



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

**Max van der Stoep**

at the OSCE Review Conference

**Vienna, 4 November 1996**

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Mr Chairman,

I am grateful for this opportunity, at the very outset of the review meeting, to report about my activities to the representatives of the participating states. It gives me the possibility to share with you some of the conclusions I have drawn after almost four years as OSCE High Commissioner. In doing so, I will not go into great detail about the various situations in which I am involved, as this would take up too much of your time. Also, I believe that my regular

reports to the Permanent Council on my activities have provided your Governments with ample information, which I do not need to repeat at this occasion. Furthermore, the recommendations I have made in the past and the reactions to these recommendations by the various states can function, if need be, as reference material.

This brings me to the first point I would like to bring to your attention. At the occasion of my reports to the Permanent Council, I am always very grateful for the strong and continued support my activities receive from so many of its members. This support is indispensable for the continuation of these activities, as it is proof of the commitment of the OSCE community to conflict prevention in the field of minorities. Without this commitment, the actions of the High Commissioner would not amount to much more than the efforts of one man operating in isolation and would therefore probably be of very little significance. Fortunately, the commitment is always put in evidence by the Permanent Council and is mirrored by another essential element for my activities: the cooperation from the states and all the parties involved in the various situations in which I am active. Needless to say that my efforts would be futile without this cooperation. I would therefore very much like to use this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the participating States for their continued support and for the cooperation I have received in the past. From my part, I would also like to express the willingness to continue in the same spirit of cooperation in the future.

Since I became High Commissioner nearly four years ago, I got involved in minority questions in the following OSCE countries, in alphabetical order, in Albania, Croatia, Estonia, the FYR of Macedonia, Hungary, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The intensity with which I follow the different situations varies with time. For a certain period of time I might devote more attention to one or a number of these countries, because it is my view that certain questions are particularly acute, but this does not imply that I consider the other situations as less important or resolved. On the contrary, it is my firm belief that all these countries face especially difficult and complicated minority issues, which need continued attention by the OSCE community. As a community of values, the OSCE has the obligation to offer assistance to all of its members who are in the process of applying the full scope of these common values to their societies, which often are going through a difficult period of transformation. It goes without saying that such a transformation is not completed over night. Nor, for that matter, are there quick fixes or easy solutions for related minority questions. In other words, even if on occasion a number of burning issues might find a solution, the fundamental problems often remain and need prolonged attention. The High Commissioner will therefore have to continue his activities in the situations he is involved in.

By the way, the same reasoning, in my view, applies to the activities of the OSCE missions. These might also on occasion come to the conclusion that one or a number of the problems they were mandated to tackle have been resolved, but this in no way means that they have outlived their usefulness as organs of cooperation with the country concerned. On the contrary, their presence is proof of the continued solidarity of the OSCE community at large.

When studying minority issues, one cannot fail to note the intense interest with which the kin state almost invariably follows the fate of the related minority on the other side of the border. This often leads to an intensive dialogue between the kin state and the state where the minority lives about the duty of a state to respect and foster the identity of a minority on the one hand and the duty of persons belonging to a national minority to be loyal to the state on the other. Such a dialogue is sometimes not free of tensions, but can also bring positive results. Perhaps you will allow me to mention but one example. In the Preamble of the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia, these two countries have laid down a number of important principles regarding the position of minorities. They agree that they, and I quote, "feel responsibility for granting protection to and promoting preservation and deepening of the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of the minorities living within their respective territories", and they recognize that "persons belonging to national minorities form an integral part of the society and the State of the Contracting Party on whose territory they live", unquote. I attach great importance to this because it stresses the duty of the State to protect and even to promote the preservation and the deepening of the identity of the minority, while at the same time rejecting the notion that the minority can only maintain its identity by isolating itself as much as possible from the society surrounding it. It is my firm belief that harmonious inter-ethnic relations can develop only on this basis. The fact that this is now laid down in a Treaty between two States is a positive development.

Fortunately, I could report signs of progress in several other situations I am following. Excessive nationalism remains the main obstacle standing in the way of stable inter-ethnic relations.

Mr Chairman,

With your permission, I would now like to turn to a number of relatively new developments in my activities. As I have pointed out at several earlier occasions, I have come more and more to the conclusion that we should devote more

attention to the root-causes of ethnic tensions. Conflicts between different groups are often the result of difficulties which, in essence, are not of an inter-ethnic nature. Sometimes a certain population group experiences particular economic or social hardship, which finds its origin in for instance a political or economic transformation process. Due to their specific situation, it is possible, in certain cases, that minorities have more to suffer from hardship than the majority population. Even if this is not intentional, it can easily be perceived as the result of discrimination.

