



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

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**OPENING ADDRESS**

by

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to

the HCNM-Kazakhstan Justice Ministry seminar

**"Legislating for Social Integration in Multi-ethnic Societies"**

Check Against Delivery!

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to return to Kazakhstan. Traditionally, your country has supported the High Commissioner on National Minorities. I am very encouraged by the strong dedication to promoting inter-ethnic harmony that I find here. I believe that together Kazakhstan and the HCNM can bring inter-ethnic issues in the OSCE context to the fore.

As some of you know, the mission statement of the HCNM is integration respecting diversity. It has two sides: rights and responsibilities. And it encompasses two obligations: not to assimilate and not to separate.

It is inherent in human beings to seek to be distinctive. People wear different clothes, drive different cars. We listen to different music. We all read different books. Tastes differ.

Almost by force of nature we tend to reject and rebel against moves to impose uniformity.

But it would be impossible to build our societies on the Brownian motion principle of totally random movement and aspirations of individuals. Interaction and a sense of common purpose are essential if we are to build a common home.

The same logic applies to inter-ethnic relations. The international community instituted an impressive catalogue of minority rights in the 1990s. These rights emerged because policymakers realized that it is pointless and counterproductive to stifle diversity, that diversity is unlikely to fade away under pressure, and that forced assimilation causes resentment, breeds discontent and, ultimately, leads to overt or open conflict.

What do we mean by forced assimilation? This is when, for example, minorities are denied the right to have schools with instruction in their mother tongue. Forced assimilation also means that minority languages cannot be used even in places of compact settlement. Forced assimilation also implies that minorities are squeezed out of the civil service, the judiciary and the police.

The other extreme is separation. When we speak of separation, we refer to a situation when communities living in one country fail to interact. In such countries, ethnic communities do not speak each other's languages; they watch different TV channels; they take no interest in each other's culture.

Integration respecting diversity holds the answer for multi-ethnic societies. It involves a balance of rights and responsibilities on both sides. On the one hand, the State respects the right of the minorities to maintain their identity, for example by facilitating education and broadcasting in the language of the minority and by encouraging their participation in public life. On the other hand, members of the minority give their allegiance to the State, pursue their objectives through their participation in the public life of the State and refrain from challenging the territorial integrity of the State.

The exact nature of the measures that constitute integration will vary from society to society. A different balance will be appropriate in each case. A single model of integration does not exist – be it a British model, a Slovak model or a Kazakh model. It would be a serious mistake to promote a Procrustean, one-size-fits-all vision of integration. Furthermore, you cannot set a model in stone. Inter-ethnic relations are not static. As our societies develop, new issues surface, while older problems sink from view.

Nonetheless, some form of integration, avoiding the extremes of forced assimilation on the one hand and separatism on the other is likely to be the best way to promote social cohesion and reduce the risk of conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This may all sound rather abstract and far removed from our daily lives. What would integration mean in practice, for example, in Kazakhstan?

I am a firm believer that integration starts in school. It is in school that children from various ethnic backgrounds meet and learn to respect differences. In fact, many friendships that last a lifetime are born while at school, second and third languages are mastered here and foreign cultures become

appreciated. While the value of integrated schooling is widely accepted, separation along ethnic lines in secondary education is a feature of education systems in many OSCE participating States.

This is also the case in Kazakhstan. Let me be clear: this is not the fault of the Government of Kazakhstan. You inherited this system from the Soviet Union. The end product of segregation in education is young people living in two, three or perhaps five parallel worlds when they leave school. Kazakhs do not master Russian well. Russians are weak in Kazakh. And beyond the linguistic implications, children rarely immerse themselves in each other's culture, traditions and ways of looking at the outside world.

This is why I wholeheartedly support President Nazarbayev's idea of trilingualism. I believe it is an excellent way of bringing communities together and tackling the linguistic legacy of the Soviet era. It is the right strategy to weave the multicultural assets of the country together.

Trilingual education has now been introduced in pilot schools throughout the country. It is important, however, not to forget about the Uzbek-, Uighur- and Tajik-language schools.

Multilingual education must embrace these communities too. They must feel part of a nationwide effort to study languages. I would, however, caution against a "Big Bang" approach. Otherwise, these communities might feel that multilingualism is assimilation through the back door.

While multilingualism is a solution, we must remember the key role that mother-tongue education plays in the maintenance and development of minority identity. I often hear how majority representatives take pride in the ever-increasing number of minority children being sent to majority-language schools. This is presented as a success story in integration.

Such a tendency may of course signal the wish of minority communities to voluntarily assimilate. This is by no means forbidden under international law. But more often than not, it signifies some form of discrimination.

If the child is placed in a school environment where a language different to the mother tongue of the child prevails, it can impair intellectual and psychological development by creating a sense of

inferiority and detrimentally affect academic achievements. As a result, the child often lacks a command of both the native language and the State language to a degree that hampers any future successful academic or professional career. It is therefore essential that Kazakhstan preserves its record of providing mother-tongue education in Russian, Uzbek, Uighur and other languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Successful management of languages is another prerequisite for building a successful multi-ethnic State. The language rights and needs of different communities – majority and minority – can and should be met in a harmonious way. Language must be viewed as a means of enhancing communication between different communities rather than as a way of identifying divisions.

