

Integration and diversity

Applying the same formula across the OSCE area



HCNM WERNER LEUKER

Part philosopher, part political scientist and part psychologist, but mostly a quiet diplomat who stays out of the headlines: that's how Rolf Ekéus describes his role during the past six years as High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). In an interview with Virginie Coulloudon for the *OSCE Magazine* on 28 June, just before his final address to the Permanent Council, the distinguished Swedish diplomat reaffirms his conviction that States can only develop in peace and security if they advocate integration policies that do not deprive minority populations of the richness of their culture and identity. Ambassador Ekéus describes the continuing relevance of the HCNM's work to today's world and explains why an enlarging Europe, with its growing diversity, would do well to follow the principles that it is promoting in the rest of the OSCE area.

Virginie Coulloudon: "Quiet diplomacy" is a hallmark of the High Commissioner's work. Does this serve as a help or a hindrance?

Ambassador Rolf Ekéus: One of the most acute problems we face in dealing with inter-ethnic tensions is that minority issues fall under countries' internal affairs. The 1945 Charter of the United Nations emphasizes territorial integrity and national sovereignty for all. The HCNM post, created by participating States at the Helsinki Summit of the CSCE in 1992, challenges this philosophy because the High Commissioner needs

to operate inside countries.

Quiet diplomacy solves the dilemma. The mandate stipulates that the HCNM is to act in a confidential and discreet manner. Confidentiality means building mutual trust with representatives both of minorities and of the State. I try to put myself in other people's shoes to understand the factors that have shaped their sense of self. My task is to persuade those in power — whether these are a country's highest authorities or its community leaders — to listen to their rational selves, and not to their self-interest, so that they may change their attitudes.

If I were to make public denunciations, I would defeat the whole HCNM idea of reconciliation and living together. So I find it more useful to identify the points of potential conflict and hatred, rather than simply accusing or criticizing.

Of course I can think of instances where it would have been helpful to mobilize public opinion, but trust is so fragile that one cannot use a "name-and-shame-policy" without putting negotiations at risk. You have to be disciplined enough not to do any grandstanding.

Speaking of points of tension, language comes to mind ...

For the majority population, the State language is a key element in building a nation-State. We support authorities in their efforts to promote integration and build a cohesive State through educational policies aimed at improving the ability of every citizen to use and speak the State language.

But we also hold the view that integration should respect diversity — otherwise there is a risk of disintegration and violence. For ethnic groups and minorities, the mother tongue is a sensitive matter. We continuously stress the importance of preserving the full richness of any given minority's identity and of not robbing people of their access to their mother tongue, their culture and their history.

You have also been actively involved in "kin States" issues. Why is this crucial to your work?

Kin States — which are usually neighbouring States — are often the driving force behind ethnic conflicts. For example, a particular State can be tempted to grant

The Hague, 18 July.
Ambassador Rolf Ekéus
(right) and his successor,
Ambassador Knut Vollebaek,
in front of the office of the
High Commissioner on
National Minorities.

Rolf Ekéus headed the Swedish delegation to the CSCE (1988-1992), playing a key role in drafting the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*. He was Ambassador to the United States from 1997 to 2000.

Looking back on decades of bilateral and multilateral diplo-

macy, he considers the period 1991 to 1997, when he was Executive Chairman of UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission on Iraq) as his "most formative years" preparatory to taking up the position of High Commissioner on National Minorities in July 2001. When

leading weapons inspectors, "I learned how to deal with people who had to cope with extremely dangerous and complex situations," he recalls.

"But actually, there's nothing like the HCNM job," he adds. "You go right into the very core of civilization."



HCNM/ERNST LEUKER

citizenship to communities next door with whom they share an ethnic identity as a way of protecting them, but this can cause complications and lead to an international crisis and even to violence.

I believe I have been tough and clear about this: Caring for the well-being of an ethnic group should be the responsibility and obligation of the country where the group lives, and any kin State should respect that State's sovereignty.

To ensure that this norm is upheld in a responsible manner, we help States to draw up bilateral treaties and arrangements based on a system that the HCNM developed. This system has worked wonderfully despite great difficulties.

In co-operation with the Council of Europe, we engaged in a joint Romania-Ukraine monitoring commission to deal with the situation of Romanians in Ukraine and vice versa. We hope it sets an example in Europe. In Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, leaders have shown great maturity by agreeing to co-operate on minority issues under highly sensitive political circumstances.

You have also been concerned about "new minorities" and their right not to be discriminated against. How exactly does this relate to the OSCE area?

For some time now, many western countries in the OSCE area have been experiencing slow and sometimes negative population growth rates. Now they are trying to deal with complex issues related to their new minorities — people who have come mainly for work and economic reasons. Although it is a fact that these migrants have a separate identity, increasingly they also wish to take part in the society they live in.

After 9/11, even Europe's leading intellectuals started giving up on the idea of integration of diversity, calling instead for much stronger assimilation efforts. I am not against this, but I am firmly against anything that is forced. The West should apply the same principle as it is promoting in the rest of the OSCE area: integration, with respect for diversity.

