



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

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

by

**Lamberto Zannier**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the

**UN Human Rights Council – 10th Forum on Minority Issues**  
**“Minority Youth: Towards Diverse and Inclusive Societies”**

**[Check against delivery]**

Geneva, Switzerland – 30 November 2017

Mr. Chairperson,  
Mr Vice-President,  
Special Rapporteur,  
Mr. Special Adviser  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to find myself among so many youth experts and representatives of youth organizations, especially ones dealing with a wide range of minority issues across different regions. Exchanging good practices on youth issues is always a pleasure when you have the opportunity to hear directly from young representatives: not only are they the most legitimate voices to express the needs and demands of young people, in many cases they also provide innovative solutions. Therefore, I would like to encourage you to be active and I look forward to hearing your comments and contributions to the discussions and to seeing the follow-up initiatives after this Forum.

Ensuring the meaningful participation and engagement of *all* youth in society is both a demographic and democratic imperative. You are the best placed not only to define your needs and priorities, but also to advocate and look for ways to address the different challenges you face. However, as I am sure you will agree, engaging with and including young people is not just about enabling you to have your voices heard. It is, most importantly, about working together with you to improve your ability to influence national and international strategies.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE] has identified youths as important actors since its very foundation in the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. This was when the Organization first expressed its commitment to promote the role and the inclusion of youth in subsequent OSCE decisions.

I must say that I am proud that during my mandate as the OSCE Secretary General, two consecutive Ministerial Council declarations, in 2014 and 2015, acknowledged the potential of young people to contribute to social development. The OSCE places special emphasis on youth protection, and on promoting youth participation in a number of areas. These include

preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that could lead to terrorism, promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue, education, advocating tolerance and non-discrimination in society, and encouraging political participation.

Today, as a result of the continuous support of the Swiss, Serbian, German and Austrian Chairmanships, the OSCE built upon its youth initiatives and now places youth high on its list of priorities. To further strengthen the voice of young people, the OSCE continues to support the Special Representatives on Youth and Security who play a key role in ensuring the continuity and sustainability of these efforts. I therefore encourage you to follow the OSCE Special Representatives' updates on youth activities on Facebook and Twitter. These are significant platforms that provide more detailed insights into the OSCE Special Representatives' work. These platforms will also help you to discover the OSCE field operations' engagement in different participating States and youth-related activities and seek ways to engage with them.

Today, I join you in my new capacity as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. My mandate empowers me to act throughout the OSCE area and to exercise my own judgement to prevent tensions from developing into full-blown conflicts. I must state here that my mandate embodies the hard-won wisdom of previous High Commissioners. Wisdom that is embodied in our series of Recommendations and Guidelines and which I – and others – view as an indispensable toolkit.

Also in this role, I pay particular attention to youth issues from the perspective of my mandate. As High Commissioner, my role is to address the structural drivers of conflicts, such as “discrimination and segregation in education”, “unequal participation in public life”, as well as “the role of the media in addressing minorities' issues”, for which my Institution's thematic Recommendations and Guidelines are invaluable. I brought some of them with me today, but you can find them all on our website. These publications serve as a reference point – a compass, if you wish – to help policymakers in their search for durable solutions in areas such as language, education, broadcasting, policing, inter-State relations and integration. Each publication deals with an issue that is fundamental for a cohesive, resilient and secure society.

Today, more than ever, we need to recognize the often neglected link between education and conflict prevention. Sustainable peace is built upon quality education for all, with no discrimination against – or self-exclusion by – segments of the population. The right to quality education is a fundamental human right. Governments should promote equal opportunities for everyone, including those belonging to minorities, and grant them access to education at all levels.

*The Hague Recommendations on the Education Rights of Minorities* were published by my Institution in 1996. They have been instrumental in outlining the content of minority rights in education, including minority-language education at all levels. They also provide guidance on the issue of decentralization and curriculum reform.

