



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

## **KEYNOTE SPEECH**

address by  
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to the  
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**and International Engagement: Kosovo"**

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Mrs. Chairperson,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may be aware, the institution of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities is now twelve years old. Its unique mandate of early action and early warning has allowed the OSCE over past years to develop a niche in terms of preventing inter-ethnic conflicts and assisting governments to implement their commitments relating to national minorities. We can, however, not rest on our laurels. There are plenty of majority-minority relations within the OSCE area that I believe warrant further attention and engagement. A number of themes also deserve further exploration and clarification. And, there is some unfinished business.

Kosovo has been the focus of HCNM attention for many years, even before the 1999 conflict. It has also served as a negative example by illustrating the consequences of neglecting majority-minority relations, when they lead to escalation of tensions and an open conflict. My predecessor and I have faced numerous problems in Kosovo starting with the Milosevic regime blocking any direct engagement. There is also the problem of the title of the institution I represent, which has led to reluctance on the part of the two main ethnic groups to become engaged in dialogue since neither Albanians nor Serbs want to be considered a minority in Kosovo. It would have been easier if I had been the “High Commissioner for Inter-Ethnic Relations”. At the same time, Kosovo and its spill-over effects has been very much present in my engagement in the region, first of all in South Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

So what are the lessons of my mandate for Kosovo? My experience has underlined that the key to conflict prevention in the longer term is to put in place a series of measures aimed at integration of all communities into a genuinely multi-ethnic society, where all groups live together in a society which respects all cultural traditions. In order to avoid or reduce tensions arising from minority issues, States should promote the integration of persons belonging to national minorities, whilst at the same time fully respecting their right to maintain their identity: namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage. States should encourage and support the participation of persons belonging to minorities in all aspects of life, including public and political life as well as economic and social life. Such measures should include steps to ensure equitable representation of the minority in legislative, judicial and executive branches of government, at both central and local levels. In

the field of education and culture, the education system should fully respect the right of minorities to maintain their own ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. It should also equip them with the skills (including linguistic skills in the State language) needed to participate effectively in the life of the State; and it should promote interethnic understanding through contacts between children from minorities and majorities and through curricula, which fully reflect the diversity of the State. How do the lessons learned elsewhere apply in the particular circumstances of Kosovo?

Kosovo's Serbs are not confined to the north of the Ibar River, as most of them are still spread throughout the whole territory of Kosovo in what could be called enclaves. They live in a virtually separate world. They are in principle able to exercise most of their cultural, educational and linguistic rights and can participate in public and political life of Kosovo but in practice they are not prepared to make full use of the existing instruments and prefer parallel structures. One should not forget that it was this system which in the past helped many ethnic Serbs to stay in Kosovo. In addition, the parallel services they enjoy are often of better quality than those provided to the rest of Kosovo's inhabitants. One should also not forget that there is a certain "tradition" of parallel structures in Kosovo since in the past Albanians also created them. Of course the first priority of all, is for the international community to ensure the peaceful existence of the two communities, and by providing security, freedom of movement and the right to return, which still seem to be the most pressing needs for Serbs in Kosovo. But the issue of parallel structures has to be addressed since maintaining this situation in the long term will not resolve the underlying tensions.

There is no doubt that some progress has been achieved in the last five years; also with regard to security, freedom of movement and the establishment of direct contacts between communities. In March 2004, however, the upsurge of violence caused a great deal of damage and many positive developments have been virtually reversed. Everything possible has to be done in the future to avoid similar incidents, especially since some radicals may seek a repetition of events in order to perpetuate the same level of instability, tension and fear, thus discouraging communities willing to return or forcing others to leave Kosovo. Keeping the peace is essential but so is making a start on the process of reconciliation and integration into a multi-ethnic society, without which the risk of future conflict will never be eliminated.

One has to be realistic, however. A truly multi-ethnic society in Kosovo has never really existed and is still openly challenged by both main communities. It should,

nevertheless, remain a long-term strategic goal. Building multi-ethnic societies requires patience, persistence and quite often a quiet approach. In the short-term perspective, living side by side is perhaps the best that can be achieved, since even peaceful coexistence seems to be rather remote. Inter-ethnic dialogue, however, is still possible. It should focus on the acceptance of differences and of common goals.

The situation in Kosovo is unique in many ways. But so are all the other situations I deal with. What they do have in common is the need for integration while respecting human rights and the key building blocks of a policy to promote it. Certain recommendations can therefore be made based on experience acquired in other countries.

First of all, I would like to highlight the issue of education because it is so essential to the sense of dignity and equal opportunity that is fundamental to integrating diversity in multi-ethnic and multilingual societies. At the same time the population of Kosovo is one of the youngest in Europe, almost 50% of Kosovo's inhabitants are under 21. It is well documented that most of the participants in the March riots were young people, often teenagers, who were seemingly manipulated by adults.

