think that a particular nation extends across international borders. Under this paradigm, the nation consists not only of the majority ethnic group within a state, but also includes national minorities in other States by reason of ethnic affinity. This interpretation of the nation is then used to claim an almost natural and permanent interest in the situation of ethnic kin abroad.

This is not to say that kin-states have no role when it comes to their ethnic kin living in neighbouring states. Our own OSCE document, the 1991 Moscow document, sets out clearly that “commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the OSCE are matters

of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.” But, there are ways to pursue legitimate interests with regard to national minorities abroad without straining inter-ethnic or bilateral relations.

What has been missing is a document that sets the terms of reference for the kin-State's interest. Where does the line lie between “direct and legitimate concern”, on the one hand, and “interference in internal affairs”, on the other? What tangible support can a kin-State offer to its kin-minority under international law? How can States co-operate rather than clash over national minority issues?

This has been the rationale behind the development of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations. They offer guidance on how to properly deal with the sensitive issue in question. In doing so, this set of Recommendations acknowledges that States may provide benefits to national minorities abroad. Its express aim, however, is to clarify the relevant international norms under which this can be done and the good practices applicable.

I would like to underline a few key messages in the Recommendations.

First, the protection of national minorities is primarily a responsibility of the States where minorities reside. In the interwar years in Europe, an elaborate maze of minority treaties and obligations was designed. In many cases, these were imposed by the “Great Powers” on new, smaller States. The result was a spectacular failure.

On the other hand, advances in the treatment of minorities in the mid- and late-1990s are attributed to the quest of States for greater legitimacy, international acceptance and recognition. In short, standards work only when States themselves are committed to them in earnest. Final responsibility for success or failure in the protection of national minorities is in your hands.

The international community can and should intervene when human rights, including minority rights, are violated on a large scale as in cases of ethnic cleansing, mass expulsion and acts of terror. However, unilateral intervention by kin-States, particularly neighbouring States, can cast doubt on their motives and the credibility of their actions.

The second message I would like to mention is closely related to the first one. References to reciprocity have no place in the debate on minority issues. I sometimes hear complaints about the real or perceived mistreatment of a country's kin minority put forward as justification for

suppressing or discouraging minority identity at home. This logic is fundamentally flawed. Let me remind you once again: one of the bedrocks of international law is that the protection of human rights, including minority rights, is primarily the responsibility of the States where minorities reside.

Finally, kin-States are allowed to extend benefits to persons residing abroad. This is not prohibited. On the contrary, this can and often does contribute to the well-being of minority groups, can ease international relations and can help minorities become the bridges in inter-State disputes. Such benefits may include cultural and educational opportunities, travel grants, work permits, facilitated access to visas and the like. They should, however, be granted on a non-discriminatory basis. At the same time, States should refrain from taking unilateral steps and fuelling separatism.

I urge you, lawmakers, to exercise particular caution and care in adopting legal acts extending benefits to ethnic kin abroad. This is an issue that is easily misinterpreted or misperceived. It requires a sense of responsibility on the part of all parties involved.

Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

These are some of the broad issues that I have been dealing with over the past 12 months. As I have mentioned at the outset, there are of course other issues and several specific country situations which engage me daily. I assure you I will continue to direct my own efforts and full capacity of the HCNM to resolving them in the spirit of OSCE values and standards. To this end, I trust that I can count on the support of all the members of this Assembly, both at the OSCE and national level.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your reactions and questions.