Another example is that sometimes minorities feel unhappy because they do not get what they want in the cultural or educational fields. Often, this is not the result of unwillingness of the Government concerned: it is more a question of the Government having little money to spend in these fields, for majority and minorities alike. A final example are the practical difficulties persons belonging to national minorities sometimes experience in their efforts to integrate into a specific society. These difficulties can be caused by linguistic hurdles, or the lack of information. Relatively minor problems can, if not tackled, develop into major sources of tension.

That is why I have decided to become increasingly involved in the development of contacts and concrete projects to look into and possibly tackle the root causes of ethnic tensions. The first example I would like to mention lies within the field of education. It is clear that education is an extremely important element for the preservation and the deepening of the identity of persons belonging to national minority. I came to the conclusion that it would be useful to make a study of the situation of minority education in the OSCE community. I have asked the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, which works closely with my office, to organize a Conference on Minority Education with the participation of the Ministers of Education of a great number of OSCE States, literally ranging from Vancouver to Vladivostok. This conference will take place here in Vienna, later this month.

A related project will be the sending of a questionnaire on minority education to all participating states. This will correspond with the wish expressed by a number of countries that comparative studies would be made on the situation of minorities in OSCE states.

Other projects in the educational field for which I have taken the initiative are support for the improvement of minority education, including the training of teachers and the publication of school books. These projects will be developed in close cooperation with the authorities, inter alia, in Albania, the FYR of Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan and

Ukraine.

Another area of increased activity is the promotion of dialogue involving representatives of the authorities and of minorities. A number of round tables were or will shortly be organized concerning inter alia Croatia, in particular with regard to questions arising when the temporary UNTAES administration of Eastern Slavonia, Western Sirmium and Baranja has come to an end; Estonia, regarding the dialogue between representatives of the authorities and of the Russian speaking population; Kazakstan, in particular with regard to the inter-ethnic situation in the North of the country and the FYR of Macedonia, concerning inter-ethnic relations in that country. During these round tables representatives from all sides have the opportunity to freely express their expectations and concerns, thus contributing to a better exchange of information. My hope is that this could help in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust. In any case it can help to dispell any misunderstandings there might be due to a mere lack of contacts.

Another type of projects I would like to mention is in the field of information. For example, in Latvia and Estonia we came to the conclusion, which is shared by the authorities, that there is a clear need for more information about the requirements for obtaining Latvian and Estonian citizenship. I have asked the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations to help the publication of an information booklet in both the State language and Russian about these requirements.

The initiatives I mentioned so far are only possible thanks to the generous financial contributions of a number of Participating States, as well as other donors such as international organizations and ngo's. I do believe that this money is well spent, because with relatively modest amounts possible causes of serious tensions can be removed and inter-ethnic harmony promoted. In other words, these are areas in which relatively small investments can yield important conflict prevention results.

There is one concrete situation to which I would like to draw your special attention and for which somewhat higher financial contributions would be necessary. I am talking about the position of the Tatar population in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Ukraine. The Tatars, and other small population groups who have returned from their deportation to Central Asia, are faced with considerable difficulties in trying to build an existence for themselves and their families. There are very few jobs, almost no housing and few opportunities for education. If these problems are not tackled, Tatar discontent might have a destabilizing effect. But to remedy the situation, large investments are

needed. Here, the international community should be aware of its responsibility and step in with considerable financial means. So far, it has been difficult to persuade sufficient potential donors about this necessity.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, perhaps you will allow me now to make a few remarks of a general nature about my activities. Earlier I mentioned the importance of support and cooperation of the participating States. I would like to add that the cooperation with other OSCE institutions is also of primordial importance. During my activities in the various countries, I always try to cooperate closely with the OSCE Missions. I see our roles as mutually supportive and reinforcing. However, this is only effective if High Commissioner and Missions are always fully informed of the positions they take in issues of mutual concern, in order to avoid contradicting messages. To achieve this, coordination is needed. I would like to reiterate that from my part I will do my best to keep the missions informed. It goes without saying that the Chairman-in-Office and the Secretary General, who has the important task of coordinating the activities of the other OSCE institutions, are always fully informed of my activities.

At a number of occasions the matter was raised if the High Commissioner's mandate needed to be changed. I am very grateful to all those who have developed ideas for changes of my mandate, with the intention of strengthening my position. But I would rather like to approach this matter from the following, pragmatic angle. The mandate had provided me, in the last almost four years, with adequate parameters within which I can operate and a degree of flexibility which enables me to develop new activities, if this is deemed necessary. I believe this will remain the case in the future, so the following expression comes to mind: "if it ain't broken, don't fix it." Looking back at the past years, I believe the OSCE has made considerable progress in conflict prevention, while a lot still remains to be done. We must have an open eye for longer-term developments with a view to anticipating future crises and not only pay attention to already existing conflicts. The success of preventive diplomacy ultimately depends on the concrete political and other support States are prepared to invest in it.

Thank you, Mr Chairman