Whatever the future status of Kosovo, we have to create conditions which will promote the future integration of all ethnic groups. Education is the key in this regard. Efforts should start with resuming the teaching of languages belonging to other ethnic groups. Currently there has been no teaching of the Serbian language in Albanian-language schools in Kosovo and no courses in the Albanian language in Serbian schools. Knowledge of the Albanian and/or Serbian languages among the majority of Bosniacs (Bosnian Muslims), Gorani, Roma and Turks is insufficient. As a result, there is a whole generation of young Albanians that does not speak Serbian and that has been fuelled with damaging prejudices against the Serbs. The very same situation applies to ethnic Serbs with regard to Albanians and the Albanian language. A determined effort to tackle this problem is needed now, starting with the earliest stages of schooling, if Kosovo is to develop into a truly multi-ethnic society and is to avoid becoming an area inhabited by hostile communities, looking to the past rather than the future. The best way forward in my view would be the gradual and carefully planned and managed introduction of an appropriate form of multilingual education in which children of all communities will study together, and by learning together come to understand each other and avoid the dangers of stereotyping.

My mandate as the High Commissioner on National Minorities requires me to look at conflict prevention “in the longest possible term” and education is crucial because it is during

the educational process that the attitudes of the next generation to different groups within the community are formed. It is my firm conviction that true reconciliation and the avoidance of tensions which could lead to conflict need to be based on genuine integration of all groups within a multi-ethnic society that values the contribution of all. It follows that the curriculum for all students should reflect the richness and diversity of the society as a whole, including the contribution of all ethnic groups. This is particularly important in subjects like history and literature. It points to the need for a careful review of the curriculum for these subjects, which should take full account of the position of all ethnic groups and involve them in its formulation. My experience in a number of other OSCE member States has shown that the association of independent foreign experts with such work can also be particularly beneficial.

University education has often been the source of tensions, and universities the centre of radicalism or even secessionism. It does not necessarily have to be like this. The South-East European University, which the High Commissioner on National Minorities launched in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2001, offers positive proof that coexistence between various ethnic groups for the sake of a better future is possible. I am not saying that this could apply immediately in Kosovo. Replication is impossible, since each situation is unique and requires a different approach. However, the example of the SEE University could provide a good basis for further discussion on the application of multi-ethnicity and multilingualism in higher education. Further efforts aimed at reforms are required to make Pristina University an academically sustainable institution for the future.

Employment of persons belonging to minorities in public service, including the police service and the judicial system, is a vital factor in establishing confidence in State institutions. Police forces in particular play a special role in this regard. It is the statutory duty of police authorities to promote diversity within their forces. While significant progress has been achieved on this front, the international community should make additional efforts in the field of community policing.

Deepening economic and social disparities, lack of the rule of law, weak governance, corruption, widespread poverty and high unemployment contribute to growing frustration and are often sources of tension. They are also key factors in generating inter-ethnic unrest. Competition for resources and goods in the economic field – especially jobs – is a normal feature of free-market democracies. Problems arise when persons find or even perceive themselves excluded or unable to compete on a level playing-field. In Kosovo there is a growing group of young people without any career perspectives, once again underlining the

importance of education. On the other hand, good governance, which ensures the involvement of all communities in decisions affecting them and aims at providing equal life chances for all members of society and achieving economic reforms, also needs to be given priority attention in this context.

Decentralisation may be a useful tool to address many minority concerns. Experience shows that decentralising power with regard to matters which do not need to be decided centrally can strengthen the State and the loyalty of all to it. Local government can usually deal more effectively with local problems and there is a trend among some governments to broaden the scope of issues that can be administered at local or regional levels without in any way implying territorial autonomy. The key is to strike a balance between different levels of government. Finding the right balance in Kosovo will not be straightforward but is a crucial element in a plan for a lasting solution to the problems of the region. There is no specific model that should be followed, but there is certainly one to be avoided. That is the so-called ethnically pure nation-state. The nation-state is a myth and efforts to create such entities almost inevitably lead to violence, population displacement and human-rights abuses. Since multi-ethnic States are the norm, whatever form self-government may take it should accommodate ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism. After all, we do not live in isolated ethnically pure communities. Even if we did, we would have to interact with our neighbours – and the rest of the world – who would not necessarily share ties of kinship, language, culture and so on. Therefore, in drawing the borders of municipalities, purely ethnically based solutions should be avoided. As should any attempt to use decentralisation plans as instruments for achieving secession. Against this background, the international community should resolutely commit itself to opposing the partition of Kosovo as part of any resolution of final status. One should not forget that any separation would mean the defeat of the idea of integration.

Finally, the international community cannot impose the steps I have suggested with regard to education, good governance and decentralisation: internal initiatives and ownership are needed. Internationally organized training courses, round tables and seminars can produce only limited effects. What should not be forgotten is the fact that a permanent international presence in the region only increases dependence, turning the region into a de facto protectorate. Progressive delegation of responsibility is required and it is good that this process has already started. Ultimately, the fate of the region lies in the hands of its own people. There is a clear need to intensify dialogue with Belgrade. The local Serbs should,

however, realize that their future is in Kosovo and they should make full use of existing institutions.

Thank you.