Increasingly, I have been urging caution

and watchfulness regarding discriminatory practices against new migrants in our western societies. The series of highly regarded and politically weighty Recommendations developed under the HCNM's aegis concerning minority rights in such matters as education, language, participation in public life, broadcasting and policing are, to some degree, also applicable to "non-traditional" minorities in the West.

Indeed, growing diversity is becoming a fact of life in an enlarging Europe, and therefore in the OSCE area as a whole. How does this affect the HCNM's agenda?

I started discussions with the EU on bringing minority rights into the European normative framework, and I have been supported by Hungary and Romania. The 1993 Copenhagen Criteria for accession to the EU say that candidate countries should respect minority rights. However, nowhere in the existing EU norm is it mentioned that present EU States also have an obligation to respect minority rights. There is something intellectually wrong with that.

This is why in 2004 I tried hard to have the EU Constitutional Treaty enshrine minority rights as an integral part of human rights. I succeeded with the help of the Irish Presidency. I will appeal to the EU to retain that clause in the new and simplified Reform Treaty.

Your work often took you to Central Asia. What is your preferred approach to addressing inter-ethnic relations in this important part of the OSCE area?

Remember that historically the Fergana Valley [encompassing areas in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan] is a highly complex area; it is where the most violent incidents have taken place.

When some of the leaders asked me to engage in resolving ethnic-related bilateral problems between their States, I took up the new challenge immediately.

We found that initiatives in education would be the best instrument. Education is among the most sensitive issues in inter-ethnic relations. Nothing makes parents more bitter, angry and threatened than when

their children are denied the right to the kind of education they feel they deserve.

In November 2006, after year-long preparations we organized a meeting in Tashkent, where we launched a structured process for upgrading minority education in the region through practical measures. [See page 18.] It was a remarkable breakthrough: Everyone accepted our invitation to sit at the same table. We now work directly with each of the five Central Asian States.

You have also visited Kosovo many times. Was the HCNM able to contribute at all towards the search for a solution to the status issue?

Initially, my predecessor, Max van der Stoep, and I kept ourselves out of the status process; we could not see what else we could bring to the issue. But we kept seeing gaps related to the continuing hatred and suffering there.

In 2004, when violence broke out, I felt we had an obligation to get involved. So we worked with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari on minority rights concerns and helped him with the section of his final report that is devoted to the rights and protection of communities.

Incidentally, the HCNM is the only institution in the international community that has been working on reconciliation between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. We have engaged persons involved in the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to join us and share their expertise. I believe we are making a real difference on the ground. I am convinced that this work will continue under my successor as there is also a conflict prevention element in conciliation.

What do you think should be the main qualities of a High Commissioner?

I would say age is the main one! [laughs]. Seriously, patience and a certain philosophical attitude are key to being effective. One needs to come up with new ideas all the time. And when these are rejected, you come up with others that are slightly modified. Take time to talk and to listen.

I was involved when we decided that the duration of service of OSCE officials should never be too long. I sometimes regretted this on a personal level, but I knew it was an important decision as far as the HCNM institution was concerned. Change brings fresh ideas.

I know that the new High Commissioner will bring new energy to the extremely complex issues of national minorities. I am very proud of HCNM. It is a magnificent institution, absolutely unique in its approach.

Virginie Coulloudon is a Senior Press and Public Information Officer and Deputy Spokesperson in the Secretariat.

Norway's Knut Vollebaek is the new High Commissioner on National Minorities

Knut Vollebaek, a former Foreign Minister of Norway, has been appointed **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**, succeeding Rolf Ekeus of Sweden. Prior to his assuming the post in July for a three-year term, he had been serving as his country's Ambassador to the United States since 2001.

Ambassador Vollebaek is an internationally eminent advocate for human rights, peace and security, and conflict prevention and resolution. These have been constant themes running through his diplomatic career at home and abroad, notably in countries of the former Yugoslavia and in Sri Lanka and Guatemala.

As Norway's Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2000, he was Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE under the Norwegian Chairmanship in 1999, presiding over the summit of OSCE Heads of State in Istanbul.

"It was a time when crises fuelled by inter-ethnic tension erupted with remarkable speed and force in the region," Ambassador Vollebaek says. At the helm of the Organization, he played a key role in seeking a peaceful solution to the Kosovo crisis in the run-up to the war and, later, in assisting in its reconstruction and rehabilitation through the establishment of an OSCE presence.



Belgrade, 10 September 2007. On his first official visit to Serbia since he was appointed High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek meets Rasim Ljajić, President of the Co-ordinating Body for Southern Serbia.

Ambassador Vollebaek's earlier international postings include India, Spain, Zimbabwe and Costa Rica, his base as Norway's Ambassador to the Central American States.

Born in Oslo in 1946, Ambassador Vollebaek holds a master's degree in economics from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen. He also studied political science at the University of Oslo and the University of California in Santa Barbara.



Kyrgyzstan's schools boast a rich mix of ethnic groups.
Photos: HCNM/Vladimir Kiryusha

Central Asia

Upgrading education for a palette of cultures

BY DMITRI ALECHKEVITCH

“Can you imagine waking up one day and finding yourself in the educational system of another State?” exclaims Elmira Imanaliyeva, Kyrgyz Deputy Education and Science Minister. “Right after independence, we had to undertake the demanding task of integrating schools that teach in Kyrgyz with those that teach in minority languages. We have achieved a lot in our efforts to put together a single, manageable and coherent system, but we are still confronting the consequences of the collapse.”

