



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

**LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR INTEGRATION:
LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION
IN A MULTI-ETHNIC KYRGYZSTAN**

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To the OSCE HCNM-Cimera Roundtable

**"Multilingual Education and Mother-Tongue Education
for National Minorities in Kyrgyzstan**

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Mr Governor, Distinguished Participants,

Please permit me to thank you all for participating in this roundtable that is being organised jointly by OSCE HCNM and the NGO Cimera. The subject which we will discuss over the next two days is multilingual education and mother-tongue education for persons belonging to national minorities in Kyrgyzstan. This is an important issue and I welcome the opportunity to explore this question in such a forum. Further, I would like to commend the initiative of Cimera to promote this issue and I believe that their work is a good example of one of the practical ways in which integration can be fostered in multi-ethnic societies.

Although my role may be familiar to many of you, I would like to take a few minutes to outline the nature of the work of the HCNM. In February of this year, the tenth anniversary of the creation of the HCNM was marked. Following the end of the Cold War it became clear that contemporary conflicts often are the product of internal tensions and frictions *within* states, between different groups - based on ethnicity, religion, and language - frequently in the context of majority -minority relations.

The HCNM was established in a time of considerable optimism about the potential for international organisations to play a leading role in promoting peace and stability. The philosophy behind the creation of the HCNM was to establish an instrument of conflict prevention. The High Commissioner is expected to engage himself for the precise purpose of addressing situations where he considers that there is potential for tensions to be generated, possibly leading to conflict within, and perhaps between states. To that end, the mandate has been tailor-made for him to take direct action to prevent inter-ethnic tensions from developing into frictions and even full-scale violence, which could spill over into international conflagration.

I am often thought to be a national minorities' ombudsman or an investigator of individual human rights violations. But as is clear from the above, this is not correct. I am the High Commissioner on National Minorities not for National Minorities. The mandate is derived from the political and security dimension rather than the human

dimension of the OSCE's activities. Indeed, the OSCE has adopted a comprehensive concept of security, according to which there is no security without human rights, including minority rights. For this reason, my work often draws upon tools derived from other dimensions such as the human dimension, and this is particularly important in my work to promote the integration of national minorities into the societies where they live.

My task is not assimilation of minorities nor separation, but to find the middle ground of integration in harmony. As High Commissioner, I thus strive to find the best ways to accommodate the legitimate concerns of majorities and minorities; seeking the means by which they can build the national society together in such a way that the State is the common home for all of them; where none are treated as second class citizens. Where those in the minority as well as those in the majority can preserve their identity and yet also share with other groups in society the identity of the national society as a whole. That is, all who so wish should be able to have dual or even multiple identities: as members of the national society as a whole and, simultaneously, as members of ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. A variety of countries have adopted policies to permit, and indeed encourage, individuals the freedoms to express their personal identities in a variety of forms. Today many other states are adopting similar approaches. In my experience, the best means to achieve this end is within the context of a set of integration policies. Integration is vital, then, because it is a means to build more stable and harmonious societies; a powerful means to overcome inter-ethnic tensions.

Integration is a challenge in states that have historic minorities, states that have experienced population transfers, and states with immigrant populations. Many participating states of the OSCE have had to face the issue of integration - for example in recent years the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Austria have embraced policies to promote integration - but it is a special challenge to the recently independent states that must tackle this issue alongside a variety of other urgent tasks.

While many believe that economic progress is the solution to ethnic tensions, I believe that this is only part of the answer. Many of the world's richer countries continue to experience tensions between ethnic groups. In my experience, the sources

of such tensions can only be overcome by persistent and long-term actions to promote harmonious relations. Constant attention to this issue is the responsibility of everyone in society.

There must be an appreciation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of society. What I have in mind is a means to promote common understandings between groups about how they can live together, respecting and indeed furthering diversity, while at the same time protecting the particular forms of diversity that makes our societies such rich and such rewarding places to live.

Integration, therefore, involves responsibilities and rights on both sides. On the one hand, persons belonging to national minorities should respect the territorial integrity of the State. On the other, the State, and the majority within the State, must demonstrate their willingness to accept and implement the basic principles regarding the treatment of persons belonging to national minorities, such as their full equality before the law and their right to freely express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity.

Integration can have a variety of dimensions and every situation is specific. Let me take an example, in the region of Samtskhe -Javakheti in Georgia, I have developed together with the authorities, the UNDP and national minority communities a comprehensive programme to integrate the region more closely into Georgian society. This consists of projects to promote knowledge of the state language amongst officials and the general population of the region, as well as initiatives to improve the socio-economic situation of the region and to develop the media and communications.

Another key part of integration strategies can be performed by education policies that are designed to bring together different ethnic communities and to foster equal opportunities. Education is a critical area in an open society for it not only embodies elements of community life, which are fundamental to the identity of individuals, but it is also the principal means by which to prepare young persons to become mature adults and responsible citizens. Education should promote values of tolerance and mutual understanding and ought to provide children with the necessary skills to live and thrive in a multi-ethnic and diverse society. In other words, there are two vital

and inter-linked elements to education. It is a key to cultural development and the perpetuation of diverse identities, but it is also central to the larger social integration necessary in any State.