For the past 25 years, my predecessors have acknowledged that policies enhancing the teaching and learning of a State's official language(s) – while safeguarding and promoting linguistic diversity – are also an effective means to promote the cohesion of society. Pursuing this subtle balance is still relevant today. During the first few months of my mandate, I therefore continued to recommend this pragmatic approach and I have further supported the development of tools to this end. Tools such as the first ever illustrated bilingual dictionary for primary school children who follow the curriculum in the Albanian language. Online (and offline) versions of the dictionary were launched earlier this month in Skopje and Belgrade. These bilingual dictionaries are concrete examples of my Institution's long-standing support for policies aimed at overcoming segregation in education and in wider society.

At the same time, the primary obligation to promote inclusive education lies with the States themselves. It is *their* responsibility to ensure that the education they offer is inclusive, that it respects all aspects of diversity, and that it is well-adapted to their own country's unique social and cultural context. My Institution is always on stand-by to help with guidance, recommendations and expertise.

The focus of this Forum is on our collective journey towards diverse and inclusive societies. However, a society can only be inclusive if every citizen is able to participate fully. My Institution therefore works continuously to help States achieve the full participation of minorities in every aspect of society. In doing so, we are able to highlight the difficulties of persons belonging to national minorities to participate in public life. We should equally note

that youth are often excluded from public life. Consequently, the participation of minority youth in public life in particular is a major challenge that needs to be overcome.

Participation is first and foremost a right. However, it is also a tool to ensure that all voices are heard and that decisions are responsive to the needs of different groups. Broad, inclusive participation leads to stable, just and secure societies. This is why the issue of participation features strongly in *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, which give answers on how to effectively manage and accommodate increasing cultural and ethnic diversity. The Ljubljana Guidelines define how integration policies can be aligned as follows:

“[E]ffective social and economic participation on an equal footing for all members of society is essential for successful integration. The participation of persons belonging to minorities in economic and social life is as important as their participation in public affairs.”

My predecessors also developed a set of Guidelines specifically focussing on “participation”: *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation on National Minorities in Public Life* outlines measures that can be taken to promote the effective participation of marginalized groups.

While policies are context-specific, the principles and the need to ensure inclusive decision-making is universal. The right of persons belonging to national minorities to participate in decision-making, especially on issues that concern them, means a lot more than simply consulting them and asking them for their opinion. It entails a positive obligation to fully involve national minorities in designing and implementing youth-related policies.

Digital media are generally perceived as a promising tool for fostering an inclusive approach to minorities. I encourage you to use the full potential of this working session to inform yourself about the new practices and use of digital media, including social networks, as well as the challenges and threats of the online world.

Although some of the advantages of online media are that they open a window onto the world and that programme production costs are lower than ever, we should not forget about the importance of ensuring media freedoms and promoting quality programmes. Media, both

public and private, should be encouraged to broadcast more programmes *for* and *by* minorities, including the transmission of programmes in their native languages. Here too, my Institution is about to publish a new revised and updated set of *Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media*. These Guidelines contain a collection of good practices, developed in close co-operation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Ensuring an inclusive media environment is not only a question of promoting a healthy democracy, good governance or respecting international obligations: it is crucial if we want to promote peaceful and stable societies in which all groups can play an equal part.

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Creating a prosperous future requires a combination of short- and long-term engagement. Some issues require immediate intervention, such as providing access to education and participation in public life. However, achieving an inclusive education system and society that provides equal, high quality opportunities – irrespective of age, ethnicity or any kind of belonging – should be a long-term strategic commitment for all of us.

A long-term view helps us to sharpen our short-term goals. That is why my role is to advocate long-term investment for a stable and peaceful environment. This cannot happen overnight: it is an evolutionary process which demands leaders, like you, with a clear vision on how to embrace the world's complexity and an obvious interest in promoting long-term policies to address these complex challenges.

I assure you that my colleagues and I will keep the doors open to any minority youth-related initiatives and will continue to mainstream and promote the inclusive empowerment of minority youth.

I am looking forward to acknowledging the results of your discussion and I wish you good work and a fruitful debate.

Thank you