OSCE

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

AN INTEGRATED FUTURE?

Intervention by
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at the
Human Dimension Committee

[Check against delivery]

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Ambassador Greminger, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to address your committee today, and I would like to thank Ambassador Greminger for the invitation. This is a good platform for discussing issues of concern in the human dimension, while remembering the overall OSCE commitment to a cross-dimensional approach.

The subject I would like to raise is what I call the integration of society.

My core business is conflict prevention. I approach the subject of integration from this perspective, and also building on the experience of two decades of work to defuse ethno-political tensions by my two predecessors and myself. To be effective, conflict prevention not only needs to address tensions at the earliest possible stage and focus on urgent situations, it also has to take the root causes of these tensions into consideration. These root causes are often structural, and their resolution requires a long-term perspective. In this way, the intersection of the first and third dimensions becomes particularly clear.

While ethnic diversity has always been part of our societies, it can be argued that this has increased at an unprecedented rate in recent decades in Europe. In the case of national minorities, it is more often redrawn boundaries than the movement of populations that result in this changing demographic composition. This is especially so in the States of the former Soviet and Yugoslav systems. In other countries, migration, especially towards urban areas, is increasing diversity. However, regardless of their origins and the various legal and policy

terms used to define them, the fact is that all our European societies are becoming increasingly rich in diversity.

All rapidly changing situations present new challenges, and sometimes even tensions. The stability and prosperity of our societies depend on ensuring a *modus vivendi* in which all members of society are included and actively participate in all aspects of life on an equal footing. At the same time, the individual rights of all members of society, including the right to belong to a minority community, must be respected.

Recognizing each person's right to an identity implies support for minority rights. Objections to multiculturalism that lead to exclusion or homogenization are misconceived. I believe that our response to multiculturalism should be to foster a common sense of belonging and interaction in a shared public space. My Institution has been promoting this balance in some very challenging situations where the tensions between ethnic groups could result in the disintegration of societies or even violence. This experience has strengthened my conviction that the foundation of a healthy, pluralistic democracy and a stable society lies in promoting the inclusion and participation of all members of society, while recognizing and respecting the differences between groups, and encouraging interaction rather than separation at the same time. My Institution's approach is "integration with respect for diversity". I am in the process of consolidating the experience and expertise that my Institution has gained in this field into a set of guidelines on integration, which I hope will provide a useful tool for policymakers and other stakeholders in the search for effective frameworks and integration policies. Let me share a few key elements of this approach with you.

First, when we talk of integration, I always stress that it is integration of society itself. It is important to recognize the inter-personal and inter-communal interaction between individuals and institutions, and the dynamics that this creates. I am aware, of course, that recognizing this two-way process is not unique to my Institution, but my experience highlights the importance of ensuring that this recognition is not limited to the realm of declarations, as it too often is when the practical burden is put only on the minorities to "integrate into" society. The more or less prevalent, albeit implicit, assumption that there is a mainstream society to which newcomers must adapt is an idea that is particularly jarring to the established minorities, the so-called "national" minorities. It is clear to them that they are already constitutive elements of their society and play a role in the history of the society that they live in. Failure to recognize this fact by the majority is precisely what leads to resentment and alienation in many cases. For minorities to have a common stake in their shared State the process of adaptation and evolution must also be a common endeavour. All sides need to understand that every member of society, minority and majority alike, is effecting the changes in their society. The whole society is, therefore, both the target for and the beneficiary of integration.

The second point I would like to emphasize is that integration, just like democracy, cannot be static. There is no end-point where equilibrium has been reached once and for all, based on the correct policy recipe. It is a process, and maintaining the equilibrium requires constant adjustment to new situations by developing policy measures and monitoring their effectiveness. It is, moreover, a very complex process. Not only is it highly contextual, but it also involves multiple actors and layers of government. Overarching national frameworks and concepts are not only important for the policies of central authorities, they also have to be implemented at the local and regional level, which is, ultimately, where people live and

interact. As we know, even when integration policies are pursued locally, they are rarely co-ordinated with the central policies, since the multiple layers of governance do not necessarily pull in the same direction. At the same time, questions about how to divide competences and interlink policies add further complexity to such policies. This is exacerbated by the fact that minorities often do not represent the same proportions in the local administrative units as they do at the national level. Taking this into account is not a threat to cohesion, but a question of ensuring good governance as a contribution to integration. Therefore, it is important to stress that integration is also a complex and multilayered process at the policy level.

