



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

OPENING REMARKS

by
Knut Vollebaek

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the
Expert seminar
**“European challenges and approaches to integration of society:
Differences and commonalities”**

[Check against delivery]

Warsaw, Poland – 22 November 2011

Mr. State Secretary,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure for me to participate in this experts' seminar on integration. I would like to thank not only our hosts and co-organizers, the Foreign Ministry of Poland, but also all of you here for making this dialogue possible.

The Polish EU Presidency has made integration one of its priorities, and for good reasons. Few other questions are today as topical for the future of our continent as this one. While it is clear that increased migration across national borders will have a lasting impact on our societies, it is largely up to us to determine what results these processes might bring. Through well-devised policies, we have the opportunity to shape today the societies of tomorrow. This, however, is not an easy task, and no exact recipe can tell us how to proceed. The one thing we do know for sure is that if we ignore these challenges they will grow and haunt us for years to come. I would, therefore, like to commend the Polish Presidency for their efforts in addressing these questions.

You who are present here today have all worked actively on issues related to integration within various national or international settings. That is why you have been invited. You know better than most what a topical and oft-debated issue this is, and you may rightfully wonder what value yet another seminar may add. Are we here to rehash some, by now, old news and principles to a small audience of more or less like-minded experts, while the real challenges and the target audience we need to bring on board, remain unaddressed?

I count on this gathering having its added value. I believe that we have a chance to engage today and tomorrow in a way that brings our thinking forward.

Firstly, we have gathered here a group of experts with integration-related experience from different European institutional settings: the European Union, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Although opportunities to meet and even work together exist, policy developments all too often proceed on parallel tracks, in isolation, and we miss the opportunities to enrich our thinking through dialogue. Through such a dialogue, we can identify what we share as challenges and the approaches to address them, and where we differ, and for what reasons. I believe we can all gain from this dialogue both in finding areas where we can reinforce each

others' work and areas where we can complement each other, bringing in different perspectives.

Secondly, it is my hope that this interactive discussion-based seminar will focus on particularly challenging questions, be they new or persisting challenges in our diverse societies, and the policies to manage these. By tackling difficulties through constructive questioning we can find ways to move ahead on our common agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The questions ahead of us are as complex as they are interesting. I am looking forward to listening to your discussions and learning from your experiences, and hope some of my own experiences will be of value to you.

Thank you for your attention so far.