



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Remarks of the OSCE Secretary General
25th anniversary of the Office
of the High Commissioner on National Minorities**

The Hague, 9 November 2018

*Dear Lamberto,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you for the invitation to join you for the 25th anniversary of this great OSCE institution.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands for hosting and actively supporting the HCNM for so many years in the beautiful office on the Prinsessegracht.

Dear Colleagues,

In his first speech as UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres said that his priorities will be prevention, prevention, prevention. I take any opportunity that I can to point out that the OSCE has been practicing prevention for 25 years – particularly through the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. Indeed, the HCNM is not only one of the most effective tools in the OSCE toolbox, it is an internationally-recognized example of how preventive diplomacy can work. My colleagues in other regional organizations are always interested to learn more about the High Commissioner’s work.

“Sustaining peace” is now in fashion. Experts highlight the importance of creating effective institutions.

They stress the need for integrating diversity. The High Commissioner has been focusing on these issues for more than 20 years – and has a track-record and thematic recommendations to prove it.

In short, this was an institution of its time – established during an era when inter-ethnic conflicts threatened the newly found peace of Europe in the early 1990s. But it was also an institution ahead of its time – practising the responsibility to prevent, promoting integration, and highlighting structural prevention precisely in order NOT to issue an early warning.

The formative years of this institution are closely linked with the name of one man – Max van der Stoep. I know that he is highly regarded here in the Netherlands. He is certainly a legend in the OSCE. It is therefore fitting that the award in his name keeps his memory alive, and pays tribute to those who do the type of work that he championed with such conviction.

But the OSCE has also been extremely fortunate with his successors—from Rolf Ekeus and Knut Vollebaek to Astrid Thors and our current High Commissioner. It is great that the three of you have found the time to join Lamberto and the rest of us for today's celebration. Welcome! Your leadership, paired with the professionalism of the great staff that have served here over the years, have ensured the continued success of this institution.

Dear Colleagues,

It is a sad reflection of our times that there has been no reduction in the High Commissioner's workload in the past quarter century. Indeed, the composition of the office today compared to the rather modest beginnings back in the early 1990s demonstrates the evolution of this institution, and the extent to which its support is very much in demand. Through quiet diplomacy and with great political sensitivity, successive High Commissioners have used their good offices to prevent conflict and foster better inter-ethnic relations within and between states.

Therefore, Lamberto, we not only celebrate the Silver Jubilee of this office, but celebrate the outstanding work that you and your team are doing to implement one of the most important and innovative mandates that OSCE participating States have ever adopted.

Your work today – in addition to the original mandate – offers inspiration and guidance on some of the most complex issues facing ALL participating States: like promoting inclusion and tolerance; accommodating and managing diversity; and addressing questions of identity.

Dear Colleagues,

I find it particularly inspiring that the *Max van der Stoel Award* will today go to a group of young people.

When the young embrace the values of tolerance and non-discrimination and begin to challenge institutionalised segregation, their energy and enthusiasm can become contagious. I hope that their example will motivate others so that they may recognize that diversity is not to be feared but to be celebrated.

Indeed, it is the youth of today who have the most to gain from an institution and its recommendations that prevent tensions from developing into conflict that could affect peace, stability and relations between participating States.

So in conclusion, while celebrating the past 25 years of this outstanding institution, and recognizing its current contribution in so many countries and on so many themes, let us wish the High Commissioner – dear Lamberto – and his team all the best with the important work that you do in preventing conflict, promoting social harmony, and sustaining peace.

Thank you.