The third aspect I would like to focus on is minority rights. In addition to recognizing that minority rights are a necessary part of democracy, and also part of the OSCE commitments, respect for minority rights is a tool in my work in the search for an effective balance between the interests of the minority and majority. Ensuring respect for minority rights, as with human rights in general, is thus beneficial not only to one group in society, but to all of society.

National minority rights, as established in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, rest on three pillars: identity, equality and participation. There are good theoretical and empirical reasons why these are the core areas for ensuring that minorities are protected and are able to play an active role as full members of society. Remembering this triangle can help us organize our work. In some ways, it is precisely recalling this triangle, together with my experience working in actual situations of ethno-political tension, which has shaped my approach in a way that diverges slightly from that prevalent in the discussions on integration in other regional and international institutions.

Finally, I would like to point to a few substantive areas related to integration that my work has often focused on.

I often deal with various aspects connected to language. Ethnic diversity also implies linguistic diversity. Beyond the attachment each of us has to our own language and its relation to our identity, I believe we can all see the value of a multilingual Europe, or world for that matter. In terms of integration, however, it is vital that we both protect and promote minority languages while also ensuring that no one is barred from fully participating in all aspects of their society because they cannot speak the official or common language. As a consequence, I encourage States to support the maintenance of minority languages, while ensuring real and accessible opportunities to increase knowledge of the State language through formal and informal lifelong education. I have learned from my experience that a positive approach based on promoting and creating incentives and opportunities to learn is more effective than one based on punitive or exclusionary measures.

Education is another area in which I have frequently and consistently engaged. The languages of instruction are an excellent way to ensure full proficiency in both minority and majority languages. This approach can be a key element of efforts to strike a balance between supporting maintenance of minority identity, if a person desires this, and the guarantee that all school graduates should have no linguistic obstacles to take full advantage of the opportunities of life, whether in higher education or employment, or in playing his or her role as an active citizen. In my experience, bilingual and multilingual education does exactly that. Furthermore, there are other aspects of education that are essential for integration. It is in school that young minds are at least partially formed, and it is the place *par excellence* to challenge stereotypes and prejudices. Schools should promote respectful interethnic

interaction and provide knowledge and understanding of the diversity of society and its history. I have seen too many cases, especially in post-conflict areas, where the trend towards separation does not diminish over time, but increases, and with it the risk for escalating tensions which threaten cohesion. The reasons for this trend may differ. There may be processes of voluntary separation, based on the choices of the parents and communities, or there may be involuntary divisions, based on complex socio-economic factors and, at times, discrimination. But regardless of the reasons, the trend is alarming and countering it should be a strong focus of integration policies.

The third substantive area I would like to highlight from my work is political participation. Participation in political life at all levels is a precondition not only for democracy, but also for good governance. The deficits in participation that we encounter all too often these days throughout Europe are particularly acute when it comes to minorities. Special efforts to promote inclusion by encouraging the active political participation of minorities and their representatives is a key aspect of ensuring that all members of society have equal opportunities to participate in debates and decision making. In any case, national minorities have an established right to be heard on matters of particular concern to them. There are many ways to ensure that effective participation is promoted, and I continue to pursue and develop the approach elaborated in the HCNM's *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life* from 1999, mindful of the specific context of each case. But political participation, as well as participation in general, is not only a right; it is also essential to achieve a cohesive society and successful social integration. Active citizenship is not only an opportunity; it is a requirement for all members of a society, including minorities.

Let me conclude by reiterating my view that integration is a process to manage diversity and at the same time to avoid the two extremes of assimilation and separation. Although the experience I have gained through my work as the HCNM relates to national minorities, I believe it can be useful in all ethnically diverse societies. As the challenges of ethnic diversity take on new forms, at times violent, it is ever more important that we take evidence-based action to formulate, implement and monitor effective policies in support of integration. These are not policies that can be reduced to the second level of priority that they all too often are, but are essential for peace and stability in and between all our societies.