



HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES

# The education solution

## Fostering harmony in diversity

I was delighted by the decision of the 2004 Bulgarian Chairmanship to assign priority to education on the OSCE agenda. As “an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage”, my job is to tackle the underlying causes of tension between minorities and majorities. Perhaps the most effective means of achieving this is by investing in educational policies and practices designed to meet the special needs and concerns of both.

**BY ROLF EKÉUS**

**T**he problems that can arise in inter-ethnic relations vary from case to case. However, I have found that education-related issues crop up again and again. This is also why the previous High Commissioner on National Minorities decided to develop practical and coherent guidelines that would help legislators, policy-makers, representatives of minority groups and NGO leaders to initiate and implement suitable educational policies in line with international standards.

This decision led a group of reputable independent experts under the auspices of the then High Commissioner, Max van der Stoep, to draw up the 1996 Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities.

The Recommendations offer education stakeholders a set of measures and principles designed to strengthen inter-ethnic harmony and social cohesion. Good practices in minority education at different school levels, including curriculum development, are explained simply and succinctly.

### LANGUAGE

The language issue has been at the forefront of political debate in a number of OSCE participating States and is at the heart of most of the ethnic-related situations I am engaged in. This is hardly surprising. Language often defines a national minority and underpins the right of its members to maintain and develop their own identity.

The Hague Recommendations point out that this right can be pursued more readily if members of minorities acquire a proper

An integrated school in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
Photos on pages 20, 21, 22 and 23:  
OSCE/Vladimir Kiriushin

knowledge of their mother tongue during the educational process, starting in early childhood. At the same time, they have a responsibility to become integrated into the fabric of national life, for example, by learning the State language.

A typical destabilizing situation may arise when authorities seek to spread the use of the State language as a tool to enhance nationhood and when a powerful minority, compelled to accept the linguistic dominance of the majority, perceives it as an attempt to downgrade the group's language.

Badly thought-out reforms in language education can have a negative domino effect on ethnic communities, and, as a result, on the country as a whole. If students from a national minority are unable to gain admission to institutions of higher learning, the group's pool of qualified labour shrinks and its ability to compete in the labour market is reduced.

Time and time again, analysts warn that joblessness and aimlessness among the young in marginalized societies create a fertile ground for hatred, intolerance and radical ideologies. And the lack of qualified



OSCE/LADIMIR KRIUSHIN

people reduces the group's opportunities to take part in the State's political, as well as economic, life.

One very practical and effective way to ensure that the needed linguistic skills of minorities are properly honed is through multilingual education — teaching part of the curriculum in a second or third language.

"The South East European University has met, indeed exceeded, its stated aims of contributing significantly to the solution of the problem of higher education in the Albanian language, providing a carefully chosen range of teaching programmes in a broad international and European perspective and ensuring a multicultural approach to teaching. The University has already shown national and regional leadership in its design of curricula, adoption of small group teaching and active learning modes, and in the rapid creation of an attractive greenfield campus with highly functional teaching spaces appropriate to its preferred modes of teaching and learning."

*Report of an OECD review, "Improving access and opportunity: Higher education in transition in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", 2004*

**South East European University.** An internationally acclaimed initiative of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the South East European University (SEE U) in Tetovo, has only just celebrated its third anniversary in late 2004, but it has already made a name for itself as a leader in the development of modern higher education in the Balkans.

The University's high academic standards are not its only drawing power. It is also a showcase for inter-ethnic integration and co-operation. It is committed to Albanian language and culture, but almost 25 per cent of the student population are non-Albanians. It has adopted a European and international orientation, with courses conducted in Albanian, Macedonian and English.

In 2000-2001, High Commissioner van der Stoep was at the forefront of the international effort to raise funds for the multilingual academic institution. Today, it is fully autonomous, with both the first and the current High Commissioners on the University's Board.