Reflecting the important place that education plays in all societies, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE have elaborated a body of international standards in the sphere of education. When applying the general international standards on minority education to specific situations, many questions arise as to the specific meaning and scope of these standards. For this reason, my office has played a pivotal role in the development of *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*, which are rooted in the international instruments. These Recommendations seek to clarify and reinforce the application of the international standards. As such, they are designed to assist in the formulation and implementation of education policy, while at the same time recognising that the educational opportunities of minorities must be considered in the context of all individuals and communities within a State.

The essential content of all education in a free and open society is directed toward the formation of adults capable of responsible citizenship. Since not all persons share the same views, language or culture, there exist a variety of perspectives on the content, approach and media of education. In so far as world-view, language and culture are inextricably bound to the identity of persons belonging to national minorities, education is of special significance to them. Their views, interests and needs, therefore, must also be accommodated if everyone is to be equally free.

For everyone to enjoy freedom, society confers rights but also duties. This is the effective meaning of integration. Reflecting the two dimensions of education I have outlined above, the Hague Recommendations highlight the right of persons belong to national minorities to maintain their identity and that this right can only be fully realised if they acquire a proper knowledge in and of their mother tongue during the educational process. At the same time, persons belonging to national minorities have a responsibility and interest to integrate into the wider national society through the acquisition of a proper knowledge of the State language. This formula accommodates minority concerns, but avoids isolation and alienation, which may lead to separation.

In securing the right balance between freedom and responsibility, the State plays a vital regulatory role as the institution with recognized authority. Securing the right balance is important because it serves the individual's interest in developing his or her own talents, skills and personality, and because it responds to the diversity which is evident in all countries. At the same time, the State has a vital role in ensuring such a balance to maintain stability, and to promote the long-term development and prosperity of society.

Too often the issue of language is presented in zero-sum terms - as either one language or the other. As I have already noted, the accommodation of minority language education is especially vital because it is essential for maintenance of identity. This need not be achieved at the expense of other languages. The Cimera project is a good example of how different languages can be taught to children in ways that make the educational experience richer for all. This is one means to effect the long-term goal of bringing people together rather than dividing them. This example is important not just for ethnic minorities but also for majorities that may be struggling to maintain or revive their language in the face of more powerful international languages.

In my work to assist States and national minority communities to achieve the goal of integration, as I have made clear, education is a vital tool. Fostering appropriate forms of language instruction, though, is only part of the equation for achieving integration. Education is also a vehicle to promote positive values, common understandings, shared history and culture. It is a means to build the types of societies that we value and in which we would wish to live.

For this reason, schooling, too, should be designed to promote integration rather than segregation. While respecting the rights of minorities and majorities to protect and promote their own identities and cultures, there should also be space for educational institutions that bring together different communities. Once again, I believe that the work of Cimera has significant lessons for all of us. Bilingual and trilingual education in schools that are ethnically mixed can establish the foundations for the

type of integrated society that I am working to establish. This type of schooling can enhance minority cultures and identities and also promote integration.

Additionally, international experience points to the significance of curriculum development based upon multi-cultural education. This means that not only should multicultural education be offered to the minority but also to the majority. State educational authorities should ensure that the general compulsory curriculum includes the teaching of the histories, traditions and cultures of the respective national minorities. Encouraging members of the majority to learn the languages of the national minorities living within the State should contribute to the strengthening of tolerance and multiculturalism within the State. National curricula should narrate the story of the People as a whole, and minorities should count in the design and delivery of education at both the national and the local level.

Integration therefore requires the development of educational policies and materials that are inclusive and which promote diverse identities. To achieve this end, one cannot rely upon materials offered from other countries or that are simply translated from the majority language. Such materials are likely to promote different views, which could run counter to the aim of integration. At the same time, it is important that minority communities with strong cultural ties to neighbouring states are able to participate in and enjoy that wider culture. For this reason, policies that promote integration should also take into account the broad educational needs of some national minorities, including knowledge of different writing scripts.

Who should do this work? In many cases the answer is the central authorities under the authority of the ministry of education. To monitor or guide the design and balance of textbooks, some consultative, advisory or analogous role for members of affected groups may be a necessity. It is important that minorities participate in the making of decisions that affect them. This is good governance.

This may, however, be a difficult task for countries such as Kyrgyzstan, where resources are limited. For this reason, I am proposing to become more involved in the area of education in Kyrgyzstan, to work with the authorities, with national minorities, with international organisations and NGOs to seek to put into practice

some of the elements of the Hague Recommendations. Significant work has already been undertaken in this area by a variety of agencies - as demonstrated by this roundtable - and I am convinced that now is the right time to build upon these foundations. I believe that together much can be achieved to foster greater tolerance and mutual respect and I look forward to working with many of you in the future to achieve the aim of increased integration through education.

Thank you for your attention.