



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

## **HCNM AND INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE SOCIETIES**

Introductory remarks by  
**Knut Vollebaek**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the

**Launching conference of the**

*Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*

**[Check against delivery]**

Brdo, Slovenia – 7 November 2012

State Secretary,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work of my Institution has been closely connected with integration since the very beginning. The *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, published just ahead of my Institution's 20th anniversary, thus represent the lessons learned through two decades of active conflict-prevention work throughout the diverse OSCE area. The Ljubljana Guidelines are the seventh set of thematic Recommendations and Guidelines issued by my office. The first three sets of Recommendations – the Hague, the Oslo and the Lund – were primarily aimed at elaborating and enhancing minority rights in the areas of education, language and participation in public life. Subsequently, we published the *Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media* and the *Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*, both important policy areas that pose challenges in many participating States. In 2008, I launched the sixth and, until today, last set of Recommendations – the *Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations*. The changing focus of the thematic publications reflects developments both within the OSCE area and in the HCNM's experience and approach over the past 20 years. At first, securing basic minority rights was the HCNM's main challenge and highest priority. Later, the inter-State aspects of minority policy became more prominent in the work of my Institution, which led to the development of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations. Today, with the launch of the *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, we address an issue that is very topical and poses challenges to all OSCE participating States. As you will see, some of the themes elaborated in previous Guidelines and Recommendations also find their place in the Ljubljana Guidelines due to their relevance to integration.

Now more than ever, I believe that integration is a key to facilitating security and stability both within and between our States. Through my work, I have learned that recognition and accommodation of minority culture, identity and political interests, although necessary, may not be sufficient alone to build lasting peace and stability. It is also essential to develop and support an integration process in order to prevent societies from becoming divided along ethnic lines, which may pose challenges to the stability and viability of any multi-ethnic State. The process towards integration is therefore fundamentally a matter of meeting the

basic responsibilities that sovereignty entails, such as providing security, protecting human rights and ensuring good and effective governance. The Guidelines we are here to launch today are the product of practical work in various countries and internal debates on how my Institution can best meet the new challenges. As such, the Guidelines are based on the activities and knowledge on which my Institution focuses. Nonetheless, I believe the insight we have gained could have value beyond the situations where I am directly involved. This is why it has long been an ambition of mine to collect and distil this experience and offer it as a toolkit to the participating States. What I am presenting to you today is the outcome of this process.

State Secretary,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout the history of my Institution, my predecessors and I have frequently issued recommendations to States on integration. Although circumstances and the specific advice given have varied, the main reason for doing so has always been the same: weak or failed integration policies allow ethnic divides to cut deep wedges into societies, thus weakening their cohesion and resilience. Based on our experience, we have a solid basis for identifying integration as essential for sustainable peace and stability. A cohesive society in which citizens have a common sense of belonging to the State is necessary in any society. This sense of belonging must be developed and actively maintained, and this can be achieved through a process of integration. In several participating States, the lack of such a shared perception of belonging is a direct threat to the viability of the State as an entity. In such circumstances, initiating an integration policy is not merely a social or an educational issue, important as they may be, but can even be a national security challenge. Sadly, integration rarely receives the priority it requires.

The relationship between minority rights and integration is a question that attracts some debate. While some argue that minority rights should be trumped by integration requirements, others see minority rights and group autonomy as the sole answer to the challenge of managing diversity. Based upon my experience of the realities on the ground, I would argue that minority rights are part and parcel of a successful integration policy. My Institution has, both through its practical work and its previous thematic Recommendations and Guidelines,

worked hard to promote respect for minority rights, and I believe this has been a crucial factor in enhancing stability in several countries. Nonetheless, we have to accept that it takes more than respect for minority rights to achieve inter-ethnic accord over time. This is where integration policies are crucially important. Integration should be seen as complementary to rather than incompatible with minority rights. In addition to protecting and promoting minority rights, one also has to create the conditions for minorities to participate on an equal footing in the wider society. In some situations, this requires that minorities renounce maximalist claims. More often, however, it requires that majority representatives acknowledge that integration is a two-way process, which necessitates adjustments from both minorities and majorities alike. It is not the minority's duty to take on the full burden of integration by accepting the norms of the majority. The benefactor of this process is neither the majority nor the minorities, but society as a whole. And this is precisely why I prefer to talk about integration of society rather than integration of a particular group into society. It is also clear that integration is a process. As such, it is never possible to achieve a fully integrated society. As circumstances change, integration policies and measures will need to be adjusted to remain relevant and effective.

State Secretary,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the political discourse seems to suggest that multiculturalism is a matter of belief, and the number of professed non-believers appears to be rising by the day. My predecessor Max van der Stoep famously remarked that minorities are a matter of fact and not definition. The same can be said about multiculturalism. All OSCE participating States are multi-ethnic. Living together with people of different cultures, ethnicities and religions is not a matter of choice; it is a fact of life. It is up to us to make the best of it. But to truly embrace multiculturalism, we need to accept that it entails more than different mono-cultures co-existing in a shared space, as is so often, and inaccurately, suggested by its critics. Multiculturalism is the antithesis of ghettos and parallel societies. Multiculturalism requires that we adopt inter-cultural approaches, promoting interaction between different cultural groups and encouraging everyone to respect and accommodate other cultures. It is in this way that multiculturalism is directly related to integration.

As policymakers, it is our common responsibility to take these challenges seriously. We must search for policies that promote and harness the positive effects of diversity. At the same time, we must not forget to acknowledge and deal responsibly with the challenges and risks that arise from diversity. A badly managed integration process can cause tensions to rise and can easily be abused by individuals or groups who seek to promote their own short-term interests at the expense of society as a whole. Therefore, managing diversity through an integration policy is not selflessness; it is self-interest. The purpose of the Ljubljana Guidelines is to provide policymakers with a statement of principles upon which integration policies should be based and a set of practical policy measures and examples that have been tried and tested through the work of my Institution. I sincerely believe that the present Guidelines can assist participating States in developing or strengthening integration policies so they can better meet the real challenges on the ground.

For integration policies to be effective, they must be contextual. The present Guidelines are therefore not meant to be a straightjacket and the principles and policy measures set out will not apply in the same way to all situations. Integration policies must be tailored to the specific circumstances on the ground, and will therefore vary significantly between different States. It is also legitimate and often necessary for States to vary their policies towards different groups within the State. While the success of integration policies depends on adjusting them to the local context, the policymaking process must ensure that all relevant stakeholders participate fully. These Guidelines provide a framework for such a process in a variety of circumstances.

State Secretary,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are joined here today by some very knowledgeable experts who will introduce the Guidelines in more detail. I will soon hand over to the moderator of the first panel, Dr. Natalie Sabanadze, who is a senior advisor and section head in my office. This first panel will explore the link between integration and conflict prevention. The second panel will look at the relationship between integration and human rights. This panel will be moderated by Professor Francesco Palermo, who is a former HCNM staff member and a current member of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection

of National Minorities. Francesco has also been deeply involved in writing process. After lunch, the third panel will look at specific integration policies and practices. This panel will be moderated by Ms. Ilze Brands-Kehris, who is the director of my office and whom I would like to thank particularly for carrying this project through.

I hope these discussions will help illuminate some of the important aspects of the Ljubljana Guidelines. I encourage you to take an active role, and I look forward to our discussions here today.

Thank you.