The State language has a vital role to play in promoting integration. It provides all citizens, whatever their ethnic background, with the means to communicate with each other and with the authorities. I therefore welcome steps to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to learn and to use the State language. However, measures to enhance the State language should not be undertaken at the expense of other languages spoken in the country or the rights of individuals to use and develop those languages. This is clearly enshrined in international standards.

Again, there are responsibilities and rights on both sides. The minority should be prepared to learn and to use the language or languages endorsed by the State. At the same time, the majority must accept the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

I know that the language issue is a painful one for many people in Kazakhstan. Kazakh was degraded to village-language status in the Soviet Union. It is fitting that it now takes its rightful place in Kazakh society.

At the same time, this process of linguistic revival should not be intimidating for minorities. They need to be told clearly that they are at liberty to use their language in hospital, in their local municipality or in running their businesses. Civil servants from minority backgrounds need to be reassured that they will not lose their jobs because of a lack of competency in Kazakh. Such statements or policies will help shape a national consensus on the promotion of the Kazakh language.

I have a feeling that this consensus is emerging in Kazakhstan. Non-Kazakhs are prepared to master Kazakh. The State is also allocating money to provide free language classes. Nevertheless, change does not happen overnight. Patience is required on the part of pro-Kazakh groups and a concerted effort on the part of minorities. Punitive measures will only deepen the linguistic divide.

Good will on both sides and a bit of creativity can help overcome problems.

Take broadcasting for example. The role of the national mass media is especially crucial. Public service broadcasting in national minority languages can promote loyalty to the State by ensuring that all ethnic communities are able to access domestically produced information and news. This will prevent a situation in which some ethnic groups have no alternative but to resort to external media sources. Technological advances – such as the use of subtitling – can be used to facilitate the use of multiple languages in the field of media at little extra cost.

I am happy to see that innovative ideas in minority-language broadcasting are taking root in your country. President Nazarbayev has endorsed my recommendations to use subtitling in news broadcasting. The benefits of subtitling extend beyond the information field. By listening to Kazakh-language news with Russian subtitles, minorities will learn Kazakh more quickly; while Russian-language news with Kazakh subtitles will improve Russian-language proficiency among the majority – in line with the Government's official policy of trilingualism.

I would also encourage the authorities to offer news in Uzbek and Uighur – perhaps one news bulletin per day. It is much better if your citizens from Uzbek and Uighur backgrounds watch news bulletins produced in Kazakhstan rather than programmes produced abroad with their particular and sometimes biased view on the news.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last week I was in Lund, Sweden, where we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lund Recommendations on Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life. At the anniversary seminar several participants rightly asserted that minority identity is more than a folk song or a lively

dance in colourful traditional costume.

There is a powerful case for giving minorities a voice in governing multi-ethnic States. Just like everybody else, minorities want to be heard; be listened to. Most of them want to feel full-fledged citizens of the State where they live. They want to contribute to and to take part in the life of the country. An able and efficient government or parliament must include representatives of both the majority and the minority.

If minority representatives are handpicked for their loyalty and for their silence on minority problems, their “selections” would not meet the true requirements for electing legitimate representatives of the minority. As well intended as they may be, such moves further alienate minority groups, making them either cynical or politically passive or, sometimes, even more confrontational.

As I have said on numerous occasions, I warmly welcome the President’s idea of boosting minority representation in the parliament. It is a wise, timely and sensible suggestion. I hope the authorities will also look into minority representation at regional and local level too, in *maslikhats* and *akimats*.

At the same time, I believe there is considerable room for improvement in the current system of nine reserved seats. First and foremost, minorities need to be allowed to elect their own representatives in a direct vote. Secondly, there has to be more than one candidate contesting each of the nine seats. Thirdly and most importantly, mainstream political parties have to be encouraged to field minority candidates in individual constituencies and to give them prominence on party lists. This is the best solution in the long run.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Next year is special for both Kazakhstan and the OSCE. Your country will take the helm of the largest security organization in the world. For the OSCE, Kazakhstan will be the first Asian and the first post-Soviet Chair-in-Office. Kazakhstan will also be the largest country – territorially speaking – to lead the OSCE.

In other words, there are many reasons to look forward with anticipation to 2010. What makes every

Chairmanship special is its ability to set the agenda and capture the mood and interests inside the diverse OSCE family.

I know that energy is one priority, and rightly so. I also hear that inter-ethnic and inter-religious concord will be another. I welcome this because few actors seem to pay enough attention to inter-ethnic issues these days. Kazakhstan has the potential in this particular field not just to lead but to lead by example.

Your country's initiatives in broadcasting, education and participation are commendable. However, do not be complacent. Promoting inter-ethnic harmony is always "work in progress" in today's globalized societies. As High Commissioner, I am keen to help you perfect your domestic ideas and to work with your country on preventing ethnic conflict in the wider OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.