

HDIM Side Event

Panel on Minority Integration and Development

12 October 2006

WARSAW

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the French Community of Belgium and the Walloon Region for organising this side- event and for inviting the High Commissioner on National Minorities to take part in it. The subject of this panel, the integration of minorities, is at the heart of the work of the High Commissioner and I welcome this opportunity to set out the High Commissioner's thinking on this issue.

Let me begin by telling you about the High Commissioner's decision last July to present to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE a study on policies on integration and diversity of some OSCE Participating States. The study was produced in response to a request by the Parliamentary Assembly, first tabled at its session in Edinburgh in 2004, to the High Commissioner to "initiate a comparative study of the integration policies of established democracies and analyse the effect on the position of new minorities". The High Commissioner believed that it provided a useful opportunity for taking forward the debate on integration by linking the High Commissioner's work on the integration of minorities to the widespread and fundamental debate about the integration of migrants which has been provoked by recent incidents in Western Europe including the disturbances in French cities, bombings on the London tube and the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands.

One problem in establishing the terms of reference of the study was to interpret the phrase "established democracies". On this point a pragmatic decision was taken to focus on seven countries whose integration policies were well-documented and easily accessible to researchers. The countries chosen were: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

A greater difficulty was posed by the term "new minorities". Since the term lacks legal status or an agreed definition, there is no agreed basis for deciding when a group of migrants qualifies as a minority and therefore for the rights and protections which go with minority status. Its use to describe the subject of the study therefore risked causing confusion and controversy. Moreover it emerged as the study progressed that, in applying integration policies, states use a wide variety of different categories and definitions to describe those to whom integration policies are applied. In drawing up the terms of reference for the study, therefore, the HCNM decided to focus on a range of groups falling within the general area of "minorities and migrants", without trying to single out "new minorities", in other words to focus on the "how" of the integration rather than on the "who".

The theme of "integration respecting diversity" has long been central to the HCNM's approach to minorities. In a recent speech the HCNM described the balance between integration and diversity as being at the core of his work. It has, in particular, provided the overarching framework for the HCNM's recommendations to states on how they should address tensions and risks arising from minority issues in such areas as education, language, political representation, broadcasting and most recently, policing. In explaining his approach he has often emphasised: first, that integration should be voluntary, as distinct from forced assimilation and that, while promoting integration, states must respect the rights of persons belonging to minorities to preserve their own identity, including their traditions, culture, language and religion; second, that states have a duty to promote participation as the key to integration by giving persons from minorities a feeling of belonging and of having a stake in the society in which they live; and to encourage and support minority participation in the political, economic and social life of the state on a basis of equality and non discrimination and third, that persons belonging to minorities have a responsibility to support and cooperate

with the integration policies of the state, for example by learning the state language and obeying the law.

The study does not focus on the traditional "models" of integration such as the republican or multicultural model but on practical measures. It identifies a wide range of integration policies adopted by the seven countries being studied. It highlights the following key issues:

- a) The roles of government in integration policy as regulators, facilitators and role models.
- b) The central importance of equality policies, including anti-discrimination policies and proactive policies to achieve equality and inclusiveness which are the cornerstone of integration policies in the seven countries. The study also notes recent moves in the European Union to strengthen anti-discrimination law.
- c) The need for pro-active policies to promote equality and inclusiveness not only in economic matters but also in the field of political representation. The study notes that in most cases voting in national elections is limited by the requirement of citizenship (and that the conditions for acquiring citizenship can vary widely) but that there is widespread acceptance that non-citizens can vote at local level.
- d) As regards equality and inclusiveness in the economic sphere, the primary importance of measures to promote equal access to the labour market which, in turn by involving migrants in working life, leads to other forms of social and cultural inclusion. The study also notes the importance of policies to foster ethnic entrepreneurship.
- e) Also within the area of policies aimed at economic inclusiveness, the study highlights policies designed to promote equal access to public services including state education, housing and health care. It also describes policies to promote social cohesion and intercultural awareness through the education system. It notes the recent upsurge in funding of state programmes for training in the state language.

f) With regard to diversity, the study notes the trend towards a greater emphasis on cohesion and shared values rather than measures to maintain the language culture and religion of minority groups which are sometimes perceived as posing a risk of embedding inequalities. It notes that such measures generally exist, if at all, outside public funding.

The study demonstrates the common foundation of policies for integrating minorities and migrants on inclusion and participation, as well as some differences of emphasis reflecting their different circumstances.. In particular the emphasis on inclusive policies aimed at supporting participation in political, economic and social life clearly underlies both approaches as does the need to find the right balance between integration and diversity. At the same time it is not surprising that the study indicates a difference of emphasis in some areas. For example, efforts to promote equal access to the labour market which are at the centre of most governments' policies for integrating migrants (and at the centre of the concerns of migrants) will often be less of a preoccupation for settled minorities. Conversely policies for maintaining culture and identity or for securing equitable political representation, which are at the heart of many minority concerns, will often be of less concern to migrants, particularly recent migrants.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman I would like to emphasise the importance of serious study and debate at both national and international level of the subject of integration. There is plenty of experience around of different methods and policy approaches to the integration of diversity. We believe this wealth of experience deserves to be analysed from the point of view of how well it achieves the stated objectives and above all, from the point of view of the High Commissioner, how best to achieve the objective of conflict prevention in the longer term. We also believe that the OSCE provides a useful forum for taking forward this discussion at the international level.