In 2005, the first freshmen who were admitted to the University in October 2001 will obtain their bachelor's degrees, thus realizing the concept behind its creation — to address the shortage of Macedonian-Albanian graduates in the country's universities.

The early impact of the SEE University has been impressive: The overall percentage of Albanians in the country's university student population has grown from an estimated 5 per cent to more than 12 per cent, with a current enrolment of more than 5,000 students.



SEE U



SEE U

**Transition Year Programme.** The High Commissioner on National Minorities introduced the Transition Year Programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM) in 1997 with the support of the Government of the Netherlands.

The Programme's aim is to boost ethnic Albanians' chances of admission into the state universities in Skopje and Bitola. Saturday classes in the Macedonian language, which are conducted by teams of Albanian and Macedonian instructors, have been growing in popularity. In the spring of 2003, more than 80 per cent of the 1,200 students who enrolled in the lessons passed the university entrance examinations.

A group of project participants also produced a handbook for teaching Macedonian to non-Macedonian speakers.

"The Transition Year Programme provides the ethnic Albanian community with a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the right to education. The quality of applicants to state universities has improved considerably, especially in mathematics, biology, medicine and the natural sciences. The Programme also brings together Albanian and Macedonian teachers and students in partnership, making its impact felt far beyond the education sector."

*Bajram Pollozhani*

*Project Director, Transition Year Programme*



OSCE/VLADIMIR KIRUSHIN

"The project on the Working Group is a pioneering initiative in Central Asia. Authorities are working hand in hand with representatives of ethnic groups on education issues. I look forward to the practical implementation of the recommendations in our final report, especially in the context of the ongoing reform of Kyrgyzstan's education standards, curricula and textbooks."

*Gaisha Ibragimova, Chairperson of Working Group on Integration through Education in Kyrgyzstan*

## PARTICIPATION

Policies to meet the needs of national minorities are likely to be more relevant and acceptable if minority members are involved in the decision-making process. Inclusion in decision-making sends an important signal of the majority's openness for dialogue and accommodation of minority interests. Frequently, however, ethnic communities are not adequately represented in public bodies and institutions precisely because of the shortage of educated minority members.

Kyrgyzstan has reason to be proud of its Working Group on Integration through Education as a model of minority involvement in decision-making. Created by President Askar Akaev in 2003 at my recommendation, it reflects the rich tapestry of Kyrgyz society.

Fact-finding trips all across Kyrgyzstan enabled members to talk to local authorities and to representatives of national minority communities,



OSCE/VLADIMIR KIRUSHIN

NGOs, teachers and parents. The Working Group gathered and analysed views on promoting tolerance and understanding among ethnic groups through curriculum development, language teaching, teacher training, multilingual education and special teaching aids.

Drawing on international norms and best practices, the Working Group issued a report with ambitious but practical recommendations aimed at fostering social integration and equality. President Akaev has said that the report would "open up a new phase in the ethnic policy of Kyrgyzstan".



### TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM

The teaching of languages is a central element in multicultural education, but it is not the be-all and the end-all. I have always insisted on a broader, more comprehensive approach — one that ensures that the curriculum covers the history, culture and traditions of both the national majority *and* the State's main ethnic communities.

Textbooks that ignore diversity or worse, present it as a threat to be feared and eliminated, serve to fuel intolerance, xenophobia and ethnic stereotyping — an explosive recipe for conflict and instability within the State.

**Commission on textbooks.** In southern Serbia, home to a significant Albanian minority, the High Commissioner and a broad cross-section of partners have established a Commission to develop a primary-school textbook on history. The Commission will oversee the development of the curricula for other second-

and third-grade subjects in Albanian-language primary schools.

The Commission's first official meeting in February 2004 was hailed as a success by project participants: the Serbian Ministry for Education and Sports, the State Union Ministry for Human and Minority Rights in Serbia, and the Albanian community, including history teachers.