Kyrgyzstan’s educators are not alone. Their counterparts throughout Central Asia are also looking for feasible solutions to the education dilemma they found themselves in after countries in the Soviet Union went their separate ways. Under the former system, minority-language schools in one republic were usually managed by the education authorities of its kin republic — who also provided textbooks, teachers and training. Just about the only items supplied by the republic of residence were the desks and chairs.

However, the challenges posed by the disintegration of the Soviet educational system go far beyond mere technical matters. Education is, after all, widely recognized as a potentially powerful tool for fostering integration in multi-ethnic societies. Only through carefully crafted education policies do children of various ethnic backgrounds gain mastery of the State or official language and learn the nation’s historical narrative while preserving their mother tongue and maintaining their national identity and culture.

“The previous system was primarily oriented towards

offering education for different ethnic groups on a segregated basis,” Ms. Imanaliyeva says. “One cannot build a cohesive society using this approach.”

Since the Kyrgyz language and Kyrgyz literature, history and geography were ignored in the republic’s minority-language schools at that time, “we now have to find ways to introduce these subjects in these same schools, while trying to respect the languages and cultures of our minority communities,” she adds. “It’s not easy to strike a balance, so we — educators in Central Asia — need to build on our joint achievements and learn from each other’s mistakes.”

REBUILDING TIES

As Central Asian countries go about setting up their national education systems, they often encounter identical issues, especially in minority education: What is the best approach to helping teachers improve their skills in teaching minority students their mother tongue? And how does one ensure that students from ethnic communities attain sufficient proficiency in the State language? What elements go into the making of a good literature textbook? How can information technology and the Internet make it easier to teach a language or write a textbook? These are just a few of the host of complex issues that education ministries in Central Asia are looking into.

Besides facing similar tasks, each State in the region boasts a different citizenry. A national minority (for example, ethnic Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan) often shares the same ethnic identity with the majority population of another State (Tajikistan) — a so-called kin State. This opens up shared windows of opportunities to bring the quality of education several notches higher.



Educators Elmira Imanaliyeva of Kyrgyzstan and Mukhtar Aktayev of Kazakhstan: "We need to build on our joint achievements and learn from each other's mistakes."

"It's only natural that Central Asians co-operate with each other in the area of national minority education," the new High Commission on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek says. "Although the protection of minority rights is the responsibility of the State where the ethnic community resides, cross-border co-operation offers great promise for higher academic achievement throughout the region."

PRACTICAL DEEDS

Judging from the supportive stance of the region's key educators regarding a dialogue on national minority education, an initiative of previous High Commissioner Rolf Ekéus, there is reason to be optimistic.

For a start, a ministerial conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, jointly organized by the HCNM and Uzbek authorities in November 2006, explored the "Challenge of Educational Reform in Multi-ethnic Central Asia". Some 70 participants agreed to translate co-operation and mutual assistance from mere words into practical deeds within a more structured setting through four working groups focusing on:

- teacher education and in-service training;
- language teaching;
- curriculum and textbook development; and
- information technology and distance learning

"At the conference in Tashkent, we immediately saw the value of supporting each other," says Mukhtar Aktayev, Deputy Head of the Education Department of South Kazakhstan Region, which has a large Uzbek population. "Several Tajik-language schools in my area of responsibility have had no textbooks or training for teachers since the early 1990s. Recently, our colleagues from Tajikistan conducted training in our Tajik-language schools and provided manuals. Our department and the schools look forward to broadening these sorts of activities with our Tajik friends."

Two out of the four working groups that were formed have met: one on teacher education and in-service training, in Astana, Kazakhstan (February 2007), and another on language teaching, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (June 2007). These have led to a number of concrete measures. Representing every Central Asian country, educators agreed to give each other support by pro-

viding professional development courses for mother-tongue teachers, arranging an exchange of linguistic experts to ensure that teachers' skills are up to date, and examining the benefits of bilingual and multilingual education. The aim is to encourage minority students to attain proficiency in both native and State languages.

SPIRIT OF COLLEGIALITY

The next round of brainstorming on how to tackle national minority education in Central Asia will be held in Tashkent in November this year. It will be devoted to what is arguably the most delicate and pressing issue of all — school curricula and textbooks. Despite the fact that each country has its own standards, its own historical perspective and its own vision of education, the region's educators are hoping that the spirit of collegiality that they have managed to forge among themselves will lead to tangible progress even in the most complex of areas.

"We know each other's problems well, and this gives me every reason to believe that my friends and neighbours will propose ideas that are worth considering by my country, and that the delegates from Kazakhstan can, in turn, suggest specific matters of interest to them," Mr. Aktayev says. "We all share one ultimate goal: to make high-quality education available to children of all ethnic backgrounds."

Dmitri Alechkevitch is the Political Adviser to the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities.



Central Asian educators: "We know each other's problems well."