At a follow-up meeting in Belgrade in June 2004, the Commission agreed that, in ethnic Albanian primary schools in southern Serbia, 30 per cent of the Serbian history curriculum would be devoted to the history of Albanians, and the rest of the Albanian curriculum would be in line with the Serbian curriculum.



This little girl in southern Serbia will benefit from improved textbooks.  
Photo: OSCE Mission in Serbia and Montenegro/  
Milan Obradović

"The working meeting between Ministry officials and Albanian teachers marks a historic event; it showed that the Ministry is willing to continue the necessary reforms for the benefit of Albanian schools in Serbia."

*Riza Halimi, Mayor of the southern Serbian municipality of Presevo and leader of the Albanian Party for Democratic Action in Serbia*

"Since we have not received any training since 1991, we highly appreciate the sessions offered by the OSCE, especially because they follow a completely new approach: practical, participatory, with the pupil at the centre, and complete with excellent teaching aids. Now pupils love coming to our classes!"

*Letter from teachers in Moldova to the High Commissioner*

### IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

During my visits to OSCE participating States, I never fail to stress the need to equip teachers with the latest teaching methodologies and techniques. In fact, both Government authorities and national minority leaders agree that the quality of teaching holds the key to the fulfilment of their aspirations in education.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities promotes interactive, student-centred methods. Teachers are encouraged to think of training as an opportunity for creativity, self-discovery and further learning, which stands in stark contrast to traditional methods.

**Teacher-training.** Our project in Moldova has been translating this concept into practice. Nearly all 1,200 teachers of Moldovan as a second language in grades 5 to 9 have undergone training in modern teaching methods. Together with our implementing partner, the participants drafted a manual on teaching the State language.



OSCEVLADIMIR KRUSHIN

"Perhaps the most important conclusion from my activities in conflict prevention is that we should devote more attention to the root causes of ethnic tensions. Conflicts between different groups are often the results of difficulties which, in essence, are not of an inter-ethnic nature. Relatively minor problems can, if not tackled, develop into major sources of tension."

*Max van der Stoep  
OSCE's first High Commissioner on  
National Minorities, 1993-2001*



OSCE/VLADIMIR KIRUSHIN

## LOOKING AHEAD

Just recently, the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre announced the results of a survey of all the education-related activities that the Organization's field operations, institutions and the Secretariat have implemented in the past five years. I take this as a signal that the OSCE's focus on education as an integral component of long-term security is not merely a passing fancy.

As High Commissioner on National Minorities, I am excited about the possibilities that education holds for the future. I intend to follow developments in this dynamic field closely, including the new ideas and concepts that are figuring in the public debate in many participating States. I will continue to expand and develop the work I am doing in education together with groups, communities and governments for the benefit of inter-ethnic relations throughout the OSCE region.

A little boy in an integrated school in Bishkek sings the national anthem to herald the new academic year.

"The Lund, Oslo and Hague Recommendations that have been drawn up under the auspices of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities are providing our country with guidance in drafting new federal laws that aim to ensure the rights and freedoms of Russia's citizens. I am referring to new laws that serve as the legal basis for promoting and developing the languages, education, art and culture of the peoples of the Russian Federation. National and cultural autonomous bodies dealing with ethnic minorities are also guided by these laws."

*Vladimir Zorin, Russian Minister for Ethnic Policy Co-ordination, 2001-2004*



OSCE/HONIM

Rolf Ekéus of Sweden has been serving as the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities since July 2001. He has had a long and distinguished diplomatic career, with foreign postings in Bonn, Nairobi, Washington, D.C., New York and The Hague. He was Sweden's Ambassador to the United States from 1997 to 2000. Ambassador Ekéus was active in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) during the post-Communist transition years, heading the Swedish delegation to the CSCE (1988-1992) and playing a key role in drafting the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990). Arms control and disarmament have been recurrent themes in Ambassador Ekéus' career. He is best known for his work as Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), during which he led the weapons inspectors (1991-1997). He also serves as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.